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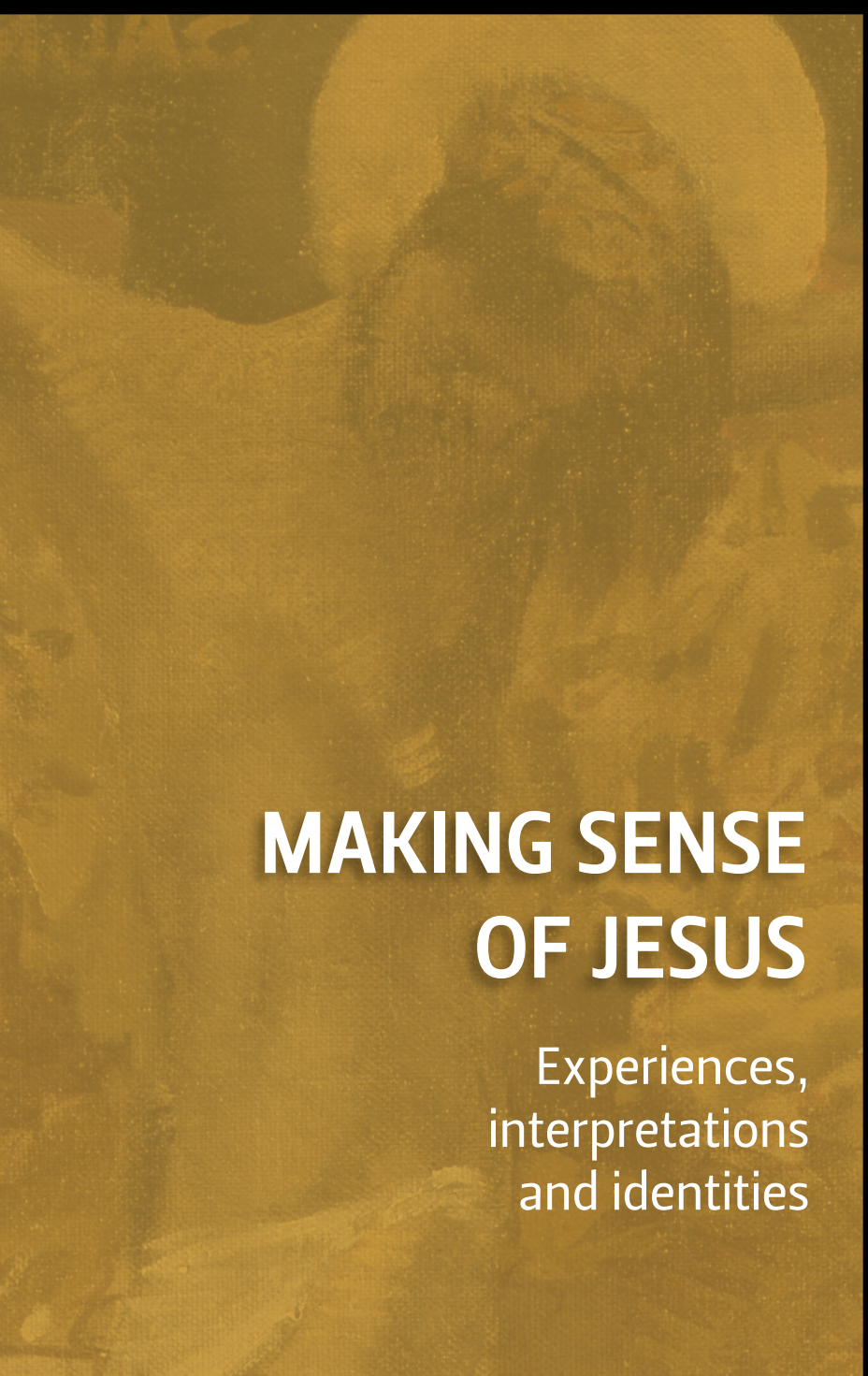

MAKING SENSE OF JESUS

Experiences, interpretations and identities

D.F. TOLMIE
R. VENTER
EDITORS

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

The ***UFS Theological Explorations*** **Series** is an initiative of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of the Free State (UFS), situated in Bloemfontein, South Africa. History, both in South Africa and worldwide, has shown that solid academic research is vital for stimulating new insights and new developments, not only in order to achieve academic progress, but also to advance human flourishing. Through this academic series, the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the UFS hopes to make a contribution to worthy causes such as these.

The university wishes the research conducted by its staff to be relevant and innovative within the South African context. In addition, the research should have international impact and visibility and should encourage national and international collaboration. The type of research published in this series is focused on achieving these goals. Accordingly, *UFS Theological Explorations* publishes only research that is of a high academic standard, has been thoroughly peer-reviewed and makes an important academic contribution to fundamental theological issues on both national and international levels. Furthermore, we maintain that good research should not only be aimed at creating significant new academic knowledge but should also be a deliberate attempt to include various and even opposing perspectives. Finally, we believe that it is especially important that research takes into account the social context within which we generate new knowledge.

This series contains both monographs and collected works. In the case of the monographs, one or more researchers work on a particular topic and cover the subject matter extensively. In this way, the monographs make a significant contribution to original research. In the case of the collected works, a group of researchers from various theological disciplines work together on a particular topic. The collected works contribute new insights on the research question from different perspectives and thus advance scholarship collectively.

The Editorial Board trusts that *UFS Theological Explorations* will have a positive and lasting impact on theological agendas all over the world!

Francois Tolmie
Series editor: UFS Theological Explorations, University of the Free State

INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME 2

From Jesus' own question – "Who do people say I am?" – till Bonhoeffer's quest – "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" – numerous attempts have been made to make sense of the Man from Galilee. The contributions in this volume form part of this never-ending theological journey, and were all generated as part of a joint research project focusing on Christology. This research project, undertaken by researchers, most of whom are affiliated with the University of the Free State, was not aimed at continuing conventional Christology, but rather at examining the interplay between event and interpretation closer. It was based on the conviction that the myriad originating experiences and the resulting effects of this hermeneutical act require continued scrutiny. The guiding notion addressed by all the contributions is that interpretative encounters with Jesus emerge from specific historical conditions and have specific performative consequences. As we all know, making sense of anything or anybody is never a neutral or innocent process; it is always a complex epistemological, rhetorical and ethical event. Against this background, the specific objective of the research offered in this volume is the generation of new knowledge by intentionally relating epistemologies, research paradigms, theories of the present and the self with the historical study of the figure of Jesus.

This volume consists of two parts. In Part One, the focus falls on *New Testament and historical perspectives.*

The first chapter is titled "Caesar, Moses and Jesus as 'God', 'godlike' or 'God's Son': Constructions of divinity in Paganism, Philo and Christianity in the Greco-Roman world". In this contribution Peter Lampe shows how the deification of Jesus in Early Christianity occurred and was influenced by the cultural context within which believers found themselves. Lampe points out that our current thinking of God is dominated by the Judeo-Christian notion that God is separate from the world, but that this was not the case in the Greco-Roman world; in those times people had no problem accepting that humans could also be gods. Accordingly, Lampe argues that it is not strange that Jesus was deified by his followers. He then goes on to discuss numerous examples illustrating how humans could be considered as "godlike" and "gods", as well as being both "sons of god" and "gods". He then works out some of the

consequences in this regard, for example that, in Christianity, Christology developed parallel to the notion of the deification of the emperors, but that this process came to an end when the notion of "divine essence" was introduced at a later stage. He concludes the chapter with some suggestions on what all of this imply for our current interpretations of Jesus.

In the second chapter Peter Nagel shifts our attention to the Gospel of Matthew, and to a particular part of it, namely the temptation narrative. Nagel calls his study "Overburdening Jesus with divinity causes theological limitations: Matthew 4:1-11 as test case". Like Lampe, he shows that it is vital to keep the historical conditions, within which New Testament writings originated, in mind when interpreting their Christologies. In this instance, he argues that the notion of the divinity of Jesus easily becomes a burden if it is perceived and understood separately from its Jewish context. Nagel maintains that the Gospel of Matthew introduces Jesus as Emmanuel, the "Son of God" and "the Christ", but that this should be understood within a Jewish context. By taking the temptation narrative in this Gospel as a test case, he shows that interpreting Jesus as the "Son of God" in supernatural or metaphysical terms actually overburdens Jesus with a skewed perception of his divinity and that this easily leads to theological limitations, exactly because such an interpretative effort happens outside of the Jewish tradition.

The next chapter is titled "Paul's way of imparting Jesus Christ crucified: Self-portrayal, identity, and vocation in 1 Corinthians". In this contribution Dustin W. Ellington begins by noting that, in his context in Zambia, Christians seldom speak of Christ's death and rather focus on the Christian faith as a route towards success. The obvious differences between such an approach and that of Paul prompts him to pose the question: "What does it mean for us, in Southern Africa today, to know what Paul knew of Christ crucified, and to give this knowledge and experience to others?" In order to answer this question he investigates 1 Corinthians, in particular 1 Corinthians 15 as well as 1:1-4:21 and 8:1-11:1. He then shows how Paul made sense of Jesus' death for the situation that he addresses in Corinth, by interpreting Christ's death as a way of life to be followed by believers; they should conform themselves to the pattern set by the gospel: to be joined to Christ's power, through weakness. Christ's death thus shapes the identity and vocation of believers. He also discusses the performative consequences for African Christians.

In his contribution, "'A beloved brother in the Lord.' On the reception of Christology and ethics in Philemon 15-16", D.F. (Francois) Tolmie draws attention to the reception of these two verses through the centuries. He notes that, currently, scholars tend to focus on three issues, namely the theological underpinnings of Paul's statements, the transformed relationship between Philemon and Onesimus that Paul had in mind, and the question whether Paul wanted Philemon to be manumitted or not. This differs from the way in which these two verses had been interpreted by earlier commentators, primarily because of the difference between their historical contexts and ours. Tolmie illustrates this by discussing the way in which these two verses had been interpreted by Jerome, Theodore of Mopsuestia, Thomas Aquinas, Desiderius Erasmus and Martin Luther. This overview of part of the reception history of Philemon 15-16 thus illustrates how interpretative encounters with Christ are influenced by historical conditions.

As the title of Pieter de Villiers' contribution – "Interpretative encounters with Christ in Revelation and its reception history" – indicates, he also calls our attention to the reception history of a New Testament writing, in this instance to the way in which the Christology of Revelation has been interpreted through history. He begins by an overview of the way in which its author appropriated his sacred traditions in the light of oral traditions about the Historical Jesus in order to construct a picture of an exalted Christ who is powerfully present in the church's ongoing spiritual journey. After this De Villiers moves on to various eschatological receptions of the Christology of Revelation as a prediction or anticipation of future events until the return of Christ, especially towards the end of the first and second millennia. A third part investigates the trajectory in the reception history of Revelation that spiritualises the book. In this trajectory Jesus is portrayed as the exalted Christ who transforms human existence. In this section De Villiers pays special attention to Dürer's careful, but mystical reading of Revelation's Christology from an aesthetical point of view.

The last contribution in the first part of the book is that of Pieter Botha, "The Lamb and the Servant as constructions of divinity: The worship of Jesus in Early Christianity from a disability studies perspective". In this chapter Botha shows how making sense of Jesus in the context of Early Christianity can be enriched when a fresh set of questions is raised, in particular when academic discourses which had been artificially separated in the past are brought into

dialogue with one another. Accordingly, he uses insights from medical discourses, social activist discourses, anthropology, the philosophy and rhetoric of the body, disability studies and feminist critiques to look again at the worship of Jesus in its earliest context. Furthermore, he also shows how infusing current discussions about Jesus with new insights about the body not only helps us to make sense of Jesus in a better way for our own contexts but that, in some instances, the beginnings of such ideas can even be detected in the canonical Jesus traditions.

The second part of the book is devoted to *contemporary and constructive perspectives*. In the first chapter in this part, titled "The plurality of contemporary Christological discourses: Some perspectives", Rian Venter investigates the phenomenon of a plurality of interpretations of the Jesus figure, and of the seemingly surplus which stimulates ever new encounters. On the one hand, his interest is one of stock-taking for academic purposes and for mapping the terrain of contemporary Christology undertaken by systematic theology; on the other hand it is also one of a more fundamental concern, namely to theorise the nature of image-construction, and to raise the question of the implications of the diversity. He discusses seven crucial discourses: Global and post-modern Christologies, and dialogues between Christology and natural science, the arts, queer-theory, post-colonialism and world-religions. The seven Christologies raise questions about the status of cultural identity and agency, about alternative conceptualities and the presence of the impossible, about the very nature of materiality, bodiliness and sexuality, about power, about transcendence and about truth. Reflecting on the seven discourses and plurality in contemporary Christology, Venter points out several implications: An obvious broadening of Christology is taking place, and the meaningfulness of the Jesus-symbol for current concerns and interests is reconfirmed. The plurality obviously has ramifications for an understanding of soteriology, and for the quest of de-colonisation of theology. The question of validity cannot be ignored, and the author emphasises the indispensability of the continued quest for the historical Jesus.

The next chapter is titled "Christ in pluralism? Michael Welker's pneumatological Christology". In this chapter Henco van der Westhuizen draws attention to the fact that Welker takes Christological pluralism seriously. Van der Westhuizen traces the different options that Welker proposes for theologians wishing to make sense of Christ, namely a focus on the Historical Jesus, Jesus' resurrection,

his cross, the exalted Christ and his reign, and the eschatological Christ. For Welker it is through these pluralisms that a clearer picture of Christ comes to the fore; yet, as Van der Westhuizen argues, this does not mean that Welker succumbs to relativism, and, accordingly, such an approach can assist us to make sense of Christ in our times and within our contexts.

In the following chapter Deborah van den Bosch takes us to a specific pastoral situation: how to help a contemporary believer prepare for the end of life in a secularised context. Her contribution thus has to do with the art of dying (*ars moriendi*). The title of her contribution summarises her insights in this regard aptly: "The dying Christ: Revisiting the *ars moriendi* in a pneumatological perspective". After an overview of the development of the notion of *ars moriendi* and a discussion of the thanatologies of contemporary theologians, she suggests that the presence of the Holy Spirit during Jesus' death could be regarded as meaningful in the preparation of believers' death, in the contexts within which we find ourselves nowadays, since this emphasises that they are included in the identity of God in the face of death. In this way she points out how one could make sense of the dying Christ in a secularised context in our times.

In his contribution, titled "The moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life", Peter G. Kirchschlaeger focuses on ethics, and illustrates how one can make sense of the ethics of Jesus within our contemporary context. He argues that Jesus' way of life had a moral-theological dimension that was an integral part of his life, suffering, death and resurrection, and that all of this serves as a challenge to his followers. However, what is asked of them is not a mere fulfilling of commandments; they are called upon to do much more: speech, decisions, actions as well as an attitude based on a reflection on the identity of Jesus. Kirchschlaeger then highlights the main elements in this regard in terms of the concept of "neighbourly love", which, for him, concretely implies limitless love, serving others, solidarity, and merciful justice without any indifference.

In the next chapter, Jakub Urbaniak investigates how a specific contemporary embodied African Christology makes sense of Jesus. His contribution is titled "What has Tswane to do with Copenhagen? Groping for an embodied Christology with Tiniyiko Maluleke". Urbaniak facilitates a dialogue between Maluleke's African Jesus and the Christ of deep incarnation theologians, in the belief that the two approaches can bring to the table even more when in dialogue. After a brief introduction of the two Christological approaches

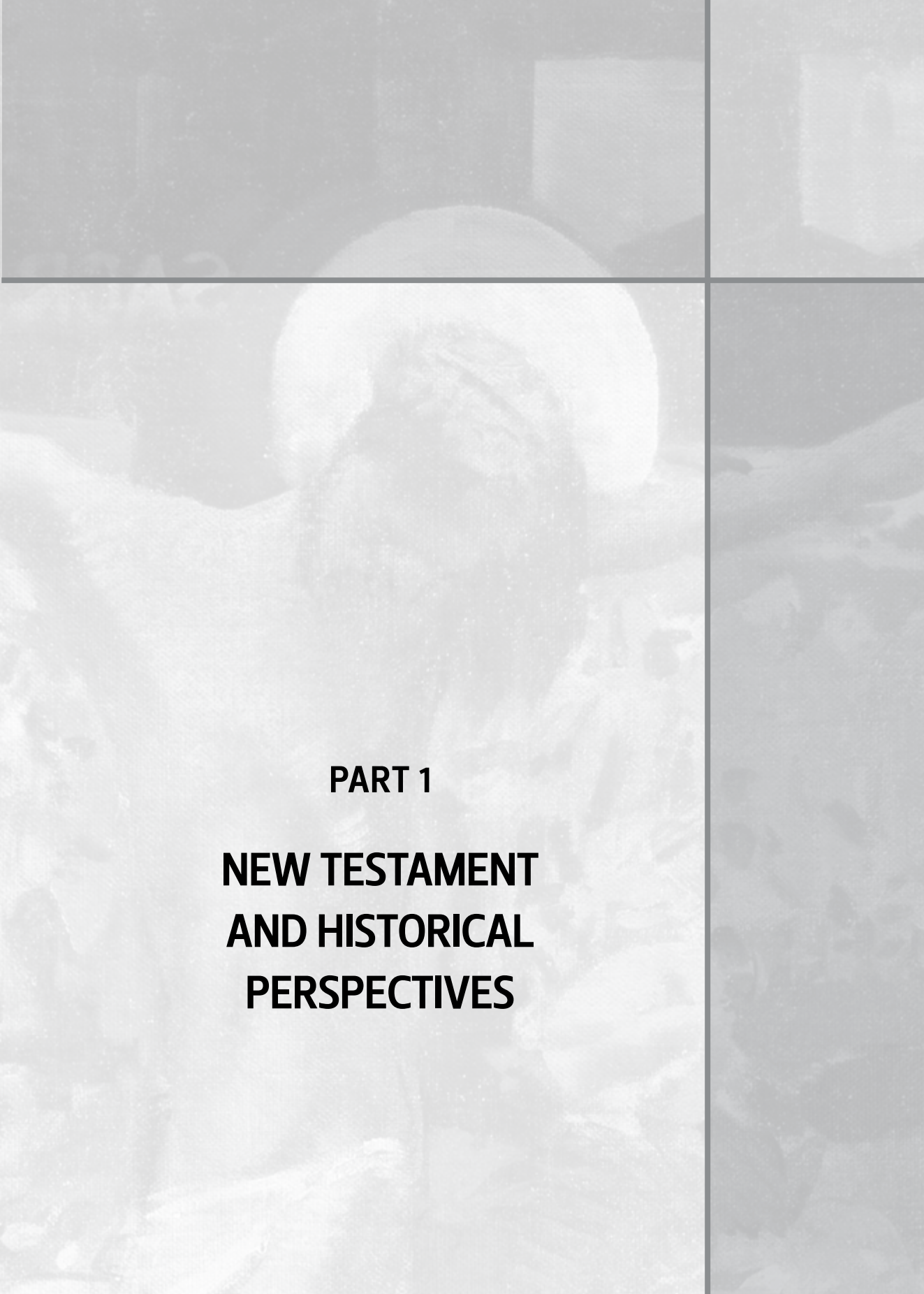
represented by Maluleke and deep incarnation theologians, Urbaniak discusses constructive Christologising at the intersection of the global and the local, before concluding with an investigation of the particular historical conditions, from which these two interpretative encounters emerged. In this way, he shows how the Western Christological tradition can benefit from an engagement with what he calls "African battle Christologies", like that of Maluleke.

The last chapter is devoted to the digital Jesus. In a contribution titled "@jesus – A practical theological following of Jesus-expressions on Twitter", Jan-Albert van den Berg explores the way in which interpretative encounters of Jesus occur on Twitter. For this purpose, he investigates two Twitter data sets deriving from distinctive celebrations on the Christian calendar, namely Christmas 2013 and Easter 2014. By using scientific approaches specifically developed for interpreting massive amounts of empirical digital data, he provides perspectives on tendencies that one can identify in these two instances. One of the important findings in this regard is the close relationship between popular culture and theology, particularly the way in which popular culture has an impact on the Christian faith, and helps us to understand the way in which "the language of the street" gives us a glimpse of people experiencing God and finding religious meaning in everyday life.

The articles in this volume evidence the myriad and vibrant attempts to make sense of the Jesus-figure and of contemporary life and its challenges in mutual engagement. A number of leitmotifs are found in the various contributions: context, that of the first century Mediterranean world and of our horizon, is crucial in interpretation; plurality is a given in the doing of theology and should be embraced; theoretical perspectives (such as disability studies, faith/science dialogue, digitalisation) are indispensable in generating new knowledge; and existential questions like death and ethics continue to stimulate Christological thinking. In the interaction between Jesus and the present horizon, a space is found where meaning is created for human flourishing and for appreciating the Jesus event ever anew.

We trust that this volume will add value to contemporary discussions of Christology, that it will go some way to answer some of the questions theologians are grappling with in this regard, and that it may also raise new questions.

Francois Tolmie & Rian Venter (Eds.)
September 2017



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Chapter 1

Caesar, Moses and Jesus as "God", "godlike" or "God's Son": Constructions of Divinity in Paganism, Philo and Christianity in the Greco-Roman World

Peter Lampe[1]

According to Acts (14:11), the people in Lystra, seeing Paul's and Barnabas' miracle working, were ready to venerate the apostles as gods. Luke's narrative, whether historical or not, realistically captured the fact that ancient people in the Greco-Roman world had no problem assuming that humans were living as gods among them. This marks a deep cultural difference from Western modernity, according to which (apart from Christ) humans can never be gods. They can be stars, even saints, but not gods. Modern thinking is deeply moulded by the Judeo-Christian monotheistic concept that God as creator is separate from the world, counterposed to it. A high barrier between divine and human characterises modern thinking. However, in the Greco-Roman world, this barrier was lower and more permeable. "What is strong is now called god", Menander joked around 300 BCE (*Carine* frg. 2 com. IV p. 144, in Stobaios 3.32.11). There was some truth to this exaggeration of the comedian. The more power one had over other people, the more likely these dependants considered one a god. Even a powerful patron in a patron-client relationship could be venerated like a god (*ut deo*) or addressed

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as "terrestrial Jupiter".[2] The powerful rulers, Caesar and Augustus, already in their lifetime were considered divine – also in the West of the Mediterranean world, not just in the East where the deification of a living person had had a longer tradition.[3] As will be shown, any human stronger and more powerful than normal people, anyone appearing to command nature's forces or being more virtuous, pure or beautiful, was entitled to being venerated in a cult and thus becoming a deity.[4] In other words, in antiquity, Mother Theresa would have been a goddess, not just a saint.

From a historian's perspective, it is not surprising at all that Jesus of Nazareth was deified by his followers. In the Greco-Roman context, it would have been more astonishing if they had not made a god of him, considering his charismatic exorcisms, his innovative and poetic teachings, and above all, the visionary experiences of his followers after his death, which for them meant that God had raised Jesus from the dead in an unprecedented way. Not ancient, but modern secular-minded people consider it absurd to proclaim a man as god. However, such secular minds of today forget that they are subconsciously moulded by the Judeo-Christian monotheistic concept of divinity. "No other gods beside me" is the monotheistic motto, flanked by the creation theology principle that the divine, as creating power, is counterposed to the creation and not part of it. That

2 Thus already Plautus (255-185 BCE), *Asin*. 712f.; *Persa* 99f.; *Capt*. 863f. Of course, Plautus also was a comedy writer, but Cicero was not when he praised his benefactor Lentulus as "parent and god of my life" (*Post Reditum in Senatu* 8). See further Claus (2001:44f.).

3 See the material in Claus (2001:17, 33f., 60, 482 *et al.*). Claus convincingly refutes older literature that tried to uphold a significant difference between the East and the West. Besides the deification of living rulers, many emperors upon their death were granted an apotheosis by the Senate. It raised them into heaven where they were venerated together with the other gods, equal to them. See e.g. Pliny, *paneg*. 35.4; 11.4; 16.4; Herodian 4.2.1; Suetonius, *Aug*. 97.1-3. Domitian consecrated several deceased family members so that Juvenal joked that he augmented the stars in the sky so much that Atlas henceforth had to carry significantly more weight (*Sat*. 13.46-49).

4 In the West, the barrier between human and divine was lower than today also because every person was considered having a *genius*, a guardian deity, that is, a divine aspect inherent in every human. In every-day life, the *genius* was considered identical with the person. After death, the *genius* would still be present and therefore could be venerated by relatives. See the material in, e.g. Claus (2001:45, 221-227).

no human can be god is the consequence. This principle is deeply imprinted into secular minds, and ironically fuels scepticism about Christian Christology today.

Historically, the deification of a human prophet, Jesus, was a Christological process "from below": A human, after his death, gradually became divine.[5] In its first phases, this process seemed to put the principle of monotheism at risk – until in late antiquity, to preserve monotheism, formulas were found according to which the one supreme God integrated Jesus into God's own divinity, into God's own divine "essence" – which was different from deifications in the polytheistic Greco-Roman world (see below).

It is true, the emperors since Augustus also associated themselves with the supreme god, Jupiter.[6] Domitian, for example, was named together with Jupiter (*IG* 3.1.1091), sometimes took over his symbols of thunder (Martial, *Epigr*. 6.10) and lightning (Bergmann 1998: Table 19.1) or was even stylised as superior to Jupiter (Martial, *Epigr*. 4.1; 8.39.5f; see also 9.34). But these associations or even identifications of gods were part of the polytheistic game, lacking the depth and the monotheistic concerns that characterised the development of the Trinitarian doctrine.

Pagan deifications did not entail philosophical speculations about a divine "essence" or assumptions about qualities such as *homoousios* or *homoiousios*. They were simpler than that. But they provided the cultural context that furthered the first steps of a deification of Jesus of Nazareth.

5 The process of forming an explicit Christology probably did not start until after the Easter visions of Jesus' followers. There is no sound evidence that the charismatic personality of the historical prophet Jesus claimed any of the traditional titles that after Easter were attributed to him – not even the title Son of Man in the sense of "future judge of the world". The historical Jesus in all likelihood only claimed prophetic power of authority, warranted by God, when preaching that the Son of Man will reach a favourable verdict if people accept his, Jesus', proclamation (Luke 12:8). The historical Jesus in all likelihood talked about the Son of Man only in the third person, not in the first. What these historical findings mean theologically is another question. A faith in Jesus as "God's Son" is not necessarily tied to the self-consciousness of the historical Jesus. See further e.g. Lampe (2012: especially 120-129) for the implicit Christology of Jesus' pre-Easter life.

6 For statues that depict the emperors from Augustus to Nerva as Jupiter, see Maderna (1988:156-196).

1. Humans as "godlike" and "god"

Already in the first century CE, emperors were praised in prose hymns and encomia (Collins 2003:361-372; Standhartinger 2006:370), which may have influenced the formulation of the Christological hymn in Philippians 2, where a godlikeness is claimed for Jesus. In this pre-Pauline hymn, which is not only to be understood against the backdrop of Jewish concepts such as the Jewish *sophia* myth or Philonic *logos* speculations, the expression "to be like (ἴσα) God" (2:6; see John 5:18) is paralleled by the Greek idea that heroes are to be praised as "godlike"; not only mythological figures such as Perseus, the son of Zeus and of the human virgin princess Danae, were considered godlike heroes (ἰσόθεος φώς; Aeschylus, *Pers*. 857), but also historical figures such as the king Dareios, who ruled without battles (ἰσόθεος Δαρεῖος; Aeschylus, *Pers*. 857), or even any person of excelling virtue and political skill. Aristotle (*Polit*. 3.1284a) wrote:

> If there is any person ... whose virtue is so pre-eminent that the virtues ... of all the rest admit of no comparison with his ..., he can be no longer regarded as part of the state; for justice will not be done to the superior, if he is reckoned only as the *equal* of those who are so far inferior to him in virtue and political skill. Such one may truly be deemed like a God among men (ὥσπερ γὰρ θεὸν ἐν ἀνθρώποις εἰκὸς εἶναι τὸν τοιοῦτον).

Similarly, Cassius Dio, centuries later, lets Maecenas remind Augustus that "virtue renders many godlike" (ἀρετὴ ... ἰσοθέους πολλοὺς ποιεῖ, 52.35.5).

The Greek idea was that the gods work in people who excel[7] and that these persons therefore are godlike. This especially was considered true about emperors. According to Cassius Dio (51.20.1f.), in 29 BCE the Senate ordered that Augustus "equally to the gods (ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς θεοῖς) be inscribed into the hymns". In the year 19 CE, Germanicus held that his father, Emperor Tiberius, and his grandmother, Livia, were worthy of godlike acclamations (ἰσοθέους ἐκφωνήσεις), as well as divinity (θειότητος).[8] And a papyrus stated that a *basileus* is godlike (ἰσόθεος), as "ruling" means being "god".[9] The emphasis, in the papyrus, shifts

7 See e.g. Claus (2001:41); a triumphant military leader entering Rome, for example, was a representation of Jupiter Optimus Maximus who, in this human, returned to his temple.

8 *Select Papyri* (LCL) vol. 2, no. 211 (edict by Germanicus).

9 PHeid 1716 (*verso*); edition in *Philologus* 80 (1925) 339f.

to power – away from extraordinary virtue (ἀρετή) and political skill as the Aristotelian base for godlikeness. Whoever had power to rule was a candidate for being considered to be godlike.

Jewish authors, however, criticised the claim of rulers to be equal to or like gods.[10] Philo praised Augustus as an ideal ruler in contrast to Caligula and admitted that "all decreed him honours equal to those of the Olympian gods" (*Leg. ad Caium* 149-152). But Jews could not venerate the emperor in this way and they did not have to, according to Philo, because Augustus respected the "laws and customs prevailing in each nation" and in fact "did not approve of anyone addressing him as master or god" (152-154). Philo here uses the motif of a virtuous ruler being reluctant to receive divine honours. Germanicus in the mentioned edict of 19 CE also denied such honours for himself.[11]

Another ideal ruler, for Philo, was Moses (*Vita Mosis* 1.148-162), who even is attributed the titles "king and god" of his people. A remarkable text, worth being read as a whole:

> (148) Of all these men [who set off for the exodus], Moses was elected the leader, receiving the authority and sovereignty over them, not having gained it like some men who have forced their way to power ... but having been appointed for the sake of his virtue and excellence and benevolence towards all men ... and also because God, who loves virtue and piety and excellence gave him his authority as a well-deserved reward.
>
> (149) For as he had abandoned the chief authority in Egypt, which he might have had as the grandson of the reigning king ... and by reason of his nobleness of soul and of the greatness of his spirit and the natural detestation of wickedness, scorning and rejecting all the hopes which he might have conceived from those who adopted him, it seemed good to the ruler and governor of the universe to recompense him with the sovereign authority over a more populous and more powerful nation, which he was about to take to himself out of all other nations ... (150) And when he had received this authority, he did not show anxiety ... to increase the power of his own family and

10 2 Macc. 9:12; Sib. 5.33f.; Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* 1.49; see *Decal.* 7; *Virt.* 219; *Vita Mosis* 2.194; *Spec. Leg.* 1.25.

11 For this motif, see further Hillard (2011:219-251).

> promote his sons to any great dignity … he subdued his natural love and affection for his children … making these feelings subordinate to his own incorruptible reason, (151) for he kept one most invariable object … namely that of benefiting those who were subjected to his authority and of doing everything … with a view to their advantage … (and) prosperity. (152) Therefore … he neither accumulated treasures … or property …. (153) … not indulging in any theatrical affection of pomp and magnificence, but cultivating the simplicity … of a private individual.

Moses here displayed a *kenosis*, a renunciation of Egyptian power to which he might have been entitled according to Philo, and a renunciation of luxurious prosperity for himself and power for his own family; he did not found a dynasty. This *kenosis* is paralleled by Christ's, who renounced divine glory and "emptied himself, taking the form of a slave … and being found in human form" (Phil. 2:7). God, therefore, also rewarded both Christ and Moses for their renunciations by giving them even more power in the end (Philo: "sovereign authority over a more populous and more powerful nation"; Phil. 2:10: "so that every knee bends, in heaven and on earth and under the earth"). If Philo wrote the *Vita Mosis* during his stay in Rome, at the end of the 30s CE, to again contrast Caligula by drawing the portrait of an ideal ruler, then the question arises whether he had heard about the nascent Christology of the Christians when designing his Moses picture. However, it is more likely that he alluded to pagan traditions when calling up the renunciation motif. Plutarch, for example, pictured Alexander the Great as an ideal ruler who renounced looting Asia, not making a personal profit and not ravaging it as a booty of good luck (ἅρπαγμα εὐτυχίας; see Phil. 2:6: ἁρπαγμός), but rather being a philosopher who aimed at peace and harmony for all people instead of riches and splendour for himself (Alex. 330DE).

Philo continues in his Moses eulogy by enumerating further virtues, such as "presence of mind", "knowledge", "patience under evil" or "justice" (154). And as Moses

> (155) discarded all desire of gain and riches … God gave him instead the greatest … wealth, the wealth of all the earth and sea … and all the other elements … For having judged him deserving of being made a partaker (κοινωνός) in the portion which he had reserved for himself, he gave him the whole world as a possession suitable for his heir: (156) therefore, all elements obeyed him as his master … submitting to his commands …

> if it is true according to the proverb that "all the property of friends is common" and if the prophet [Moses] was truly called the friend of God (see Ex. 33:11) then it follows that he would naturally partake of God himself (μετέχω αὐτοῦ) and of all his possessions as far as he had need. (157) For God possesses everything ... but the good man has nothing that is properly his own, not even himself, but he has a share (μεταλαγχάνω) granted to him of the treasures of God as far as he is able to partake of them .... (158) What more shall I say? Has he not also enjoyed an even greater fellowship (κοινωνία) with the Father and Creator of the universe (see Arrianus, *Epict*. 2.19.27: ἡ πρὸς τὸν Δία κοινωνία) ...? For he also was called the god (θεός) and king of the whole nation, and he is said to have entered into the darkness where God was (Ex. 20:21; 19:9, 18-20; see 33:9-11); that is to say, into the invisible, and shapeless and incorporeal world, the essence (οὐσία) that serves as the model (παραδειγματικός) of all existing things, where he apprehended (κατανοέω) things invisible to mortal nature. For having brought himself and his own life into the middle, as an excellently wrought drawing (γραφή), he established himself as a most beautiful and godlike (θεοειδής) work, to be a model (παράδειγμα) for all those who were inclined to imitate him. (159) And happy are they who have been able to take ... a faithful copy of his excellence in their own souls. For let the mind ... take the perfect appearance of virtue ... (160) ... men in a lowly condition are imitators of men of high reputation ... (161) If the chief of a people adopts a .... dignified course of life then subjects ... give him an idea that they are devoted to the same pursuits ... (162) But, perhaps, since Moses was also destined to be the lawgiver of his nation, he was (γίγνομαι) himself long previously (πολὺ πρότερον), through the providence of God, a living/spiritual (ψυχικός) and reasonable (λογικός) law (νόμος), since that providence appointed him to the lawgiver, when as yet he knew nothing of his appointment.

The latter appears to allude to the Platonic teaching of a pre-existence of the rational soul, here of Moses' soul, which Philo seems to consider as having been a pre-existent law. Or should one rather interpret: His pre-existent rational soul had profound knowledge of a pre-existent law that God had in mind as one of his "ideas"? Unfortunately, the text remains enigmatic.[12] According to the

12 Brucker (1997:224) asks whether Philo alluded to a pre-existence of Moses in the world of ideas. However, that Philo considered the human Moses an image of an (pre-existent) ideal Moses seems rather farfetched.

Platonic *anamnesis* theory, Moses later would have remembered this law when he became a lawgiver.

Besides pre-existence, seen against a Platonic backdrop, and besides *kenosis,* the text leaning on Exodus 33:11 presents Moses as a friend of God, with whom God shared part of his power over nature and its elements, so that he was able to perform miracles such as changing a rod into a serpent (see 77-82). He therefore was a fellow and partner (κοινωνός) of God. The most climactic formulations, however, are that Moses himself was a "god" of his people, "partaking of God (himself) and his possessions". As the context shows, "partaking of God" was not sharing in God's essence, although Moses stood face to face with God's essence during the Sinai events (158). In view of the context, partaking of God rather has to be interpreted as an ellipsis, that is, as "partaking of God's power" over the world – or, to move beyond Philo's immediate context, Moses was partaking of God's glory shining on his face like on a mirror (Ex. 34:29f.; see 2 Cor. 3:7, 9). In our text, Philo therefore calls Moses a "godlike" picture of God; God's essence was a "model of all existing things", that is, also of Moses. In turn, Moses as picture can become a "model" for other people imitating him, a model of virtue (158-161). The Platonic pyramid of being, together with the categories of archetype and image, stands in the background of such deliberations. Moses is conceived as a godlike mediator (158) between God and the other humans, sharing in God's supernatural power and displaying a virtue that far exceeds that of other humans (see Aristotle above).

In sum, mirroring the Greco-Roman society's deification of human individuals who rule and, at the same time, display excellent virtue (including for example Moses' modesty), incorruptible reason and benevolence towards one's subjects, Philo's remarkable eulogy of Moses opens its flanks to the same criticism that Christians had to face when developing a Christology: Is monotheism at risk when further going down this road? Neither Philo nor the early Christians were aware of the later Trinitarian formulae that attempted to uphold monotheism.

Again, what strikes in the Philonic – as well as the pagan – deifications of individual humans, is not any interest in speculations about sharing in a god's essence. The divine quality of some individual heroes is rather anchored in their power over others and in their virtue that elevates them above normal humans. It is politically and morally based. Even the hot-tempered hero Heracles, who, upon his cruel death was granted an apotheosis, at his famous crossroads, decided to follow Virtue and not Bliss.

2. Humans as both "sons of god" and "gods"

Matthew parallels the aspect of virtue when defining Jesus' title "Son of God" at the beginning of his narrative (2:15; 3:17; 4:1-11). He not only focuses on Jesus being the Messiah from the House of David (1:1 etc.) and a "God with us" (1:23), fathered by the Holy Spirit (1:18, 20), he also especially highlights his obedience to the will of God – which for Matthew appears to be the ultimate virtue of a Christian.[13] Furthermore, as moral subjects, who by obedient behaviour "get a share of holiness", even the Christians can be called "sons" of God (Heb. 12:4-11).[14]

Theologians have been trained to deduce the Christian Son of God title mainly from the Hebrew Bible and the Mesopotamian and Egyptian prehistory of Hebrew Bible motifs. The kings of Israel, God's Anointed (Ps. 2:1), were adopted by God as Son of God (Ps. 2:7)[15] at their enthronement without, however, having divine qualities or being venerated in a cult.[16] In fact, if the king fails and sins, God punishes him as any human (see 2 Sam. 7:14). Like Psalm 2, Nathan's prophecy calls a successor of David "Son of God", with God promising to be his Father (2 Sam. 7:14; see 1 Chron. 17:13). Interpreted as a messianic prophecy, this Hebrew Bible text, among others, directly fed into early Christian Christology.

> As background, Egypt and Mesopotamia have been rightly compared. In Egypt, the king as a person remained human, without being

13 Matt. 4:1-11 refers to God's will in Deut. 6:13, 16 LXX; 8:3. Matt. 3:15, 17 considers the obedient fulfilling "of all righteousness" a virtue worth of being crowned with divine sonship. Likewise, the Philippians hymn (Phil. 2:6, 8) combines godlikeness with obedience, although here his godlikeness, interpreted as "being in the form of God" (ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων), also characterises his pre-existent, non-human state.

14 Also in rabbinic Judaism, (God's) sons are humans who obey God's will: mQuiddushin 1.61c.36. However, apart from virtue and morals, the New Testament also calls Christians "sons of God" because of Christ's salvific work: Those whom God elected and justified are brothers to Jesus, "conformed to the image of His Son", who is the firstborn among them (Rom. 8:29; see Gal. 3:26; Heb. 2:11f.). They eventually will share in his power (1 Cor. 6:3; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6; see Luke 20:36). As Christians call God "Father" (e.g. John 20:17; Matt. 6:9), they also are "sons of God" or "children of God" (John 1:12; see Heb. 2:10, 13).

15 Applied to Christ in the quotes in Heb. 1:5; 5:5; Acts 13:33; Matt. 3:17; 4:3; Luke 3:22; John 1:49 (God's Son = King of Israel).

16 Only at their funerals special rites could be performed: 2 Chron. 16:14; 21:19; Jer. 34:5; see Deut. 26:14; Ps. 106:28.

> venerated cultically. Instead, he himself had a priestly function, and his designation "son of god" pointed both to the quality difference between the divine and the pharaoh and to his being a mediator between gods and humans. Similarly, in Mesopotamia in the first millennium BCE, the king remained a human creature. The deity chose him to be its son and a perfect image of the divine qualities, for example, when being pure or a wise man participating in the deity's wisdom. If these qualities were not displayed or the king's duties neglected, the deity could chose another person (See e.g. Schmitt 2006).

However, there is more to the son of god title when looking into the Greco-Roman world in which the ancient readers of the early Christological texts found a plethora of motifs they could associate with the Son-of-God title, when listening to these texts.

In the propaganda of the emperors, when legitimising a new emperor's rule, the deifying consecration of the predecessor played a significant role (see especially Gesche 1978:374-390). Not only because the consecration made the new emperor a "god's son", but also because the consecration entailed that a *god* had chosen the new emperor as heir and son. In this way, the transition of power could not be questioned easily. Who would dare to criticise a god's judgment? At the beginning of his reign, Antoninus Pius struggled with the Senate about the deification of Hadrian, his legal father. The Senate resisted a consecration, but Antoninus Pius argued that without an apotheosis Hadrian would be branded a bad ruler and his decisions, including his adoption of Antoninus Pius, would be meaningless, with Antoninus not being able to start his new job (Cassius Dio 70.1.2f.; SHA, Hadrian 27.1-4; Antoninus Pius 6.7). Although this rhetorical argumentation was a huge exaggeration, it nevertheless shows the link between a ruler's legitimisation and the divinity of his father that had been established in the mind-sets over the course of the previous century. Being of divine descent meant to be a "true image" (*imago vera*) of the divine ancestor, with his divinity – and his protection – reflecting onto the descendent (Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.52.2, referring to an incident in the year 26 CE).

Already in Republican times, *Caesar* emphasised that he descended from immortal gods via his father,[17] and after his military victories in the first half of the 40s BCE, he himself was considered a god not only in the East but also in Italian towns (see Claus 2001:46-53). In Rome a statue was dedicated to

17 Suetonius, *Caesar* 6.1: *paternum [genus] cum diis immortalibus coniunctum.*

him as "invincible god" (Cassius Dio 43.45.3). After Caesar's death, *Augustus* (Octavian) attempted to highlight his being the legal son of the deified Caesar, thus his being son of a god. Especially during the civil war, Augustus minted coins stylising himself a god's son (*divi filius*; see further Gesche 1978:382-384). Augustus' opponent, *Antonius,* traced his genealogy to the deified Heracles, so that in the East, he was venerated as a god, as a second Dionysos or Osiris. The third antagonist, *Sextus Pompeius*, claimed to be the son of Neptune. The civil war was a battle of (sons of) gods. For Augustus, his being the legal son of the god Caesar was a stepping stone to being recognised as a god himself already during his lifetime (see the material in Claus 2001:54, 59). Augustus even claimed that in 42 BCE his deceased divine father helped him in the battle near Philippi against Cassius (Valerius Max. 1.8.8). *Tiberius* was *divi Augusti filius* (*CIL* 11.3872; *AE* 1950: 44), son and grandson of gods (Caesar and Augustus), whom Valerius Maximus praised for his "celestial providence". According to Valerius Maximus, Tiberius promoted the "virtues", and his "divinity" was equal to that of his father and grandfather who, with their apotheosis, had become stars in the sky.[18] How much Tiberius himself valued his being the son of the divine Augustus can be seen in his efforts to push and develop the cult of Augustus.[19] *Caligula* also, emphasised his descent from deities, via his grandmothers descending from both Augustus and Antonius, and like his predecessors he himself was considered a deity in his lifetime (Claus 2001:89-94). *Nero*, after having been adopted by Claudius in the year 50 CE and before his ascent to the throne, had a cult as a god's son at Pompeii with its own priest (*flamen Neronis Caesaris Aug[usti] filii*; *CIL* 4.1185; see 11.1331 at Luna), and when he came to power in 54 CE, he was celebrated as a new deity in Alexandria.[20] *Vespasian*, only being a banker's son, attempted to legitimise his claim to the throne by seeking authorisation from Egyptian gods. In the name of Serapis, he allegedly worked healing miracles, to

18 Valerius Max. *praef*.; see Claus (2001:89) for further references for Tiberius' divinity already during his lifetime.

19 E.g. to the priest (*flamen*) of the deified Augustus he added a priestess like in the Jupiter cult, and he punished a town in Asia Minor for not completing an Augustus temple. Cassius Dio 57.24.6; Tac., *Ann*. 4.36; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37. See further Claus (2001:370).

20 See the material in Claus (2001:98-111) and Lampe (2010:9-12).

which the Gospel of Mark covertly but critically alludes,[21] and claimed to be the fulfilment of the messianic expectations of the Jews.[22] A papyrus from the last quarter of the first century CE[23] called him "Son of Amun" and at the same time "saviour", "benefactor", "lord" and "god" (θεός). In the same way Alexander the Great had legitimised his rule over Egypt by having the Amun oracle in Siwa affirm his being the son of Amun, whom he identified with Zeus.[24]

Titus consecrated his deceased father, Vespasian, to legitimise his own rule and was deified himself by his brother Domitian. *Domitian,* consequently, could legitimise himself as brother as well as son of a god (Pliny, *Paneg.* 11). At the same time he was hailed as "our Lord"[25] and as god (*deus*),[26] just like Thomas acclaimed Jesus in John 20:28, and already Vespasian had been addressed (see above). Domitian's own son, who died before his father ascended to power in 81 CE, was consecrated a god (*divus Caesar*) shortly after Domitian had become emperor. A coin depicted him as Jupiter, sitting on a globe as a naked child, surrounded by seven stars.[27] Domitian also consecrated the deceased daughter of a god, Julia, daughter of his deified brother Titus.[28] More examples could easily be added continuing through history. Numerous successors of Nerva[29] traced their divine decent to him, and

21 Tacitus, *Hist* 4,81f.; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 7; Dio Cassius 66.8.1; reflected in Mark 3:1-6; 8:22-26. See further e.g. Lampe (2015:111-129, especially 119-122).

22 Josephus, *Bell.* 6.312f; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.13; Suetonius, *Vesp.* 4.5.

23 P. Fouad 8 (See Philostratus, *Vita Apollonii* 5.27-36): Οὐεσπ]ασιανὸς εἷς σωτὴρ καὶ ε[ὐεργέτης][Ἄμμων]ο[ς υἱ]ὸς ὁ ἀνατέλλων ε[ ] [ ]α φύλαξον ἡμῖν αὐτ[ὸν] [κύρι]ε Σεβαστέ ε...ιενϛαρ[ ] [ ]α Ἄμμωνος υἱὸς κ...απλ̣[ ]...θεὸς Καῖσαρ Οὐεσπασια[νὸς.

24 Kallisthenes of Olynth, *Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker* 124 Frg. 14; Strabo, *Geographika* 17.1.43; Diodorus, *Bibliotheca Historica* 17.51; Plutarch, *Alexander* 27. See further Bosworth (1988:71-74).

25 *CIL* 2.4722: *D[ominus] n[oster] Imperator Caesar divi Vespasiani Aug[usti] f[ilius];* 10.444: *optim[i] principis et domini.*

26 E.g. Martial, *Epigr.* 5.8.1; 7.34.8f.; 8.2.6; 9.66.3; Suetonius, *Dom.* 13.2; 4.4; Pliny, *Paneg.* 33.4; 49.1; 78.2; *AE* 1941: 73. See the same titles for his father in P. Fouad 8, above.

27 Photo and references in Claus (2001:122).

28 *CIL* 3.13524; 9.1153; Martial, *Epigr.* 9.1.6f. For Trajan, the son of the deified Nerva, and Hadrian, the son of the deified Trajan, see *AE* 1950:58, as well as Claus (2001:135f., 143). It appears that common people considered Trajan capable of performing healing miracles like Vespasian: Pliny, *Paneg.* 22.3.

29 See the epigraphic material in Claus (2001:371f.).

in 318 CE Constantine minted coins[30] in which he celebrated his deified father Constantius[31] to underpin his own power and dignity.

All of the examples show that a god's son was not just a human but considered elevated above other humans, in most cases being called "god" himself.[32] It is therefore not surprising that the New Testament, in a seemingly incoherent way, calls Jesus both Son of God and God in the same sentence or passage (Heb. 1:8; John 20:28, 31; 10:33, 36; 19:7; 1:14, 18). In the same way, Christ in a later inscription is entitled "God, the Son of God" (*deus dei filius*).[33] For ancient ears, this was not conceptually blurry or incoherent at all. The same was true for both God and Christ being called "God" (θεός) in the same sentence (e.g. Heb. 1:9; see John 1:1, 18). Only monotheistically trained ears may have been surprised.

A second common denominator of all of these examples, including the Christian ones, is that the category of divine essence (οὐσία) did not play a role (yet) for describing divine sonship. This explains why Arianism succeeded in convincing many people for a long time with its subordination Christology and the notion that "the Logos is in every aspect alien (ἀλλότριος) and non-similar (ἀνόμοιος) to the essence (οὐσία) of the Father" (Schmidt & Schubart 1910:10677). The term οὐσία as Christological or Trinitarian category did not exist in the New Testament.[34]

When the Romans wanted to express the divine aspect of an emperor they used *numen,* denoting his divine effective power, or *genius*, that is, his guardian deity; the *genius* was considered a divine aspect, inherent in every human, not just

30 See Claus (2001:196, 202). For other emperors as sons of gods in the 2nd and 3rd centuries see *ibid*. 147, 152, 160f., 174, 181, etc.

31 "Emperor on earth and god in heaven": *Paneg. Lat*. 6(7).4.2.

32 See also the pledge of allegiance to Tiberius by the Cyprus people upon his accession to power in 14 CE: They pledged to venerate as divine not only the new emperor-god Tiberius but also his sons Drusus and Germanicus (although the latter explicitly rejected divine honours for himself five years later; see above).

33 *ILCV* 1613a (Moesia superior). See also the text by the church historian Socrates, footnote 37.

34 In Luke's parable 15:12f., οὐσία simply meant "property/financial assets" that the father gave to the prodigal son. Also Heb. 1:1-4 is far removed from using the "essence" category, contrary to some modern translations that insinuate such a reading. See Lampe (2009:63-71).

the emperor.[35] For Latin Christians *genius* and *numen*, however, were not fit to become Christological categories. *Numina,* for Tertullian, was just another term for "gods". The pagans themselves make fun of their *numina*, Tertullian laughed (Tertullian, *Nat.* 1.10). And about the *genius* term he wrote,

> We make our oaths ... not by the *genius* of the Caesar ... *genius* is a name for *daemon* or in the diminutive *daemonium* ... we are accustomed to exorcise *daemons* or *geniuses* ... not to give them the honour of divinity (*divinitas*) (Tertullian, *Apol.* 32.2f.; see *Nat.* 1.17).

Third, biological fatherhood was irrelevant. What counted was legal sonship, with numerous emperors having been adopted by their predecessor. In the same way, Psalm 2:7, quoted in Hebrews 1:5; 5:5; Acts 13:13, did not mean God's "begetting" (γεννάω) his son in any literal way; "begetting" denoted the king's adoption by God at the enthronement (see above).

3. Some hermeneutical consequences

i. As was shown, for quite a while, Christology ran parallel to the ideology of deifications of emperors, putting monotheism at risk, until the church, to preserve monotheism, in late antiquity managed to rein in this process by focussing on the category of divine "essence", and thus cutting the ties to tendencies to Arianism. However, not until Nicea in 325 CE, the (originally Gnostic) formula of Christ being of the same essence as the Father, of being "*one* in being" and "consubstantial" (ὁμοούσιος), was made official doctrine.

ii. The long-term parallelism between Christology and emperor ideology entailed that, at least latently, Christology was an antithesis or antipole to the emperors and their religious claims. In this way, a politically critical aspect was inherent in early Christology, even already in the pre-Pauline hymn of Philippians 2 if more recent anti-imperial exegeses of the Pauline literature[36] can be trusted, considering the convincing evidence they have accumulated.

35 For the emperor's *numen*, see Claus (2001:229-237); for his *genius*, *ibid.*, 221-229. In addition, see note 4 above.

36 See e.g. Collins (2003:361-372) and Standhartinger (2006:370). For an anti-imperial exegesis of Mark, see Lampe (2015:111-129).

iii. To contextualise the Christian deification of Jesus within the Greco-Roman world and not just within the Jewish tradition (with its titles Son of God, Anointed/Messiah/Christ, Son of David or Son of Man) appears to be legitimate, considering that people in antiquity also deemed the veneration of Jesus as god analogous to the deification of an emperor;[37] both Jesus and an emperor were humans made into gods. On the same line, but much earlier, Luke appeared to have composed his ascension story as an antithetical parallel to apotheoses of emperors.[38] Moreover, from the third century onward the legend was circulated that Pilate told Emperor Tiberius about Christ's numerous miracles and about the belief of many people in Jesus' divinity, so that the emperor made a move in the Senate to consecrate and thus deify Christ.[39] This legend confirms that ancient minds were aware of the parallelism between deifications of emperors and the Christian deification of Jesus. Modern scholarship, therefore, might as well explore the parallels.

The parallelism was even more imposing, as not only Jesus' death and resurrection were considered an enhancement of his divinity (see e.g. Rom. 1:4) but also the divinity of an emperor after his death obtained an even higher quality upon his consecrating apotheosis. The emperor god, depicted as belonging to both the divine and the human sphere and thus mediating both, may have served as one model for the Christological construction process in the first centuries.

However, the parallelism does not support that the emperor ideology contributed to the *origins* of Christology. Christology was first formulated when reading and interpreting Jewish writings. Nonetheless, from the perspective of reader response criticism, the parallelism supports that already first-century readers could associate the omnipresent emperor ideology

37 See Socrates, *Hist. Eccl.* 3.23 (Migne Patrologia Gr. 67, p. 445). Socrates criticises that, while the sophist Libanios "himself deified (ἀποθεόω) (the emperor) Iulianos (Apostata)", he makes fun of the Christians that they "make a human from Palestine into God and Son of God". For Socrates both deifications were parallel, and for Libanios this parallelism also existed, but for him it was ridiculous – *not* because a human was deified by the Christians but because some insignificant Jewish preacher from the Palestinian hinterland was deified like an important emperor and thus compared to him.

