

The Divine Sabotage: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Ecclesiastes 3¹

by Dan Lioy²

Abstract³

The author uses the concept of the “divine sabotage” as a starting point for an exegetical and theological study of Ecclesiastes 3. He notes that on the one hand, God has “set eternity in the human heart” (v. 11). Yet, on the other hand, “no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end”. The author explains that God has imposed limitations on the human race that *undermine* their efforts to look beyond the present—especially to understand the past and probe into the future. Expressed differently, because people are creatures of time, their heavenly-imposed finitude *subverts* their ability to fathom the eternal plan of God. An objective, balanced, and affirming examination of Solomon’s treatise indicates that the fundamental quality of life is defined by revering God and heeding His commandments (cf. 12:13).

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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1. Introduction

The idea for the title of this essay comes from Roland Murphy's discussion of Ecclesiastes 3:11 (1987:256; 1992:39). The verse states that God has "set eternity in the human heart, yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end".⁴ Murphy explains that God has placed within people an awareness of "the timeless", namely, a "sense of duration". Yet, He also prevents people "from understanding what [He] is about in all the key undertakings of life". This is a "case of divine sabotage" in which humanity's efforts to look beyond the present—especially to understand the past and probe into the future—are subverted by numerous heavenly-imposed limitations.

Seow (1997:173) remarked that "God is responsible for giving both time and eternity, and the human being is caught in the tension between the two". In a similar vein, Bridges (1860:68) observed that people "can neither unravel the thread of [God's] counsels, nor grasp the infinite perfection of his work". Kaiser (1979:60) described the finitude and frustration of human beings in this way: "So vast, so eternal, and so comprehensive in its inclusion is [God's] plan that man is both threatened and exasperated in his attempts to discover it for himself". Williams (1984:257) maintains that God "does not resolve the crisis" for humankind. Instead, He "remains hidden in His person, work, and justice". In light of this dilemma, Lee (2005:121) concluded that "any attempt to strain for the impossible or master the mysterious is destined to lead only to frustration and failure".

Polkinghorne stated in an interview that the "mysterious infinite reality of God cannot be caught within the finite nets of human thinking" (Fitzgerald 2008). Kidner (1976:39) likened the human predicament to the "desperately nearsighted, inching their way along some great tapestry or fresco in the attempt to take it in". People "see enough to recognize something of its quality", yet the "grand design" eludes them, for they "can never stand back far enough to view it as the Creator does, whole and entire" from start to finish. Caneday (1994:103) noted that "man struggles for life and meaning in

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from *Today's New International Version* (hereafter abbreviated, TNIV).

an environment that taunts him with its paradoxes: birth and death, weeping and laughter, love and hate, war and peace, and the like”. This “relentless and inflexible cycle of events extends beyond the grasp of man’s control and understanding”.

Together, the litany of preceding comments paint a rather stark, unsettling picture. When we candidly and objectively look at the facts, we should not be surprised that at times our existence seems vague, incongruous, and antithetical. We are left feeling confused, powerless, and frustrated. As well, somewhere along the way, we begin to ask what life is *really* all about. Solomon (otherwise referred as the Teacher, sage, and Qoheleth), who was Israel’s wisest and most powerful king, also wrestled with these issues, and he recorded his observations and conclusions in the Book of Ecclesiastes.⁵ This essay will consider in part what he had to say by undertaking an exegetical and theological study of chapter 3 of his discourse. Observations and conclusions drawn from it are representative of what is found throughout the philosopher-theologian’s entire treatise.

2. The Lord’s Sovereign Ordering of Life’s Events (Eccl 3:1-8)

Earlier in Ecclesiastes, Solomon noted that life is ephemeral, unreliable, and incomprehensible, especially when divorced from God (cf. 1:1-11). Likewise, true meaning and joy come only from God. In chapter 3, the sage considered the spectrum of life’s activities and events and affirmed that all of them were under God’s sovereign ordering and control (cf. Ps 31:15; Prov 16:1-9). The parallel sentence structure of Ecclesiastes 3:1 indicates that the Hebrew terms rendered “time” and “season” denote a range of human endeavors and situations on earth, all of which are appointed by God to occur at the appropriate moment (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:273, 773). While He has ordained a time for everything, the responsibility of the upright is to seek the Lord’s wisdom so that they might discern what activities go with what seasons.

⁵ This essay holds to the traditional view of the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. Admittedly, it is not imperative to have a definitive identification of the author to understand the message of the book. For a discussion regarding the inspired perspective of Ecclesiastes, see Lioy 2006.

Verses 2-8 list many of the activities that take place “under the heavens” (v. 1). The reader finds here 14 pairs of opposites. In Hebrew speech, the mentioning of opposites together expressed totality (for example, “heaven and earth” stands for all of physical and spiritual reality). Thus, these 14 pairs are meant to be representative of all the activities of life (cf. Glenn 1985:983; Longman 1998:114; Provan 2001:87). Verse 2 opens with the observation that God establishes the time for birth and the time for death. In Qoheleth’s view, God has a plan for one’s arrival on earth, for the living out of one’s temporal existence, and for one’s departure from life. In the previous two chapters, the sage commented on the brevity of life. Ecclesiastes 3:2-8 rounds out his presentation by addressing what comes between birth and death.

In the divine ordering of earthly existence, people take time to plant crops as well as to uproot the same (v. 2). They engage in killing and healing activities, as well as tearing down and building up initiatives (v. 3). These three lines of the poem address creative and destructive endeavors used for either establishing or undermining. For instance, planting seeds and pulling weeds must be done to reap a harvest. The same is true of life in general. Some aspects must be planted and others uprooted if one’s life is to be complete and meaningful.

When Solomon noted that there is a time to kill, he was not condoning premeditated murder. His point was more complex than that. Perhaps he was suggesting that the righteous must wrestle for God’s wisdom during times when they are confronted with aggression. For instance, when is the proper time to resist evil with forcefulness? On the other hand, when is it time to negotiate and seek reconciliation? Of course, there are also times when those who seek to revere and obey God need to tear down negative aspects of their personal lives and times when they need to build up the positive aspects.

Verse 4 moves the reader farther along the path of life’s sovereignly ordered events by mentioning such activities as expressing sorrow and joy, along with mourning and dancing. The Teacher covered the range of human emotions—both private and public—in these two lines of the poem. The Hebrew words translated “weep” and “laugh” indicate expressions of an individual’s emotions (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:113, 987), while the Hebrew verbs translated “mourn” and “dance” indicate expressions of a group’s

emotions (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:704, 955). Put differently, there is a time for an individual to be sad, and a time for that person to be happy. Likewise, there is a time for an individual to join with others in lamenting a loss, and a time for that person to join with others in celebration.

In verse 5, the sage drew attention to throwing away and gathering stones, along with embracing and refraining from doing so. Various interpretations exist of these two lines of the poem, which focus on friendship and enmity. In ancient times, fields taken by enemies were made unproductive by scattering stones across them. Oppositely, stones were gathered from fields as a sign of a community's desire for peace. A different interpretation points to the gathering of stones for use in building a wall to keep out invaders. In contrast, tearing down those stone walls indicated the residents' desire to make peace with their enemies.

According to one view, "a time to embrace" is a call for people of faith to comfort someone who is experiencing pain, grief, or reconciliation; and yet at other times, it is best for the upright to respect a person's privacy, and not to interfere. A second, more literal view places Qoheleth's advice in the context of love and its physical expression between a man and a woman. Thus, there is a time to show affection and a time to refrain from doing so.

Verse 6 reveals that God establishes the time for individuals to search for people and possessions as well as the moment when the latter should be given up as lost. At least a portion of life on earth consists of humanity's concern for accumulating or getting rid of what they own. According to the sage, God bestowed on people special times when they must look long and hard for things, friendships, and goals, and hold on to them when they were acquired; but there are other times when He summons people to give these up.

In verse 7, the Teacher spotlighted times of ripping things up and sewing them together, as well as keeping silent and deciding to speak. The tearing and mending most likely refer to the ancient custom of rending one's clothes in grief. If so, this line of Solomon's poem restates verse 4, in that it shows there is a season to express grief and a season to recover from grief. The second half of verse 7 reminds the reader that communication—a key part of human

existence—is like a two-way street. Thus, there is a time to remain quiet and a time to voice one’s opinion, an interval to listen and an interval to remark.

Verse 8 notes that in the divine ordering of earthly matters, there are times for love and hate, along with seasons for war and peace. Qoheleth recognized that life on earth can hardly resemble what God intended for it when human affections are missing. Indeed, throughout history, the existence of people has been marked by both love and hatred. The sage encouraged his readers to be careful about the times both are exercised. As a king, Solomon understood the necessity of taking account of the political endeavors of his audience. For instance, the same emotions that can give rise to love or hatred in two individuals can also give rise to war or peace in two communities. Furthermore, as history has shown, conflicts will always arise. Sometimes wrong is resisted with force; at other times, peace is the goal.

3. The Decision to Enjoy the Present Amid Life’s Uncertainties and Inequities (Eccl 3:9-22)

The poem recorded in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 leaves the reader with the impression that there is an unmistakable rhythm and order to existence on earth; however, it would be incorrect to conclude from this that everything that occurs in the world is straightforward and predictable. An examination of the first two chapters of Solomon’s treatise indicates that existence is filled with paradoxes and that God oversees the ebb and flow of Creation, even though it remains opaque and cryptic to human beings.

It is understandable why people, in their effort to make sense of life’s enigmas, would ask what advantage or benefit they obtained from their hard work (v. 9). Qoheleth acknowledged the “burden” (v. 10) God has placed on the human race. “Burden” renders the Hebrew noun *‘inyān*,⁶ and also can be translated as “occupation”, “task”, or “job” (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:775). In the present context, this referred to the efforts of people—through theology, philosophy, and science (to name a few disciplines)—to determine on a daily basis where they fit into the divine ordering of life;

⁶ The Hebrew consonantal and vowel transliterations used in this essay conform to those found in Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:xx.

however, this search for meaning only ends in frustration, for people constantly discover anew that the whole picture of life on planet Earth eludes them.

Theology may be defined as the study of the metaphysical—including the nature of God, the content of religious belief, and the character / conduct of religious practice—done through an examination of revelation, Scripture, personal experience, and culture. Philosophy may be defined as the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, done primarily through speculative means (rather than empirical methods). Science may be defined as the investigation of physical reality, done through a complex interplay of theory, observation, and experimentation (cf. Baker 2007:153-172; O'Brien, 2007:59-67; Orr 2006:437-442; Scott 2001; Willard 1994).

Even the sharpest minds remain ignorant of God's providence. Rather than become endlessly preoccupied with trying to discern the latter, Solomon affirmed that God has beautifully orchestrated everything to occur at precisely the right moment. The king also acknowledged that God has "set eternity in the human heart" (v. 11). Expressed differently, the Creator has made people with a deep-seated, inborn awareness of "God's ways in the world" that transcends the present and impels them to comprehend how the past, present, and future all fit together (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush 1996:816).

Krüger (2004:87) thinks the Hebrew noun *'ôlām*, which is rendered "eternity", denotes a "concept or idea of 'distant time' that extends far beyond the life of an individual human being in the direction of either the past or the future or both" (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:761). Despite each generation's stellar intellectual abilities and attainments, people remain largely ignorant of what God has foreordained. They are even unable to fathom the nature and timing of events during the course of their individual lives. Incredibly, no one is "privy to the designs of this inscrutable God, and cannot predict the consequences of human works" (Ranger 1989:2). This impasse is a prime example of divine sabotage.

For a discussion of the overall failure of science, as a discipline, to recognize God as the primary agent or cause behind the ordering and coherence of the

universe, cf. Pretorius 2007. The author notes that science is able to “argue what reality is from as many realms and ideas” as it chooses; yet this hypothesising is based on a “limited understanding of how the cosmos was formed”. In contrast, the Judeo-Christian Scripture “widens the picture”. Specifically, the Bible “gives deeper meaning to the purpose for creation and causes one to search for answers to greater truths than science can produce” (41). In the final analysis, the “theistic world-view” is the “most biblically viable” paradigm “within which reality can be understood” (10). More generally, even the “most major alternate world-views are self-defeating and inadequate” in making sense of existence (both physical and metaphysical). All these constructs (whether philosophical or empirical in character) are unable to “answer questions surrounding humanity’s journey of life and their final destination, life after death” (26).

Such observations notwithstanding, Pretorius affirms that “both science and theology involve themselves in a journey of discovery, both seek answers, and both concern themselves with truth” (12). Furthermore, he maintains that it is possible for “science and theology” to “comfortably work to further each ones’ understanding of reality” (23). Based on the preceding supposition, it seems reasonable to consider “science and religion” as separate and complementary disciplines that “address aspects of human understanding in different ways”. Moreover, “attempts to pit science and religion against each other create controversy where none needs to exist” (National Academy of Sciences and Institute of Medicine 2008:12).

In another study, it was maintained that since the dawn of time, the human drive for life has been checkmated by death (Lioy 2006). Specifically, a biblical-theological examination of Genesis 5 and Ecclesiastes 1 indicates that despite the efforts of people both individually and collectively to extend the realms of human existence, their efforts are ultimately ambushed (in a manner of speaking) by a divinely-imposed termination of life (cf. Pss 2:1-6; 18:25-27; 37:1-40; 75:4-10; 90:3-12; Prov 3:32-35; 10:25; 14:11; Isa 40:5-8, 15-17, 21-24; Dan 2:20-21; 7:9-12; Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5-6; Rev 18:1-24; 19:11-21). Moreover, while each generation appears to be making incremental strides—sometimes even laudable gains—the reality of death neutralizes these advances and in some cases entirely wipes them out. A consideration of 1

Corinthians 15:50-58 informs people of faith that only in the Messiah can work and leisure be enjoyable, beneficial, and fulfilling.

Paul's statements recorded in Romans 1:18-32 draw attention to a circumstance in which the Lord increasingly gives pagan humanity over to the futile outcome of their perverted lifestyles. The apostle began by affirming that God's wrath was being revealed against the wickedness of all those who suppressed the truth (v. 18). This is something that is occurring even now, as people continue to believe their own deceptive hearts. The individuals described in Romans 1 were certainly worthy of God's wrath, for they suppressed divine truth. The latter refers to the character of God and His invisible qualities revealed in creation.

God's eternal power and divine nature are demonstrated through what He has made (vv. 19-20). This is known as natural revelation, for God uses the created order to disclose a part of Himself. Special revelation, in contrast, is the disclosure of God's character through the written words of Scripture. God, who is "spirit" (John 4:24), is invisible (Col. 1:15). Though the physical eye cannot see Him, His existence is reflected in what He has made. Because God has disclosed Himself in creation, all people stand condemned before Him. The condemnation of those who suppress God's truth is justified because ignoring the revelation of God in creation is indefensible.

Romans 1:21-23 indicates that these individuals worshiped the creation instead of the Creator. By seeing the intricate design of the universe, they could clearly understand the nature of God. Instead of glorifying God for His power, they looked for substitutes. In their foolishness they refused to give thanks to God. Their thinking became futile and their hearts were darkened. Because of their idolatry, God abandoned pagan human beings (or "gave them over") to their depravity. Instead of attempting to restrain their wickedness, God simply allowed their sin to run its course. He removed His influence and allowed their willful rejection to produce its natural consequence, which in this case was deadly.

What did God give the Gentiles over to? Verse 24 indicates it was *sexual impurity*. In this way pagans exchanged the truth of God for a lie. This also involved an exchange in worship. People served the creation instead of the

Creator (v. 25). In verse 26 we read for the second time that God “gave them over”—this time to *sexual perversion*. Individuals perverted God’s gift of physical intimacy in the context of marriage by engaging in homosexual acts (vv. 26-27). Men and women exchanged natural relations (between men and women) with unnatural relations (men with men and women with women). The result of exchanging the truth of God for a lie was the substitution of natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. For this twofold exchange, they received the due penalty for their perversion.

In verse 28 we read for the third time that God “gave them over”—this time to a *depraved mind*. These pagans put God’s reasonable moral boundaries out of their minds, and God responded by abandoning them to warped thinking. Out of this mindset comes all kinds of evil deeds. In verses 29 and 30, Paul categorized these into four kinds of active sin: wickedness (the opposite of righteousness), evil (the profound absence of empathy, shame, and goodness), greed (the relentless urge to acquire more), and depravity (a constant bent toward immorality). Such sinful behavior was not due to ignorance of God’s commands (v. 32). Rather, people sinned despite their knowledge of God, making them all the more responsible. Not only that, but they also applauded these practices in others. Perhaps seeing others do these things filled them with a sense of self-justification. In any case, they received what they deserved—*spiritual death*.

