

**TOWARDS A BIBLICALLY FAITHFUL OPERATIVE THEOLOGY WITH REGARDS
TO GODLY WISDOM AT WORCESTER CHRISTIAN CHURCH**

By

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The opinions expressed in this thesis are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African Theological Seminary or the supervisor(s) of the research.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leon Anton Potgieter', written over a horizontal line.

Leon Anton Potgieter

Monday, December 30th 2016

ABSTRACT

This study overviews Godly wisdom as outlined by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1-2, and correlates it with the practices of Worcester Christian Church. The intention of the study is to show how greater Biblical faithfulness may be achieved in praxis in this congregation with regard to Godly wisdom.

The objective of the research can be stated as the formulation of a theologically-informed strategic plan to show how the Worcester Christian Church may be helped in regards to improving their praxis of Godly wisdom. To this end the study employs a mixed-method empirical research method to adequately interpret the church's current operative theology and compare it with a study of Paul's ideas in 1 Corinthians 1-2 with brief attention to a few other verses and a systematic theology perspective. This culminates in practical suggestions for improving the church's current praxis that more faithfully reflects Godly wisdom.

The study found that Worcester Christian Church to a large degree adhered to a practical outworking of Godly wisdom as taught and applied by the Apostle Paul. The primary deficiency that was identified was an implicit anti-intellectual tendency amongst congregants and a dichotomous dualism between natural and spiritual methods of knowledge acquisition.

Based on the works of Christian Schwarz, and his model of 'radical Christian balance', various practical and liturgical suggestions are made to show how this imbalance may be corrected and to erase the dichotomy. The desired end is a practice of a more holistic Godly wisdom, similar to that presented and espoused by Paul himself.

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CHAPTER 1:

Introduction

1.1 Background

Worcester Christian Church (WCC) is a non-denominational congregation started in the mid-90's in the town of Worcester (Western Cape, South Africa) by Pastor Johan Schoonraad. He is a qualified lawyer who left his practice in order to spearhead the church plant.

The church recently (mid-2015) celebrated its 20th anniversary. It has experienced tremendous growth during the past two decades with approximately 500-600 regular Sunday attendees and multiple ministries. After a slow start in the 90's and having difficulty finding acceptance amongst a community where more traditional (Dutch Reformed) churches are plentiful, WCC is today recognised across the entire region. It is well-established as a mission-minded and diverse community of evangelical believers. The following are three characteristics of the church (<http://www.worcg.co.za/>):

- *Mission Minded.* The church's mission statement (drawn from Matthew 28:19) states that the congregation wishes to be involved in church plants and the support of missionaries. As such, the church regularly has prayer events for a variety of international missionaries that are supported either through prayer or finances by the congregation as a whole.
- *Diverse.* The church is racially diverse though the majority of worshippers are white Afrikaans-speaking Christians.
- *Evangelical and Charismatic.* WCC and its leaders hold to a conservative theology with emphasis on personal conversion and the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

My interest in the concept of Godly wisdom started a few years after the culmination of my seminary education. This was when my inter-cultural exposure brought me into contact with different Christian ministers and lay individuals. My new friends had

been exposed to different methodologies of knowledge acquisition during their ministerial/theological training. My interest in Godly wisdom – its nature and experience by the believer – was thus initially aimed primarily at seminary education and particularly its epistemology and methodology with regards to appropriating Godly wisdom. Then it shifted to the congregational arena. It finally was focused on one specific local church – WCC.

Godly wisdom (see 1.3) is a clear biblical concept and would therefore I would see it as important for any church to grasp and seek, where appropriate, to demonstrate. This is particularly so in Charismatic churches where traditional sources of human knowledge and wisdom are largely eschewed in favour of divinely-sourced knowledge and wisdom.

The research question therefore for this mini-thesis is how can WCC as an evangelical Charismatic church be helped to have a biblically faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom?

1.2 Objectives

1.2.2 Primary objective

The primary objective of this study was to formulate a theologically-informed strategic plan to ensure that the praxis of WCC with respect to Godly wisdom, especially as presented in 1 Corinthians 1-2, is biblically faithful and optimally relevant to its ministry.

1.2.3 Secondary objectives

The primary objective is achieved by dividing it into three secondary objectives, each of which serves as the objective for a chapter of the mini-thesis. The three secondary objectives are:

1. Interpret the operative theology of WCC with respect to Godly wisdom, especially with reference to 1 Corinthians 1-2 and Pauline religious epistemology in general.
2. Determine what a biblically faithful operative theology with respect to Godly wisdom will look like for WCC in its context.

3. Develop a strategic plan to enhance the operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom at WCC.

1.3 Definition of key terms

Throughout this study the following working definition is used for 'Godly wisdom': **divinely revealed knowledge and its effective outworking in the Christian's life.** I thus use the phrase here in the sense of the application of knowledge that enhances one's life.

I will throughout this work be using a capital 'G' when writing the phrase 'Godly wisdom'. While I realise a small 'g' would normally be used when writing of Christians trying to emulate God's wisdom, this thesis is focused more on the *wisdom of God*. Even when the treatment deals with manifesting God's wisdom in the Christian's life and the church's ministry, the thesis is concerned with the stress being on *God's wisdom* at work rather than the Christian's interpretation of divine wisdom. It was thus decided to retain the capital 'G' throughout.

The term 'Evangelical' is broad. The once homogenous Evangelical movement has in recent decades experienced more doctrinal diversity stemming from divergent interpretations of commonly held beliefs (Light 2012:8). In this mini-thesis the term will imply the following: (i) a thorough commitment to the Bible as a divinely-inspired, unified and reliable document and the sole authority for belief and practice of the believer; and (ii) Christian discipleship is important and to be life-transforming, meaning that every segment of the believer's life is to be dramatically impacted by the Christian Gospel as fully revealed in apostolic doctrine (adapted from Light 2012:9-11).

1.4 Design and methods

1.4.1 Design

The research design for this mini-thesis is Don Browning's (1991: chapter 3) four-step approach to *strategic practical theology*. In Browning's vision of practical theology, as in Smith's (2011) approach to integrative theology which this master's programme follows, strategic practical theology is the climactic final movement. The

first movement is descriptive theology, which results from an interpretation of some practice and its embedded meanings (Smith 2011:38,39). The second movement is historical theology, which involves taking the questions raised by an examination of our practices to our normative texts in order to determine what those texts really imply about our practices (Smith 2011:39). This movement covers 'the traditional disciplines of biblical studies, church history and the history of Christian thought' (Browning 1991:49). The third movement is systematic theology which is 'the fusion of horizons between the vision implicit in contemporary practices and the vision implied in the practices of normative Christian texts' (p. 51).

The fourth movement is strategic practical theology which flows from the previous three movements (p. 53). This last movement constitutes answering four questions (see below). Browning's model of strategic practical theology follows an in-depth theological analysis of a selected theme, and provides a framework for exploring the outworking of the theoretical research in a particular faith community.

Browning (1991:55–56) proposes four steps in his strategic practical theology based on answering four consecutive questions:

1. How do we understand the concrete situation in which we must act? (flows from the first movement)
2. What should be our praxis in this concrete situation? (flows from the second movement and part of the third movement)
3. How do we critically defend the norms of our praxis in this concrete situation? (flows from part of the third movement)
4. What means, strategies, and rhetorics should we use in this concrete situation?(largely unique to the fourth movement)

This mini-thesis follows this four-step approach, but treats the second and third steps together, resulting in three content chapters (each chapter effectively is geared towards achieving one of the three secondary objectives necessary to answer the research concern or question) . This yields the following structure for the thesis:

Chapter	Title	Notes
1.	Introduction	This chapter introduces the research by providing the background, objectives, methods, and structure.
2.	Interpreting the operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom at WCC	This chapter covers Browning's first question that deals with interpreting the present praxis of WCC in relation to the theme of Godly wisdom.
3.	Developing and defending an operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom for WCC	This chapter covers Browning's second and third questions, namely, developing and defending a vision of Godly wisdom and what a related biblically faithful praxis would look like for WCC in its ministry context.
4.	Developing a communicative and strategic plan for enhancing the operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom at WCC	This chapter covers Browning's fourth question, namely, formulating a communicative and strategic plan to strengthen the understanding and praxis of WCC in relation to the theme of Godly wisdom.
5.	Conclusion	This chapter concludes the research by reviewing the objectives, methods, and findings.

1.4.2 Methods

Chapter 2

This chapter deals with Browning's first question that requires research into the operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom at WCC. This involves more than just describing the operative aspect of Godly wisdom in the life of this church. It also necessitated exposing what Browning calls the theory behind the operative

dimension as all practices are “theory laden” (Browning 1991:55). To help me answer Browning’s first question I conducted a small-scale empirical study to glean information about WCC’s operative theology with regard to Godly wisdom. I selected eight congregational members (including individuals in leadership) from WCC and used a questionnaire including both closed- and open-ended questions. The questions dealt with their personal and WCC’s understanding and implementation of Godly wisdom, particularly Pauline religious epistemology.