38 See Lampe (2010:8-9) and Kezbere (2007).

39 Tertullian, *Apol.* 5.2; Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.2.2; Rufinus, *Hist. Eccl.* 2.2.1-3; Orosius 7.4.5.

when reading Christological texts. In this way, the further unfolding of Christology may have been partly shaped in response to this ideology. Why else, for instance, did Luke, as the only New Testament author, separate Christ's elevation to heaven from Christ's resurrection, with "resurrection" being a genuinely Jewish concept (e.g. Dan 12) while elevation to heaven was comparable to Greco-Roman apotheoses?

iv. It is not easy to draw consequences from these findings for today's Christology, and the following thoughts are just preliminary, far from doing justice to the hermeneutical problems. First, it might be wise to keep the at least latent socially or politically critical aspect of Christology alive, keeping in mind that God elevated somebody who had innocently died on the "electric chair" of the Roman Empire as a despised criminal, who had preached mercy and love, especially toward down-trodden and the people at the fringes of society, who had not sought worldly honours and, in this way, had turned the ancient concept of hierarchies and honour/shame categories upside down (see e.g. 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5; Mark 10:42-45). If this man from Palestine was worthy of God's honouring him, the powerful rulers of the world and their actions might be called into question if necessary.

Second, it may be wise to move away from the late-antiquity philosophical category of "essence" or "substance", which has little to do with Scripture and can no longer be easily conveyed to people of today. What is "divine essence" as opposed to "human essence"? A contemporary churchgoer might have trouble explaining this even after lengthy dogmatic elaborations by theologians. Even a modern anthropologist might have difficulties expounding what "human essence" is, considering the progress in, for example, the science of animal ethology in recent years.

Third, it might be wise to put less empasis on the traditional Christological titles – such as Son of God. This title denoted the anointed king of Israel, a human, from whose house a future human messianic king and political saviour was expected to come. At the same time, it was a title of Roman emperors, that is, of human rulers considered to be equipped with extraordinary ("divine") power and maybe even virtue.

As New Testament title, this designation of Jesus is constantly (mis-) understood by Christians today, construing it in the sense of the Nicene creed,

while it originally meant a human who excelled other people in power and/or virtue without making any statements about "divine essence". One might call the Nicene understanding a misunderstanding of an original meaning or, more positively put, a further semantic development of a traditional title. But people have to obtain clarity about what happened hermeneutically in the past, to avoid blurriness in the present.

According to the early Christian reality construct, in Jesus of Nazareth, God had revealed God's will and intention in an especially clear way, including God's intention to "save". In Jesus of Nazareth, in his words and actions, God therefore had been especially present. This is what the traditional New Testament Christological titles wanted to convey. It makes no difference with which traditional linguistic label this special position of Jesus was verbalised ("Son of God", "Son of Man", "Anointed = Messiah, Christ", etc.). In every case, the new content given by Jesus' life burst open the old title (a crucified "Son of God", a weak "Anointed", a humble "Son of Man"), so that the choice of the individual terms does not matter, but rather their common vanishing point: the special presence of God in the sayings, deeds and sufferings of Jesus of Nazareth (see Lampe 2012:121). Instead of using traditional titles and formulas, theologians of today might be well advised to find their own words for the excelling importance of the Palestinian man from Nazareth, using language that, for example, could focus on functions or on relational ontology. Traditional titles, when applied to Jesus, had been emptied of most of their traditional content already in the first century when they had been refilled with new content moulded by Jesus' life, his death and his disciples' Easter visions. It is this content that contemporary theologians need to formulate in the language of today, without having to lose the exclusivity of Jesus in his salvific death and his resurrection. They have a prophetic, creative task and cannot settle for repeating "correct" dogmatic tradition. The traditional formulas and titles have driven many people out of the churches in the increasingly secularised societies of our time.

The result of such prophetic proclamation might perhaps resemble, for example, Arianistic inclinations in late antiquity, but this comparison is anachronistic and useless, as useless and anachronistic as accusing the New Testament of tendencies to Arianism. Old labels and battles, nestled in their specific historical situations, are blind to the needs of the present

time. Each period has to take responsibility for its own formulations of what it means that God worked in Jesus. Present-day theologians thus need to contextualise the gospel as much as the New Testament writings did in the first hundred years of Christianity. It is this hermeneutical method that also was canonised – not just certain Christological formulas or titles.

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Chapter 2

Overburdening Jesus with divinity causes theological limitations: Matthew 4:1-11 as test case

Peter Nagel[1]

1. Introduction

The divinity of Jesus is a contentious issue and arguments both against and in favour of it have been widespread ever since the start of his public ministry in the early first century CE. Furthermore, it is reasonable to infer that the New Testament authors, in general, defined "divinity" as possessing "super" human abilities;[2] and that the title "Son of God" was used for someone with such abilities. It does, however, seem as if the Matthean Gospel explored alternative ways of understanding "divinity," especially in relation to Jesus as the "Son of God." The theory to be tested, here, is if the Jewish embeddedness of the Matthean Gospel encouraged the author to explore alternative ways of understanding the divinity of Jesus.[3] The premise underlying this theory is that the theological potential of the Matthean Gospel lies within the reinterpretation

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2 It should be noted that there are various nuanced emphases and differences between the New Testament authors in this regard. It goes without saying that there was no uniform idea of "divinity." Moreover, I do not suggest that the New Testament authors intentionally defined "divinity." Based on the New Testament evidence, I postulate that they would have defined "divinity" as possessing supernatural abilities.

3 Versnel (2011:268) makes a valuable remark that "the terms *ho theos, hoi theoi, to theion, ho daimon, hoi daimones,* referring to an anonymous and mysteriously interfering divine (or at least supernatural) power, abound in Greek idiom of all periods"; see also Klauck (2000:25-30).

and recontextualisation of the Jewish tradition. Therefore, the emphasis on the divinity of Jesus in the traditional sense of the word undermines and limits the theology offered by the Jewish tradition. The continuation of the Jewish tradition is the foundation for theological relevance and effectiveness of the Matthean Gospel in and through the person of Jesus; I summarise this in the title of this chapter as "overburdening Jesus with divinity causes theological limitations." A valid question in this regard is if the Matthean Gospel has any interest in divinising Jesus.

The primary aim of this chapter is not to address the divinity issue *per se*.[4] It aims, rather, to evaluate and discuss the theological[5] limitations that result from overburdening Jesus with divinity, seen specifically in the context of Matthew 4:1-11. The contention here is that the devil is representative of the "traditional" understanding of Jesus' divinity as the "Son of God." Moreover, the author allows the devil to confront Jesus as "Son of God," while playing into three essential Jewish roles, prophet (the desert), priest (the temple), and king (the mountain) symbolically representing the Jewish tradition as a whole, making Matthew 4:1-11 an ideal literary context to test the theory of whether the Jewish embeddedness of the Matthean Gospel encouraged the author to explore alternative ways of understanding Jesus' divinity.[6] A simple textual analysis of this passage will reveal the traditional understanding of divinity as having the ability to perform supernatural deeds, and to act metaphysically. The tone for the scene in Matthew 4:1-11 is set with the phrase καὶ καλέσουσιν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἐμμανουήλ (Matt. 1:23b), explained in the Greek vernacular as ὅ ἐστιν μεθερμηνευόμενον μεθ' ἡμῶν ὁ θεός. Jesus, son of Mary and Joseph, is

4 I agree with Versnel (2011:382) that human beings (including the author of the Matthean Gospel) cannot perceive a completely non-anthropomorphic "god" since we cannot speak about him/her in non-anthropomorphic terms. In the case of the Matthean Gospel, the appropriate "anthropomorphic" constructs to use are for the most part informed by the Jewish tradition.

5 My working definition for theology is that it concerns both the verbal and non-verbal expression of – and reflection on – the human experience of and relation to the Transcendent, embedded as it is in a deep spiritual awareness and existential experience.

6 Versnel (2011:390) makes a valuable remark that "gods unite complete sets of anthropomorphic and allomorphic characteristics, which are all available on demand according to situation and context."

introduced here as the "coming-into-flesh" of אל (*El*, the wise Hebrew deity).[7] This construct signifies a great deal more than the mere identification of Jesus as the expected Messiah.[8] It is the Hebrew deity – the metaphysical – that becomes existential in the flesh and person of Jesus. This gives rise, though not exclusively so, to the "Son of God" title. This construct, sanctioned by the Isaiah 7:14 citation, allows the author of the Matthean Gospel to present the Hebrew deity in anthropomorphic terms, even though the idea that a person "embodies" the Hebrew deity, and may thus himself be deemed divine, was wholly unacceptable in Jewish thought, as is clear from the interaction between the high priest and Jesus in Matthew 26:59-66.[9] The creative challenge for the Matthean Gospel is to show how Jesus as Emmanuel reveals the God of the Jews.

The identity of the son of Mary and Joseph in relation to the Hebrew deity stems from first century Jewish-Christian thought. According to Dean Overmann (2010:10), the divinity of Jesus relies on the consistency of the high Christology found in primitive Christianity. Udo Schnelle (2007:48),[10] on the other hand, refers to Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), who argued that the Jesus of history[11]

7 The Hebrew phrase עִמָּנוּ אֵל, captured by the Greek Ἐμμανουήλ, forms the centripetal force of Jesus' divinity. Knupp (1996:164) refers to "Emmanuel" as the collective remnant and corporate faith in God's deliverance; the "with-us-God" embodies the assurance of God's dynamic power.

8 An important question in this regard is how the title Χριστός relates to the concepts Ἐμμανουήλ and ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. The term Χριστός, used as title for Jesus, was adopted very early on in primitive Jewish-Christian thought, even as the divinity of Jesus remained a contentious issue (Ochs 2013:3-6); Hahn (2011a:530), on the other hand, notes that, for the Matthean Gospel, the Χριστός title is closely related to the Old Testament Messianic tradition. For a more in-depth study on Messianism in Second Temple Judaism, see Horbury (1998:5-35), in particular his discussion of the messianic origins and the cult of Christ (Horbury 1998:109-152).

9 It is obvious that the "Emmanuel" construct does not imply that the recipients of the Gospel will ascribe the unique qualities of the Hebrew deity to Jesus, e.g. immortality and power over nature and human life (see Versnel 2011:391).

10 Schnelle also refers to M. Kähler, who is of the opinion that Jesus can only be comprehended through the Gospels, while for Bultmann Jesus can only be known clothed with a mythical garment (Schnelle 2007:49; see Hahn 2011a:31).

11 Hahn (2011a:31) explains the distinction made in the German vernacular between the "historischer Jesus" and the "irdischer Jesus." The former implies Jesus as the object of historical critical research, while the latter refers to the proclaimed, post-Easter Jesus

and the proclaimed Christ are not identical. The discovery of new artefacts around the middle of the 20th century (Qumran and Nag-Hammadi manuscripts, especially the Gospel of Thomas), heralded the era of interpreting Jesus of Nazareth within the context of Judaism. Overmann alludes to the prominence of these artefacts, especially the Gospel of Thomas and its dating, as "prooftexts" for the human nature of Jesus. Overmann will concur with Schnelle's critique on the matter:

> Das Ziel solcher Konstruktion liegt zweifellos darin, die Deutungsmacht der kanonischen Evangelien zu brechen und ein alternatives Jesusbild zu etablieren. Dabei dienen häufig die Lust am Sensationellen, die bloße Vermutung und das unbewiesene Postulat als Stimulans für eine bewusst öffentlichkeitswirksam geführte Debatte. Historischer Kritik halten solche Konstruktionen nicht stand, denn weder die Existenz eines, geheimen Markusevangeliums' oder einer „Semeia Quelle" lassen sich wahrscheinlich machen und das Thomasevangelium gehört in das 2.Jh.! (Schnelle 2007:51; see Overmann 2010:7-8).

The Matthean Gospel uses the "significant other", the devil, to "force" Jesus to act "stereotypically" divine and by so doing, highlights the theological potential of Jesus as the "Son of Man." The question whether the Matthean Gospel nurtured the divinity of Jesus will be addressed next.

2. Does the Matthean Gospel nurture the divine identity of Jesus?[12]

The title "Son of Man" dominates in the Matthean Gospel,[13] and, according to Schnelle (2007:131), refers to "eine himmlische, menschenähnliche Gestalt

as the exalted "Lord": "... vorösterliche Geschichte und Botschaft Jesus, und sie ist die Grundlage für die gesamte nachösterliche Tradition" (Hahn 2011a:128).

12 Kim (1983:3) argues that Mark's adaption of Peter's response to Jesus' question, from σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστός (Mark 8:29) to σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος (Matt. 16:16) is the clearest example of the equation of the Son of Man with the Son of God in the Synoptic Gospels. Kim fails to take the text-critical data into account, however. The text-critical data for Mark 8:29 suggest a variant reading in codex Sinaiticus, among others, as ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. One could, therefore, infer that ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ came from an earlier *Vorlage* from which both Mark and Matthew inherited the concept. The Χριστός title is nowhere near a dominant term in the Matthean Gospel. It is used in only five instances (Matt. 1:1, 17, 18; 11:2; 23:10), two of which are in close conceptual proximity to the term Ἰησοῦς (Matt. 1:1, 18).

13 Matt. 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 11:19; 12:8, 40; 13:37; 17:9, 12, 22; 19:28; 20:18; 25:31; 26:2, 24, 45; see Schnelle (2007:130-134). O'Collins (2009:62) mentions that Jesus refers to

mit Richter-, Herrscher- und Retterfunktion". This interpretation of the "Son of Man" as a "heavenly" being in human form fits in well with the kingdom of heaven-construct, also predominately used throughout the Gospel.[14] The concept of heaven as a divine locality, on the one hand, and the title "Son of Man" ascribed to Jesus, on the other, reveals Jesus' unique relationship to this locality, and reveals his authoritative function. This, however, does not necessarily speak to Jesus' divine character.[15] To determine the author's predisposition to the divinity of Jesus, one ought to attend to two other titles used for Jesus, namely Jesus as "Son of God," and Jesus as "the Christ."[16] By doing this, it is not suggested that the author's perception of Jesus' divinity is limited to these titles or constructs. Rather, it is generally accepted that the definitions of these concepts inform the divine nature of Jesus (O'Collins 2009:229-334).[17]

himself as "Son of Man" sixty-nine times in the Gospels. As part of the Jewish polemic against Jesus' divinity, Ochs deals extensively with the title "Son of Man"; in *Sefer Yosef ha-Meqanne* (Ochs 2013:149-151, 158); in *Kelimmat ha-Goyim* (Ochs 2013:271); and in *Hizzuq Emunah* (Ochs 2013:302, 309, 311).

14 Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 5:10, 19, 20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:7; 11:11, 12; 13:11, 24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47, 52; 18:1, 3, 4, 23; 19:12, 14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1. The author also alludes to ἄγγελοι ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ (Matt. 22:30; 24:36). The construct παρὰ τοῦ πατρός μου τοῦ ἐν οὐρανοῖς (Matt. 7:11, 21; 10:32, 33; 11:25; 12:50; 18:10; 14, 19) is not only prominent, but also well developed. The concept of τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ (Matt. 5:16, 45; 6:1, 9, 26; 8:20; 13:32), though not as frequently used, emphasises the author's inclination towards "heaven" as a divine locality. The voice and spirit from heaven during Jesus' baptism further highlights this notion (Matt. 3:16); see Hahn (2011a:527).

15 Regarding the origin of the "Son of God" title, O'Collins (2009:122) reiterates that 1 Thes. 1:10 is the oldest Christian reference to Jesus as Son of God. From this he argues, and I agree, that for Matthew the destiny of God's (collective) son, Israel, was understood to have been fulfilled in Jesus (O'Collins 2009:123). The pre-Christian, Judaic version of the "Son of God" as royal sonship, if you will, dominates the Matthean Gospel (see O'Collins 2009:122-126). Also see the discussion on Jesus as god/God in Dunn (2010:132-136). Hurtado (2005:46-48) would categorise Jesus as one of the principle agents of the One God.

16 Hahn (2011a:530) describes how the title ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, the conception through the Holy Spirit, and the virgin birth, are intertwined with the Messianic function. The temptation narrative, as captured in Matt. 4:1-11, is a perfect example of the connection between the divine sonship of Jesus and his messianic function (Hahn 2011a:530).

17 See the discussion on the revision of the exclusive understanding of titles assigned to Jesus and the problems associated with the Christological title in Theißen & Merz (2011:453-455), as well as the discussion on the development from Messiah to the

The ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ construct occurs as a title for Jesus in only ten instances,[18] and is never claimed by Jesus himself.[19] In the Beatitudes, we learn that "peacemakers" will be called υἱοὶ θεοῦ (Matt. 5:9), but in light of chapter 4, it is the two demon-possessed men who draw attention when they refer to Jesus as υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ. This is not a statement made in the third person; instead they are addressing, in fact mocking, Jesus to his face (Matt. 8:29). They (the demons) apparently know that Jesus is able to drive them out of the men because of his so-called "divine" status as the "Son of God." Suspiciously, it is first the demons, and later the devil, that push the metaphysical dimension of Jesus' divine character. Following Peter's failed attempt to walk on water, and Jesus' ability to calm the winds, those around him confess: ἀληθῶς θεοῦ υἱὸς εἶ (Matt. 14:33). Ironically, it is the same Peter who, in response to Jesus' question of who the disciples say he is, confesses in Caesarea Philippi: σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος (Matt. 16:16).

It is noteworthy that a confession of this nature is never isolated from a response by Jesus himself, confirming that this perception of both Jesus and his divine nature is being critiqued or put into context. This particularly holds true for Matthew 26:63, where the high priest poses the question to Jesus: ἐξορκίζω σε κατὰ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ζῶντος ἵνα ἡμῖν εἴπῃς εἰ σὺ εἶ ὁ χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ("I charge you under oath before the living God, to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God"). Jesus does not answer in the affirmative, but responds as follows: ἀπ' ἄρτι ὄψεσθε τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ("But I say to you all, that in future the Son of Man will be sitting on the right hand of the mighty one and coming on the clouds of heaven"), herewith affirming his cosmic-apocalyptic function as the "Son of Man." The contemptuous nature of referring to Jesus as the "Son of God" is also illustrated in Matthew 27:39-44, when those passing Jesus on the cross call out at him: εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ, [καὶ] κατάβηθι ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ. The chief priests and

"Son of God" (Theißen & Merz 2011:481-482). See Schnelle (2007:134-136), as well as his discussion on the development of the Christological title (Schnelle 2007:163-172); as well as Hahn (2011b:194-225).

18 Matt. 4:3, 6; 5:9; 8:29; 14:33; 16:16; 26:63; 27:40, 43, 54.

19 The prominence of the "Son of David" title should also not be overlooked. The opening lines of the Gospel begin with Βίβλος γενέσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ υἱοῦ Δαυὶδ υἱοῦ Ἀβραάμ (see Matt. 1:20; 9:27; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9, 15). The father-son analogy is alluded to in Matt. 11:27; see Matt. 5:45.

teachers, also party to the mocking of Jesus, went a step further by suggesting that Jesus should wait for God to rescue him, since Jesus had proclaimed his trust in God by claiming, θεοῦ εἰμι υἱός. This statement made by the chief priests and teachers is, of course, false. Jesus never referred or alluded to himself as the "Son of God," but used the title "Son of Man." Their mocking thus reflects their ill-informed perception of Jesus' identity, and their skewed expectation of his presumed divinity as "Son of God."

Table 1 provides a condensed overview on how the title "Son of God" is used in the Matthean Gospel.

Table 1: An overview on how the title "Son of God" is used in the Matthean Gospel

Text reference	Construct	Context	Person uttering it
Matt. 5:9	Peacemakers will be called "sons of God"	Beatitudes, Sermon on the Mount	Jesus
Matt. 8:29	Jesus as the "Son of God"	Jesus driving out emons	Demon possessed men
Matt. 14:33	Jesus as the "Son of God"	Jesus calming the wind after Peter failed to walk on water	Disciples
Matt. 16:16	Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God	Jesus posing the question to his disciples, "Who do you say I am?"	Peter
Matt. 27:38-43	Jesus as the "Son of God"	People mocking Jesus while hanging on the cross	Chief priests, teachers and other

Following this brief discussion on the Matthean approach to the divinity of Jesus, it seems plausible that Jesus' divinity in the cosmic-apocalyptic, heavenly-authoritative, and functional sense of the word, forms the backdrop against which both the "Son of Man" title and Jesus' relationship to and with the Hebrew deity should be interpreted. Jesus, as mediator of the kingdom of heaven, finds widespread support in the Matthean Gospel. The divinity of Jesus in the metaphysical, supernatural sense of the word, however, is critiqued rather than nurtured. The variant, ambiguous, and satirical utilisation of the "Son of God" concept highlights the sceptical stance taken toward Jesus' divine character as an equation with the Hebrew deity: Peacemakers will be sons of God, demon-possessed men mockingly confront Jesus, the disciples and Peter confess Jesus to be the Son of God, followed again by people mocking Jesus.

The author does not burden Jesus with divinity, let alone overburden. It will be interesting to see to which extent Matthew 4:1-11 fits in with this approach.[20]

3. Analysis of Matthew 4:1–11

The temptation narrative should be understood in the context of Matthew 3:1-4:11 (see Nolland 2005:162; Luz 2007:147-148). Matthew 3 introduces Jesus' alternative Jewish affiliation with John the Baptist, living in the desert as opposed to the stronghold in Jerusalem (vv. 1-12), and points to the father-son relationship between God and Jesus (οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, ἐν ᾧ εὐδόκησα; vv. 13-16). This is followed by Jesus being led into the desert, an alternative space, where he is to be tempted (Matt. 4:1-11).[21] The citation from Isaiah 7:14 in Matthew 1:23b should also be kept in mind, since it sets the tone for how Jesus will be understood in relation to the Hebrew deity.

3.1 Prophetic role: First divinity challenge (Matt. 4:1–4)

The (god-forsaken) desert, where Jesus is "led" by the "Spirit," sets the perfect scene for the divinity challenge[22] of Jesus as the "Son of God,"[23] as orchestrated

20 In light of *Milhamot ha-Shem*, Ochs (2013:188) suggests that, from the outset, Matthew did not consider Jesus to be divine.

21 Nolan is of the opinion that the three trials of Jesus, as found in Matt. 4:1-11, echo the story of David (Nolan 1979:172). He makes this claim in light of the prominence of the "Son of David" title, discussed extensively in chapter 7.

22 Ochs (2013:191). argues that the temptation in Matt. 4:1-11 operates under the premise that Jesus is somehow able, as "Son of God", to follow Satan's suggestions. He elaborates, "[T]his would suggest that Matthew saw Jesus as a human with 'divine powers' (who could turn stones into bread), or as a divine being that experienced hunger" (Ochs 2013:191, n. 106). I do not, however, consider these to be the only options. It is equally plausible to interpret the challenges posed to Jesus, especially in the manner and in the context that they were posed, as the author's critique against those (represented by the devil) who suggested that Jesus as the "Son of God" is divine. This will support the general Jewish polemic against the divinity of Jesus. According to Knupp (1996:33), the narrator is one of the most important rhetorical elements in the discourse of the First Gospel. The implied author speaks in the third person, and by so doing reveals his ideological point of view and executes his critical function (see also Knupp 1996:34).

23 O'Collins (2009:121) explains that sonship, in general, means: (1) belonging or being related to God in some special way, and (2), being commissioned by God to fulfil some vocation. Bird argues that Jesus identified himself as a divine agent with a unique

by the devil.[24] Jesus' "alternative" affiliation, identification, and association are being questioned, namely with that of the desert, John the Baptist, and baptism for the forgiveness of sin.[25] It is not merely a man, Jesus, going into the desert to confront the devil; he is led by the Spirit. The scene has, therefore, been carefully constructed by the author, to respectfully reaffirm, first, that Jesus is not divine in metaphysical terms, and second, that Jesus understood himself as "Son of Man" (see O'Collins 2009:66-67). These aspects alone already provide substantial enough ground upon which to infer that (over)burdening Jesus with divinity, as the "Son of God," causes theological limitations.

The symbolic "forty" (ἡμέρας τεσσεράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσεράκοντα) calls an array of conceptual memories to mind.[26] Some of the most prominent among these include the Israelites' wandering in the desert for forty years before entering Canaan as the Promised Land, and Moses' Mount Sinai retreat.[27] Like Jesus, Moses also refrained from eating and drinking during this period of writing the Ten Commandments, the covenant, on the stone tablets.[28] With this phrase, then, particularly ὕστερον ἐπείνασεν, the author manages to emphasise Jesus' mental and physical state before he was tempted. Specifically, his humanity and the limitations as a mortal being are put to the fore. As Ochs (2013:190) puts it, if Jesus were God, he would not have become hungry and the Spirit would have sustained him indefinitely. It is, therefore, inconceivable, from a Jewish point of view, that Jesus should "be" the Hebrew deity, and that God could have

authority and a unique relationship with Israel's God (Bird 2014:46). While I agree with Bird on this point, I do not think that Jesus believed himself to embody the very personhood of God (*contra* Bird 2014:64).

24 Meyer (1864:115) comments that the ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος and ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου phrases stand in close relationship with one another, both in this verse and in history. According to Berger (2011:22), the themes addressed by the temptations of Jesus are (1) the personal calling of Jesus, (2) the definition of God's kingdom, and, subsequently, (3) the revelation of God.

25 These aspects stand in direct opposition to the temple, the Jewish elite, and the law.

26 Gen. 7:12; Ex. 16:35 (see Deut. 2:7; 8:2; Amos 2:10; 5:25); 24:18.

27 Ex. 24:18; see Ex. 34:28 (see Deut. 10:10). See also Nolland (2005:162-163); Luz (2007:151).

28 Ex. 34:28; see Deut. 9:11, 18.

"become" a human, or at most, be found in human form. Jesus' fasting, in short, places him in the same category as other pious Jews.[29]

The tempter approaches Jesus with a challenge: "If you are the Son of God, instruct these stones to become bread." The conditional clause, introduced by the preposition εἰ, does not aim to highlight the tempter's doubt. On the contrary, like the demon-possessed men, the tempter accepts that Jesus is the "Son of God," and understands this to mean that Jesus possesses supernatural abilities, or at least that he is able to intervene in the "natural" world.[30] This is, however, not the issue at stake. The tempter plays into ὕστερον ἐπείνασεν (Matt. 4:2) when he suggests that Jesus should command the stones to turn into bread. He hopes that Jesus will be overcome by his frail physical and mental state and will use his "supernatural" powers as a "divine" or "spiritual" being. The question posed by a presumed "heavenly" or "spiritual" being reveals the author's understanding that to act "divinely," especially when forced by physical challenges, will result in a limiting "divine" impact. Thus, the imbalanced interplay between the physical and the spiritual limits the theological potential. The scene is set by means of the locality (the desert, a space void of divinity), the characters (the heavenly being and Jesus, presumed divine), and the dialogue between the characters. The "un-divine"

29 Nolland (2005:163) interprets the fasting as "self-deprivation to facilitate exposure to one's self of the nature of the self before God: the pressure of hunger can be immensely self-revealing". For Luz (2007:151), the aim of the fasting is to distinguish Jesus as the Son of God. See Hagner (1998:64).

30 Meyer (1864:116) interprets v. 3 as meaning that not only is the devil not ignorant of Jesus' identity (stated negatively), but that he also has no doubt that Jesus is the "Son of God" (stated positively). The tempter's challenge thus aims not to establish the identity of Jesus, but to stimulate Jesus to act upon the challenge as "Son of God" (Nolland 2005:163-164; see Luz 2007:151). Hagner (1998:64-65) is correct when he comments that the devil regards the title "Son of God" as something to exploit. Ochs (2013:110) discusses Rabbinic rejections of Jesus' divinity, based on interpretations of Matt. 4:1-11, namely that of Jacob ben Reuben, *Milhamot ha-Shem*; Duran, *Kelimmat ha-Goyin*; and Rabbi Troki. Jacob ben Reuben believes (1) that God cannot be tempted and (2) that Jesus' divinity is rubbished by both this statement and Jesus' subsequent response. Duran (see Ochs 2013:268) regards the temptations in general as far-fetched and improper, and holds that Jesus does not consider himself to be divine. The fact that Satan wants to cause Jesus to sin is in itself sufficient illustration of the improbability of Jesus' divinity. Finally, Rabbi Troki (see Ochs 2013:308) makes it clear that, since God cannot be tempted by Satan, it is evident that Jesus is not God.

space, the heavenly being, and the divine nature presumed by the tempter's challenge, create the impression that Jesus' divinity is indeed the central theme of the narrative. Jesus' own response, however, will prove the opposite.

Jesus' response, οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ("But one does not live from bread alone"), though in itself "un-divine," produces a wealth of theological potential. First, he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3b-c: οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ παντὶ ῥήματι τῷ ἐκπορευομένῳ διὰ στόματος θεοῦ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος ("But one does not live from bread alone, but from every word that goes out from the mouth of God, to give life to a human").[31] In the Old Greek (hereafter OG) version of Deuteronomy 8:3b-c, the opening phrase (οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος) and the concluding phrase (ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος) cause ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος to take centre stage. The text is concerned with sustaining human life as a collective, not with the pampering of an individual's divinity. The Matthean opening phrase (οὐκ ἐπ' ἄρτῳ μόνῳ ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος) and concluding phrase (διὰ στόματος θεοῦ) in turn, place the emphasis on στόματος θεοῦ. It is the word proceeding from God's mouth that sustains human life.[32] The divine character of the tempter's question, ironically, holds little or no value for sustaining human beings, even though it is a matter of "bread and butter." Jesus' response, on the other hand, shifts the focus from the "self" as the "Son of God" to God, which results in the realisation that it is divine wisdom that sustains human life.[33] Jesus' response is not a satisfactory one for the tempter, however, compelling him to pose another "divine" question.

3.2 Priestly role: Second divinity challenge (Matt. 4:5–7)

The "tempter" is replaced with the "devil" as acting agent – the one who takes Jesus to the holy city and leads him to stand on the edge of the temple.[34]

31 The Matthean Gospel "omits" ζήσεται ὁ ἄνθρωπος (Deut. 8:3c).

32 The "Lord's prayer" in Matt. 6:9-11 confirms the notion that the "divine" is called upon not for "supernatural" matters, but for τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον. It confirms the healthy interaction and interplay between human beings and the divine, referred to as the "Father in heaven."

33 In the words of Berger (2011:23): "Die Brisanz und die Anstößigkeit der Versuchungsberichte liegen genau darin: Gött verzichtet auf das kurzfristig und sichtbar Hilfreiche. Das überlässt er im Zweifelsfalle dem Satan."

34 Berger (2011:25) comments that the appearance of the devil is not in itself important, but rather the fact that it is presented as an intelligent, suggestive power – characteristics that make him almost human-like.

Everything about this phrase exemplifies divinity, sacredness, holiness, and the spiritual. The intensity of the "divine" challenge has now been stepped up: The εἰς τὴν ἔρημον is replaced with a more "appropriate" setting, namely τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν (the holy city) and τὸ πτερύγιον τοῦ ἱεροῦ (the pinnacle of the temple).[35] The traditional Jewish view regards the temple in Jerusalem as the space most suitable to the divine, but setting the scene at the highest edge of the temple adds even more tension to the narrative.[36] If the burden of being considered divine by way of the title, "Son of God", is not enough, the "divine" and "godly" locality will surely succeed in overburdening Jesus. It is therefore "fitting" that it is no longer ὁ πειράζων who is juggling with divinity, but הַשָּׂטָן, the accuser, the opponent of old, who will burden Jesus with his version of being divine.

The repetition of the conditional clause (εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ) accentuates the devil's desperation to have Jesus "act out" his divinity as "Son of God". The "Son of God" construct is once again understood as a title of divinity, implying a metaphysical dimension with supernatural powers. The devil supports his request by quoting Psalm 90:11-12, making the point that τοῖς ἀγγέλοις αὐτοῦ ἐντελεῖται περὶ σοῦ ("He will send his angels to protect you"). The author allows one to assume that the devil knows that the cited content refers to θεός, while the third-person personal pronoun, αὐτοῦ, refers to Jesus. It is also possible, however, to interpret αὐτοῦ as referring to θεός – not just in its source context (Ps. 90:11-12), but also in the target context (Matt. 4:6). The former interpretation (that αὐτοῦ refers to Jesus) places Jesus' divinity in the centre, whereas the latter interpretation (that αὐτοῦ refers to θεός) reaffirms Jesus' close, intimate relationship with God – the Son in which God, the Father, delights. The devil's interpretation of Psalm 90:11-12 is misplaced. Enjoying angelic protection from bumping one's foot against a stone is vastly different from jumping from the highest point of the temple. The devil is

35 Hagner (1998:66-67) agrees that the challenge is intensified by the fact that, this time around, Jesus' life will be in mortal danger, which will force God to save him. I am in agreement with Luz's (2007:152-153) insight that the wealth of meaning hidden in this second temptation becomes visible only when read in the context of the entire Gospel. Nolland (2005:164-165) calls this heightened intensity "an increasing concentration of uses of the historic present through this episode … [T]hey do create a sense of crescendo."

36 For Nolland (2005:164-165) the temple location calls to mind the presence of God and therefore the reality of God's help.

anxious to manipulate Jesus into acting "divinely," in the stereotypical sense of the word, but this very anxiety short-circuits the devil's sound theological interpretation of Psalm 90:11-12, stripping it of its theological content. This not only underscores the devil's devious intent, but also ridicules the divinisation of Jesus. Jesus is led to stand on the edge of the highest point of the temple, a sacred and holy space, and then challenged to jump, if he is the "Son of God." Jesus would not have had a problem with the jumping, nor with the falling, because both are normal aspects of the human experience. It is the "supernatural" aspect of divine intervention that would have been problematic, because it places a damper on common sense, forces unwise action, and results in attempts to sustain life apart from God (διὰ στόματος θεοῦ).[37] The author allows the devil to pose these challenges, so to accentuate both the skewed perception of Jesus' nature as divine, and how theologically limiting this is. There was great theological expectation when the devil led Jesus to the edge of the highest point of the temple, but these hopes are thwarted when the devil's metaphysical understanding of the divine overburdens the situation, resulting in a lack of benefit for both mortal (natural) and immortal (supernatural) alike.

Jesus again responds with a quotation, this time from Deuteronomy 6:16: οὐκ ἐκπειράσεις κύριον τὸν θεόν σου ("You shall not tempt the Lord your God"). The phrase is rich in ambiguity. On the one hand, one can interpret it as Jesus referring to himself as "the Lord God", implying that the devil is the one testing him (Jesus), as the Lord and God. On the other hand, by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, Jesus opens the possibility to interpret the Lord God as referring to the Hebrew deity. The implication is that he, Jesus, like all other pious Jews, should not challenge or tempt the Lord God – in this case by jumping off the temple in the hope of supernatural, divine intervention. If the devil understood the divinity of Jesus as the "Son of God" to mean that Jesus himself had the ability to evoke metaphysical intervention from angelical beings, then by quoting Deuteronomy 6:16, Jesus refutes this claim on three levels. The first is that Jesus is not the Lord God and can, therefore, not call upon angels to act on his behalf. Second, if Jesus had such an ability as a divine figure, he still should not force the Lord God to intervene in the natural world, especially because God had

37 Luz (2007:152-153) points out that, at his arrest, Jesus also refuses to call on God's angels for help, instead remaining obedient to the Scriptures.

already shared his wisdom for sustaining human life.[38] Finally, no one should manipulate the metaphysical nature of the Hebrew deity for selfish reasons, and this includes the disciples and the devil. Jesus thus does not understand himself to be the Lord God in the narrative. Instead, by acting wisely as a Son of Man, he creates the theological potential that may be indirectly contributed to him as being divine.

3.3 Kingly role: Third divinity challenge (Matt. 4:8–11)

The intention of the devil remains unchanged. He is persistent in forcing Jesus to act his part as "Son of God," or at least act in accordance with his perception of Jesus' divinity. The intensity of the challenges is now even further increased. Jesus is taken up the highest mountain and shown the kingdoms of the world. This challenge introduces a conceptual shift on the part of the devil; the focus is no longer on the divinity of Jesus, but on the devil and his desire for power. Jesus and the devil are now on the highest mountain, overlooking all the kingdoms. The stakes are high.

The devil offers Jesus all the kingdoms of the world, if he would only bow down and worship him. It is almost as if the accuser of old, so aptly introduced in Job, wants to reclaim the power given to him by the Lord to do what he likes with Job's possessions (Job 1:12). Let us entertain this parallelism for a moment. It is obvious that the role and function of the devil remains unchanged. The Lord, likewise, still has the ultimate power, with Job and Jesus being exemplary, pious Jews. In the case of Job, it is the Lord that offers the devil the necessary authority and ability to act against Job, whereas in Matthew 4:9, it is the devil who claims to have the authority and the ability to give someone else the authority over kingdoms. Moreover, the condition upon which this is offered is for Jesus to bow down and worship him. Up until this point the challenges put forward by the devil represented a fair picture of how power in the public space was understood. The devil's request that Jesus should worship him, however, takes it a step too far. With this request, the intent and true character of the devil is

38 Hurtado (2003:338) points to the widespread consensus that "Son of God," as expression of Jesus' divine sonship, is the only thing the author wishes to affirm. While I agree in principle, I disagree that this is the only thing the author wishes to establish. In my view, the author also aims at allowing Jesus to make his true nature and character known, and by doing so, reveal the true essence of the kingdom of heaven.

exposed. His aim was never to reveal the divine nature of Jesus as the "Son of God," but rather to force him to act stereo-typically, whereby he would have portrayed metaphysical abilities while losing theological relevance. The indirect implication would have been that the devil had exposed Jesus as typical (acting with supernatural power) and not unique (acting with humility, amid the divinisation of the flesh). Like the disciples, high priests, and others, the devil too misunderstood the true character and nature of divine flesh.

Jesus' response to the tempter's request is to be expected. He instructs Satan to leave,[39] while substantiating his stance by citing Deuteronomy 6:13: κύριον τὸν θεόν σου προσκυνήσεις καὶ αὐτῷ μόνῳ λατρεύσεις ("Worship the Lord God, and serve him alone"). Jesus' reply reaffirms that the Matthean Jesus does not regard himself as the Lord God incarnated. He does, however, in the author's view, have a very significant role to play and function to fulfil in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus rebuking Satan should not be interpreted as two divine entities opposing one another. "Satan", "the devil" and "the tempter" represent humanity's desire for metaphysical visibility, divine power, and supernatural actions. Jesus' counter argument emphasises the preconceived idea and expectations of divinity in general, and Jesus as the "Son of God," in particular.

Finally, the over-emphasis on the metaphysical or supernatural conceptualisation of Jesus as "Son of God," as represented by the devil, has been successfully refuted by Jesus' own self-understanding, namely that his divinity does not lie in some supernatural ability, but in the fact that (and the moment in which) he existentialises the metaphysical in the flesh – incarnation. It is not Jesus who instructs the angels to take care of him, as mediators of the heavenly realm – they simply come to take care of him. By attending to Jesus, the angels acknowledge both his divinity as "Son of God" and his function and role as the anthropomorphic existent of the Hebrew deity.

3.4 Summary

With the phrase ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνήχθη εἰς τὴν ἔρημον ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος πειρασθῆναι ὑπὸ τοῦ διαβόλου, the stage has been set and the intent made known. Jesus is led to a "god-forsaken" place by the Spirit to undergo the divinity test, and the one

39 Calling "the devil" "Satan" reinforces the notion that his function as accuser, as introduced in Job, has remained unchanged.

who will conduct the test is none other than the devil. The view taken here is not that Jesus is stereo-typically "tempted" by the adversary, who wishes Jesus to commit a sin. Rather, the scenario is sketched with the aim of challenging the metaphysical or supernatural understanding of Jesus' divine character as "Son of God." The narrative is a showdown between Jesus as the perceived metaphysical, divine-becoming-flesh on the one hand, and the "Son of God" possessing supernatural abilities as presented by the devil, on the other. It is a face-off between the identifiable relevance of the "Son of Man" in service of the Hebrew Deity, and the inaccessible, metaphysical, and supernatural perception of Jesus' divine nature as the "Son of God." It is the Divine taken up by the flesh as opposed to the Divine acting through the flesh. The scene where Jesus goes into the desert to be tested by the tempter invites us to question whether overburdening Jesus with divinity causes theological limitations. Table 2 serves as an abbreviated summary.

Table 2: An abbreviated summary

Challenge	Response	Outcome	Implication	Reference
Change stones into bread!	Life is not sustained by bread alone, but by the word proceeding from God's mouth.	Jesus' submission to God and his wisdom take priority over Jesus' perceived divine identity.	The burden to act supernaturally is transformed into the supernatural acting to sustain life.	Matt. 4:3-4
Jump from the temple so that the angels can save you!	Do not tempt the Lord God!	Jesus' recognition and respect for God's commandments are more important than supernatural actions.	The burden to act supernaturally is again transformed into the supernatural acting to protect life (through his commandments).	Matt. 4:5-7
Bow down and worship the adversary!	The Lord God is the only God who should be worshipped!	Jesus reaffirms the supreme rule of the monotheistic Hebrew deity.	The desire to be worshipped as a deity, is opposed by the mundane.	Matt. 4:8-11

4. Conclusion

The theological contribution and the effectiveness of the Matthean Gospel are based on the notion that Jesus as Emmanuel, the "Son of God", "Son of Man", and "the Christ," is introduced against the backdrop of Moses as

the one instrumental in revealing the Hebrew deity to Israel by way of his "commandments" and "covenant". The divinity of Jesus as the "Son of God" is understood in a Jewish context, as to avoid overburdening Jesus with divinity, and in so doing, unleashes theological potential. The Gospel allows Jesus to infiltrate the Jewish mind-set by systematically revealing Jesus as a unique representative of the kingdom of heaven. The references to Jesus as the "Son of God" aim not to promote his divine character, but to reveal the insignificance of a Jesus who is overburdened with divinity. The analysis of Matthew 4:1-11 has shown that interpreting the divinity of Jesus as (a) exclusively supernatural or metaphysical, and (b) detached from its Jewish context is a burden with limited theological potential. Overburdening Jesus with divinity alienates the Matthean Gospel from the Jewish tradition, limiting its theological relevance, potential, and significance. The theological impetus of Jesus is not accomplished by him claiming divine status as the "Son of God," but by him revealing the kingdom of heaven, while pointing to the Hebrew deity, the sustainer of life. Matthew 4:1-11 takes a critical stance against the overburdening of Jesus with divinity as the "Son of God." This critical stance produces the potential for the Jews to relate and identify with Jesus as the one "becoming divine" through his loyalty and obedience to the Jewish God. It calls for a theologically responsible reading of the Matthean Gospel as part of the Jewish tradition.

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Chapter 3

Paul's way of imparting Jesus Christ crucified: Self-portrayal, identity, and vocation in 1 Corinthians

Dustin W. Ellington[1]

1. Introduction

The idea for this chapter was born of curiosity. I observed, and wondered about, a stark difference between the apostle Paul's frequency of speaking about Christ crucified, yet the apparent infrequency of speaking about Christ's death among Christians where I live and teach in Zambia.[2] The latter tend to place heavy focus, instead, on the Christian faith as a route toward situating ourselves for success in this world. My students explain to me that, in Southern Africa, religion equals power, including power for economic and political advancement. It sometimes seems as though the theme of success serves as a sieve for selecting topics and texts of the Bible for reading and preaching, while other subjects and passages pass through untouched.[3]

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2 I speak mainly from my experience at Justo Mwale University, which trains pastors mostly for Reformed and Presbyterian churches in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and elsewhere in Central/Southern Africa. In a separate paper under review for publication, I give an account of the words "success" and "succeed", referring to events in this life, being mentioned 4.75 to 33 times more often in speech during university chapel services than words referring to the death of Jesus Christ in any variety of ways.

3 Wimbush (1993:128) observes that cultural contexts heavily influence which passages of Scripture are read and how they are interpreted.

The broad differences between Zambian Christian perspectives and the outlook of Paul – who affirmed, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2) – lead me to ask: What would it mean for us, in Southern Africa today, to know what Paul knew of Christ crucified, and to give this knowledge and experience to others? To serve those who might wish to reflect more deeply in answer to such questions (for Africa or elsewhere), this chapter asks the more preliminary questions: What did Paul mean by knowing Christ crucified, and especially, how did he approach the imparting of this knowledge?

In Jonathan Draper's approach to African contextual hermeneutics, he (2015:2) speaks of "a moment of autonomy for the text", a space "to allow the voice of the text to speak over the hubbub of our own voices". Moreover, he states that "the text constructs a world which we can enter and in which we can imaginatively 'live', so that we may be transformed by the experience of an-other". In this chapter, I offer an extended moment for listening to 1 Corinthians with regard to what Paul thought about imparting the knowledge of Jesus Christ crucified. The reality that the Corinthian Christians lived in a context which was noted particularly for the pursuit of status and success makes 1 Corinthians an especially pertinent choice of text (Thiselton 2006:325, 326).

Our study begins with 1 Corinthians 15, the section of the letter which Karl Barth and others (see Mitchell 1991:291; Ciampa and Rosner 2010:736) have called the culmination and interpretive key to Paul's argument. I will uncover clues in 1 Corinthians 15 to Paul's way of transmitting knowledge of the gospel to a congregation. The apostle is finishing a long letter to a group of believers who, in his view, fail to see the performative consequences of their knowledge of Christ and the gospel – that this knowledge involves a particular shape of life, including an identity and vocation formed by being joined to Christ's death, and modelled on that death. Findings in 1 Corinthians 15 will signal the importance of going back to earlier stages of the letter to observe more closely how Paul imparts the gospel of Christ crucified to this congregation. The chapter will then trace Paul's approach in 1 Corinthians 1:1-4:21 and 8:1-11:1, passages where the apostle treats problems in the congregation by exemplifying a union with Christ and the gospel and by reflecting on the practical outcomes of this union. Paul concludes both extended passages with commands to imitate himself. This chapter thus offers exegetical sketches from three sections of

1 Corinthians. Three sections, in one of Paul's longest writings, reveal that we are not dealing with something peripheral but central to the apostle's way of "making sense of Jesus" to others. In each exegetical piece, we will see that Paul's manner of imparting the knowledge of Christ also reveals much about how he understands what it means to know Christ. For Paul, knowing Christ crucified means having a participatory relationship with Christ and the gospel in which Christ's death becomes, for believers, our dying; that is, Christ's death becomes our way of life, our gospel-shaped identity and vocation.[4]

While acknowledging that Paul imparted this relationship with Christ's death through preaching the gospel, I also demonstrate that he imparted it by embodying the gospel's pattern in his own life. In this study, I will maintain that 1 Corinthians represents Paul's written attempt at imparting the identity and vocation which arise from knowing Christ crucified.[5] Paul uses his own self-portrayal, as an extension of embodying the gospel with his life, to impart a way of thinking and living that makes space for God's power in the midst of weakness and sacrifice. This impartation of Christ crucified seems to be the heart of what Paul has in mind when he calls believers to imitate him. For the apostle, "making sense of Jesus" means coming to know Jesus Christ in such a way that his crucifixion (and life and resurrection) becomes our way of life. Writing 1 Corinthians was Paul's attempt to transfer this same reality from himself to the Corinthians, so that knowing Christ crucified would shape the Corinthians even as it had shaped his own life.

2. Imparting knowledge of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15

A superficial look at 1 Corinthians 15 reveals that Paul's topic is the resurrection of the dead, but a closer reading suggests that other factors are also at play, beginning with his focus on the gospel and his own role in its transmission. Paul tells the Corinthians that they received the gospel and stand in it (15:1). However, he immediately expresses concern for their status in the gospel, saying

4 I describe elsewhere (2013:44-49) Paul's concept of participation in Christ in light of 1-2 Corinthians. For the idea of Christ's death belonging to believers' ongoing experience, see Hooker (2013:86-92).

5 Funk (1967) demonstrated that Paul's letters act as a (weak) surrogate for his presence. Mitchell (1992) and Johnson (2006) ably argue that Paul sees his letters as, at times, more effective and appropriate than his own presence.

they are being saved through the gospel, "if you hold fast, unless you believed in vain" (15:2). Then, instead of drawing their attention entirely to the message of the gospel and to his argument regarding the resurrection, he turns their thoughts to himself, saying repeatedly that they received the gospel from him. By the time he introduces the traditional formula "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (15:3b), Paul has already mentioned three times that the gospel came from him to them (εὐηγγελισάμην in 15:1, 3). In this brief space, he refers to himself using first-person singular verbs five times, and he employs second-person plural verbs five times, repeating "I" and "you". These observations suggest that 1 Corinthians 15 does more than make a case concerning the resurrection of the dead, and that it also focuses on more than the gospel. I suggest that Paul's own conveying of the gospel to the Corinthians is itself a topic, especially in 15:1-11.[6] Paul highlights a human and relational role in the gospel's transmission, in order to put flesh on the practical claims of the gospel upon his hearers' lives.[7]

After repeating several times that Christ appeared to various apostles and believers, Paul again brings the attention back to himself in 1 Corinthians 15:8-9. He says that last of all, Christ appeared to him, the least of the apostles, the one not fit to be called an apostle. Some scholars have called 15:9-10 a digression from the argument. Fee (1987:736) laments: "Paul's argument has gotten away from him a bit".[8] But we have reason to doubt that position.

Paul is working to finish a long letter to believers who fail to see what behaviour befits their membership in Christ (see 1 Cor. 6:13-20) and their standing "in the gospel" (15:1-2). Paul senses that the Corinthians have not comprehended the gospel's connection with their way of life (see 3:1-3), and thus they misunderstand

6 Mitchell (1991:284) observes that Paul names as his topic not the resurrection but the gospel as 1 Cor. 15 opens.

7 See Rowe's comments (2016:183) on MacIntyre (1988) regarding the teacher's role in helping to actualise participation in a tradition of knowledge.

8 Fee tends to see Paul's self-portrayal in 1 Corinthians as defensive instead of recognising its role in exhorting the Corinthians toward a way of life. For similar views, see Collins (1999:532) and Lambrecht (1991:665-666). In contrast, Mitchell (1991:285) recognises that "the self-renouncing, self-effacing attitude displayed in 15:8-10 is entirely consonant with Paul's use of himself as the example of humility and conciliatory self-sacrifice throughout the letter."

the gospel.[9] Paul, believing that a true understanding of the gospel only occurs as people take on a life that befits the gospel, sees his work with their congregation as unfinished. Rowe (2016:195) argues, for early Christian thinkers (and for Stoics as well), "we cannot see clearly without habituation" to a way of life. At this point in the letter, just before Paul explains the resurrection of believers' bodies,[10] he gives a self-portrayal to illustrate how the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection works in a human life. Paul allows the Corinthians to see his practice of the gospel. He says that, despite being the least among the apostles and having been a persecutor of the church, his life is what it is by the grace of God. Moreover, "His grace toward me was not κενή (in vain), but I worked harder than all of them. Yet it was not I but the grace of God with me" (15:10).

To continue the process of truthfully transmitting the gospel to the Corinthians, Paul exhibits what it looks like, and what is possible, when one stands in the gospel, and when the gospel works its way into the life of a believer.[11] Paul proceeds to his explanation of the resurrection of the dead, but then returns to his example in 15:30-32, where he says apostles put their life in danger every hour, and that his life is a daily death, and that apart from the resurrection, this way of life makes no sense (15:30-32). We observe that, to transmit the gospel faithfully, Paul exhibits himself as a picture of practising life in connection with the gospel of Christ crucified and risen.

Later, Paul moves to conclude the letter by exhorting the Corinthians: "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, since you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58). Here Paul takes two keywords from his self-description in 15:10 (ἐκοπίασα/"I laboured" and κενός/"vain") and re-uses them in the command to the congregation in 15:58 (their κόπος/labour is not κενός). Thus, verse 58 calls them to what Paul himself has modelled.[12] The earlier self-descriptions serve the goal of exhortation and transmission, informing the Corinthians that faithful

9 See Rowe's reflection (2016:182–183) on the requirement of a transformed self to be able to gain understanding.

10 Mitchell (1991:175) clarifies that this, too, is part of moral formation.

11 See Mitchell (1991:287), who says Paul demonstrates in 15:10 what he does so that his faith is not in vain.

12 Mitchell (1991:287), crediting Sellin (1986:229, 250), says that 15:10 "represents the very advice which Paul in his conclusion will urge on the Corinthians" in 15:58.

obedience (15:34) and hard work (15:58) in the body, and for the community, express what it means to be "in" the gospel (15:1) and "in the Lord" (15:58). Being in the gospel, with access to grace (15:10), empowers believers' work and causes it to abound. Paul's admonition marks a fitting conclusion to a section that began with Paul saying that the Corinthians "stand" in the gospel, and yet expressing hesitancy about that very stance. If they receive his exhortation and take up his example, they will stand in the gospel. Paul's admonition to be steadfast in the work of the Lord invites the Corinthians into the relationship which he has with Christ, grace, and the gospel.

While some scholars say Paul's self-portrayal in chapter 15 is a digression or essentially apologetic, Paul's example in this chapter actually links this part of 1 Corinthians with his concern to transmit a way of life to the Corinthians throughout the letter, something scholars have tended not to recognise.[13] Paul believes the Corinthians do not understand the gospel unless they also know the life which accords with the gospel, and receive that life as their own. Therefore Paul's modelling of a way of life takes on profound importance in the transmission of the knowledge of Christ.

Thus we observe how Paul works with the Corinthians as he writes: He uses images of himself to continue imparting the gospel of Christ crucified, to call the Corinthians to a deeper union with Christ and the gospel. His self-portrayal meets the Corinthians' need to see an image of what it looks like to live in true relation with Christ and the message of the crucifixion. Paul utilises self-portrayal aimed at transmitting a way of life that befits the gospel.