According to Ecclesiastes 3:11, since God’s ways are inscrutable, human beings are powerless to make anything different—at least permanently. Towner (1997:5:284) explains that this state of affairs is “deterministic, but not fatalistic”, for people are “still perfectly free and responsible to act”. The author takes issue with the notion that Qoheleth depicts God as being “arbitrary and capricious or even just plain absent”. Instead, the sage characterizes God as being both transcendent and imminent in the world, which He created and oversees. This view is contra Bickerman (1967:149), who claims that for Qoheleth, God was an “morally neutral being, beyond good and evil.” Also, God reputedly was as “arbitrary and fickle as Luck”.

Lee (2005:47) points out that in the “drama of life”, God is the undisputed “primary Actor”, the “one who gives and authorizes”. Moreover, the “human agent is given a responsibility for the proper use of that right of disposal”.

Accordingly, rather than become frustrated and disillusioned, people of faith choose to revere and obey God, trusting that His wisdom is infinite and His eternal purposes are wise. Ellul (1990:37) maintains that the “unexpected appearance of God in this text cannot be seen as a later supplement or pious veneer”. Instead, “God’s presence at every turn signifies a righting of the situation”.

For an analysis of the concept of God in Ecclesiastes, cf. Estes (1982). The author’s study deals with both the “elements of God’s activity” (19-102) and the “effects of God’s activity” (103-163). Estes concludes that Qoheleth’s primary emphasis is on God’s transcendence, sovereignty, and inscrutability (164-165). In a similar vein, Kidner (1976:15) asserts that in Ecclesiastes the reader encounters God in three primary ways: “as Creator, as Sovereign, and as Unsearchable Wisdom”. Eaton (1983:82) advances the discussion by noting that affirming the “sovereignty of God” is crucial to properly enjoying His material blessings. Here one finds “secularism [giving] way to theism, pessimism to optimism, [and] human autonomy to human faith”.

This mindset is reflected in verse 12, where Qoheleth advised his readers to enjoy life in the present (cf. 2:24-26). Based on his observations and personal experience, he concluded that the most worthwhile approach is for people to find joy in their God-given existence. The latter included doing “good” (3:12) as long as they lived. Lee suggests that “enjoyment is not only a matter of right conduct.” As well, it is a “matter of *character* and *disposition*” (2005:52; italics are the author’s). While deriving enjoyment in life could include the satisfaction the comes from being charitable and philanthropic in one’s undertakings, this does not rule out the idea of obtaining pleasure from daily, ordinary experiences. Indeed, the Teacher noted that a great source of contentment can be found in eating, drinking, and performing satisfying work (v. 13).

How can one find real delight in the common outlets of life? The righteous do so by believing that such daily activity—indeed, all of life itself—is a gift of God. The is only possible when people humbly revere the Lord and place their confidence in Him. Smith (1996:731) maintains that Ecclesiastes 3:12-13 is not advocating “licentiousness”. Instead, Qoheleth is enjoining “that happy appreciation of the innocent pleasures which the love of God offers to those

who live in accordance with his standards of goodness”. Ginsberg and Fox (2007:6:90) explain that while God-given enjoyments are “brief, imperfect, and uncertain, they are enough to make life worth living”.

Furthermore, the sage advised the prudent to adopt a measure of humility regarding the short-term import of their lives. Unlike the achievements of the human race (whether individually or collectively), everything God undertakes has a certain finality to it. As a matter of fact, what He does “endures forever”, with people being unable to change His sovereign plans. God has designed the world to operate in this way “so that people will fear him” (v. 14; cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:431). The latter is not an irrational feeling of dread and impending doom. As well, it is more than courteous reverence. Fearing the Lord is a multivalent concept. It includes an affirmation of His sovereignty and power; it involves revering Him in worship and obeying Him unconditionally (cf. 12:13); and it encompasses a “reverent recognition of the perfection of God’s work” (Krüger 2004:89).

Parsons (2003:164) thinks the “concept of the fear of God is not an afterthought but is a theme woven into the fabric of the book” (cf. Eccl 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13). According to Gordis (1995:236-237), the biblical concept of fearing God has “both a metaphysical and an ethical character”. Expressed differently, the notion “embodies both a theory of life and a course of conduct”. In specific terms, fearing God “means to be conscious of His limitless and unfathomable power and to be aware of the uncertainty and brevity of life”. Seow (1997:268) explains that those who fear God recognize the “chasm between the divine and the human”. Also, they know the “proper place of humanity in relation to the deity”. Moreover, they embrace life as God providentially gives it—including the “contradictory realities” of existence on earth.

Deuteronomy 10:12 conveys a similar set of priorities. Moses urged the covenant community to live in reverential trust of the Lord, to obey His commandments, and to love and serve Him with all their heart and soul. A corresponding set of admonitions is found in Micah 6:8. The Lord’s requirements recorded in this verse set the highest standards for godly living. For instance, to “act justly” means to treat others with honesty, integrity, and equity (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:1048). To “love mercy” implies

being loyal to God and kind to others (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:13, 338). This is not done impulsively, but rather as a consistent part of one's life. To "walk humbly" with God signifies being circumspect in what one says and modest in one's demeanor (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:229, 857). People of faith willingly choose to follow the Lord and submit to His will. These requirements progress from what is external to what is internal and from one's relationship to other people to one's relationship with God. Specifically, in order to be just toward other people, one must display loyal love. Also, such compassion demands a humble walk before the Lord.

In Ecclesiastes 3:15, Solomon used a brief poem to take a broader view of history, especially as it affects people. Throughout the course of human affairs, people seek to discern God's will. As they try to make sense of His providential undertakings, they begin to discover that history is more than just facts and events repeating themselves without meaning. Admittedly, incidents tend to occur in certain patterns over and over again. Nonetheless, whatever is happening now or will take place in the future has already occurred before (cf. 1:9-11). Such observations notwithstanding, the upright, with faith in God's wisdom, can learn from the course of human events in ways that will benefit them in the present.

The precise meaning of the latter part of 3:15 is debated. The TNIV margin states that "God calls back the past". The idea is that He seeks to do again what occurred in prior generations. The TNIV main rendering of 3:15 says that one day "God will call the past into account". This statement can be both unsettling and reassuring. For instance, it is sobering to realize that people must answer to God for whatever they have done throughout their time on earth. All the same, it is comforting to remember that God will vindicate the righteous. In particular, He will not overlook those who have suffered evil at the hands of others, especially believers and innocent people who have been persecuted or slaughtered.

The reality of the latter truth is stressed in Revelation 20:11-15, which concerns the judgment of the wicked dead. John, in his heavenly vision, saw God open several books that contain a record of the deeds of every human being. The Lord will judge all people according to their works. This did not mean that salvation is based on good deeds, but that God keeps a record of

what people do in this life. God then will open “the book of life”, which records the names of those who trusted in the Messiah for salvation. The Lord Jesus will deliver from judgment only those whose names appear in this book. For those who spurn the Son, all that remains is for the Father to condemn them. It will be a terrifying scene as He issues a verdict of guilty against the unsaved.

Moreover, John saw the sea giving up the dead who were in it, and death and Hades (the realm of dead) also giving up their dead. The idea is that no one will escape judgment. The Creator will cast death and Hades into the eternal lake of fire. John called this the second death because it is the final state of everlasting torment. The documents detailing humanity’s deeds will be a sobering witness that cannot be refuted. The Father will banish forever from His presence those who do not have their names listed in the Lamb’s book of life. No unsaved person will escape this fate.

Ecclesiastes 3:16-22 explore further the theme of divine justice in the midst of human oppression. “Judgment” (v. 16) translates the Hebrew noun *mishpāt*, which refers to the rendering of a verdict (whether favorable or unfavorable) in a court of law (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:1048). “Justice” translates the noun *tsedeq*, which denotes what is upright or fair in a moral or legal sense (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:841). Solomon observed that often in a society’s judicial system, people grasped for power rather than pursued justice, and then they used that power to maltreat others. As a result, “wickedness” reigned over the place of judgment instead of equity and compassion. “Wickedness” translates the noun *resha’*, which points to a variety of iniquities committed by people in society (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:957).

Down through the centuries, believers have wondered why God allows evil in the world (cf. Hab 1:13). Whether one is considering evil attitudes, actions, or aims, this wickedness results from the absence of the moral perfection that God originally intended to exist between good things. Ultimately, only God knows why He has allowed evil to exist in the world. Nevertheless, it remains true that the Lord may use ungodliness to bring home to people the distressing fact of their mortality, to warn them of greater evils, to bring about a greater good, or to help defeat wickedness. The last two reasons are especially evident

in the cross of the Messiah. Despite the tragedy of His suffering at Calvary, His atoning sacrifice resulted in a greater good (the salvation of the lost) and the defeat of evil (for instance, sin and death).

Rather than giving in to pessimism and despair, Qoheleth voiced some hope. He pointed his readers to a higher court—the justice of God—when he stated his belief that the Lord would judge both the “righteous” (Eccl 3:17) and “wicked.” “Righteous” translates the Hebrew adjective *tsaddîyq*, which refers to those who are lawful and upright in their conduct (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:843). “Wicked” renders the adjective *rāshā’*, which (like the related noun *resha’*) denotes those guilty of criminal activity (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:957). Garrett (1987:163) acknowledges that “Qoheleth does not speculate about what type of punishment the wicked will receive”. Nonetheless, he “offers the the hope, albeit an undefined one, of divine judgment and vindication”.

The sage observed that in the divine ordering of life’s events, there is an appropriate time for every human undertaking (cf. v. 1). Likewise, God has reserved a time of judgment for all that people do. Perhaps for the moment the wicked might seem to get away with their evil deeds, but in the end God’s justice will triumph (cf. Eccl 9:1; 11:9; 12:14; Mal 3:16—4:3; Rev 22:11-12). Kaiser (1979:125) clarifies that people are “responsible beings, not brutes, who are destined to live to confront the past with the God that they either feared or flouted”.

Next, Solomon directed his attention to another related aspect of the human condition. Time after time people fail the divine test to live uprightly. The presence of injustice in the world clearly establishes this fact. Additionally, despite the efforts of individuals to exceed the parameters of their existence, they remain as mortal as any other creature on earth (Eccl 3:18). Like animals, people both breathe and are destined to die. In point of fact, the “shadow of death relativizes human distinctions” (Crenshaw 1987:84). Moreover, the prevalence of wickedness and the inevitability of death indicate that humans have no temporal superiority or “advantage over animals” (v. 19).

Because this is so, the sage declared that everything in life seemed fleeting and fruitless. After all, both humans and animals have the same lifebreath and end

up in the grave. Fox (2004:26.) explains that the Hebrew noun *rûach*, which is rendered “breath” (cf. Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1983:924), does not refer to an “immortal ‘soul,’ but . . . an animating force that gives and preserves life” (cf. Gen 6:17; Job 34:14-15; Ps 104:29-30). Every creature is made from the same minerals and chemicals of the ground, and in death that is where all of them return (Eccl 3:20; cf. Gen. 3:19; Pss 49:12, 20; 103:14). No living entity can escape this destiny. In light of this sobering truth, people of faith choose to revere God and obey Him (cf. Laurin, 1990:594; Waltke 2007:964-965).

In a way, the issue of death is just as difficult to deal with as is the issue of injustice—particularly for those who have no trust in God. For the atheist, if there is no ultimate justice (as is typically alleged), and if people simply die off like snakes and sparrows (as is often maintained), then life would indeed seem to be a farce. To an extent, Solomon indulged this mindset in Ecclesiastes 3:21 by adopting a noncommittal stance on the question of whether there is life after death. Hubbard (1991:200) suggests that Qoheleth made numerous provocative statements in Ecclesiastes as a way to “penetrate the dull ears and hard hearts” of his peers. In a corresponding manner, Dorsey (1999:197) thinks Qoheleth first aimed for the “demolition of misguided hope” before “rebuilding on firmer ground”. Expressed differently, the author “clears away the foolish debris down to bedrock, and only then does he begin to rebuild on a solid foundation”.

When the horizon of human knowledge and understanding rise no higher than temporal earthly existence, it is impossible to prove conclusively that in death a human’s lifebreath ascends upward to heaven and an animal’s lifebreath sinks down into the netherworld. A determination cannot be made on the basis empirical evidence obtained through scientific investigation. In short, “death prevents one from extrapolating a conclusive forecast after he dies from principles governing his present life” (Lobdell 1981:95). Wright (1991:5:1164) notes that Solomon was “speaking phenomenologically”, that is, “as things appear to the senses”. In like manner, Glenn (1985:985-987) remarks that “no living person can *observe* or *demonstrate* a difference between people and animals by watching them as they die” (italics are the author’s).

Even so, it is clarifying to note that the Teacher did not categorically rule out the likelihood of immortality for people. Also, Qoheleth did not affirm the pagan notion that death is either a state of nothingness or total annihilation. Indeed, as Waltke (2007:965) indicates, the “doctrine of the afterlife in Ecclesiastes is consistent with the Old Testament in general”. Furthermore, other passages of Scripture reveal a distinction between the respective fates of humans and animals. While people have an afterlife that is dealt with by God, all other earthly creatures cease to exist when they physically expire. In the Old Testament, there is an emerging awareness of the truth that there is life after death for people (cf. Pss 16:9-11; 49:15; 73:23-26; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2). With the advent of the Messiah, the truth of the resurrection has been fully and clearly revealed in the gospel (cf. John 5:24-29; 2 Tim 1:10).

In Paul’s day, some of the Corinthians did not believe in the bodily resurrection of the dead. They may have affirmed that Christians, after death, live on forever in heaven as spirits; but to them the idea of one’s soul being rejoined with one’s body was distasteful. Paul felt he had to correct their error. Recognizing the seriousness of this problem, the apostle strove to reason the Corinthians out of their mistaken opinion. To start, he pointed out that if the dead are not raised, then neither could Jesus have been raised, for that would be an exception to the rule. Besides, if the dead are not raised, then there was no point in the Messiah’s resurrection. In short, the Corinthians’ two beliefs contradicted each other. They could not assert that Jesus was raised and claim say that the dead are not raised (1 Cor 15:13-16).

From this point Paul drew some conclusions, ones the Corinthians would not like but would have to recognize as logically consistent with their denial of any resurrection. First, if the Savior was not raised, then the apostle’s preaching and the Corinthians’ faith were both useless, for Jesus’ resurrection is at the core of the Christian faith. Without His resurrection, the gospel is not worth spreading or believing (v. 14). Next, if the Son was not raised, then Paul had taught falsehood about God, for the apostle declared that the Father had raised the Son from the dead. In other words, Paul was a liar and the Corinthians could not trust his teaching (v. 15). Finally, if the Messiah was not raised, then the Corinthians’ belief in Him had done nothing to solve their sin problem. They were all still hell-bound. In that case, no one was more pitiable

than believers, for Christians were hoping for salvation while remaining under condemnation for their sin (vv. 17-19).

In one sense, all the logical conclusions Paul had drawn from the Corinthians' implicit denial of Jesus' resurrection were meaningless, for He was raised. The apostle firmly asserted that Jesus is the "firstfruits" (v. 20) of those who would be resurrected. At harvest time, Israelite farmers took the first and finest portions of their crops and offered them to the Lord (Exod 23:16, 19; Lev 23:9-14). The whole nation initially celebrated the offering of the "firstfruits" in the late spring, 50 days after Passover, at the beginning of harvest season. At first, this celebration was known as the Festival of Weeks. Later it became known as Pentecost, the Greek word meaning "fiftieth". The celebration was repeated throughout summer as other crops were brought in. The whole purpose of the festival was to give thanks to God for His bounty. It was a time of great rejoicing throughout Israel. The Son not only was the first to rise from the dead, but also He serves as a pledge that more resurrections will one day follow. His resurrection guarantees that all the deceased who placed their trust in Him while alive will someday be raised from the dead.

In Ecclesiastes 3:21, Qoheleth may have meant to galvanize his readers into action by being so opaque about the issue of life after death. Instead of them giving up in the face of certain death, the sage urged them to make the most of their opportunity to live for God. Solomon perceived that because life is so short and filled with injustice, it was best for people to find satisfaction in their work. Ultimately, whatever joy they obtained from their labor was their God-given reward. Assuredly, after people died, God would not bring them back from the grave to reenter temporal existence and discover what the future held for succeeding generations on earth. In short, God's perfect plan for human beings was to serve Him fully and joyfully right now before their lives ended (cf. 9:7-10).