Chapter 3

This chapter deals with Browning’s second and third questions. This necessitated a study of the traditions and texts of WCC relevant to Godly wisdom. This was to establish an operative theology relevant to WCC that would faithfully reflect a biblical understanding and be defended. For this purpose firstly exegesis and biblical, historical and systematic theology perspectives were investigated. The results of this composite study were then fused into an extended definition of Godly wisdom with special reference to sections in 1 Corinthians 1-2.

The normative position on Godly wisdom is then brought into dialogue with the actual situation at WCC presented in chapter 2. This is in order to identify deficiencies in WCC’s operative theology in regards to Godly wisdom and arrive at what a more biblically faithful praxis looks like.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 is concerned with Browning’s fourth that seeks to elaborate procedures to bring the operative theology at WCC with reference to Godly wisdom (chapter 2) into line with the answer provided in chapter 3. To achieve this, a strategic plan is developed with practical solutions that address the theoretical and practical deficiencies that would move WCC towards a more holistic and biblically mature version of Godly wisdom. This fulfils Browning’s criteria of theology as ultimately *transformational* (Browning 1991:55-58). The nature of the strategic plan attempts to provide feasible and realistic steps, keeping in mind the natural limitations of human and financial resources at WCC.

1.5 Overview

As mentioned, this study is based on the outline provided by Browning in his *Fundamental Practical Theology* (1991:55-56), where he provides four questions to drive a practical theological research project. This mini-thesis answers these questions and thereby attains the primary and secondary objectives for this study that answers the research question. The research question is concerned to discover how can WCC as an evangelical Charismatic church be helped to have a biblically faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom?

CHAPTER 2:

Interpreting the operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom at Worcester Christian Church

2.1 Introduction

I now turn to the first question in Browning's four-step approach to practical theology: "*How do we understand the concrete situation in which we must act?*" (1991:55-56). The concrete situation is in respect to the operative theology with regard to Godly wisdom at WCC. Before trying to make any adjustments it is vital to research the current situation. Failure to do so could lead to an inadequate strategic plan to achieve any required changes. Browning thus in his first question calls for a thick description of some church practice where there is or might be a difficulty or concern – a thorough description of both the practice in its context and the theory behind the practice as influenced by its traditions. Browning favours a hermeneutical methodology to achieve his thick description, but does also allow for empirical research to get a better grasp of what is happening and why.

In this chapter of the thesis I will thus be studying the operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom at WCC. More specifically, in this chapter I am attempting to find out how WCC views Godly wisdom and how this influences their various ministries, especially in their evangelistic and missions-related departments.

As noted above, WCC is a non-denominational and Charismatic church started by a qualified lawyer. The church sprang from the vision of the planting pastor who saw the need for an evangelical Charismatic church in the town. This was because many Christians were beginning to express interest in churches with a more Charismatic approach to ministry. Today the church has one of the largest Sunday morning church attendances in the town and is still growing. It has a strong outward focus, with large parts of its yearly budget being channelled for the support of evangelistic community projects in the surrounding area. The church also regularly conducts prayer events for a variety of international missionaries supported by the congregation through prayer and some financially. Clearly the Charismatic and

evangelistic nature and growth of the church can be expected to influence its operative theology with respect to Godly wisdom. The Godly wisdom I will mostly focus on is that found in the writings of the Apostle Paul, especially as outlined by him in 1 Corinthians 1-2 and which affected his Christian ministry and training of others for ministry.

This chapter delineates the methods used in the empirical research and justifies the choice of a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) approach as well as the selection of participants. It then presents a summary of the questions the participants had to answer in the research and defends the choice of them.

The next section of the chapter presents the results of the empirical study in a clear presentation. This is followed by an analysis of the data by discussing the significance of the results, salient points, and specific areas of interest for the rest of this thesis.

2.2 Nature of the empirical study

In attempting to discover, with reference to Godly wisdom, the theory-laden practices of WCC I conducted a small-scale empirical study.

2.2.1 Mixed methods and selection of respondents

Eight members of WCC (a sample of the entire congregation) completed an electronic questionnaire (see below for research design). The research focused on two main areas:

- (1) How do these eight individuals, as a selected sample of the congregation, personally view and display Godly wisdom, particularly as presented in Pauline epistemology and writings (especially 1 Corinthians 1-2)?
- (2) Do the evangelistic and missional practices of the congregation as a whole reflect an understanding of Godly wisdom, particularly as presented in Pauline epistemology and writings (especially 1 Corinthians 1-2)?

The nature of the above investigation necessitated the use of mixed method research (qualitative and quantitative) in my questionnaire (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner 2007:112-133). Since the subject matter is quite abstract, it required a thorough and

broad probing of the participants' thoughts, ideas and experiences of Godly wisdom in order to determine their personal theory and praxis. This was done in the first section of the questionnaire. I believe that for this section the employing of only quantitative research (Vyhmeister 2001:3093) with a larger group of participants would not have provided the 'thick description' of which Browning (1991) frequently speaks in his work. For the second part of the questionnaire, which consisted primarily of multiple choice questions, a more quantitative research approach was used. This was done partly to counter-balance the first part of the questionnaire, which required paragraph-type answers from respondents that were more strenuous to answer. It was also decided that this would make the quite long questionnaire less intimidating to the participants.

The study was carried out by first obtaining permission from the pastor of WCC, whom I had briefly met on two previous occasions. He seemed eager about my proposed research and was prepared to cooperate. My member selection requirements were the following:

(1) The selected participants had to be adult Christians who had been believers for more than two years. The reason for this was that an understanding of Godly wisdom is not a novice concept, and also that many questions in the survey required that participants had at least some working knowledge of Scripture and the concepts of Godly wisdom/Knowledge as found in 1 Corinthians 1-2 and elsewhere.

(2) The selected participants had to have been involved in the life and ministry of the congregation for quite some time. In other words, the participants had to have more than a superficial knowledge of the different ministries of the church. The reason for this is similar to the above, in that someone new to the congregation would not be able to provide the necessary information.

The purpose of my research was explained to the secretary. Eight participants were identified and contacted by her. After she had gained the eight members' agreement to participate in the research I was allowed to contact them directly. I thanked them for their willingness to help and the background and objective of my study was more fully explained, including details of the degree, seminary, etc. All of the practical information for completing the questionnaire electronically was also communicated

and participants were invited to contact me if they had any questions (whether technical or theological) prior to completing the questionnaire. One of the participants did do this, wanting more information on the subject matter of my thesis. This person was happy that I provided it only after the questionnaire had been completed so as not to influence his answers. The eight volunteers were all assured of the confidentiality of their answers and anonymity in the mini-thesis and again thanked. Six out of the eight volunteers completed the questionnaire within the following two weeks. The final two participants did it in the third week.

The final part of my interaction with the respondents took place when I, in line with expected practice when dealing with electronic questionnaires (Vyhmeister 2001:3226-3279), sent them a follow-up email with my results. This was done so that they could verify my reworked understanding of their answers in summarised form (as provided in the results section below). It was also so that they could also provide additional feedback if they felt any of my interpretations of their data did not truly reflect their own ideas. However, during this stage none of the participants had any concerns about the accuracy of my summary of the results. Each one felt his/her answers were represented.

2.2.2 Structure and Summary of the Questionnaire

I will now present a summary of the questions used in the questionnaire and provide justification for their use and inclusion. The questionnaire attempted to capture the views and experiences of eight representative congregational members and the practices of the church corporately with regards to Godly wisdom. Drafting the questionnaire proved to be amongst the more difficult aspects of this entire study. This was due no doubt to the somewhat abstract and intangible nature of the subject matter and thus the difficulty of crafting questions that would give meaningful feedback. The design of the questionnaire was made easier due to the second movement in Browning's approach to theology (which he sees as fundamental practical theology) having been partially completed before starting on the fourth movement (strategic practical theology) which provides the structure for my thesis. This enabled me to design the questionnaire more effectively in order to obtain a detailed picture of Godly wisdom at WCC.

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 38 questions of which 50% (19 questions) required paragraph type answers, and 50% were multiple-choice-answer questions. As the above implies, the first 50% of the questionnaire (from here on referred to as **Q1**) was qualitative in nature, with the latter 50% (**Q2**) probing in a quantitative manner.

The biblical and systematic theology perspective on Godly wisdom can be summarised as follows (see chapter 3):

*“For Paul, Godly wisdom was directly connected to the **Gospel** Message of Christ crucified, a wisdom that is primarily **revealed** through the **experiential** and illuminative work of the Holy Spirit, that requires a **humble** participatory attitude in the heart of the recipient.”*

The four highlighted words in this summary point to the four conclusions about Godly wisdom according to the Apostle Paul that are reached in chapter 3 of this thesis:

- (i) Godly wisdom is rooted in the Gospel message, is not esoteric, and not gained through human wisdom.
- (ii) Godly knowledge, the basis for Godly wisdom, is primarily revealed by the Holy Spirit, and not gained through pure intellectual reasoning alone.
- (iii) Godly knowledge becomes Godly wisdom when experienced in daily life, i.e. Godly wisdom is not emotionally passive or primarily cognitive.
- (iv) Godly wisdom is dependent on a humble character and therefore is not available to the proud of heart.