That which Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15, in the culmination of the letter, helps to establish the importance of attending to the way he combines the gospel and his example in the letter as a whole. The human and relational element is critical in the impartation of the knowledge of Christ. Indeed, two of the letter's three

13 The tendency to see Paul's self-portrayals as apologetic has impeded scholars from seeing the hortatory function of his personal example. Moreover, Sellin (1986:51, 65) places chapter 15 in a different letter from 1 Corinthians 1–4. Pesch (1986:90–91) argues that 1 Corinthians 9, where Paul's "I" is perhaps most prominent, cannot have belonged to the same original letter. Mitchell argues persuasively for the integrity of 1 Corinthians as one unified argument. She (1991:287) and Malcolm (2013:266) are exceptional in recognising a connection between Paul's self-portrayal in 1 Cor. 15 and the argument as a whole.

main sections conclude with an exhortation to imitate himself, in 4:16 and 11:1, each time after Paul has just modelled participation in Christ crucified through his own self-depiction. Let us go back to the first of those now.

3. Knowing and imparting Christ crucified in 1 Corinthians 1:1–4:21

We observe that as Paul opens 1 Corinthians, before naming the congregation's problems, he already begins treating their condition with ten mentions of Christ in the letter's first nine verses; Paul thereby describes a framework of participation in Christ through which he views, and hopes the Corinthian congregation will interpret, their situation and calling (see also 1:30). The apostle describes the believers as the church of God in Corinth, yet set apart in Christ and called to be saints. Paul thanks God for the grace given them in Christ Jesus. They have been enriched in him in all knowledge; Christ's own witness has been established in them. Paul concludes his introductory thanksgiving, affirming, "You have been called into the fellowship (κοινωνία) of God's Son" (1:9). The multiple locative (*contra* Campbell 2012:76-78) and participatory expressions reflect, for Paul, what knowledge of Christ is.[14]

Once Paul has focused their attention on Christ – describing a Christological and participatory way of seeing, and naming the Corinthians' calling in light of this frame of reference – he briefly labels their problematic condition (1 Cor. 1:10-12; see also 1:31; 3:21) and quickly turns to speak in depth about preaching the gospel. He characterises it as "the message of the cross" (1:17-18).[15] Revelation, which is beyond what we humans can obtain on our own, comes from God through the preaching of the gospel (1:21-24, 30). Rowe (2016:195) states: "Repair of our defective sight is beyond our skills and even our greatest capacities. The only help for our predicament comes, as Paul might put it, from an 'apocalyptic' intervention …" Exulting in human wisdom and holding to human criteria of value prevent such knowledge and empty the substance and power of the cross (1:17; see Barclay 2015:17). God's power intervenes through the proclamation of Christ crucified. As Gorman (2001:277-278) states:

14 In Ellington (2013:44-49), I describe in more detail Paul's concept of participation in Christ in light of 1-2 Corinthians.

15 Malcolm (2013:161) says while scholars see the precise problems in Corinth differently, they tend to agree that the solution is the cross.

> Paul means that Christ as the crucified Messiah – and *only* as the crucified Messiah – is the power of God, a power unleashed in the proclamation of the Messiah – but only in the proclamation of the *crucified* Messiah.

However, this is not a natural or expected message, and Paul supplies clues throughout the letter that people do not properly receive the gospel message unless it also becomes embodied in their way of life (1 Cor. 1:9-13; 3:1-4; 4:9-14; 6:11-20; 11:20-34; 15:1-2); therefore, to help the Corinthians receive the message, Paul supplies pictures of this gospel practised in a human life. He depicts his manner of life as one who knows Christ: "While I was with you, I did not come in superiority of speech or of wisdom..." (2:1). Such speech could point to human strength and thus detract from the message of the cross.[16] For Paul, knowing Christ includes participating in him through weakness. Paul goes on: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in much weakness, fear, and trembling...." (2:2-3). Paul portrays himself in terms similar to the way he describes the message of the cross, in contrast to what the Corinthians esteem, and in order to puncture their tendencies toward self-exaltation.[17] The Corinthians need to replace their images of power and status with new pictures which grant new criteria for what to denigrate and what to celebrate (see also Barclay 2015:4-5). Paul's life gave them such images. His self-portrayal describes the sort of place where God participates in human life – power in weakness, as with the cross (see also Barclay 2015:20).

Paul's self-depiction, even as it arises from and mirrors the message of cross, also reflects the weak in their congregation. Paul describes the Corinthians as "not

16 Koperski (1996:382) says Paul is "perhaps implying that what he proclaims does not need to be presented with rhetorical artifice; its sublimity, or excellence, is inherent"; however, the context as a whole (see 1 Cor. 1:17) suggests that such rhetoric actually encumbers the message. Fitzmyer (2007:173) affirms: "Paul is rejecting explicitly the art of persuasion cultivated by the orators trained in Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition."

17 Marcus (2006:78) says of Roman crucifixion: "This strangely 'exalting' mode of execution was designed to mimic, parody, and puncture the pretensions of insubordinate transgressors by displaying a deliberately horrible mirror of their self-elevation." See also Meggitt (1997:66) and Nguyen (2008:36) for crucifixion as a sign of degradation and low status, and Friesen (2015:814) on Paul's example in light of the "staging of the divine destruction of self-assured wisdom and political power" in Greek tragedy.

many wise ... not many powerful" (1 Cor. 1:26). He meets the congregation where most of them live, in weakness, in order to lead them toward knowing Christ and participating in him.[18] Moreover, if weakness is where God gets involved in human life, then Paul's strategy undercuts the Corinthians' spirit of boasting in one leader over and against another. His example of weakness supplies reason to place their confidence in God. As chapter 2 finishes, Paul says, "We have the mind of Christ" (2:16). In light of what precedes, this is the mind of Christ crucified (see also Philippians 2), as opposed to being someone who is ψυχικός, natural, unspiritual.

At the beginning of chapter 3, Paul says the Corinthians are still only infants, held back by jealousy and strife. They treat power as though it arises from strong human leaders (3:3-5). Paul wishes the Corinthians to mature. He therefore undercuts human boasting, emphasising that while human actions play a role in God's work, genuine growth comes from God's intervention.

In 1 Corinthians 4, Paul closes the first major section of the letter by describing himself and calling the Corinthians to imitate him. The apostle's conduct may seem like the reverse of what the Corinthians would naturally wish to emulate (Malcolm 2013:153). Paul seeks to impart something which will seem unnatural, which must also be revealed in order to be received. He and his apostolic colleagues are as people sentenced to die; they have become a θέατρον ("a place for seeing" *LSJ* 787; Eastman 2010:14) of weakness, neediness, and humiliation (4:9-13). Paul has turned to personal examples for revelatory images; the apostles' way of life evokes the pattern of the cross. The gap between the description of the Corinthians (likely how the congregation as a whole wish to see themselves) and that of the apostles, gives content to the exhortation to imitate Paul. The differences Paul underlines between the Corinthians and himself clarify where he wishes to call his readers.[19]

18 In chapters 2, 4, and 9, Paul becomes like (the weak members of) the Corinthian church, before calling them to become like him. Eastman (2010:4) observes that in Philippians 2 Christ becomes like humanity, so that "that they also show forth God's redemptive incursion in the world".

19 *Contra* Castelli (1991:32, 101, 103), who says Paul leaves the Corinthians in the dark about what following his example would mean.

Paul's concluding exhortation, "Become imitators of me," arises from the common ground shared by the apostle and the Corinthians. The participatory expressions, "in Christ I begat you through the gospel" and "my ways in Christ" (4:15, 17), echo the framework of 1:1-9 and signal the critical role of a shared participation in Christ as the basis of their similar life.[20] Paul became their father in Christ Jesus and through the gospel. As Paul's children, they bear essentially the same relationship to Christ and the gospel as the apostle himself. This enables them to live the sort of life Paul lives, shaped by participation in Christ and the gospel. Although he does not say, "as I (imitate) Christ," as in 11:1, his prior description of the life of apostles in 4:9-13 suggests this idea. Paul's call to imitation in 1 Corinthians 4:16 is, in light of chapters 1-4 as a whole, a command and invitation to embrace the pattern of the cross as the identity and vocation that arise from knowing Christ and participating in him. For the Corinthians to obey Paul's command is to receive his transmission of the knowledge of Christ crucified, and make it their own.

This exegetical sketch of 1 Corinthians 1-4 demonstrates that Paul's act of writing to the Corinthians aims toward imparting an identity and vocation that arise from the knowledge of Christ crucified. We saw that the message of Christ crucified is where God's power participates in human life. Since this gospel message goes against the grain of Corinthian values, Paul takes care to transmit the knowledge by modelling it. He exemplifies the integration of the gospel in his way of life. Because Paul participates in the weakness and power of the cross, these become visible in him. Paul's participation in Christ, then, leads to embodying the gospel and is a key to how he transmits the knowledge of Christ. The call to imitate the apostle reveals that Paul's integration of the gospel with his life belongs not only to his identity and vocation as an apostle but also to the congregation as a whole. Christ's death – his power and weakness – becomes our own.[21] For apostle and believer alike, receiving the gospel means living the pattern of the gospel.

20 God is frequently the subject of key verbs and the understood subject of passive verbs in Paul's self-description (e.g. 1 Cor. 4:9; 15:10), suggesting that participation also grants the ability to imitate Paul.

21 Malcolm (2013:48) correctly observes that 1 Corinthians 1-4 focuses on "summoning the Corinthians to inhabit the crucified Christ".

4. Imparting participation in the gospel's pattern and progress: 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1

As with 1 Corinthians 1-4, in this section, Paul is addressing a particular problem: To eat or not to eat food that has been offered to idols. Some in the congregation are acting in accordance with their knowledge about idols but not with respect to love, which would consider the effect of their actions upon other members, and would act to build them up. Essentially, Paul faces a situation in which people have become believers without embracing a life of letting go of personal privileges for the sake of others' faith and salvation. Paul apparently interprets this as the Corinthians having a problem in their relationship to the gospel. The apostle's response runs through chapters 8 to 10, climaxing with his statement that he does all things for the sake of the gospel, in order to be its partner (9:23), and ending with the exhortation that the Corinthians imitate him as he imitates Christ (11:1). Paul uses his example, and the call to imitation, in an attempt to impart to the Corinthians the same kind of relationship with the gospel which he has.

Paul presents the imitation of himself (actually of his imitation of Christ) as the solution to the problem. We should be able to understand more precisely what Paul has in mind by examining his rendering of Christ and himself, in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Yet in these three chapters, the only mention of Christ's behaviour is the statement that he died for the brother who is weak (8:11). Following this significant mention of Christ, Paul concentrates his problem-solving effort through his own example. The apostle imitates Christ's death for the weak brother by abstaining from meat sacrificed to idols, since eating such meat might cause fellow (weak) believers to fall. Paul addresses the Corinthians' problem mainly by sharing the example of what he does, and by explaining that he bases his conduct on his relationship with the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 9, the apostle talks about himself as much or more than anywhere else in his letters; Paul also mentions the word "gospel" and "preaching the gospel" as often as in any other passage in the New Testament. It is no accident that Paul places together the theme of the gospel and the theme of his life. He knows that the life of a human being is a powerful medium for a message. Yet, in the case of the gospel, Paul knows he must communicate an example which goes against the grain of the Corinthians' mind-set, thus making the reinforcement

of the message even more important. 1 Corinthians 9 instructs the believers on the shape of a right relationship with the gospel.

The double concentration on the gospel and on Paul's own example especially begins when he says: "We endure all things in order that we might not give any hindrance to the gospel of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:12). The word for "hindrance" (ἐγκοπή) is related to the word for "stumbling block" (πρόσκομμα) which Paul uses when he says he wants to avoid causing any believer to stumble (8:9). The two words come from the same stem which refers to cutting in the way of or blocking a person or thing. However, in 9:12, instead of saying that he does not wish to cause a person to stumble, Paul personifies the gospel, and says that he does not want to put a barrier in its way. The actions of believers can cut into the gospel's path and keep it from advancing, so Paul exemplifies how not to block the gospel's way.

If someone can obstruct the route of the gospel, then the gospel is more than a message spoken; it is an advancing force for salvation (see also Rom. 1:16), and for transforming the behaviour of believers (see also Schütz 2007:211). The choices believers make either cooperate with that power and movement, or become a hindrance. Either way, the actions of believers affect the gospel's transmission.

The power of the gospel also presses upon people, impelling its sharing. "If I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about. A necessity is laid upon me" (1 Cor. 9:16). As with the prophets Jeremiah or Ezekiel, Paul's calling was not by choice (Jer. 1:5-10; Ezek. 2:1-3:9). He cannot stop the urge to share the gospel; he can only surrender and cooperate. The forthcoming command to imitate Paul may include sharing the gospel, but since that would otherwise be fairly unique in Paul's writing, his words in 9:16 more likely say that the gospel is a power to which we must all bend. When we relate rightly to the gospel, we surrender to its power and progress.[22]

In 1 Corinthians 9:19-23, Paul continues to reflect on his work of imparting the gospel, saying that he enslaves himself for that purpose. "For although I am free from all, I make myself a slave to all, that I might win more" (9:19). A slave, instead of exercising personal rights, lives for the benefit of another

22 See Barram (2006:173) for Paul's expectation of "salvific intentionality" on the part of Corinthian behaviour.

(Martin 1990:51). Paul asserts five times that he makes it his personal aim to win various groups of people (9:19-22). He keeps repeating the purpose behind his actions: to win others to the gospel. He does all that he does "so that by all possible means I might save some" (9:22). Paul recognises that a person can make a difference in others' salvation.

Along with the word "win", Paul repeats another term over and again. After saying that he made himself a slave for the sake of all, he repeats ἐγενόμην, "I became", four times (1 Cor. 9:20-23), and implies it twice more. Paul adjusted himself to become what served the gospel. This self-modification did not fit the ethos of the Corinthian church (see also Kok 2012:10), especially his words, "I became weak to the weak" (9:22a). So Paul models personal adaptation for the sake of working with the gospel, to win people on its behalf, but also to win the Corinthians to a life shaped by the gospel.

After describing how he gives up his rights for the sake of others and their salvation, his self-description in 1 Corinthians 9 reaches its climax when he says that everything he does, he does for the salvation of others, in order to become the gospel's συγκοινωνός (9:23). A συγκοινωνός typically referred to partners or participants (BDAG, 952). The NIV reads, "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings".[23] The word "blessings" is not present in the Greek manuscripts. However, the NIV does reflect the preference of most translators, who say that Paul wants to be among those who participate in the benefits of the gospel, especially the salvation it brings (Fee 1987:432). The main problem with this translation is the preceding literary context. Paul has been writing about his actions not as though they are aimed at his own salvation, but rather for the sake of others' salvation. The idea that Paul does all that he does to become a partner of the gospel, for the sake of its progress, makes sense within the context. Therefore the more literal translation of συγκοινωνός is preferable: "I do all things for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become its partner" (9:23). Instead of getting in the gospel's way, Paul exemplifies partnership with the gospel.

But what does it mean to be the gospel's partner? I suggest Paul has already shown us pictures of how to be partners of the gospel, through his self-description in

23 The NRSV and ESV are very close to the NIV. Kok (2012:10) also accepts the correctness of "blessings".

1 Corinthians 9, and elsewhere throughout the letter. Paul portrays how he lets go of privileges that are rightfully his. He mirrors the pattern of the gospel to reinforce the message and clear the way for its transmission.

Following 1 Corinthians 9:23, Paul makes use of a negative model for the purpose of warning, showing that Israel's "baptism" did not prevent their bodies from being strewn across the wilderness. Paul's participatory statements about baptism and the Lord's Supper throughout chapter 10, along with his self-description in 9:24-27, warn the community that, for their participation in Christ to be genuine, believers must live in a way that is congruent with the gospel's pattern.

Paul's concluding exhortation in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, "Become imitators of me, as I am an imitator of Christ" (11:1), calls the congregation to follow his example by identifying with the weaker members of the community – becoming weak to the weak – and sacrificing their own rights for others' salvation. Paul places heavy emphasis on what he became, how he accommodated himself, for the sake of the gospel (9:19-23). Paul became the gospel's partner as he shared in its pattern, power, and movement. His hearers must also assume a manner of being one with Christ's pattern of dying for the weak, and thereby work with, not against, the gospel's power in their midst. The call to imitate Paul, and thus also Christ, invites the Corinthians to a particular way of relating, not only with one another, but more fundamentally with the gospel itself, by becoming its *συγκοινωνοί*.[24]

We discover in 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, that Paul attempts to impart a particular way of relating with the gospel. The gospel is on the move, and believers can block it or cooperate with it. Believers collaborate with the gospel by accepting its pattern of sacrifice for others, even as Paul surrenders his prerogatives in order to become useful to the gospel.[25] Paul conceives of believers as sharers in the power and pattern of the gospel.

24 I make this and other points regarding 1 Cor. 8:1-11:1 elsewhere (Ellington 2011) in more detail.

25 Betz (1967:161, 165, 168), in contrast, argues that when Paul includes Christ and himself in the salvation event, he precludes the possibility of their being ethical examples.

5. Conclusion

This chapter set out to address the questions: What did Paul mean by knowing Christ crucified, and especially, how did he approach imparting this knowledge?

For Paul, knowing Christ crucified means a participatory relationship with him and with the gospel, so that Christ's death becomes our dying. That is, Christ's death becomes our way of life, making us people who conform ourselves and are conformed to the gospel's pattern of sacrifice for others. To know Christ is also to be joined to Christ's power, through weakness. The pattern of Christ's death becomes our own manner of life, so that our weakness and sacrifice give space to – and work together with – the power of the gospel. In this way, Christ's death shapes our identity and vocation.

Paul saw a human element – he saw that he could do things – in transferring to others both the knowledge of Christ crucified and its performative consequences. This human element could help to compensate for the reality that the message of Christ crucified tended to violate the Corinthians' own criteria of value. Paul believed that by preaching the gospel with words and displaying it with his life, he might restructure and reinforce the Corinthians' own relationship with the gospel, and therefore their values as well. Alongside preaching, Paul's embodiment of the gospel as a way of life reveals how he helped the gospel to get worked into the life of others.

Moreover, Paul's act of writing is an attempt at impartation through a letter. Paul writes to cultivate the Corinthians' participation in Christ and their ability to embody the gospel. 1 Corinthians (like other letters to congregations which knew him personally) involves almost continuous depiction of the integration between gospel and behaviour. Paul supplies a steady stream of images to aid his readers in taking on the same relationship with Christ and the gospel that shapes his life.

It is not strictly that deeds and self-description, even when combined with preaching, are quite so powerful in themselves. Many ancient teachers shared convictions about the use of personal example (Fiore 1986:177-178; Malherbe 1989:69-70). Paul stands out because he combined the gospel of Christ crucified with his personal example of suffering and sacrifice. Paul embodies the pattern of the cross. His example brings God's role into focus: human weakness making space for God. The apostle exercises his life and

ministry as he does because of his conviction about how God operates, bringing power to weakness, as in the case of the cross. Embodiment of weakness and sacrifice for others, combined with the preaching and explanation of the gospel, makes space for God.[26]

It may be that Africa poses particular challenges for the way of thinking about the impartation of Christ crucified which this chapter uncovers in 1 Corinthians. African Christians know the cost of suffering perhaps much more than most other believers, and so its preachers and congregations may be keen to embrace a theology which highlights Christians' socioeconomic advancement, and avoid a theology of the cross which grants a role to weakness in the Christian life. On the other hand, Africa's suffering also poses heightened possibilities. In Paul's view, weakness opens the door to experiencing the depth of Christ crucified, and thus also the transforming power of Christ. If we deny and stigmatise suffering, instead of owning it, we may block the power of the gospel.

26 See Barclay (2015:20) regarding God's presence and ancient Christians' suffering.

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Chapter 4

"A beloved brother in the Lord." On the reception of Christology and ethics in Philemon 15-16

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When one thinks of the Letter to Philemon, Christology is not the first aspect that springs to mind.[2] As Fitzmyer (2000:38) correctly points out, "There is no development of christological teaching in the letter". However, this does not mean that Christology is absent from the letter. Although it is not emphasised explicitly, it is definitely implied (Martin 2005:205), or as Barth and Blanke (2000:165) put it, one should speak of a different kind of Christology in the letter, namely a "Christology by social involvement". The close interrelationship that is often noted between Christology and ethics in Pauline theology[3], thus finds a very distinctive expression in the Letter to Philemon in that Paul draws out the implications of being in Christ for the particular issue at hand, namely his intercession for Onesimus, so that he may return to Philemon's household.[4] That Onesimus had become a Christian in the meanwhile had a decisive impact

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2 Christ is mentioned in vv. 1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 20, 23 and 25 – only in formulaic phrases.

3 See, for example, how this aspect is expressed by Schnelle (2003:632): "Das ethische *proprium christianum* is somit Christus selbst, und die Ethik umfasst bei Paulus die *Handlungsdimensionen der Christusteilhabe*, d.h. das Thema der paulinischen Ethik ist die Entsprechung zum neuen Sein."

4 Exactly what made Onesimus leave Philemon's household is not clear, but it seems as if he had caused Philemon some harm and then fled to Paul for intercession on his behalf so that the relationship between him and Philemon could be restored. For details, see Lampe (1985:135-137 and 2010:62-65).

on the way in which Paul approaches this. In this study, I wish to draw attention to a brief but vital part of Paul's Letter to Philemon, namely to vv. 15-16.

> Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother – especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord (NRSV).

To Paul, the fact that Onesimus and Philemon were both in the Lord meant that they were spiritual brothers, thus adding another crucial aspect to their relationship. In this study I wish to investigate some of the diverse ways in which the implications of this new relationship between Onesimus and Philemon have been interpreted throughout the centuries; or, to put it differently, I wish to focus on the reception of Christology *cum* ethics in this letter, in particular as it is reflected in the interpretation of vv. 15-16. I trust that this will serve as a good illustration of the issue that has been highlighted in the invitation to this research project, namely that *interpretative encounters with Jesus emerge from specific historical conditions and have specific performative consequences.*

Let us first turn to the way in which these two verses are interpreted in the present day. Three aspects normally receive attention: Firstly, the theological underpinnings of Paul's words are usually unpacked in terms of what it means to be "in Christ". To cite but one example:

> Paul's intention may be summed up in the following way: (a) in Christ, brother Onesimus is eternally elected by God to be holy and blameless ... (b) Christ has died for this brother too ... so that he is now dead to sin but alive to God in the Messiah Jesus ... Therefore in verse 16 the formula (lit.) "in Christ" is so rich and comprehensive that it forms the nucleus and summary of all that Paul has to say ... (Barth & Blanke 2000:452-453).

Secondly, there is usually agreement amongst commentators that Paul had some kind of transformed relationship between Philemon and Onesimus in mind, in which brotherhood in Christ would become the determining factor. Thirdly, attention invariably turns to the question of whether Paul wanted Philemon to manumit Onesimus. The question is answered in diverse ways: Paul did not want Philemon to manumit Onesimus, but wanted their relationship henceforth to be stamped by Christian values (for example, Nordling 2004:253-259); Paul

was unsure of what to recommend and deliberately left the letter open-ended (Barclay 1991:161-186); Paul wanted Philemon to manumit Onesimus and send him back to him so that he could become a partner in his ministry (for example, Fitzmyer 2000:115); Paul did not prescribe to Philemon that he should manumit Onesimus, but gave him space to decide on this matter himself (for example, Lampe 1998:222 and Müller 2012:122-123); or that one cannot really determine from the letter what Paul actually had in mind (for example, Dunn 1996:334-336).

To summarise, in current receptions of vv. 15-16 one thus finds an integration of Christology and ethics, and a deliberate attempt to link this with the performative consequences that Paul's letter might have had for Onesimus (manumission or not). The reason why the issue of manumission receives so much attention in the present day is perhaps due to our unease about the compatibility of slavery as a social institution with what we regard as the central values of Christianity – a matter which only became important in the reception of this letter since the 1800s, when the way in which some Christians interpreted the performative consequences of this letter gave cause for concern;[5] before that it was never really a problem.

Let us now use the current approach to vv. 15-16 as a backdrop for investigating some of the ways in which these verses have been interpreted through the centuries.

1. Jerome

Jerome (*c.* 347-420 CE) wrote his interpretation of the Letter to Philemon between the years 386 and 388 CE, i.e. shortly after had moved to Bethlehem. It was the first of his exegetical works on the Pauline letters, and he depended to a large extent on the (now extant) commentary of Origen in his interpretation of this letter (Friedl 2010:289-294).

In his interpretation of vv. 15-16, Jerome pays most attention to a theological issue that he deems important in these verses, namely that God can turn something evil into something good. He points out the example of Joseph whose brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites out of jealousy – yet God turned this deed

5 See, for example, the way in which this happened in the United States, as discussed by Atkins (2010:205-222).

into something good. According to Jerome, the same happened in the case of Onesimus: his evil deed of fleeing his master was turned into something good, since he met Paul in prison in Rome, became a believer and eventually became a minister of the gospel (*in Philm.* 15-16 [97.421-98.438[6]]). Jerome then turns his attention to the contrast that Paul makes between the (little) "while" (that Onesimus had been separated from Philemon) and the "forever" (that Philemon will have him back). He draws attention to the fact that no master owns a slave eternally: When the slave dies the master's authority over the slave and the slave's condition of slavery come to an end. Jerome continues: When Onesimus became a Christian, he received the Spirit of freedom (a reference to 2 Cor. 3:17) and, while still a slave, he also began to be an eternal brother of both Paul and Philemon. In other words, from being a slave (until death) he has been transformed to being both a slave and an eternal brother (*in Philm.* 15-16 [98.446-453]). To twenty-first century minds, what then follows seems a bit disappointing. Jerome concludes that by being united with Philemon in the Lord, Onesimus was now bound to his master by law in a twofold sense: for a time by the necessity of the flesh, and eternally by the Spirit. He also highlights the performative consequences of his interpretation: This applies to all slaves who believe in Christ (*in Philm.* 15-16 [98.455-457]).

Jerome does not ponder any other implications that the brotherhood in Christ might have had, for example, in terms of Philemon's behaviour towards Onesimus. He only focuses on the implications it had for Onesimus: the prospect of eternal brotherhood of Philemon and Paul after death, but, until then, being bound to Philemon in a twofold sense.

Two further remarks about this issue are noteworthy. First, this view – which might seem very strange to us – makes sense if we take the historical situation from which Jerome interpreted the letter into consideration. As Klein (2001:402) points out, Jerome grew up in a wealthy family that had many slaves and he was educated in Rome and Constantinople, where slavery was part of the everyday setup. To him, the institution of slavery was something natural, a social institution he would never have considered challenging. In fact, he probably had slaves himself. As Klein (2001:411) also points out, many of the scribes that

6 I have used the critical edition of Bucchi (2003:75-106), citing page and line numbers in brackets according to this text.

Jerome made use of in writing his (lengthy) biblical commentaries, and who had to be ready whenever he wished to dictate to them, were probably slaves. It should also be kept in mind that passages elsewhere in the New Testament such as Ephesians 6:5-8 and Titus 2:9-10, would leave no doubt in Jerome's mind that slavery was acceptable to God and that slaves had to obey their masters (Klein 2001:420-425). Jerome thus undoubtedly and automatically interpreted the events depicted in the Letter to Philemon from this perspective.

Secondly, it is interesting to note that he does not try to unpack the meaning of the words "in the Lord" in his interpretation of vv. 15-16. The only explicit references to Christ in his explanation of these two verses are to Christ as the object of (Onesimus') faith (*in Philm.* 15-16 [97.433-434; 98.446-450]). It is also interesting to note that although Jerome regularly refers to Christ elsewhere, i.e. in his comments on other parts of the letter, he never refers to the implications of Onesimus' being in Christ. To mention some of the notions that he links to Christ elsewhere: the idea of suffering for Christ, in most cases with an emphasis on Paul's willingness to do this (e.g. *in Philm.* 1-3 [83.65-84.80]; 8-9 [94.326-95.356]; 10-13 [95.357-96.384]); what it means that Christ is called ἀγαπητός (*in Philm.* 1-3 [87.150-171]); the unity of Father and Son (*in Philm.* 1-3 [88.198-89.206]); the necessity of love for and faith in Christ (*in Philm.* 4-6 [89.225-90.231]); the holiness of the body of Christ (*in Philm.* 4-6 [91.270-277]); Christ as the source of goodness and grace (*in Philm.* 4-6 [93.309-311]); Christ as example (*in Philm.* 18 [99.468-470]); Christ giving himself for humankind (*in Philm.* 18 [99.470-472]); and all the many virtues that Christ has (*in Philm.* 20 [100.500-509]). In one instance he even refers to Galatians 3:28 (that there is no difference between people in Christ), but this is done within the context of v. 2, where Apphia is mentioned and he thus does not consider the implications this has for slavery (*in Philm.* 1-3 [88.192-197]). The point is that the theme Christology – ethics is never developed in terms of its implications for slavery.

A similar approach could be pointed out in most of the writings from the Church Fathers, but I will consider only one other example.

2. Theodore of Mopsuestia

Theodore (*c.* 350-428 CE) wrote his commentaries on Paul's letters late in the first or early at the beginning of the second decade of the fifth century CE

(Fitzgerald 2010:342-345), i.e. about 20 to 25 years after Jerome's interpretation of the letter. The interpretative angle from which Theodore reads the letter differs from the way we approach it nowadays. Nowadays scholars focus primarily on the way in which Paul attempts to restore the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus. In contrast, Theodore emphasises the relationship between Paul and Philemon; for Theodore the letter is primarily a good example of how a church leader (in this instance, Paul) approaches a fellow Christian about a personal matter.[7] The implications that the letter had for Onesimus, thus, tend to take a back seat in Theodore's commentary. Furthermore, it is important to be aware that the social location from which Theodore reads the letter was one of dispute in church circles about the question of whether slaves who had become Christians should be manumitted or not.[8] Whereas some Christians apparently believed that such slaves should be manumitted, Theodore opts for the conservative position, arguing that Paul thought it best for people to remain in the "rank" to which God had appointed them. According to him, God can easily make everyone equal, yet he chooses not to do so; thus all people should stay in the position in which God has placed them. The Letter to Philemon also provides Theodore with an excellent argument against his opponents: In this letter, Paul does not request Philemon to free Onesimus even though he had become a Christian; according to Theodore, Paul only wants Philemon to pardon him and receive him back as a slave (*in Philm. arg.* [778.18-780.25][9]).

Theodore's interpretation of vv. 15-16 is also quite different from that of Jerome. Whereas the idea that God can turn something evil into something good is theologically important to Jerome, Theodore begins by emphasising that Onesimus' flight was caused by a perverse choice, that he had made himself. He then stresses that Paul *hesitantly* (he emphasises *τάχα/forsan*) mentions the possibility that Onesimus went away so that he might become better. However, Theodore then immediately points out that Paul does not have in mind that Philemon should *have*[10] Onesimus back as slave and show more affection to him (according to Theodore, to say something like that about a fugitive slave would be ridiculous). The

7 See Fitzgerald (2010:348-350) for a detailed discussion of this aspect.

8 Fitzgerald (2010:351-354) provides a thorough overview of this issue.

9 I refer to the text in Greer (2011:772-805) indicating page and line numbers in brackets according to Greer's text. Greer also provides an English translation.

10 Theodore distinguishes between ἀπέχῃς and ἔχῃς. See Greer (2011:803, n. 16).

emphasis falls rather upon the fact that Philemon should *take* him back as slave, in the sense that Onesimus will now display a better attitude towards Philemon than what slaves typically do (*in Philm.* 15-16 [798.25-800.13]). To explain this new attitude, Theodore then moves to the words "dearly beloved brother", interpreting them as meaning that Onesimus would love Philemon very much (*in Philm.* 15-16 [780.15]). For some strange reason Theodore interprets the word ἀγαπητός the wrong way round. Paul used it to indicate that Philemon should accept Onesimus as a beloved brother, i.e. that Philemon should love Onesimus (because he was a brother in Christ). Yet Theodore focuses on Onesimus' love for Philemon. This is then expounded in terms of notions such as Onesimus' obedience, his willingness to suffer for Philemon, that he would be useful to Philemon, that he would render faithful service to him and that he would behave in a way that corresponds to the position in which he has been placed in this world (*in Philm.* 15-16 [800.16-802.5]). In other words, Theodore only emphasises the obligations that brotherhood in Christ had for the slave – and not for the master.

Like Jerome, Theodore also does not comment on the expression "in the Lord". Furthermore, he never mentions Christ in his explanation of these two verses. In the rest of his commentary, Theodore also rarely mentions Christ. He refers twice to people suffering for Christ (*in Philm.* 6 [792.1-2], 9b-c [794.1-10]), once to Jesus' words in Matthew 16:18 ("Where two or three are gathered ..."; *in Philm.* 2c [788.31-32]) and once to knowledge given to Paul by Christ (*in Philm.* 5a [780.20-22]). Thus, like Jerome, the fact that Onesimus is a brother *in Christ* is never really considered. It is true that Theodore does refer several times to the fact that Paul should take Onesimus back with affection (*affectuosus*); however this is not linked to the fact that Onesimus has become a Christian, but rather to the fact that Onesimus would behave in a proper way in future (see for example *in Philm. arg.* [772.14-15] and [774.20-23]; 2c [790.1-3]; 12a-b [796.10-18]). That God rewards masters for kindness towards their slaves, also seems to have been a powerful argument for Theodore (see *in Philm.* 19a-b [802.20-30]).

3. Thomas Aquinas

If one turns from the Church Fathers to the commentary of Thomas Aquinas (1224/25-1274) on the Letter to Philemon, i.e. about eight centuries later[11] – one feels as if one has been transported to a different world. The "atmosphere" of the commentary is totally different.

In particular I wish to draw attention to three striking aspects: Firstly, Aquinas clearly identifies the issue addressed in the letter as the relationship between masters and slaves, and frames this in terms of notions such as brotherhood and friendship. He begins the prologue of his commentary with a quotation from Ecclesiasticus 33:31 ("If you have a faithful servant, let him be to you as your own soul: treat him as a brother, because in the blood of your soul you have begotten him").[12] He then highlights three important aspects about the relationship between master and slave, which are all further explained by biblical quotations: that fidelity is required from the servant (quotations from Matt. 24:45 and Prov. 20:6), that the master should feel towards the slave as he feels towards a friend (quotation from Acts 4:32), and that in terms of use the slave should be treated like a brother. This last aspect is motivated in two ways, namely that both master and slave are created by God (quotations from Job 31:13 and Mal. 2:10), and that both slave and master receive grace in a similar way (quotations from Gal. 3:27 and Matt. 23:8; *in Philm. prol.* 1). According to Aquinas, these words (referring to Gal. 3:27 and Matt. 23:8) are relevant for the interpretation of the letter, because in it, Paul shows how masters should behave towards their servants, and how faithful servants should behave towards their masters (*in Philm. prol.* 2).

The second interesting aspect is the way in which Aquinas foregrounds the notion of *caritas* (love) in his interpretation of the text. This word and its cognates occur five times in the letter (vv. 1, 4, 7, 9, 16), which might not seem much but, as De Villiers (2010:181-203) has shown, this notion plays a very important role

11 It is difficult to determine the dates of composition of Aquinas' commentaries on Paul. They were based on his lectures on the letters of Paul, but it unclear when he lectured on them. It seems as if he did so in Italy between 1261 and 1268 and then again later in Paris and Naples. See Torrell (2012:17 and 2005:340) for more details.

12 I have used the Latin/English edition by Larcher (2012:461-472). This is his translation of the quotation from the Vulgate. All further references to Thomas' commentary are also to this edition.

in the letter. That this is the case seems to have been picked up by Aquinas. That he does so might be the result of the important role that *caritas* plays in his views on ethics. For him *caritas* was the most important Christian virtue, unifying all moral virtues, just as the virtue of prudence unified all virtues in Aristotelian ethics (Pinsent 2013:58). Aquinas understood *caritas* as friendship with God, which was intimately connected to a particular kind of friendship with one's neighbour. Although he distinguished between *caritas* as *dilectio/amicitia Dei* and *caritas* as *dilectio/amicitia proximi* he insisted that they were related: we love our neighbour because God is in him/her or because we desire that God should be in him/her (Fuchs 2013:210-219, in particular 215). In his interpretation of the Letter to Philemon one can see the importance of this concept from the thorough way in which Aquinas explains its first occurrence (in v. 5). He refers to 1 Corinthians 13:1 ("Without *caritas* nothing avails ...") and also emphasises Christ as the source of love for the neighbour (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 1, 9). It also comes to the fore in the fact that he introduces it several times in his discussion of parts of the letter where it is not explicitly mentioned, for example, in his interpretation of the expression "communion of your faith" in v. 6 as referring to Philemon's *caritas* (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 1, 10), and by understanding the expression "in the Lord" in Paul's exclamation in v. 20 ("May I have joy in you in the Lord") as referring to God's actions of love in Philemon, having as its fruit *caritas* (*in Philm.* c. 1 l. 2, 28).

Thirdly, Aquinas very often quotes from the Bible to illustrate or substantiate something that he says, but what is remarkable in this commentary is how many times he quotes sayings of Jesus, and the fact that these quotations so often refer to aspects such as love, brotherhood and willingness to serve: Matthew 24:45 (*in Philm. prol.* 1 l. 1, 10), 5:10 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 1, 4), John 13:34 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 1, 5), 13:18 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 1, 9), 14:1 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 1, 9), Matthew 28:19 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 1, 9), 10:26 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 2, 21), 23:8 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 2, 24), and 10:40 (*in Philm.* c.1 l. 2, 26). In a sense, this emphasis on what Jesus taught in this regard is a superb illustration of his own explanation of the concept of *caritas* in v. 5: *ex Christo dulcius dilecto derivatur dilectio ad membra* ("From beloved Christ love for the members is more sweetly derived"; *in Philm.* c. 1 l. 1, 9).

In his exposition of vv. 14-15 Aquinas (like Jerome) draws attention to the providence of God, citing the same example as Jerome (Joseph). He explains the reason for Paul's use of "perhaps" as the incomprehensibility of God's judgements

(citing Rom. 11:33 in this regard). He then turns to the expression *pro servo* (in "not as a servant, but more than a servant"). Whereas the Greek has ὑπὲρ δοῦλον, the Vulgate has *pro servo* which Aquinas quite correctly interprets as meaning "in the place of a slave", and then links it to Jesus' words in Matthew 23:8 ("You are all brothers"; *in Philm.* c. 1 l. 2, 24). This fits in well with the emphasis elsewhere in his commentary on brotherhood in Christ.

In his exposition of the rest of the verse Aquinas focuses on the words "flesh" and "in the Lord". The first he interprets in terms of creation, i.e. Philemon and Onesimus are brothers, because have both been created by God. In this regard he refers to Deuteronomy 32:6 and Malachi 2:10. The expression "in the Lord" is interpreted in the sense of spiritual love, from which Aquinas then draws the conclusion that one is moved by *caritas* (!) for two reasons, namely by love which has its origin in the flesh (referring to creation) and by spiritual love (*in Philm.* c. 1, l. 2, 24). Thus, all in all, Aquinas' interpretation of vv. 14-15 is structured in terms of the dominant concepts in his commentary identified above, namely that the relationship between masters and slaves should be understood in terms of brotherhood and friendship, the importance of *caritas* in his ethical thinking, and an emphasis on Christ's teachings on brotherhood.

4. Desiderius Erasmus

Erasmus (*c.* 1466-1536) wrote his *paraphrasis* on the Letter to Philemon towards the end of 1519 (Bateman 1993:380). Unlike his *annotationes* on the New Testament writings, his *paraphrases* were intended for a broader audience. His aim, in this regard, is aptly summarised by Cottier (2012:32):

> The essence of the paraphrase is to restore the thought, the *sensus*, of the text by reformulating it, but without changing the meaning. Erasmus compares it to a seasoning that adds to the savour of a dish without taking its place.

In the *paraphrasis* on the Letter to Philemon one can also see, in a practical sense, how Erasmus' appropriation of the text was influenced by certain fundamental humanist viewpoints that he held regarding Christian life (elsewhere formulated by him in terms of the *philosophia Christi*), such as that Christian life was not primarily about doctrine; it was rather concerned with following practically what Christ has taught (Leinsle 2010:247-248). For Erasmus, true Christians embraced Christ in the depths of their hearts and expressed this by acting

towards others in a Christian spirit, guided by the motive of love (Provost 2016:99). In his *paraphrasis* on the Letter to Philemon one can see this in the fact that he continually emphasises acts of Christian love. Some examples in this regard: Philemon is praised for his sincere faith and his true evangelical love for the Lord Jesus, and Erasmus then notes that Jesus regards any deed done for fellow-believers as something done towards himself (LB VII 1076E[13]); Philemon is also praised for his deeds which show him to truly be a brother (LB VII 1076F) and the many instances in which he showed himself to be a true worshipper of Christ through his acts (LB VII 1076F); Philemon is reminded that the doctrine of the gospel requires that people who experience the mercy of forgiveness from the Lord should forgive others (LB VII 1077A) and that those who confess the doctrine of Christ should help anyone who is a prisoner for Christ (LB VII 1077B); and Philemon is also called upon to show his *caritas* to Paul since his love for the gospel has already made him show so much love towards others (LB VII 1077C). To summarise, Erasmus constantly highlights the importance of concrete acts of love and brotherhood that are required by Christ.

In Erasmus' paraphrase on vv. 15-16 the same emphases may be seen. He begins by stressing the changes that have taken place in Onesimus: He has compensated for his flight by his duties, washed it away by baptism and put it away by his tears. Erasmus then spends some time in explaining that this might have been part of God's plan; he then moves to the notion of brotherhood in Christ. This is motivated theologically in various ways: Paul and Onesimus are brothers because of their common faith in Christ which makes them equal, because of the common inheritance to which both of them have been called and because of a common Father and Redeemer – all of which implies that there is no difference between a slave and his owner. Erasmus then interprets the expression "in the flesh" in an interesting way: Onesimus is dear to Paul because of the spiritual bonds between them (as he has just outlined); how much more dear would he not be to Philemon, because the two of them do not only share such spiritual bonds, but also the bond of the flesh (LB VII 1077E-1078A).

13 References are to the *Editio Lugdunensis* (1703-1706), facsimile edition (Erasmus 1961-1962). For an English translation, see Bateman (1993:70-74).

5. Martin Luther

What is nowadays known as Luther's (1483-1546) commentary on the Letter to Philemon consists of the lectures delivered by the Reformer as professor of Theology in Wittenberg on 13, 16, 17 and 18 December 1527. These lectures were taken down by George Rörer, but not revised by him or any other editor at that time for the purposes of publication; they were only prepared for publication in the twentieth century (Pelikan 1968:ix-x).

Luther regards the letter primarily as an example (*exemplum*) of how Christians should handle and attempt to restore fellow believers when they fall (WA 25, 70.12-15[14]; see also 76.26-28). He calls the letter "a letter of compassion" (WA 25, 70.22), by means of which Paul was trying to persuade Philemon to do a good work concerning Onesimus (WA 25, 71.32-72.1; 72.33-31).

Of all the commentaries discussed so far, this is the one in which one finds the most references to Christ. Not only does Luther almost always explain the meaning of the prepositional phrases referring to Christ, but he also quite often introduces Christ when discussing matters in the letter where Paul has not explicitly mentioned him – mostly integrating what we would now distinguish as Christology and ethics. In fact, Luther deliberately combines these two aspects. For example, when he begins his first lecture on the letter, he points out that the letter is concerned with a private and domestic matter, but that Paul cannot address this issue without bringing in the topic (*locus*) of Christ. He then continues: There is no matter so ordinary that Christ is not present (WA 25, 69.26-70.3). When Luther begins his second lecture on the letter the next day (beginning with v. 7), he reiterates this idea: Because Paul's heart is full of Christ, he always speaks and writes about him (WA 25, 73.17-19). Luther's Christological point of departure is thus clearly seen from the outset of his lectures on the letter. This emphasis is one of the characteristic traits of Luther's theology, and reflects his own spiritual journey in this regard. Arnold (2014:274) summarises this aspect neatly:

> In his life and thought Luther passed from a terrifying vision of Christ as judge to a comforting and reassuring vision of God who saves humanity in Christ and who declares humanity justified on the basis

14 References are to the *Weimarer Ausgabe* of Luther's works (Luther 1902). For an English translation, see Pelikan (1968:93-105).

> of the righteousness of another (*iustitia aliena*), namely, of Christ. … [T]he person and work of Christ save Luther from death, from sin and from the Devil, and amount to the only comfort in the face of the temptations of these malevolent powers.

Interestingly enough, of the commentators discussed so far, Luther not only refers most to Christ, but is also the one who mentions Satan the most.[15] As Batka (2014:248) rightly points out, "the concept of the Devil, Satan, and Antichrist belong to the core of Luther's theological language and personal conviction."

In his commentary on the Letter to Philemon, Luther refers to Christ in a variety of ways, but one of the central notions is the reconciliation achieved by him. According to Luther, in this letter, Paul takes Onesimus' sins against Philemon upon himself, justifies him to Philemon and grants him all his rights over Onesimus and the crime he has committed (WA 25, 75.11-13). How important this aspect was to Luther is clear from the fact that it is also the issue that receives the most attention in his prologue to the Letter to Philemon in his translation of the New Testament, published in 1522.[16] Apart from this aspect, Luther also mentions Christ in quite a variety of different contexts. To mention some of these: He refers to the liberty Christians have in Christ (for example WA 25, 70.7), Christ as the source of spiritual treasures (for example WA 25, 73.13), Christ as the source of trust between Christians (for example, WA 25, 74.15), doing something for the sake of Christ (for example WA 25, 70.23), the joy one has to feel when Christ binds one or lets one be bound (for example WA 25, 76.9-10), ascribing good qualities to people because they are in Christ (for example WA 25, 72.9-10), praising[17] someone in Christ (for example WA 25,

15 The emphasis falls on Satan's active attempts to destabilise Christianity: Bishops (Luther thought that Archippus [v. 2] was a bishop) have the responsibility to fight against Satan, death and sins (WA 25, 71.18-19), Satan lies in ambush for Philemon (WA 25, 72.14), the devil tries to frighten off and "persecute" the knowledge that Christians have about Jesus (WA 25, 73.7-8), it is the nature of the devil to aggravate sin (WA 25, 77.22), and Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of homicide, error, darkness and falsehoods (WA 25, 78.29-30).

16 See Wolter (2010:170-171) for a good discussion of this issue.

17 Luther uses various words to refer to this rhetorical strategy of Paul: *adulatio sancta* ("holy flattery", WA 25, 71.20; see also *adulor* in WA 25, 74.10), *bona titilatio sed sancta* ("good and holy flattery" [lit. 'tickling'], WA 25, 74.8-9) and *blandior* ("flatter/fawn". WA 25, 74.11; see also 74.22). One should be careful to understand Luther correctly; he wishes to make a theological point here: When we praise another Christian, we praise

74.8-12), and what it means to have faith and brotherhood in Christ (WA 25, 77.6). From this, the close interrelationship between Christology and ethics in Luther's appropriation of the letter is evident. In every instance the emphasis falls on what Christ means for believers.

Luther's explanation of vv. 15-16 also follows the pattern that has been indicated thus far. He begins by pointing out that Paul tries to extenuate Onesimus' sin; this is typically the work of the Holy Spirit, whereas the devil always tries to aggravate sin (WA 25, 76.19-22). Luther also stresses the change that has occurred in Onesimus, and all the good things he now shares in Christ (take note how Luther introduces Christ here) – the result of which is that he will serve Philemon obediently with love in future (WA 25, 77.4-10). Luther then moves on to the relationship between Philemon and Onesimus: Onesimus is beloved to Paul and Philemon because of the gospel of Christ; he should be even more beloved to Philemon because of the Gentile law (this is Luther's interpretation of "in the flesh") and because he has been truly born in the Lord, thereby having become Philemon's brother in the Lord and thus having become willing to serve him in future, in a brotherly way. Luther then also highlights the performative consequences of all of this. According to him, it shows us how we should accept the heart of someone else (WA 25, 77.10-17).

6. Conclusion

I trust that these examples from the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of Philemon 15-16 have illustrated how interpretative encounters with Christ emerge from specific historical conditions and result in specific performative consequences. To summarise the findings briefly:

As we have seen, in current interpretations of vv. 15-16 the focus not only falls on the way that Onesimus' being in Christ changed the relationship between him and Philemon, but also almost always develops into a discussion of the question of whether Paul wanted Philemon to manumit him. In a sense, our interpretations of these words thus focus to a large extent, nowadays, on whether brotherhood in Christ would or should have led to a change in Onesimus'

him/her as Christian, i.e. we praise Christ in him/her who dwells in him/her; that is why it is good and holy (WA 25, 74.8-12). Later on he points out Paul's motivation in doing so: *charitas* (WA 25, 74.22-25).

social status. From a totally different situation to ours, Jerome and Theodore were primarily interested in the obligations that Onesimus' changed status in Christ implied for him. For Jerome it meant that Onesimus was bound to his master in a twofold sense, and for Theodore that Onesimus would love his master, and show it by serving him obediently. Both Jerome and Theodore also linked the performative consequences to the obligations this had for Christian slaves in general: Jerome explicitly mentions that Onesimus' situation applied to all Christian slaves, while Theodore links it to the notion that God wanted Christian slaves to stay in their "rank". More or less eight centuries later, Aquinas' reception of vv. 14-15 is undergirded by different notions: that the letter equally addresses master and slave and that the relationship between them should be understood in terms of brotherhood and friendship, with the importance of *caritas* as guiding principle in his ethical thinking and a constant emphasis on Christ's teachings on brotherhood. In Erasmus' reception of the two verses one can see a humanist angle: Christian life was not primarily about doctrine, but about following, practically, what Christ has taught. In this instance brotherhood in Christ implies that master and slave were equal. Furthermore, whereas Jerome focused on the obligations brotherhood in Christ held for Onesimus, Erasmus focuses on its obligations for Philemon: Onesimus should be even dearer to Philemon than to Paul, as Philemon is bound to Onesimus by spiritual bonds, as well as by the flesh. In his reception of the letter, Luther spiritualises its message: It shows us how to handle fellow Christians when they fall. Furthermore he constantly stresses the importance of Christ in his interpretation of the letter, integrating ethics and Christology all the time: In this letter of compassion, Paul is trying to extenuate Philemon's sin – typical of the Holy Spirit, whereas the devil always attempts to aggravate sin. For Luther, this letter truly shows us how to accept the heart of a fallen fellow believer. Thus, we have five interpreters, five different receptions of Christology *cum* ethics in Philemon 15-16, and five different views of its performative consequences.

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tomos distincta, quorum primo, in hac editione, præfixa sunt elogia & epitaphia Erasmi, a uiris doctis conscripta, nec coniunctim unquam antea sic edita: cum indicibus totius operis copiosissimis. Hildesheim: Olms.

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Chapter 6

The Lamb and the Servant as constructions of divinity: The worship of Jesus in Early Christianity from a disability studies perspective

Pieter J.J. Botha[1]

1. Making sense of Jesus: Framing some questions

Christology, as a theological discipline, developed as an exploration of what it means to say that Jesus Christ is determinative for Christian faith — as attempts to interpret and apply what we know about Jesus of Nazareth. In a profound way, all Christological work is "a sign of a deeply felt need to identify and affirm what binds all Christians together and to express this common faith in a full and coherent manner" (Migliore 1995:242).

Of course, particular contexts and the impact of new understandings in the sciences and humanities, often associated with changes in worldview, challenge theological interpretations. Historical Jesus studies came into being as a critique of traditional (perceived as "obsolete") perspectives on Jesus Christ – the essence of Christianity was to be found not in the dogmatic Christ but by reaching back historically into or behind the New Testament texts to the joyful message of Jesus concerning the universal fatherhood of God and the profound value of individuals, with specific emphasis on the importance of love.[2]

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2 This summary evokes Harnack (1896:65–72), whose work serves as a useful recapitulation of this scholarly trajectory, namely discovering how the Christian religion can be said to be dependent upon historical fact (see Harnack 1896:14). This "real" Jesus

Whatever the relationship between Historical Jesus studies and systematic Christology is, or should be, both disciplines share the perspective that remarkable, important –or even revolutionary – changes in worldview, ethics, faith and relationships are at stake when one attempts to make sense of Jesus.

This brief exploration in what follows links to this potential paradigmatic shift available in the Jesus traditions. I do not claim that there is a (thus far) undiscovered "true" theology or "new" historical facts to be explicated and incorporated; simply that aspects – relatively well-known implications – of the Jesus traditions can be developed further. Rather than offering a prescription for an updated theological interpretation of Jesus of Nazareth, this contribution wants to do two things: On the one hand, the aim is to raise a fresh set of questions opened up by bringing together discourses which have been artificially firewalled from one another, such as medical discourses, social activist discourses, anthropology, the philosophy and rhetoric of the body, and disability studies and feminist critiques. On the other hand, it presents an effort to infuse current discussions incorporating Jesus with some fairly radical and subversive ideas about the body of which the beginnings can be detected in the canonical Jesus traditions.

In a way, these aims can be combined by stating that examining Jesus is, actually, to pay particularly close attention to the ways how we conceive what it means to be human, and thereby to open up and make more sensitive our practices of being human. Some of the best work done to clarify in practical terms what it means to live as if all humans are valuable, can be found in disability studies and it deserves long overdue conceptual consideration in order to display why such practices (e.g., finding ways to live with, serve with and to relate to the disabled, to be present with those with disabilities) can be an extension of making sense of Jesus – and, indeed of the historical Christian faith.

2. Beyond binary attributes: The power of paradox

The Oxford English Dictionary (2002) includes amongst its definitions of paradox "a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition

interpretation is mostly identified as the "liberal Jesus". Dunn (2003:25-65) provides an overview of this trajectory, noting the recent return of the (neo-)liberal Jesus in the work of scholars such as Funk and Crossan (Dunn 2003:58-64). Nichol (1986) reviews Harnack's work as a quintessential example of liberal Protestantism.

which, when investigated or explained, may prove to be well-founded or true". In his philosophical discussion of paradoxes, Sainsbury (2009) highlights the paradoxical nature of paradoxes themselves:

> Paradoxes are fun. In most cases, they are easy to state and immediately provoke one into trying to "solve" them. ... Paradoxes are serious ... [and they] raise serious problems. Historically, they are associated with crises in thought and with revolutionary advances. To grapple with them is not merely to engage in an intellectual game, but is to come to grips with key issues (Sainsbury 2009:1).