In Ephesians 5:15-20 (cf. Col 3:15-17), Paul offered similar counsel for his readers. He urged them to act like people with good sense, not like fools. Indeed, because the era in which they lived was characterized by evil, they were to make the most of every opportunity. For instance, rather than act thoughtlessly, they were to discern what the Lord wanted them to do. This included putting themselves under the control of the Holy Spirit. In turn, those

whom He filled had a strong desire to worship God, particularly with music. Paul encouraged believers to communicate among themselves with psalms, hymns, and other kinds of sacred melodies. Additionally, on an individual level, they were to praise the Lord with all their hearts. In these and other ways, they offered thanks to the Father for all He had done for them in union with the Son.

4. Conclusion

This essay has undertaken an exegetical and theological study of Ecclesiastes 3. Doing so has enabled an exploration of a number of issues related to the central question of this provocative book: What is life *really* all about? The reader discovers that from the vantage point of eternity, human existence seems “utterly meaningless” (Eccl 1:2; 12:8), especially when divorced from God. One also finds out that humanity’s efforts to look beyond the present—especially to understand the past and probe into the future—are thwarted by the divine sabotage. Expressed differently, because people are creatures of time, their heavenly-imposed finitude subverts their ability to fathom the eternal plan of God. This frustrating predicament is like trying to pitch “our tents in an oasis of peace and happiness” surrounded by a “desert of absurdity” (Towner 1991:5:303).

The prudent response to this nonnegotiable impasse acknowledges and accepts both the “impossibilities and possibilities of being human”. Also, there is an awareness that “human limitations can lead to a profound freedom”. In this scenario, God empowers the upright to “embrace life all the more fully and enjoy the gift of each moment of goodness present to them”. There is a recognition that while “life is beyond one’s control”, every single “moment is for the taking, by the gift of God” (Lee, 2005:121). Furthermore, one learns from a study of Ecclesiastes 3 that the fundamental quality of life is defined by revering God and heeding His commandments (cf. 12:13). If human existence is likened to a cord made of three strands (cf. 4:12), it remains coherent and interconnected when God is at the center of one’s inner world, the core of one’s understanding of the external world, and the basis for the significance one derives from life.

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Homosexuality: Legally Permissible or Spiritually Misguided?¹

By Anna-Marie Lockard²

Abstract

One of the most divisive issues facing the Christian church today is the ubiquitous issue of the acceptance of homosexual behaviour within the parameters of church leadership. Revisionist theologians contend that the church must redress her stance on this issue to keep in step with the prevailing culture of the day, which favours the acceptance of homosexual behaviour due to its proposed biological determinism.

This article analyses this divisive issue from four perspectives: (a) historical attitudes towards homosexuality in a variety of cultures across time, (b) empirical studies regarding the causation of homosexual orientation, (c) the witness of scripture and (d) the implications for pastoral ministry.

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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1. Introduction

For more than two decades few topics have become as divisive in the 21st century church as the issue of homosexuality. The heated debate touches on a variety of issues that are contested throughout the culture: sexual ethics, the meaning of marriage and family and, most significantly, the genetic basis for same sex relationships. Within the church, debated issues on homosexuality have involved revisionist theology regarding scriptural interpretation, ecclesial authority and theological understandings of creation and sexuality.

One popular argument often posited by revisionists is that the church's stance should be re-evaluated in the light of new scientific evidence which suggests that homosexuality is a genetically inherited condition and thus a permanent state. Their consensus, therefore, is that homosexuality should be accepted by the church as a natural variant of sexual orientations, a manifestation of the richness of God's creation (Austriaco 2003).

As a result of theological revisionism, the schism within several mainline denominations in the USA (e.g., Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Methodist, Lutheran, United Church of Christ and Anglican) has proved painful. The Protestant church, particularly the Episcopal Church, has been on the verge of rupture since the 2003 election of an openly homosexual bishop, V. Gene Robinson of New Hampshire (Rossi 2006).

This issue was an impetus which caused the battle over gay marriage which shook the political and religious foundations of South African society when archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane supported V. Gene Robinson's election in 2003. South Africa became the fifth country in the world to allow gay marriages. Retired Anglican Bishop David Russell of Cape Town posits that South Africa is now dividing along new lines—this time over sexuality (Kane 2007). Additionally, the United Methodist Church faced issues “so deep as to harbour the danger of explicit disunity or schism” (Christian Century, 1998).

Predictably, many church members are confused over what constitutes sound Christian teaching. Those who take the traditional and conservative view hold that sexually active homosexuals are ineligible for ministry. Those who are

more liberal argue that the church is being rigid and out of touch with social progress; it needs to modernise its criteria for appointing ecclesial leaders.

1.1. Dichotomy in cohesive theological thought

Revisionist theologians (Nelson 1977; Boswell, cited in Humphreys 1985) acquiesce to a climate of tolerance toward same sex behaviour and posit that one must re-examine scriptural interpretations to include more relevancy to the current cultural mores, while conservative theologians argue that scriptural tradition maintains that there is a generally accepted code of morality, derived from the inerrancy of the scriptures, and deviations from that code should be labelled as abnormal, deviant behaviour (sin).

Max Stackhouse (quoted in Helm 1998), professor of Christian ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary, contends otherwise when he states:

I think a rough consensus has been reached among mainline churches: They agree to defend the rights of homosexuals and on the need for a policy of tolerance toward people in homosexual relationships. Although, most churches agree that homosexual relationships are not the ideal. They are not something the church should praise or celebrate. Despite disagreement on ordination, there are these two over-arching agreements.

Is faulty theological reasoning behind the gay hermeneutic? Clearly, the confusion of the church on the issue of homosexuality is varied with both liberal and conservative views. Is there a possibility to assuage the confusion and bring to light God's revealed plan for all human behaviour?

1.2. Statement of purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine critically the divisive issue of homosexuality from four perspectives: historical, empirical, scriptural and pastoral.

- *Historical*. The article will examine ancient societies in an attempt to determine the origins of the practice and to learn whether they were tolerated by those societies. Proponents of homosexual behaviour contend that anti-homosexuality ideas originated from the Western Christian churches. This article will explore the historical accuracy of these contentions.
- *Empirical*. The paper will examine the findings of empirical, scientific research regarding the causes of homosexuality to determine there is convincing scientific evidence showing that homosexual behaviour is biologically or genetically determined. The salient issue of homosexual orientation versus chosen behaviour will be examined, asking questions such as: Are people born gay? Can a homosexual change his/her sexual orientation? Is there a gay gene for homosexuality?
- *Scriptural*. The article will briefly present the traditional view of the witness of Scripture. Although revisionist theologians postulate against the witness of scripture, it is essential to give careful and accurate interpretation to God's mandates on homosexual behaviour.
- *Pastoral*. Finally, particular emphasis will be given to the implications of the study for pastoral ministry within the context of the current and future church of Christ. Two of the most salient issues facing pastoral counsellors today will be examined: If homosexuality is legally permissible, (a) should the church conduct same-sex marriages? (b) should homosexual "Christians" be given full rights among church leadership in all aspects of teaching, preaching and leading?

1.3. Defining homosexuality

The word "homosexuality" was first used in 1869. Even the root word "sexuality" is a 19th century coinage (ACUTE 1998). For clarity of this research, the following definition of the word "homosexual" will guide the contents of this paper:

People whose sexual attraction is predominantly towards their own sex, whether or not it is expressed in homoerotic sexual activity, and that the term "homoerotic sexual practice" be used

to denote genital or other activity pertaining to sexual arousal between people of the same sex (ACUTE 1998:17).

Let us examine the historical dimensions of ancient societies to determine the origin of the practice. When and where did the practice surface? How were homosexuals treated by society?

2. Historical dimensions of homosexuality

Many proponents of homosexuality argue that hostility toward homosexual behaviour originated with the Christian church. One prominent proponent of this ideology was Professor John Boswell, a Roman Catholic professor of history at Yale University. Upon his death to AIDS in 1994, Boswell left a legacy of being the foremost scholar on the history of lesbian and gay Christianity. In his book *Homosexuality, Intolerance, and Christianity*, Boswell set out to claim evidence that the church was the cause of hostility to homosexual people. However, he claims *not* to have found such evidence when he wrote: “As it happens, it isn’t what I found in the documents in this case” (Boswell, quoted in Humphreys 1985).

Animosity to homosexuals did not originate with the Christian church. Abhorrence to such behaviour was evidenced in ancient and pagan societies, beginning with the ancient Hebrews, Egyptians, and Assyrians. Historical evidence maintains each of these societies had laws against homosexual practices (Davis 1993).

Other ancient societies also showed a clear aversion to homosexuality.

Hittite Laws. Hittite law from the second millennium B.C. classified homosexuality as an abomination which incurred harsh and cruel punishment. For instance, a man convicted of homosexual rape was subjected to forcible penetration, then castrated (Greenberg 1988:126).

Iran (early Persia). Zoroastrianism founded in Iran (unknown date) took a very harsh view of homosexuality. Its teaching places sodomites among the ranks of those who may be killed on the spot. Later texts of the 9th century A.D. continue to regard homosexuality as heinous (Greenberg 1988:186).

Greek Society. Although from the 6th century homosexuality was referred to in the art and literature of Greece, it is historically clear that ancient Greek culture never fully accepted homosexuality as a societal norm. For example, Aristotle, Herodotus, and many Stoic and Cynic philosophers expressed moral disapproval of homosexual practices (Davis 1993). Other Greek societies strongly disapproved of sexual relationships between men of the same age. Men who did not marry, according to Plutarch, were scorned or punished by Spartan authorities (Hine 2007).

Roman Society. Similarly, in ancient Roman society, visibility of the practice through the writings of Suetonius, Catullus, and Martial, was ridiculed and not met with general social approval (Davis 1993; Norton 2004).

Ancient Pagan Societies. Additionally, there is a lack of historical evidence for the acceptance of homosexuality within the pagan cultures. The 8th century Vikings, Visigoths, Celts, and Vandals vehemently opposed homosexual activity. As a result, some of these pagan cultures punished the people severely. The Visigoths' law condemned homosexuals to be burned at the stake (Davis 1993). Equally, Salvian, 5th century presbyter of the church in Marseille, France, described the Goth, Saxon, and Vandals as strictly chaste: "The vandals were not tainted by effeminacy, nor did they tolerate it" (Greenberg 1988:243).

Within the pagan culture of the Celts, homosexuality was strongly disapproved and completely unacceptable. Such men were regarded as abominations. Homosexual men were often exiled from their homeland and if they kept the practice hidden and were discovered, they were put to death by mob rage (Hine 2007).

Germanic Peoples. Homosexual relationships were frowned upon amongst the Germanic peoples of the 10th-12th centuries. Tacitus reports that the German custom was to bury alive in a swamp anyone found guilty of homosexual behaviour (Greenberg 1988).

Early Europe. From 1000 to 1500, Europe began to experience an increase in homosexual activity. From the late 16th century to the early 19th century, sexual deviation grew in England. In 18th century London, homosexuals

“married” without legal sanction in central London in places called “molly houses”. These places consisted of disorderly pubs and coffee houses where homosexual activities transpired (Norton 2004).

The Netherlands. In 1969, 44 percent of the Netherlands population rejected homosexuality (DeBoer 1978). Loving relationships between two men or two women was by no means generally accepted in the Netherlands (Sandors 1980:1). However, a transition in the societal norm occurred when homosexuality was transformed from sin and pathology into psychological and social problems that could be treated in mental health care, thus ushering in a change in relation between religion and healthcare. Religion lost importance in modern Dutch society because physicians, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists created new areas of intervention in people’s private lives and took over the traditional task of the church in the field of charity and pastoral care (Oosterhuis 1996).

North America. American settlers from England in the 17th-18th centuries labelled homosexual behaviour a sin and a crime, an aberrant act for which the person received punishment in this life and the next. During World War II, USA armed forces excluded homosexuals from serving in the military.

In North America, during the 1940s, there were strong societal norms (religious beliefs, laws, and medical sciences) against homosexual behaviour. Typically, anti-homosexuality attitudes prevailed as a theme of American political culture throughout the same era. It was during the 1950s when America swung the pendulum in favour of homosexuality.

A leading advocate of gay rights began when Henry Hay, a member of the Communist party, founded what is known as the homosexual emancipation movement, the Mattachine Society (D’Emilio 1983). As a result, growth of homosexuality escalated into the 1970s through gay bars in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. These highly gay-oriented establishments served as a marketplace for homosexual liaisons (Murray 1996).

In North American history since the 1970s, homosexuals have been increasingly visible and militant. It was in 1973 that homosexual activists pressured the American Psychiatric Association to remove homosexual from

its list of mental disorders as outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (Davis 1993; cf. APA 2007). However, since that time some psychologists have questioned the validity of removing homosexuality from the illness model. Their rationale is that, despite its legitimate therapeutic and sociopolitical drawbacks, the illness model of homosexuality included elements of causality that are lacking from newer theories (Gonsiorek 1990:1).

Neither ancient nor modern history support the contention that abhorrence to same-sex behaviour originated with the Christian church. Pagan cultures, too, found the practice to be unacceptable for a variety of reasons.

3. Multifactorial causation of homosexuality

3.1. The interactional model for homosexuality

Recently, scientists have postulated that there may be factors that pre-dispose one to homosexual behaviour. Matheson (2007) studied the predisposition of homosexuality and made several compelling discoveries. Evidence suggests that three main groupings of factors are involved in complex interactions: biological drives, interpersonal relations and psychological factors. These comprise what social scientists call an interactional model for homosexuality.

Byne and Parson (2007) concur with Matheson (2007) that an interactional model exists for homosexuality, combining biological and environmental influences. However, there is a caveat when discussing the biological aspect of homosexuality. Herein, lies the apex of the debate and it is at this conjecture that Christians must exercise caution and gain clarity on the issue. Let us further and more clearly define the biological model for homosexuality.

Biological research on homosexuality is driven by powerful ideologies. Research on same sex behaviour is not “immune to the cultural and political context within which it takes place” (Abbott 1995:59). Biological theory suggests that genes or prenatal hormones cause homosexuality. Some scientists (e.g., Schuklenk, Stein, Kerin & Byne 1997) propose that the brain and hormones direct our behaviour in a one-way cause and effect manner. Biologic theory assumes that the brain affects behaviour, but behaviour does not influence (or change) behaviour.

However, Valenstein (1998:126-128) argues that experiences or behaviours can indeed modify the brain:

A person's mental state and experience can alter the brain. . . . Various experiences can cause structural and functioning changes in the brain. . . . Genes are responsible for establishing scaffolding of the brain, but a large amount of neuronal growth that leads to the establishment of connections has been shown to be influenced by experience.

Thus, we learn that it is through the biological model for homosexuality that the issue causes intense debate and concern for Christians. If one espouses this model, one is in agreement that homosexuality is an illness for which the person is helpless to control. Thus, society and the church must fully accept homosexuals into complete fellowship.

Environmental theorists, such as Matheson (2007), posit that social experiences such as an unhealthy parent-child interaction and or sexual abuse contribute to same sex behaviour and, therefore, the behaviour is primarily learned.

Abbott (1995), however, brings another compelling component into the debate when he proposes that an interactional model for homosexuality, which addresses biological, environmental and psychological issues, fails to consider the aspect of freedom of choice in shaping sexual orientation and behaviour. As in all human behaviour, there is the element of personal choice which is a strong component in shaping behaviour. Following is a careful analysis of the free agency aspect of persons when discussing contributory causal factors of homosexuality.

3.2. Free moral agency of human beings

It is imperative to assess the individual's own active participation (choice) in sexual preference, that is, a person's freedom to choose a homosexual lifestyle. Diamond (1998) addresses this salient issue when he contends that while biology may bias a person's sexual orientation, individual behaviour is flexible when responding to environmental influences, and therefore free

choice must be considered. It is generally agreed that humans are at least somewhat free to make behavioural choices regardless of past or current experiences (Abbott 1995).

The concept of “free agency” implies choice, free will or self-determinism—the ability to make decisions independent of past choices or circumstances (Burr, Day & Bahr 1993). Humans do have agency to make conscious choices and are free to alter their thinking, emotions and behaviours (Warner 2001). A sober example of a person’s free agency to choose moral behaviour even amidst the most dehumanising situations comes from the Nazi concentration camps of the 20th century. Viktor Frankl a psychiatrist and survivor of the Nazi concentration camp during World War II concurs that the experiences of the camp (Nazi prison) life prove that man/woman does have a choice in his/her actions. Frankl (1985:86) concludes:

There were always choices to make. Every day, every hour offered the opportunity to make a decision. In the final analysis it becomes clear that the sort of person the prisoner became was the result of an inner decision and not the result of camp influences alone. Fundamentally, any man can, even under such circumstances, decide what shall become of him—mentally and spiritually.