It was thus vital that these four elements were explored in the questionnaire as a whole. So Q1 provides the participants' individual views on, and experience of, Godly wisdom through the lens of the above four elements. Q2 does the same but with reference to whether the praxis at WCC in its understanding and experience of evangelism and mission reflects Godly wisdom. As mentioned earlier, this proved somewhat complicated at times due to the intangible nature of the subject matter; and also because many of the more complicated questions (eventually not used in the final draft) lent themselves towards meaningless textbook answers that would not

provide true insight into the participants' actual views and experience. The questionnaire provided the respondents with ample opportunity to also describe their views outside the fourfold framework provided by the normative study of Godly wisdom in chapter 3. I will now briefly describe the different collections of questions in the order they occur in the questionnaire. I also give one sample from each collection and the reasoning behind its use.

Q1 opens with three introductory questions probing the participants' general views on Godly wisdom, how it relates to Scripture and God, and how they think the Apostle Paul defined it. Question 1 is my sample question: *How would you define, in one sentence, the phrase 'Godly wisdom'?* This first question of the survey serves as introduction to the entire concept of Godly wisdom and tries to capture the participants' actual view prior to any potential influence the following questions in the questionnaire might have on their thoughts.

The following five questions of Q1 probe into the first established point of my research by attempting to discover how closely participants view Godly wisdom in connection with the Gospel message itself as opposed to a gnostic position (that sees it as preserved for the spiritually elite) or human wisdom. I thus question their views of the role of human intellect as it interacts with the Christian faith and Paul's deliberate avoidance of worldly wisdom during his ministry.

My sample question is: *In 1 Corinthians 2:7 Paul says the following: "No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." Why do you think Paul, writing to Christian believers, call's God's wisdom "secret" and "hidden"?* Here, an attempt is made to see whether participants link the words "secret" and "hidden" to Godly wisdom (i) in a Gnostic or esoteric sense (i.e. Godly wisdom is secret because it is reserved for the selected group of Christians who have reached a high level of Charismatic proficiency – Baird 1959:426-427), or (ii) due to the fact that Godly wisdom is a spiritually mysterious message that seems foolish from the perspective of Worldly (Human) Wisdom and needs the ministry of the Spirit to be fully understood and accepted (which I believe is in line with Paul's reasoning – Cousar 1990:171).

Next I used five questions to probe the participants' view on the relationship between the Holy Spirit and the acquisition of Godly wisdom. I specifically wanted to see if participants viewed the Holy Spirit exclusively as the Charismatic empowering member of the Trinity (i.e. involved in the gifts during a Sunday Morning worship service), or as the one who *also* reveals divine wisdom. The sample question is: *What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays with reference to attaining Godly wisdom?* This question was born from my personal experience of worshiping in, and training with, charismatic churches, where the active role of the Holy Spirit can often be limited and compressed to nothing more than the gifts or the supernatural. The idea is thus here to try and gauge what kind of link, if any, participants see between the Spirit and the acquisition of Godly wisdom.

The following section of Q1 deals with the relation between experience/participation and the attaining of Godly wisdom. Here I'm trying to gauge how closely participants view the role of personal experience (especially an experience of the personhood of God) with the attaining of Godly wisdom, as opposed to a more academic, intellectualised approach. Sample question: *There's a common saying that Christians will often use: "There's a difference between knowing God in relationship and just knowing about God." How do you think these two are related to Godly wisdom?* This question – more difficult than some of the others in the questionnaire – tries to verify whether participants see an established link with personal experiential knowledge of God and the acquisition of Godly wisdom.

The final section of Q1 deals with the relation between *pride* and *Godly wisdom*. Here I ask participants to provide exegetical commentary on Proverbs 11:2, which speaks of the connection between humility and wisdom.

The latter half of the questionnaire (Q2) consisted of multiple choice questions that probed the evangelism and missionary activities of the local congregation, including the thinking behind their implementation. Here I am trying to see whether the congregation employs a Pauline understanding of Godly wisdom in these activities or whether it unconsciously relies more on a secular understanding of wisdom. The latter would be indicated by (i) viewing education as the means to solving society's problems, (ii) the thinking that personal problems are best solved by secular

psychology, (iii) and seeing the gospel as primarily a vehicle for social and not spiritual change.

The questions in this section are generally much simpler than those from Q1 and are usually self-explanatory, such as the following two whose answers required agreement or disagreement with the statement: *(1) When doing training for missions, WCC relies more heavily on information and findings from secular human psychology and the social sciences than the Bible. (2) I have found that members of WCC genuinely believe that the human intellect is fallen and imperfect and that therefore pure intellectual reasoning (only using one's mind) is not sufficient on its own to understand and accept the Gospel.* These questions, like the others in the section, simply try and determine to what extent the church's activities draw from Scriptural sources and related Godly wisdom, as opposed to extra-Biblical sources, when engaging in evangelism or missionary work.

2.3 Results of the study

I now present the data from the questionnaires by providing summarised answers to the participants' responses to each question.

1. How would you define, in one sentence, the phrase 'Godly wisdom'?

Participants provided somewhat divergent answers, but two responses were central regarding the nature and source of Godly wisdom: (i) Scripture and (ii) the Holy Spirit. A few of the participants also emphasised the fact that this wisdom is separate from regular "worldly" wisdom and empowers the believer in a supernatural manner on a day-to-day basis.

2. Do you believe that it's possible for an unbeliever with no knowledge of the Bible to have Godly wisdom? Please explain your answer.

A large majority of participants answered "No" to this question, due to the fact that they see Godly wisdom as connected to a relationship with the Trinity and Scripture. Dissenting voices noted God's omnipotence and the fact that wisdom is universal to man.

3. I think most Christians would agree that the Apostle Paul had Godly wisdom. Why do you think so?

Participants here referred to Paul's Godly character, and (especially) the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. The majority of participants saw a strong connection between Paul's Godly wisdom and the filling and empowering of the Holy Spirit. Those who presented a different view referred to Paul's actions, achievements, training and natural ability as proof of his Godly wisdom.

4. What role do you think human intellect and reasoning have to play in the Christian life and how would this relate to Godly wisdom?

Participants were fairly evenly divided over the use and usefulness of human intellect and reasoning. Amongst the positive group, the consensus was that reasoning is important but should never supersede, or make unnecessary, Scripture and the leading of the Spirit. Reasoning was almost neutral in the sense that it can, when submitted to God, become a force for good. The other group of participants saw human intellect as irrelevant or foolish with reference to Godly wisdom since Godly wisdom is more dependent on revelation and the work of the Spirit than man's natural ability.

5. The Apostle Paul was a trained religious scholar and likely an experienced public speaker. Yet when he writes to the Corinthians he says that he "did not come proclaiming ... the testimony of God with lofty speech and wisdom" (1 Cor. 2:1). Why do you think he specifically chose not to use lofty speech and wisdom?

The majority of participants stated that Paul rejected the use of lofty speech in order to reach the uneducated and uninformed of society. A secondary reason, advanced by some participants, is that Paul was trying to reach the hearts of his hearers and not simply stimulate their intellects with the Gospel message.

6. When you think of the phrase 'Godly wisdom', does the following sentence seem relevant to you? Please rate your answer on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the least relevant.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

All participants saw a very strong connection between Godly wisdom and John 3:16. Human wisdom would not accept this verse as relevant.

7. *In 1 Corinthians 2:7 Paul says the following: "No, we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began." Why do you think Paul, writing to Christian believers, call's God's wisdom "secret" and "hidden"?"*

Participants emphasised through different phrasing the following reasons why Paul calls Godly wisdom "secret" and "hidden": (i) It is only available to those who earnestly seek and desire it, (ii) It is only revealed by the work of the Holy Spirit and not through natural means, (iii) It seems foolish to non-believers.

8. *To what degree do you think each of the following helps us in gaining Godly wisdom? Rate according to the following scale: Unhelpful / Somewhat helpful / Very helpful.*

*[Listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit] [Reading and studying Scripture]
[Reading biographies and testimonies of other believers] [Being in communion with other believers and interacting with them] [Thinking through tough theological questions] [Spending time in God's presence through meditation and prayer] [Listening to the results of purely human research without reference to any Biblical teaching]*

The results are indicated and listed in order of helpfulness, indicating the percentage of participants who chose an answer:

Listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit: Very Helpful 87.5% / Somewhat Helpful 12.5 %

Reading and studying Scripture: Very Helpful 87.5 % / Somewhat Helpful 12.5%

Spending time in God's presence: Very Helpful 87.5% / Somewhat Helpful 12.5%

Being in communion with other believers: Somewhat Helpful 62.5% / Very Helpful 37.5%

Reading biographies and testimonies of other believers: Somewhat Helpful 87.5%/ Very Helpful 12.5%

Thinking through tough theological questions: Somewhat helpful 75% / Unhelpful 25%

Listening to the results of purely human research: Unhelpful 75% / Somewhat Helpful 25%

9. *The New Testament frequently uses the word 'revelation'. What do you think this word means in a Biblical context? Do you think it has any relevance to Godly wisdom and why?*

Summarised answer of all participants' responses: Revelation is when you receive a deeper underlying understanding of God's Word, or a situation, other than the obvious (obtained through natural means). A strong connection between revelation and Godly wisdom was seen throughout, meaning that participants closely tied their understanding of the phrase 'Godly wisdom' to a revelatory lifestyle where the believer is able to understand Scripture, or a specific situation in their lives, through supernatural wisdom provided by the Holy Spirit.