A significant number of channels of scientific inquiry, across various disciplines (including the social, biological and physical sciences), indicate the importance of harnessing paradoxical phenomena to advance our understanding of the world, especially ourselves. A useful illustration of this deals with the lack of correspondence between wealth and happiness. This has come to be called the Easterlin Paradox, after the economist Richard Easterlin (1974) who discusses the factors contributing to happiness, and questions how economists think about the relation between income and happiness.[3] Graham (2008) similarly explores this paradoxical feature of how health and happiness relate to each other in contradictory ways. The adverse effects of wealth on well-being and efficiency are emphasised by others (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade *et al.* 2006; Quoidbach, Dunn, Petrides *et al.* 2010). This same seemingly paradoxical feature of human behaviour is brilliantly exploited by Jonathan Haidt, in what he calls the "adversity hypothesis" (Haidt 2006:136): Trauma can lead to the highest levels of strength, fulfilment and personal development.

Another thought-provoking paradox relates to a branch of medicine: Oliver Sacks notes that neurology's "favourite word is deficit, denoting an impairment or incapacity of neurological function" (Sacks 1985:1). Yet, the same discipline, he emphasises, reveals the opposite: "Defects, disorders, diseases, in this sense, can play a paradoxical role, by bringing out latent powers, developments, evolutions, forms of life, that might never be seen, or even be imaginable, in their absence" (Sacks 1995:xii). The remarkable cultural-historical psychologist Lev Vygotsky made a similar point a long time

3 Understandably, Easterlin's paradox has raised considerable and vociferous responses (e.g. Clark, Frijters & Shields 2008; Hagerty & Veenhoven 2003; Stevenson & Wolfers 2008); Easterlin responded to his critics (2005; Easterlin, McVey, Switek *et al.* 2010).

ago (1929), commenting on the importance of considering compensatory strategies and mechanisms in cases such as blindness (Vygotsky 1993:52-64).

> The doctrine of overcompensation has an important significance and serves as a psychological basis for the theory and practice of educating a child with a loss of hearing, sight and so forth. What horizons will open up to the pedagogue, when he recognizes that a defect is not only a minus, a deficit, or a weakness but also a plus, a source of strength and that it has some positive implications! (Vygotsky 1993:56)

Paradoxical thinking reveals how often widely accepted assumptions appear to be incorrect, and this has implications for how we understand our interpretive and constructive work and consequently how we implement these findings in practical settings, in moral behaviour and in personal and social relationships.

Christians through the ages have often been forced to address paradoxical impulses in our tradition in the face of ideologies that conceive Christianity to be a religion that promises believers victory, dominance, self-control and self-improvement; usually weakness or fragility are discussed as stages on the way to overcoming such shortcomings (Brock 2013:328).

Ernst Mayr, whose work has radically changed the field of evolutionary biology, remarks that a "prevailing paradigm is likely to be more strongly affected by a new concept than by a new discovery" (Mayr 2004:168). Disability studies could be such a "new concept" in theology. Conceptually, disability can (re-) activate paradoxical thinking with regard to our foundational traditions. Among the possibilities can be a different paradigm with which we can make explicit arguments for a Christianity which values fragile and marginal human life against the dominant Christianity of fear or power; with which to rethink issues of freedom and self-determination so that dependency, assistance and care can become embodied practices.

3. Paradoxical Christological traditions

It cannot be claimed that we can find any clear and distinct theology of disability among the New Testament authors. "I frankly despair, as do most scholars, of describing the ethics of even one NT writer so systematically that all the pieces fit neatly and are seen to be given coherence by one powerful perspective"

(Malherbe 2013:17). However, hints at (traces of?[4]) exactly such an alternative paradigm can be detected in Early Christian and canonical writings.

There are a number of such "starting points" or "evocative possibilities" that lend themselves to a perspective which incorporates the paradox of disability, but for current purposes only two "descriptions" of Jesus will be explored. This selection acknowledges the work of the New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham (2009) who calls attention to a Christology of divine identity in the earliest New Testament witness, namely that Jesus belongs to the identity of God. The claim that all the New Testament texts espouse such a Christology is an overstatement,[5] but at least the Gospel of Mark gives distinct indications of rethinking what God is, namely that perceiving Jesus (crucified) is to perceive God ("Jesus Christ is intrinsic" to the identity of God; Bauckham 2009:x).

Seen in such a light, the cross of Christ, as narrated by Mark, suggests a suffering in God, just as the death of Jesus eventuates a death within God. I connect the perspective (or possibilities) of this "high Christology" with the notion of a "deep incarnation" (Gregersen 2001) according to which God not only assumed human nature in general, but the nature of a scorned social being with a human-animal body, at once vibrant and vital and yet vulnerable to decease and decay. A "deep" incarnation allows for theological thinking that includes the biological world as well as the world of matter:

> [T]he incarnation of God in Christ can be understood as a radical or "deep" incarnation, that is, an incarnation into the very tissue of biological existence, and system of nature. Understood this way, the death of Christ becomes an icon of God's redemptive co-suffering with all sentient life as well as with the victims of social competition. God bears the cost of evolution, the price involved in the hardship of natural selection (Gregersen 2001:205).

4 Acknowledging that the ethos of hegemonic kyriarchal Greco-Roman patriarchy is present in the New Testament writings, Schüssler Fiorenza emphasises the importance of searching for, or "imaging", alternative *traces* in them, to engage "in a 'symptomatic' reading of the textual traces of tension and contradiction between a kyriarchal ethos on the one hand and an egalitarian ethos on the other" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983:xxviii).

5 In my reading of Bauckham he oversimplifies "Jewish monotheism", and relies on some vague, anachronistic terms (such as "identity") and tends to push all the New Testament authors into a singular template. See further Chester (2011) and Tuggy (2013).

In this sense the cross of Christ can be seen as a microcosmic paradox with which to scrutinise the complexities of life. Of course, the "cross of Christ" is shorthand for a number of Jesus traditions, and I now turn to two particular descriptions used in Jesus traditions to "identify" him.

3.1 Servant

At the heart of Jesus' ministry was a combination of healing and hospitality.[6] In the context of Jesus' community – that is, a community that strove to maintain boundaries between the sacred and the profane, clean and unclean, the faithful and the infidel – Jesus created a circle that problematised such religious and secular boundaries. It is precisely these transgressive yet supportive acts of Jesus that are highlighted by the gospel narrators when they identify Jesus as a servant and slave.

3.1.1 Mark 10:42–45

Consensus is not a conspicuous feature of contemporary New Testament scholarship, but one of the remarkable points of agreement entails that Mark's Gospel, in part or in whole, responds directly to the power and propaganda of Rome and/or its emperors (Myers 1988; Horsley 2001; Evans 2000; Incigneri 2003:170-173; Winn 2008). The Gospel of Mark is read as presenting a political contrast between the rulers of the Roman world and Jesus and his disciples. Recently Adam Winn has extended this reading to specifically include Mark 10.42-45, by means of an analysis of the rhetorical strategy of *recusatio.*[7] The Jesus-saying is seen as engaging the Roman emperors, as a consideration of the expectations of the Romans regarding their rulers as well as the political ideology that birthed those expectations. Thus Winn (2014) offers a reading of Mark 10:42-45 in light of this Roman political ideology and shows how this reading eases perceived tension in the Gospel's narrative and Christology, and contributes to the Gospel's subversion of Roman imperial power.

6 Crossan's work on the Historical Jesus has revealed the strong presence of healing and hospitality and their mutual relationship in the Jesus traditions; this is well identified by Powell's summary of Crossan's exegesis: Jesus, magic and meals (Powell 1998:83-100).

7 This strategy involved resisting or protesting all realities that might convey one's possession of absolute political power, but it did not involve the surrender of any true power. See Wallace-Hadrill (1982); Jakobson & Cotton (1985).

Noting this "perceived tension in [Mark's] narrative and Christology" I want to draw attention not to the possible political critique but to another (and in fact, more fundamental) aspect or implication of Mark's emphasis on Jesus the servant-slave,[8] who came to serve and who expects humble service.

It is well-known that Mark's theology is "problematic".[9] Throughout the spectrum of methodologies employed to make sense of the Markan Gospel we find various admissions of this elusiveness. Kee (1977:165-175), interrelating "social, literary and conceptual" analyses, emphasises that the "Markan community" is esoteric (in addition to being evangelistic). The "secrecy elements" in Mark are never clearly revealed but in "characteristic Markan fashion" events that will give insight are merely pointed to rather than being described (Kee 1977:174). The secrecy becomes a "secret", terminological obfuscation artfully created by Mark to say what he did not clearly say. In the (Markan) community, Jesus will be confessed "rightly" and the community can live with confidence and the assurance of eschatological vindication (Kee 1977:174-175). Watson (1987), adopting a narratological approach while stressing the relative independence of text and reader from historical circumstances, sees the Markan narrative as formed by an "ambiguous dialectic." Mark, though accepting the apocalyptic significance of Jesus' resurrection, leaves the message "with a question-mark against it": There is ambiguity surrounding the presence of the new age in the midst of the old (Watson 1987:16).

The various identifications and solutions of Mark's theology are embedded in the discussions of Mark's Christology, which are overwhelmingly dominated by analyses of the titles accorded Jesus in Mark's narrative. These discussions typically regard the Markan use of titles for Jesus as either (1) corrective – ideas

8 Though Beavis is writing about the Matthean parables, her critical comment that "the translation of δοῦλος as 'servant' rather than 'slave' or 'bondsperson' downplays the servile status of the parabolic actors and, in certain instances, leads to interpretations that do not fully comprehend the probable response of ancient audiences to the parables" is relevant (Beavis 1992:40).

9 In Markan scholarship this aspect is conventionally indicated as the Messianic Secret, and the diversity of approaches is well illustrated by the collection of studies in Tuckett (1983). The Markan Messianic Secret, again with wide agreement, is considered Mark's way of controlling Christology. Rather than a "secret," my proposal is to emphasise the *paradoxical* thrust of this Christology. See further Geddert (2015); LaFargue (1994) and Neufeld (2014).

about the Royal Messiah/Son of Man are being corrected by the crucified Son of God – or (2) adaptive/expanding – Messiah, Son of Man and Son of God all fit together into an overall plan of salvation. Reasons for Mark's lack of clarity about these matters are invented to support the appropriate solution.

I would identify the following reasons for the Markan ambiguity: (1) Mark is possibly not quite fully in command of his traditions, as the narrator/author is caught between oral presentations and scribal reproductions of the Jesus story, but (2) he is attempting to tell a story about the paradox of the reign of God and being a humble child (Mark 9:35-37[10]) and a slave, serving all (Mark 10:42-45).

Mark is picking up on a "hint", a possibility in the Jesus traditions known to him, with which he wants his hearers and readers to pursue the paradox of the Son of God being a slave. The focus on titular Christology (by scholarship) attempts to find the contents of the various titles in Israelite traditions which are considered to be enhanced by Greco-Roman myths. However, with regard to the Markan setting of the servant/serve sayings it is noteworthy that Mark does not really expand much on what exactly is meant by any title; he blends them together to create an impression of Jesus. And when Mark does explain what Jesus is all about he allows Jesus to explain himself – as he does in Mark 10:42-45.

There is clearly an ethical aspect to this saying, in that "Greatness is therefore measured not by one's status or power but by one's commitment to serving others in Jesus' name" (Culpepper 2007:361; see Lull 1986:295), but the true import surely is about identity: Humble, humiliating service and suffering and giving life away are characteristic markers of the Messiah. There is no doubt that in Mark the "servant" title for Jesus is placed in an apocalyptic and sacrificial context, but underlying Mark's theological views is the paradoxical linking of divinity to being a slave/servant. This gains particular poignancy when looked at from a disability studies perspective (see below).

3.1.2 Matthew

Davies and Allison identify the importance of the servant figure in Matthean Christology: Matthew desires "to interpret Jesus with the christological category of servant", and "'servant' is … a comprehensive title" for Matthew's Jesus, which "covers Jesus' entire ministry, all that Jesus says and does" (Davies

10 "In the ancient world, a child had virtually no status until he or she was useful" (Bock 2015:262).

& Allison 1993:329; see Hill 1980; 1984). The problem with these studies – as with Markan scholarship – is the tendency to construe a discrete, well-defined servant figure and then correlate this with Matthean indications.[11] The point being, there was no servant figure present in Matthew's cultural encyclopedia for Matthew to use or for his hearers and readers to appreciate. The Isaianic servant material in Matthew's Gospel has other functions than to present Jesus as the suffering servant; Isaiah 53:4a in Matthew 8:17 concerns healing, and Isaiah 42:1-4 in Matthew 12:17-21 concerns Jesus as the obedient embodiment of Israel and Gentile inclusion. Matthew's Gospel does not present Jesus as a version of the "prophetic" suffering servant; rather, Matthew's narrative reiterates Isaiah to generate an understanding of the figure of the suffering servant as one involved in "brand-new" activities and relationships.

By putting "servant-hood" in precisely such a broader perspective Gerhardsson (1973) demonstrates the rightness of the title which he gives to his article *Gottes Sohn als Diener Gottes* ("God's Son as servant of God") in which he shows how in Matthew's presentation of Jesus he exemplifies being a servant with his entire ministry. We should put together all the possible implicit and explicit references to Jesus as the servant. Gerhardsson's argument that Matthew sets out to present Jesus as the Son of God who takes it upon himself to be the perfect servant of God in all things becomes very persuasive. The servant theme is used for more than to "enhance" Matthew's dominant "Son of God" Christology (so Kingsbury; see Kingsbury 1975; 1984). The servant theme gives the necessary content to Matthew's "Son of God" Christology, a content without which "Son of God" is a strangely empty title. Jesus' sonship is expounded, given content, possibly even validated, by Matthew (more clearly than by Mark) in terms of Jesus' servant-hood in general and by his exemplification of the servant, *ebed Yahweh* (Hill 1980:14-15).

3.1.3 Luke-Acts

In Luke-Acts we can only speak of a primitive servant Christology (Jones 1984) – but the glimpses are there. Of the Gospels, Luke is the most Greek in outlook.[12]

11 "Christology was, from the very beginning, based on inclusive thinking. There never existed an exclusive, clear-cut Messiah Christology, son of David Christology, Son of God Christology, or the like" (Gerhardsson 1999:29).

12 See Downing (1988; 1992); Geldenhuys (1956:43-45); Moessner (2005); Rosik (2008); Smith (1987) and Tyson (1983).

The Greek ideal (to simplify somewhat) was the perfect human being. Perfect humanity in a Greco-Roman context equals divinity. Luke sets out to present Jesus as a person who realised his ideals and in doing so excelled as the Greek ideal. In describing Jesus in this manner for his readers, a problem immediately presented itself to them when they read/listened to the Gospel: the incongruity that the Redeemer of humans, the perfect Son of God, could be subject to suffering and dying on the cross. Greco-Romans thought of divinity as being different from the *kosmos* and humanity exactly in that it was free from suffering. Outside of God, life was not conceivable without suffering.[13]

Against this background the influence of Stoic thought on some New Testament writers becomes visible (Pierce 1955; Bosman 2003). In Stoic thought the ideal for humankind was *ἀπάθεια,* insensibility to suffering. When one attained this, one was in a state of *ἀταραξία*, quietude. The distresses of life, *τὰ θλίβοντα,* of which death is the last, were to be overcome by the philosopher (the virtuous man). We know that the cross did in fact become a stumbling block to the Greeks in Corinth (1 Cor. 1 and 2; see Gal. 5:11; 1 Pet. 2:8), but the problem was always looming in the history of Christianity. The suffering of Christ was repugnant to the Gnostics in the late first and second centuries. The Docetists sought to solve what was a problem to them by stating that Christ did not really have a human body and did not therefore suffer. It just seemed *(δοκεῖ)* as if Christ's body were real. So Luke's Christology must have provided particular impact, with the depiction of Jesus as a limited, actual human body serving others (such as in Luke 4:18-19). This aspect is vividly illustrated by Luke in what he tells about Jesus after the crucifixion and resurrection: touching and eating (Luke 24:39-43). In the body of the resurrected Jesus, the Lukan disciples saw the suffering servant as fulfilment and as divine presence. The last and most important word was not tragedy and sin, but the disabled God who embodies both impaired hands and feet and pierced side and the *imago Dei*. Paradoxically, in the very act commonly understood as the transcendence of physical life, God is revealed as tangible, bearing the representation of a body reshaped by injustice and sin. Here (in Luke 24:36-39)

> is the resurrected Christ making good on the incarnational proclamation that God would be with us, embodied as we are, incorporating the fullness of human contingency and ordinary life into God. In presenting

13 For exposition of these generalisations, see Jonas (2001).

> his impaired hands and feet to his startled friends, the resurrected Jesus is revealed as the disabled God. Jesus, the resurrected Savior, calls for his frightened companions to recognize in the marks of impairment their own connection with God, their own salvation. In so doing, this disabled God is also the revealer of a new humanity. The disabled God is not only the One from heaven but the revelation of true personhood, underscoring the reality that full personhood is fully compatible with the experience of disability (Eiesland 1994:99-100).

3.1.4 Jesus the servant/slave: Paradoxical Christology

The implications of a Christology which accentuates the role of Jesus as a servant, become very clear when placed in the context of disability studies. Most interpreters understand the healing stories in the Gospels as reports with metaphorical meaning. Adela Yarbro Collins, for instance, explains the meaning of the healing of blind Bartimaeus (which follows immediately on Mark 10:45) as follows:

> The blind man himself, being an individual in need of physical healing, also represents the "blind" disciples ... The evidence of the text ... supports a symbolic reading. The allusion to Jeremiah in v. 18 implies that the disciples are "blind." The section in which Jesus gives the disciples extensive private instruction (8:27-10:45) is framed by two stories about healing the blind. ... A symbolic reading is supported also by the use of blindness as a metaphor in Greek and biblical traditions. In Greek tragedy, among the pre-Socratics, and in Plato's works, blindness is a metaphor for ignorance. In the Bible, Isa 6:9-10 and Jer 5:21 use the metaphor of blindness for the impenitence and obstinacy of the people. Mark cites both of these passages (Yarbro Collins 2007:393-395).

This type of metaphorical interpretation raises a number of questions once we read them from a disability perspective. Everyone engaged in issues of theology and disability knows about the special challenges tied to the interpretation of healing narratives (see Betcher 2007:68-89; Ebach 2002). When read through the lens of what one would call a "hermeneutic of the perfect body" these texts, instead of providing inspiration, easily become a tool of marginalisation and discouragement for people with disabilities. Dorothee Wilhelm (herself bound to a wheelchair) rejects the healing narratives altogether as "stories of normalization" (Wilhelm 1998; 2006).

Not unexpectedly, in conventional Christological reflection discussions of Jesus and disability are limited to healing almost without exception. (This is not meant to belittle those who suffer or the importance of Jesus the healer, which would be an absurd approach). The conventional perspective is triumphant, dualistic and ignorant as most interpretations of healing stories assume an underlying "theology" completely unrelated to disability (except when "they" are to be "healed").

Why must we assume that every blind person is in need of physical healing? Not all blind people consider their condition abnormal or themselves as in need of healing. Tiffany and Ringe ask, "Why is such a premium placed on able-bodiedness? Why is the 'good news' not expressed as a world made accessible to and accepting of persons of all physical, mental, and psychological circumstances, rather than as persons changed to conform to the world's norms?" (Tiffany & Ringe 1996:183).

In theological reflection, in analyses of Christology there is by-and-large a complete unawareness of the presence in biblical narratives of persons (such as the disabled, women, slaves) being depicted as unworthy, as objects of prejudice and name-calling, as reflecting personhood that is "different," hidden, "cursed," "alienated." Christological discussions adopt these depictions uncritically as "projects" to illustrate theological points, affirming that these persons are indeed rejected, often "guilty" and, worryingly, with little or no call to change such practices.

Jesus the servant/slave forces re-consideration of characters in relational encounters requiring not just amending actions, giving assistance, actions supplemented with love, but unlimited support and service (as by a slave).

Another particular aspect of Christology from a disability perspective deserves attention. Note that much of Jesus' healing involves touch (e.g. Mark 3:10; 5:27-28; 6:56; 7:33; 8:22, 25; 10:13).[14] This profound (and extensive) touching reminds us of skin as a potential meeting point of mindfulness, disability activism, and an ethics of care. The phenomenological turn in disability studies has redirected attention from social conditions to the materiality of the body, restoring discussions of pain, sexuality, and caregiving to disability praxis.

14 Jesus's touch and touching Jesus or his clothing is a tool of healing throughout the miracle stories (e.g. Mark 1:41; 3:10; 5:27–28, 30–31; 6:56; 7:33; 8:22; 10:13).

However, theological discussions of health continue to suffuse reflection on moral agency with idealised, perfect bodies, simply ignoring the importance of touch, and explanations of healing and well-being tend similarly to assume a non-disabled physicality in the discussions of body and community. It is not without relevance, in addition, to be reminded of the role of physical contact and touching in slave activities, keeping in mind that slaves played a crucial if not dominant role with regard to household labour, especially in personal care of the household's family members (Hezser 2003; Glancy 2002).

Thinking about the role of "touching" in the context of disability and pain places the focus on the precise moment of contact between subjects. Jesus' willingness to touch, then, prompts some reflection. How do we think and write about the symbolic import, and the psychotherapeutic value, of skin touching skin? Well-being practice begins with the realisation that skin mediates between bodily and emotional states (Peloquin 1989). If we take seriously the kind of skin-to-skin connection that might occur in instances where someone is in pain or has a disability, we are construing a more meaningful and sustainable notion of embodiment so that emotions, thinking, acting, caring and support all connect. The importance of touching might very well foster ways of understanding ourselves as interdependent and corporeal beings, introducing the intensities and transformative potential of physical touch to the ways in which we conceptualise subjectivity.

Jesus the servant/slave adds complexity and theoretical rigour to the theologically powerful images of inclusion and justice (see Creamer 2009:91). This "confession" allows us to reimagine how we can and should relate to persons with "disabilities" and especially to rethink the dynamics of power attending such relationships. Thinking with and through the paradox of the Son of God as a humble (childlike), ministering slave, allows one to move beyond theological concepts and engage the representation of various relational encounters. Such a paradoxical awareness of relational encounters (by Jesus, but also by those trying to follow Jesus' way) leads to the cultivation of participants who are more critically and strategically attuned to how matters of personal identity, agency, and expression are constructed and negotiated through such encounters.

In such encounters the proper meaning of "deep incarnation" – which holds that the dichotomy between the particular and the universal is not helpful – can become visible. If Jesus is believed to be in a particular and unique way relevant

and present in ways more than just a historical figure, such aspects (the cross, being a servant) must be active and structuring (and even informational) in ways and senses more than just that suit the able-bodied.

The concept of mutuality (adopted from post-colonial criticism) is useful here. Mutuality is a composite praxis that resists and potentially transforms hegemonic relational dynamics (see Mainwaring 2014:59). Service and serving brings to the fore the significance of our bodies for an understanding of what it means to be serious about Jesus and ultimately for what it means to be human and to begin to see the importance of bodies that some might consider to be different.

3.2 The Lamb of God

Not all apocalypses originated from a clearly hostile historical situation (such as the Book of Daniel), but all apocalypses attempt to give their readers a new interpretive lens whereby they might see the world in a different way. Such a new way of seeing has the potential to reshape and even reorient life for their readers. The Book of Revelation functions in just this way. As with other apocalypses it, too, offers its readers/hearers a new world view, a new vision. For the first-century Christians of Asia Minor who were inundated by Roman imperial propaganda and perhaps mesmerised if not seduced by Roman culture, the Book of Revelation offers a different way to interpret their situation; Revelation is "a work of religious rhetoric, intended to shape the beliefs and lifestyle of its audience" (Yarbro Collins 1998:412). It offers a prophetic-ethical critique of the imperial cult and other aspects of Greco-Roman culture.

3.2.1 Pacifist?

One of the remarkable names for Jesus in the Book of Revelation is the "Lamb of God". The important question to ask about the Book of Revelation's construction of a symbolic universe is the function of the Lamb Christology within that universe. The followers of Christ had the name of the Lamb and "his Father's name" written on their foreheads (14:1), in antithesis to the worshippers of the beast in chapter 13, who are marked on the right hand or forehead with the name (or number) of the beast. The description of the 144 000 as the ones who "follow the Lamb wherever he goes" is a clue to the identity of this group. There are clear indications that this entails martyrdom and eventual victory but, surely, the fundamental aspect to notice is the paradoxical nature

of following a lamb. There is an array of texts that could be discussed here (sacrificed lambs in the OT; the Paschal lamb in Exodus; the Suffering Servant in Second Isaiah; Daniel 8; Genesis 22; Micah 5:6; the lambs of eschatological peace; and the occurrences of το ἀρνίον in the LXX), but it is clear that a case for the lamb as a symbol of vulnerability can be made. Now vulnerability is not the foregrounded theme in the Book of Revelation, but "an ethic of faithful, nonviolent resistance" (Reddish 2013) is, and this (in part) determines the significance of the lamb-title. Faithful resistance will lead to the Christians' being slaughtered like the Lamb. Of course, there is irony in this according to the Apocalypse, as it will turn out, in the Apocalypse's future, that those who appear to be the conquered are in actuality the conquerors, but consider the rhetorical force of the Lamb Christology: "[T]he lamb *has triumphed in* his death and resurrection, not that the lamb *will triumph in the future, subsequent to* his death and resurrection" (Johns 2003:161, his emphases). Faithful resistance led the Lamb to death—and so to triumph. And so it will for the Christians of Asia if they resist (not fight) Rome and its cults.

Still, it needs to be acknowledged that the ethics espoused in the Apocalypse is not consistent. This Lamb theology does not fit with the incredible violence in the Apocalypse and, more significantly, with its interpretation over the past two thousand years (Johns 2003:171-202). If the vision of the Apocalypse is ultimately ethical and nonviolent, it has not been very successful.

3.2.2 Questioning Roman masculinity

However, a different angle on Lamb-Christology has been uncovered by Chris Frilingos (2003; 2004). Frilingos emphasises the comment by John about the Lamb "as if slain" (Rev. 5:6) and places this within the context of the performance of masculinity in the Roman world. He points out that the apocalyptic Lamb expresses more than a Christian ethic of vulnerability with resistance in the face of evil and domination. The Lamb is a destabilising image for ancient constructs of masculinity. Working from Michel Foucault's study of the technology of the self in the Roman world, Frilingos turns to the Greek novel, *Daphnis and Chloe* by Longus, to consider the spectacle of sexuality. Frilingos wants to open the eyes of the modern reader of Revelation to "the pulsing rhythms of Roman culture at play in the Book of Revelation" (Frilingos 2004:13). Such a viewing, according to Frilingos, draws the viewer

and viewed into a complicated web of both spectacle and the ambiguities of (sexual) penetration. The Lamb problematises images of masculinity; the Lamb is both slain and slayer, pierced and punisher, penetrated and penetrator. Once acknowledged, one realises the Lamb in Revelation plays on the trope of masculinity.

The "monsters of Revelation", such as Satan in Revelation 12 but also the women who appear as beasts in the text: Jezebel, the Woman clothed with the Sun, and Babylon, the "synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9; 3:9), and the two beasts in Revelation 13 (Frilingos also includes here the 144 000, Rev. 7:1-11; 14:1-5) are all part of a spectacle (in the sense of theatrical performance) by which the Apocalypse "renders the concept of the 'masculine gaze' problematic" (Frilingos 2004:114). Dominating (penetrator) yet slain (penetrated), the Lamb haunts Revelation and its audience, a spectacle that challenges the viewers' self-control as they try to follow it. Revelation does not so much oppose Rome as put Roman culture on display. Adopting Frilingos's perspective we notice the extent to which the great spectacles of the Roman world, not least games in the arena, have impacted on the Apocalypse's visionary world. Rome was a society in which seeing and being seen were both fundamental. Just consider the role of staged hunts of wild animals, gladiatorial contests, the public execution of prisoners of war and criminals, the imperial cult, and one realises how these display, justify *and* enable the domination of the "other". In Greco-Roman culture, the extent to which the peoples of the empire, from the emperor downwards, were always "players" in the theatre of masculinity and femininity, always being reminded of who gazes (powerful men) and who are objects being gazed upon (women and slaves), cannot be overemphasised.

When we take into account representations of masculinity and femininity in Roman society, and adopt these as an appropriate background against which to view Revelation's slaughtered Lamb, we notice a paradoxical feature. The Lamb is not only a spectator, gazing on the burning enemy and the destruction of the great city, but also a spectacle, being slaughtered and "gazed" upon. This is visual imagery which distinctly "marks" and makes visible what is usually considered unacceptable: that an unmanly spectacle, bloodied and on display, is also judge and conqueror, worthy of worship.

In terms of Christological exploration, the possibilities of viewing the Lamb as questioning and undermining conventional ideas of masculinity (and thereby

of normalcy) are immense. With powerful evocations the Lamb prompts us to explore various ideologies that shape how the human body (in particular, the disabled human body) is understood and often not addressed within theological education. The Lamb empowers Christians to reflect on submission and service, inviting the study of disability, and the presence of people with disabilities in particular, within that reflection. The "missing note" of disability in theological inquiry, when it comes to observing and being observed, parallels the absence of reflection about the Lamb "as if slain".

4. Some implications for the "meaning" of Jesus: An embodied, non-binary worldview, theology and ethics

I have identified disability studies as a conceptual tool to reframe research into Christology and to invigorate theological reflection. Conversely, the ways in which we discuss and describe the so-called "question of disability" will inevitably "be reshaped if we notice that Christians throughout the ages have in fact had to deal with and think about all sorts of variations and apparent lacks and sufferings that are part and parcel of the human condition" (Goldingay 2013:279).

Too much of Christological reflection tries to "get" the "facts" or the "texts" with a rhetoric of inquiry built on objectivity and framed by an androcentric, competitive reality with highly-idealised and commercialised images of the body. The results are predictable: We end up with perfection and individual heroism as the norm, supported by ideals of beauty and flawlessness, structured by a logic based on unilinear authority and, most disturbingly, invisible disability. That is why scholars, as modem individualists, tend to presuppose a "great man" view of history, typically attributing too much influence to one charismatic person and paying not only inadequate attention to the social and economic currents that can help explain why the movement that grew up around that individual succeeded precisely where and when it did, but especially not noticing the myriad of human relationships constituting the events being discussed. Sight of the "incomplete", broken and not-"normal" bodies actually making up real history has been lost. Theological practice (and the church) have often tended to make the suffering and the brokenness and the service (the being bound to others) of Christ somehow into a military symbol; a victory, a display of power. Salvation, then, is of course about beauty and perfection and singular, individual minds (or souls). Conventional understandings of disability are dependent

on assumptions that characterise disability as misfortune and by implication privilege the "normal" over the "abnormal." Consequently, it is presumed that societal organisation based upon able-bodied and -minded norms is inevitable and that the best we can do is show sympathy or pity. This is a result of a "distorted" Christology, underplaying Jesus as the servant/slave and the Lamb who questions (Roman) masculinity. It has made us content to think that achieving equality for the disabled is a question of medicine or health, or an issue of sensitivity and compassion. Jesus the servant/slave dramatically confronts us with the question of politics, of power and powerlessness. A servant ideology is a critique of our cultural idols, such as scientism, healthism, intellectualism, unhealthy perfectionism, commercialism, and materialism.

Several early Christian depictions or interpretations of Jesus (and his divine significance) hint at precisely this critique of society, religion and morality. They challenge the "normal"/"not normal" binaries and promote a "theology for embracing difference", a theology of inclusion, interdependence, and *koinonia*, all predicated on a perichoretic vision of the triune relationships (see the informative studies by Rian Venter [2006; 2007; 2008a; 2008b]). Over the past century, theologians and ethicists have expressed unease with the growing problem of competition in human relationships. While most agree that competition dissolves relationships of fidelity and trust between people, many have argued on the basis of the political mythology of social contract theory that competition is a natural, albeit sad, fact of being human. Jesus as the Suffering Servant and as the Lamb who dissolves Roman masculinity prompts rethinking the problem of competition in human relationships.[15] In contrast to the view that human beings are naturally competitive, we can reinterpret human being as depending on the cultivation of non-competitive relationships that require interdependence in vulnerability, acceptance of others, and a vision of fully human life compatible with and modelled on the experience of disability. I would suggest that such a non-competitive anthropology assists in changing the focus of Christian discussions of salvation from adversarial, forensic and competitive accounts of the atonement to practice-oriented and social views of becoming human by belonging with others.

15 A theological critique that can be aligned with the work of Jean Vanier, Carl Rogers and James Alison. See Sider (2012) and Swinton (2012).

The disabled body of Christ has a critical potential as a metaphor in our time. It is important to examine the actual appearance of the metaphorical referent that is the body of Jesus. It reveals the frailty of the body and speaks of the presence of God in our world. As a metaphor for the human body, it serves as an effective contrast to the idealised and commercialised images of the body. It provides an alternative image of communal life for social bodies, a transformable context that is given to us, not created or controlled by us. In addition, it gives us a vision of God's future as already present in human life. The body of Christ is a relevant metaphor for Christological, ecclesiological and anthropological reflection. Our earliest traditions invite us to define Jesus' body as a disabled and bruised body, to extend the metaphorical potential of it, and to clarify and deepen the connection between the three theological areas (Christology, ecclesiology and anthropology). Instead of affirming power, dominance and "beauty", Christology should empower us to return to our paradoxical roots. Conceptually, disability can (re-)activate paradoxical thinking with regard to our foundational traditions. Among the possibilities can be a different paradigm with which we can make explicit arguments for a Christianity which values fragile and marginal human life against the dominant Christianity of fear or power; with which to rethink issues of freedom and self-determination and actually embody dependency, assistance and care.

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Chapter 5

Interpretive encounters with Christ in Revelation and its reception history

Pieter G.R. de Villiers[1]

1. Encountering Jesus in the ongoing history of the church: A Christological appropriation

Revelation represents the hermeneutical exercise of an author who reflected on the meaning of the Historical Jesus for his time and context, in the light of his sacred[2] and oral traditions,[3] in an imaginative, complex manner. Hebrew Scripture, and especially prophetic texts, played a decisive role in his hermeneutics as inspiration, source and guidance in his reflection on Jesus. At the same time

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2 This reflection has a subtle, indirect character, as is shown by the author's extensive allusions to Hebrew Scriptures, without quoting them directly. He does this so consistently and comprehensively that Kraft (1974), in his well-known commentary on Revelation, regarded Hebrew Scriptures as its exclusive source. The commentary of Beale (2000) is the other modern commentary that is known for its focus on the relationship of Revelation with Hebrew Scriptures.

3 New Testament scholarship investigated links between the use of the Synoptics and the Old Testament that reflect their common interpretive traditions. Vos (1965) early on was convinced that the author of Revelation used an oral tradition about Jesus that is also to be found in the Synoptics. Penley (2010) remarks that "traditions controlling the appropriation of OT prophetic material in the Synoptic account of Jesus' message of Jerusalem's destruction also gave shape to parts of the message of judgment in John's Apocalypse." This research is part of general scholarship on the relation of John's writings to the Synoptics. See Moody Smith (1992) for a general overview, but also Dunn (1996) who reflected on the differences between the Synoptics and Revelation in terms of theological issues.

his "prophetic" text would also emulate the hermeneutics of the prophets in Hebrew Scriptures, when they expressed their encounters with the divine in a new, imaginative manner in terms of their own contexts and times.[4] This process did not end there. Later readers of John's text similarly interpreted the book, in terms of their own historical conditions and social settings. As a result, they produced "new" texts that reflected their own creative interpretation of their encounter with Christ. An investigation of this reception history will show that there is no neutral or innocent reading of Revelation. Later readings are not merely reproductions of Revelation.

This chapter will investigate how John's text and later readings of Revelation reflect unique representations of encounters with Christ that resulted from particular socio-historical conditions with extraordinary performative consequences for faith communities, and even secular discourses. This investigation will show how making sense of Jesus represents a complicated epistemological, rhetorical and ethical event – often with major consequences for communities, societies and individuals, as will be discussed now.

2. Christ in Revelation

The Revelation of John itself is not a neutral or naïve report about Jesus, as is evident from his unique representation of the Historical Jesus, his depiction of the exalted Christ and the pragmatics of the text.

2.1 The Historical Jesus

Revelation contains little information about the Historical Jesus, though it is clear that the author writes about and speaks of a transformative encounter with him. Johannine scholarship has confirmed his knowledge of and references to the Historical Jesus. Historical-critical studies of Revelation, especially in the twentieth century, have pointed to key references to his names (Jesus: 1:9; 12:17; 14:12; and Christ 11:15; 12:10; 20:4, 6), his Jewishness (5:5), his twelve apostles (21:14), his death (5:9-10), his crucifixion in Jerusalem (11:8), his resurrection (1:5, 18) and ascension (3:21, 12:5).[5] Whilst John writes about

4 See the extensive discussion in Brueggemann (2001).

5 See already Charles (1920:cxi) in his extensive commentary on Revelation, and, in most recent times, Boxall (2011). Johannine scholarship extensively researched the nature of and links between John's Gospel, the Revelation of John and the Johannine letters. It

Jesus, the findings of scholarship indicate that he does not wish to present a historical discussion of him.

2.2 The exalted Christ

The paucity of references to the Historical Jesus finds its counterpart in John's extraordinary interest in the resurrected and glorified Christ, as has been spelled out by narrative, literary and theological approaches to Revelation. John's narrative about the encounter with Christ is not about recalling historical information about Jesus as indicated, for example, in John 20:30-31 and Acts 1:1-3. John, like Luke's book of Acts, wants to discuss the ongoing involvement of the exalted Christ in the world. This is shown by his characterisation of Christ's person, preaching and actions in the unfolding history of the world. So thorough is his Christological reinterpretation of the Jesus event, that Revelation's obvious dependence on Jesus' eschatological proclamation (with key terms like the Son of Man in e.g. Rev. 14:14), is not always recognised by later readers.[6]

forms part of a broader interest in the relationship of biblical texts with the Historical Jesus. For an accessible overview of this research on the Historical Jesus, see Powell (2004). Relevant for this study is his remark:

> Perhaps the most distinctive hallmark of Jesus scholarship in the 1990s was a repudiation of the notion that Jesus expected and announced an imminent end of the world. Indeed, that repudiation was what prompted coinage of the term "third quest," to distinguish the work of scholars like Borg, Crossan, and Robert Funk (all associated with the Jesus Seminar) from that of persons associated with what had been popularly called "the new quest of the Historical Jesus" (e.g. Günther Bornkamm, Norman Perrin, and Gerd Theissen, all of whom did attribute an imminent eschatological perspective to the Jesus of history). The emerging, third quest paradigm favored a Jesus who did not speak about the end of the world but of a new way of being. The eschatological and apocalyptic sayings attributed to Jesus in the Gospels were dismissed as enthusiastic attributions of a church in crisis, exemplary of the kind of rhetoric spouted by sects experiencing violent persecution and/or social ostracism.
>
> Research of the Historical Jesus is an area that is characterised by a plethora of research approaches and methodologies. The pragmatic consequences of this academic field of research are most evident in the controversies evoked by the Jesus seminar. For an overview of the cultural wars that are operative in the research, see Johnson (1996).

6 See Bauckham (1998:94-96) for a discussion (with references to relevant literature) of this topic.

As mentioned briefly above, one explanation for John's unique reception of Jesus is to be found in the genre he chose for his text. He knew that he was exploring new ground when he focussed his narrative on the ongoing divine actions in and of the exalted Christ. He narrated it in this new way by appropriating the mystifying language of traditional prophetic texts into his Christian discourse to produce a text that is now known as an apocalypse. In his desire to illuminate in a thick manner the hidden, even incomprehensible nature of the life-giving presence of Christ in creation and church, he describes his text as a "revelation" of (or about) Jesus Christ (Αποκάλυψις Ιησοῦ Χριστοῦ).[7] It reveals, therefore, what was hidden and unknown, but it also does so in a hidden, mystical manner. The mystical nature of the text is confirmed by Revelation 1:1-2, which describes itself as having been "signified" to John. This seminal word, used in oracular and prophetic contexts, indicates the symbolic and signifying nature of its contents. It communicates a message that is difficult to put into words and could only be expressed through signs.

The hidden nature of the book is confirmed by its symbolic nature and language. It contains what God and Christ revealed as "signs" to John (ἐσήμανεν; Rev. 1:1). They include, for example, the woman and dragon in Revelation 12 and the woman in Revelation 17 (see also Rev. 15:1). These signs are so mysterious that John fails to understand them and needs an explanation (Rev. 17:7). Some of the signs are even so profound that he is told not to write them down (Rev. 10:4).[8]

7 See already Swete (1911:1) for a discussion whether this phrase reflects a subjective or objective genitive. Though the case for the former has much support, some argued that the latter will make good sense in the light of, for example, 1 Pet. 1:7.

8 Other examples illustrate in a more sophisticated and subtle manner the layers of meaning that the author infuses in his text. The reader is, for example, explicitly prompted not to read text motifs literally. In Rev. 11:8 that speaks of the killing of the two witnesses who preached to the great city, their bodies are said to lie in the street of the city where the Lord was crucified. At the same time, though, the city is "figuratively" described as Sodom and Egypt. The symbolism aims to make the reader aware that Jerusalem that crucified Christ represents a symbol for deeper, life-destroying and evil dynamics continuously at work in the history of salvation. The evil forces of the past are also at work in Christ and in the time that Revelation was written. Schüssler-Fiorenza (1986:14) explained this dense, "poetic-evocative" symbolism with the image of an onion which comprises various layers of meaning and, therefore, allows for various interpretations.

This hidden nature is also indicated by the repeated appeal to the readers to decode the book's message, for example, at the end of each of the seven letters (Rev. 2-3) and at key moments in the book (Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 13:18; 17:5, 7, 9).[9]

John's "revelation" of hidden things implies that it was meant to play a vital role. It was not merely a review of who Jesus was or will be. He imparts a new, comprehensive message that had specific and special relevance for the immediate situation of its readers. This is also spelled out early in the text when Christ instructs John to write ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσὶν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα (Rev. 1:19). This important phrase ties the message of the book not only to the past or future, but also and especially to the present state of affairs. The revelation is about the ongoing presence of the exalted Christ in their midst as it relates to "the totality of existence in its three aspects of past, present and future" (Van Unnik 1962-3:87-89). It mediates the deepest meaning of human life and realities to the faithful for their ongoing spiritual journey towards the consummation of all things. His revelation determines the eternal fate of its readers (Rev. 22). John claims that his readers will be blessed eternally when their ethos and ethics reflect a lifestyle that is worthy of Christ.[10] John thus presents the present dispensation from a consistent Christological perspective.

An overview of Revelation's contents confirms that Christology is the overriding issue and concern.[11] From its very first words, the book describes Jesus Christ as the One who powerfully reveals the divine mystery (Rev. 1-3). The appearance of Christ as the Revealer of the divine word affects the visionary physically and spiritually. John fears for his life and, in deadly awe, falls down on the ground (Rev. 1:17). At the beginning of each of the seven letters John lets Christ introduce himself with exceptional descriptions, culminating in the remark that he is the Son of God (Rev. 2:15).[12] This exalted nature is

9 The Greek verb ἐσήμανεν in this case reflects the profound, difficult and ambiguous nature of the book's contents and the need for adequate interpretation.

10 They are called to keep John's understanding of Christ's commandments (Rev. 22:14) and the words of his prophecy (Rev. 22:6, 18-19). Those whom he regards as sorcerers, idolaters, adulterers, murderers and liars face divine punishment (Rev. 22:15).

11 For some of the many studies on the Christology of Revelation, see Bauckham (1993) and Boxall (2011).

12 Each one then begins with an exalted description of Christ (Rev. 2:1; 2:8; 2:12; 2:15; 3:1; 3:7; 3:14).

emphasised in the subsequent narrative by the description of his sharing of the divine throne and the divine honours accorded to him (Rev. 4-5; 19:10; 22:8-9). In the four septets that structure the main body of the text (Rev. 6-16), he is the mighty Judge and Warrior who, together with his heavenly army, wages war against the unrepentant opponents of God (Bauckham 1993:133-140).[13] As the powerful Lord of the church, he shields those who follow him and remain in his presence from evil. The intercalations represent descriptions of his soteriological actions (e.g. Rev. 7:1-17, 10:1-11:13).[14] Christ not only reveals, but also embodies the divine Word: His name, as indication of his identity, is Word of God (Rev. 19:13). His arrival as the Lamb with his bride inaugurates the time of salvation and bliss in God's paradise (Rev. 20-21). Even Revelation 21:1-21, that speaks about the presence of God in the New Jerusalem, ends with a description of God and the Lamb being the light and temple in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:22-22:5). The last chapter repeatedly refers to the coming of the Lamb (Rev. 22:7, 12, 20), with a final dialogue between Christ and the Spirit/bride, who calls for Christ to come (Rev. 22:17, 20-21). This information emphasises the consistent Christological nature of the book.

2.3 The pragmatics of the text

Revelation is a good illustration of how making sense of Jesus has major consequences for the spiritual praxis of its initial and later readers. The sense-making is intricately linked with the pragmatics of the text.[15] John is the

13 His power is evident when he treads "the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God" (Rev. 19:15). He is "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16).

14 See the discussion in Mazzaferri (1989:399) and Bauckham (1993:9).

15 Recent research reveals how New Testament scholars seek to explain the meaning of Biblical books, that is, what authors of Biblical texts wished to do with what they were saying. Powell (2004) writes,

> Today's Historical Jesus scholars want to emphasize the significance that reconstructing a historically credible Jesus has for systematic theology, pastoral preparation, spiritual formation, ecumenical discourse, and a variety of other agendas. Those who have made their way through N. T. Wright's *The resurrection of the Son of God* will have no doubt noticed the breadth of its concern. Historical questions are raised, but the book also wants to deal with theology; it wants to explicate what resurrection faith has meant, does mean, and ought to mean for those who commit themselves to it. Likewise,

pastor who succours his communities to cope with their difficult situations against the deadly onslaughts of evil that threaten them physically, but also lure them away from the true life. Not only the contents of the book, but also the identity ascribed to Christ, reflects this pastoral intention. He portrays Christ as the one who is walking protectively among the faith communities and "holds" them firmly in his hand (Rev. 3:1). They are sustained by these images to relate to Christ as the one who protects, judges, guides, invites and admonishes in their complex, dangerous context. He does so in a most imaginative way, offering language of beauty and joy that are particularly relevant within and for their challenging physical and spiritual conditions in the Middle East: Christ leads his people to springs of living water and, thus, will bring hunger, thirst and scorching heat to an end (Rev. 7:16-17; see 22:5). The river that flows from the divine throne will run through the middle of the eternal city, with trees that produce abundant crops throughout the year. In the face of violent, ruthless persecution, he identifies Jesus with a profound and merciful depiction of God, the Creator, who is keenly aware of their suffering and will wipe away tears (Rev. 7:17; 21:4; see Isa. 25:8). This compassionate God who loved and liberated them in Christ (Rev. 1:5) and who made them priests and kings (Rev. 1:6) continues the intimate relationship and transforms them, not only from having been enemies of God to followers of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5-6), but also to persevere, to continue to pray and to worship God, who remains faithful to them.

John presents his book as a text that has to be read repeatedly to the communities Asia Minor in the liturgy of their assemblies on holy days to empower them to live in full awareness and consciousness of the divine presence. In other words, it is a book about the transformation and deepening of their relationship with the divine. They have to read and reread the text, but also to "keep" it in conscious reminder of their commitment to the divine will and word (Rev. 1:3). The text is, therefore, performative in nature – wishing to influence the recipients' commitment to the new vision for the world that their lived experience of Christ implies and represents. It is, therefore, also about the vital, transformative nature and deepening of their faith through their relationship with the exalted Christ.

James Dunn's massive *Jesus remembered* is explicitly marketed as volume one in a "Christianity in the making" series and is less concerned with establishing what Jesus said and did than with analyzing how Jesus was remembered and why.

Their radical transformation from fear to joy is illustrated by symbols in the book that depict their new life in Christ. Christ's very being, permeated by lightness and exuding divine glory (Rev. 2) is depicted as being contagious: The seven churches are lampstands (Rev. 1:20) who live because of, and reflect, his lightness, beauty and glory. This is complemented by other symbols for the faith community. They are like the bride of the Lamb (Rev. 21) and the New Jerusalem, which has the divine glory as light that removes darkness (Rev. 20:11). The Lamb is the lamp of the city (Rev. 21:23). The city, permeated by divine light is a light that also burns bright and glorious. Even the nations will walk by its light (Rev. 21:23). This is the deepest sense of the book: It portrays how Christ brings glory back into creation, in the faith community and in this dispensation. In doing so, Christ is the powerful one who transforms them from their present condition.

3. The eschatological reception

One of the earliest trajectories in Revelation's reception history focused primarily on its eschatological nature and contents. Other than in the Christological reception discussed in the previous section, attention focusses on Revelation's understanding of time. Such a reading is not surprising, given the general expectation of the imminent *parousia* in Early Christianity, but also because of some prominent pronouncements in the text: John praises those who appropriate the book's message "because the time is near" (ὁ γὰρ καιρὸς ἐγγύς; Rev. 1:3). He repeatedly speaks about the coming of the Lord's day (Rev. 6), of the Antichrist (Rev. 20), of "the Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20) and of the future eradication of evil and the return of paradise (Rev. 22).

This focus on the eschatological message of the book is found in the earliest receptions of Revelation, promoted by early Latin exegetes like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus and Victorinus of Petovium, who understood the book's eschatology literally and linearly as predictions of the future (McGinn 1992:14). This reception is closely linked with specific historical conditions of uncertainty, anxiety and transitions when communities feel alienated by their circumstances. It is also marked by major and devastating social consequences, especially when expectations of a future end failed to materialise.

The eschatological reading of Revelation was especially prominent at some crucial stages in history, such as the year 500, 1000 and 1500. Towards the

dawn of the first millennium, expectations of an imminent end arose when much tension and anxiety were caused by factional rivalry between Eastern and Western faith communities which culminated in the Great Schism of 1054 along doctrinal, theological, linguistic, political, and geographical lines. In the East, the Muslim and Turkish threat of the Byzantine Empire and the first crusade to retake Jerusalem from its Muslim rulers also caused uncertainty and anxiety. These social events coincided with and evoked heightened eschatological expectations.

A specific example of how Revelation was read in such a context, is offered by events in parts of France. First of all, the imminent second millennium heightened eschatological expectations.

> Numerous contemporary commentators in the Burgundian-Lotharingian area around 960 understood the approaching, biblically significant interval of a thousand years since the birth of Christ as important and predictably identified the hitherto unknown Hungarians as the apocalyptic peoples of God and Magog (Fried 2003:19).

The fervour existed over a much wider area than this region, including "Aquitania, northern Spain, France, York, and even parts of the Ottonian real. Lotharingia was perhaps affected earliest, then Italy, and even later some areas of Saxony" (Fried 2003:61). Religious leaders in these regions were gravely concerned about catastrophic events, wars and other crises. The common folk often regarded these events as signs of the imminent end of the world and the coming of the Antichrist.[16] In some cases, it contributed to revolutionary movements, as people took to arms to attack their opponents. Leaders, who were apprehensive of these developments, responded to these movements with arguments based on their careful study of biblical texts (Verhelst 2003:87). Of special interest to them were the motifs of the Antichrist that were regarded as precursors to and heralds of Christ's return and that were associated with the political status quo. Towards the middle of this century, Adso, the abbot of Montier-en-Der, wrote a much-read work about the Antichrist with the title *De ortu et tempore Antichristi*. His text responded to those who challenged the

16 Wandering preachers undertook pilgrimages, during which they preached against corrupt church leaders and institutions. They became so influential that they were opposed and persecuted by authorities.

rule of King Louis IV of France and depicted him as an illegitimate ruler and the embodiment of the Antichrist. Adso defended the king with the argument that he was a legitimate heir to the Roman Empire whose rule could not be questioned because biblical texts indicated that the Antichrist will not appear, as long as a Roman Emperor occupies the throne.[17]

This reading shows how educated religious leaders[18] reacted against the enthusiasm that resulted from literalist readings of Revelation. And yet, even though they criticised the readings of their opponents, they read the book as literally as their opponents did. They also accepted that Revelation was about the end of time, and that the world will eventually be subjected to the coming rule of the Antichrist. Their main point was that the coming of the end could not be imminent. And they were not less political than their opponents in their attempts to counter the political use of Revelation to instigate rebellion against political powers.

Such social unrest and upheaval was also the context within which Pope Urban II organised a crusade to retake Jerusalem. The call was immensely successful: In 1096, 100 000 "warriors, priests, women, poor folk, bishops, prophets and a few children left homes in France, Italy and Germany and marched to Jerusalem" (Rubenstein 2011:xii). The First Crusade was characterised and became infamous because of the crude and mindless violence with which it was conducted. And it is indeed the case that many participants perpetuated extreme actions in their

17 McGinn (1992:3-19) concludes his essay on the Revelation of John with the remark that, other than in the earlier times of the Latins (Tertullian, Victorinus and Lactantius) and the Greeks (Irenaeus), Revelation was read in the Middle Ages mostly non-literally or, in the words of Jerome, in a "spiritual" way (1992:18-19). He quotes Jerome as describing a literal reading as to "Judaize." This was also the case from the middle of the ninth century onwards in influential works of Bede, the Irish monk, the *Bibelwerk,* the commentary of Autpert, the Italian monk, and the work of the Carolingian monk, Haimo of Auxere, that were widely read in the medieval West. All these authors read Revelation historically, but without dating or predicting the future (Bede) or allegorically in terms of an eschatology that has been realised (Lobrichon 2003:70-74).

18 See Fried (2003:61):

> What is remarkable is that in all instances, leading intellectual contemporaries grappled with the question. One gets the impression that increasing levels of education, monastic and ecclesiastical reform efforts, and millennial expectations were closely interconnected.

greed to plunder, or even in their arrogant view of inflicting just punishment on infidels and enemies of the church.

Recent research suggested a more religious nature of some who joined the pilgrimage because they were promised absolution of sins or because they were inspired to spread Christianity's influence.[19] Rubenstein (2011:xii) argued that one of the important reasons why people went to Jerusalem was "because they fundamentally believed that their pilgrimage would help spur the prophesied end of time." They were convinced that the crusade could set in motion the events of the Apocalypse and fulfil biblical prophecies that predicted Christ's heavenly battle in Jerusalem in the end times (Rubenstein 2011:4). They were, thus, helping to bring about the Apocalypse, the final battle between good and evil that would inaugurate the end of the world.[20] They were convinced that the end of time and the end time Armageddon was imminent and that the earthly Jerusalem was the place to be.