In a similar way, individuals have been predisposed to homosexuality due to a variety of environmental influences may make decisions that lead to same sex behaviour. But, if they do, there is always an element of choice or free agency involved.

Theologically, free agency is a two-fold process. First, there must be “knowledge of truth”. Second, a person must make a decision to “live truthfully”. Agency does not consist chiefly in doing what we want; rather it consists in doing what we should do, that is, knowing true principles and making a conscious *choice* to live by them (Williams 2004). In the Old Testament, Joshua admonished the Israelites to make a choice when he said: “Choose this day whom you will serve” (Josh 24:15, ESV). God has always granted mankind the freedom of choice.

Freedom without moral principle is not freedom. Thus free agency cannot exist in a moral vacuum (Needleman 2004). Psychologist Allen Bergin (2002:206) concurs:

For sexual expression to nurture relationships, . . . it must be guided by spiritual principles. Behaviour outside these principles puts at risk our ability to attain the highest joys of sexual expression. Such principles come from our Creator.

Therefore, free agency is the ability to grasp the true reality of our sexual natures and the conscious, deliberate choice to fulfil our true roles as heterosexual beings. The individual is considered able (in most situations—apart from extreme mental handicaps) to alter his/her thinking, emotions, and behaviour to live in harmony with revealed truth (Abbott 1995).

Glock (2004) cogently summarises the impact of free will upon the engagement in same sex relationships:

Scientists effectively ignore free will as a possible causal agent. This is not because scientists do not believe in a free will. Certainly in their everyday lives they think and act as if free will exists. When they function as scientists, however, they have not found means to establish if free will may be operative as a determinate of human behavior.

While science gives no credence to free will as a possible contributor to behaviour, neither does science offer proof of its non-existence (Glock 2004). Both environmental factors which predispose one to homosexuality and freedom of choice must be considered as factors contributing to the causation of homosexuality.

Is there a natural orientation toward same sex behaviour or is it clearly a chosen behaviour?

3.3. Natural orientation or chosen behaviour?

As evidenced previously, debate in the sexual polemics of the day continues in the blurring of the line between sexual orientation (biologic basis) and chosen

behaviour (free agency) of homosexuals. The standard Roman Catholic position on homosexuality does not condemn homosexual orientation; it does condemn homosexual behaviour.

While the homosexual community denies that sexual orientation is chosen (most homosexuals believe they have no choice, since they were “born that way”), it fails to recognise that, indeed, homosexual behaviour in its human dimension is a chosen act of life (O’Brien 2004).

Scientific literature has often concluded that the sexual orientation of a person cannot be changed any more than one can change his/her eye colour. Thus, it postulates a biological (illness) model for homosexuality. However, Throckmorton (2003:4) compellingly contends:

My literature review contradicts the policies of major mental health organizations because it suggests that sexual orientation, once thought to be an unchanging sexual trait, is actually quite flexible for many people, changing as a result of therapy for some, ministry for others, and spontaneously (as a matter of choice) for still others.

Even psychiatrist Robert Spitzer, a member of the American Psychiatric Association who was instrumental in helping to remove homosexuality from the *Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1973, now concurs that some people can change. He reached this conclusion following his interviews in 2000 with 200 men and women who claimed to have completely turned from homosexuality (Abbott 1995).

In a further discussion of sexual identity development, Strauss (2006) postulates that it is a safe observation to conclude that humans are personally aware beings able to make choices regarding their own sense of identity and course of behaviour.

3.4. Empirical research on the causes of homosexuality

In evaluating a multifactorial causation for homosexuality, scientific research on sexual orientation has taken many forms. One early approach was to discover evidence of a person’s sexual orientation in his/her endocrine system.

The hypothesis was that homosexual men would have less androgenic (male) hormones or more estrogenic (female) hormones than heterosexual men. However, an overwhelmingly majority of studies failed to demonstrate any correlation between sexual orientation and adult hormonal constitution (see Schuklenk, Stein, Kerin & Byne 1997).

Perhaps one of the most globally divisive moral questions today is whether or not there is a gay gene for homosexuality. This debate initially ignited a media fire-storm during the 1990s when there was a surge of interest by western scientists to push toward the discovery of a major gene for homosexuality. Revisionist theologians and pro-homosexual activists often cite the following three scientific studies published in the 1990s to prove their position that homosexuality is a genetically-inherited condition.

3.4.1. LeVay: neurons in the hypothalamic region of the brain

The first study was conducted by Simon LeVay in 1991.³ A scientist at Salk Institute in San Diego California, he reported his findings that a group of neurons in the hypothalamic region of the brain appeared to be twice as large in heterosexual men than in homosexual men. Previous studies in primates suggested that the hypothalamus is a region of the brain involved in regulating sexual behaviour. Other studies indicated that these neurons are larger in men than in women. As a result, LeVay concluded that sexual orientation had a biological basis (Austriaco 2003).

Later, LeVay admitted that all nineteen of the subjects identified as homosexuals had died of AIDS complications. Medical doctors agree that it is possible that the reduced size of their hypothalamus may have been caused by their illness rather than their homosexuality (Fryrear 2006:2). At a later interview, LeVay himself revealingly opined:

Time and again I have been described as someone who proved that homosexuality is genetic. . . . I did not. It is important to stress what I didn't find. I did not prove that homosexuality is genetic, or find a genetic cause for being gay. I didn't show that

³ For a more detailed analysis of LeVay's research and the three problems identified in his paper, refer to www.NARTH.com website and "Science" 253 (1991): 1034.

gay men are born that way . . . nor did I locate a gay center in the brain.

Although, LeVay himself has made public statements that gay men are not “born that way”, proponents of homosexuality continue to spread erroneous information to the uninformed populous.

3.4.2. Bailey and Pillard: study of identical twins

The second scientific study to determine a genetic basis for homosexuality was undertaken in December 1991 by John Bailey and Richard Pillard. They reported that it was more likely for both identical twins to be homosexual than it was for fraternal twins or both adopted brothers. Bailey and Pillard reported that 52 percent of identical twins were homosexual; 22 percent of fraternal twins were both homosexual, and 11 percent of the adoptive brothers were both homosexual.

It is now clear, however, that there were scientific problems with each of these reports, which seriously undermined the validity of their study. Bailey’s (Bailey et al. 1994) follow-up study in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* suggests that the genetic influence may be dramatically less than his earlier studies indicated. Since then, it is well known in the behavioural science community that Bailey’s statistical methods have been refuted (Jones 1999:53).⁴

3.4.3. Dean Hamer’s study of chromosomes

The third and perhaps the most widely publicised research suggested a genetic link to homosexual behaviour. In 1993, Dean Hamer and his colleagues at the USA National Institute of Health studied forty pairs of homosexual brothers and concluded that some cases of homosexuality could be linked to a specific region on the human X chromosome (xq28) inherited from the mother to her homosexual son.

This study, however, has come under heavy criticism both inside and outside the behavioural sciences. The office of Research Integrity of the Department

⁴ For further study of Bailey and Pillard’s (1991) research, see *General Psychiatry* 48:1089.

of Health and Human Services, USA, investigated Hamer for alleged fraud in this study (eventually he was cleared of the charges). Significantly, the study could never be reproduced. Although Hamer, as a behavioural scientist, was well aware that you cannot verify the validity of research without innumerable such correlations.

Two subsequent studies (Hamer et al. 1995; Bailey et al. 1999) of other homosexual brothers have concluded that there is no evidence that male sexual orientation is influenced by an X-linked gene (Austraico 2003). In July 1993, the *Science* research journal was quick to publish the study by Hamer which posited that there might be a gene for homosexuality.

Unfortunately, what was not disseminated and understood by the non-scientific community was the fact that Hamer and his research team performed a common type of behavioural genetics investigation called a “linkage study”. This is a limited model of research whereby researchers identify a behavioural trait that appears to be prevalent in a family and then proceed with the following:

- They look for a chromosomal variant in the genetic material of the family.
- They determine whether that variant is more frequent in family members who share the particular trait.⁵

Importantly, despite intensive scientific and medical research, there is no sound evidence that people are born homosexual. Rather, studies indicate that behaviour is acquired and not instinctive.

3.4.4. The genetics of behaviour

It is erroneous to conclude that the correlation of a genetic structure with a behavioural trait implies that the trait is “genetic” or inherited. Hamer and his colleagues failed to relay to the non-scientific community that there cannot be a human trait without innumerable such correlations (NARTH 2004).

⁵ For a complete study of Hamer’s research, see “Science 261” July 16, 1993:321.

A more recent study conducted by researchers at the University of Chicago (UIC) was published in March 2005. Psychologist Brian Mustanski led the team. UIC press release boasted the following:

In the first-ever study combining the entire human genome for genetic determinism of male sexual orientation . . . , we have identified several areas that appear to influence whether a man is heterosexual or ‘gay’ (AFA 2005).

Dr Warren Throckmorton, professor of Grove City College in Pennsylvania, conducted a very thorough critique of Mustanski’s study. He cites admissions by the researchers that their evidence of genetic differences between heterosexual and homosexual men falls short of being statistically significant. Three members of NARTH also reviewed Mustanski’s study and found it to be lacking. One member, Dr. Dean Byrd states:

Sexual orientation involves complex behaviors which involve multiple factors. Homosexuality might involve predispositions that are strongly influenced by cultural and environmental factors. (AFA 2005:1).

Behavior scientists tell us that in understanding the theory in genetics-of-behavior, one must clearly comprehend two major principles that guide the research: (a) heritable does not mean inherited; (b) genetics-of-behaviour research which is valid will identify and then focus only on traits that are directly inherited (NARTH 2004).

Reputable scientists concur that although almost every human characteristic is potentially heritable, few human behavioural traits are directly inherited. Inherited means directly determined by genes and changing the environment of a person will not prevent or modify the trait (e.g., eye colour or height).

Even Dr Hamer, who, following his landmark study in 1991, was dubbed the “gay gene guru”, now recognises the multifactorial components to homosexuality. He was later poignantly quoted in several sources: “Environmental factors play a role. There is not a single master gene that makes people gay.... I don’t think we will ever be able to predict who will be gay” (Fryrear 2006:1). Five years after Hamer’s study was published, he

consented to another interview and reiterated: “There is not a single all-powerful gay gene, and for the record, there is no gay gene” (Gallagher 1998:1).

Often researchers, in qualifying their findings, will use scientific language that is unfamiliar to the non-scientific community. Although to their fellow scientists the researchers have been honest in acknowledging the limitations of their findings, the media does not always receive the same understandings. As a result, this evades general understanding and, if not clearly understood by the press, will be avoided in publications. A case in point is an example of scientific jargon used by one researcher: “The question of the appropriate significance level to apply to a non-Mendelian trait such as sexual behaviour is problematic.” Although this rings of scientific jargon to the lay populous, it is actually a very significant statement which translates as follows: “It is not possible to know what the findings mean – if anything- since sexual orientation cannot be inherited.”

Dr Joel Gelenter, a Yale scientist, refutes the recent genetics-of-behaviour research for homosexuality when he asserts:

Time and again, scientists have claimed that particular genes or chromosomal regions are associated with behavioral traits, only to withdraw their findings when they were not replicated. Unfortunately, it is hard to come up with findings linking specific genes to complex human behaviors that have been replicated. All (findings) were announced with great fanfare; all were greeted unskeptically in the popular press; all are now in disrepute (NARTH 2004).

Gelenter (NARTH 2004) is correct when he affirms that often researchers’ overzealous public statements to the media are grandiose, yet when addressing their colleagues in the scientific community, they respond with caution.⁶ For example, Dean Hamer, when addressing the scientific community in an interview by “Scientific American”, was asked the volatile and controversial

⁶ For current article on how scientific research is sometimes manipulated and produced by Scientists, see Hubbard and Wald (1999).

question as to whether homosexuality had a biologic determinism. He quickly replied:

Absolutely not. From twin studies we know that half or more of the variability in sexual orientation is not inherited. Our studies try to pinpoint the genetic factors . . . not [to] negate the psychosocial factors (NARTH 2004).

3.4.5. Bailey and Martin: female same-sex orientation

A scientific study set out to determine a genetic basis for same sex female orientation was conducted by Northwestern University professor Michael Bailey and Australian geneticist, Nicholas Martin. They concluded:

Female sexual orientation is more a matter of environment than heredity. We would say our research did not find evidence that female sexual orientation has a genetic basis. (Bailey et al. 1993).

Thus far, this paper has demonstrated two components in the complex issue of homosexuality: First, this researcher identified the ancient practices and history of homosexuality. Second, relevant empirical scientific reports were analysed as to the validity of the scientific community's assertions that there could be a biologic or genetic determinism for homosexuality. Documented quotes by the scientists themselves lend validity to the basis that indeed, a gene has not been discovered to confirm that homosexual behaviour has a pathological basis. Let us now turn our attention to another very salient and divisive issue among the behavioural scientists: Is it possible for homosexuals to change their behaviour and live productive and rewarding heterosexual lives?

3.5. Changing a person's sexual orientation

Matheson (2007) is a current licensed professional counsellor (LPC) in New Jersey and is the director of the Center for Gender Wholeness. Matheson's counselling practice works primarily with male gender issues in trying to

restore homosexual men toward heterosexual behaviour. He contends: "Overcoming unwanted same-sex attractions is absolutely possible."

Evidence supporting environmental theories posit that same-sex behaviour is primarily learned and, therefore, can be unlearned or changed. Van der Aardweg (1985), Nicolosi (1991) and Satinover (1996) have collected data suggesting that homosexuals have been successful in completely reversing their sexual orientation. A significant study was conducted by MacIntosh (1995) when he interviewed 422 psychiatrists regarding their assessment of homosexuals who change their orientation to heterosexuality. The doctors reported that 23 percent of their patients had converted to heterosexuality, and 84 percent made significant improvement toward heterosexual identity. Nicolosi, Byrd, and Potts (2000) surveyed 882 individuals who had gone through some type of conversion education or therapy (mostly in religious settings). Amongst those responding, 34 percent reported a significant change toward heterosexuality. Twenty-three percent reported no change; and 43 percent reported some change. About 7 percent of the men reported that they were doing worse psychosocially than before the conversion interventions (Throckmorton 1998).

Robinson (1998) summarized his findings after interviewing seven married men who had been previously involved in a high level of homosexual activity. Reportedly, these men were reactivated into religious worship and had not participated in homosexual activity for at least one year. As a result, they no longer had compulsive same-sex lustful desires or thought patterns. Robinson (1998:319-320) summarized his findings:

The most important conclusion of this study is that change is possible . . . the change was experienced as being personally fulfilling and greatly increasing the quality of their lives socially, emotionally, and spiritually.⁷

⁷ For a testimony from a former homosexual, see Duncan (1989). For additional studies proposing that homosexual behaviour can be reversed, Nicolosi (1991; 1993) and Nicolosi, Byrd & Potts (2000).

3.6. Multiple causation of homosexuality

Other behavioural scientists (Matheson 2003; LeVay 1996; McFadden 1998; Goldberg 1994) share the view that sexual orientation is shaped for most people at an early age through complex interactions of either environment, parent-child relationships, social interactions and/or psychological components, thus comprising multifactorial causation for homosexuality. Simon LeVay (1996) concurs: “At this point the most widely held opinion (on causation of homosexuality) is that multiple factors play a role”.

Neuroscientist, Dennis McFadden, from the University of Texas, opines:

Any human behavior is going to be the result of complex intermingling of genetics and environment. It would be astonishing if it were not true for homosexuality (Charlotte Observer 1998).

Steven Goldberg concludes: “I know no one in the field who argues that homosexuality can be explained without reference to environmental factors” (Goldberg 1994).

Thus far, this paper has critiqued and analysed two important components in assessing the issue of homosexuality: Firstly, the historical dimension of the origin and accepted practices of same sex behaviour and, secondly, the presentation of the scientific community’s empirical studies and evaluation of the biologic determinism for homosexual behaviour versus the multifactorial causation.

The third essential component for evaluating the issue of homosexuality is that of the tradition and witness of scripture interpretation. Throughout the span of human history, the moral values of civilized societies have given credence to the stated moral code of the holy scriptures as given by God himself to mankind. History is a witness to the fall of sophisticated societies that turned from biblical mandates on accepted human behaviour. Therefore, let us carefully examine the theological determinants on the moral behaviour of men and women.