10. *What do you think the Bible means by worldly wisdom?*

Summarised answer of all participants' responses: The conclusions man arrives at by using his intellect and reasoning alone.

11. *What role do you think the Holy Spirit plays with reference to attaining Godly wisdom?*

The Holy Spirit is seen as absolutely crucial for attaining Godly wisdom. Participants argued that it is essentially impossible to obtain Godly wisdom without the help of the Holy Spirit.

12. *Why do you think it is possible for an unbeliever to intellectually understand biblical doctrine but not believe it or accept it?*

Participants provided divergent answers, but a majority argued that unbelievers are frequently not transformed by the Gospel since they use only their intellects to engage the message. The gospel, seeming foolish from a human perspective, is thus rejected. One participant mentioned the importance of surrendering to the Lordship of Christ (which requires humility) in order to truly grasp the Gospel message.

13. *A literal translation of Ephesians 1:17-18 reads like this: "...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the true knowledge of him, [that] the eyes of your understanding being enlightened for your knowing what is the hope of His calling..."*

This forms part of a wider prayer that Paul was praying for the Christians in Ephesus. Please comment on the phrase, “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened”, explaining what you think it means.

Participants saw the phrase "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened" as referring to revelation provided by the Holy Spirit – providing an understanding that goes beyond mental images.

14. There’s a common saying that Christians will often use: “There’s a difference between knowing God in relationship and just knowing about God.” How do you think these two are related to Godly wisdom?

Participants viewed "knowing God" as connected to intimacy, through closer relationship due to time spent together. In the context of this relationship, Godly wisdom is provided. One participant summarised it as thus: "Knowing God in relationship is personally talking to God, consulting God and then hearing from God. Knowing about God simply means you have heard of him. They are not related."

15. How do you think (i) biblical and theological knowledge and church history and (ii) life experience (learning from things that happen in everyday life as you attempt to put the Bible into action and walk with God) relate to Godly wisdom?

Responses can be grouped in the following way: (i) Theological and Historical knowledge provide a reference from which one can learn and grow, and (ii) All knowledge needs to be submitted to the Holy Spirit before they become useful for attaining Godly wisdom. One participant also mentioned the importance of differentiating between a rote learning of facts, and the application of facts (which involves wisdom).

16. Proverbs 11:2 says the following: “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.” This verse seems to say that humility is a prerequisite for wisdom. Why do you think this is so?

All participants agreed that humility is a prerequisite to receiving Godly wisdom, and argued that humility provides the teachable spirit necessary to learn and grow.

17. For the final question of this section, I’m asking for four examples of how Godly wisdom is currently reflected (or not reflected) in your life. Remember that these answers, along with all the other answers, are kept confidential.

Participants provided a variety of examples based on their specific situations, referring mostly to experiences in their homes and ministry. In some cases they referred to asking God for his wisdom for a situation, or reported that God's wisdom helped them in the situation.

[NOTE: From here on the questions shifted focus from a personal level (qualitative research) to a congregational level (quantitative research) – indicating the start of Q2 as explained above in the methods section. In these answers the respondents spoke about the church as they have observed and perceived it]

18. List 5 (or fewer) projects/activities at WCC focused on missions or the training of members to be involved in missions.

Grace House / Prison Ministries / Swop Shop / Bible School / Supporting Missionaries / New Members Classes / Cell Groups / Yearly Short-Term Mission Trips / Farm Ministry

19. List the one missions related activity (including training) done by WCC that you feel has been the most effective in missions (it doesn't matter whether you participated in the activity or not).

The majority believed that "Prison Ministry" has been the most effective, with two others referencing short term outreach and the support of full time missionaries.

[NOTE: From here on the questions required the respondent to choose an answer on the scale 1 to 5 from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Unsure, Agree, to Strongly Agree]

20. The task of missions in the suburb where the church building is situated and the wider town is important to the leadership at WCC (pastors and elders).

100% answered with Strongly Agree.

21. The task of doing missions in other parts of SA and in other countries is important to the leadership at WCC.

50% answered with Strongly Agree and 50% with Agree.

22. When looking at the monthly or quarterly calendar of WCC church (and keeping in mind activities perhaps not on the calendar), it can be seen that WCC regularly places its members' focus on the Biblical tasks of missions.

50% answered Strongly Agree and 50% Agree.

23. *WCC can be described to an interested newcomer in the following way: "Our church has a strong outward focus demonstrated in active involvement in missions in our town and surrounding areas."*

60% answered Strongly Agree and 40% Agree.

24. *In Acts 1:8 Jesus' final command to his disciples was to spread the gospel to Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. For the church today, the context would be viewed as our home town, the rest of our country, neighbouring countries, and the rest of the world. WCC is fulfilling this Acts 1:8 mission mandate?*

60% answered Strongly Agree and 40% Agree.

25. *If a newcomer was to become a Christian and join WCC, it would not take long for him/her to be exposed to the idea of missions.*

90% answered Strongly Agree and 10% Strongly Disagree.

26. *When doing training for missions, WCC relies more heavily on information and findings from secular human psychology and other non-Biblical sciences than the Bible.*

90% answered Strongly Disagree and 10% Strongly Agree.

27. *When doing training for missions, WCC places emphasis on the fact that human solutions to the world's problems are insufficient.*

90% answered Strongly Agree and 10% Disagree.

28. *WCC believes that the knowledge revealed by God (through Scripture and an enlightened understanding through His Spirit) is the prime source for understanding sin and its solution.*

100% answered Strongly Agree.

29. *WCC believes that research in the social, human and other sciences can provide additional insights into our societies and the challenges they face, but that this knowledge alone cannot fully describe and solve all the problems in people and society.*

90% answered Strongly Agree and 10% Disagree.

30. *Members at WCC genuinely believe that missions can only be effective when done in the power of the Holy Spirit.*

87% answered Strongly Agree and 13% Strongly Disagree.

31. *Members at WCC genuinely believe that the human intellect is fallen and imperfect and that therefore pure intellectual reasoning (only using one's mind) is not sufficient on its own to understand and accept the Gospel.*

87% answered Strongly Agree and 13% Agree.

32. *When doing training for missions, WCC places emphasis on the fact that the world's problems are primarily due to a lack of a good school and tertiary education.*

75% answered Strongly Disagree and 25% Strongly Agree.

33. *Most members at WCC believe that it is not enough to simply teach about God, but that unbelievers need to be brought to a place where they can experience God (in whatever way might be appropriate/relevant).*

87% answered Strongly Agree and 13% Agree.

34. *Thinking back specifically to any training you might have received as a Christian at WCC (Sunday school, Bible classes, sermons, small groups), do you believe that WCC places a greater emphasis on intellect (learning about God using your minds) or on experience (learning about God from things that happen in everyday life as you attempt to put the Bible into action)? Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being "A strong focus on intellect" and 1 being "A strong focus on experience" and 3 being an equal focus on intellect and experience.*

The majority answered with an equal focus on intellect and experience, and about 20% chose Leaning more towards the intellect.

35. *At WCC most people realise that the Holy Spirit plays a very important part in shaping a believer's views on God, theology and the Bible, and is **not just** responsible for giving charismatic gifts to Christians.*

87% answered Strongly Agree and 13% Fully Agree.

36. *The following sentence is generally genuinely believed by the members: "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom" (Proverbs 11:2).*

90% answered Strongly Agree and 10% Unsure.

37. *During training for missions, WCC frequently teaches on humility as a prerequisite to receiving God's wisdom.*

90% answered Strongly Agree and 10% Unsure.

38. *During training for missions, WCC has systems in place to help members identify symptoms of arrogance and self-pity because they close the door to Godly wisdom.*

75% answered Largely Agree and 25% Unsure.

2.4 Discussion of the results

This section seeks to interpret the results of the empirical research into WCC's understanding and experience of Godly wisdom in Pauline writings. I first focus on the respondents' relationship to the four areas of Godly wisdom (cf. 2.2.1) covered in Q1. Then I look at how participants viewed WCC enacting Godly wisdom in terms of its evangelistic and missional engagement with local culture and further afield in Q2.