> Christian thinkers and theologians begin searching the stars and their libraries for signs of the advent of Antichrist and the eventual return of Christ in majesty. The roads to the heavenly and earthly Jerusalems were opening all at once (Rubenstein 2011:4).

There are other indications of how an eschatological reading of Revelation's language influenced the crusade. Some authors justified their vindictive and violent acts during the military campaigns by arguing that the extreme violence reflected fulfilment of Revelation's prophecy. Raymond of Aguilers depicted the sack of Jerusalem in terms of the gruesome language of the judgment by the Son of Man, through an angel in Revelation 14:20. To him the bloody slaughter represented the righteous and glorious judgment of God. He describes how their soldiers pursued their fleeing opponents, "killing and slaying even to the Temple of Solomon, where the slaughter was so great that our men waded in blood up to their ankles ..." He then adds,

19 At the same time, physical conditions made the pilgrimages easier because of a new road to Jerusalem through Hungary that was built by Stephen I as its first Christian king.

20 See Nemeroff (2016), who writes:

> Being a part of a divine event and helping to bring about the Apocalypse was a far more compelling reason to go on the journey to Jerusalem than many of the other common reasons cited today.

> So let it suffice to say this much, at least, that in the Temple and porch of Solomon, men rode in blood up to their knees and bridle reins. Indeed, it was a just and splendid judgment of God that this place should be filled with the blood of the unbelievers, since it had suffered so long from their blasphemies. The city was filled with corpses and blood (Krey 1921:243-248).

This reception of Revelation reflects a literal reading of Revelation, that selected certain key pronouncements in the text and interpreted them chronologically as predictions of future events that were being fulfilled in the time of the readers. The reception rested on an ahistorical approach that moved in a facile manner from the realities of the original context to those of later times, as if the same forces of evil were at work. Though such readings also expected the return of Christ and the inauguration of a kingdom of peace, the pessimistic outlook on the present world and the anxiety about troubling times made them focus more on overcoming fear. This, too, challenged and diminished the awareness of the divine presence in Christ. This has as consequence that the Christological nature of Revelation was obfuscated.

The various eschatological readings of Revelation towards the end of the first millennium in many parts and regions of Western Europe were not that unique. Towards the end of the second millennium, similar expectations became wildly popular, mainly among fundamentalist groups, with even more dramatic consequences. This time, though, the eschatological expectations were characterised by a millennial discourse that was based on Revelation 20, and its references to the binding of Satan for a thousand years. The discourse included a reign of an elect group, followed by the release of the devil and a final war before the last judgment. The final end begins after the final eradication of evil.[21] What is now known as the "Left Behind"-culture spread like a wildfire across the globe. Authors like Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye who wrote 16 "Left Behind"-books that sold more than 80 million copies, linked their speculations with historical events in the Middle East.

This eschatological reception of Revelation is, once again, determined by complex religious, historical, social and political conditions. Its pragmatic outcomes are manifold, violent and destructive: It reads Revelation as if it

21 See Court (1979) and Beale (1999:47) for more information.

speaks primarily about a situation long after it was written, and as if it is directly relevant for much later conditions. It is pessimistic about existing socio-political structures, is characterised by exclusivism, is driven by a right-wing political agenda, and does not shy away from advocating or approving of dangerous violence. [22] According to LaHaye, for example, Jesus does not promise peace, but the sword. He is, in the most literal sense, Revelation's Warrior against evil. Eschatological pronouncements are linked with institutions, events and people: The Antichrist is, for example, the secretary-general of the United Nations who promises world peace. Any politician who aims to eliminate economic inequalities, to end poverty, campaigns for total disarmament, promotes abortion, homosexuality, multinational co-operation and trade alliances, financial institutions and international bodies promotes the cause of the Antichrist. These interpretations show the dire and highly prejudiced performative consequences of eschatological predictions. These readings vilified others, but also have serious political implications for peace in the Middle East and the political discourse in the United States. War in the Middle East plays a vital role in eschatological expectations of Christ's return.[23] This eschatological interpretation reflects a fundamentalist, literal reading of the text that harmonises biblical material from different books (Daniel, the Synoptics, Revelation, 1 Thessalonians) and from different times to generate arbitrary schemes that predict the future rather than reveal life's deeper, richer meaning. All this confirms how the act of interpretations and of making sense of Jesus is never neutral and innocent but, in fact, represents a complex epistemological, rhetorical and ethical event.

22 Matson (200:43) has made some seminal remarks about a literal reading of Revelation's language about the end time:

> Divorced from Revelation's suffering context, these words can come off sounding self-serving and vitriolic. We're right, they're wrong! We win, they don't! Many white, middle-class Christians who read Revelation to satisfy their curiosity about end-time matters might do well to listen to other readers of the book, those persons and groups who more easily identify with the social location of Revelation. As Hays observes, "Something very strange happens when this text is appropriated by readers in a comfortable, powerful, majority community: it becomes a gold mine for paranoid fantasies and for those who want to preach revenge and destruction."

23 The political implications of this development have been spelled out by Rossing (2004) and Davis (2011).

4. A spiritualised reception of Revelation

The introduction to this essay discussed the exalted Christology of Revelation, before it focussed in the previous section on a trajectory in the reception history of Revelation that predicted the future return of Christ through extensive calculations, and that deviates from the Christological focus in Revelation. There are, however, other readings that represented more adequate responses to the text itself. Many factors contributed to this later reception with its predominantly non-literal and spiritual character. Among them is the growing frustration with and scorn of failed predictions with their negative consequences and their dangerous political implications, but also insights that appreciated the nature of Revelation as a mystical text.

4.1 Spiritual readings of Revelation

From an early stage, the literal eschatological reading of Revelation was questioned by authors like Origen, Tyconius, Augustine and Jerome who argued that the prophecies have been fulfilled in Christ: In him the millennial reign was inaugurated and the final end would take place with his second coming. The result of this alternative, "spiritualised" reading was that the text was to a large extent understood as timeless document that spoke of the on-going history of the faith community and that had nothing to do with a literal chronology. It is ironical, however, that in some instances this spiritualised reading was not without political implications or motivated by political considerations. It was often directed against groups whose apocalyptic interpretations threatened the stability of the political status quo. It served to protect the church's relationship with and influence on the political powers. This example shows how Revelation can generate contradictory readings in one context and on one (political) theme.

There is, however, more to this second trajectory in the reception history of Revelation. An analysis of the trajectory will further illuminate how also the spiritual reading of Revelation can be complex and multifaceted. Recent research in biblical scholarship confirmed that Revelation belonged to a group of texts with a distinct mystical nature (Rowland 1982; Stone 1976). Their research argued that eschatology is not the most essential or consistent feature of such

texts, but that they sought to understand human existence in past, present and future matters as it relates to the divine presence.[24]

> The common factor is the belief that God's will can be discerned by means of a mode of revelation which unfolds directly the hidden things of God. To speak apocalyptic, therefore, is to concentrate on the theme of the direct communication of the heavenly mysteries in all their diversity (Rowland 1982:14).

This research offers concrete insights in the spiritual nature of reading Revelation and its pragmatic consequences, as will be indicated in the conclusion.

4.2 An aesthetical reading of Revelation: Dürer's vision of Christ

The insight in modern scholarship is not new. There are examples of artists who read Revelation in a mystical way. One example is a remarkable painting of the gifted and highly skilled Renaissance artist, Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) who lived and worked in the then prosperous German city of Nuremberg, a major commercial hub in Europe. He created his famous set of 15 woodcuts on Revelation in 1498, two years before the significant date of the year 1500. The fame of these woodcuts was only partially due to the fact that it was the "first book to be planned, illustrated and published by an artist" (Podles 2012). They also enjoyed attention because of Dürer's special reputation as official court artist for emperors Maximilian I and Charles V and because of the popularity of his biblical works among wealthy and privileged groups.

Dürer's work cannot be understood without his context: He was interested in theological developments, particularly in the Reformation. His friendship with the reformer Melanchton and the humanist Erasmus are indications of his interest in religious matters, whilst his exposure to Renaissance thought and his training also contributed to his skills as a gifted artist. This context generated his intellectual formation, his enlightened, critical acumen and his technical mastery.[25]

24 See Rowland (1982:2): "The mysteries of heaven and earth and the real significance of contemporary persons and events in history are also the dominant interests of apocalypticists."

25 Interpreters of Dürer's work have pointed out its epistemological nature. As a gifted craftsperson with exceptional technological skills, Dürer's knowledge of theology and, especially his committed faith, contributed to the creation of a profound image of that

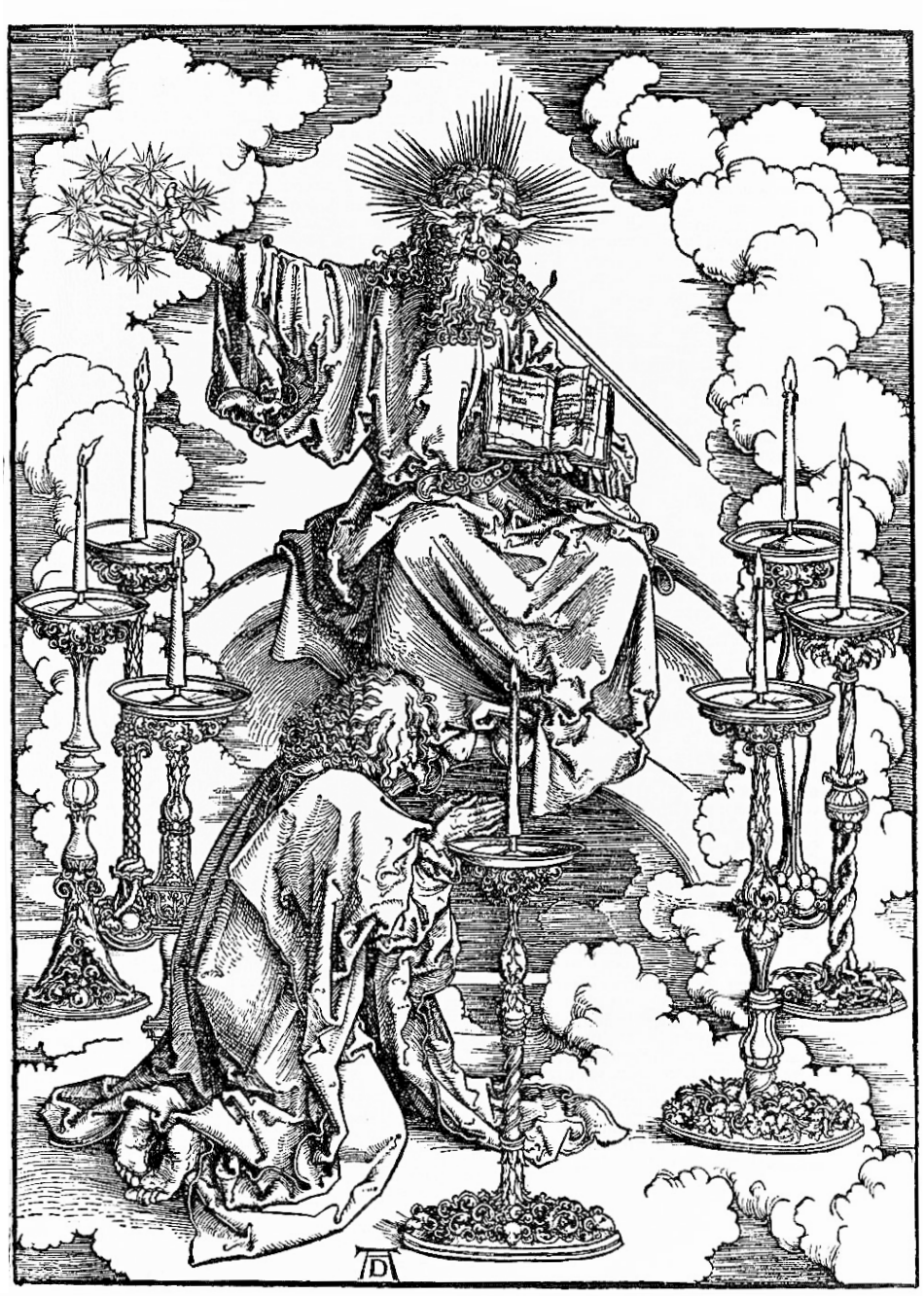
The 15 woodcuts represent several eschatological scenes from Revelation, which became so famous that they may create the impression that he, too, promoted an eschatological reading of Revelation. And yet, this is not the case, as is clear from his meticulously crafted and well-designed[26] woodcut of the One like the Son of Man in Revelation 1. In this woodcut Dürer attends to minute detail in the Christophany in Revelation 1 which describes how John received an instruction from Christ to write down his vision (Rev. 1:19). John sees a Son of Man-like figure, dressed in a long robe girded by a golden sash. The Son of Man has a glorious appearance, white hair, fiery eyes, feet like glowing bronze, voice like rushing water and shining face. He has seven stars in his right hand, whilst a double edged sword comes from his mouth.

4.2.1 Christ symbolism: the upper part

The highly symbolic and unusual features of Christ in the description of Revelation 1 pose major challenges to an artist. Dürer remains true to the text of Revelation when he portrays John and Jesus as embodied, human characters who are inhabiting space and who are framed by recognisable and concrete objects

which ultimately lies beyond technology, knowledge and science. His works reflects on the interaction between reason and faith: Horton (2008) drew attention to the decisive role of the Renaissance ideal of rationality and of ancient wisdom that qualifies Dürer's work. How rational, can be seen in his design of proportions in the drawing: "Dürer superimposed figures and images of an apocalyptic vision upon the pattern of a Greek mathematical solution for the doubling of a cube." In his work, Dürer seeks to promote the religious commitment of his age with reason. It was his way of presenting new knowledge. "It can best be understood in the context of Dürer's work and his diligent scholarship, his desire to bridge the religious fervor of the Age of Faith with the commanding reason and wisdom of the ancients that the Renaissance sought once more to unlock" (Horton 2008). And Dürer's plain objective is the accomplishment of an inner harmony between theology and classical antiquity.

26 His intellectual approach and his technical insights are shown by his interest in major conceptual themes. He wrote four books on human proportions, reflected on geometric theory by, for example, investigating how to double a cube – a concept which he wanted to make the organizational principle for the composition. Horton (2008) states, "The design proceeds from a center which is unfolded, and key design elements are linked to them. Dürer's solution posits eight secondary 'unfolded' squares about the center, and these are the candlesticks, the supplicant body of St. John, the head of Christ and banks of clouds."



Durer, A Apocalypse: St. John Beholding 7 Golden Candlesticks

like clouds, stars, lampstands and books and swords.[27] At the same time, though, his creative reinterpretion differs from the narrative in Revelation 1 in some striking detail. Christ does not walk (Rev. 3:2) among the seven lampstands, but sits on a throne.[28] More strikingly, Jesus also holds a Bible in his left hand – a motif that is also not mentioned in Revelation 1. The motif is placed in the upper part of the woodcut that focusses on Christ. This insertion of the Bible reflects Dürer's Protestant context with its emphasis on the central place of the Bible (*sola Scriptura*) and the unique role of Christ as Mediator. Furthermore, the sword from Christ's mouth rests on this Bible and points towards the first of the seven churches. The sword symbolically depicts how the Word of God challenges and eliminates evil. The Word is the originary and purifying power through which Christ is present among faith communities.

Dürer creates a dynamic relation between elements in the scene to effect movement and depth (Horton 2008). The flames of the lampstands illustrate this movement. They differ in size, showing that they are burning. More specifically, the flame of the one to the left is, mysteriously, gently blowing to the right. He creates depth by designing three lampstands on either side of Christ in two half circles, with the seventh one prominently in the middle of the two. The six lampstands which are positioned in the picture behind each other, create more depth and, at the same time, the illusion of a circle in which the lampstands encircle Christ. Christ is truly "in the midst" of the lampstands (Rev. 1:13). The movement of the clouds and figures that float in the air, contributes a surreal, sublime and dynamic quality to the image of Christ.[29]

The movement in the drawing is so important because it guides the gaze of the onlooker into the drawing and upwards past the richly decorated lampstands to

27 Podles (2012) remarks about the concreteness of the two figures in the woodcut: They are "fully articulated in space."

28 There are, however, some textual grounds for this representation: In Rev. 4-5 he shares the throne with the Father. This collapsing of two text parts in one representation adds divine authority to the image of Christ.

29 Technological analysis reveals the mystical impact of this woodcut. Dürer carefully carved open spaces in his woodcut for the clouds and then filled it with various ink tones in order to create a light, airy impression (Horton 2008). This technical approach points towards lightness which underlines the mystical, enigmatic quality of the text.

the glorious, shining face of Christ with its massive halo.[30] And the gaze of the onlooker is also drawn towards the seven stars that are held prominently in his right hand on the same level as Christ's face. Their location in Jesus' outstretched hand, is made even more conspicuous because, once again, of the background of the white cloud on the left. All in all, the focus is on the powerful, glorious Christ as the exalted one who protects the churches.

4.2.2 Symbolism of John: the lower part

Though a circle of clouds binds the upper and lower part in an aesthetic unit, there are also two distinctive parts in the woodcut. The lower part that focusses on John as visionary of Christ, offers crucial perspectives on Dürer's understanding of Christ. John remains the representative of the human pole in the divine-human relationship. Other than in Revelation 1:17, though, John does not lie as if dead after he sees the vision. He kneels, whilst the divine Christ sits on the heavenly throne. Other contrasts characterise the humanity of John. His clearly visible feet are drawn naked to contrast with Christ's shoes which reflects the bronze glow of Revelation 1:15. The feet are "meticulously rendered, inward curving bare feet" (Horton 2008).

His kneeling is an act of worship, an indication of his response to and keen awareness of Christ's presence. This humble, but respectful posture further underlines the exalted Christology of Revelation. It confirms the prominent role of Christ in Revelation and the awe that is experienced because of the divine presence (Rev. 1:17).

The awe and respect are underlined by other elements in the woodcut. The viewer sees the back of John's bowed head with its shoulder-length hair. It contrasts with the ornate head of Christ. That the bowed head is a symbol of prayer is confirmed by his kneeling and his hands that are held together in a symbolic gesture of prayer. One cannot miss the hands. They are located in a striking place in line with the centre of the drawing. They stand out through their light colour against a dark background. They contrast with the strong hands of Christ that powerfully hold the Bible and stars. The onlooker thus cannot miss the humble, prayerful attitude of John who stands in awe before the power of Christ. John in

30 The face also stands out because of the white open space of the clouds that surround him in the background.

the woodcut is the praying believer, not the shocked visionary of Revelation 1. He kneels in amazement before the mystical glory of Christ who sits majestically on his throne. It is a mystical representation of John, illustrating the intimate relationship between the Saviour and Judge who is himself present among the churches through the Word of God and the recipient of the divine mysteries who prayerfully worships him.

There is, however, more to be pointed out. Dürer locates John within the circle that the churches form around Christ to express a highly symbolic notion. John, despite his humble, prayerful adoration of Christ, and his bare feet, is dressed in an impressive robe that looks like that of Christ: he reflects and shares in the divine glory and image. The light on his head and on his robe, shares in the light of Christ's robe. It confirms his special, transformed status.

But John is also part of the circle of churches that represent humanity and the people of God who have been restored to their divine destination and who remain in the presence of the divine as a worshipping, praying community. They exemplify faith as standing in ecstasy in the presence of the divine, powerful figure of Jesus as Saviour and Judge.

Dürer brings the onlooker to reflect on the ineffable, the mystical, that which is hidden from normal observation about what is happening "behind the scenes" of their difficult times and oppression. It is an apocalypse – revealing the word of God about God's people to the people. The vision thus guides the onlooker to reflect on the deeper meaning of life and of events. The end effect is that the space that the figures of Dürer occupy, is clearly "the realm of the imagination and the supernatural, with its floating lampstands and startling effects of light around Christ's head and hand." With this creative representation Dürer overcomes the difficult challenge to visually portray "what is essentially unseeable" (Podles 2012).

5. Conclusion

Dürer's representation of the exalted Christ is profoundly spiritual because it ultimately derives from and reflects his faith experience. The drawing is mystical because it is about faith that is permeated by an awareness of being in the presence of the Ineffable and Divine. The dynamic and transformative nature of his faith experience can be detected by this response to the long tradition of eschatological readings of Revelation. Some of his contemporaries also engaged

in such speculative readings in the light of the approaching year of 1500. In contrast to their dark, depressing readings, Dürer's optimism is clear from his drawing which speaks of light, of life-giving relationships, of being enthralled by the profoundness of being human in the divine presence. In the words of Podles (2012), his optimism reflects a conviction

> that the struggles of his time were leading not to doomsday and meltdown, but to the dawning of a new historical era for the people of Germany and all of northern Europe. The optimism expressed in his *Apocalypse* would be sorely tested, but it would never be defeated. It was rather to be transmuted into resilient hope, as Dürer came increasingly under the spell of the reforming energies emanating from Wittenberg.

This optimistic view was more than an indication of his humanist convictions or his confidence in his own popularity and mastery. It flows forth from his faith, as Podles (2012) wrote:

> Dürer identified himself deeply with Christ: in his own writings, he tells us he followed the *Imitatio Christi*, and in his art, he recognized that his creative powers derived from those of God, and that God is honored by the expression of that creativity in art. For Dürer, the artist, by special favor, conforms himself to Christ, and his expression of himself is, *Deo gratias*, an expression of the divine.[31]

It was his way of making sense of Jesus. His drawing is an indication of how interpretive encounters emerge from and coalesce with specific historical conditions and are the result of a complex epistemological, rhetorical and ethical event. Throughout history the faith experience of the living Christ was expressed in dynamic, new ways in an attempt to appropriate the Jesus event in a

31 Dürer's identification with his vision is indicated by the way in which he portrays himself as John in the woodcut. Podles (2012) observed that:

> John's long, hooked nose and tumbled curls are very like the artist's own, and the candlesticks may refer to his early training as a goldsmith. Further, his youthful choice of a difficult subject and his bold handling of it make a statement about self-expression and the artist's vision that rival the Evangelist's. In 1500, Dürer painted another self-portrait, an even more audacious statement. Here he styles himself in the image of Christ, based on the traditional icon and known to him in contemporary renderings of Christ as *Salvator Mundi*.

new, changed environment. It indicates a spiritual process with an exceptional creative nature.

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Chapter 7

The plurality of contemporary Christological discourses: Some perspectives

Rian Venter[1]

1. Introduction

One encounters an inexhaustible source of meaning at the heart of the Christian faith – the person of Jesus. This has not only stimulated endless diversity in this religious tradition, but has also fuelled vitality in ever-changing conditions. The combination of the unique contours of this particular personal narrative, in a social condition of empire, against the backdrop of a vibrant, intellectual and religious horizon, formed a matrix which inspired continuous and countless interpretations. The work by Pelikan, *Jesus through the centuries* (1985/1999), as one scholarly example, gives a fascinating overview of these "images" in history. In successive cultural periods, Jesus has become the "King of Kings", the "Bridegroom of the soul", the "Universal Man", or the "Liberator". I am interested in this phenomenon of a plurality of interpretations of the Jesus figure, but also of the apparent surplus, which stimulates ever new encounters. On the one hand, the interest is merely one of stock-taking for academic purposes, and to map the terrain of contemporary Christology undertaken by systematic theology; on the other hand, it is also one of a more fundamental concern to theorise the nature of image-construction, and to raise the question of the implications of this diversity. Both interests may address a scholarly need in systematic theology.

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2. Mapping Christological discourses

Since the mid-twentieth century, major Christologies have been produced by theologians like Pannenberg, Schillebeeckx, Kasper, Sobrino, Moltmann and Haight.[2] When reviewing more recent literature, one cannot escape the impression that some significant shifts have been taking place. Although these "major Christologies" have all been ground-breaking in their methodologies and have become especially more historically and contextually sensitive, they still, to some extent, represent conventional and Western approaches. A major recent publication, *The Oxford handbook of Christology* (Murphy 2015), signals some of these shifts, and it is worth taking careful note of. One now encounters "Chinese and African Christologies", "Feminist Christologies", "Christ in cinema and literature" and "Christology and world religions". Here are clearly theoretical frames of reference and interest, which have not been attended to, previously. However, despite its comprehensive nature, the Oxford handbook is disappointing in its neglect of some current perspectives.

My take on the contemporary state of scholarship on Christology, in systematic theology, is that attention should be given to at least the following seven crucial discourses: Global and post-modern Christologies, and dialogues between Christology and the natural sciences, the arts, queer-theory, post-colonialism and world-religions.[3] In this chapter, I will briefly attend to these and focus on one major theologian who has done significant work in each discourse.

At stake, here, is not a mere academic exercise to take stock of new developments. It seems to me that current Christological exploration amounts to nothing but a drastic engagement of the Jesus symbol with fundamental human dilemmas. Recently, in an interesting slim volume, Wüstenberg (2014) relates Jesus Christ to four questions: those of progress, spiritual searching, humanism and human rights, and gender equality. The seven discourses I have identified seem, to me, to follow a similar route, but one with a different discernment of what our critical questions are, today. The seven discourses raise questions about the status of cultural identity and agency, about alternative conceptualities and the

2 For an older, but good overview, see Macquarrie (1990). For a more recent discussion of various types of Christologies, see Greene (2004).

3 This list is not exhaustive, and the perceptive reader will immediately detect the absence of somewhat older approaches by liberation, feminist and black theology.

presence of the impossible, about the very nature of materiality, bodiliness and sexuality, about power, about transcendence and about truth. By approaching the "mapping" in such a manner, one inevitably opens the avenue of probing the significance and necessity of plural Christologies.

3. Exploring seven major contemporary Christological discourses

3.1 Emergence of global Christianity – African Christology

The shift of the centre of gravity from the northern to the southern hemisphere is an epochal development in the history of the Christian faith.[4] More is obviously at stake than a mere statistical shift of focus. The intellectual leaders in Asia, Africa and Latin America have started to take control of their own agency, and have started to "write back", in an attempt at expressing their experiences and their interpretations of the Christian faith, from their cultural and social conditions. Christology was the obvious locus for such global re-interpretations,[5] and especially in Africa we find a proliferation of incultural and liberation Christologies.[6]

The work by the Canadian scholar, Diane Stinton (2013), is worth taking note of because of its thorough acquaintance with older and more recent literature.[7] It is important for her to assert the coherence of African Christology with historic Christianity, in terms of the centrality of Christology, the content in terms of humanity and divinity, and the foundational place of the Bible.

4 The work by Jenkins (2002) has become a classic of describing the shift. The work of the historian of the missionary movement Andrew Walls should also be mentioned, in this regard.

5 For one good example of scholarly stock-taking, see the work by Küster (2001). He identifies *four contexts*: poverty and oppression in Latin America, tribal cultures and religion in Africa, Asian cultures and religions, and poverty and oppression in Africa and Asia. See also Green, Pardue & Yeo (2014).

6 A large volume of work has been published, in this regard. See for a good volume, albeit a bit dated, the one by Schreiter (1991). One recent, major African Christology, which gives prominence to the notion of revelation, should be mentioned – the one by Ezigbo (2010).

7 Her major work is the 2004 volume, *Jesus of Africa: Voices of contemporary African Christology*. For the brief summary of her thoughts, I will rely on her recent article, "Jesus Christ, living water in Africa today" (2015).

The distinctiveness is obviously to be found in the sources of this theology, especially the common experience of domination by Western Christianity, and the African social and religious world. She identifies four clusters of images that she finds in the literature: Jesus as Life-Giver (including the notion of healing), Jesus as Mediator (including ancestorship), Jesus as Loved One (including relational metaphors like friend and brother), and Jesus as Leader (including king/chief and liberator images). She is also quite aware, in her mapping of Christology, that one should also be receptive to specific African womanist Christologies (Stinton 2013).

Global Christologies are not a mere appendix to assumed universal Christologies, produced in the West. They simultaneously relativise all Christologies and expose their inherent contextual nature, and at the same time they expand the notion of catholicity beyond its traditional spatial connotation. If the church is catholic, her theology should be catholic, including faith expressions beyond Western experiences and conceptualities. Jesus Christ releases and honours human agency in diverse social and cultural contexts, employing them to shape kaleidoscopic identities.

3.2 Crystallisation of the impossible – Postmodern Christology

For many, postmodernity as a cultural condition is a spent force, and postmodernism as theoretical frame was nothing but a fashionable fad. Both dismissals would be incorrect. As fundamental critique of modernity and the specific shape of its rationality, the postmodern posture will remain relevant. The various manifestations, especially in continental philosophy of religion, and the categories of thought that generated crucial discourses, are pertinent to theology in general, and to Christology specifically.

The Norwegian scholar, Jan-Olav Henriksen, has produced a major Christology – *Desire, gift and recognition* (2009) – utilising postmodern thought categories. He is interested in the dialogue between systematic theology and the philosophy of religion, and gives a place of prominence to the category of the impossible. This, for him, captures and refers to phenomena of surplus, for example, gift, forgiveness, desire, recognition, sacrifice, hospitality, excess, trust and reconciliation (Henriksen 2009:2). Christology, in a postmodern key, is concerned with the surplus of creation as such, and stresses the non-conclusive, the open and the excessive, thereof. Henriksen's concern is, especially, to

pursue new understandings of God. Employing an entirely different set of categories and conceptualities, he reinterprets traditional views on kingdom, the two-nature doctrine, the crucifixion and the resurrection. The resurrection is a phenomenon of surplus *par excellence*. It prevents us from experiencing this world, ending in death, as totalising; it keeps open the possibility of God as a God of life, who can overcome the impossibility, represented by death.

Postmodern Christology highlights the nature of hermeneutics: Interpretation is an ongoing process which no vision can totalise. In this Christology, one encounters the very nature of life – the surplus of creation.

3.3 Appreciation of materiality – Evolutionary Christology

The religion-science dialogue has been one of the most important developments in theology, during the last thirty years. It is a burgeoning field of study, attracting more and more scholars and expanding its investigation in an ever wider and more sophisticated way. Attention to evolutionary theory has obviously been unavoidable, but what is surprising is the application of it to traditional theological loci, like Christology.[8]

One scholar who has done original work in this regard, and should be briefly attended to, is the Danish theologian, Niels Gregersen. In various publications, he has investigated the implications of evolutionary theory for Christology, and has advanced the notion of "deep incarnation".[9] At stake, for Gregersen, is the scope of incarnation, and he develops his thoughts in reaction to anthropocentric orientations. Stating the centrality of the Prologue of John (the Logos becoming "flesh"), he develops the idea that the divine Logos assumed not mere humanity, but "the whole malleable matrix of materiality" (Gregersen 2010:176). Important is the insight of the continuity of humanity with other animals, and with the material world at large, in its "growth, vulnerability and decay". "Flesh" signifies the whole dimension of materiality, in its weakness and disintegration. The crucial implication of this insistence on materiality should not be missed: The very scope of salvation is at stake.

8 The earlier precedent in the work of Teilhard de Chardin should be mentioned.

9 In a major recent volume, see Gregersen (2015), a number of prominent participants in the faith/science dialogue, like Edwards, Deane-Drummond, Southgate, Russell, Polkinghorne explored the theme.

The Christological ideas proposed by Gregersen should not only be seen as part of the religion-science dialogue, but as part of a related concern – to link Jesus Christ to *ecology*, to the earth. In more recent and fascinating thought, Christology is even connected to astro-biology.[10] The central concern, here, is to relate the Jesus figure to science, to nature and ultimately to the cosmos. A vast extension of traditional Christology is taking place here.

3.4 Discovery of the aesthetic – Movie Christology

It has been fairly easy for theology to relate the divine to truth and goodness, but the connection with beauty has often been viewed with suspicion. Given notable historical exceptions, the twentieth century could be considered a turning-point for theology. For example, in the work of the scholar, H. Urs von Balthasar, glory understood as beauty became the primary vehicle for speaking about God. This turn to the aesthetic has been manifested in many diverse ways. The arts, in general, have become a prominent dialogue partner for theology. Increasingly, one encounters specific fields of application, such as literature, music, visual arts and cinematography. "Theology and the movies" has become an exciting and intriguing field of study on its own.[11]

I will briefly focus on the work of the Dutch scholar M. Brinkman and his views on film and Christology.[12] Convinced that Western theology lacks a serious interaction with contemporary culture, he focuses on artistic expressions as faithful antennas for what is happening in a culture. Film, for him, presently constitutes the most culturally influential artistic expression. What he is interested in, is critically important to grasp: the hidden Christ images in modern Western films (Brinkman 2013:74). The well-known *Babette's feast* is, for him, "one of the most impressive imaginations of the Last Supper in the history of Art. It points to the soteriological, ethical and communal aspects of sound Christology" (Brinkman 2013:78). Foundational to his artistic Christology is an understanding of transcendence, which presupposes some form of relation (Brinkman 2012:35ff.).

10 The work of T. Peters on astrotheology should be mentioned, here. See, for example, Peters (2016).

11 For a related discussion, see Johnston (2007).

12 His primary work is *Jezus incognito: De verborgen Christus in de westerse kunst vanaf 1960* (2012).

The prioritising of the visual, combined with cultural expressions and the shifting quests for transcendence, render this form of Christology of utmost importance. It moves way beyond traditional boundaries and opens exciting possibilities for dialogue between a secular culture and religious symbols.

3.5 Transgression of hetero-sexuality – Queer Christology

A significant resistance to the hetero-patriarchal mentality of theology emerged in late twentieth century theology, advocating the prioritising of the body and of sexuality, in reflection. The close relation between heteronormativity and contemporary social exclusion and exploitation is pointed out, especially. Questioning heterosexuality amounts to disrupting the social order. "Queer theology" implies more than gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgendered identities; it "requires that all boundaries be challenged" (Isherwood 2001:252). For Christology, the implications become obvious: The sanitised, asexual Christ should be imagined as the transgressive Christ, to become the basis for transgressive politics. Isherwood (2001:260) makes the following programmatic statement: "Queer Christology aims to destabilise 'normative' Christology in an attempt to free those held captive by it or excluded because of it."

A number of constructive proposals have been developed, for what a queer Christology might entail.[13] The provocative work by Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent theology* (2001), has become such a hallmark in queer theology, that one can hardly ignore this.[14] For her theology is a sexual act, meaning one should recognise the imperial character of sexual orthodoxy and should "come out" of the ideological "closet", and refuse to comply with "vanilla theology". She suggests that theology should be done "without underwear": Theologians should own up to their sexual, political and economic desires. Employing a hermeneutics of obscenity, she attempts at "undressing" Christ from heterosexuality, and redressing him for transgressive locations. Bisexuality becomes a suitable category for her to disrupt heteronormativity (2001:112-120). Her aim is to enlarge Christ outside of binary categories, and to legitimate alternative sexual identities.

13 See for example Sheffield (2008).

14 See for a discussion Goss (2003) and the volume of essays by "indecent theologians" celebrating her work in general (Panotto 2016).

For conventional readers, the language of queer theology could be unsettling. The deeper intentions should, however, be grasped. The rhetorical strategies are intentional; it deliberately wants the reader to see the world differently. The contribution to connect Christ to materiality, to the human body and to sexuality should be recognised. These crucial areas of human life have been devaluated for too long.

3.6 Resistance to hegemonic power – Post-colonial Christology

With the independence struggles in former colonial countries in the twentieth century, increased reflection on the pervasive impact of the power of empires gained momentum, and post-colonial theory developed as an influential academic field of study. Theology has not escaped this intellectual interest, and a vibrant discourse developed – which is attracting more and more participants.[15] The South American scholar, Dussel (2013:29), is even of the opinion that "[t]he epistemological decolonization of Eurocentric theology ... will occupy the whole of the twenty-first century".[16]

The Methodist scholar, Joerg Rieger, has written extensively on the relation between Christianity and empire, and it is worthwhile to attend to his constructive work on Christology. Christianity cannot be understood apart from empire, as it developed in the Roman context, and subsequent major developments never escaped the force field of this reality. Hence, the investigation of this relation can no longer be optional, for theologians (2015:254, 260). He (2007:2f.) understands empire as "massive concentrations of power that permeate all aspects of life", which do not allow alternative pursuits. In his major Christological work, *Christ & empire* (2007), Rieger is interested in a double movement, or an ambivalence: Christianity has been deeply influenced by empire, but at the same time, there is a Christological "surplus", which is resistant, and which defies domestication (2007:9). In the various historical periods, he discusses this. For example, in the patristic period, there was a particular intimate entanglement between empire and church. Rieger gives a

15 Duggan (2013) already identifies four strands of scholarships in this regard. The latest one has an "indigenous, contextual, transnational and inter-disciplinary" focus (2013:15f.). His article gives a good overview of the available literature.

16 He regards the four phenomena – modernity, Eurocentrism, colonialism and capitalism – as four aspects of the same process (see 2013:26).

fascinating reading of the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon (2007:69-117), and convincingly indicates the ambivalence. The various contending parties agreed on one premise: A hierarchical and oppositional understanding of humanity and divinity. This served the emperor and the ruling classes perfectly well (2007:83ff.). Both councils were interested in homogenising unity, which reflected the logic of the empire. At the same time, the councils, especially with the notion of *homoousios*, suggested an indeterminacy: It introduced a "messiness into the divine itself", which offers resistance to empire and its insistence on hierarchy and conformity (2007:95f.).

A post-colonial optic is a most promising approach in a world riddled with oppressing powers. It reveals, historically, the deep interplay between theology and social dynamics, which we are only now beginning to understand. The ambivalence identified by Rieger is the most fruitful approach to recognising both the accommodation and the resistance. Various constructive Christological proposals are being developed, signifying the rich possibilities of this paradigm, and should be carefully attended to.[17]

3.7 Confronting truth traditions – Inter-religious Christology

In a post-secular and globalised age, religion has not only acquired greater public prominence, but has also attracted increased scholarly attention to its diverse historical manifestations, and mutual relationships. The inter-religious dialogue has become one of the truly significant conversations, and the shift from relativism and absolutism to "polydoxy", with its simultaneous appreciation of each religion's distinct identity, whilst maintaining an openness to the other, is a most constructive development.

The Finnish theologian, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, has established himself as a scholar who expanded the horizons of traditional systematic theology. His multi-volume, *Constructive Christian theology for the pluralistic world*, with its vision of an inclusive, dialogical and hospitable theology, arguably offers some of the best work available today. His Christology not only integrates Christian voices in the global context, but intentionally engages Judaism, Islam, Buddhism

17 For additional examples, see Grau (2004) who uses an economic lens to explore the notion of "divine commerce" in the Jesus-event, and Ezigbo & Williams (2014).

and Hinduism.[18] What is clear is that each dialogue assumes its own shape, especially in light of the distinct contours of each religion.

Situating Jesus in this interpretative context of alternative truth quests stimulates self-reflexivity and leads to fresh appreciations of relative distinctiveness and uniqueness.

4. Navigating the plurality of Christological discourses

The fact of an immense diversity in Christological thinking should not escape attention. The deeper roots and dynamics of this phenomenon require investigation. The plurality of discourses has become a Christological problem own its own.

4.1 The obvious should probably be stated, up front. The vibrancy of Christological exploration evidences a conviction of the sheer meaningfulness of the Jesus-event. In their respective and various life situations, people continue to find orientation and integration in the narrative of this person, and they experience this encounter – whatever form it might assume – as transformative for their lives.

4.2 Taking stock of the spectrum of discourses opens a fascinating window, regarding what matters for people. The diverse Christological portrayals convey the range of contemporary sensibilities, and the directions into which theology is venturing. Clearly, three of these crystallise: Theology is dialogical, it enters into conversation with the natural sciences, with the arts and with other religious traditions; theology is receptive to alterity, those voices of, for example, non-Western cultures and of non-heterosexual orientation; and theology is sensitive to the presence of hegemonic power. In this regard, the study of the plurality of Christological discourses is also fruitful for other areas of theology.

4.3 The discourses, briefly described, go way beyond conventional Christologies. No template of two natures, two states and three offices is followed. With the imaginative and creative constructions, an obvious broadening takes place. Experiences, interests, and concerns crystallise, which vastly expand the horizon of investigation. Traditional binary thinking, or reductions,

18 See especially Kärkkäinen (2013: chapters 10 & 15).

have become anathema. Life, in its fullness, is being related to Jesus as the Christ. Pelikan's (1999:220) final description of Jesus, as "The man who belongs to the world", is quite fitting.

4.4 Methodology has become like a never-ending stream. Attending to the Christological discourses, one undeniable observation transpires: The very nature of doing theology is imaginative and constructivist. It is clear that the faith response to the person of Jesus is creative and, fundamentally, a hermeneutic endeavour. There is a dynamic interplay between the horizon of the person of Jesus, and that of the faith community or the theologian. Understanding Christologies requires a constructivist gaze, one which considers the impact of tradition, of social experiences, but also of operative theoretical paradigms. No Christology is possible as direct un-complicated re-presentation of biblical texts.

4.5 The orientation of the imaginative and expanding Christological work should not be missed. The pluralising direction of contemporary Christology is, inherently, also a most innovative refashioning of soteriology. For example, placing the queer body central, and relating that to the Christ figure, transgresses conventional approaches of salvation. In a sense, a silent revolution is taking place here: The radical healing wrought by Jesus Christ is translated in new and innovation ways. This obviously warrants a study of its own, but should be pointed out. Pluralistic Christologies go hand-in-hand with pluralistic soteriologies.

4.6 In contemporary theology, especially in the South, a rather large insistence on decolonialisation is found. What this entails may be interpreted quite differently. Mbembe (2016:37), one respected theoretician, refers to "pluriversity … a process of knowledge production that is open to epistemic diversity." Taking note of the plurality of discourses in a sub-field, like Christology in systematic theology, may be of assistance. The antenna for dialogue, for alterity, and for power may suggest a way forward, concerning how post-colonial theology should be pursued.

4.7 The problem of validity has lurked in the background and cannot be escaped. This requires a somewhat more extensive treatment. The question formulated by Tracy (1991:115), when addressing the problem of a plurality of interpretations of the biblical text, applies *mutatis mutandis* to

this Christological dilemma also: "The central question has become how to understand anew, on theological grounds, the unity amidst so wide and potentially rich a diversity of readings". His suggestion to distinguish between "event" and "interpretation" is attractive, but the problem is that the event is never encountered un-mediated by any interpretation. Even if the "Christ-event" is the integrating force, the biblical traditions confront us with their own shape and profile. I want to suggest that the question of unity and plurality and, ultimately, of a criteriology of validity, be addressed with reference to three perspectives: The enduring relevance of the Historical Jesus quest, the notion of symphonic truth, and the ethic of self-formation.

The Historical Jesus quest, in its various mutations, has entered systematic theology only at a fairly recent stage (see Galvin 1994, Venter 1995 and Loewe 2000). Some systematic theologians acknowledge the importance of the earthly life of Jesus, without actually paying much attention to it;[19] for others it has become a crucial focus of their Christology.[20] The continued conversation between systematic theology and New Testament studies, in this regard, remains an important task, taking into account that this research is vibrant and on-going.[21] That the central focus of the Christian faith is a historical person, and not a mere idea or an interpretation, renders this orientation indispensable, if not an enduring challenge. Interpretation always runs the risk of becoming projection; historical studies may provide the safeguard against this.

Plurality should not be deemed problematic, but rather as enriching and complementary. The various models, briefly discussed in this chapter, convey an impression of a certain indispensability – none of the central questions and foci could be omitted. Basic to the problem being addressed in this chapter is an understanding of truth which welcomes plurality. Von Balthasar's notion of "symphonic truth" could be employed here, fruitfully.[22] Another resource

19 See in this regard Welker (2013:73-94).

20 See the major section devoted to the Messianic mission of Jesus by Moltmann (1990:73-150).

21 For fairly recent overviews of the state of the discourse, see Powell (2009) and Crossley (2013).

22 For a discussion of this, see Colón-Emeric (2005).

could be Coakley's proposal of a *théologie totale,* a theology which excavates what has been previously neglected, and which renders itself "persistently vulnerable to interruptions from the unexpected" (Coakley 2013:48f.). Viewed in this manner, plurality is not a dilemma but an imperative to be pursued, in order to reveal the "depth of the riches". Fundamental to any Christological project should be an openness to multiple voices, concerns, and perspectives.

This obviously does not render legitimate any form of Christological construct or image. The practice of construction is hermeneutical, but simultaneously ethical, as interpretations are finally performative – they work, they impact on the self-formation of people. Christologies, which tend to be exclusionary, to be escapist, can hardly pass as being responsible. Obviously the very ethic of our ethics deserves scrutiny. The seven approaches mentioned in this chapter demonstrate an antenna for cultural identity, for power, for excess, for respect of the material, the body and sexuality; they encourage the search for transcendence and embrace alterity. Such Christologies could rightly be appreciated for their soteriological thrust. Christologies, firmly anchored in reference to the historical person, which interact with the deepest yearnings of contemporary humankind, and which embrace plural quests, contribute to Christianity's interpretation of human and cosmic flourishing.

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Chapter 8

Christ in pluralism? Michael Welker's Pneumatological Christology

Henco van der Westhuizen[1]

1. Introduction

The biblical traditions paint the most diverse pictures of Jesus Christ. It has often been shown how the most divergent contexts highlighted different portraits of the controverted figure, emanating from these traditions. In *Jesus through the centuries: His place in the history of culture*, for example, the Yale historian, Jaroslav Pelikan, showed just how diverse these portrayals have been, and still are.[2] In addition, the plethora of Christologies emerging from different contexts today, has revealed even more pictures of Jesus Christ. Is it possible, in light of the variegated ways in which Jesus Christ has been understood through the centuries, and also today, to make sense of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to ask,

1 Dr H. van der Westhuizen, Department of Historical and Constructive Theology, Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

2 The nature and purpose of his book, he writes, is not a life of Jesus, nor a history of Christianity, nor even a history of theological doctrines about Jesus, "but a series of images portraying his place in the history of culture" (1). In this series he writes about Jesus Christ as: "The Good, the True, and the Beautiful" (1-8); "The Rabbi" (9-20); "The Turning Point in History" (21-33); "The Light of the Gentiles" (34-45); "The King of Kings" (46-56); "The Cosmic Christ" (57-70); "The Son of Man" (71-82); "The True Image" (83-94); "Christ Crucified" (95-108); "The Monk who Rules the World" (109-121); "The Bridegroom of the Soul" (122-132); "The Divine and Human Model" (133-144); "The Universal Man" (145-156); "The Prince of Peace" (168-181); "The Teacher of Common Sense" (182-193); "The Poet of the Spirit" (194-205); "The Liberator" (206-219); and "The Man who Belongs to the World" (220-234).

with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the often repeated question of who Jesus Christ is for us today? Is it possible to even attempt an answer to this question?

In his *Gottes Offenbarung: Christologie*, translated by Douglas W. Stott as *God the Revealed: Christology*, this is what the German theologian, Michael Welker, endeavours to do (Krebs 2013:463-466). His theology of Jesus Christ might, indeed, be described as an attempt to answer Bonhoeffer's question, thus taking the question of the pluralisms Christ seems to be painted in seriously (Van der Westhuizen 2015). Bonhoeffer himself answered the question, by saying that Jesus Christ reveals a God who is weak and powerless in the world. For him it was precisely in this way, and only so, that the question of Jesus Christ could be answered today. The question for Welker, however, is what the answer to the question of who Jesus Christ actually is, would be for people not finding themselves in Bonhoeffer's situation. What would the answer to this question be for us today? (Welker 2012a:17-20).[3]

To answer this question, it is, therefore, important for him to realise that Bonhoeffer wants to speak about God in the polyphony of life (Bonhoeffer 1998b, 1998c, 1998d), i.e. in the polyphonic, multidimensional presence of God in the Spirit (Welker 2012a:23-28). In this light, it is clear why Bonhoeffer is critical toward situations in which God is made to be a marginal figure, i.e. moved to where human knowledge is at an end (Bonhoeffer 1998g). For Welker it is important to grasp that God wants to be recognised in the midst of our lives, i.e. in the midst of a polyphonic, multidimensional or even pluralist life.

For Welker, both of these legacies are imperative when trying to make sense of God's revelation in Jesus Christ today. Through the centuries, however, there has been an one-sided interest in what he labels the iconic presence of Jesus Christ, i.e. a fascination with God's iconic proximity in the depictions of the beginning and the end of Jesus' life, on the one hand, and Jesus Christ as cultural icon, i.e. an interest in his life recurrently prompted by the many ways in which he is customarily present, on the other (Welker 2012a:28-29).

3 In the last years of his life, Bonhoeffer developed what Welker finds to be his most important theological questions and thoughts (Welker 2009a:103-120). Here, writing from prison to his friend Eberhard Bethge, Bonhoeffer (1998a) asks the question of what Christianity or who Jesus Christ actually is for us today. Bonhoeffer sees this to be the "starting point" for speaking of Jesus Christ, in a religionless *Zeitgeist*. See Bonhoeffer (1998g).

For Welker, the fact that Jesus is iconically present, and is generally seen as a cultural icon, does not mean that there is an interest in the Jesus often embedded in conflict-laden contexts,[4] and emphatically regarded as the concrete revelation of God (Welker 2012a:13-14). On the contrary, Welker calls attention to a "Christophobic" attitude that, although evident especially in Europe and North America, extends to all of Christianity in general (Welker 2012a:29-31). Here, in line with what Bonhoeffer (1998a) labelled the "religionless age", he indicates how the problems attached to the question of who Jesus Christ is for us today, have led to a subjectivist faith.[5]

For Welker, this interest in a subjectivist faith is clearly fathomable, in light of the fact that a Christologically confused situation made it difficult to make comprehensible, theological sense of the foundation and central content of faith: "God revealed himself in Jesus Christ" (Welker 2012a:46, 48). For him, the task of Christology is to make clear that, and how, this formulation offers

4 Welker does not only refer to the contexts recorded in the biblical traditions, which fundamentally call into question the iconic presence, where Jesus Christ comes close to human beings and touches them in a consoling manner, by emphasising the conflict-laden contexts of both "the cross" and "the baby in the manger". In the light of these contextualisations, he refers to the multifarious contextual theologies of Christ today. Here, he highlights the necessity of the discernment of spirits. He makes it clear that theology is, and has always been, embedded in a context, that there is a need for continuous self-critique, and that theology continuously needs to subject itself to extra-theological critiques of religion, while engaging in a Christologically oriented critique of religion itself. See Welker (2012a:20-24, 32-38).

5 Welker (1999a; 2012a:39-47) differentiates Wolfgang Hüber's concept of self-secularisation, into this so-called subjectivist faith. This is a form of faith that, in an emphatic self-relation, believes itself to be certain of a removed entity that is, at the same time, remarkably close (Welker 2004:239), i.e. faith is reduced to an inwardness, a feeling, an immediate relation to an "inneren Ganz Anderen in mir" (Welker 2001a:17). This powerful form of faith leads to religious speechlessness and an incapacity for communication. It is an empty religious form that does not gain contours in the disclosing of content, appears as a decisive certainty and does not advance from this mere certainty to a communal search for truth, i.e. to the disclosure of truth content (Welker 1989b; 2001b; 2005a). It is also a self-irritating form, in the sense that the entity that is remarkably close nonetheless stays removed; and it is, furthermore, an individualising form of faith that, in its escapist character, removes itself from communicative forms of religious life (Welker 2004:243).

insight into faith (Welker 1980; 2001c). He therefore aims to move from the iconic and subjectivist toward the multicontextual and pneumatological,[6] showing how different paths need to be taken in the search for truth and understanding (Welker 2012a:47-53, 238-242). Accordingly, he asks as to the presence of God in the history of Christ, in the Spirit of the resurrection, and in the coming of his reign, thus showing how the human spirit becomes capable of knowledge of God, through God's Spirit. Welker, thus following Bonhoeffer (1998a) in his search for convincing language about God and for a sustainable Christian faith in a "religionless age" (Welker 2012a:26), in this manner, wants to theologically reflect on God in a way that lends itself to critical analysis and conceptual articulation, i.e. a method of reflection that is accountable, not only within the sphere of the church, but also within that of public discourse (Welker 2000a). To do this, he seeks an alternative to the dissolution of faith, not only in the aforementioned subjectivist faith, but in theistic metaphysics (Welker 1995a).

In the following discussion, the impulses emanating from the different paths that Welker suggests for theologies interested in making sense of Jesus Christ, will be sketched. These paths, i.e. the Historical Jesus, the resurrection, the cross, the exalted Christ and his reign, and eschatology, sheds light on a more differentiated conception of Jesus Christ, in pluralism.

2. CHRIST IN PLURALISM

2.1 The Historical Jesus

The first path is the Historical Jesus. For Welker, this path is indispensable for a realistic theology that wants to make sense of the revelation of God in this human being. Here, he suggests different lines of query in the search for truth about the Historical Jesus (Welker 2002a). He moves beyond what is labelled the "first quest", which is characterised by optimism and positivistic conceptions of historical objectivity and certainty (Welker 2012a:62-67),[7] and the "second quest", which is characterised by the presupposition that the Historical Jesus

6 For his thoughts on multicontextuality and pluralism, that are to be distinguished from a mere plurality and *anything goes* mentality, see e.g. Welker (2001d).

7 Welker refers, especially, to Albert Schweitzer's work that marked the end of the "first quest". In his work on the Historical Jesus, Schweitzer gives an overview of "nearly two

is not positivistically objectifiable (Welker 2012a:62, 67-70),[8] and draws from the "third quest". This "quest", which enabled Historical Jesus' enquiries to move beyond the constraints of the "first" and "second quest", was able to develop a more nuanced appreciation for pluralism (Welker 2012a:54-62, 70-83).[9] In light of this "third quest", Welker then suggests a shift toward the "fourth quest" (Schweitzer 2014:142). Here, the search for truth, about the Historical Jesus, is accompanied by a recognition of what he refers to as a fourfold multicontextuality.