4. The tradition and witness of Scripture

Proponents of homosexuality contend that Christians selectively choose from scripture to defend their stance that homosexuality is wrongful behaviour. Several biblical passages, however, which deal directly with homosexuality have been expounded upon admirably by many ancient and modern biblical scholars from both the Old and New Testament writings, such as the following: Gen 19:1-29; Rev 18:22, 20:13; Matt 15:19; Mark 7:21; Rom 1:18-32; 1 Cor 6:9; and 1 Tim 1:10 (ACUTE 1998).

Additionally, a general pattern of clear biblical teaching on sexuality was affirmed and well summarised by the House of Bishops' 1991 statement "Issues in Human Sexuality." There was in scripture an evolving convergence on the idea of lifelong monogamous heterosexual union as the setting intended by God for the proper development of men and women as sexual beings (ACUTE 1998:16).

Genesis 1-2. For a complete and succinct understanding of human sexuality, it is foundational that we begin by examining the creation account in Genesis 1-2. It is here that one clearly discovers that human sexuality is reflected in the extreme physical differentiation between our first parents, Adam and Eve. It is in such a design that God defines sexual differentiation as the basis of human marriage and pro-creation. It is at the beginning of creating mankind when God determined that homosexual relationships cannot fulfil the procreative dimensions of human sexuality and marriage which God so brilliantly designed (Davis 1993). God purposely designed physical differentiation between men and women.

Genesis 19. The first reference to homosexual behaviour in the Bible is found in Genesis 19:1-11. This text has been the object of intense debate among revisionist theologians. The passage describes how Lot entertained the two angels sent to the city of Sodom. That night some of the men of the city demanded to see Lot's visitors: "Where are the men that came to you tonight? Bring them out that we may know them (19:5)."

Revisionists (e.g., Nelson 1977) argue that the demand to "know" (Hebrew, ידע) the strangers was nothing more than a desire to get better acquainted in a

hospitable fashion, to show respect and acceptance toward the visitors. The problem with this assumption, however, is that in the book of Genesis, the Hebrew word ידע is used twelve times and in ten of those instances it denotes sexual intercourse (Davis 1993). In Genesis 19:8, ידע is used in a way that unmistakably refers to sexual intercourse. It is clear that the men of Sodom were not asking for a friendship acquaintance, but rather they were demanding homosexual intercourse with Lot's guests.⁸ Both the immediate context of Genesis 19:5 and a history of both Jewish and Christian interpretation point to the true meaning of the text: homosexual practices. Therefore, the revisionist interpretation of this passage is a gross misinterpretation.

The law of Moses. Homosexual behaviour is strongly condemned in the Mosaic laws of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. The word "abomination" (תועבה) is used five times in Leviticus chapter 18. It is a term of strong disapproval, depicting what is detestable and hated by God.

Judges 19. In Judges 19 there are explicit references to homosexuality. We find the same Hebrew word ידע in verses 22 and 25 to demonstrate that the men of that city were demanding homosexual intercourse with the visiting Levite. The language of the biblical narrative is consistent with the reference to homosexuality and that such practices are viewed with abhorrence (Davis 1993).

Why does scripture evidence that homosexuality is so abhorrent to God? Ashton (2007) suggests that the nations who inhabited Canaan before the Israelites conquered the land practiced homosexuality and prostitution only in connection with their heathen worship; this is what the law was trying to prevent. Homosexuality was generally rampant in many of the Canaanite cities. The word "sodomy" has become a widespread term used to describe the homosexual act. The term derived from the city of Sodom during the prevalent time of homosexual practices of that particular society. There is historical evidence that rife homosexuality had infiltrated the very fabric of ancient societies, in a similar way that is transpiring in many 21st century societies.

⁸ For a more thorough analysis of the views of Josephus, Justin Martyr, Origen, Methodius of Olympus, and the Jewish commentator Rashi, see Davis (1993).

The New Testament. In three places of the New Testament: Romans 1:26,27; 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10, there are strong prohibitions to homosexuality. Romans 1:26-27 discusses homosexuality from the perspective of the larger context of man's relation to God and God's general revelation in nature—because they turned away from God:

Even women exchanged natural relations with unnatural ones . . . men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men.

Biblical scholars safely conclude that in Romans 1, homosexuality is seen not as a violation of some Jewish or Christian sectarian code, but rather as a transgression against the moral law of God our Creator (Davis 1993). Davis further contends that it is significant in Pauline analysis of his New Testament writings, that homosexual practices derive ultimately from the human heart or inner disposition which has turned away from God.

This inward and invisible apostasy of the heart (away from God) becomes apparent and demonstrable in immoral and deviant sexual behaviour.

More specifically, in 1 Corinthians 6:9, the apostle Paul used two terms, *malakoi* and *arsenokoitai*, which are generally considered by biblical scholars to refer to homosexual behaviour.⁹ The term *arsenokoitai* is used in the New Testament only in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and in 1 Timothy 1:10. The word is a compound from *arsen* “male” and *koite* which is a word with definite sexual overtones. The literal etymology of this compound term suggests “males who go to bed with males” (Davis 1993).

Both the Old Testament and New Testament have quintessential teachings that homosexuality is contrary to the moral law of God as defined in the holy scriptures. Therefore, revisionists who erroneously conclude otherwise use forced and arbitrary modes of interpretation to strengthen their claim that the

⁹ There has been some debate about the proper translation of these two terms. The debate is reflected in these translations: (a) “effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind” (KJV), (b) “male prostitutes and homosexual offenders” (NIV) and (c) “homosexual perversion” (NEB).

scriptures need to be reassessed to keep abreast with the modern cultural mores, which contend that homosexual behaviour should be an acceptable lifestyle.

Revisionist theologian, Nelson (1977), served as professor of Christian ethics at United Theological Seminary in Minnesota. He asserts and supports propagating the following (erroneous) revisionist ideology:

- 1) Seek the church's full acceptance of homosexuality without prejudgement on the basis of a sexual orientation—given that they had no basic choice.
- 2) Espouse fresh insights from feminist theologians and gay Christians... who frequently manifest God's "common grace".
- 3) Some stories in the Bible are based on a biological misunderstanding of man.
- 4) The Sodom story in Genesis refers to the men of Sodom wanting to show hospitality and not sexual perversion toward Lot's guests.
- 5) In the Pauline letters, Paul does not claim that homosexual practices are the cause of God's wrath.
- 6) "Perhaps we should accept Paul for what he was—a peerless interpreter of the heart of the gospel and one who was also a fallible and historically conditioned person."
- 7) "Sexuality is not intended by God as a mysterious and alien force of nature, but as a power to be integrated into one's personhood and used responsibly in the service of love."

For the past two decades, the question of moral authority has been seriously eroded in our society and churches. As evidenced above, even Christian leaders and teachers are granting moral legitimacy to what God condemns. The prevailing ethic in the minds of many scholars and teachers, has sadly become a genetically-based morality.

To base morality on scientific study is to relegate the scriptures to an outmoded moral law that needs revision and is irrelevant to address the complexity of human needs in the 21st century church. To do so is to commit the suicide of Christian theology. It seems clear that the Old and New Testament scriptures, when correctly interpreted, consistently condemn

homosexual practices while repeatedly affirming that God can forgive any repentant sinner.

5. Implications for pastoral ministry in the 21st century

Proponents of homosexuality struggle with the church accepting their humanness as homosexuals and their need to feel human within the context of the church. Their premise is that within the household of God, there are no aliens.

What are appropriate responses by the church to the issue of homosexuality? If same sex marriages are legally permissible should pastors be obliged to conduct homosexual unions? Should homosexuals be given full rights among church leadership in preaching, teaching and leading? What about gay Christians who are celibate? Should celibate homosexual Christians be eligible for ordination? How does one respond to the person who says he/she is homosexual and a follower of Christ? Should evangelical congregations welcome and accept sexually active homosexuals? Should pastors defend the rights of homosexuals as a persecuted minority and evidence support by participating in gay parades, marches, etc.? Each of these are salient issues facing today's pastoral leader.

5.1. The church's balanced response

Simply put, homosexual behaviour, or any other lifestyle that is contrary to God's law, is absolutely incompatible with Christ's call to holy living and constitutes disobedience to the known laws of God. Therefore, a pastoral response to a homosexual should be the same response offered to anyone caught in the web of sin (e.g., adultery, fornication). One cannot legitimise that which God clearly labels sinful behaviour.

Condoning a behaviour that is strictly forbidden in scripture leads to one's own disobedience to God's clear mandates. Pastoral counsellors are under an obligation to call a brother or sister to repentance by speaking the truth in love (Craven 2007:1). Pastors must seek a balanced response from the church which should include two key components: biblical teaching and meaningful support.

First, firm biblical teaching on the subject will ensure that confusion does not rest with Christians who are influenced by media and the behavioural sciences. Pastoral counsellors are responsible to God to sound forth to society a clear word from God. The Bible does not teach that homosexuality is an unforgivable sin: offer them hope and help. Reject the sin while embracing the sinner.

Second, meaningful personal support for the homosexual who is seeking change from the orientation is vitally important. Christian supportive fellowships can be established to support people in their brokenness and desire to change their sinful behaviour. Homosexuals must be faced with a caring and compassionate church to assist them in seeing a God who reaches out to them even through condemnation of the behaviour. At the same time, the church must teach that homosexuality is contrary to the divine purpose for human sexuality.

The old sin nature can be transformed through repentance and faith in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit within the depths of every personality. There is no such thing as a “powerless grace”. If behavioural scientists, Masters and Johnson, can achieve a 66 percent success rate in dealing with homosexuals, how much more can pastoral counsellors accomplish with the power of the Holy Spirit? It is a biblically-based hope which pastors and churches should hold forth as a tangible possibility for delivering people from the bondage of destructive homosexual behaviour (NARTH 2001).

Dr Russell Waldrop (2001) is a pastoral counsellor, psychiatric chaplain and a licensed professional counsellor. He provided this warning to the church:

There is a real threat here to the church and it comes from both within the church and outside it. From outside the church, secular licensing and training groups could withhold licenses from people who do not believe in gay-affirming counselling . . . and they might be able to withdraw the licenses from those who still do not agree with gay-affirming counseling.

The divisive issue of whether to ordain homosexual clergy has received centre attention in many Christian churches throughout the 21st century world. It has been clearly stated: the scriptures give very clear guidelines for the appointment of ecclesial leaders. Churches seeking to align themselves with the authority and inerrancy of scripture cannot ordain avowed and practicing homosexuals to positions of leadership. If unrepentant sexual practices bar one from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9), surely it must prohibit one from leadership in the church (Davis 1993).

Another issue facing pastoral leadership today is: Should churches support the drive to ensure “civil rights” for homosexuals? Christians cannot consistently support making a civil right that which has been condemned in scripture to be morally wrong. Equally wrong, would be for Christians to participate in campaigns to physically harm and persecute homosexuals (Davis 1993).

5.2. Care and counselling resources for homosexuals

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) has offered three well-defined guidelines for the care and counselling to homosexuals: education, friendship, and healing and counselling resources.

- *Education.* They recommend that the church provide education on the biblical understanding of human sexuality through sermons, study, and support groups in order to lay a foundation for understanding. Those seeking answers to their sexual confusion may work toward wholeness in Christ.
- *Friendship.* The basis of friendship must be a recognition of our common need for the grace of Christ. Evidence the incarnation of Christ by identifying those we are trying to reach. There is a need for homosexuals to experience an acceptance of their person apart from their sexual concerns.
- *Healing and counselling.* It is essential that the church provide resources for healing in the area of sexual identity through Christian counselling or other ministries to homosexuals. These could include: pastoral counselling, Christian psychologists, worship and prayer. As homosexuals move away from their behaviour, they need supportive

and caring Christians to assist them toward wholeness in Christ (EPC 2005).¹⁰

In counselling homosexuals, Matheson (2006) has developed a counselling paradigm that incorporates four principles of change. He believes the reason that many homosexuals become discouraged when their feelings and attractions do not change quickly is because their efforts at change are not broad enough. Therefore, he suggests using the acronym M-A-N-S: masculinity, authenticity, need fulfilment and surrender.

- Masculinity: men in the change process need to feel masculine and bond with other men.
- Authenticity: getting out of the false self and facing feelings in open relationships.
- Need fulfilment: develop relationships, experiences, and opportunities that strengthen, nurture, and lead to joy and personal satisfaction.
- Surrender: letting go of everything that prevents change from happening and letting in the things that restore the growth processes.

Matheson (2006) developed these principles of change in order to counsel homosexuals to live in freedom from homosexual behaviour. Although he does not give scriptural mandates against homosexual behaviour, the fourth change principle—*surrender*—could be effectively developed by pastoral counsellors from a biblical paradigm of change through transformation by the Holy Spirit.

6. Conclusion

This research explored four critical components involved in homosexual behaviour: history, causes, the witness of scripture, and implications for pastoral ministry in the 21st century Christian church. These are some of the most significant conclusions of the study.

¹⁰ For a comprehensive listing of resources to assist homosexuals in reversing their sexual orientation to heterosexuality, see Appendix A.

- Anti-homosexual predilection did *not* originate with the Western Christian church's teaching; on the contrary, many pagan cultures abhorred the practice.
- A thorough literature review of scientific research reveals that there are multiple factors that cause homosexuality, but there is no empirical evidence to suggest that genetic or biological determinism is one of them.
- Both the biological (illness) and environmental models fail to consider the aspect of free agency as a constituent factor of homosexuality; that God designed humankind with the cognitive capacity to make autonomous decisions for or against any human behaviour. Behavioural scientists have confirmed this often neglected aspect of homosexuality (Byne & Parsons 1993; Warner 2001; Needleman 2004).
- In sum, then, homosexuality does not have a genetic basis; neither is it determined by hormonal imbalances. Rather, multifactorial causes point to its origin: environmental and psychosocial factors (e.g., previous sexual abuse and/or poor parent-child relations). Furthermore, the free will agency of choice in choosing homosexuality as a lifestyle must not be discounted as a causation.
- Failure on the part of the media to communicate the findings of empirical research accurately can lead the non-scientific community to believe unsubstantiated claims. Critical investigation is paramount when anatomising behavioural science research, paying particular attention to vague statements such as "there may be a gene...", "we think we have discovered..." or "the possibility exists that...".
- If the scriptures are soundly interpreted, both Testaments clearly and consistently condemn homosexual behaviour. The revisionist gay interpretation of key texts does not conform to sound hermeneutical principles.
- Empirical studies have indicated that homosexuality can be reversed. Importantly, one cannot dismiss the Holy Spirit as a powerful and final change agent for same sex behaviours. Treatment of homosexuals within the body of Christ should be the same as anyone who is caught in the clutches of sin's grip. Gentle restoration is the example of Jesus Christ's ministry, which he calls us to follow.

Further research should include a comprehensive study of the role of free agency in sexual identity development, particularly homosexuality. A more complete review of the literature is required. A valid understanding of the role of choice in homosexual behaviour is essential when counselling homosexuals who desire to reverse their sexual desires from same sex to healthy heterosexuality. This is a critical component of which pastoral counsellors need to be cognizant.

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Direct Translation: Striving for Complete Resemblance¹

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to provide a readable description of direct translation, an approach that emerges logically from a relevance theoretical perspective on communication. Direct translation is an approach that strives to attain the highest possible level of resemblance to the source text. It does this by transferring the source's communicative clues and requiring readers to familiarise themselves with the its context, an assumption that minimises the need to provide contextually implicit information, explicate figurative language, adopt inclusive language or remove ambiguities. It values a good balance between naturalness and literalness, prioritising naturalness when these two conflict.

1. Introduction

Basing his views on a communication model known as *relevance theory* (Sperber and Wilson 1986; 1995), Ernst-August Gutt (1991; 2000) proposed two approaches two translation based an analogy with direct and indirect

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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reported speech; he called the two approaches *direct translation* and *indirect translation*. Failing to understand Gutt's framework completely, early critics labelled direct and indirect translation as just new names for the age-old distinction between formal and functional equivalence (e.g., Wendland 1997).

Although Gutt objected to equating direct translation with formal equivalence, to my knowledge he never attempted to spell out what a direct translation should look like. Van der Merwe (1999), exploring the possibility of producing a concordant (direct) translation in Afrikaans, made a helpful contribution to understanding what such a translation might look like. In my doctoral dissertation (Smith 2000), I tried to explore the principles that would be applied to produce a direct translation. Unfortunately, relevance theory is so complex and littered with technical jargon that most presentations of the translation approaches based on it are difficult for most readers to follow.

The objective of this article is both modest and ambitious, namely, to describe how direct translation works and to do so with minimal technical language. This goal is modest in that it does not attempt to break new ground. It is ambitious because a readable presentation of a translation model based on relevance theory, keeping technical jargon to a minimum, is no simple task.