The *first section* in Q1 explores whether participants see Godly knowledge as something rooted in the Gospel message of Christ crucified and raised again rather than in worldly (esoteric and/or humanistic) wisdom. Worldly wisdom (the kind Paul is warring against in 1 Cor. 1-2) revels in sophisticated human reasoning, rhetorical genius, persuasive words with compelling delivery, and airtight logic.

It seems clear from the analysis of the data that members of WCC do not see any connection between Godly wisdom and "sophisticated human reasoning" or "rhetorical genius" or gnostic means of acquiring knowledge. In Question 5, when asking about Paul's deliberate avoidance of fancy rhetoric, participants mostly argued that Paul wanted to reach the uneducated. Though missing the sociological context of 1 Corinthians (Paul was deliberately avoiding fancy rhetoric since some of the Corinthians themselves revelled in this kind of worldly wisdom – Frestadius 2011:54-56 & Cousar 1990:169-170), participants nevertheless clearly saw that Paul did not link Godly wisdom to manifestations of human wisdom (such as compelling delivery and impressive logic). This is clear from other questions as well (questions 2, 4, 10 and 15).

The question that most deliberately sought to test the link between Godly wisdom and the Gospel (question 6) shows that all participants see Godly wisdom revealed clearly in the Gospel. However, the fact that 100% of participants answered in complete agreement shows that the question might have been worded in a way so as to elicit an expected answer.

Smith (2010:50) mentions the fact that testimony forms a central part of Pentecostal spirituality, precisely because narrative is so central to Pentecostal identity. Personal observation during the last eighteen months has made it clear to me that WCC is unapologetically Pentecostal/neo-Pentecostal in its liturgy. This is also reflected in some of the answers of the participants, where a strong reliance on the power of the Holy Spirit is frequently referenced (more on this below), and brief testimonies are also involved in the answering of questions when attempting to describe theological truths.

However, this strong focus on personalised narrative on the part of the respondents leads to a sense that a large group of the participants underplay the value of the mind, natural reasoning, and God-given cognitive ability, including its usefulness for growing in Godly wisdom (note that 'Listening to pure theological research' in Question 8 was nearly unanimously ranked as 'Unhelpful'). While Paul was writing in 1 Corinthians 1-2 to a group of largely ex-slaves, who were likely overly impressed with the natural mind (Lim 1987:140), the other extreme of over-spiritualising the process and nature of Godly wisdom was possibly in play at WCC. This is certainly not true of all the participants, but nevertheless an undercurrent detectable within the answers themselves.

The *second section* in Q1 explores if participants viewed Godly wisdom/knowledge, apart from the Gospel, as primarily revealed by the Holy Spirit or as something to be gained through pure intellectual reasoning. An analysis of the data showed that the participants collectively identified a strong connection between the Holy Spirit and Godly wisdom. Specifically, they seemed to believe that the Spirit provides an intuitive or revealed wisdom which may or may not have any direct reference to Scripture, but which will never contradict it.

From the very first question of the survey, even those making no pneumatic reference, participants nearly unanimously referred to the Holy Spirit, specifically the *leading* of the Spirit, as essential for acquisition of Godly wisdom. This again testifies to the fact that the Pentecostal nature of the teachings at WCC likely placed frequent emphasis on this aspect of the Christian walk.

Perhaps the most telling of all questions in this regard is question 8, where participants were asked to list the helpfulness of activities in relation to obtaining Godly wisdom. Here, "Listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit" ranked as the most helpful, whereas "Thinking through tough theological questions" ranked at the bottom. Looking at the questions that specifically deal with the relation between Godly wisdom and the Holy Spirit (Questions 8, 9 and 11), participants viewed the Holy Spirit as absolutely crucial for obtaining Godly wisdom or, as one participant put it, "*No Holy Spirit means no Godly wisdom*".

The Holy Spirit, as was seen by respondents, is able to tap into the hearts of men and provide a method of 'knowing' that cannot be reduced to cognition or pure intellectual perception (A Pentecostal Epistemological concept also explained by Smith 2010:57). As Pascal famously put it, "the heart has reasons of which Reason cannot know" (cf. Blomberg 2013:61-62), and this seemed to align with the respondents' pneumatic view of Godly wisdom.

In the *third section* in Q1, I explored whether the participants in any way also connected Godly wisdom with experience rather than primarily the mental and cognitive faculties. By way of explanation it should be noted that the word "experience" here refers (as noted in the questionnaire) to the fact that wisdom is attained through *an experiential or participatory encounter with the person of God, primarily through intimate fellowship*. In other words, the factual content of the Scriptures should always lead one to an experiential encounter with the personhood of the Trinity (Healy 2007:138-139 agrees). Since the Scriptures point to Jesus as the way of salvation (and do not contain salvation in itself), intellectual truths from the Bible should always be accompanied by a spiritual encounter with the God of the Bible (Dunn 1997:220).

With that in mind, an analysis of the data led me to believe that participants clearly saw a need for moving beyond mental capacities when dealing with spiritual truth (Question 13). Godly wisdom is connected to intimacy with God and revealed in the context of relationship and personal discourse (Question 14).

Participants believed that unbelievers are frequently left unchanged by the gospel precisely because this experiential factor (of a personal encounter and union with the

Trinity) is substituted for pure intellectual religious pursuit (Question 12). When dealing with Biblical and Theological knowledge, participants again pointed to the necessity of the work of the Spirit, while admitting the objective helpfulness of factual content such as church history or biblical theology (Question 15).

After careful reading and summarising of participants' answers, the case could be made of an implicit or subdued anti-intellectualism present within the majority of the participants. Quite a few questions (especially 4, 5, 8 and 10) gave participants opportunity to express their opinion of human intellect (by itself – devoid of any spiritual or religious influence) which led to many denouncing intellect as sub-par or even worthless. Participants seemingly demonstrated a low view of the usefulness of human intellect, especially when divorced from spiritual revelation. Admittedly, this was done in a context where the discussion centred on *Godly wisdom*, but the opinions are nevertheless telling.

By way of brief analysis, I would like to quote in full a short section from Smith (2010:50) where he describes a foundational element of Pentecostal epistemology, which I believe is relevant in this specific case-study as well.

“... incipient [Pentecostal] epistemology is not antirational, but anti-*rationalist*; it is not a critique or rejection of reason as such but rather a commentary on a particularly reductionistic model of reason and rationality, a limited, stunted version of what counts as 'knowledge.'”

I believe Smith is here describing an 'ideal' Pentecostal epistemology which does not summarily disregard philosophical methods of reasoning. While I initially thought this was the situation at WCC, I have after more analysis and thought concluded that likely the majority of participants in this survey do *indeed go a step further* than simply being anti-*rationalist* (or levelling a “postmodern critique of autonomous reason” as Smith [2010:52]) calls it). They actually *do* eschew pure intellectual endeavour by itself as having little or no benefit for obtaining Godly wisdom. More on this will be mentioned towards the end of this section.

The *last section* in Q1 tries to determine whether participants viewed humility as a prerequisite for obtaining Godly wisdom. This is the question where the 'correct'

answer was likely the most obvious to participants and consequently their responses were in line with what any/most evangelical Christian(s) in a pietistic-influenced tradition would answer. The respondents saw a strong and irreversible connection between humility and the reception of Godly wisdom. By way of explanation, participants in a general manner pointed to the fact that humility provides the teachable spirit necessary to grow and learn; and that God makes it clear that he resists the proud of heart.

Briefly looking at questions 36-38 (which also deal with humility, but form part of Q2 of the questionnaire), the greater majority of participants agreed that not only they themselves, but the congregation of which they are a part also see a strong link between humility and Godly wisdom.

Turning now to Q2, I briefly discuss how the respondents described their congregation from a missional and evangelistic perspective, and whether these aligned with Paul's view of Godly wisdom. I believe that Paul's understanding of Godly wisdom is centred in the Gospel (see chapter 3). Therefore a local church that understands Godly wisdom will be committed to a sustained and dynamic evangelistic and missional mind-set and praxis.

The first two questions of Q2 asked for practical examples of local missional or evangelistic activities at the church. Respondents were able to provide a list of more than five and most agreed on the most effective of these. Questions 20–25 then tried to gauge the general importance that the congregation (as directed by its leadership) ascribed to the task of evangelism and missions. For most of these questions the majority of participants either agreed completely or to a large degree that the congregation highly valued evangelism in the church's local suburb and town (20), and, to a lesser degree, in the rest of the country (21). Respondents mostly agreed that newcomers to the church are quickly introduced to the importance of evangelism and missions (22, 25) and all agreed completely, or largely, that the church focuses outwardly to a sufficient degree. I believe these answers prove what I already suspected from personal involvement with the congregation over a period of 12 months: *Worcester Christian Church has a strong outreach focus and is actively involved in local, national and (indirectly in) international missions and evangelism.*

The following questions (26–38) tested the motivations behind many of these activities. The overwhelming majority of participants did not believe that WCC relied heavily on extra-Biblical sciences (26), secular problem solving (27), or any kind of salvation theory not rooted in an orthodox interpretation of the Gospel (28, 29, 32). This demonstrated that they believed that the Gospel supremely displays Godly wisdom as it provides answers for the human condition that no other humanly-originated solution can provide. They grasped that the human predicament centres in a sinful relationship with God and fellow humans, resulting in societal problems and the arousal of God’s eternal judgement for which only a divine solution will suffice. Members unanimously thus agreed that WCC recognises the limitations of the human intellect (31) and understood the importance of relying on the Gospel and Holy Spirit for Christian missions (30, 33).