For Welker, it is particularly important to recognise that the Historical Jesus himself gives rise to a multiplicity of perspectives, indeed to pluralism (Welker 2002a:140). The first level of multicontextuality refers to the different multifaceted contexts that Jesus finds himself in, i.e. how he conveys himself and how he is conceived in multiple diverging contexts. This level of multicontextuality is recognisable through a second level of multicontextuality, namely that of the New Testament and extra-biblical traditions.[10] Also, here, Jesus finds himself in plurality. These pluriform traditions focus on Jesus from a multitude of contextual perspectives. Here, it is important to realise that these traditions are continually questioned in the light of the first level of multicontextuality, i.e. how and in which ways these traditions chose to portray the multiplicity of contexts, disclosed by the initial level. The

hundred years of life-of-Jesus scholarship, ranging from Hermann Samuel Reimarus to William Wrede" (Welker 2013a:65), of which Welker then gives an overview.

8 For Welker, the "second quest" commenced, *inter alia*, with Günther Bornkamm's work, which was representative of the skeptimistic Historical Jesus research of the time. Nonetheless, as is clear in Welker's detailed description of Ernst Käsemann's work on the Historical Jesus, this quest sought "to make do with securing a minimum of sustainable elements of the Jesus tradition … a single message that remained constant" (Welker 2013a:69).

9 Welker finds the "third quest" to have been set in motion, not only by archaeological work, *inter alia*, by James Charlesworth, Jonathan Reed, and the textual archaeological work by John Dominic Crossan, but also, *inter alia*, by Martin Hengel, Larry Hurtado, and James Dunn's work on high Christology, Geza Vermes' work on Jesus within the context of contemporary Judaism, Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz's work on social history, particularly also Theissen's work on the politics of symbolism.

10 For his conception of complexity of the biblical traditions, see e.g. Welker (1992a:253-258; 1996a; 2001e; 2002b).

complexity of this level of multicontextuality is increased when not only the multiple contexts of those writing these texts are kept in mind, but also the multiplicity of the supposed readers of these texts, not to mention the readers throughout the centuries. The search for the Historical Jesus, thus, requires the constant clarification of the mutual relation between the first and second levels of multicontextuality (Welker 2011a:187; 2012a:84-85). The second level of multicontextuality, however, not only retrospectively focuses on the first, but on a third level, that of the Old Testament (Welker 2011a:187). For Welker, it is important to ask how this level stands in relation to the first and second levels of multicontextuality, i.e. it needs to be clarified what kind of influence, if any, these different levels of multicontextuality had on the other (Welker 2012a:90-98).

Why do the pluriform pictures painted of Jesus Christ not lead to the point of view that it is, indeed, impossible to make sense of Christ in these pluralisms? Explaining why he finds the biblical traditions to be of particular importance in a pluralist *Zeitgeist*, Welker refers to the fourfold weight of these traditions. While recognising the pluralistic character of the biblical traditions, in what he refers to as the historical weight[11] and the cultural weight,[12] the biblical traditions are, for him, more than a mere diffuse plurality of divergent testimonies (Welker 2000b:135). What he refers to as the canonical weight of the biblical traditions lies, for him, precisely in these traditions' "internal relationships, inner consistency and inner rationalities" (Welker 2003a:5). For him, an inherent "dialogue", in the biblical traditions, aims at coherence, i.e. "as new situations arise, these testimonies refer to each other, learn from each other, criticize each other, and strengthen each other" (Welker 2002a:380). The potential of this canonical weight gains clearer contours, in what Welker refers to as "canonic memory", which plays a major role in his thought (Welker 1999c; 2008a).

Welker follows the work of an Egyptologist, Jan Assmann, who accentuates that memory is more than a mere "internal phenomenon, localised in the brain of the individual – a theme for neurophysiology, neurology, and psychology"

11 The concept of "historical weight" refers to how, over more than a millennium, these biblical traditions grew from what was gathered and compared, giving rise to a multiplicity of testimonies referring to a multi-contextual search for knowledge of God.

12 The concept of "cultural weight" refers to the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the biblical traditions since canonisation, indicating how these traditions, even today, have an enormous impact on the most diverse *Sitze im Leben*.

(Assmann 1992:19-20). Assmann understands memory as a formative power, i.e. a power for the communal formation of a world. It not only defines the collective past, but the common present, and that which is conceived as the future. For Welker, the power of memory becomes clear, where Assmann differentiates "communicative memory" from "cultural memory" (Welker 2008a:327-329). A community's "communicative memory" is a fluid and changing memory (Welker 1999c:39); it is, on the one hand, continually being deepened, and, on the other, continually fading (Welker 1999d:322). Where "communicative memory" develops out of the concrete circumstances of societies, "cultural memory" influences these societies by imposing "sinnhafte Formen", i.e. meaningful or content laden forms on their collective past, their common present and on their future (Welker 2002b:168). This "cultural memory" is characterised by the fact that, generally, it is long-lived memory, i.e. it is only with great difficulty that these forms can be changed. The "cultural memory" of a society can thus work to stabilise it against change, inter alia through "communicative memory" (Welker 1999c:39). Assmann, following the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966), refers to this as "cold options of cultural memory", which are to be distinguished from "hot options".

For Welker, it is important that these "cold" and "hot" options of memory are placed neither over, nor against each other (Welker 2008a:328). The tension between these options of memory rather brings forth a "living cultural memory", or what he often calls a "canonical memory" (Welker 1999c:39). He accentuates that the biblical canon is a medium that allows for such a tension between these options of memory, i.e. the canon, in fact, brings these "cold" and "hot" options of memory into relations furthering "living cultural memory" or "canonical memory" (Welker 1999c:39). For him, "canonical memory", thus, is a significant power (Welker 2008a:330-331). On the one hand, a specific set of texts binds the "cultural memory" and limits the potential for change, i.e. it functions as "cold memory" (Welker 2000d:25-26). On the other, the interpretations of these sets of texts stimulate a "living" memory that potentiates change without giving up the interrelatedness of their plurality, i.e. functioning as "hot memory" (Welker 2008a:330-331). It is important to see that human beings cannot induce this "canonical memory", i.e. "a canon or canonic memory cannot be planned, launched, or constructed" (Welker 2000e:286). For Welker, rather, this "canonical memory" is a reality through the Spirit, i.e. "the

Holy Spirit is the power which continually renews the act of bringing human beings together for the solidification, renewal, revitalization, and enrichment of (this) memory" (Welker 2000f:132). From this perspective, it is clear why, for Welker, the pluriform pictures painted of Jesus Christ do not lead to a point of view where it is impossible to make sense of Christ in pluralism.

The fourth level of multicontextuality, which, for him, facilitates the "fourth quest" for the Historical Jesus (Welker 2011a:187), refers not only to the history of reception, but also to the multicontextuality of today (Welker 2008), i.e. the multicontextuality in which Jesus is received and in which the fullness of this Jesus is realistically effective. In this manner, such a "quest" facilitates the discernment of continuities between the Historical Jesus and his living presence in the Spirit (Welker 2012a:14). In the light of this level, which is already to be taken note of in the biblical traditions, it is important to realise that the search for the Historical Jesus can only be reductive, and must constantly be referred back to the other three levels of multicontextuality to, in this manner, constitute a self-critical search for the Historical Jesus.

2.2 The resurrection of Jesus

To further discern the continuity between the Historical Jesus and who he is for us today, Welker endeavours to comprehend the resurrection of Jesus Christ, i.e. the presence of the resurrected Christ in the Spirit.[13] Through this second path, Welker (1999b:96-109; 2002c) wants to make sense of the real presence of the Resurrected, through what he calls a "spiritual body" (Welker 2010a), by a differentiated conception of the relation between "Spirit" and "body". In order, however, to understand what is meant by these loaded concepts, it is, for him, of utmost importance to recognise that the resurrection is not what has been considered to be resuscitation (Welker 2012b). In the understanding of the multitude of reverences of the biblical traditions to what might be described as "light appearances", which verifies a discontinuity between the pre- and post-Easter Jesus, in spite of a continuity, and the "empty tomb", which verifies that the pre-Easter body of Jesus disappeared or was definitively withdrawn, it is, for him, absolutely clear that the resurrection cannot be equated, simply with a physical revivification (Welker 1994; 2002d). The biblical traditions depict the

13 See e.g. Welker (2000b). The significance of the relation between the resurrected Jesus Christ and the Spirit is also alluded to in the *Festschriften,* given to Welker on his sixtieth birthday. See Schüle and Thomas (2007; 2009).

more complex, real presence of the Resurrected[14] as exhibiting features of both continuity and discontinuity. Despite their emphasis on continuity between the pre- and post-Easter Jesus, these encounters with the post-Easter Jesus evidently substantiate the immense difficulty of re-identifying and recognising the resurrected Jesus.

Welker, furthermore, distinguishes between the biblical notions of "flesh", the physical dimension of a person's life that, though perishable, nevertheless indispensably lives at the expense of other lives, and "body" that, whilst bound to the flesh, is pervaded by spirit/Spirit.[15] While the fleshly dimension of the body might be totally absent in the appearances of the Resurrected, the spiritual dimension of the body is present (Welker 2012a:125). This presence acquires a new, concrete form, insofar as the Resurrected himself, in the power of the Spirit, creates a post-Easter "body of Christ". In the Spirit, the Resurrected is thus encountered in "bodily" form.[16] This differentiated understanding of the "body" in relation to the "Spirit", thenceforth, enables him to define the more complex "spiritual body", as a multifaceted[17] or pluriform bearer of revelation, in which the complete fullness of Christ's person and life is now present (Welker 2012a:125).

2.3 The crucifixion of Jesus

Welker describes the third path to the theology of Jesus Christ as that of the cross. The full dimensions of a theology of the cross, for him, become discernible

14 Welker makes it clear that, for him, the resurrection of Jesus Christ should not be confused with a mere myth, as is the case in the work of David Friedrich Strauss and Rudolf Bultmann, or merely with a vision, as in the work of Gerd Lüdemann. For him, the mistake that they make is caused by the fact that they, in the same manner as many religious fundamentalists whom they are indeed writing against, confuse the resurrection with a physical revivification. See Welker (1996b; 2012a:99-106). Welker (2012a:106-111), following the path of Wolfhart Pannenberg's theological endeavour to make sense of the resurrection, wants to comprehend the resurrection as a real event, of which the facticity can be known.

15 For the significance of the relation and the differentiation of the human spirit and the Spirit of God, see e.g. Welker (2010b; 2011b; 2013b).

16 See e.g. Welker (2007), where, in conversation with Nicholas Thomas Wright, the biblical view on the "bodily" nature of the resurrected Jesus Christ gains clearer contours.

17 See e.g. Welker (1995b), where he describes, in more detail, the differentiated constitution of the body of Christ.

only in the light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, i.e. the fullness of his person and life. Welker frequently warns that the theology of the cross, without a developed conception of the resurrection, might result in the perception that God is dead, i.e. that there is no God.[18]

In the light of the resurrection, Welker finds the theology of the cross to be directed against speculative and abstract conceptualisations of God.[19] Here, it is important to grasp that a theology of the cross cannot be reduced merely to the revelation of the aforementioned weakness and powerlessness of this God.[20] A theology of the cross also reveals the judging and the rescuing God (Welker 1991; 2012a:172-178). Welker follows Bonhoeffer (1998e), who insisted that God is recognised in the world in a non-religious way, by which he means a recognition of the fact that human beings live in the world as if there were no God, i.e. that God is recognised in a way that does not cover up the godlessness of the world, but rather uncovers it (Bonhoeffer 1998f). The cross exposes how an entire representative world cooperatively conspires against God.[21]

> The event of the cross parades before us a horrific nexus of blindness and self-deception: indecisive and intimidated, ultimately likely

18 This is clear in Welker's considerable analysis of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and Friedrich Nietzsche's impressive critique of religion, where the cross and the theological implications of the cross play a significant role. Here, it is of particular importance that, in their profound critique, Hegel affirmed the enduring relevance of the event of the cross and Nietzsche, even though he rejected it, acknowledged the biblical traditions' concern with an ethos of love and mercy (Welker 2012a:142-159). For his appreciation of Hegel, see Welker (1978).

19 Here, Welker follows the impulses of Martin Luther who, following Paul, who "decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified", placed the theology of the cross at the centre of his thought (Welker 2011a; 2012a:135-142).

20 The fact that the cross also reveals the suffering God is for Welker articulated in Kazoh Kitamori's theology of the cross (Welker 2012a:171-172). Welker, however, differentiates this suffering further by saying that, in the cross, the deity of God is called into question, thus calling attention to the suffering deep within deity itself.

21 The impulse to this important observation Welker *inter alia* finds in Jürgen Moltmann's biblically orientated Christology of discipleship (Welker 2012a:161-164). For a more detailed description of Welker's conceptualisation of the explicit situation leading to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, see Welker (1999b:105).

> indifferent political leadership, a blinded religious elite similarly acting more out of considerations of maintaining power, inflamed by public opinion ("Today: hosanna! Tomorrow: crucify him!"), a manipulated system of justice, abused legal and religious norms – these witnesses confront us with a bewildering weave of entanglements (Welker 2013a:194).

The cross, from this viewpoint, reveals the godforsaken situation of human beings, the world closing itself off from God, the separateness of God and human beings; in fact, that God closes himself off to human beings, i.e. that his revelation might not reach them. It thus reveals the situation of human beings being tied in the power of sin (Welker 2011c; 2012a:192-197).[22]

In the light of the resurrection, however, the cross also reveals the God who, selflessly, gives himself to these human beings. Welker, conscious of the fact that the concepts of selflessness and self-giving have been misused, differentiates between sacrifice that implies victimisation and sacrifice that has to do with this selfless giving. In the light of the crucifixion, it becomes clear for him that Jesus Christ, by becoming and being human, gives himself to human beings as sacrifice, despite the fact that he is then victimised by those whom he gives himself to.[23] The cross, in the light of the resurrection, furthermore reveals that the Spirit is, in fact, given to those who, in the power of sin, conspire against God (Welker 1992a:290). In this manner, by being giving to human beings, the Spirit of the crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ judges and rescues human beings, and makes them bearers of this revelation. This becomes particularly clear in what Welker considers to be the fourth path to a theology of Jesus Christ.

2.4 The reign of Jesus

Welker's thoughts on Jesus Christ culminate in this fourth path, that of the exalted Christ and his reign. Welker follows an insight of John Calvin for whom

22 See Brandt, Suchocki and Welker (1997) for an inquisitive conceptualisation of the meaning of sin. For them, the *Zeitgeist* is characterised by an inability to comprehend the meaning of sin. Sin, as is alluded to already in the title, has become incomprehensible.

23 Here, Welker follows the thought of Sigrid Brandt, Hartmut Gese and Bernd Janowski, who worked on the themes of "sacrifice", "atonement" and "substitution" respectively. For Welker, the distinct strength of these contributions lies in the fact that the differentiated conceptual worlds of both the Old and the New Testament traditions are taken seriously. See Welker (1999b:118-124; 1992a:311; 2012a:184-194).

it became clear that the resurrected and exalted Jesus Christ is present through the Spirit and that it is through this Spirit that Jesus Christ is not without his witnesses (Welker 2012c). Welker repeatedly emphasises that it is through the plurality of these witnesses that Jesus Christ really is embodied today.

He follows a second insight of Calvin who realised that what Jesus Christ conferred upon human beings could be recognised in the *munus triplex Christi*, i.e. the threefold office of Jesus Christ.[24] The exalted Christ in fact pours out his Spirit[25] so that his witnesses can participate in his royal, priestly and prophetic offices. For Welker it is precisely through these three offices, to what he refers as the threefold form of the reign of God, that the resurrected and exalted Christ is efficaciously present today (Welker 2012a:208-219). Welker relates the pre-Easter life to the royal form (Welker 2012a:219-227), the resurrection to the high-priestly form (Welker 2012a:257-282), and the crucifixion to the prophetic form of the reign of God (Welker 2012a:283-292), in each case emphasising the resonance of the Spirit. He repeatedly warns against the emphasising of one of these forms over another.

For Welker, it is essential to grasp that this reign is an emergent reality, i.e. a reality characterised by the interplay of a multiplicity of concrete instances that, through the fundamental change brought forth by this mutual interaction, leads to a new reality (Welker 1992b). He thus describes the reign of God as a discernible reality, that is coming. This reign is present, immanent, and perceivable, insofar as it changes the interplay of concrete instances, in an emergent manner. The reign of Jesus is future, insofar as it is not exhausted by such changes, but rather continues its efficaciousness by letting human beings contribute to this reality, even though it remains beyond their control (Welker 2012a:230). In this manner, it exerts real influence, even though it remains inconspicuous. For him, this reign becomes evident in the radicalisation of the intentions of the law, of justice, mercy and the worship of God (Welker 1989c; 1998b; 2013c), in what he labels an ethos of free self-withdrawal for the benefit of others (Welker & Wolter 1999c). This is especially clear in his conceptualisation

24 The notion of the *munus triplex Christi* does not only make connections between the pre-Easter life of Jesus, the crucifixion, the resurrection and Old Testament traditions possible. It also reveals an ecumenical consensus in recent Christology. See e.g. Welker (2011d:83, 84)

25 See e.g. Welker (1993; 1995c). For his conceptualisation of "heaven", from where the Spirit is poured out, see e.g. Welker (2006a).

of the royal form of God's reign, where the royal rule of Jesus Christ gains clear contours in love and freedom (Welker 1989d; 1997a; 2011d) mediated in love.[26] This love, which, for him, is not to be defined solely in one-to-one relations,[27] is characterised by free self-withdrawal for the benefit of others and by free and creative self-withdrawal of others, for the self. At this point, it is clear why he relates this royal form of the reign to a humanism, characterised by the pre-Easter life of Jesus Christ.[28] Here, in the light of the outpouring of the Spirit, it is important to recognise that this royal form must not be restricted merely to *a* time and space (Welker 1989a),[29] It is characterised by pluralism.

> Whenever and wherever human beings today strive to bring about education and healthcare for everyone, to shape free communities and civil societies, and never cease emphasizing and insisting on unconditional respect for human rights and human dignity – in such cases, consciously or not, forces deriving from Christ's royal ministry invariably constitute part of their underlying motivation and orientation (Welker 2013a:243).

In this light, Welker can bring the royal form of the reign of Jesus in relation to that of the public Jesus Christ (Welker 2012a:244-250; 2013d). This public character, however, must not be dissociated from his eschatological character, which, for him is the fifth path to a theology of Jesus Christ.

2.5 The eschatological Jesus

For Welker, it is important to ask as to the reality of God's revelation also in the field of eschatology. In the light of his realistic insights into the reign

26 The remarkable fact that this royal Jesus Christ rules by this liberating love and, thus, revolutionises hierarchical and mono-hierarchical forms of rule, must not be overlooked. See especially Welker (1992a:134-158).

27 See e.g. Welker (2001f), where he tries to regain a deepened conception of love through the biblical traditions.

28 See Welker (2009b), where he critically emphasises that this royal Jesus Christ and his reign are not to be conceived of without the polyphonic interplay of the members of his body, and where he makes it particularly clear that Jesus Christ's reign must not be restricted to the Word and the sacraments.

29 Welker (2012a:202), nevertheless, repeatedly warns that, even though the royal form of the reign cannot be restricted to the church, it must not foster the self-secularisation thereof.

of God, the eschatological presence of Jesus Christ gains pertinent contours (Welker 2002d). This is especially clear in his emphatic conceptualisation of the high-priestly and prophetic form of the reign of God. Welker relates the high-priestly form of the reign to the breadth, the multidimensionality, the plurality, of the *Gottesdienst*, i.e. of worship. For him, it is important to recognise that worship serves to disclose, secure and deepen knowledge of the triune God. Here, in the light of the resurrection, it becomes clear that human beings encounter Jesus Christ as truly human, "who was one of them and still is" (Welker 2013a:280), and truly God,[30] through whom they are elevated into the communion of the *erhaltende, rettende und erhebende Gott*.[31] Through faith in the triune God, they are enabled to participate in God's life, even now. This becomes specifically clear in Welker's conception of the sacraments, i.e. baptism[32] and Holy Communion.[33]

In Welker's theology of Jesus Christ, the prophetic form of the reign is of particular importance: "[T]he present Christology culminates in a presentation of Christ's prophetic office and the prophetic *Gestalt* of God's reign" (Welker 2013a:260). The prophetic form intensely pursues indications of God's will for us today. In the light of the cross of Jesus Christ, Welker finds this form to be concerned with a quest for truth and concretisation of justice.[34] This form-critically and self-critically orients itself toward Jesus Christ and toward Scripture.

> By frequently emphasizing the qualification "according to scripture", "that scripture might be fulfilled", "according to the law and prophets", Jesus's proclamation and the New Testament

30 In contrast to the dualistic structures, inherent in the so-called doctrine of the two natures of e.g. the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Definition, Welker finds the priestly and also prophetic forms of the reign to develop a more differentiated notion of the confession that God revealed himself in the human being, Jesus Christ. See Welker (2012a: 242-257).

31 For his biblical view of the triune God, see Welker (2005b).

32 For his conception of baptism, see e.g. Welker (2005c; 2006b; 2012:261-269).

33 For his ecumenical and biblical endeavour to conceptualise what happens in Holy Communion, see e.g. Welker (1996c; 1999b; 2012a:270-282).

34 This concern with truth and justice goes along with a specific concern for the development of freedom-based societies and human dignity, and is, thus, related to the royal form of the reign. See e.g. Welker (2001g; 2015).

> writings themselves underscore this indispensable tie with their comprehensive source of inspiration and spiritually illuminating prophecy (Welker 2013a:309-310).[35]

Welker particularly emphasises the responsibility to constantly engage in self-critical dialogue with secular, scholarly disciplines (Vorster 2014:1), i.e. "Christologically and biblically oriented proclamation in truth- and justice-seeking communities" (Welker 2013a:304-313).[36] In this light, it is clear that the prophetic form is closely connected to the royal and priestly forms of the reign of God. It is in this realistic interplay of the royal, priestly and prophetic forms of reign that Welker finds hope: "[P]recisely in this alliance of offices, prophecy in discipleship to Jesus Christ takes the long, deep breath of eschatological hope: Not my will but yours be done!" (Welker 2013a:306, 314-319).[37]

3. Conclusion

It has been argued that Welker's theology of Jesus Christ, on the one hand, is too pluralistic,[38] and that he, on the other, is not really facing up to or not

35 See also Welker (1997b; 1998a; 2001e), where it is emphatically clear why he finds the biblical traditions to be an exceptional witness to Jesus Christ.

36 For his thoughts on interdisciplinary thinking and dialogue, see e.g. Welker (2012d).

37 It is in the light of the resurrection and the coming reign, i.e. the threefold form, that Welker conceptualises eternity-eschatology, i.e. the *parousia* of Jesus Christ, where it is clear that this *parousia* has already been taking place, and takes place, even now. See Welker (2012e).

38 See Gamble (2015:167) who criticises Welker for "presuppositions against dualisms". For him, in fact, "Welker's call for basic Christological reconstruction is a siren song that may sound attractive to some but is one that all good mariners should carefully avoid" (Gamble 2015:167). Mattes (2014:488, 489), who recognises Welker's concern with contexts "marked by pluralism", in a way criticises Welker's Christology for not "more succinctly and clearly" clarifying "how Jesus Christ is gospel". See also Gray (2016:606) who, while reiterating the "'multidimensionality' or 'polyphony' of human life, the multiple contexts in which we persist and act," criticises Welker as he is "not always systematic enough". For a positive critique of Welker's use of "multidimensional reflection", see Walter (2015:90, 92), who praises him for the fact that for him "contemporary pluralism demands that we make claims that make sense in multiple spheres of life. See in this regard also Penner (2015:567).

really contributing to the basic issue of Christianity in an age characterised by pluralism, i.e. that he does not really ask how and if a theology of Jesus Christ is, at all, still relevant in an age characterised by these pluralisms. It is, however, precisely Welker's conceptualisation of the pluralism inherent in a Christology of the biblical traditions that contributes to the question of Christianity in pluralism.

In his theology of Jesus Christ, Welker has been able to bring the most divergent Christological perspectives together. His biblically realistic hermeneutic is able to embrace the pluralisms within which the portraits of Jesus Christ have been embedded. For him, it is precisely in these pluralisms that a clearer picture of Jesus Christ emerges. He not only emphasises the importance of an interplay between the different paths, leading to a more differentiated picture of who Jesus Christ was, but also captures the most divergent contextual interpretations and concretisations through the centuries, and also those of the present day. It is when Christians, as the body of this Christ, begin to get to know their own pluralistic make-up that they become able to contribute to conversations regarding who Jesus Christ is, in the plurality of their respective contexts. It is only then that they are able to contribute, in their diversity, to conversations attempting to make sense of Jesus Christ within the plurality of the ecumenical context.

In addition to this, it is with consideration of the pluralistic make-up, inherent in Christology, that Christians are able to contribute to conversations with others. This is the case, since recognising Christ in pluralism also implies recognising the fact that we do not have Christ, as if he were at our disposal. It is, thus, through a more nuanced conception of their own existence in pluralism, their pluralistic composition, that it becomes possible to creatively make room for others in their respective contexts. It is, precisely, through a conceptualisation of their own pluralistic constitution that Christians, as the body of this Christ, can contribute to public life in its polyphony. In short, to make sense of Christ in pluralism implies not merely asking how Christians are Christians or how they relate to an age characterised by pluralism, but rather asking how their own pluralistic constitutions, hermeneutically, allow them to converse with, learn from and contribute to the most divergent pluralistic contexts.

It is precisely a theology that at least recognises Christ in pluralism – not only in the multiple contexts of the biblical traditions, but also in the multiple

contextual *Wirkungsgeschichten* (that also include those of our own times) – that will be able to contextually speak to *us* in our divergent pluralities. This is true of Welker's theology of Jesus Christ as it is characterised by a hermeneutic that is conscious of the different ways Christ has been and is contextually misused. It is precisely this hermeneutic[39] that is important for making sense of Jesus in pluralism.

Welker's theology is thus able to allow for diverging pluralist perspectives, without lapsing into relativism, or "anything goes" thought-patterns. His theology of Jesus Christ, with its particular emphasis on the theology of the cross and the prophetic form of the reign related to the crucifixion may, rather, be characterised as having an inherent seismographic hermeneutic that is alert to and warns against manifold functionalisations of Christ. It is precisely Welker's conception of the cross that prohibits the forming and functionalisation of Christ into portraits fitting our theologies – as if our theologies might be able to capture what Christ should be for us today.

Is it, then, possible to answer the question of who Jesus Christ is for us today, when the pluralisms Christ seems to be portrayed in are taken into consideration? In consideration of Welker's theology of Jesus Christ, it may be argued that a more differentiated picture of Christ may be articulated in pluralism, i.e. it is precisely a Christology that takes these pluralisms into due consideration that can, hermeneutically, accompany those who are trying to make sense of Jesus Christ today.

39 See Awad (2016:207) who critically argues that Welker's theology of Jesus Christ is not "about Christology *per se*", but about "theological hermeneutics in relation to Christology".

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Chapter 9

The dying Christ: Revisiting the *ars moriendi* in a pneumatological perspective

Deborah van den Bosch[1]

1. Introduction

In the past year, I regularly visited a congregant. He was a man, in his early sixties, diagnosed with cancer. The diagnosis of cancer came unexpectedly, since he had always been very healthy and vital. Now, medical specialists told him he only had a few months left to live. In those few months, during our pastoral encounters, we talked about how he felt, about the life he lived with his wife and his family. The man faced his impending farewell with an open mind. The things he could still do, he did. The things he had to let go, he let go. The things that needed to be said, he said. When we talked about the life awaiting him, he would become hesitant, saying, "I don't know how it will be, but I trust it will be all-right. Christ will somehow be there. That's all I can say for now."

This pastoral situation with a congregant, preparing for the end of his life, exemplifies the experience of many pastors in a modern, secularised context. It reveals that the perspective of life beyond death has changed. For many faithful believers, an evident eschatological prospect has faded, the fear of the final judgment is less prominent, vivid imaginations of the ultimate encounter with the Creator have become difficult to verbalise, and the proclamation of Christ at one's death bed has become optional, since our culture has become less and less defined by Christian tradition (see Leget 2008:82). The example of my pastoral encounter illustrates the altered way of doing theology in the light of death. According to me, this illustration emphasises the need for a contemporary

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ars moriendi, because a present-day art of dying requires a different approach and different emphases than the traditional *ars moriendi,* as it originated in the Middle Ages.

Considering the fact that the traditional *ars moriendi* does not correspond with the needs of (post)modern believers anymore, one wonders what a revisited *ars moriendi* would look like. Which theological notions are crucial in reframing a Christian art of dying? Which biblical/Christological riches may offer novel insights for a meaningful, contemporary *ars moriendi*? The starting point for my contribution is the pastoral encounter with men and women, who faithfully believe that their whole being is safely in the hands of God, but who have lost the traditional frame of reference when it comes to the final judgment and their eternal place in heaven or hell. I will start with a description of the traditional *ars moriendi*, followed by an exploration of contemporary thanatologies. This exploration results in a number of features that may be constructive in thinking towards an inclusive, modern *ars moriendi*. One of these features is the presence of the Holy Spirit during the process of Jesus' death on the cross. Can the presence of the Holy Spirit be considered significant in the face of our own deaths, just like the Spirit kept Christ company during his death? This is what I understand as an interpretative encounter with Jesus, having specific performative consequences – making sense of Jesus in the light of dying/death in a (post)modern, secularised environment.[2]

Right at the start of this exploration, I want to emphasise the fragmentary nature thereof, which is mainly about "gathering intuitions"[3] and about exploring notions that might lead to alternative understandings of the Christian art of dying.

2. Ars moriendi

2.1 Genesis, function and meaning

Jean Gerson, chancellor of the University of Paris, wrote the work *De arte moriendi* in preparation of the Council of Constance (1414-1418). This work is regarded as the first treatise on the Christian art of dying. Its purpose was to

2 See the contribution of Rian Venter on Christological discourses elsewhere in this volume (pp. 135-150). This exploration of meaningful notions of a contemporary *ars moriendi* might fit in the discourse of postmodern, constructive Christologies.

3 See Rambo (2010:43), following Sharon Betcher (2007:22).

instruct priests in their ministry to believers who were in the process of dying. Gerson's *De arte moriendi* provided a basic pattern to what later transformed into a distinct genre of literature.

Originally, the *ars moriendi* instruction material was only meant for priests who assisted the dying, but gradually more and more sources became available to lay people as well. Most lay people were illiterate, which attributed to the inclusion of lively illustrations for the purpose of explanation. *Ars moriendi* sources, thus, transformed into popular, accessible instruction booklets for believers, concerning how to die well. In addition, the invention of the printing press highly stimulated the spread of the how-to-die-well booklets with their all-explaining pictures. The advancement of the *ars moriendi* had to do with a paradigm shift in the interpretation of death. In the early Middle Ages, people understood death to be the exit of life, whereby the final judgment would be postponed until the eschaton. The final, eschatological judgment did not carry any personal notion, but was rather perceived as a collective matter. In the 15th century, this understanding started to change. The focus gradually shifted from communality to individuality, and from the eschaton to immediate judgement after one's exit from life. The implication of this shift was that a particular urgency became attached to the death of a person, because now there were individual consequences related to death and dying. From now on, a careful and personal preparation in the face of death was deemed necessary.

The central meaning of the *ars moriendi* was a proper preparation of one's process of dying, since eternal life was at stake, here. If the believer was able to remain steadfast during the trials of dying, he/she would fall into the arms of Christ. Otherwise, he/she would end up in the domain of the devil. The basic idea was that the dying person would experience five moments of affliction; during those five moments, the dying person would have to make the right choice. The moments of affliction were caused by the devil, but there would be an angel to guide the dying person. The art of dying was found in the dying person's ability to surrender himself/herself to Christ, in the most critical moments between life and death.

2.2 General pattern of the ars moriendi

The *ars moriendi* literature does not reveal a fixed order of trials; nor is there consensus regarding the particular kind of trials. However, a general pattern

of five essential moments of decision can be noted (Leget 2008:78). These five deathbed decisions pertain to (1) doubt (the dying person is overwhelmed by doubt concerning the existence of God), (2) despair (the dying person is in despair concerning the power of God's grace and forgiveness), (3) attachment (the dying person is faced with the challenge of freeing himself/herself from earthly and material life), (4) impatience (the dying person experiences a serious intensification of pain and suffering, which puts his/her patience and endurance to the test), and (5) pride (the dying person runs the risk of being complacent after enduring nearly all trials). The ultimate test is to hold on to humility and submission to God (see Leget 2008:78-81).

2.3 The Reformed ars moriendi

Ars moriendi has its origins in the Roman-Catholic tradition. The Reformers continued to address the art of dying in their theological thinking, although they emphasised different notions compared to Roman-Catholic theology.[4]

Martin Luther (1483–1546)

In 1519, Luther wrote *Ein Sermon von der Bereitung zum Sterben*. With this sermon, Luther offers a whole new contribution to the *ars moriendi* of the Middle Ages. Luther was of the opinion that the existing material about the art of dying needed a powerful reformation, since these books did not provide proper preparation anymore (Hoek 2012:333). Luther's reformation of the art of dying starts with the emphasis on justification, by faith in Christ alone. Nothing other than the union with Christ is the key to the art of dying. The focus should not be on the performance of the dying person who is heavily tested but still perseveres; nor should the focus be on the saints or the holy sacraments.[5] Luther's crucial contribution to the art of dying can be found in situating one's deathbed in the

4 I will focus on the main concepts of Luther and Calvin, although there are other theological reflections on the art of dying within the Protestant tradition. For an extensive treatment of the *ars moriendi* in Hoornbeek and Voetius, I refer to the M-Thesis of Berend Borghuis (2008). This thesis explores the meaning of the *ars moriendi,* in light of contemporary pastoral practices.

5 Luther did appreciate the traditional sacraments of the dying (confession, Holy Communion, administering extreme unction) as meaningful ways to build the faith of the dying person, since these sacraments were considered as visible signs of divine forgiveness of sins (see Kirn 2007:200).

realm of Christ's power. In other words, Luther centralised Christ's person and his saving work, while previous death literature focused on the power of the devil and on tormenting afflictions of the dying person. This new focus on the person of Christ led to another shift in perspective, because the Christocentric emphasis shifted the attention away from the achievement of the believer, and towards the work of God. The implication was that salvation was no longer the believer's responsibility, but was fully in the hands of Christ, now. Nothing but the reconciling death of Christ was claimed to be decisive in the believer's journey to eternity. Luther thus advised the dying believer not to be intimidated by images of sin, death and hell, but rather to redefine death: Death had to be viewed in light of the crucified and risen Lord (see Kirn 2007:201). The centrality of Christ (and thus the redefinition of the terror of death) became the source of comfort and the assurance of eternal bliss for the dying person.

John Calvin (1509–1564)

Whereas Luther developed a clear perspective on the art of dying, Calvin's views on dying and eschatology were more implicit. His thoughts were part and parcel of his view on human life. Like Luther, Calvin emphasised that preparations for future life should not be restricted to the actual process of dying. Instead, the believer has to prepare for the final destination during his/her life. In other words, the art of dying should also be regarded as the art of living. According to Calvin, a central notion in this art of life was the pilgrimage (*peregrinatio*). In this life, the believer is a pilgrim, a stranger who does not belong to this world, travelling to his ultimate dwelling in Christ. Thus, the basic meaning of pastoral counselling to the dying was to ponder ultimate, future life. Other Protestant theologians followed Calvin in his emphasis on pilgrimage and eschatology.

2.4 Developments in the Protestant ars moriendi

The basic difference between the Roman-Catholic *ars moriendi* and the Reformed *ars moriendi* is the shift from the art of dying to the art of living. Death preparation does not start at the end of life, but has been appointed appropriate space and time as part of life. It is through reflection, meditation and prayer that a person will develop faithfulness, as the proper attitude that will turn out to be constructive during the final phase of earthly life. Another difference is the absolute Christocentric focus, resulting in the fading away of

other aspects such as the devil, demons, mother Mary or the holy saints from deathbed circumstances. The dying believer only needs to concentrate on Christ and his redeeming presence. The significance of the Reformed *ars moriendi* is not only found in the shift towards the art of living, and in the emphasis on what Christ has done (instead of what the individual believer has accomplished), but is also found in the notion of pilgrimage. In this life, the believer is in a process of transition – he/she ultimately belongs to another realm. This notion of the pilgrim believer provides such a deep consolation, that its pastoral meaning should not be underestimated.

Simultaneously, seen from a pastoral perspective, the absolute Christocentric nature of the Protestant *ars moriendi* turns out to be its weak spot, as well. This weak spot has to do with the excluding nature of "Christ only". The pastoral value of Luther's emphasis on the redeeming work of Christ, without the believer's contribution, is crystal clear in the context of the late Middle Ages, when the general idea was that salvation was mainly determined during the hour of death. However, one could ask whether an absolute Christocentric *ars moriendi* has the same pastoral value in a modern, secularised context.

After the fifteenth century, the Protestant *ars moriendi* changed gradually but drastically. One evident explanation is that the art of dying transformed into the art of living. This led to conventional and standard forms of prayer and other Christian rituals.[6] A second explanation is that, while the *ars moriendi* seemed to lose its urgency and became integrated in Christian life, nowadays it also loses its distinct nature, due to the fact that medical science started to secure a grip of sorts on the issue of dying (see Leget 2008:75). Also, besides the medicalisation of dying, death is kept at a distance, due to higher levels of life expectancy. As De Lange (2013:323-332) indicates, the life stage of "old age" has been extended by an average of 20 years, resulting in a delay of dealing with/preparing for the final farewell. In addition, the art of communicating in meaningful language, including speaking about death, has basically evaporated in our society (see Leget 2008:82).

Recently, the *ars moriendi* made a reappearance on the theological agenda, due to certain developments in palliative care and the need for caretakers to assist people in their preparation for the end, and also due to the need of many

6 See www.deathreference.com/A-Bi/Ars-Moriendi.html.

elderly people to deal with the question of what it means to live at an old age, with death approaching (Leget 2008; Novello 2011; Verhey 2011; Kruijf 2013; De Lange 2013, 2014).

3. The dying Christ: Thanatologies

A few theologians developed substantial ideas regarding dying and death. The most prominent ones are Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Barth, Eberhard Jüngel and Jürgen Moltmann. More contemporary contributions on theologies of death are offered by Alan E. Lewis, Shelly Rambo, and Henry L. Novello. I will address their work to discern notions and accents that can be constructive, in a present-day approach to the *ars moriendi*.

3.1 Karl Rahner

Rahner's understanding of the human being is that we have an innate openness to God. Our mind/spirit is naturally focused on "being", on personal existence, on self-realisation of the unique human being. Initially, this existential desire is unfocused, until it is directed by Christian faith. Then it turns out that the desire for "being" is linked with the God who is love. God is a gracious God, who makes us long for union with him. So, human existence is about transcendental openness to infinity, which is to be understood as openness to the loving God. Humankind is meant to become one with God. Rahner (1974:186) labels this existential yearning as freedom – it is humankind's "capacity for the eternal".

Rahner's transcendental theology implies that life is in process; it is continuously evolving. This means that humans are involved in ontological dialectics of passivity and activity. Humans did not choose life actively. Instead, life is given. Humans thus receive life, and from then on, they are involved in the existential task of exercising freedom. Freedom, according to Rahner, is not so much the potential/power of the individual to exercise his/her own personal choices. Rather, it is the self-realisation, whereby one grows closer to God.

In his *On the theology of death* (1965), Rahner relates the freedom of humans to the final end of human existence. Dying/death is marked by the same dialectics of passivity and activity as the dialectics of life. According to Rahner, death is a construed act, that is the conclusion of a person's life. Actually, dying is a process that has its beginning in life, and humans respond to this process by their free choices and deeds. So, death is not to be understood as the sudden end of life, but death

is the accumulation of choices and events in a person's life. Death is so much more than the moment when there is no breath anymore; it is the consummation of the whole person. Death is the climax, "the highest act of believing, hoping, loving" (1965:71).

Since the process of life can be seen as a process of self-realisation and self-determination, then the process of dying requires a person to be equally involved in this active deed, before God. God's liberating commitment is expressed in the realisation of ultimate freedom for a person. In his view on dying/death, Rahner accentuates the active dimension that is immanently present in the human being, and that is closely linked to personal freedom. Rahner thus dismisses the understanding that death is defined as an event/experience at the end of human life, as if death is something that can only be responded to in a passive manner.

Since death itself must be construed as an act, in which the human being says "yes" to God, the implication of Rahner's view on dying is that there is an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of a person, in light of what will happen at the other side of life. As Novello points out clearly: "[W]ith death comes the finality of the fundamental option – as redemption or perdition – which permeates one's history" (Novello 2011:114).

When it comes to the death of Christ, in relation to the death of humans in general, Rahner stresses Christ's solidarity with humans in the process of dying and death. The soteriological meaning of Christ's redemptive death is found in the love of God, that "was meant to prove itself victorious over man's no to God" (Novello 2011:116, referring to Rahner 1979: 207-208). So, Christ's solidarity in succumbing to death has a strong inclusive notion for humans, turning death into something salvific: "[D]eath itself in the person endowed with grace is to be regarded as a salvific event, while of course this death must also be seen as an act of freedom recapitulating that person's life" (Rahner 1983:252).

3.2 Hans Urs von Balthasar

Different from Rahner, Balthasar accentuates the notion of passivity in dying/death. This can be explained by the experiences of Adrienne von Speyr, who, during a long period of time (1941-1966), had visions of Christ's suffering and death (see Balthasar 1981; see also Speyr 1966). Every year, during the passion week, Speyr would physically and spiritually come into contact with his suffering,

and she would develop supernatural insights. This passion process would start on Friday afternoon and would last till Sunday morning, whereby Speyr suffered from intense migraine headaches, as if the crown of thorns was being pressed on her temples (Rambo 2010:49). But on Holy Saturday, Speyr would enter a different kind of suffering. The active kind of suffering would transform into a passive kind of suffering. Balthasar developed his theology of Holy Saturday, based on these experiences of von Speyr, contributing to theologies of suffering from a whole new perspective. The main idea is that Holy Saturday carries a distinct notion, in comparison to cross and resurrection. The events on Good Friday and Easter Sunday may be seen as active involvements, but the utter powerlessness of death on Holy Saturday is fully passive. Death implies "the abandonment of all spontaneous activity" (Balthasar 1993:148). Against this background, Balthasar underscores that Christ does not descend into hell, but that he is going to hell – there is no active act, but only passivity.

Another notion of Holy Saturday, stressed by Balthasar, is about the relation between death and hell. Considering that Christ suffered the terror and the abandonment of death, now the abyss of death is illuminated by the Redeemer, who has been there (Novello 2011:128). Due to the death of Christ, hell is no longer a place where God cannot reach. Hell is no longer cut off from God's life; now it belongs to Christ's sphere of influence: "[H]ell is a part of the universe accepted by Christ; with that, it becomes a mystery of salvation. Christ takes everything upon himself – and with that, everything becomes different" (1988:112; see also Novello 2011:124).

With Balthasar, Holy Saturday and Trinitarian life are indissolubly linked. Everything happening on that day, and everything that Christ had to suffer, must be understood in the light of God's love, renewing everything. Christ's suffering and death are founded is the *Urkenosis*, the original overflowing and self-emptying love of God, whereby the Father had anticipated humankind's abuse of freedom; therefore the Father sent the Son into the world, and even into the realm of hell, for the sake of sinners. The separation between Father and Son at the cross is not to be interpreted as alienation and desolation, because the Holy Spirit, who embodies the union of Father and Son, is "the witness who can always testify to their unity even in separation" (Balthasar 1998:261). Due to the fact that Christ suffered and went to the abyss of death, hell is now included in Trinitarian life.

The soteriological meaning of Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday, is that humankind is included in the suffering of Christ for its own sake. Our own powerlessness and desolation are enlightened by Christ, who preceded us to the place of hopelessness, and in doing so, this place is transformed by his presence in the abyss of death. The implication is that dying into the Dead One, and being included in Trinitarian life, is not determined by our condition at the moment of dying. There is inclusiveness, based on the "objective" redemption, because death has been included in divine life as well, thanks to the inexhaustible love of God. Another implication concerns the boundary of death. From the perspective of the world, death is a final end to human life; but from the perspective of Trinitarian life, death is the beginning of new life, of the "true eschaton" (Balthasar 1998:261). This explains how Balthasar is able to consider death as the privileged place, where God's saving work provides new life.

3.3 Karl Barth

Barth's theological thoughts about death centralise the person of Jesus Christ, in whom God reveals himself completely. Christ mediates the fullness of God, and he has accepted full human nature. In his suffering and dying, Christ included all anger and rejection from God. This means, according to Barth, that there is only one possibility for humankind, and that is to move in the direction of God. There is no such thing as God rejecting the sinner (Barth 1957:410). God longs for humankind to accept divine love, and to live in union with God.

Barth's approach to death is twofold: From the perspective of faith, he sees death as a contradiction of God's desire for humankind to be blessed. In this sense, death is the sign of God's judgment of sin. At the same time, Barth understands death as "natural", as an event that has to do with the finitude of creaturely existence. In this perspective, there is no judgment: Humankind is mortal and finite. Mortality has to do with the essence of creation.

In Barth's theological thought, the death of a human is Christologically focused. Due to Christ's redemptive death, death has come in the power of God. So, sin and death (as judgment on the rejection of God's love) are bound by divine and redemptive love. Christ bestows his very own being upon the sinner/rejected (see Novello 2011:140), who is transformed through his death. So, humankind participates in the death of Christ. With Barth, atonement receives an ontological status when it comes to the soteriological transformation of the

believer, while he explains the atonement in juridical terminology, as Christ having suffered vicariously.

3.4 Eberhard Jüngel

The Lutheran theologian Jüngel is called "the theologian of the grave of Jesus Christ", because he centralises the crucified Christ as the only perspective to render meaning to Christian reflection. For him, a theology of the cross is the only proper perspective, since God reaches out to suffering humanity through the crucified Christ. While Barth addresses God's suffering in the cross, and Moltmann allows for the thought that death is in God, Jüngel moves a step further by emphasising the death of God (Novello 2011:142; see also Lewis 2001:197-257).

Jüngel's approach to the relation between God and death is not just about God being associated with the crucified Christ, but even more: God defines himself by the dead Christ (Jüngel 1983:3-42). Through this definition, there is a strong emphasis on the humanity of God, and on God's identification with the dead Jesus of Nazareth. The implication is twofold: God's being is defined by death, and the nature of death is being redefined, as well. Jüngel understands death to be relationlessness, utter desolation, being cut off (Jüngel 1975:78, 87). But since God included death in his being by identifying with Jesus, death itself has changed: It is no longer a desolated place for God, but God transformed it into a place where new relations can be brought to life, amidst God-forsakenness: "[O]ut of the midst of the relationlessness of death there emerges a new relationship between God and man" (Jüngel 1975:109). So, with Jüngel, death turned into a locus of new relations, in the light of God.

In Jüngel's theology, death does carry a notion of passivity, since humans cannot play an active role in their dying, nor can they create new relations (Jüngel 1975:91). Only God is able to create a future and new possibilities. God does so in the abyss of death. When humans surrender themselves unto death (which can be seen as absolute self-abandonment), then that is the ultimate confirmation of life in God; when a person accepts death as the final boundary of created life, it is the acceptance of what it means to be human in God (see Webster 1986:88).

3.5 Jürgen Moltmann

Moltmann approaches the issues of dying and death from the perspective of hope and the eschaton. Moltmann's theology is characterised by process theology: God's narrative with a person continues, even after the person's death. The person continues to exist before God. Moltmann stresses the notion of concrete, earthly life that is considered here. It is about the whole person being involved in resurrected life. Moltmann's approach is the same as Jüngel's, but different from Rahner, who makes a distinction between body and spirit after death.

For Moltmann, the hope of resurrected life, of immortality, is not about the complete sum of earthy life to be "transported" into a dimension of eternity, with all its good and distressing moments, but it is about distancing the pain and suffering of human life events. It is about eternal life as transformed mortal life: "[E]ternal life is the final healing of this life into the completed wholeness for which it is destined" (Moltmann 1996:70-71). Moltmann's theology of death/eschatology is theocentric. The continued life of humans is not in their own hands, but is found in the relationship between them and God. This relationship is established and maintained by the Spirit of God.

In his work on the Holy Spirit, Moltmann (1992:62) poses an intriguing question: How did the Holy Spirit experience the life and death of Jesus? Moltmann explains this by analysing Old Testament and New Testament narratives, which indicate that, chronologically and theologically, the presence of the Holy Spirit is the premise of Jesus' history. The Holy Spirit is the One who empowers Christ to surrender to death, and to say at Gethsemane, "Not my will, but your will be done". It means that the Holy Spirit is not only the Spirit of Christ, but also that Jesus is the Christ of the Spirit (Moltmann 1992:60f.). In other words, the Holy Spirit and Christ are inextricably linked. The implication is that the passion of Christ is simultaneously the passion of the Spirit, even though the Spirit does not suffer the same way as Christ does (Moltmann 1992:64; see Novello 2011:94).

3.6 Alan E. Lewis

In his work *Between cross and resurrection*, Alan Lewis addresses Holy Saturday as the centre of the three days. This work is considered the first comprehensive theology of this empty space we call Holy Saturday. Resisting the notion of the nature of Holy Saturday as a non-event, an inert void between cross and

resurrection, Lewis approaches faith's supreme drama as a coherent, three-day narrative, with Holy Saturday as the best point to start from when we want to understand the meaning of God's story with humankind.

Lewis approaches Holy Saturday in three different ways. In the first part, he reads the story of Christ's death, burial and resurrection as if there is no foreknowledge of Easter. This compels the reader to remain with the awful finality of Jesus' grave, which gives a deeper understanding to the meaning of Holy Saturday. In the second part, Lewis reflects theologically on the narrative, concluding that this entire experience of three days involves God's very being. This is about Trinitarian life, about the death of God – the rupture in the very relations internal to the life of God's own being as community (Lewis 2001:251). In the third part, Lewis addresses the question if and how Christians can actually live with this double-edged narrative of death, burial and resurrection. Auschwitz, Hiroshima, Chernobyl – living God's story in world history rests in the divine Trinitarian community as "the ontological ground for thinking and living a story which promises the final consummation of time and of the world beyond history's defeat and loss" (Lewis 2001:299). Lewis thus explores the impact of a theology of Holy Saturday on daily life, and identifies its implications. That is, it requires critical solidarity with those who seem alien and different from us, yet united with us in our mortality.

3.7 Shelly Rambo

In her work *Spirit and trauma*, Rambo explores the meaning of Holy Saturday in light of trauma. Holy Saturday symbolises the experiences of traumatised people who know that the presence of death still continues even after the incident. They are facing the challenge of remaining, of surviving in the middle of death. Trauma is not only located in the horrific event that happened at a particular moment, but trauma also covers the return of that event. Rambo (2010:7) asserts that "for those who survive trauma, the experience of trauma can be likened to a death."

In relation to trauma, Rambo (2010:7) introduces the concept of "the middle". The middle is understood as the figurative site in which death and life are no longer bounded. This discourse of the middle can be identified easily with Balthasar's theology of Holy Saturday – the deep darkness in between cross and resurrection. Rambo thus critiques traditional theology of rushing from Good Friday to Easter Sunday, while the real experience of Holy Saturday, that

is having to live with the experience of death returning continually, is neglected. According to Rambo, theological ideas need to be developed that address those situations where there is no relieved or elevated "it is finished", because death will never pass.

Closely linked to the concept of "the middle" is Rambo's pneumatological orientation. Her theology of the Spirit in relation to trauma is about the sustaining divine power that continually witnesses the ruptures, moving between death and life. But this Spirit is not to be understood as the Spirit of Life, whose presence creates life and whose absence means death (see Moltmann 1997:19). Rather, Rambo (2010:114) gestures toward a pneumatological approach that exceeds this death-life opposition, because trauma includes both death and life. The "Middle Spirit" then is the One who remains and persists where death and life defy ordinary expression.

Rambo (2010:137) identifies theological strands based on the experience of the middle, of Holy Saturday, by focusing on the Johannine narrative. In the traumatic death of Jesus, the disciples were transformed into witnesses when Jesus handed over his breath – a spirit of persisting. The disciples remain behind as witnesses, arising from the middle, with the commandment to remain in his love. It is about acknowledging the remaining fragments of death and the remaining breath of witness. That is where the Spirit persists.

In redefining the space of life and death by forging an alternative space of the middle, Rambo (2010:131) also recasts the doctrine of redemption. She moves away from the language of redemptive suffering on the cross, and she ties it to language of witnessing, remaining, persisting – redemption from the middle is about attending to the losses, grief and chaos of life, and it is about sensing and reconnecting with life, by the work of the Spirit. Refraining from a Trinitarian, pneumatological approach, Rambo shifts the focus from the cross to the middle, reshaping the power of divine love, in terms of witnessing and remaining.

3.8 Henry L. Novello

In his *Death as transformation: A contemporary theology of death*, Henry Novello moves away from negative or neutral interpretations of death, and he introduces a positive character to death. Death is not to be explained as a result of sin, nor as the plain finitude of creaturely life. Rather, Novello broadens the scope by

interpreting not only life but also death as a special and even a privileged place in the relationship with God, through Christ.

In his theology of death, Novello sees the Holy Spirit as the One who provides continuity at the cross. The Spirit warrants the relationship of the dying Son and the non-intervening Father. With this Trinitarian perspective of the Spirit, Novello (2011:94) points specifically to this function that is indissolubly linked to the Holy Spirit: the function of presence during the process of dying. In the utter loneliness, the Spirit is there. Yet, the Spirit does much more than being present. The Spirit, being seen as the possibility of God, is the One who turns the event of our own death into the final condition for receiving the plenitude of the Father's selfless life (2011:109). Death then becomes the privileged moment of participating in the redemptive death of Christ, and of sharing in the admirable exchange of natures. In other words, death is transformation. It is being ontologically transferred from the kingdom of death to the kingdom of eternal life, through the ecstatic presence of the Spirit (2011:199).

4. The dying Christ and the Holy Spirit

Considering these thanatologies developed by various theologians, some important notions surface. Among these are the absolute solidarity of Christ in death, the salvific death of Christ, the active and/or passive attitude of the dying believer, death as entering Trinitarian life, death as discontinuity and/or continuity, death as transformation, death as relationlessness, death as the absence of God's Spirit, death (or trauma) as the middle, and death as cradle of the salvific work of the Holy Spirit. All these notions are worth exploring further, but this cannot be done here. The main question, here, is about the presence of the Holy Spirit during Jesus' death on the cross. Can the presence of the Spirit be considered meaningful in the shadow of our own death, just like the Spirit kept Jesus company during his death?