2. The purpose of direct translation

There are two kinds of reported speech, namely, direct and indirect quotation. Direct quotation records exactly what another said. If interpreted with the original context in mind, it enables a third party to retrieve the original speaker's exact meaning. Indirect quotation only offers an approximation of what another said, often filtered in terms of what the reporter deems most relevant or interesting; there is usually some loss or distortion of the speaker's intent. Direct and indirect translation are analogous to direct and indirect quotation. Direct translation attempts to translate exactly what the original writer said, while indirect translation filters the message so as to make it more immediately relevant and understandable to the target reader, accepting some loss in meaning.

Every translator knows it is not possible for a translation to convey everything in the original. Complete equivalence cannot be attained. In choosing the

translation approach, translators must decide on the level of resemblance required between the original and the translation. Their decision should take into account that there is a trade-off between the level of resemblance that can be achieved and the amount of effort a reader needs to invest to benefit from greater resemblance. If translators require *complete* resemblance, they should attempt a direct translation realising it will require more effort for readers to understand it. If a lesser level of resemblance will suffice, an indirect translation is preferable because it provides instant “payoff” to readers.

The goal of a direct translation of the Bible is to make accessible to its modern readers as much as possible of the meaning the original would have conveyed to its readers. An indirect translation, by contrast, has a much more modest goal—to produce immediate contextual effects. Indirect translation accepts some loss of resemblance in exchange for instant impact on the reader. These two approaches operate on a continuum (see diagram 1) in which direct translation is a limiting case, striving for complete resemblance, while indirect translation covers the remainder of the continuum covering varying degrees of resemblance. As a translation moves towards the left, it trades interpretive resemblance for instant impact.

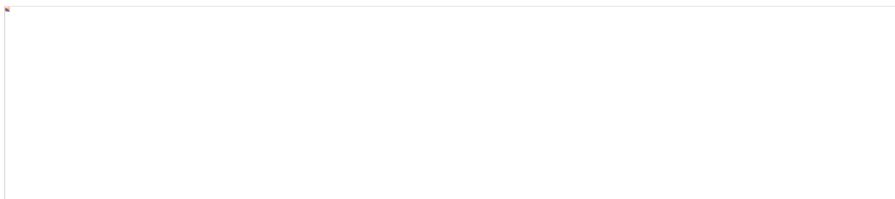


Diagram 1: Target level of interpretive resemblance in direct and indirect translation

Stated differently, the goal of a direct translation of the Bible is to enable its readers access to the same interpretation(s) they could infer if they could read the Hebrew Old Testament or the Greek New Testament. It attempts to provide its readers with as many of the verbal clues present in the source text as is possible in the receptor language. The translation is accurate to the extent that it allows its readers to infer and evaluate all the communicative clues available to a modern reader of the original text. This also serves as the measure of success for a direct translation.

In essence, then, direct translation is an approach that prioritises maximum resemblance over instant impact. It strives for complete resemblance between

source and translation. It aims to provide its readers with exactly the same communicative clues they would have if they could read the original text.

3. The foundation of direct translation

Relevance theory emerged in the late 1980s as an attempt to describe how communication works (see Sperber and Wilson 1986; 1995; Wilson and Sperber 1987). At the time, the prevailing theory was the code model, which assumed that we communicate by encoding and decoding messages. Recognising that the code model provided a hopelessly inadequate explanation of the complexities of communication, Dan Sperber and Diederik Wilson devised an alternate model in which encoding and decoding were only one part. At the simplest level, they suggested that a speaker provides evidence of her intention. A recipient can infer her meaning from the evidence she provides. The evidence (called a stimulus) often takes the form of words (a verbal stimulus). Words on their own do not clearly represent the speaker's meaning (the weakness of the code model); the context in which they are spoken helps to remove ambiguities and thus provide clear evidence of the speaker's intent.

The crucial point here is that the words are not identical with the message. They point to the message, but they need to be contextually enriched to be the message. There is a gap between the words people speak (or write) and the message they intend to convey. The context shared by the speaker and hearer fills the gap so as to make the message clear and complete. If a woman tells her husband, "I'm going upstairs to shower", her words may seem to send a clear message. If, however, you know they have a one-year old child, her real meaning becomes "honey, won't you please watch baby for the next 15 minutes". Similarly, on a cold winter's day, your guest might *say*, "it is cold in here", but his real *intention* is to ask you to close the window (Unger 1996:19). Words function as a clue to the speaker's intentions, but they must combine with contextual factors to produce a complete message.

We can look at a verbal stimulus from two perspectives (Gutt 1991:126). First, we can observe its intrinsic properties and how it functions as a communicative clue to the speaker's intent. Second, we can explore the interpretation it produces when contextually enriched. Direct translation

focuses on the intrinsic properties of the utterances in the source text. It attempts to formulate equivalent communicative clues in the receptor language. To the extent that it succeeds in producing equivalent communicative clues, readers of the translation will reach the same interpretations as readers of the original provided they use the same contextual assumptions to complete the message.

The concept of *communicative clues* is critical. Direct quotation can retain the exact properties of the message it reports. This is not possible across languages. No two languages share their intrinsic properties so closely as to permit a direct transfer of structures and forms. If, however, one can correctly identify how the parts of the original message functioned as communicative clues helping the audience to deduce the writer's intent, then formulating equivalent clues in the receptor language enables readers to recover the full message (at least in theory). The reformulated communicative clues need to interact with the original context in a manner equivalent to the way the original's clues would have done.

4. The principles of direct translation

What are the baseline principles a Bible translation must follow if it hopes to achieve the greatest possible level of interpretive resemblance to its source? Relevance theory provides a framework for determining these principles. There are three essential ones.

1. Direct translation values both the form of the original and the naturalness of the translation. Relevance theory provides a fresh perspective on the quest for balance between literalness and naturalness, between form and meaning. As a result, a good direct translation “is both literal and natural—literal in that it translates what was said rather than what was meant; natural in that it uses forms of expression that are natural in the receptor language” (Smith 2000:70).

A direct translation aims to provide clear communicative clues from which its readers can infer the author-intended meaning. To achieve this, its style needs to be as natural in the receptor language as the original was in the source language. Therefore, direct translation genuinely values a translation using an

idiom natural to the receptor language. A standard, middle-of-the road modern idiom is most appropriate. For modern English, something in the order of the ESV or the NIV seems most appropriate. In my opinion, the KJV is too formal, the NASB too awkward and the Message too colloquial.

At the same time, direct translation also values the form of the original and will remain as close to it as is possible while still providing clear communicative clues in natural idiom. For example, the semantic range of the Greek genitive case overlaps substantially with the way English uses the preposition “of” to join two nouns, and English speakers are comfortable with this usage. Therefore, it is seldom necessary for a direct translation to alter the form of so-called objective or subjective genitives. In 2 Corinthians 5:11, “the fear of the Lord” (NIV) is just as natural to English speakers as was τὸν φόβον τοῦ κυρίου to ancient Greek speakers; a direct translation would not change the form to “what it means to fear the Lord” (GNB).

What should translators do when they face a choice between literalness and naturalness? They should provide clear communicative clues—as clear and natural as the ones in the source text. Naturalness takes priority over literalness. The maxim is, translate literally to the extent that it is clear and reader-friendly in the receptor idiom. In Romans 8:17, it would be inappropriate to translate the Greek phrase συγκληρονόμοι . . . Χριστοῦ literally as “fellow heirs of Christ”; for the sake of clarity, the form should change to “fellow heirs with Christ” (ESV), but need not go as far as “we will possess with Christ what God has promised for him” (GNB).

2. Direct translation requires that translators interpret the original correctly in order to translate it effectively. Due to the mechanical nature of producing a literal version, translators can cope with a relatively shallow grasp of the source text by simply matching glosses and forms between two languages. When it comes to the depth of the translators' understanding of the original, direct translation resembles functional equivalence. Translators need a thorough grasp of its intricacies, far beyond the lexical and grammatical level (see Winckler and Van der Merwe 1993:54-55; cf. Gutt 1991:164; Van der Merwe 1999).

The translators' task is to identify the communicative clues the source text provided for its readers and translate them into equivalent clues for the receptor audience. These clues may emerge from any level within the discourse features of the source text. They also depend on the interplay between text and context for their effectiveness. Therefore, producing a good direct translation requires skilful exegesis of the source text, taking into account its “discourse features, rhetorical devices, and social conventions” (Smith 2000:228; cf. Van der Merwe 1999).

3. *Direct translation requires readers to interpret it with the original context in mind.* Winckler and Van der Merwe's (1993:54) definition makes this point well:

A direct translation is a receptor language text which the translator intends the receptor audience to interpret in the context envisaged (by the original author) *for the original audience*. And in making a direct translation the translator has the informative intention to communicate to the receptor language audience *all* the assumptions communicated by the original in the context envisaged for the original.

All communication acts are context-dependent. This is a fundamental principle of relevance theory. If communication is context-dependent, then it is impossible to keep a complex message fundamentally unaltered while permitting the target audience to interpret it using a completely different contextual framework.³ Functional equivalence fails here—it is based on the code model, which wrongly assumes that any message that can be encoded in one language can also be encoded in another. This simply is not true. If messages could be fully encoded, it might be true. But messages are encoded *in context* in such a way that the interplay between code and context produces the full meaning.

A corollary of the content-dependent nature of communication is that a translation which allows readers to assume a contemporary context will suffer

³ Many have protested the legitimacy of requiring readers of a translation to be familiar with the context underlying the original. Gutt (2000) responded persuasively on this point; I shall not rehash his arguments here.

greater loss of resemblance to its source than one which requires them to be familiar with the original context. It follows, therefore, that a translation which strives for maximum resemblance must require readers to interpret it with the original context in mind.⁴

These three principles emerge directly from relevance theory. To produce a translation that achieves maximum resemblance to its source, translators must (a) value both naturalness and literalness, (b) interpret the original correctly and (c) assume readers will interpret the translation with the original context in mind. Translators can use these principles as guidelines for making difficult translation decisions.

5. The application of direct translation

Now we need to grapple a little with how a direct translation should handle some of the most common and important translation problems modern Bible translators face. I have selected four for discussion: (a) implicit information, (b) metaphorical language, (c) inclusive language and (d) ambiguous texts.

5.1. Implicit information

How should a direct translation of the Bible handle information that is implicit in the original, but will be lost in a literal rendering? To what extent should it add clarifying words or phrases in an attempt to make explicit to the reader what is implicit in the original?

Relevance theory offers a satisfactory account of the role implicit information plays in communication, but that account is too complex to explain here (cf. Gutt 1996; Unger 1996). All I shall attempt here is a simplified account of how direct translation handles implicit information.

Firstly, we need to distinguish between *linguistically* and *contextually* implicit information. Linguistically implicit information is required for the sake of

⁴ One means of helping to reduce the burden on readers to familiarise themselves with the context of the source is by including notes containing essential background information. This option is more feasible for translations that will be published electronically than for printed Bibles.

grammatical correctness and completeness. For example, 1 Timothy 1:3 begins with καθώς (“just as”), “a construction that needs a ‘so now’ to complete it” (Fee 1988:48). Although “so now” is omitted in the Greek text, grammatical correctness requires it to be supplied. The “so now” clause is linguistically implicit because the sentence is not grammatically complete without it. From a relevance theoretic perspective, the missing words are judged to be part of the communicative clue, so a direct translation should supply them.

Contextually implicit information is information that is derived purely from the external context; in other words, it is not implied by the syntax of the language. In Revelation 3:15, the Laodicean church is rebuked for being “neither cold nor hot” (NIV). To appreciate the force these words had on the original readers, one needs to know that Laodicea had no water source of its own, but received its hot and cold water from nearby water sources. All their water was lukewarm by the time it reached them. Although the author surely had this information in mind when he penned 3:15-16, it is not implicit in the text itself, but in the external context. Because direct translation presupposes readers will use the original context to interpret it, it does not explicate contextually implicit information.

This distinction between two main types of implicit information tends to simplify and polarise the situation too much. We cannot always draw a line neatly between the two. Nevertheless, the general principle would be for direct translation to lean towards making linguistically implicit information explicit, but leaving contextual clues implicit.

5.2. Metaphorical language

Functional equivalence permits and, in certain situations, actively encourages translations to convert figures of speech that will not be easily understood by modern readers into literal statements. In the case of metaphors, this usually means identifying the main point of comparison and spelling it out for readers, converting a metaphor into a proposition. Relevance theory's view of metaphors makes this method incompatible with a translation that strives for complete resemblance with its source.

Whereas literal expressions make a single, direct statement about a subject, figurative language tends to project a range weak implications upon it (see Sperber and Wilson 1986:231-237). The famous words of Psalm 23:1, יהוה רעי, usually translated literally as “the Lord is my shepherd”, illustrate the point well. What is the main point of comparison the psalmist intends between Yahweh and a shepherd? Is it protection, guidance, care, nourishment? The answer is *none* of these . . . and *all* of them. The Lord does for his people many of the things a shepherd does for his sheep. If a translator, judging that modern city dwellers know nothing about ancient shepherding, chose to explicate the statement as “the Lord takes care of me”, she would rob the reader of access to a whole range of ways in which the Lord shepherds his people.

Converting metaphors into propositions seriously distorts the message, overemphasising certain implications and completely disregarding others. Direct translation, therefore, must render metaphors literally, expecting readers to familiarise themselves with culture and context from which the metaphor derives its force.

5.3. Inclusive language

Many early twenty-first century cultures have become highly sensitive to gender-related issues, especially any perceived gender bias. This has led to a proliferation of recent Bible translations (or revisions) adopting inclusive language where the Hebrew or Greek text uses masculine language to refer to both men and women. The goal is to produce gender-neutral translations that do not cause unnecessary offence or misunderstanding on the part of gender-sensitive modern readers. The NRSV, NLT and TNIV are examples of major English translations that employ inclusive language. Even recent translations that do not formally adopt inclusive language show much greater sensitivity to the matter than was the case 30 years ago; the ESV is a good example (see Decker 2004).

There are two questions of importance to this article: (a) Should a direct translation use inclusive language at all? (b) If yes, to what extent?

When interpreted with the original context in mind, a direct translation should provide clear communicative clues to the author's intended meaning. “The test of a good direct translation is that when interpreted in the context envisioned for the original readers it yields the author-intended interpretation” (Smith 2000:82). In the vast majority of cases where the original biblical text uses masculine language with the intent of including both genders, it will make no difference whether or not the translation uses inclusive language. If a modern reader were to use a first-century worldview to interpret Matthew 12:30, it would hardly matter whether ὁ μὴ ὦν μετ’ ἐμοῦ κατ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστίν were rendered “he who is not with me is against me” (NIV) or “whoever is not with me is against me” (NRSV). The suggestion I made eight years ago seems even more appropriate today than it did then:

In general, a direct translation should not depart from the form of the original unless that is required for the sake of preserving its communicative clues. However, if translating for readers who are known to be sensitive to feminist issues and lacking the space to provide explanatory notes that alter the readers’ cognitive environment, translators are free to employ inclusive renderings so as to prevent communication breakdowns (Smith 2000:82).

The answer to the first question—should a direct translation use inclusive language at all?—is that it is free to do so if this does not distort the meaning. However, for a translation assuming an ancient context, inclusive language is not essential and should be avoided if it may distort the interpretation in any way.

Critics of inclusive language point out many examples where a general policy of changing masculine language into gender-neutral language can cause subtle distortions (see Grudem 2002a-b; 2005; Cole 2005; Poythress 2005; Marlowe 2006). Cole's (2005) examination of Psalm 1 sounds a caution regarding a hidden danger. The NIV translated verse 1 “blessed is the man who . . .”; the TNIV altered it to “blessed are those who . . .”, a seemingly harmless instance of changing from masculine to neutral language. The traditional identification of “the blessed man” of Psalm 1 is as a righteous human being. However, a rising tide of scholarly opinion is open to the idea that “the blessed man”

could have been identified with the Messiah by ancient Israelites. The switch from “blessed is he . . .” to “blessed are those . . .” denies modern readers access to a Messianic interpretation of the verse, which violates one of the primary goals of direct translation—to allow modern readers access to the same range of interpretations that were available to the original's audience.

The New Inclusive Translation of the New Testament and Psalms (NIT) provides a more obvious and extreme example of inclusive language changing the meaning of the original. The NIT chose to refer to God not as “Father”, but as “Father-Mother”. If this title were interpreted with the first-century context in mind, it would evoke in the minds of its readers a totally different array of images to what the ancients would have associated with the Greek title *patēr*. Thus it would make a poor direct translation.