These findings in Q2 aligned mostly with those discovered in the Q1 portion of the survey. One could therefore perhaps make the claim that WCC does not seem to put much stock in extra-Biblical solutions to the world’s problems. Like Paul, WCC’s missional practices align with the idea that the Gospel message itself is soteriologically sufficient (including for moral righteousness) as it truly encapsulates Godly wisdom.

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the study that answers Browning’s (1991) first question in his practical theology method: *“How do we understand the concrete situation in which we must act?”* It used the IMRAD method for reporting a research project. The result of the research was a *thick description* of the concrete situation at WCC with reference to Godly wisdom – its understanding and expression of this wisdom. This revealed the operative theology on Godly wisdom at WCC, with special reference to its ministry and ministries (in particular its missions programme).

I firstly provided some background to the congregation, describing its non-denominational nature and Pentecostal liturgy and teaching style. I then expounded on the methods of my research: how selection of participants from the congregation was conducted; gave an overview and summary of the questionnaire used; and provided a selection of questions (one from each major area) and motivation for

using them. This was followed with a presentation of the research data received from the respondents. Here answers to the various questions were summarised with salient points highlighted like common and dissenting opinions.

Finally the chapter presented an analysis of the results. Firstly discussed were the results of Q1 in terms of four areas of Godly wisdom (see chapter 3). Then I analysed how participants saw WCC enacting Godly wisdom in terms of its evangelistic and missional engagement locally and further afield (Q2).

It was found that members at WCC agree with the apostle Paul that Godly wisdom is rooted and irrevocably connected to the Gospel message, primarily revealed by the Holy Spirit, experienced in life, and dependent on humility of character (the four areas of Godly wisdom presented in chapter 3). However, they also tended to easily take the next step toward anti-rationalism by partly underplaying the value of natural reasoning. The significance of this is discussed in more detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

Regarding evangelistic and missional engagement, where the Godly wisdom of the Gospel is strongly reflected, I found that Worcester Christian Church does seem to have a strong outward focus manifested in a variety of outreach ministries. Their confessed dependence on the Holy Spirit, Scripture and Gospel as the only true solutions to humanity's problems also leads to a natural avoidance of secular methods and wisdom for problem solving, including non-Biblical solutions to the human problem. In this regard they do thus align themselves with a missiological method, the prime manifestation of Godly wisdom, which I believe Paul would have underwritten.

I am well aware that the small sample size of the research group could reasonably lead to questioning the reliability of my conclusions concerning the operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom at WCC. In a sizeable church like WCC it would be expected that a larger portion of the congregation would need to have been interviewed (I mention this briefly below as an avenue for further research). Surely drawing conclusions from the responses of merely eight members is unjustified and academically irresponsible. However, it needs to be noted that I worked within the constraints of a mini-thesis project. Further, that I attempted to limit the deficiencies

of a small research group by relying on the church secretary to select a group best equipped for providing the information about the church that was required, i.e. they had to have attained a level of spiritual maturity and some or significant ministry leadership experience and been at the church for longer than two years. The combined responses of such a group would surely provide a solid record of the situation.

Further, the results from this chapter proved that the individuals sampled were not uniform in their answers to the issues surrounding Godly wisdom, especially with reference to the situation at WCC. The eight were thus clearly not conditioned to provide the answer the senior pastor wanted. And yet, despite their somewhat diverse answers, the main deficiency (*implicit anti-intellectual bias* which chapter 3 exposes as not implied by Godly wisdom) was a common thread throughout, showing that this is likely a problem in the larger church, or certainly for at least a large section of it. The results therefore of chapter 4 to rectify this shortcoming will benefit these members. The relevance to the other members would be to confirm them in their more faithful view of Godly wisdom.

This chapter has laid the groundwork for developing a strategic plan to implement a more biblically faithful operative theology at WCC with reference to Godly wisdom. Chapter 3 will provide greater clarity on this operative theology and chapter 4 will then bring the concrete situation as covered above into dialogue with the preferred situation that emerges in chapter 3 to achieve the required strategic plan.

CHAPTER 3:

Developing and defending an operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom for Worcester Christian Church

3.1 Introduction

While the task of the previous chapter of this thesis was to sketch a broad picture of a particular ministry or church context, the focus now shifts to a proposed theory of action. The praxis-theory-praxis paradigm is followed by most practical theologians today. As noted above, Browning embraces this paradigm. Studying the current praxis is not an end in itself, but the first stage in a process geared towards improving the praxis. The praxis presently operating needs to first be fully described and understood before it can be measured against a more biblically faithful praxis to see where it has shortcomings and an appropriate plan formulated to transform it. Chapter 2 achieved the former and now the next logical step in the practical theology discipline is to seek a truly biblically operative theology with regard to Godly wisdom for WCC.

This chapter contains an investigation of the biblical view of Godly wisdom and its relevance for WCC. The insights gained constitute the theory for informing the ministry praxis of WCC with reference to Godly wisdom. I develop a theory of action for the church which will enable it to align itself to a greater degree in its ministry and vision of Godly wisdom with that of the apostle Paul's. The theory of praxis that emerges in this chapter, especially the basis for it, is then defended. This chapter therefore tackles the next two questions in Browning's sequence in his strategic practical theology the blueprint for this mini-thesis(1991:55-56): *What should be our praxis in this concrete situation, and how can we defend it?*

To this end I first provide a systematic study of Paul's view on Godly wisdom, with special focus on what is taught on the topic in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16. This study commences with a literature survey of key theological works on Paul's epistemology. The study covers exegetical, systematic theology and historical theology

perspectives on Godly wisdom. Following this, and drawing on the findings of the previous chapter, I attempt to highlight where the current faith community praxis of WCC is falling short of the biblical vision.

Finally, I develop a holistic theory of action for the church to achieve the new praxis theory with reference to Godly wisdom. The place our rational thinking plays in relation to Godly wisdom is also touched on. Browning (1991) is one practical theologian who argues that religious communities, including the church, are also communities of 'practical reason and practical wisdom' (1991:2).

3.2 A Systematic theology study of Paul's view on Godly wisdom with special reference to 1 Corinthians 1-2

3.2.1 Literature review of some current authors

In overviewing the literature of current authors on Pauline epistemology – specifically the apostle's view on Godly wisdom – I have found it necessary to divide scholars into two sub-groupings: (1) Those who comment on New Testament Pauline Epistemology in general, and (2) those who provide exegetical commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16 our main epistemological passage. The amount of material for the latter vastly outnumbers that of the former, so I limited the exegetical commentaries to those by scholars who specifically present findings with regards to Paul's views on the source of knowledge and its outworking in wisdom. I further restricted my choice to those works that explore the influence that the Corinthian sociological context had on Paul's declarations.

Firstly, regarding Pauline Epistemology it should be noted that this idea as a focal point for study is rather new. The two definitive writings on biblical epistemology with a focus on Paul is that of Scott (2006) and Healy (2007:138-139). Scott firstly argues that epistemology was no minor element in Paul's writings and thinking. He points to the fact that vocabulary related to *knowledge* occurs more often in Paul's letters than words related to *salvation*. The Pauline corpus also contains over half of the New Testament references to knowledge and wisdom. According to Scott, the Pauline concept of knowledge acquisition was centred on a narrative conversion experience and was fundamentally rooted in historical events that form a 'grand unified story' with the Incarnation at the middle. However, Scott does not argue that Paul

completely discarded natural modes of attaining knowledge and learning as his sophisticated writings and polemics certainly testify (I readily agree). He simply went farther than the natural mind by prizing divine revelation as a primary vehicle for true knowledge.

Healy's work *Biblical Epistemology* (2007) forms the other authoritative and extensive publication on this topic. One chapter is of specific interest to this study as it is devoted to the study of Paul's phrase "the knowledge of the Mystery" (Ephesians 3:4). Healy's views can be summarised as follows: Paul moves away from the contemporary Greek idea of knowledge as pure theoretical speculation and instead sees it as primarily soteriological. For Paul, the knowledge of God was always tied to an encounter with the living Christ (as his own dramatic conversion-experience testifies). Like Scott, Healy sees Revelation as the biblical conduit for knowledge and makes the following observation, which I found enlightening: Paul's use of the words for knowledge in the New Testament can only be properly understood when interpreted along the same lines as the contextual 'yada' ('to know') of the Hebrew Old Testament, namely that of *experiential* knowledge.