As the biblical narratives show, there is an intricate link between the death of Jesus and *pneuma*. Though *pneuma* can be interpreted differently as the breath of life or as the Holy Spirit (see e.g. Smit 2016:447-462), in light of a modern *ars moriendi* it still may be fruitful to hold on to the close, or rather perichoretical, relation between Jesus and the Spirit. In other words, when the Jesus thanatology is framed by the concept of pneumatological *perichoresis*, would that offer new perspectives for a modern *ars moriendi*?

Perichoresis is understood as the notion that depicts a relationality between equal persons, drawing their distinguishable identities from being in this relationality. It can be described as a divine ecstatic dance, a dynamic movement of self-giving, and of being shaped by this giving. The doctrine of *perichoresis* shapes our thinking about God's life: Father, Son and Holy Spirit receive their identity from being deeply related to one another.

These perichoretical relationships form the heart of Balthasar's incarnational theology. Balthasar, influenced by Barth, holds on to a strong focus on the inner-Trinitarian relationality: God reveals himself in Jesus, and in this revelation and self-communication, God reveals himself. The moment of Jesus' death on the cross was the moment of revelation of divine *perichoresis*. God's Trinitarian life remained united, even in the extreme moment of separation, because the Holy Spirit binds the Father and the Son together. In the utter passiveness of the Son, the Holy Spirit is at work.

The same focus on pneumatological *perichoresis*, in relation to the death of Jesus, can be found in Moltmann's holistic theology. According to Moltmann, the relationality of Trinitarian life forms the basic pattern in understanding life and death. Death and life stand in direct opposition. Where there is life, there is God's Spirit. Where there is death, God's Spirit is absent. The Spirit creates, renews, and counters the forces of death. That is what the Spirit of Christ does in the cross event. When the Son is banned to desolation, the Spirit accompanies the Son. Moltmann's interpretation of the role of the Holy Spirit in the death of Christ means that the Spirit of God is the Spirit of the crucified Christ. In the cross event, the complete desolation of the Son and the mourning of the Father is translated into a history of love and surrendering, through the work of the Spirit. As Augustine defined the Holy Spirit as the connection of love between Father and Son, Moltmann stresses that this love, who is the Holy Spirit, unites the Father and the Son in the process of terror and desolation on the cross. In other words, the Son's surrender and the Father's longing originate in the work of the Holy Spirit. From this pneumatological perspective on the dying/death of Christ, whereby the Spirit is the divine presence amidst God-forsakenness, one can say that the Holy Spirit creates life in death. This is how Moltmann (1992:67f.), following Calvin (*Corpus Reformatorum* XLVII, 48), identifies the Holy Spirit as the *auctor resurrectionis Christi*, the source of life and renewal of Christ, and of every living being. The Holy Spirit creates the bond between

God and humankind, and the Spirit protects this bond in the middle of death (see Moltmann 1996:75).

Both approaches of Balthasar and Moltmann illustrate that the concept of pneumatological *perichoresis* has a lot to offer in thinking about death: The emphasis on Trinitarian communion offers constructive images of the Holy Spirit as the bridge (Balthasar), or as the bond of love (Augustine, Moltmann). The concept of pneumatological *perichoresis* reveals the Spirit as the ultimate creator of possibility amidst impossibilities, as the One who carries creaturely life out of the abyss of death.

One point of critique could be that these images are relatively "clean" and "static", since the suggestion is that the Holy Spirit secures love between two opposing realities, between life and death. There is victory over pain and loss, through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Life and death are two conflicting spaces, and only the Spirit is able to bridge them. The work of the Holy Spirit is approached from a particularly triumphant perspective; the images of the Spirit as bond, as bridge, as all-compassing presence holding everything together, identify the Spirit as the Spirit of life, of life over death. In other words, the Holy Spirit is characterised from the Easter perspective. The question being raised by theologians like Lewis and Rambo is whether such an Easter perspective does justice to our experiences with suffering and death.

In light of a modern *ars moriendi*, the following question should be considered: Does being in the process of dying not require a more complex understanding of the Holy Spirit? Perhaps an understanding of the perichoretical presence of the Spirit needs to be aligned less with life only, in order to create an unconventional path between binaries and false dichotomies (see Rambo 2010:115, Keller 2003:167, Grey 2003:110). Embracing the presence of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of the middle, as the One who exceeds the death-life opposition, and who witnesses to an absence, leads to a multifacetedness that can be meaningful for both the dying person, as well as for the remaining persons. In her intriguing work, *Spirit and trauma*, Rambo particularly focuses on the traumatic experience and its between-death-and-life nature. She develops a theological approach to the middleness, whereby the perspective of the survivor is that of witnessing and remaining. Although Rambo elaborates on the experience of trauma as an event with disastrous effects, her pneumatology of bearing witness to the absence of life can be considered as constructive in exploring a contemporary *ars moriendi*,

since it directs the attention to the modern believer, who finds him/herself right there in the middle between life and death. Paying attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit during the process of dying and death addresses the mind-set of the modern, faithful believer – one's absence is being witnessed by the Spirit of Christ. The Holy Spirit provides continuity of human life, where no one else can provide it. In other words, a focus on the distinctive, salvific presence of the Holy Spirit leaves room for the shift that takes place at the soteriological understanding of present-day believers.

5. Gathering intuitions

I started with an illustration of a pastoral encounter with a congregant reflecting on his life in the shadow of death. The purpose of the illustration was to show the need for a contemporary *ars moriendi*. After highlighting the features of the traditional *ars moriendi*, I explored contemporary Roman-Catholic and Protestant thanatologies. After this exploration, I wondered whether the presence of the Holy Spirit, during Jesus' death, could be considered meaningful in the preparation of our own deaths. In other words, my intuition is that the perichoretical relationship of the Son and the Spirit can be meaningful for construing a modern, inclusive *ars moriendi*.

The perichoretical relationship of the Son and the Spirit does not only mean that the Spirit allows for the human being to participate in the self-sharing and outward flowing Trinitarian life of God, but it also means that the human being is included in the identity of God, in the face of death. Just as the Holy Spirit was present during the death of Jesus on the cross (Balthasar, Moltmann), we might think of the Holy Spirit being present during our own death, thus witnessing our own absence and drawing us into the inclusive being of God.

Rambo's theology of remaining provides crucial insights for developing a contemporary *ars moriendi*. Rambo introduces the notion of "the middle" – which is the place where death and life are no longer bound, and where there is no clear perspective of victorious life over death. It is the Holy Saturday experience. The strong association of the Holy Spirit and the middle could be essential in this exploration of an *ars moriendi*. Although Rambo's pneumatological approach lacks a Trinitarian structure, the novelty of her approach of "the Spirit of the middle" is a serious attempt to move beyond the death-life opposition. Rambo draws our attention to the critical relationship of the Spirit to death.

Rethinking "the Spirit of the middle" as the Spirit of Christ means that the Spirit of Christ is the One who witnesses the absence of life, and who remains present right there, where there is no breath of life anymore. Broadening the attention to the presence of Christ's Spirit, with the one who is dying, invites a broadened understanding of soteriology and of pastoral theology. It seems to me that this broadening serves present-day believers in their art of dying, because a contemporary *ars moriendi* asks for different accents, such as, for example, an integral approach of physical, psychological, social and theological dimensions. The complex dynamics of the relation of the dying Son and the remaining Spirit opens up alternative perspectives for a contemporary, inclusive art of dying.

Sitting at the deathbed of a congregant, a contemporary, inclusive *ars moriendi* may be about tracing those moments in life, wherein the congregant experienced something of the presence of the Spirit. It may be about articulating such experiences as part of a (Protestant) *ars vivendi*. It may be about recognising these *ars vivendi* experiences as a meaningful preparations for the process of death. It may be about embracing the understanding that the dying person is in a Christ-like situation – he or she is in the presence of the Holy Spirit, who was and ever will be witnessing and remaining in the midst of death.

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Chapter 10

The moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life

Peter G. Kirchschlaeger[1]

1 Introduction

Elaborating the moral-theological dimension of Jesus means to focus on a particular aspect of the coming of the Son of God: His life, his suffering, his death, and his resurrection were all devoted to the revelation of God. The message of salvation – in its theological, Christological, and eschatological dimensions – is at the heart of Jesus' existence. An integrative part of the latter is its moral and ethical content, because to strive for the moral good in one's own words, decisions, and acts is a consequence of discipleship of Jesus. Discipleship of Jesus embraces a response to the loving initiative of God. This response to the love of God comprises a moral and ethical imperative, representing the challenge of Christian existence. The love of God creates an atmosphere, where love is given, without demanding the fulfilment of any conditions beforehand.

The moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life is evident from his new reading, new interpretation, new understanding, and new practice of the Hebrew Bible as somebody who understood himself in his entire existence as Jewish, and as someone who lived a Jewish life. His words and acts included moral and ethical messages, and a moral-theological reflection on the life of Jesus attempts to get access to Jesus as a moral example, thereby providing guidance regarding moral questions and ethical issues (P.G. Kirchschlaeger 2017). In fact, the entire story of Jesus is a moral narrative account, because it treats love and its

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triumph over death (Söding 2013:159). The addressees of the New Testament, thus, enjoy the privilege that a moral-theological dimension of Jesus is brought to them in narratives, depicting morality and ethics relating to the will of God, based on a Christological reading of the Torah and a trust in the Holy Spirit, and embedded in an eschatological horizon, thus inviting them to follow the example of Jesus (Van der Watt 2006a:629-632). There are not any ethical principles in the New Testament which are not oriented toward Jesus Christ. The personal-exemplary point of reference in the person of Jesus Christ, thus, constitutes the categorically unique value of moral and ethical considerations, based on the New Testament.

The New Testament represents one of the sources to the moral-theological dimension of Jesus. The significance of the biblical texts for theological ethics becomes even more evident if one reverses the perspective: The Bible cannot be equated with Christian ethics. However, one can indicate what Christian ethics would lack without the Bible (Frevel 2015:16).

Our attempt at approaching the moral-theological dimension of Jesus by looking at biblical texts, must, of course, recognise the revelatory character of the Bible; it does not comprise an ethical or moral handbook, where one can find responses to the moral questions of the present (Lienemann 2008:192). This requires one to analyse the biblical texts and to determine if there is a moral or ethical element in the texts. In order to respect the biblical texts, it does not help to merely cling to the letters of these texts; neither does a reading of one's own views into the text help in any way. What is necessary is an analysis, contextualisation, and interpretation of the texts. This should include an embedment of their moral and ethical affirmations in the overall picture of the theological message of the biblical authors, as well as in the overall picture of their construction of reality (Konradt 2011:280). This is necessary in order to unlock moral and ethical elements of such texts, in terms of their narrative embedment, so as to guide moral and ethical decisions of the present (Bobbert 2015:98). For Christians, moral and ethical principles possess the highest intensity of justification if they are based on or can be deduced from the Christ event (see *Dei Verbum* 4), as it is testified to in the New Testament. The texts of the New Testament obtain normativity

> ... weil in den neutestamentlichen Schriften das geistgeprägte Zeugnis über eine geisterfüllte Zeit überliefert ist, und weil in

> diesen Schriften das Wort und Handeln Jesu, des Christus Gottes, und das jeweils neu in ihren Kontext hinein reflektierende und aktualisierende Wort und Handeln massgeblicher Personen über das Christusgeschehen seinen Niederschlag gefunden hat – deswegen ist der Blick zurück nicht beiläufig oder als einer unter anderen möglich. Dieser Rückblick nimmt hingegen einen Norm gebenden Platz ein (W. Kirchschläger 2009:454).

At the same time, Christians must reckon with the possibility that many concrete moral questions and ethical issues of the present do not find immediate and directly relevant, normative insights and answers in biblical texts. For example, there are not any concrete norms regarding care for the environment or the evaluation of technology; however, the use of the biblical sources may offer a clarifying function, when it comes to exploring motivations and defining horizons of meaning (Lesch 1999:27). Furthermore, the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life can only be explored by paying close attention to the Hebrew Bible, because of the Jewish life and self-understanding of Jesus, of most of the authors and main figures of the New Testament, and of the significant influence of the Hebrew Bible on the New Testament (P.G. Kirchschläger 2012:109, 127).

Based on these introductory remarks, the following section will focus briefly on some hermeneutical observations. On this hermeneutical basis, some fundamental viewpoints, regarding Jesus as moral model, will be developed. After that, some elements of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life will be developed further.

2. Hermeneutical considerations

From a hermeneutic perspective, it needs to be taken into account that the texts of the New Testament possess normativity, due to their correlation with the Christ event, mentioned above. One must, thus, take into account this normativity of the New Testament when interpreting biblical texts. For the interaction with biblical texts, it merits attention that direct deduction of moral and ethical affirmations and judgments, from the biblical sources, is impossible (Hailer 2006:289). However, it seems helpful to understand the process of interaction with these normative texts as a communication process. Both poles of the communicative event contribute to this process. Therefore, both of them

should be respected in their specificities, in their contexts, and in terms of their original intentions. Both ends should also be contextualised, i.e. the texts of the New Testament (their moral and ethical elements), as well as the recipients of the New Testament texts (Roediger 2012:63, 89).

On the basis of the modi of biblical communication, identified by Marianne Heimbach-Steins (2011:254-258), the following methodical considerations could help one in discussing biblical texts, in terms of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus (P.G. Kirchschlaeger 2017). In order to determine which texts of the New Testament may give an answer to the hermeneutic question of how they may become a source for guidance, regarding moral questions and ethical issues, a pattern of moral discernment can be distilled from the New Testament itself, consisting of the following four steps: "perceiving, discerning, judging, and giving of account" (Wannenwetsch 2008:177). This pattern builds a "circle of reflective ethos as it is suggested by a conceptually alert reading of the New Testament" (Wannenwetsch 2008:177). It possesses the character of a communication process ("perceiving", "giving of account"), comprising the combination of a subjective and an objective dimension ("discerning", "judging"), as well as a narrative element ("giving of account"). Thus, it is evident, that such a hermeneutical approach respects the genre of biblical texts which are not historical reports but accounts of revelation.

On this hermeneutical basis, the normativity of the texts of the New Testament could be approached from a methodical perspective, with the first step being "listening". The focus of "listening" is the attempt to understand the original intention of the text (see Bachmann 2003:32, 45; Ebner & Heininger 2005; Schnelle 2013; Schreiber 2006:11-14; W. Kirchschlaeger 2012:8-30). Of course, the concern which one brings to the texts matters. But more important and decisive should be the original intention of the text. The narrative dynamics of the biblical text, its literary context and the context of the Bible are at the centre of attention, in this phase. The focus, thus, does not fall on specific responses to specific ethical questions, on terms and concepts, nor on morally or ethically sounding *topoi* (Heimbach-Steins 2011:254). Of course, this process of "listening" is influenced by one's own context, one's own horizon of faith, knowledge, and understanding, one's own reality, one's own ears. The aims of this phase of "listening" includes understanding of the original intention of the biblical text and finding moral and ethical orientation, facing moral questions

and ethical issues of the present. However, it excludes arbitrariness, because the text is regarded as a biblical text and, therefore, as part of the Holy Scriptures of the religion. This influences the Christian addressee, as well as Christian ethics, since it is a scientific discipline which strives for an interpretation of the text, within the broader academic discourse (Heimbach-Steins 2011:255). Thus, the search for moral and ethical guidance should never override the aim of understanding the original intention of a biblical text, because this would provoke a failure to "listen".

After that, the second step of "inquiring" entails the critical examination of the results of the "listening", by asking if this is really what the biblical text wishes to convey to the addressees, or if it still conveys what one would like to see in the text from our current moral and ethical perspective. The controlling question is whether the results of the "listening" phase would also make sense without the moral and ethical perspective forming the basis of the "listening". When "listening" and "inquiring", one must also keep in mind that determining the original intention of a biblical text presupposes that such an attempt always remains a construction from a current perspective.

Based on the phases of "listening" and "inquiring", the third phase of "locating" aims to embed the potential moral and ethical elements in a biblical text (which have passed the examination) within the horizon of faith, knowledge, and understanding of the authors and the addressees, in a genuine experience of God, and in a hermeneutical circle of the self-interpretation of the believing subject (Heimbach-Steins 2011:255). It must be possible to integrate these elements into the general scheme of the biblical message. Such "locating" is necessary, in order to respect the context of a biblical text, and in order to consider differences between the present and the past in the debate regarding the normativity of biblical texts. It also comprises the meta-ethical discourse, thereby trying to clarify which aim the perceived biblical, moral and ethical elements served in the original context, which reasons led to this particular solution, and what kind of understanding of principles, such as justice and equality, informed the normative frameworks, which can be found in the biblical texts (Heimbach-Steins 2011:257-258).

The transfer from moral and ethical elements of a biblical text to the present comprises the fourth step, "bringing to mind". A rapprochement of the ethical questions of the present with the moral and ethical elements of a biblical text

takes place when the moral and ethical elements of the text are brought to mind. This rapprochement faces the challenge of whether the moral and ethical elements of a biblical text are compatible with moral questions and ethical issues of the present. Can it still inspire and provide guidance although the horizon of knowledge and understanding has changed substantially? (Heimbach-Steins 2011:258). In order to do justice to a biblical text, and in order to avoid reading aspects into the biblical accounts which are not there, a re-examination with the focus of the second step of "inquiring" is necessary, at this stage.

Finally, the necessity of providing an argumentative basis for these moral and ethical elements of the biblical accounts of current ethical discourse, is accepted in the fifth step of "justifying". The character of biblical texts as religious texts, should be considered. Moral and ethical messages, in a biblical text, could face the challenge that its normative foundation might be questioned, because it is not the result of a rationally accessible and plausible justification. Instead, its justification may be limited to its immediate relevance with regard to the world of the community for whom such an account is a religious text, since it might be based on ideas that are difficult to grasp or follow for those outside the believing community, as the ideas may lack self-evident rationality. The step of "justifying", thus, aims to build a bridge to a moral and ethical discourse, respecting the conditions of rational ethics or morality.

> A rational or critical morality is one that claims for itself rational justifiability for its principles. Moral principles are rationally justified if they are generally endorsed by, that is to say acceptable to, all affected persons, given their full equality and effective self-determination (Koller 1999:75).

This means that such principles should be based on arguments which are plausible and acceptable for all humans, in the sense of a model of thought and not in the sense of referendum.

3. Jesus as "moral example"

In the New Testament, Jesus is perceived as a moral and ethical paradigm. His unlimited, total inclination towards God, his Father, and his unique concentration on God as the core of his life form the source, motivation and justification for all his words and acts, thus constituting what one – in relecturing the Christ event – may understand as moral and ethical challenges.

His being rooted in God, and his orientation towards God, moved Jesus to live up to convictions and to defend his positions, even if he risked severe, painful, and even lethal consequences in so doing (e.g. Mark 3:1-6; Trautmann 1980:278, 318; Thissen 1976:74, 89). These positions possess moral and ethical quality, and are to be perceived as moral and ethical elements. Jesus was oriented strictly towards his God, and he proclaimed how he understood his God and Father. Therefore, following the moral example of Jesus implies embracing a fundamental readiness to follow his example with regard to a radicalism, in terms of a cross-discipleship, which includes giving up one's own life for the sake of others and standing up for one's own convictions, even when facing the risk of failure (Furger 1978:23).

Jesus, as a moral example, comes across in the texts of the New Testament in a variety of ways. This variety consists, on the one hand, of textual presentations of Jesus' acting and preaching as having ethical relevance. On the other hand, this variety embraces different elements of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life, of which some will now be discussed.

4. Norm-constituting dimensions of the Christ event

Due to the missiological aim of the New Testament in making God present in human life, several moral and ethical principles can be observed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (P. G. Kirchschlaeger 2017). Together, they constitute core features of any human ethical conduct, which is rooted in the identity of God himself and presented to humankind in the conduct of Jesus Christ.

4.1 From love of the neighbour to limitless love

Mark 12:28-34 *par*. and John 13:34-35 introduce – on the basis of the teaching of the Hebrew Bible, mainly Leviticus 19:18 – the love of the neighbour as a moral-theological element in Jesus' way of life. In Mark 12:28-34, Jesus is asked which commandment is the first of all commandments (πρώτη πάντων). In his response, Jesus quotes the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4f.; Breytenbach 2006:64), and identifies the love of God as the first commandment in accordance with Jewish tradition: "The most important is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'" (Mark 12:29-30; all quotations from the ESV; see Van Iersel 1993:194). He then adds a second

commandment (Van Iersel 1993:194), which shows his sovereignty regarding the question (Dschulnigg 2007:324; Lührmann 1987:206): "The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:31). The words "as yourself" introduce reciprocity into and build the point of reference for the love of neighbour. This does not embrace self-love, but rather an attempt to assume the perspective of the other, based on the awareness of one's own fears, worries, needs and interests (Pesch 1977:241). From an own perspective every human knows how it is to live a life, to suffer, to enjoy … This source can, thus, enrich such an attempt.

The love of neighbour, preached and lived out by Jesus, is also related to the love of God. The one does not function properly without the other, and the second is combined with and integrated into the first (Kertelge 1994:122). Both belong to each other. The first and most important commandment – the main commandment – leads to the second, the commandment of the love of neighbour, as its consequence (Pesch 1989:107). To love God means to love all humans. Together, they build the nucleus of the biblical message. This double commandment of love represents a canonical criterion, a hermeneutical principle, and an ethical canon of the Torah (Schrage 1982:72). Together they form the backbone of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The first commandment, to love God, is the basis for the fulfilment of other commandments because only a person who loves God will fulfil his commandments. The second one, the love of neighbour, is the core of all the commandments which fulfil the Law (see Rom. 13:8-10; James 2:8; Matt. 7:12; 22:40; Pesch 1977:241). The second commandment thus indicates how the first commandment must be fulfilled. God wishes to be loved in that humans love each other, since he is merciful and loving (Schnackenburg 1986:95). As God loves all humans, he loves the subjects of his love, as well as the objects of his love (Söding 2015:124-125). God's love for all humans is, thus, the source both for loving him (Mieth 2015:248), and for loving other humans; both are expected from humans on the basis of the two commandments. In loving, Christians correspond to their origin and their goal (Halter 1977:473). Both commandments share one focus: "Love brings its object, whether God or man, into account as a factor in any calculation, any decision which has to be made about conduct" (Scott 1948:23). By prioritising these two commandments over all other commandments, Jesus ensures that the fulfilment of any commandment does not neglect putting God and all humans

in the centre. Furthermore, the two commandments introduce a dynamic and relational, and therefore, a high moral standard.

This standard is raised even further if John 13:34-35 is considered: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." The reciprocity of the love of neighbour is provided a new point of reference, "as I have loved you". This legitimates characterising this commandment as "new", and defines it as requiring limitless love. Furthermore,

> cette nouveauté dépend de la personne de son locuteur et de la situation qu'il instaure: le commandement est nouveau parce qu'il est fondé en Christ et qu'il s'inscrit dans la réalité nouvelle instaurée par le Révélateur (Zumstein 2007:53).

New is also the influence of the love of Jesus, which should be given to others, the focus on the disciples, who are called to continue his work, as well as the perspective of the resurrection, which lets the eternal life begin already now – in other words, in the love of Jesus. Furthermore, the commandment offers a future beyond guilt and death (Söding 2015:199-200).

Jesus himself, his words, his acts, and his life as the new point of reference for the reciprocity of love, turn Jesus into a moral model – a model anchored in God. "His followers are to reproduce, in their mutual love, the love which the Father showed in sending the Son, the love which the Son showed in laying down His life" (Dodd 1965:405). This perspective of limitless love obtains a totally new quality. Its reciprocal pattern (Van der Watt 2006b:116) develops into a transformed reciprocity because Jesus does not require for his love any mutuality towards him but love towards the other disciples following his example. Therefore, the transforming-reciprocal relation of love does not only embrace the relation between Jesus and humans but also the relation among humans. Its scale consists of Jesus as the moral model, and his limitless love for humans. Its normative legitimacy originates in the love of Jesus for his disciples. As moral model, Jesus indicates what love embraces and why it obtains normative quality.

In this way, the transformed-reciprocal understanding of limitless love excludes the possibility that missing or lacking love of others could be presented as a reason, or used as an excuse to neglect this commandment, since Jesus is introduced as the donor and guarantor of the commandment. Due to its basis

in the limitless love of Jesus for his disciples, the categorical and unconditional validity of this commandment is implied. The disciples are called to follow Jesus in his attitude of pro-existence, which is practised by Jesus in an exemplary way, through his words and acts. "Parce que le Christ instaure l'amour comme une réalité dans le monde – plus précisément comme la réalité eschatologique – les disciples sont mis en condition d'aimer" (Zumstein 2007:53).

As part of the Farewell Discourses of Jesus, these verses fulfil a testamentary function. "Le commandement d'amour mutuel est la première disposition testamentaire prise par le Christ joh pour pallier son absence" (Zumstein 2007:52). The disciples of Jesus are shown which direction they should follow (Thyen 2005:608). This contextual embedment increases the relevance and the significance of the commandment of limitless love even further.

> Le commandement est la parole qui empêche le disciple de se focaliser sur le Christ comme étant un personnage appartenant bientôt au passé, et de s'enfermer dans la peine qu'il éprouve face à sa prochaine disparition. Au moment de quitter les siens, le Christ engage ses disciples à se tourner vers l'avenir et vers le prochain. De cette façon, l'amour qui a été manifesté dans le passé – et en particulier à la croix – devient la force qui habite le futur et qui lie les disciples entre eux. Précisément en cela, le Christ demeure présent parmi les siens (Zumstein 2007:54).

A lifestyle based on this perspective should be the unique attribute of Jesus' disciples, thereby giving it a testimonial character (Zumstein 2007:53; Thyen 2005:609). By practising limitless love, and by respecting the standard of the love set by Jesus, the disciples should, thus, be a unique sign of his community on earth: "L'amour n'est pas à concevoir comme une disposition intérieure, ni comme un sentiment, mais comme le service concret rendu dans l'humilité au frère dans la foi" (Zumstein 2007:53). For the Christian faith, such limitless love becomes an obvious practice; indicative of its rootedness in Jesus (Thyen 2005:609). It also represents an event which cannot focus on itself, but which always finds its realisation in corresponding deeds (Schnelle 2006:318).

4.2 Serving others

A further element of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life is that of serving others. In John 13:1-17, Jesus performs the washing of the feet

of the disciples. As ὁ κύριος, he serves the disciples. By fulfilling the function of a servant, he seems to contradict his legitimate title. However, what seems to be a contradiction in fact emphasises the imperative of this narrative: "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14-15). The argumentative construction "If I ..., you also ought to ..." transmits a clear message to the addressees. If even the Son of God does not point out his primacy although he would be entitled to do so as Son of God, his community should not dare to act this way. Instead, his followers are called upon to serve others like Jesus does – even as ὁ κύριος. This embraces a common destiny. If the master humiliates himself, the servants may not exalt themselves. Self-abasement of the master, thus, implies self-abasement of the servant, too.

This element of service to others, as part of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life, means that the characteristic of servanthood of the leader influences the service of the followers, as well. This element has its basis in Jesus' pro-existence. This aspect cannot be justified by means of a rational and logical line of argumentation, but originates in the personal orientation towards Jesus, and in Jesus' orientation towards God. As ὁ κύριος, Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and sets an example by doing so. This paradox – breaking the logics of power and of economy – creates a dialectical tension which can only be resolved by the personal imitation of Jesus. Logically, it introduces equality among humans, because serving others does not accept any hierarchic differences.

4.3 Solidarity

In Matthew 25:31-46, one finds an account of behaviour that could help people facing hardship and poverty, distinguished by mercy and solidarity (W. Kirchschlaeger 2011:75). The addressees knew such lists from the Hebrew Bible and Rabbinic tradition (Luz 2002:535; Eltrop 2008:219-225). Such lists included humanitarian acts, which were relevant for eternal life (Fiedler 2006:377). There is, though, one decisive difference between the account in Matthew and other examples of such catalogues. The various situations of human hardship, suffering, and poverty are linked to Jesus Christ: "I was hungry, thirsty, in the prison, naked, homeless ... " (W. Kirchschlaeger 2011:75). This paradoxical content may irritate the addressees, as they cannot find any failure to act in such a way towards Jesus (W. Kirchschlaeger 2011:75). Their questions

underline the paradoxical and innovative character of the identification of Jesus with suffering humans (Gnilka 1988:374) – summarised in the quintessence: "Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40). Christians – as individuals and as community (Luck 1993:277) – are, thus, called to unconditional and unlimited solidarity with all humans by a personal identification of Jesus with suffering humans. This implies that there are no limits to solidarity, because the need for help does not know any boundaries either (Fiedler 2006:377). This solidarity should be practised for the sake of solidarity, not for remuneration. This message of solidarity is credible because of its messenger – Jesus Christ. He is credible and authentic, because he has proven unconditional and unlimited solidarity with all humans – by even facing suffering and death for the sake of all humans (Schnackenburg 1987:251).

The solidarity embodied by the moral example set by Jesus aims to end hardship, suffering, and poverty. The personal identification of Jesus, with the poor and suffering humans, emphasises the necessity and the urgency to stop and prevent such problematic phenomena and realities. Furthermore, the personal orientation towards the example of Jesus indicates the scale for the realisation of such solidarity. At the same time, it makes solidarity not only an element of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life, but also a criterion for following him. This criterion cannot be defined by means of a commandment or a legal rule; it can only be lived (Luck 1993:277). According to the kingdom of God preached by Jesus, the solidarity with poor and suffering humans and the commitment against exclusion, structural injustice, individual and collective egoism, as well as the commitment to inclusion, justice and pro-existence are all essentially part of the kingdom of God. Solidarity enables, encourages and empowers poor and suffering humans to oppose the hardship and to liberate themselves from it.

Moreover, the personal identification of Jesus with poor and suffering humans, Christologically legitimates the normative nature of such solidarity. These personal and Christocentric aspects ensure its moral quality, and exclude the possibility of reducing it to a desideratum. By locating solidarity in the personal encounter with Jesus Christ, this moral-theological element of solidarity obtains a sacramental intensity and a corresponding urgency. Precisely the symbolic character of solidarity with the poor and suffering humans justifies defining it as a sacramental event (Klauck 1989:273-285; Mueller 2002; 2007:209-220;

Sattler 2010:339, 347), even as a sacrament (W. Kirchschlaeger 2011:75). According to Matthew 25:31-46, this solidarity becomes a *conditio sine qua non* for a good life. As long as there are poor and suffering humans, an encounter with Jesus Christ remains impossible without becoming involved with them (Ellacuria 1996:761, 787). Such an encounter with, and such a commitment to them, are both associated with the identity of Jesus Christ, thus enhancing the urgency of the corresponding imperative for solidarity.

As an element of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of living, solidarity has its origin in the traditional Jewish understanding of God saving his people from Egyptian servitude and standing on the side of the oppressed. Jesus Christ follows this line in his words and deeds, by serving all humans without making any difference between them (Fiedler 2006:379). The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ emphasises his pro-existence, based on the identity of God, thus providing the foundation for this presence of Jesus among poor and suffering humans (Schuermann 1994:286-315).

4.4 Merciful justice, yet no indifference

In John 7:53-8:11, a woman who had been caught in adultery was put at the centre of a group of people. Jesus is confronted with the following question: "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" In the narrative, the question is part of a discussion among experts about the right interpretation of the Torah. The focus does not fall on the legal case (Theobald 2009:556); rather the position of Jesus is tested because he preaches mercy which, in this case, would imply running the risk of disrespecting the Torah. Jesus finds himself in a delicate situation. Should he give up the mercy preached by him or should he contradict the wording of the Torah? (Schnackenburg 1971:227). The situation within which Jesus finds himself is even more difficult because the challenge posed to him is not a theoretical one, but deals with the concrete case of the woman standing at the centre of the group and in front of him. In fact, by means of this debate with Jesus, she is abused (Zingg 2007:326):

> When (they) brought the woman (...) to Jesus they dehumanized her, turning her into an object for debate and discussion. Interpretations of John 7:53-8:11 that focus exclusively on the woman and her

> sexual behavior as sin continue to dehumanize and objectify her (O'Day 1995:297).

However, the focus of the discussion is on Jesus and his teaching, not on the woman. "The dramatic presentation of the case of the adulterous woman has little to do with the woman, but everything to do with Jesus, the narrator warns" (Toensing 2003:163-164). Jesus faces a predicament because every possible response seems to be wrong. If he respects the Torah, he contradicts his preaching of mercy, thus disqualifying his teaching as empty words, which cannot handle concrete situations. But Jesus finds a solution: "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:7). This response is "einmalig und unvergesslich formuliert" (Schnackenburg 1971:229), and silences his conversation partners. This affirmation gains even more weight by the fact that it represents the first verbal statement by Jesus in this dialogue (Zingg 2007:322). With this response, Jesus turns the focus away from the woman to, on the one hand, the ones who wanted to test his teaching, and, on the other hand, to the fundamental questions of how a community should deal with humans committing sins (O'Day 1995:636), and if there are mistakes which do not allow a new beginning together (Theobald 2009:559).

At the same time, Jesus reaffirms his respect for the Torah and emphasises mercy without indifference, thereby introducing a merciful justice without indifference. Jesus does not relativise the Torah and the wrongness of adultery, but encourages and trusts the woman not to sin again (see John 8:11). He confirms the validity of the Torah but defines a condition for the implementation of its norms (Zingg 2007:327). The situation of the woman remains dangerous because her fortune continues lying in the hands of those conversing with Jesus (Toensing 2003:164-165). The condition for the implementation of the legal norms, proposed by Jesus, makes the enforcement impossible, something which is also accepted by his conversation partners. They leave because they are confronted with the truth that nobody is without sin (Zingg 2007:334). They show discernment and turn from being judges to examples for rigorist persons; in fact, the latter become the main addressees of this narrative, as they are expected to learn from the discernment of the Scribes and Pharisees, in order to enable themselves to let the stones fall from their hands (Theobald 2009:559).

Finally Jesus liberates the woman: "'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' She said, 'No one, sir.' And Jesus said, 'Neither do I condemn

you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.'" Merciful justice without indifference does not redefine the sin as something acceptable, but respects the Torah and emphasises its ongoing validity, underlines its merciful application, and entrusts the woman to not sin from now on.

> The rule of life for the Christian is to go far beyond the rules. The beatitudinal formula "You have heard ..., now I say to you," (Mt 5:20ff), might even be interpreted to be a call to move far beyond the demands of rational autonomy, personal rights and duties, and obedience to concrete laws. While Jesus did not come to abolish the law, he did come to fulfill it (Rehrauer 2001:58).

Jesus saves the woman twice. Firstly, he saves her with his question which turns the attention away from her towards her accusers. Secondly, he encourages her and entrusts her the responsibility not to sin again. "Jesus nimmt sich im Namen Gottes der Sünder an; er will nicht richten, sondern retten" (Schnackenburg 1971:232). This is thus intended as an obligation for his followers.

An attitude of "merciful justice, yet no indifference" embraces the call to leave behind a mentality of mere fulfilment of the Torah; instead, the Torah is embedded in a relation between God and humans. This includes a space for interpretation and for contextualisation, in order to respect the merciful love of God and the complementary responsibilities of obedience to and of the constitution of norms. Love is understood as "Sehbedingung" (Monzel 1960:67) of merciful justice without indifference.

5. Concluding remarks

The moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life was an integral part of his life, suffering, death, and resurrection, in particular in terms of its perception from a moral and ethical perspective. This serves as a challenge for his disciples because it is not simply about the practice of fulfilling commandments. Rather, it calls for speaking, deciding, acting, and an attitude which result from a reflection on the identity of Jesus from Nazareth. In the biblical texts the items elaborated above can be identified as the main elements of the moral-theological dimension of Jesus' way of life. It has to do with love of the neighbour, i.e. limitless love, serving others, solidarity, and merciful justice, yet no indifference. By his existence, words, and deeds Jesus set a moral and ethical example which needs to be well respected in one's own words, decisions, and deeds, as a response

to the loving initiative of God. Such a response embodies a moral and ethical imperative, which implies a definite refusal to being indifferent to the Law. This imperative is also categorical, in the sense that it is not based on the fulfilment of any conditions before having normative validity. The latter originates in the love of God, i.e. the love of Jesus for humans. This imperative is also unlimited, because there are not any boundaries to this kind of love. Furthermore, it is challenging due to its personalised point of reference: Jesus. At the same time, it is enhanced by an atmosphere, which is created by the love of God, where love is given without asking. This imperative is also unique because it goes back to Jesus' reading, interpretation, understanding, and practising of the Hebrew Bible. Moreover, it is unique, as it does not only have a personal point of reference, but even a theological one, being rooted in the relationship between God and Jesus Christ and, thus, with humankind. In a world facing complex and multiple ethical issues, this supreme foundation for discernment and decisions seems indispensable for Christian ethics.

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Chapter 12

@jesus – A practical theological following of Jesus-expressions on Twitter

Jan-Albert van den Berg[1]

1. Introduction

The American summer of 2007 was to be remembered for the long-awaited and much anticipated public release of the Apple iPhone. The iPhone combined the power of an iPod, cell phone and PDA into what Steve Jobs, Apple's president, claimed would be "your life in your pocket". Just hours after Jobs' public webcast demonstration, the iPhone was touted and referred to as the "Jesus phone". In the days that followed, some tech loggers lauded the Jesus phone as the "holy grail of all gadgets" and complimented it with images communicating the phone's supposed divinity (Campbell 2011:1-2).

This serves as an excellent introductory example of the intersection between the evolving field of information communication technology – also called "new media" – and making sense of Jesus in a digital-lived religion. Observing this, then, also confirms that the Jesus name can be interpreted continually and dynamically at different levels of contextualisation. In my opinion, it links dynamically to the confirmation from New Testament studies that "[t]he names of Jesus therefore have a tradition history that should be interpreted on different levels of contextualization" (Dreyer 2012: e-source).

This contribution follows – resonating the "following"-metaphor, strongly associated with the well-known social media platform Twitter – perspectives on the naming of a so-called digital Jesus. This following is further accentuated by using the @ symbol, normally used to indicate a Twitter handle (username) in

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the digital sphere, and in connection with the name of Jesus ("@jesus") strongly emphasised in the title of the contribution. Finding a link with the central aim of the research project, namely, to account for interpretative encounters with Jesus from specific historical conditions and which have specific performative consequences, an attempt to make sense of a digital Jesus is provided. By using the following sub-sections, a possible identikit of sorts of the digital Jesus is sketched. Firstly, and by way of providing a background, an attempt to briefly describe the current connected digital age will be offered. Secondly, and actively engaging with available digital palette colours and painting techniques, some empirical research will be offered, in order to provide some concrete evidence for the construction of the face of the digital Jesus. In conclusion, perspectives on the meaning of a digital Jesus, for the description of lived religion, will be provided from a critical onlooker's point of view.

2. Background – A connected digital age

2.1 A triple digital revolution?

Scholars differ in naming this time of change in human existence. From the so-called "digital revolution" (Anderson 2015: e-source), "the second machine age" (Brynjolfsson & McAfee 2014: e-source), or "the evolution to the fourth industrial revolution" (Schwab 2016: e-source), one driver is present in all the equations configuring our time, namely that of the role of digital technologies. Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2015: e-source) have indicated that "we're living in a time of astonishing progress with digital technologies – those that have computer hardware, software, and networks at their core." This digital revolution is responsible for the fact that different and divergent facets of human existence are, for example, increasingly becoming embodied within a digital domain. Goldin and Kutarna (2016:30) have therefore rightfully indicated that the "advent of digital" is a second Gutenberg moment, providing for "a new medium for capturing, communicating and exchanging data ...".

Focusing on the research project, Anderson (2015: e-source) recently indicated that the "'triple revolution' of the internet, mobile devices and digital social media is revolutionizing the way we lead our lives and live out our faith." In starting to calculate the meaning of these far-reaching developments for practices of faith, it is, therefore, important to remember that "[p]aradigms have

shifted and are shifting. People interpret their worlds differently than previously and consequently use different languages than previous generations" (Müller 2011: e-source). Illustrating the art of reading and interpreting changing maps, Khanna points to the fact that maps initially oriented around holy sites and that these maps were as much about "theology as geography" (Khanna 2016: e-source). Taking the movement of tectonic plates and seismic adjustments seriously, one can rightfully ask about the mapping of theology and faith in a digital geography of change.

2.2 A practical theology of digital-lived religion

In spite of the various advantages opened by these digital freeways, it is also this dynamic and growing sphere of digital living that presents multi-dimensional challenges. The specific meaning of this quest for this particular research project can be motivated in terms of Campbell and Garner's (2016: e-source) argument that "[w]e live in a world where our digital technologies are increasingly intersecting with our spiritual lives." Taking the character and scope of this research project into account, the question is, then, what the appropriate approach would be to use in the research. Due to epistemological and methodological considerations, acknowledging the implicit underlying philosophies that are concerned with theories of knowledge construction (Swinton & Mowat 2006:32), a practical theological orientation serves my approach towards the research project best. Providing contours of understanding might be helpful, in order to define not only my positioning within the field, but also to describe some of the characteristics of contemporary practical theology. Practical theologians around the world would, to my mind, currently agree on three aspects regarding the character of practical theology:

First of all, practical theology is concerned with the theological study of practices; while other theological disciplines focus on the textual sources of a religious tradition or on the systematic conceptual structures, practical theology deals primarily with practices. This is the reason for the presence of a strong overlap with social sciences, just like systematic theology overlaps with philosophy, and biblical theology with the study of languages (Van den Berg & Ganzevoort 2014:181). This orientation is, indeed, portraying a "bold case that new theological insight can come about through empirically based investigations of human experiences in particular contexts" (Cahalan & Mikoski 2014:2).

The challenge for the practical theologian is to "read" the praxis hermeneutically by moving between the empirical data and the sources of the Christian tradition (Ganzevoort 2003:77-78). In terms of practices, within which not only primary theologically defined practices are assumed, acknowledgement is accorded to the "theory-laden importance" of the character of practice. In the empirical description of the practice, recognition is given to the already implicit presence of normative perspectives. Therefore, theological normative perspectives do not have to be incorporated into the practice; they already form part of the fibre of all possible practices, implicitly and in an inductive manner. Ganzevoort (2004:18) emphasises this understanding, stating that "the theological and normative dimension of practical theology is not something added to empirical investigations, but present in the material we research." In describing the tracing of normativity, there is a dynamic movement and interaction between practice and theory descriptions towards further development. In the empirical search, it is emphasised that "practical theology might truly become theology of praxis: building theological theory from the material of human praxis" (Ganzevoort 2004:18). Recently, the aforementioned reflection has also been acknowledged through further developments in practical theology in particular, and specifically the development and description of a "lived religion" or "lived spirituality" (Ganzevoort 2009: e-source). This approach entails an innovative interpretation of practical theology, which developed from a discipline that was, initially, only concerned with clerical and congregational ministry (Osmer 2008: e-source), into a discipline focusing on the "radical transformation of modern religion into postmodern spiritualities" (Graham 1996:38).

Secondly, this focus on practices is especially relevant in view of the fact that practical theology focuses mostly on contemporary practices. Indeed, as rightfully indicated by Miller-McLemore (2012:14), practical theology has a focus on "the tangible, the local, the concrete and the embodied ... it remains grounded in practice and stays close to life." Internationally, practical theology presently demonstrates a further development, within which the interest in practices contextually, and in a concrete manner, forms part of everyday life. In this expansion of traditional horizons, the gap between the traditional interest in Sunday practices is widened to include the everyday life of all the days of the week. It is, in fact, the discovery of the art of hermeneutics of everyday life which confirms the development that "theology is not for Sundays only ... theology is

an everyday affair ... theology not only articulates beliefs but suggests 'designs for living'" (Vanhoozer 2007:7).

In summary, practical theology is "theology in active mode, grappling with the contemporary culture. It does not pretend to rise above culture but recognizes that it is deeply implicated in it" (Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney & Watkins 2010:13). In her book, *Digital religion: Understanding religious practice in new media worlds* (2013), Heidi Campbell, therefore, rightly points out some important dimensions of a digital lived religion as follows:

> Digital religion as a concept acknowledges not only how the unique character of digital technology and culture shapes religious practice and beliefs, but also how religions seek to culture new media contexts with established ways of being and convictions about the nature of reality and the larger world (Campbell 2013:4).

The growing interdisciplinary study of religion and the internet during the past few years has highlighted the understanding that the new media have become embedded in our everyday lives, and are commonly used as a platform for spiritual engagement (Campbell 2011:10). With regard to the theological interpretation of the relative research, it is, in my opinion, necessary to initially present a broad framework dealing with the relationship between theology and technology. In this regard, the following remark by Garner (2013:252) is important:

> Thus theological reflection on technology, and by implication the Internet, is often a kind of contextual theology, which locates itself as a theological endeavour seeking to articulate and critique a practical theology rooted in the experience of the individual or community, through an explicit dialog between the past (represented by scripture and tradition) and the present (represented particularly by personal and community experience).

A relevant focus from a practical theological viewpoint would, therefore, relate to the tracing and describing of ways or modes in which technology, spirituality and theology are expressed. It is further envisaged and proposed that this focus should lead to a revalidation of the human condition, according consideration to, amongst other aspects, the influence of the virtual era on the human spirit (thus spirituality), on individual but also on collective levels.

Thirdly, practical theology has an action-oriented dimension (Heitink 1993:105), informing the pragmatic task of this discipline (Osmer 2008:

e-source), leading to a positive contribution in the development of practice. More than other disciplines in theology, and also more than mainstream social sciences, practical theology often has an action-oriented dimension and aims to develop and sustain practices rather than merely describe or understand them. This is what Rick Osmer (2008: e-source) calls the pragmatic task of practical theology. Reader (2008:7) even points to the outcome of this strategic endeavour, saying that "practical theology is transformational in that it aims to make a difference not just to people, but also to understandings and situations in the contemporary world."

In taking the complexity of practices seriously, research in practical theology is very often associated with a strong design-creative component, with an emphasis on creating the preferable or desirable (Hermans 2014:124-125). With the current research project in mind, as well as taking the characteristics described above into account, one can indeed start talking about creating a practical theology for digital-lived religion. In a practical theology for digital-lived religion, an affinity for the digital world, associated with connectivity, constant liquidity and flux of meaning, is rendered.

2.3 Twitter as a background angle on the digital Jesus

With a view to describe a digital Jesus, the social media platform, Twitter – with its character as a micro-blog – was chosen as the first sphere of research. Serving as background, a short description of Twitter is offered next, while motivational reasons for the choice of this specific social media platform are also presented.

Twitter, which became known as the "SMS of the internet" by its initial use of only 140 characters (Wagner 2012:120; Murthy 2013: e-source), has about 316 million monthly users who participate daily in the sending of approximately 500 million tweets (Smith 2015: e-source). The Twitter message has evolved over the past decade to a rich canvas featuring hashtags, photos, videos and more. Currently, further development is taking place, in order to provide users with the opportunity to make even more from a 140-character tweet (Sherman 2016: e-source). In using the Twitter platform, significant socio-political dynamics have been unlocked worldwide, as could be seen, amongst others, during the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street movement, and the recent #feesmustfall campaign by students in South Africa (Fuchs 2014:196; Nicholson 2015: e-source). Through the use of the @ and # symbols, specific search domains on Twitter are explored by making use of the built-in search facility on

this particular platform. The @ symbol is used specifically in the search for individuals, since this symbol is used to indicate a personal username, generally known as a Twitter handle: "The dialogue between Twitter users occurs through the at-sign (e.g. a user can direct tweets to another user by prefixing a post with an at-sign before the target user's name)" (Murthy 2013: e-source). By means of the # symbol, a search is conducted within the flow of tweets selected in terms of a specific focus, and thematically grouped under the concerned hashtag, such as #feesmustfall. In this way, the focus falls on a certain thematic selection from a stream of information, with a particular focus on a specific theme. Murthy (2013: e-source), therefore, indicates: "Any word(s) preceded by a hash sign '#' are used in Twitter to note a subject, event, or association. Hashtags are an integral part of Twitter's ability to link the conversations of strangers together." In view of the above, the social media platform, Twitter, was chosen as the practice terrain for mapping and describing important accents associated with a new, digitalised world and way of life. The motivation for this choice lies, firstly, in the character of Twitter as a social media platform, which is a particularly apt expression of a mobinomic phenomenon (Knott-Craig 2012: e-source), demarcating the formation of a virtual mobile ecosystem of connections across various spheres and layers of life. Van Dijk (2011:35) rightfully points out that the users of Twitter are most likely to access the platform through the use of wireless internet on mobile devices. Users are, thereby, given an opportunity to contribute – regardless of location and time – to the development of a moment-by-moment transmission of news and personal opinion; hence the emphasis on mobility in the character of Twitter. A second reason that can be put forward in motivation of the choice of Twitter as a possible concrete expression of practices associated with living in a digital world is to be found in the significant growth of this platform. White (2012:121) rightly points out that one only needs to watch the news to hear about Twitter and its popularity and usage with news media. A third reason is found in the fact that the Twitter platform, until recently, had a 140-character limit per tweet or message, which facilitates the empirical analysis of the limited text format. In summary, "Twitter has emerged as a valuable resource for tapping into the zeitgeist of the internet, its users, and often beyond" (Zimmer & Proferes 2014:250).

3. Empirical research

With a view towards a focused and manageable empirical research project, I have made the choice to focus particularly on the analysis of two data sets, namely,

Christmas 2013 and Easter 2014. Only these two sets of data will be used in order to be able to present a realistic and receptive analysis for the specific limited contribution. The fact that two older data sets (Christmas 2013 and Easter 2014) are used, is also not viewed as limiting, as the focus is on the use of the Twitter platform, rather than on the actuality of the individual tweet. By using these two Twitter data sets, deriving from distinctive and important celebrations on the Christian calendar, strongly associated with Jesus, engagement with daily life is demonstrated, whilst the implicit, normative character of the content is also acknowledged. With the choice of respectively Christmas and Easter as an expression of Jesus' birth, as well as his crucifixion, a purposeful choice is made for a specific normative orientation, strongly resonating with the Christian faith.

The presentation of the results of the empirical research is conducted on two levels: Firstly a general and shorter overview on the analysis of the so-called Big Data[2] will be provided, specifically focused on the Christmas 2013 data set. Due to the limit in scope of the contribution, it was decided to include only the Big Data analysis for the Christmas 2013 period. This will, then, also be followed up by a more in-depth analysis of individual tweets, coming from both of the two indicated periods.

3.1 A Big Data analysis for Christmas 2013

After using a random sampling technique[3] of all possible mentions in the original 3 million harvest texts, 8 844 individual messages, harvested on 25 December 2013, were selected for further analysis.

By using the NVivo software (NVivo 2016: e-source) to further assist in the process of fracturing[4] the data, the principle of "show and tell"[5] in empirical

2 The concept "Big Data" generally refers to large amounts of data being generated by computing activities such as social media (Paulus, Lester & Dempster 2014:193).

3 As part of accepted research practice, a random sample technique (Vogt & Williams 2011:467) was used in order to obtain a more manageable amount of tweets from the initial Big Data list consisting of 3 million harvest texts.

4 Referring to the action of systematically drilling down in Big Data sets in order to establish smaller workable units.

5 The NVivo-consultant, Dr Jenine Beekhuyzen (Brisbane, Australia), who assisted with technical aspects of the empirical research, introduced me to the concept "show and tell". According to this principle in quantitative empirical research, results are first portrayed and then reflected on.

research is followed, whereby through the presentation and analysis of data and discerning the meaning, patterns are clearly indicated. The first movement in this regard was to employ the technique of word-counting. The main contribution of a word-counting technique is to produce data condensation or data distillation, in order to highlight the essence relevant to the study in an ocean of data (Ryan & Bernard 2003:97). The underlying rationale for doing a word count is, indeed, to look into words and topics in people's conversations (Ryan & Bernard 2003:96).

The software program, NVivo, has the capacity to quantify Big Data, and is used by way of, amongst others, counting the top 100 words from the indicated 8 844 Twitter posts, for the purpose of discerning definite patterns. This data is then further fractured by way of using (i) a word cloud-presentation, (ii) a top ten stemmed word analysis and (iii) a word tree analysis.

(i) Word cloud

By way of a visual representation of the 100 most frequent words coming from the indicated data, a summary is provided, enhancing clarity for research findings (Ramlo 2011:101). For this specific visual representation, I have used a word cloud. The contribution of word clouds is to be found in their ability to reveal the frequency of different words used, providing viewers with an overview of the main themes or topics (McNaught & Lam 2010:630).

The word cloud method is used to visually indicate the 100 most stemmed[6] words of the 8 844 messages. The associated word cloud shows a pattern, within which the most accentuated occurrence of words, according to the score, is indicated graphically and visually. Although the word count of the words corresponds with the visual representation of the word cloud, certain words, such as "christians, "jesus", "#christmaseve", "family", "days" are also observed:

6 Words associated with the same stem of the basis word.

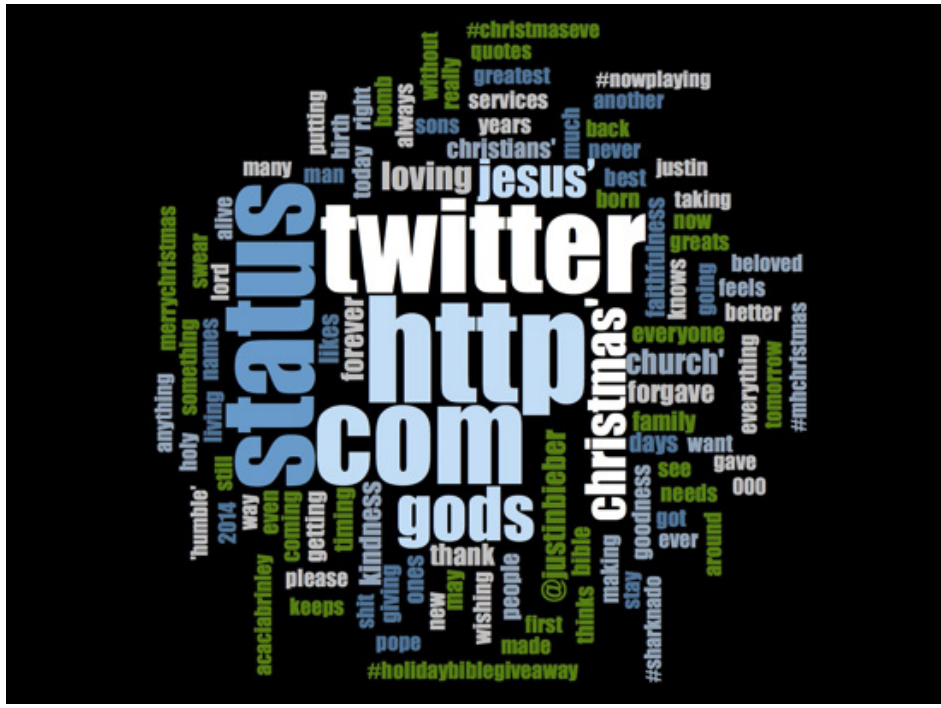

Figure 1: World cloud, Christmas 2013 (NVivo 2016: e-source).