In essence, then, direct translation permits cautious use of inclusive language, but generally favours maintaining the gender of the original so as to minimise the potential for subtle changes in meaning. Since the goal of direct translation is maximum resemblance (in the original context), avoiding inclusive language minimises the risk of unintentional distortions.

5.4. Ambiguous texts

We have established that a direct translation is dependent on the quality of the exegesis underlying it. Since we are so far removed from the biblical writers, many aspects of these ancient texts are ambiguous to us. This raises an important translation question: If a direct translation relies on sound exegesis of the source text, how should it handle elements in the source text that are exegetically ambiguous, that is, elements which could be interpreted in more than one way?

Ambiguities fall into two categories—those that can be reproduced in the receptor language and those that cannot. Psalm 5:3 contains an example of an ambiguity that cannot be retained in translation. The clause אֶעֱרֹךְ לְךָ זֶבַח could mean “I prepare a sacrifice for you” (ESV), “I lay my requests before you” (NIV) or “I will present my case to you” (NET). There is no English construction that makes all three of these interpretations accessible. The age-old dispute about whether to translate πνευματικῶν in 1 Corinthians 12:1

“spiritual gifts”, “spiritual things” or “spiritual ones” also falls in this category. Does the figure of speech *καλὸν ἀνθρώπῳ γυναικὸς μὴ ἄπτεσθαι* in 1 Corinthians 7:1b mean “it is good for a man not to marry” (NIV text) or “it is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (NIV margin)? In this case, a translation can sit on the fence by translating the figure literally as “it is good for a man not to touch a woman” (NASB). It is unclear whether *ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ* in 2 Corinthians 5:14 refers to our love for Christ or Christ's love for us. A translation need not take a stance, though, since the English “the love of Christ” retains the ambiguity.

Since direct translation assumes the reader will use the author-intended context to interpret its statements, it does not *need* to alter the wording of the text in an attempt to remove ambiguities. If a statement is grammatically ambiguous in the Hebrew or Greek text, presumably the context would have removed the ambiguity for the original readers.⁵ In direct translation, the translator's task is to provide clues which, when interpreted with the original context in mind, will lead modern readers to the same interpretation as the original would have led its intended readers.

Therefore, where it is possible to leave a verbal ambiguity in the translation, permitting readers to interpret it in the same range of ways someone might interpret the source and relying on the original context for clarity, this is the approach most consistent with the principles of direct translation.

What about cases in which the main text of the translation cannot retain an ambiguity? How should a direct translation handle a problem like the one in Psalm 5:3? The verb *כָּרַע* means “to get ready, set out in order” (HALOT 1999:884). The ambiguity stems from the fact that no direct object is stated, so the Hebrew text literally reads, “I will set my . . . before you”. To complete the sentence, English translations must supply an object from the context. Some attempts include “requests” (NIV), “sacrifice” (ESV) and “case” (NET). These are supplied based on the translators' attempts to reconstruct the context of the psalm so as to infer what the psalmist had in mind. Since we are so far

⁵ In ordinary communication, it is possible the speaker or author did not provide a clear clue to his/her intended meaning. For those who hold a high view of biblical inspiration, this argument does not apply to the Bible. We believe the Holy Spirit superintended the writing process to ensure the human authors of Scripture recorded his message properly.

removed from the psalmist, the best we can manage is a plausible reconstruction. Each of the three example translations above represents a plausible reconstruction. We do not have enough information to remove the ambiguity.

Since a direct translation strives to give its readers access to the same range of interpretations that were accessible to the intended readers of the original, the best way to manage these kinds of problems is to place one option in the text and the others in explanatory notes. *The NET Bible* (2006, Ps 5:3, n. 6) does this quite well here by adding this note:

tn *Heb* “I will arrange for you.” Some understand a sacrifice or offering as the implied object (cf. NEB “I set out my morning sacrifice”). The present translation assumes that the implied object is the psalmist’s case/request.

This at least gives studious readers access to the interpretations open to modern readers of the psalm in Hebrew, which is the best a translation can hope to achieve.

6. Conclusion

Two different kinds of translation emerge from relevance theory: direct translation, which strives for complete interpretive resemblance, and indirect translation, which prioritises instant impact on readers. Direct translation seeks to retain the linguistic properties of the source text in translation. It cannot do so literally because no two languages share the same formal properties, so instead it transfers them value as communicative clues. In producing equivalent communicative clues, translators should strive to balance naturalness and literalness, prioritising naturalness when these values clash.

The most important principle of direct translation is that it assumes readers will use the original context to complete its communicative clues and recover the author’s intended meaning. As compared with indirect translation, this requires extra effort from readers wishing to understand it correctly, but offers the promise of greater resemblance to the source. This assumption minimises

the need to provide contextually implicit information, explicate figurative language, adopt inclusive language or remove ambiguities.

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Evaluating the Changing Face of Worship in the Emerging Church in terms of the ECLECTIC Model: Revival or a Return to Ancient Traditions?¹

Noel B Woodbridge²

Abstract

The desired approach to worship in the Emerging Church is a revival of liturgy and other ancient traditions, brought back with life and meaning. The aim of this paper is to answer the question: Is Emerging Worship a modern-day revival or is it merely a return to ancient traditions? In particular, an attempt will be made to evaluate some of the common values or characteristics of Emerging worship gatherings in terms of the ECLECTIC model. The paper concludes with a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of Emerging Worship and provides recommendations regarding the application of Emerging Worship in today's church.

¹ The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the beliefs of the South African Theological Seminary.

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1. Introduction

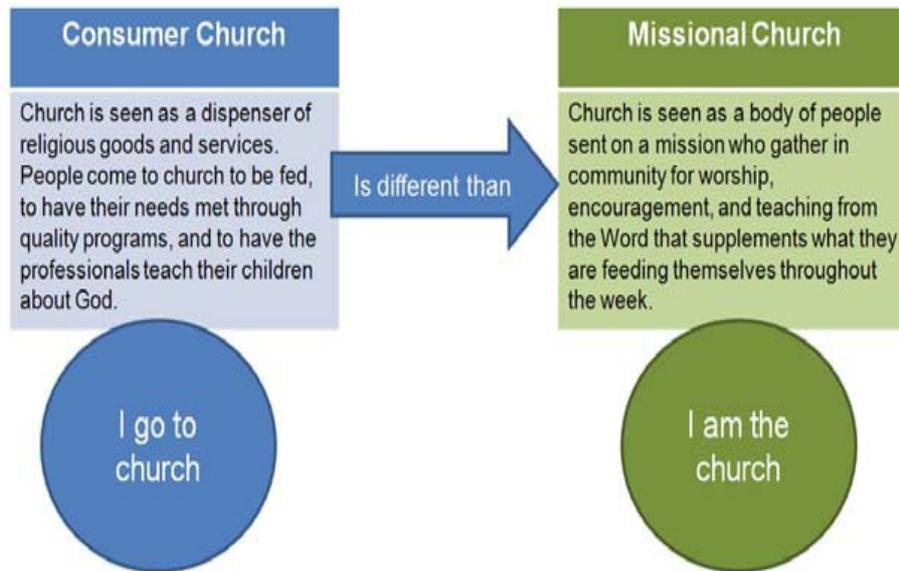
1.1. The Emerging Church Movement

The Emerging Church Movement (or the Emergent Church Movement) is described by its own proponents as, “a growing generative friendship among missional Christian leaders seeking to love our world in the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (*About Emergent Village* 2007).

While practices and even core doctrines vary, most emergents can be recognised by the following values (Taylor 2006):

- *Missional living*: Christians go out into the world to serve God rather than isolate themselves within communities of like-minded individuals.
- *Narrative theology*: Teaching focuses on narrative presentations of faith and the Bible rather than systematic theology or biblical reductionism.
- *Christ-likeness*: While not neglecting the study of Scripture or the love of the church, Christians focus their lives on the worship and emulation of the person of Jesus Christ.
- *Authenticity*: people in the post-modern culture seek real and authentic experiences in preference over scripted or superficial experiences.

In the diagram below Kimball (2003:95) clearly points out the difference between today’s “Consumer Church” and the “Missional Church” of the Emerging Church Movement:



1.2. Understanding Emerging Generations

To understand the characteristics of worship in the Emerging Church, one needs to know, in advance, who are the major players of the Emerging Church. In other words: Who are the emerging generations? The emerging generations have been variously described as: The post-modern generations, the next/young generations, the generation X, or the baby busters who follow the baby boomers (see Table 1 below).

Factors	Builders	Boomers	Busters
Ages	52+ years	33 to 51	14 to 32
Formative years	1920s, 30s, 40s	1950s, 60s, 70s	1980s, 90s, 2000s

Table 1: Generations (Kim 2007:3)

What are the characteristics of the emerging generations with regard to worship? McKnight (2007:37) indicates the following:

- The emerging generations want to experience the truth through feeling and emotion rather than mere reason.
- They want to experience the presence of God through worship.

- They want to take part in worship as positive participants, not passive spectators.
- They respect relationships and are image-centred.
- When it comes to faith, they are praxis oriented, not doctrine oriented. For example, the definition “*how a person lives is more important than what he or she believes*” is their main concern.
- They are also hungry for symbols, metaphors, experiences, stories, and relationships that reveal greatness.

1.3. Understanding Emerging Worship

Leonard Sweet (2000) in his book *Post-modern Pilgrims* sums up this stream or movement of emerging churches, as *First Century Passion for the 21st Century*. He helps us see the need for an EPIC church for EPIC times. Using the EPIC (theory) acronym, he describes the ideal worship for an Emerging Church. He points out four categories, which post-modern churches should pursue to prepare the twenty-first century future church for new generations (Caldwell 2006):

- **E** – *Experiential*. It is not just about listening and thinking, but the idea of “let’s enter into worship as an experience.”
- **P** – *Participatory*. The idea that worship is not just something you observe, like watching television. You really participate. For example, an important part of worship might be a period of about 20 minutes in which there are stations around the room where people might go to write down a prayer, make their financial offering, or have Communion.
- **I** – *Image-based*. The idea here is not just words for the ears, but an increased emphasis on things you can see. Because of digital technology you have the capacity to project images, show artwork, use film and video.
- **C** – *Communal*. A strong emphasis on community. People are saying, “We don’t just want to attend a service and look at the back of people’s heads.”

The worship style, which emerging churches pursue, is described as “*Vintage-Faith Worship*.” To understand more deeply the character of the emerging

worship, we need to be aware of the unique term, *Vintage Faith*. Vintage Faith looks at what was vintage Christianity and goes back to the beginning and looks at the teachings of Jesus with fresh eyes and hearts and minds. It carefully discerns what it is in contemporary churches and ministry that perhaps has been shaped through modernity and evangelical subculture, rather than the actual teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures (Kimball and Fox 2007).

The return to Vintage Faith is illustrated below as a church paradigm shift from Modern to Post-modern, which in itself represents a shift to Ancient traditions (see Table 2):

Church Paradigm Shift				
Ancient	Medieval	Reformation	Modern	Post-modern
Mystery Community Symbol	Institutional	Word-oriented	Reason Systemic Analytical Verbal Individualistic	Mystery Community Symbol

Table 2: Church Paradigm Shift (Kim 2007)

In this paper, an attempt will be made to answer the following question: Is *Emerging Worship* a modern-day Revival or is it merely a Return to Ancient Traditions?

The author has arranged the following eight characteristics/elements of *Emerging worship* into an acronym to form the ECLECTIC model:

- Engagement
- Conversation
- Liberty
- Experience
- Communion
- Traditions
- Images
- Contemplative Prayer

In the next section an attempt will be made to evaluate these eight characteristics of *Emerging worship gatherings* in terms of the ECLECTIC model – an appropriate name, since it represents the Emerging Church’s acceptance of several ancient traditions and worship practices from various sources.

2. Evaluating emerging worship in terms of the ECLECTIC model

2.1. Engagement: Positive participation in the *worship gathering*

Sally Morgenthaler cited in Kimball (2003:155) indicates that, “The problem is, we are living in a culture that breeds spectators. . . . Spectator worship has been and always will be an oxymoron.”³

The normal church service today is like a congregation watching a “show” at the theatre:

People patiently scan the church bulletin and read the names of the pastoral staff and an outline of the sermon . . . Then the moment everyone is waiting for begins! People look up to the stage and sit as they watch Act I start with the band and the band leader cheerfully singing a few songs. Act II includes announcements and promotion about various upcoming church events. . . . Act III features the main star (the preacher), who comes out and gives the sermon. . . . The show ends, and then we are dismissed (Kimball 2004:75).

Most emerging churches sufficiently recognise the danger of this type of worship, and try to plan and practise a new worship style, which incorporates the positive participation of the congregation, as opposed to a passive worship. In this regard, emerging churches prefer to use the term ‘*gathering*’ or ‘*worship gathering*’ instead of the term of ‘worship service’ (Kim 2007:8).

The Pauline approach to worship encourages maximum participation. Guided by the Spirit, everyone in the body is encouraged to make a contribution (Liesch 1993:73). Paul provides a good illustration of this approach in 1

³ A phrase, which combines two words that seem to be the opposite of each other.

Corinthians 14:26 (NIV): “What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, *everyone* has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church” (own emphasis).

2.2. Conversation: Evangelism as an interfaith dialogue rather than a verbal message

Proponents of the Emerging Church Movement refer to evangelism as a *conversation*, because of its emphasis on interfaith dialogue rather than verbal evangelism. The movement's participants claim they are creating a safe environment for those with opinions ordinarily rejected within modern conservative evangelicalism. Non-critical, interfaith dialogue is favoured over dogmatically-driven evangelism in the movement. Emergents do not engage in apologetics or confrontational evangelism in the traditional sense, preferring to allow persons the freedom to discover their faith through conversation and witness (*Emerging Church* 2006).

Kimball (2003:201) explains how in the past many churches have focused their evangelistic efforts on getting people (pre-Christians) to attend services. However, if post-Christians are not interested in attending our services, then we need radical changes in our evangelistic strategy. He summarises these changes as follows:

Modern Church	Emerging Church
Evangelism is an event that you invite people to.	Evangelism is a process that occurs through relationship, trust and example.
Evangelism is primarily concerned with getting people into heaven.	Evangelism is concerned with people's experiencing the reality of living under the reign of his kingdom now.
Evangelism is focused on pre-Christians.	Evangelism is focused on post-Christians.
Evangelism is done by evangelists.	Evangelism is done by disciples.
Evangelism is something you do in addition to discipleship.	Evangelism is part of being a disciple.
Evangelism is a message.	Evangelism is a conversation.
Evangelism uses reason and proofs for apologetics.	Evangelism uses the church being the church as the primary apologetic.
Missions is a department of the church. Jesus died for your sins so that you can go to heaven when you die. (Modern church focus of the gospel message.)	The church is a mission. Jesus died for your sins so that you can be his redeemed coworker now in what he is doing in this world and spend eternity with the one you are giving your life to in heaven when [you] die. (Emerging church focus of the gospel message.)

Table 3: Paradigm Shift in Evangelism Strategy (Kimball 2003)

Brian McLaren is among those who vigorously advocate of the “Emerging Church” approach to evangelism. However, it could be argued that he goes too far when he states the following:

I don't believe making disciples must equal making adherents to the Christian religion. It may be advisable in many (not all!) circumstances to help people become followers of Jesus and

remain within their Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish contexts ... rather than resolving the paradox via pronouncements on the eternal destiny of people more convinced by or loyal to other religions than ours, we simply move on (McLaren 2004:260, 262).

Oakland's (2007b) expresses his concern about the Emerging Church's evangelisation programme. He indicates that walls that once separated biblical Christianity from pagan religions are being demolished. The narrow way that Jesus proclaimed leads to heaven through faith in Him alone has now been broadened to permit open access for the sake of establishing the "kingdom" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Steve Addison cited in Wayne (2006) summarises evangelism in the Emerging Church as follows:

- Evangelism has more to do with presence than proclamation; more to do with lifestyle than words; more to do with engagement than conversion.
- Evangelism is redefined as remaining open to God at work in other religions. Remaining open to being evangelised by other faiths.

2.3. Liberty: Liberty of movements in *worship gatherings*

In most emerging worship gatherings, people aren't forced to remain stationary in their seats for the whole meeting. During the service people are allowed to leave their seats to go to prayer stations to pray on their own, write out prayers, pray with others or go to an art station, where they can artistically express worship, while worship music plays in the background (Kimball 2004:89-90).

In some Emerging Churches people are encouraged to walk the *labyrinth*. The labyrinth is a structure that is growing in popularity, used during times of contemplative prayer.