Healy also lays emphasis on the important role of the Holy Spirit in Paul's writings and believes that Paul saw the Spirit Himself as a hermeneutical key. This key opens the door to the human mind to fully understanding the crucifixion, and helps the believers to access otherwise inaccessible truth. Here Healy is clearly in agreement with many Pentecostal Scholars like Fee (2009 and 2000).

Gaffin (2005:103-124) makes noteworthy reflections when commenting on the link between 1 Corinthians 2 and Matthew 11:25-27. He argues for revelation as indispensable – and not merely optional – for the Christian believer who desires true wisdom.

Secondly, when dealing with exegetical commentaries on 1 Corinthians 1-2 it is helpful to divide them into two camps. The first camp, of which Baird (1959:426-427) is an example, sees clear gnostic overtones in Paul's rather interesting choice of verbs and nouns in this passage, admittedly only indirectly. He believes that Paul, like many non-biblical writers at the time, saw knowledge as mysterious due to the fact that it was only accessible to a certain spiritual elite.

I have found the arguments for this view unconvincing since it does not align with an evangelical understanding for the unity of Scripture and the influence of the historical context of a passage. My disagreement is based on the fact that both the literary, social and historical contexts of 1 Corinthians 2 point in fact (and as outlined by the authors below) to a different interpretation.

Instead of concluding that Paul was making Gnostic claims in 1 Corinthians 2, exegetical thoroughness leads one to believe that he was instead tying the concept of "wisdom" very closely to the crucifixion and resurrection message (justified more thoroughly below). This mundane "wisdom" was unavailable to the proud of heart who frequently longed for intellectually stimulating and complex truths. This true wisdom is mysterious in the sense that it was primarily transmitted by the Holy Spirit, through revelation, and was thus its understanding and experience are dependent on humility. This revelation was not a disconnected ethereal experience, but was initiated through involvement with the story of the Gospel message. Scholars who agree, for the most part, with this view of the passage include Frestadius (2011: 54-56), Cousar (1990: 169-170), Thistelton (2006:50-59), Van Der Merwe (2012: 168-185), Lioy (2009:35-61) and Miller (1972: 522-528).

Paul's understanding of Godly wisdom is that it is significantly seen in, and through an encounter with, the gospel. Such wisdom was not rooted in rhetorical skills that lead to factionalism (so also Grindheim 2002:689). The closest Paul comes to the concept of what would later be called 'Gnosticism' is when he emphasises the mysterious and secretive working of the Holy Spirit in one's understanding and acceptance of the gospel. However, in the believer's life the gospel can be increasingly understood and thus there is no elitist group in the church who possess through mystical experience or elitism some deeper knowledge of the gospel.

In summary, the following quote from Grindheim (2002: 689) alludes to the relevance of this review for my overall study: "The Corinthian factionalism is rooted in a misapprehension of the gospel. Instead of having their self-identity in the word of the cross, the Corinthians rely on a kind of rhetoric that was supposed to allow them to excel in personal status, to the detriment of others." I believe both the causes and results of the Corinthian division is a key indicator for understanding Paul's response

thereto and indeed to help us interpret Paul's view of Godly wisdom as he presents it to this divided congregation.

This brief and limited literature review paves the way for a more detailed investigation of Godly wisdom in Paul's writings, especially 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. It is to this that I now turn.

3.2.2 Select biblical passages

For the purposes of identifying and exegesis of the relevant passages for my topic of study I am primarily following Healy's view (2007:135) with which I agree based on my overview of the Biblical literature that showed that Paul's thoughts on epistemology scattered throughout the New Testament converge in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16. This passage will therefore serve as the first and most important text for the study. I will also look briefly at passages in three other Pauline letters: Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians.

3.2.2.1 First Corinthians 1:18-2:16

In expounding the theme of Godly wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 I will take special note how the historical and sociological contexts of the recipients of the letter influence the meaning (Thistelton 2006:14). I have previously noted that failure to do this might lead to a pro-Gnostic interpretation as taken by Baird (1959:426-427).

Baird's argument is primarily lexical. He notes certain Greek words in the passage (*teleion* and *lalein*). He then explains that since these words are often used in esoteric/philosophical non-biblical literature of the time (such as the works of Philo and the mystery cults), it is likely that this is the meaning Paul has in mind. However, the Reformation principle says that 'Scripture should interpret Scripture' with which I agree. This approach also does not ignore the original context which it sees as crucial to the exegesis of any scripture. I find myself more in agreement with Lim (1987:137-149) who notes that it is wiser to let the social and historical context of the epistle, as well as Paul's other musings on wisdom, interpret these verses instead of a few random non-Biblical passages.

From the historical context it becomes clear that First Corinthians is an *ad hoc* letter. It was written by the apostle to answer important questions and concerns that the

infant church had asked him to address. The concerns probably reached him through hear-say. The underlying constant that triggers their questions and concerns were the **divisions** in the church (Lim 1987:140). From Paul’s strong rhetoric and cutting responses it becomes clear that the ecclesiastical divisions can mostly be attributed to a self-aggrandising spirituality that was born out of selfish ambition and carnality.

This context, and Paul’s responses thereto, clearly is an important exegetical key to unlocking the meaning behind some of Paul’s more cryptic pronouncements regarding wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. I agree with Thistelton (2006:50-59) that Paul is contrasting two kinds of wisdom in this passage: “Godly wisdom” and “Worldly Wisdom.” Consequently an understanding of what Paul means by worldly wisdom will throw light on what he means by Godly wisdom. The events surrounding the tension between the congregants and the Apostle help us to understand something of the nature of the two wisdoms and why he so sharply differentiates them.

The following table captures the dichotomy between worldly and Godly wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2:

MAN’S (WORLDLY) WISDOM	GOD’S WISDOM
Proclaimed in proud superiority of speech	Proclaimed in plain speech, weakness and fear
Dependant on persuasive words	Dependent on the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment and power
Inadequate foundation for faith	True foundation for faith
Understood by rulers of this age	Hidden and mysterious and therefore not understood by the rulers of this age
Limited to human history and will pass away	Predestined from before eternity and will never pass away

Taught by human wisdom	Revealed and taught by the Holy Spirit
Domain of the natural man	Foolishness to the natural man

The nature of the contrasting items in this table will be expanded on in the rest of 3.2.2. But clearly there is a marked difference between the two forms of wisdom.

As already mentioned, the overall argument of 1 Corinthians was sparked by dissensions and divisions in the church (Frestadius 2011; and other scholars mentioned above). They were due to Corinthian rivalry rooted in self-aggrandisement and claimed superiority. With reference to one of the areas of conflict, one group clearly favoured a more intellectual or persuasive rhetorical presentation of the gospel and related biblical doctrine. This was likely a cause of pride and a recipe for conflict and division.

Thistelton (2006:50-59) argues that in 1 Corinthians 1-2 Paul is deliberately renouncing audience-pleasing devices in Christian rhetoric and equating them with the “wisdom of this world”. Lim (1987) draws similar conclusions to Thistelton from the historical context: Paul is setting aside the kind of “persuasive speech” that would appeal to the Corinthian obsession (or at least a significant number of the church members) with intellectually astounding grandiloquence. This is firstly then what Paul means by “worldly wisdom”.

It is not that Thistelton believes that Paul was against the use of rhetoric (cf. the rhetorical elements and tight arguments of his letters). Rather, that he so strongly denounces manipulative methods of speech in Christian communication points to the fact that he believed the message and its powerful application by the Holy Spirit (1:21; 2:2-5) did not hinge on the eloquence of its messenger. Thus Paul’s view of Godly wisdom is first of all that it is not dependent on persuasive and impressive communication on the part of its preacher. It is also not dependent on advanced intellect on the part of the hearer.

My research into the Corinthian situation thus far leads me to agree with Liroy’s further comment (2009:44) that the Corinthian preoccupation with philosophical debate essentially drew them away from the central tenets of the Christian faith. It is

against this that Paul battles as is indicated by his intense and deliberate focus on the message of Christ crucified in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 (specifically 1 Corinthians 1:18, 22-23, 25).

Paul notes his observations that the gospel is found to be mundane and even uninteresting and foolish and weak to the worldly-wise (Lioy 2009:51). Paul counters this position by arguing that God's Wisdom is actually the message and power of the Christ crucified. This can be observed by the strong correlation he makes between the "Wisdom of God" (2:7) and the "message of Christ crucified" (2:2) (see also 1:23-24,30). Might it be that some at Corinth were only too aware of this and gave in to the human need to 'dress up the gospel', making it sound more impressive and sophisticated through advanced rhetoric, intellectual sophistication and theoretical showiness? This then would be a second meaning of worldly wisdom: the claim that the gospel is foolishness and weakness.