(ii) Top ten stemmed word analysis

From this clear graphic and visual prescription, where the words appearing most often are shown prominently, the next movement in the analysis of the indicated tweets is utilised. In terms of this, the huge amount of data is further broken up through the fracture principle to make use of even smaller and more detailed units, as part of the analysis. A further analysis provides an overview of the ten most stemmed words in the data set of Christmas 2013. The heading of the table indicates, amongst others, the word itself, its length, the number of times it was counted, with a weight percentage of the word against available data as well as similar words in the relative data set. Of specific interest is the reference to the stemmed word, "jesus" (in bold font), with an indication of various formats of use within the indicated data-set.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage	Similar Words
http	4	10284	7,54%	http
twitter	7	8878	6,51%	twitter
com	3	8849	6,49%	com
status	6	8844	6,49%	status
gods	4	4262	3,13%	#god, "god, @god, @godly, @gods, god, god", godly, gods
christmas'	10	2732	2,00%	#christmas, #christmas #family #church, christma, christmas, christmas'
jesus'	**6**	**2476**	**1,82%**	**#jesus, #jesus', "jesus, @jesus, jesus, jesus", jesus'**
loving	6	1318	0,97%	#love, @love, love, loved, lovee, lovely, loves, loving
church'	7	954	0,70%	#church, church, church', churches
@justinbieber	13	782	0,57%	@justinbieber, justinbieber
forever	7	641	0,47%	forever
kindness	8	622	0,46%	kind, kindly, kindness
thank	5	604	0,44%	thank, thanked, thankful, thankfulness, thanking, thanks
forgave	7	603	0,44%	forgave

Figure 2: Top ten stemmed word analysis, Christmas 2013 (NVivo 2016: e-source).

(iii) Word tree

In a third movement, and flowing from the aforementioned dynamics, whereby Big Data are evaluated by way of smaller fractured units, use is made of word trees, whereby patterns in data are even more visually indicated. I am sensitive to the fact that the concentrated data provided by word lists and counts do not

take the original context of word use into account (Ryan & Bernard 2003:97); I have, therefore, made use of the technique of word co-occurrence, also known as collocation, from the science of linguistics and semantic network analysis to emphasise that the meaning of a word is related and connected to certain concepts (Ryan & Bernard 2003:97).

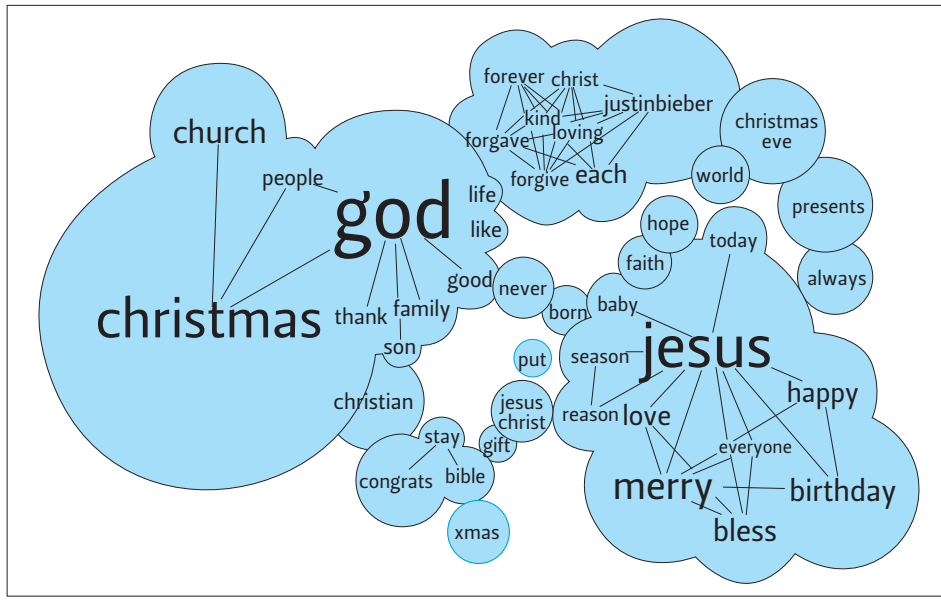

Figure 3: Word tree, Christmas 2013 (NVivo 2016: e-source).

Central to the interpretation of the word trees of prominent words, associated with Christmas 2013, is the following Twitter message from world-renowned pop sensation, Justin Bieber (@justinbieber 2013: e-source):

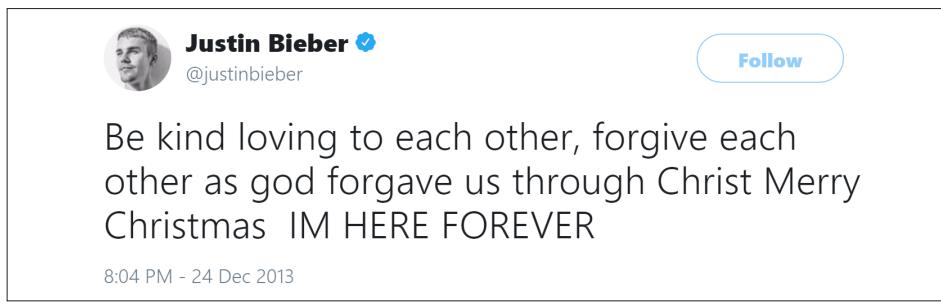

Figure 4: Justin Bieber's Twitter message, Christmas 2013 (@justinbieber 2013: e-source).

On Christmas Day, the message was retweeted 162 582 times by supporters of Bieber – generally known as "beliebers" – by using the retweet function on the Twitter platform (@justinbieber 2013: e-source). This specific tweet was also liked by 1 391 028 followers of the Justin Bieber account on Twitter (@justinbieber 2013: e-source). However, it is indeed ironic, as pointed out by the social media monitoring company Fuseware (2015: e-source), that the official @justinbieber account (@justinbieber 2013: e-source) received more mentions on Christmas Day 2013, than the semi-official @jesus account (@jesus 2013: e-source).

Bearing this dynamic interaction in mind, the question could critically be asked whether, in the formulation of the initial message and its subsequent retweets, the message concerns believers or, rather, perhaps beliebers (the supporters of Justin Bieber). The dynamics of the relationship become discernible in the search for the influence of the sender (Justin Bieber), and the content of the relative tweet, as well as the dynamics involved in the sending and further distribution of this message in the Twittersphere. In reflection, it should, once again, be borne in mind that the prominence and status of the person who had formulated the initial tweet, as well as the number of supporters had, indeed, contributed to the spread and influence on Twitter. Supported by the dynamics and use of the retweet function on Twitter, as well as the manner in which, as a mechanism, it contributes to the strengthening of distribution of the single message, this is naturally of particular significance (Murthy 2013: e-source).

In line with the strong theme in the data set of Christmas 2013 a fragment of the word tree of the Twitter handle @justinbieber is next indicated. Thereafter I will also, in comparison, present a fragment of the word tree of the Twitter handle @jesus. I will also briefly discuss the two different word trees.

The word tree of the Twitter handle, @justinbieber, corresponds directly with the Twitter message which the pop icon sent on Christmas Day 2013, in which the words "be kind loving to each" are emphasised. Various positive and negative reactions followed the sending of the message, which confirm the pop star's influence. The word tree is dominated by a strong religious content presented mainly by way of a positive sentiment. The message carries, amongst others, the meaning that a blessed Christmas confirms the meaning of God's presence amongst us.

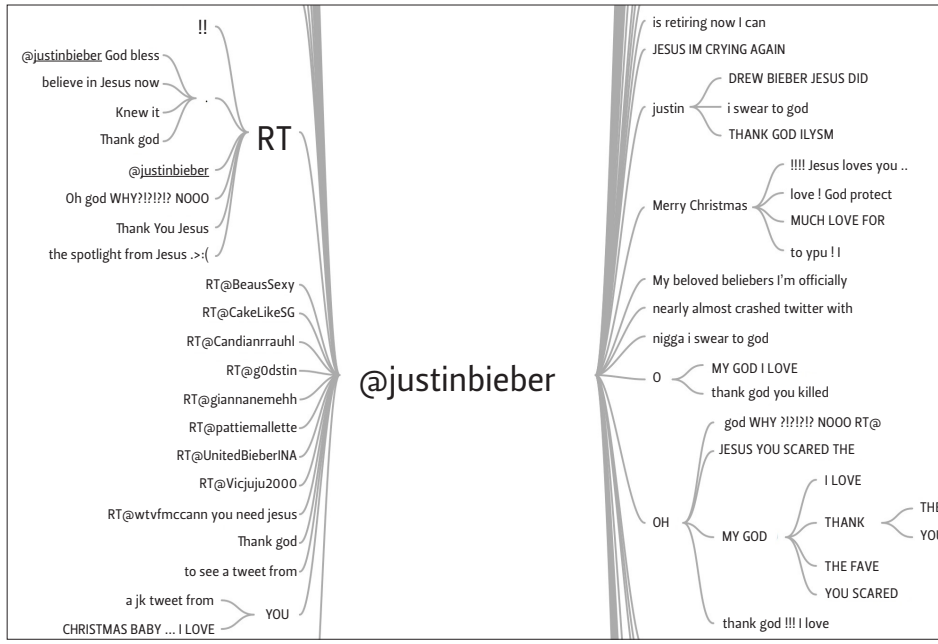

Figure 5: Word tree of the Justin Bieber Twitter handle "@justinbieber" (NVivo 2016: e-source).

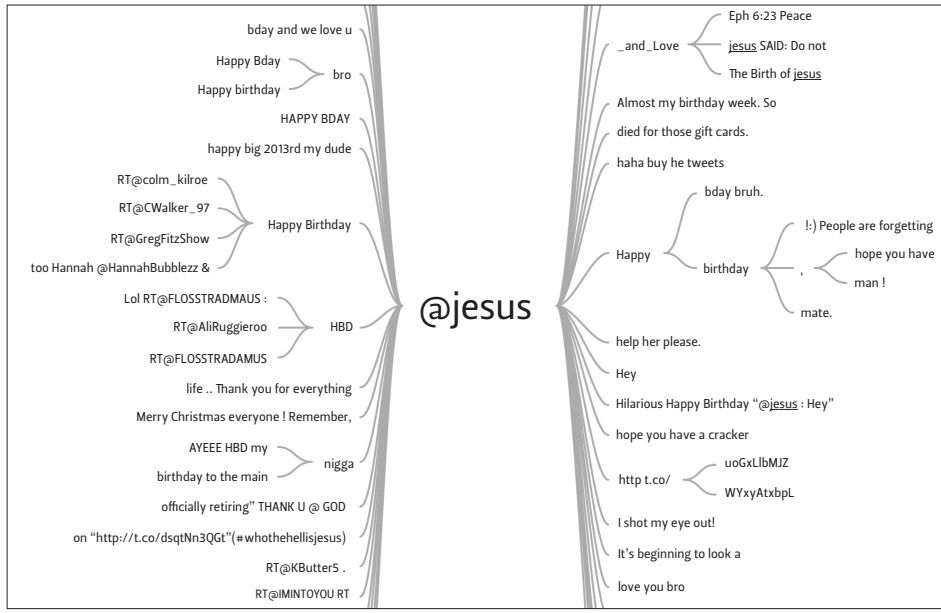

Figure 6: Word tree of the Twitter handle "@jesus" (NVivo 2016: e-source).

The word tree of @jesus is comprised mainly of expressions which are directly related to the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Various expressions, some filled with humour, are used to refer to the celebration of the birth of Christ. In confirmation of this observation, Holmberg, Bastubacka & Thelwall (2016:353) indicate, in their 2016 article, " '@God please open your fridge!' A content analysis of Twitter messages to @God: Hopes, humor, spirituality, and profanities" that "religion and religiosity are communicated on Twitter in a manner that creates a sphere in which praise and profanities coexist".

3.2 A detailed analysis of Christmas 2013 and Easter 2014

In the presentation of the existing possible good practices of normativity on Twitter, the following two examples from the collection of Twitter messages were used, which were retweeted the most during Christmas 2013 and Easter 2014, respectively. The criteria used to choose a specific message from the different data sets were as follows:

Firstly, the message must have formed part of the ten most retweeted messages for the various periods. Secondly, I chose messages consisting of words only and which contained no links towards a webpage or any hashtag symbols. Thirdly, it was endeavoured to strike a balance in the selection of messages; on the one hand, those of well-known Christian individuals and, on the other hand, those of popular personalities.

After the selection of the two messages, the following methodology was used in analysing the two selected tweets. Initially a short, general overview was given of the message, especially reflecting on the profile of the sender. This was followed by an in-depth analysis of the message itself, typically drilling into the message, looking at some of the words.

For this part of the analysis, principles which underlie the qualitative discourse analytical research method were used. While being sensitive to the fact of not arriving at a set of normative rules, however, the end of this exercise did provide some pointers regarding the facilitation of discussion on normative aspects associated with the formation of best practices.

The detailed analysis of the two identified Twitter messages was conducted with the acknowledgement of the role of the researcher's subjectivity in reading and interpreting the content. Aspects, such as the nature of the personality involved,

the choice of the used profile picture, as well as the profile description, all play an important role in informing a subjective understanding.

(i) Christmas 2013

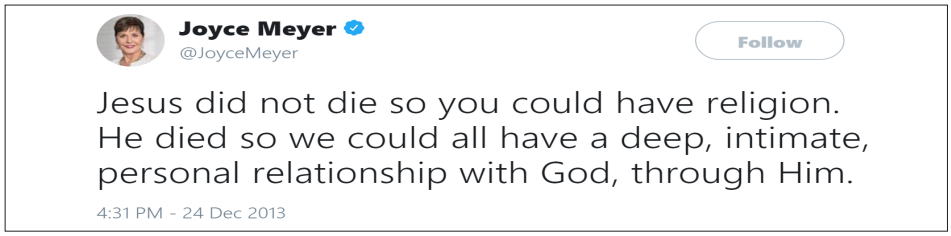

Figure 7: Joyce Meyer's Twitter message, Christmas 2013 (@joycemeyer 2013: e-source).

In the message of popular American Christian writer and speaker, Joyce Meyer, a theological interpretation of the Christmas events is presented. She also manages to convey the general meaning of Christmas as an appeal on a personal level. The message was retweeted more than 3 200 times and received more than 2 500 likes. It is interesting how the sender composed the message, creating tension between "Jesus" and "religion". This tension is heightened as Christmas is usually associated with the Christian religion. However, for the composer of this message, it is all about Jesus and not as much on the meaning of his birth on a collective level with regard to religion; it places more emphasis on the personal aspect.

(ii) Easter 2014

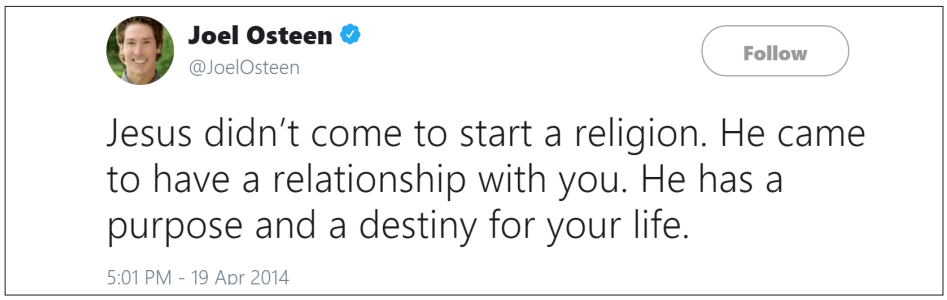

Figure 8: Joel Osteen's Twitter message, Easter 2014 (@joelosteen 2014: e-source).

Popular Christian writer and preacher, Joel Osteen expresses, just as in the message of Meyer, the view that Christmas is not, in the first instance, about religion, but about a personal relationship with God. The emphasis of both the Christian writer's and the preacher's messages during Christmas 2013 and 2014, respectively – that Jesus' service is not primarily related to the church – is noteworthy. Except for the emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus, the author of the message expanded the implication of the message by including aspects of purpose and destiny as outcomes of this relationship and discipleship.

In offering some general remarks sprouting from the detailed analysis of the two selected messages, the hermeneutical skill of interpreting how contemporaries make spiritual sense of their lives, is exercised (Beaudion 2014:198). Following important perspectives regarding "God-talk in street language" (Willhauck 2013:88), the analysis of these tweets focused on how digital media enables individuals to integrate religious aspects of their identity into other spheres of everyday life. With this exercise, the aim is not to create a movement from the text to the field, but rather from the field to the text.

4. Popular culture, Twitter and the search for a digital Jesus

An aspect of further research, which can be identified in this initial scan of specific Twitter messages associated with Jesus, is the important and embedded relationship between popular culture and theology (Cobb 2005:294; Lynch 2005:14; Sweet 2012: e-source). This, in itself, is further evidence of the influential manner in which popular culture is impacting all facets of life, even the Christian faith.

In line with this theoretical orientation, Willhauck, in her important article, "The urban dictionary, street wisdom and God: An intersection of linguistics and theology" (2013), demonstrates clearly the importance of "street language" in the facilitation of faith. By using the metaphor of the street, reference is made to all possible contexts – including the world of social media and Twitter – and how the profane "language of the street gives insight into how people receive religious meaning and come to experience God" (Willhauck 2013:98).

Language is the medium through which expression of the normative dimension is provided. In the distinction between first-order and second-order language, an important perspective for the research project is to be found. In first-order language, the emphasis is on the language of ordinary people, while second-order language pertains to an academic theological discourse (Ganzevoort 2004:20).

In the research project, the emphasis is obviously on the ordinary, lived expressions of first-order language users.

While the emphasis was, in the past, placed on the second-order theological language as associated with academic theology, the emphasis in the project is on the first-order theological language, as used generally by people. This orientation ties in with the emphasis that a singular and linear use of authoritative sources cannot, on its own, be responsible for normative interpretation. "This means that not only are the kinds of normative claims a theologian might make always in a state of flux, but so too are the normative sources that contribute to how we make those claims" (Wigg-Stevenson 2015:3). Other factors, which also have an influence in the construction of normativity, are, amongst others, how identity and a community are established in the social media world. As a practical theologian, I am challenged with attending to the meaning of these worlds, which is "no less important and no less demanding than the ability to interpret the texts of revelation and tradition" (Beaudion 2014:198).

Therefore, in the normative search for a practically orientated, theological model, the expectation is that new means of expression on Twitter can, in fact, play a meaningful role in the manner in which Jesus is talked about, and in the formulation of Christian theology. Willhauck (2013:96) rightly comments "that new ways of speaking have power in the formation of faith, that some popular street language can and does reveal God and can be useful in doing Christian theology and ministry."

In this respect, the investigation into the use of the name of Jesus, on Twitter, specifically embodies a relevant and contemporary expression of the research project, namely "making sense of Jesus". The documented Twitter messages assign new meaning to the use of the Jesus name in the dynamic intersection between that which is holy, and that which is mundane. Making sense of Jesus is, then, to be found in the intersecting and vague boundaries of the sacred and profane, as religion is lived out in everyday life (Lövheim 2013:49).

5. Conclusion

In facilitating this conversation on the portrait of a digital Jesus, as portrayed in the Twittersphere, the following markers for orientation seem to be noteworthy:

The recognition of authority on Twitter is important in negotiating a position of normativity. Cheong (2014:13) indicated that religious authority

is communicatively constituted and emergent "through the construction of new sacred texts and norms of credibility in social media sites." However, this authority arises from and is further supported by an already high offline presence. This acquired authority coming from an offline world is endorsed through the number of followers, as well as through messages being retweeted and liked. The retweet function, especially, serves as an important component in establishing and building authority on Twitter (byod,[7] Golder & Lotan 2010: e-source). The retweet and like functions on Twitter provide for a creative way in further enforcing the impact of a specific message, contributing to the creation of a specific normativity within an online community. It is also through the character of social media, in which connectivity is emphasised, that community is created. Within this online community, aspects of normativity are negotiated by traditional sources of Christianity, among others. This perspective concurs with the following important reflection by Campbell and Garner (2016: e-source):

> We argue that careful attention to how religion is seen online can teach us about how people's faith is manifested and informed by the structures and culture of network society in general. It also reveals the specific way new media technologies may shape the practices of people of faith and reflect changing assumptions about the nature of our spiritual lives.

In further investigating the way in which "making sense of Jesus" is expressed on Twitter, it would appear that a strong emphasis on individuality, and an intimate personal understanding, are both associated with the name, Jesus. Except for the emphasis on a personal relationship with Jesus, authors also elaborated on the implication of the message, by including aspects of purpose and destiny as outcomes of this relationship and discipleship.

This aspect is further emphasised when focusing on the fact that this concerns specifically a relationship with Jesus and not so much a religious affiliation. This communicates a definite "espoused theology" (Cameron *et al.* 2010:54) that voices specific theological presuppositions. The latter appears to be particularly popular in conservative-evangelical and Pentecostal traditions, but is also read and spread by Christians from other traditions.

7 The author prefers her name and surname not to be capitalised.

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Chapter 11

What has Tshwane to do with Copenhagen? Groping for an embodied Christology with Tinyiko Maluleke

Jakub Urbaniak[1]

1. Introduction

Making sense of Jesus, in a way that does not help us to make sense of our shared life in South Africa today, does not make sense to me. This is my personal view which expresses my commitment to doing Christology which, itself, is both engaged and prophetic (Urbaniak 2016a). I begin by spelling it out, so that it may serve as both the self-corrective and the ultimate measure of the success or the failure of what I intend to posit here.

Like other authors, I have been invited to "probe innovative avenues in Christology ("making sense of Jesus") in the light of many new social and cultural sensibilities and novel disciplinary developments."[2] My own modest contribution to this initiative will consist of facilitating an improvised dialogue, between Tinyiko Maluleke's African Jesus and the Christ of deep incarnation. Why these two?

Put briefly, I believe that our South African debates on the decolonisation of the mind and of social structures need to incorporate an environmental dimension to no lesser degree than the global ecological movement is in need of grounding

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2 See the introduction to this volume.

its agenda in the social contexts of exclusion, not the least of which are those of structural racism, sexism and xenophobia – areas in which South Africa still, sadly, champions. Regarding this mutual conversation between the global and the local, the universal and the particular, deep Christology and African Christologies alike have a significant contribution to make.[3] And they can bring more to the table, I will argue, while in dialogue.

This chapter is organised into three sections. I begin by briefly introducing both Maluleke's Christological approach and the deep Christology approach. My focus here is on showing how the former is informed by, and resonates with, the "new social and cultural sensibilities" in South Africa, while the latter exemplifies "novel disciplinary developments" in global theology and science.[4] The middle section is dedicated to a constructive Christologising at the crossroads of the global and the local. In the final section, I take a step backwards to ask about the specific historical conditions from which these two interpretative encounters with Jesus have emerged.

2. Between Tshwane and Copenhagen

No one who lives in South Africa, in the age of fallism, can deny that our cultural sensibilities are being shaped today in great measure by the "decolonisation narrative". Whether one likes it or not, #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall, "Open Stellenbosch", the ANC's recent (pre-election) attempts to hijack the EFF's revolutionary postulates regarding land redistribution without compensation, the "public lynching" of Helen Zille, after her suggestion that "colonialism was not only negative", the growing academic awareness of the need to decolonise the curricula and the very systems of knowledge in which they are grounded (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Zondi 2016),[5] – all that bear witness to the fact that the

3 In a sense, this project takes over from where my 2016 study on "What makes Christology in a post-apartheid South Africa engaged and prophetic?", also published in *UFS Theological Explorations*, ended (Urbaniak 2016a). This is why I do not spend much time here explaining my choice of Maluleke as a conversation partner for the Deep Incarnation theologians.

4 These words were used in the invitation to this research project.

5 These themes were discussed, among other occasions, at the conference titled "Decolonising knowledge, power and being", which was held at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, from 9 to 20 January 2017.

(long overdue) quest to discover what it means to be African in a post-colonial South Africa, alongside black Africans' determination to take ownership of their lives and become agents of political-economic change, has become the main driving force behind the cultural and social transition, currently at stake.

Among theological approaches developed in democratic South Africa, few could claim to reflect the kairotic commitment to the context and the critical-subversive edge, inherent in the prophetic tradition of the black theology of liberation, to the extent found in Maluleke's work. Currently, Maluleke is based at the University of Pretoria, City of Tshwane, which he joined in 2014. Maluleke is also an influential academic and political commentator, critical of the current government and especially of President Jacob Zuma. He has published numerous opinion pieces on various educational, social and political issues affecting South African society. Glimpses of his theological thinking can also be found in those popular articles. Personally, I like to think of them, collectively, as a form of ordinary theology, accessible to all.

In his Christologising, Maluleke insists over and over again that Africa, its culture, its (pre-colonial) past and present, as well as all its peoples, must be taken seriously as a valid and creative "host" and "container" of Christ (Maluleke 1994:62). This emphasis, I believe, inscribes itself perfectly into the prevalent social and cultural sensibilities fuelled by the "decolonisation discourse" which is carried out, with better or worse results, on so many levels of public life in our country. In some of Maluleke's writings, arguments are framed explicitly within the (de)colonial discourse (2000b; 2003; 2007), whereas in others, he rather speaks about "Africanisation", "liberation", "rediscovering the agency of Africans", etc. (2000c; 2004; 2005; 2010). These are organically connected in his reflection with the issues of inculturation, contextualisation and, not least, incarnation (1994; 1997; 2000a).

On the one hand, Maluleke is aware that many, globally and locally alike, still fail or resist to acknowledge Africa and Africanness as a legitimate "host" for Christ. On the other hand, Maluleke's multi-faceted reflection on African appropriations of Jesus to be found in the "hidden transcripts" (Scott 1990:4-5) of African Christians, demonstrates that African Christianity has already become an African religion in its own right (Maluleke 2005:123). Africans have not waited for official permission from their white masters, whether in their churches or in the public square, "to try to speak and confess Jesus Christ" and to "celebrate salvation in

Jesus" in a way that represents them and in a way in which they perceive it (Lubala 1998, quoted in Maluleke 2000a:83). In brief, Africans have not waited for official permission to embody faith in Jesus "brought by the missionaries" in their own cultures. Thus, in his quest for an embodied Christology, Maluleke acknowledges that *it is already there*: Among other places, in the liturgies of African indigenous churches where Christ truly becomes and is worshipped as the healer, liberator, ancestor, mediator, elder brother, the crucified one, head and master of initiation, the Black Messiah, etc. (Maluleke 1994:57)

Maluleke's work consists of more than merely identifying such *loci theologici* as African Christologies in their own right – in which task his famous proficiency in most of the official South African languages and a background in missiology certainly come in handy. It also goes beyond underlining their significance for understanding African Christianity (Maluleke 2010:379). Based on his reading of the signs of the times (sought notably among the black, poor and marginalised Christians), Maluleke does what the Kairos theologians did in the mid-1980s and what every liberation theology worth its name does: He creatively articulates people's Christologies as prophetic Christology, and he does so – in my view – without betraying their original spirit, without sanitising and domesticating them, which means also without taming the woundedness and anger so often inherent in them (Urbaniak 2017:31).

From Tshwane we move north to Copenhagen where the idea of deep incarnation was born. Its father and main protagonist, Niels Gregersen from the Copenhagen theological school, admits that he coined the term almost in passing, as part of a theological response to the problem of evolutionary suffering (Gregersen 2001:193; 2016:1-2). And yet looking through the 2015 publication edited by Gregersen and titled *Incarnation: On the scope and depth of Christology* (Gregersen 2015d), one will immediately realise that the present-day reflection centred on the notion of "deep incarnation" amounts to nothing less than a nuanced, original, cutting-edge, multi- and cross-disciplinary discourse carried out by leading theologians, philosophers and scientists committed to rethinking Christology in a contemporary age.

Even though the term "deep incarnation" remains central for the (self-) identification of this fairly new Christological trajectory/school, other terms have been also used by its proponents. For instance, Elizabeth Johnson introduced a broader notion of "deep Christology" (Johnson 2015) which

embraces both "deep incarnation" and "deep resurrection" – the latter phrase has been coined by Johnson herself as a correlate to Gregersen's "deep incarnation" (Johnson 2014:207-210; Gregersen 2016:4). "Christic paradigm" (McFague1993:162-78) is another term that shows "family resemblances" with the proposal of "deep incarnation" (Johnson 2014:199-206).

As I refer in this study to the "deep incarnation theologians", it should be made clear that even those who directly contributed to the development and elaboration of this Christological proposal are not united or organised into any formal school of thought. They come from various disciplinary and denominational backgrounds and differ significantly in their respective interpretations of incarnation. What they have in common is the conviction that God's incarnation in Jesus Christ extends into the whole fabric of physical and biological creation (Gregersen 2016:2). In the incarnation, Jesus' body becomes not only an "exemplar of humanity", but also an "instantiation of the 'frail flesh' of biological creatures" (Gregersen 2014:344) and all physical matter.

The insight which underlies the proposal of deep incarnation is by no means a new one. Already the Church Fathers had developed a profound cosmic Christology, whereby the divine Logos was seen as present in the world of creation before and after the advent of Christ (Gregersen 2015a:7).[6] In more recent times Bonhoeffer pointed out that the space-time continuum belongs not only to the humanity of Christ, but also to the very definition of his divinity (Bonhoeffer 2009:45-46), thus articulating a central tenet of what is known today as deep incarnation (Gregersen 2015c:364). What is then truly novel about the proposal of deep incarnation is, in my view, its twofold grounding, in Christian tradition and in present-day science, and the radical way in which it articulates the ecological implications of the belief that Jesus "immersed himself into the grains of creation and into the biological conditions that humankind shares with other life-forms" (Gregersen 2013:253-254).

Regarding the twofold grounding, Gregersen asks,

6 For instance, "[I]n Athanasius, the Logos assumes not just an individual body but the material world *in extenso*, which already bears the marks of the presence of the divine Logos" (Gregersen 2015c:369; see also Athanasius, *De incarnatione verbi* 17). Ambrose of Milan, in turn, boldly preached that "in Christ's resurrection the earth itself arose" (*Patrologia Latina* 16:1354).

> What does the incarnation in Christ have to do with the world of star formations, animal suffering, and the restless productivity in nature, as we have come to know cosmic and biological evolution from the sciences? (Gregersen 2015a:3)

Elizabeth Johnson's book *Ask the beasts: Darwin and the God of love*, published in 2014, serves as a case in point. Johnson examines Darwin's work against the backdrop of Christian Trinitarian faith. She offers an unparalleled synthesis of scientific and theological ideas, which converge on a number of essential points, notably the universal interconnectedness of all life and flesh (Johnson 2014:121; 196). Apart from biological and physical evolution, which occupies a central position in the proposal of deep incarnation, there are a number of other scientific perspectives which inform it in various ways (see, *inter alia*, Russell 2015; Peacocke 2014; Gregersen 2014; Gregersen & Görman 2007).

With regard to the far-reaching eco-theological implications of deep incarnation, suffice it to say that if Jesus as God's Word/Sophia is indeed "part of the vast body of the cosmos" (Johnson 2014:196), then it is Jesus' extended body, his social and cosmic body, that humans violate as they abuse their natural environment and exploit the poor of the earth. In Johnson's phrase, "How tragic is when human action shatters and destroys the flesh that the Word became!" (Johnson 2015:140). From a theological perspective, it is hard to imagine a more radical ground for an "ecological conversion" (*Laudato Si* §216-221).

Thus the proposal of deep incarnation indeed stands as a noteworthy example of a multi- and cross-disciplinary novel development which comes at the "time of awesome discoveries about the universe" that paradoxically "occur in tandem with massive damage at human hands to Earth's fabric of life" (Johnson 2015:133).

3. Extending and locating Jesus' body: A Christology of radical embodiment

Now it is time to ask, what has Tshwane to do with Copenhagen?

In a sense, I believe that the notion of "radical embodiment" (or rather the reality of "radical embodiment") lies at the heart of both the Christ of deep incarnation and the African Jesus of Maluleke. Put crudely, while the deep incarnation theologians extend Jesus' body into social and cosmic bodies,

Maluleke locates Jesus' body in the bodies of his fellow Africans. Both these Christological moves – I want to argue – are manifestations, albeit in a different sense, of a radical embodiment.

3.1 All flesh, social and cosmic, as Jesus' extended body

"Deep Christology" sees incarnation as "a divine assumption of the full ecospace of the material world of creation" (Gregersen 2016:1). Johnson adapts a Christological expression from Gregersen: "If this is God, then thus is God". If Jesus is God-with-us, then his life, death, and life again "carry a precious disclosure about how incomprehensible holy Mystery, whom no one has seen or can see, relates to the world" (Johnson 2014:199).

Jesus' own body can be seen as distinct yet not separate from his extended body, both social and cosmic. Gregersen suggests that Luke's Gospel portrays Jesus as the accommodating body:

> In all four Gospels Jesus is not understood as a person in the modern sense, that is, as a psychological individual. An *in-dividuum* (in Greek, *a-tomos*) means something indivisible, whereas Jesus becomes precisely what he is in the exchanges with others than himself. The landscapes he crosses, the people he meets, the religious culture he both embraces and oversteps belong to Jesus' body, just as his body cannot be understood without either God's Spirit animating him or without his relationship to his heavenly Father, whom he addresses in prayer and whose will he seeks to understand (Gregersen 2012:234-5).

Thus, by looking at Jesus' body against the backdrop of his life and ministry, Gregersen points out that it "not only moves in time and space but is moved and transformed by whom and what Jesus meets and is met by" (Gregersen 2012:235). However, the mystery of Jesus' extended body can be fully grasped only through the double lens of the incarnation and the resurrection. In the Christ-event – from cave to cross and resurrection – God has entered "into the sphere of the materially vulnerable and mortal to shed light on all from within" (Johnson 2015:134). Rahner famously noted that "the statement of God's *incarnation* – of his (*sic*) becoming material – is the most basic statement of christology" (Rahner 1975:175). But it is only in his resurrection that "Jesus' body has become accessible *worldwide*" (Gregersen 2012:242). This is the ultimate ramification of what Johnson labelled "deep resurrection" (Johnson 2014:209).

Jesus' body appears as extraordinarily open, not only in relation to God and Jesus' fellow humans, but also to sensitive creatures ("sparrows" and "foxes"), whose pains he himself has experienced, to all biological life-forms ("grass" and "lilies"), whose fate he himself has shared and ennobled, and ultimately to matter as such ("all flesh"), whose material conditions of creaturely existence he himself has conjoined (Gregersen 2015b:225-226; see also Gregersen 2012:239). "Transformed from a biological, cultural body into an extended body – a kind of body-fellowship" (Gregersen 2012:243), Jesus' body can be now seen not only as a hermeneutical key to social bodies and cosmic matter, but indeed as the most elementary "eschatological material" of all flesh (Urbaniak & Otu 2016:3).

3.2 Jesus' body located in broken African bodies

What drives Maluleke's fragmentary and often informal Christological reflection is, ultimately, his desire to bring Jesus home, to enable his fellow Africans to see Jesus as near and accessible, and at the same time to make Jesus feel at home among Africans. By doing so he does not fight against the natural religious and theological instincts of African people. On the contrary, he recognises affinity between Jesus and ordinary Africans as something constitutive of both their religious experience and theological appropriations of Jesus, and gives it a more mature Christological expression.

African lay-preaching, testimony-giving, singing and spontaneous liturgies are good illustrations of an embodied grassroots Christologising. Far from a cerebral exercise, these are indeed all about an embodied experience. For instance, in the common practice of "shared-preaching" not only ministers' but also congregants' bodies are "overtaken" by Jesus' Spirit and

> even the quietest, most illiterate people, suddenly have the courage and the wisdom to speak and speak sense ... In them you see Jesus in earnest, speaking out forcefully, gesturing, crying, jumping up and down and sometimes even fainting in the process (Maluleke 1997:25).

Through such Christologising African Christians express their self-identification with Jesus and paradoxically, at the same time, their belief in the integral otherness of Jesus (Maluleke 1997:20-24; 2000a:83-93). Maluleke traces both trajectories in the hidden transcripts of African Christianity, notably in the popular choruses sung in many local churches. "Grass-root

African Christianity," he comments, "harbours a dialectic of identification and non-identification with the suffering ... Christ" (Maluleke 2000a:93).

While this dialectic should be kept in mind, it does not diminish the fundamental feature of African Christology, which is lived by millions of Africans in their daily experience, namely the awareness that their bodies *embody* Jesus' body (Maluleke 2000a:87). Ultimately, what allows Africans to experience Jesus as someone tangible and approachable, from whom power can be derived and requested (Maluleke 1997:22), someone who is keen to enter their world, with all its joys and unsolved problems, is his own brokenness. This is what they truly have in common. It is Jesus' brokenness that makes him most intimately close and familiar to African people (Maluleke 1997:20-24; 2000a:83-93). Maluleke refers to Mofokeng's account of the revival night vigils on Good Friday in South African black churches, whereby the lure of Christ's passion among black believers is linked to (and explained by) the *pathos* of their own lives (Malukeke 2000a:84):

> Jesus is being tortured, abused and humiliated in their presence and in their time. In fact it is their own painful life story that they are reliving and narrating ... They are hanging on the cross as innocent victims of white evil forces. Jesus' cry of abandonment is their own daily cry (Mofokeng 1983:27-28).

This account illustrates accurately, I believe, my point about locating Jesus' body, particularly Jesus' broken body, in the bodies of his African followers. What has to be underlined once again is that before such move occurs Christologically, as it does in the theological reflection of Maluleke, it first happens on the experiential level – in the lived faith of the millions of "African cross-bearers". It is this affinity between their daily experience and that of Jesus' cross that becomes a departure point for prophetic Christologising, like the one exemplified by Maluleke (2000a:85).

3.3 Convergences, tensions and the scandal of reciprocity

Apart from many obvious overlaps, there are at least three significant points of convergence between the proposal of deep incarnation and the Christological approach of Maluleke of which I want to take note, none of which appears as evident.

First, I venture to suggest that, in principle, Maluleke would agree with the deep incarnation theologians that there is some sort of connection between the enfleshing of the divine Logos/Sophia and the need for our human solidarity with all flesh. It is in his brief popular article published in *Mail & Guardian* in 2015 that Maluleke challenges the stereotype according to which it is unAfrican, especially for an African male, to care about creatures such as dogs. He discloses the falsity of the claim that loving other species, like canines, is at odds with loving *homo sapiens* – as if the two kinds of love were exclusive and competing with one another. And perhaps most tellingly, he identifies his ecological stance as "the confessions of an African who is rediscovering his *African roots*" (Maluleke 2015).

Second, what underlies both perspectives, it seems to me, is the basic conviction about the mutual relatedness and interdependence of humanity and its natural environment (ecospace/land). Or put differently, the interconnectedness between social and cosmic bodies (deep Christology), or between African bodies and the land they inhabit (African worldview). What African land on a micro level is for African people, earth on a macro level is for humankind. Whether one looks at it from a local or from a planetary perspective, what is at stake is – in Johnson's words – "the biophysical world of which human beings are a part and on which their existence depends" (Johnson 2015:140). In Christological terms, it comes down to the fundamental belief in Jesus' bodily presence, and indeed participation, in the *oikos*, the household that God intimately shares not only with humanity but with all flesh, interconnected and interdependent as it is. While deep Christology focuses on the environmental dimension of this participation, African Christologies emphasise the cultural one.

Third, deep and African Christologies converge with regard to their understanding of the most intimate relationship between the crucified Jesus and other broken bodies. Let me suggest here a Christological formula which could be agreeable to both positions while allowing them to hold to their respective emphases: If through incarnation in Jesus God reveals Godself as enfleshed, universally, in all bodies, through Jesus' cross God reveals Godself as enfleshed, particularly, in broken bodies.

Against the backdrop of the one-sided focus of Western theological tradition on the cross as an instrument of salvation/redemption from sins (understood in an individualistic moralist framework), deep Christology's quest to expand

the traditional *theologia crucis* so as to include animal pain and human suffering which "cannot be explained by reference to human sin, and therefore cannot be reduced to social injustice" (Gregersen 2001:201), is not only understandable but indeed praiseworthy. Similarly, in light of the universalising tendencies of the hegemonic Christian narratives that see Jesus' death as reconciling all without any differentiation, one can appreciate the critique of the black theology of liberation, among others, which points to

> the tension between justice (for the poor) and forgiveness (for the perpetrators of poverty) – a tension between God's "preferential option for the poor" and God's preferential option for all of humanity and all of creation (Maluleke 2000a:88).

Or to put it in the language used here, the tension between Jesus' embodiment in all flesh and his embodiment in broken African bodies. That through Jesus' cross everything, without any differentiation, has been universally reconciled with God is not sufficient ground for building a sustainable culture of reconciliation in a continent where economic racism persists ensuring that the "white minority remains the richest and most powerful group, [where] the ethnocentricity (together with all its antecedents) has led to the many internecine wars and genocide", [etc.] (Maluleke 2000a:92). To use a somewhat crude analogy, the universal claim that "all lives matter" (as opposed to "black lives matter"), as true as it may be, does not prove helpful in the context where it is black lives, above others, that are being treated like a commodity.

The most evident tensions between the Christ of deep incarnation and the African Jesus of Maluleke can be captured in the form of the following juxtapositions:

a. Recognising Jesus, and his specific call, in the Kairos ("the favourable time in which God issues a challenge to decisive action"[7]) v. recognising Jesus in the whole fabric of physical and biological creation (ecospace);

b. Underlining the need for the appropriation of Jesus in cultural terms v. emphasising the eco-ethical dimension of incarnation with its practical implications for the natural environment;

7 This is how the *Kairos* is understood in the *Kairos Document* (1985: chapter one).

c. Focusing on the affinity between the crucified Jesus with the African cross-bearers (victims of moral evil) v. focusing on the pre-moral principle that explains the hardship of evolutionary processes (animal pain and human suffering as part of the natural order).

All these, essentially, reflect the fundamental dialectic between the universal and the particular, which is constitutive of Christian faith, as such. It is worth underscoring that both deep incarnation theologians, and Maluleke, are aware of the role of this dialectic in their respective Christological approaches, and neither of the two perspectives aims simply to overemphasise one dimension to the detriment of the other. Rather, each of them, in its own way, sees the particular and the universal as belonging together. However, Maluleke's radically contextual and prophetic stance entails a multi-faceted critique of the universalistic tendencies which characterise the hegemonic theological narratives imposed on African Christianity (Maluleke 2011:84; see also Urbaniak 2016b:513-516).

In a broader sense, what we touch upon here is the threefold scandalon of particularity which permeates the New Testament's Christology, namely that of materiality, suffering and uniqueness (Gregersen 2015a:4). In this sense, a radical embodiment of Jesus can be considered as the pivotal point in this Christological perspective, whereby the particular (especially in the form of the scandal of materiality) and the universal (the belief that in the incarnation Jesus' body has been extended into social and cosmic bodies alike) come together. African Christologies, like other contextual and liberationist theological approaches around the globe, have reconsidered the same triple scandal of particularity *prophetically* by locating the particular in their own socio-cultural contexts, and (while not plainly denying) by "keeping in check" the universal. Thus, in African appropriations of Jesus, his own broken body is being located in the broken bodies of his African followers.

However, there is a certain "twist" to an African Jesus, which makes him quite unique when compared to the Christ of deep incarnation and other Christological perspectives (at least those born in the northern hemisphere). I will call it the scandal of reciprocity. In a nutshell, not only Jesus' body is extended into all flesh, including African bodies (deep Christology), and not only is it located in African bodies in a particular way (my reading of Maluleke's Christological insights), but African bodies also actively *enflesh* the body of Jesus. That is to say, through their own embodied experience Africans not only

participate in but also contribute to God's bodily presence in the world. This is how I understand the mutuality inherent in the African appropriations of Jesus.

Maluleke articulates a similar insight when he describes an African Jesus as someone approachable, someone who can be "taunted" into action (Maluleke 1997:21-22), and not least, as someone whom "Africans are taking ... by the hand, teaching ... a few African 'moves' and sensitising ... to local issues and conditions" (Maluleke 1997:27). I find particularly compelling the intentionality with which Maluleke, in his own Christologising, builds upon and gives a mature, prophetic expression to the experiential reality which he finds in African people's attitude towards Jesus. Thanks to his theological work, one can see the traces and the glimpses of this scandal of reciprocity in African theologies of the cross, the African approach to preaching, traditional choruses, and so on.

4. Battle Christologies: What embodies an African Jesus and why does it matter?

To close the loop, I want to underline the importance of probing the dynamics of power and difference, inherent in the cultural appropriations of Jesus, like deep Christology and African Christologies.

Gregersen makes a useful distinction between anthropocentric and anthropogenic frames of reference (Gregersen 2016:3). That an anthropocentric understanding of humanity and the world is problematic and, indeed, detrimental from an ecological perspective (among others), goes without saying. Nonetheless, Gregersen rightly points out that all human thinking is unavoidably anthropogenic, that is, always starting out from a human point of view (Gregersen 2016:3).

I want to suggest, analogically, that one should distinguish between Afrocentric and Afrogenic frames of reference with regard to African people and their own attempts at "making sense of Jesus." *Mutatis mutandis*, the former must be deemed to be at least unhelpful and, at worst, divisive – as much in Christology as in other domains, while the latter should be considered not only natural and legitimate, but also incarnational in the most literal sense of the word. A potential danger, inherent in a narrow-minded Christological Afrocentrism, basically consists of the possibility of essentialising the Africanness or blackness of Jesus. It is one thing to locate Jesus' body in black African bodies, and it is

another thing to claim that this is where it belongs, exclusively. What protects African Christologies from such a parochial Afrocentrism is the belief that "all human beings are alike in being less than Jesus. But equally all are alike bearers of the image of God" (Maluleke 2000a:87; see also Tutu 1999:11, 34ff.).

In a purely descriptive sense, Christologising within an Afrogenic frame of reference means that, while appropriating Jesus, Africans start out from an African point of view – this is simply how things have always been, are and will be. Of course, other viewpoints, not seldom marked by political and economic agendas, were imposed on them from the very dawn of the Christianisation of their world. Thus the highly controversial role of missionaries, merchants and colonialists, in "bringing Christ to Africa", has rightly found itself under investigation by historians and theologians alike, as a part of a de-colonial project in our day. To put it more constructively, appropriating Jesus within an Afrogenic frame of reference can be equated with what I described elsewhere as doing Christology which is both engaged and prophetic (Urbaniak 2016a:136). In brief, an Afrogenic Christology, aware of its prophetic calling, will challenge the existing status quo whenever it does not adhere to the vision of a shared life, grounded in the values of God's reign and, especially, where power is abused, where the poor are exploited and where the vulnerable are marginalised and sinned against (Vellem 2010:5; Koopman 2008:251; Maluleke 2000c:30).

Telling, in this context, is Maluleke's insight that Africans do not enter the struggle against dehumanisation as healthy warriors who are ready for battle, but rather as wounded souls at the risk of further injury (Maluleke 2016). Any theology, which does not take this condition of an "African soul" into consideration, is likely to contribute to disembodying ("voiding of flesh") rather than embodying ("filling with flesh") the faith of African people, that is, making it abstract, alien and, ultimately, irrelevant to their lives. As Maluleke stresses, "[F]or centuries both African religion and African culture have been weapons of resistance as well as arenas of the battle for the soul of Africa(ns) in the military, spiritual and cultural assault on *Africanness*" (Maluleke 2016). This is why, I believe, the African appropriations of Jesus, as diverse as they are, can essentially be seen as "battle Christologies".[8] Put negatively, in contrast to Christological traditions

8 From a methodological perspective, this resulted not only in the radically contextual and praxis-oriented approach of African Christologies, but also in a "methodological restlessness", i.e. an ongoing concern with issues of method, theory and ideology. Maluleke

developed in the West (here used as a "cultural", not a "geographical" category), African theologians never had the luxury of being able to reflect on Jesus in the neat and stable circumstances of ecclesiastic, monastic or academic life. Theirs has always been the path of appropriating Jesus in the battlefield, while facing an oppressor and while fighting the battle for the soul of Africa(ns), the battle against dehumanisation.

Needless to say, Western Christianity has been anything but uniform in its interpretations of the Christ-event. Within its extremely rich tradition of Christologising, there are a number of trajectories, which – like African "battle Christologies" – have their own historical and cultural origins, as well as specific thematic foci and methodological approaches related to the circumstances in which they were born and developed. The major historical contributors to the Christological tradition of the West include a "council Christology",[9] a "rivalry Christology",[10] a "pulpit Christology",[11] a "lab Christology"[12] as well as the "minority reports", such as a "mystical Christology"[13] and a "victims' Christology."[14]

interprets this feature of South African black theology as something positive. It is, in his view, the complexity of challenges faced by a theology whose project is "comprehensive liberation" in the South African context that demanded (and still demands) keeping vigilant theoretical focus (Maluleke 2005:117-118; see also Maluleke 1995:22-23).

9 This type of Christology fed the official church doctrine; it can be exemplified by the Christological debates regarding the two natures in Christ and the like, that took place during the first centuries of the Common Era.

10 Often having an apologetic edge, this type of Christology can be exemplified by the post-Reformation controversies around the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

11 With its diverse strands, it can be exemplified by Christological themes such as *theologia crucis* found in the great preachers of the church from St John Chrysostom to John Wesley.

12 This type of Christology can be exemplified by the neo-scholastic practice of "manualist theology", often based on biblical text-proofing, for instance, with regard to the speculation on the intertrinitarian relations, which used to be carried out, completely apart from any reference to God's salvation-historical activity, through Jesus Christ and the Spirit (Grenz 2002:39).

13 This trajectory can be exemplified by Julian of Norwich's visions or "showings".

14 Among the "victims' Christologies" developed in more recent times, two examples stand out; the first one is the Jesus of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the second one is the Jesus of liberation theologians.

Unlike "battle Christologies", born out of brokenness due to a persistent dehumanisation and an equally persistent resistance in the face of the oppressors/powerholders, these Western Christologies were, for the most part, coined by the privileged members of the society, namely clergy and scholars who were, needless to say, almost exclusively male and white. As such, the Western interpreters of Jesus enjoyed, depending on historical and cultural circumstances, a lesser or greater level of economic and political stability, access to intellectual and other resources, and not seldom the support of the institutions of which they were members – be it ecclesiastical (like monasteries or religious orders) or secular (like universities). These factors have to be taken into consideration while accounting for the unmatched proliferation and diversity of the Western Christological tradition. But the same factors must be kept in mind while critically probing its limitations. Indeed, all too often the forms of Christianity that, throughout the ages, gave birth to the hegemonic Christological narratives, fell prey to a "widespread institutionalisation and co-optation ... by dominant economic and political forces in the West" (Heyward 1999:xi).

This study sought to demonstrate that the present-day African Christologies (such as the one by Maluleke) may benefit from listening to and engaging with their Western counterparts (like the "deep voices" from the North) and *vice versa*. But I want to argue that, here, on a more fundamental level, it is theologians who represent the Western Christological tradition, including local South African academics who deliberately inscribe themselves in that tradition (notably "public theologians"), that can learn from an engagement with African "battle Christologies". I refer to nothing less than the *modus operandi* of the African appropriations of Jesus. In essence, "battle Christologies" are concomitant of Jesus' own life. His was the life of solidarity with the victims of oppression and misfortune, of brokenness and rejection, but also of resistance and struggle against the hypocrisy of the religious establishment and social injustice. Jesus proclaimed God's reign, not from the position of privilege and power, but from that of the simplicity of a life in the service of others and the powerlessness of the cross. Above all, the affinity between the brokenness of Jesus Christ and the brokenness of African people – not as a neat metaphor for their existential situation, but as a daily reality, experienced in their black bodies for almost four centuries – is what qualifies African Christologies, what gives them right to bring the category of "radical embodiment" to the very heart of theological reflection on Jesus Christ.

A caveat should be made at this point. What I describe, here, as "battle Christologies", "affinity in brokenness" (between Jesus and his followers), etc., must not be essentialised as something uniquely and exclusively African. It is the scale and duration of the suffering of African people alongside their persistent, bold, ironic and astounding belief that it is Jesus who is being crucified in their bodies, "this stubborn insistence that God's image resides in this [God-forsaken] Africa" (Maluleke 2000a:83-84), that compels one to pay due attention to African "battle Christologies". But at the same time, one should not forget that "African cross-bearers"' – that is, those who live their embodied faith in Jesus on the underside of history – are to be found in all times and places.

On the one hand, the scandal of reciprocity, which I described as a characteristic feature of an African Jesus, implies that the hardships of all flesh should never be allowed to belittle the unique affinity between Jesus and Africans who do not only identify themselves with the crucified, but also *enflesh* his body in theirs. On the other hand, the deep incarnation theologians will be right to keep us mindful of the organic connection between social injustice and ecological devastation, both of which contribute to the cross carried by those most vulnerable, including our planet.

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Making sense of Jesus is comprised of twelve chapters of a Christological nature, which are the result of a multidisciplinary theological research project. The aim of this book is to ascertain how, in the current cultural situation, an encounter with Jesus is determined by specific historical and personal conditions, and what the consequences of such an encounter may be. The book is divided into two parts, the first of which contains research that deals with encounters, mediated by New Testament and historical studies, while the second is dedicated to contemporary and constructive issues of a cultural, technological, moral and existential nature. The basic approach of the research, and that of this publication, is not to continue conventional Christology, but to generate new knowledge therein. In this approach, issues are raised and questions are asked which, while both inspiring and unsettling, no serious academic can afford to ignore.

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