Walking the labyrinth has been described as follows: The participant walks through the maze-like structure until he or she comes to the centre, and then back again. Often prayer stations with



candles, icons, pictures, etc., can be visited along the way. The labyrinth originated in early pagan societies. The usual scenario calls for the *pray-er* to do some sort of meditation, enabling him or her to center down (i.e., reach God's presence), while reaching the centre of the labyrinth (Oakland 2007a: 67).

The questions arises: Should a Christian be involved in such "walking meditation" or should this practice be regarded as suspect by the Christian? From a Biblical perspective, in Deuteronomy 12:1-14, God commands us clearly not to participate in anything that has ever been used in pagan ritual for worship. From early times the labyrinth has been used as a tool of divination, a gateway to communicating with other spirits. It was incorporated into the Roman Catholic experience at a time when there was little understanding of the Bible (Muse 2007).

2.4. Experience: Multi-sensory oriented worship gatherings (Creating as Created Beings)

Henri Nouwen (cited in Kimball 2003:156) states that, "more and more people have realized that what they need is much more than interesting sermons and prayers. They wonder how they might really experience God."

Stimulating images that provide spiritual experiences are an essential part of the Emerging Church. Many churches are darkening their sanctuaries and setting up prayer stations with candles, incense, and icons (Oakland 2007a: 65).

God created us as multi-sensory creatures and chose to reveal Himself to us through our senses. Therefore, it is only natural that we should worship him using all of our senses (Kimball 2003:128). In 1 John 1:1 (NIV) we read, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.

The emerging church embraces multi-sensory worship. Participation and experience are very important to people in emerging generations, in all areas of life. Kimball (2004:81) indicates that multi-sensory worship involves

seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, touching and experiencing. This means that our worship of God can involve singing, silence, preaching, and art, and hence encompasses a wide spectrum of expression.

According to Sweet, a “spiritual awakening” is impacting the post-modern generation and is characterised by a hunger for experience. He writes:

A spiritual tsunami has hit postmodern culture. . . . The wave is this: People want to *know* God. . . . Post-moderns want something more than new products; they want new experiences of the divine (Sweet 1999:420).

Julie Sevig claims that post-moderns prefer to encounter Christ by using all their senses. She argues that the following aspects of classical liturgical or contemplative worship appeal to them: “the incense and candles, making the sign of the cross, the taste and smell of the bread and wine, touching icons and being anointed with oil” (Sevig 2001).

Mark Driscoll cited in Oakland (2007a: 66) summarises multi-sensory worship as, “Everything in the service needs to preach – architecture, lighting, songs, prayers, fellowship, the smell—it all preaches. All five senses must be engaged to experience God.”

Kimball (2003:185) offers the following suggestions that show how the “modern church” should adjust and move towards a “no-holds-barred approach” to worship:

- Services designed to be user-friendly and contemporary must change to services that are designed to be experiential and spiritual-mystical.
- Stained-glass windows that were taken out of churches and replaced with video screens should now be brought back into the church on video screens.
- Lit up and cheery sanctuaries need to be darkened because darkness is valued and displays a sense of spirituality.
- The focal point of the service that was the sermon must be changed so that the focal point of the service is a holistic experience.

- Use of modern technology that was used to communicate with a contemporary flare must change so that church attendees can experience the ancient and mystical (and use technology to do so).

From the above it appears that the Emerging Church is more experience-based than Bible-based. It is also apparent that in the Emerging Church the Word of God takes a secondary position to the worship of God. Oakland indicates his concern about this trend in worship. He states that deviating from the Word of God for extra-biblical experiences could open the door to deception. While worshipping God is an essential part of the Christian faith, there can be problems, if worship supersedes the Word of God (Oakland 2007c).

2.5. Communion: The Eucharist as a Core of the Emerging Worship Gathering

Before the Reformation, the Eucharist was central to worship. In modern churches today, communion has become so formal that it has lost its beauty. The wonder of remembering, what Jesus did, has faded away. However, there is a growing desire among emerging generations for the Lord's Supper to become the centre of worship once more (Kimball 2004:94).

There is a lack of agreement in today's Church regarding the nature of the Communion. For example, the Catholic position regarding the Eucharist is as follows:

According to the Roman Catholic Church, when the bread and wine are consecrated in the Eucharist, they cease to be bread and wine, and become instead the body and blood of Christ. . . . The mysterious change of the reality of the bread and wine began to be called "transubstantiation" in the Eleventh Century (*Eucharist* 2007).

On the other hand, many Protestants do not believe that Christ's body and blood are *physically* present in the Lord's Supper. Rather they believe that Jesus is *spiritually* present:

Many Reformed Christians, who follow John Calvin hold that Christ's body and blood are not physically present in the

Eucharist. The elements are only symbols of the reality, which is spiritual nourishment in Christ (*Eucharist* 2007).

Dr. Webber (2005:10) states that to be a successful part of the Emerging Church Movement, one needs to “rediscover the central nature of the table of the Lord in the Lord’s Supper, breaking of bread, communion and Eucharist.” However, Dr Webber’s reference to the rediscovery of the Eucharist reminds one of the Roman Catholic “new evangelisation program” presently underway to win the “separated brethren” back to the “Mother of All Churches”.

According to Oakland (2007a:122), the Catholic Church plans to establish the kingdom of God on earth and win the world to the Catholic Jesus (The Eucharistic Christ). He claims that this will be accomplished when the world comes under the rule and reign of Rome and the Eucharist Jesus. The Eucharist Jesus is supposedly the presence of Christ, through the power of *transubstantiation*, which is the focal point of the Mass.

2.6. Traditions: Reflecting on Liturgy, Ancient Disciplines, Christian Calendar, and Jewish Roots

Many modern churches have basically ignored the worship practices of the historical church. They have limited discipleship by focusing on the disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, giving, and serving. They have neglected many of the disciplines of the historical church, such as weekly fasting, practising silence, and *lectio divina*⁴ (Kimball 2003:223).

Dr Webber claims that to be a successful part of the Emerging Church there needs to be a rediscovery of congregational spirituality through the Christian celebration of Traditions, such as Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Holy Week, Easter and Pentecost (Webber 2005:10).

According to Dan Kimball, the *Emerging Worship* is often called *Vintage-Faith Worship* for the following reason. Ironically, emerging generations living in post-modern times tend to love and admire ancient tradition. Hence the desired approach to worship in the emerging church worship is a revival of

⁴ *Lectio Divina* means "Divine Reading" and refers specifically to a method of Scripture reading practised by monastics since the beginning of the Church.

liturgy and other ancient disciplines, brought back with life and meaning (Kimball 2004:92).

Oakland (2007c) confirms this trend in the worship style of the post-modern generation. He indicates that while purpose-driven evangelists removed crosses and other Christian symbols from church services to be seeker-friendly, the post-modern generation, are apparently attracted to crosses, candles, stained glass, liturgy, and sacraments (Oakland 2007c).

It appears that the goal of the Emerging Church is to reintroduce an “Ancient-Future” faith based on the ideas, dogmas, traditions and views of the Early Church Fathers, rather than going back to the inspired Word of God (Oakland 2007c). However, Oakland (2007a: 80) issues the following word of caution:

If the church that emerged from the New Testament was based on ideas and beliefs foreign to Scripture, why would we want to emulate a previous error? When doctrines of men replace the doctrine of Scripture, many are led astray. It has happened in the past, and it is happening now. Following doctrine not based on the Word of God always results in the undoing of faith.

2.7. Images: Making a sacred space for the worship gathering

Images and the visual arts are considered very important in the worship gathering of emerging churches, as they pursue a sacred space of worship. “Emerging generations are very visual. They crave a sense of mystery and wonder as they worship God” (Kimball 2004:78).

The emerging generation desires a spiritual environment for worship. In emerging worship candles are often placed all around the room, so as not to focus on the stage. They are used for decorating worship spaces to create a sense of mystery. The value of worship in emerging worship gatherings is seen in the décor and layout of the room. Usually candles are used to portray the seriousness of worship. They all represent the light of Jesus in a dark world (Kimball 2004:80).

As an expression of worship the Emerging Church provides numerous art forms and visuals to create a sacred space for the worship gathering. These

visuals may include still images, video clips of symbols. There may be a sequence of images of the cross reminding people that the reason they are there is to remember and focus on the risen Jesus (Kimball 2004:84).

It appears that the Emerging Church is in the process of converting their culture from word-centred to image-centred. In this regard, it would be wise for them to reflect on the following Mosaic injunction:

Certainly the Old Testament, that is with regard to the instruction that God mediated through Moses to the nation of Israel, is categorically opposed to both any visual representation of God and the resultant worship of God by means of such an idol (Exod. 20:4-6) (Horner 2007).

2.8. Contemplative Prayer: Stressing prayer and participation in spiritual activities

Another common theme woven throughout emerging worship gatherings is the emphasis on prayer. Much time is given for people to slow down, quiet their hearts, and then pray at various stations and with others. Each person needs to allow the Spirit to convict or encourage his or her heart after a message – rather than rush out the door (Kimball 2004:94). Prayer is therefore an important element in the Emerging Church. The Emerging worship gathering is well planned and provides plenty of time for people to slow down.

Contemplative prayer is a vital element of the Emerging Church and openly integrates the spiritual practices of other religions. Many involved in contemplative and centering prayer find their influence and practices from eastern mystics and Roman Catholic mystics (monks) (*The Issue of other Religious Practices* 2006).

Brian McLaren (2004:255) elaborates:

Western Christianity has (for the last few centuries anyway) said relatively little about mindfulness and meditative practices, about which Zen Buddhism has said much. To talk about different things is not to contradict one another; it is, rather, to have much to offer one another, on occasion at least.

It is clear that McLaren is promoting is an exchange of spiritual practices. Being open to other spiritual practices often translates into incorporating other religions into the Christian Faith. Although he does not openly reject the fundamentals of Christianity, it appears that they lie deeply buried beneath the new teachings and practices of a new spirituality for their post-modern outreach (*The Issue of other Religious Practices* 2006).

Centering prayer is a method of prayer, which prepares us to receive the gift of God's presence. It is supposed to lead a person into contemplation. The person tries to ignore all thoughts and feelings - the thinking process is suspended. It is a spiritual process that is supposed to put the ordinary person into direct contact with God - to enter and receive a direct experience of union with God (Feaster 2007; *The issue of other Religious Practices* 2006).

It appears that the underlying premise of contemplative spirituality is panentheism - the belief that God is in all things and in all people (Oakland 2007c). This explains why mystics say, all is one. At the mystical level, they experience this God-force that seems to flow through everything and everybody. All creation has God in it as a living, vital presence. It is just hidden (Yungen 2007).

The theological implications of this worldview put it at direct odds with biblical Christianity. The Bible makes it clear that only one true God exists, and His identity is not in everyone. Furthermore, the fullness of God's identity, in bodily form, rests in Jesus Christ alone (Col 2:9). The Bible clearly teaches the only deity in man is Jesus Christ who dwells in the believer. Jesus also made it clear that not everyone will be born again and have God's Spirit (John 3). However, the panentheist believes that all people and everything have the identity of God within them (Yungen 2006).

3. Conclusion

It is clear that the Emerging Church Movement cannot be ignored. It has the potential to reshape Christianity. What can Today's Church learn from the Emerging Church with regard to worship? In Matthew 9:17 (NIV) Jesus indicates that: "Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do,

the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Kimball (2004:9) applies Matthew 9:17 to *Emerging worship* in the following way:

Jesus used a metaphor of new wineskins to describe the different approaches to God that he introduced. The emerging church provides new wineskins for worship. These new wineskins are needed in response to our new postmodern culture.

On the other hand, appropriate contextualisation *also* implies, “adapting my communication of the gospel without changing its essential character” (Keller 2004). In short, we must retain the essentials and adapt the non-essentials.

According to Kim, culture is like the wineskins, not an object to be neglected and destroyed by new wine, the gospel. As the gospel of Matthew indicates, both the new wine (gospel/worship/Christ) and the new wineskins (culture/context) should be preserved. In this respect, it seems that the emerging church is endeavouring to practise this teaching of Jesus regarding worship (Kim 2007:17).

In this paper an attempt was made to answer the question: Is *Emerging Worship* a modern-day Revival or is it merely a Return to Ancient Traditions? From the above evaluation it appears that *Emerging Worship* has the following strengths and weaknesses (See also the Table at the end of the paper):

Strengths

1. Emphasis on the Lord’s Supper
2. A commitment to contextualising the gospel, especially amongst post-moderns.
3. A wide scope of experiences in the expression of worship is provided.
4. Emphasis on authentic spirituality and reverent prayer.
5. A commendable example of lifestyle evangelism and emulating Christ.
6. Positive worship through Liturgy and Ancient Church Traditions.

Weaknesses

1. Worship is based more on Experience and Ancient Traditions than on the Word.
2. Tends to confuse cultural accommodation with cultural immersion.
3. Tends to promote syncretistic spiritual beliefs and practices.
4. An increased use of images in worship can easily lead to idolatry.
5. Greater freedom in worship tends to downplay the role of church leadership.
6. The major purposes of the church are regarded as worship and edification, rather than the proclamation of the gospel.

What can Christians learn from Emerging Worship? Amongst other things, Christians need to learn how to contextualise their worship services to meet the needs of our post-modern culture by adopting new approaches to God. However, in this process believers need to be careful to remain biblical and retain the essential character of the gospel in their worship practices.

Woodbridge, Emerging Worship

Characteristic of Emergent Church Worship	Strengths (Revival)	Weaknesses (Regression)
Engagement	Positive participation in worship	Lack of preaching The Word of God takes a secondary position to corporate worship
Conversation	Interfaith dialogue Contextualises the gospel Cultural <i>accommodation</i>	Open access to the Kingdom of God Syncretises the gospel Cultural <i>immersion</i>
Liberty (of movement)	Free and dynamic movement between elements of worship	The use of eastern mystical practices (e.g., the labyrinth) A search for one's own identity
Experience	Multi-sensory oriented worship Wide scope of expression in worship (e.g., singing, silence, preaching, arts)	Worship is more experience-based than Word-based
Communion	The centrality of the Lord's Supper (thanksgiving and remembrance)	Protestants led back to Rome The Eucharistic reign of Christ The doctrine of transubstantiation
Traditions	Return to ancient traditions Positive worship through liturgy	Worship is based more on ancient traditions than on the Bible
Images	Using symbols (e.g., the cross) to create a sacred space for worship (the ancient feeling of reverence)	The danger of idolatry Worshipping the image (an idol) instead of God
Contemplative prayer	Emphasis on prayer	Syncretistic spirituality Using eastern meditative practices (e.g., centring prayer)

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Book Review

A Letter to Africa about Africa

Kevin Gary Smith

Munza K 2008. *A letter to Africa about Africa*. Johannesburg: Trans-World Radio. (78 pages)

The objective of this short book is to argue that the root cause of the social evils that afflict Africa have their roots in an unbiblical worldview, and the appropriate treatment is “theotherapy”, helping African Christians to embrace a biblical worldview.

The author begins with a brief chapter outlining the technological, economic, social and medical ills of Africa. Turning to the common reasons for these problems, he rejects colonialism, a spiritual curse, lack of education and poverty as candidates for the primary cause of these ills, regarding them as symptoms rather than the disease itself. He proposes that the traditional African worldview is the primary cause.

Much of the remainder of the book is devoted to exploring the traditional African worldview and its implications. Munza summarises the African worldview as a cycle of life between two worlds, the temporary physical world and the spiritual world (home). Birth and death are gateways between these two worlds. He explains how these beliefs promote lack of development, spread of disease and rejection of western medicine, power struggles and wars, fatalism, cannibalism, and other ills.

After briefly describing his conversion and personal change of worldview, Munza offers his interpretation of a biblical worldview, focusing on a biblical perspective on the relationship between the physical and spiritual realms, and a linear view of life and death. Much of the latter half of the book addresses

Book Review: *A Letter to Africa about Africa*

the question, “How can we help African Christians develop a biblical worldview?”

A Letter to Africa about Africa is a short, reader-friendly book[let] that can be read in an hour. The book's presentation of the traditional African worldview and how it limits peace and progress is enlightening. This is its greatest value; it is worth reading just for this insight. I found the analysis of complex problems in the latter half of the book simplistic and unconvincing, littered with sweeping, unsubstantiated claims.

Does the book achieve its purpose of arguing for a change of worldview as the solution to Africa's problems? Although philosophically I agree with this premise, I think the argument for it is weakened by the simplistic analysis of complex problems. Munza does expose that without a change of worldview, the ills of the continent will continue, but I was disappointed with his case for “theotherapy”.