We are now in a position to define with more clarity Paul's understanding of Godly wisdom. It refers firstly to the gospel and the experience of its saving power. The New Testament shows the gospel covers a number of dimensions and results. God made salvation possible through his eternal Son's incarnation and ministry on earth and His now universal reign and intercession in heaven. This salvation does not only involve justification and reconciliation to God, but also the power to live a life pleasing to God. Such a life glories alone in God as the only saviour from the curse and penalty and power of sin. Such a life displays the true worship of God and love of fellow human beings. It is the truly abundant life filled with joy, meaning, purpose and hope. In other words, the gospel does not just offer another religious theory, but the power of a transformed life. The gospel is the wisdom of God precisely because it is more than just intellectual knowledge. It leads to the dynamic outworking of the Christian doctrines in our lives through the power of the Holy Spirit that honours God and serves our fellow human beings. Paul's writings thus unmistakably note the experiential nature of the gospel, showing that it impacts every area of our lives. It provides the blueprint and enabling power that brings our humanity to its greatest heights. This is truly God's wisdom at work.

However, we know from various verses that in spite of all that the gospel is, it not only involves living according to gospel truth and the Holy Spirit's power but also through human effort. This ties in with the general definition of wisdom: *Wisdom is the successful practical outworking of knowledge relevant to human life to make life better and more rewarding* (wisdom is used in the sense of enhancing one's life through wise decisions based on relevant knowledge). However, this human effort is presented in the New Testament as being made possible through the gospel.

Another important point arises from 1 Corinthians chapters 1 and 2. In addition to arguing strongly that biblical truth centred in the gospel does not originate from the natural mind, Paul argues that it also cannot be *understood* solely with the natural mind (1:19-21,25; 2:6-16). This means that biblical (spiritual) truths, including the gospel, can only be apprehended properly by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. Van der Merwe (2012:168-185) agrees and concludes that there are three "constituents" or necessities that are requirements for individuals to discern divine wisdom. These are (1) the Holy Spirit, (2) being a "spiritual" person, and (3) a measure of spiritual discernment (the latter two points apply to Christian maturity).

It can now be clearly seen why Paul taught the inferior place of worldly wisdom – of dependence only on human philosophy, science, power or oratory. The Godly wisdom revealed in the gospel could never have had its source in human wisdom and power.

All the above that has emerged from the study of parts of 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 combines to bring out the embarrassing limitations of worldly wisdom and the overpowering superiority of Godly wisdom (cf 1:19-20; 2:7-9) supremely revealed in the gospel. The contrast is so stunningly great that the only logical and appropriate response is to view human wisdom with remorseful humility and boast in God's wisdom alone (1:29,31). In other words, Godly wisdom disallows any place for human pride in its philosophies and achievements and only boasting in God's salvific work through Christ (cf. 1:28-31). But pride stalks the human enterprise seeking to usurp God's supremacy and any need for dependence upon him. Human pride as can be gleaned from 1 Corinthians 1-2 will not submit to a wisdom that does not

come from humans but only from God. Pride in the human heart will thus always be an obstacle to accepting the gospel. This is another aspect of worldly wisdom.

In Summary, the first two chapters of 1 Corinthians contribute significantly to our understanding of Godly wisdom. Such wisdom is centred in the gospel that is rooted in and the outworking of God's redemptive plan through Christ for the human race. It could not be achieved by man's wisdom or power. More seriously, worldly wisdom sees the gospel as anathema. Pride is the biggest obstacle to embracing it. Enlightenment by the Holy Spirit and humility alone provide access to God's wisdom and the proper response is to boast only in God and not in worldly wisdom.

3.2.2.2 Romans, Galatians and Ephesians

Looking beyond the Corinthians passage to other Pauline writings, I turn firstly to Romans 1:18-28. Here Paul is linking "ignorance" or suppression of truth with the notion of human wickedness and God's judgment. Paul then argues that the moralist and Jew are in a similar condition. This is followed by the only solution, namely the reconciling and justifying work of Christ (Romans 2-5). This is because Christ bears the wrath of God against sinners (breakers of his law) and that the fruit of this ministry can be freely appropriated by repentance and faith. Failure to recognise this truth leads in the case of wilful sin to being handed over to a "depraved mind" and further dreadful sins. Much of the rest of Romans (chapters 6-8,12-16) deals with the positive outworking of the gospel in the life of the Christian – a life of overcoming sin and serving both Christian and non-Christian in love.

Clearly in Romans Paul is defending the superiority of God's wisdom revealed supremely in the gospel. This is true wisdom as it restores our relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ; and it enables a righteous and abundant life that contributes to the success of individuals and society at large. The rejection of this gospel for any other way would thus, according to the evangelical Christian, be a tragedy. This is what the unconverted do as they embrace their own philosophy of life, which is what Paul calls worldly wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2.

Galatians 1:11-12 is also relevant to understanding Godly wisdom. Paul here makes an important statement for the necessity of the revelatory work of the Spirit with regards to true wisdom (Chamblin 1986:1-16). The gospel was revealed to Paul by

divine revelation. Therefore, without divine revelation Paul would never have known and understood the gospel. Further, the letter to the Galatian church shows that victory over sin and selfishness is achieved as a result of the application of the gospel in the believer's life through the power of the Holy Spirit (5:13-26). Again we see the wisdom of God revealed in the gospel.

In Ephesians 1:17-23 Paul intercedes for the Ephesian church using vocabulary rich with epistemological overtones and with a strong pneumatic emphasis. The essence here is the person and work of Christ, and we note once again the correlation between understanding the gospel and the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit (Fee 2000:33-48). Further, in Ephesians, Paul again works out the gospel as both knowledge to be believed and also experienced in everyday life, i.e. it is wisdom because it reconciles to God, places us in his family, and enables a quality of life where righteousness reigns. In this life service is a hallmark of the relationship of believers with unbelievers.

It has been demonstrated that these three letters of Paul harmonise with the teaching about God's wisdom being revealed in the gospel in 1 Corinthians. Godly wisdom is centred in the gospel, requires humility and the work of the Holy Spirit to understand and accept, and leads to a life empowered for godliness and loving service.

3.2.3 A brief historical survey of some views on Godly wisdom

This section looks at how certain authors throughout history have viewed the concept of 'Godly wisdom' as presented in the New Testament, specifically in the writings of Paul. It contains a brief review of some works of four ancient writers and one later writer: John Chrysostom, Origen, Ambrosiaster, and John Calvin.

Chrysostom wrote commentaries on First and Second Corinthians. Knight (2009) shows from them the perspective of a 4th century pastor on many Pauline topics. In commenting on 1 Corinthians 2 he comments in depth on Paul's understanding of wisdom. According to him Paul was plainly attempting to repress the Corinthian pride by using simple speech in order to avoid feeding into their desire for human eloquence. Chrysostom understands the sociological context of the chapter, and realises that Paul is countering the Corinthian obsession with advanced and

complicated rhetoric. Paul chooses instead to focus on the Gospel's powerful demonstration, which Chrysostom identifies as Charismatic manifestation.

He attests to the supernatural element of this wisdom when attributing folly to the natural man (“[he who] attributes everything to reasoning's of the mind”), who exclusively follow the ways of Plato or Pythagoras. Finally, he makes the simple, but important observation that I myself argue for, that Paul equated the concept of ‘wisdom’ directly with the Gospel message and its power.

Ambrosiaster, another 4th century writer, provides valuable criticism on the Latin New Testament text. In *Ambrosiaster's* commentaries we find agreement with Chrysostom that Paul was alluding to the supernatural element of Godly wisdom (Bray 2009:128). Though Chrysostom recognises the connection between Charismatic manifestations as part of Paul's gospel presentation, he further bemoans its absence in his contemporary setting. But *Ambrosiaster* sees the avoidance of supernatural doctrine as ‘foolish’ and even erroneous. According to him, ‘heretics avoid supernatural doctrine’ such as the virgin birth and literal crucifixion.

Ambrosiaster identifies the role of the Holy Spirit in Paul's epistemology when he claims that the “things of God cannot be understood without the Spirit of God” (Bray 2009:129). He also strongly argues against a Gnostic interpretation of Paul's works by comparing him to other genuine Gnostics of the time, such as Marcion.

A few brief observations about other ancient writers summarised in a collective work (Oden 1999:22) shows that *Origen* saw Godly wisdom (as defined in 1 Corinthians 1-2) as eternal and worldly wisdom as temporal. He elaborates by explaining that faith should never be rooted in rhetorical art or philosophical skill, since that wrong foundation would surely crumble. In contrast, the power of God, that which the Scriptures testify to, is the source of true wisdom. More than mere intellectual skill is needed to decipher its meaning, since the Gospel message is certainly more than an ‘intellectual riddle’.

John Calvin, writing nearly a thousand years later, provides a more complicated and nuanced commentary. While Chrysostom and *Ambrosiaster* saw Paul's words as a polemic against pure human intellect, Calvin does not quite go that far. On the one

hand he admits that the gospel 'far transcends the perspicacity of human intellect' (Calvin 1573), but the role of the Spirit in bringing illumination is omitted. He does later admit that the Lord honours the believer with a 'special illumination of the Spirit', but seems to define this to simply mean that Paul used effective teaching, and mentions nothing about the active (Charismatic) work of the Holy Spirit in this process.

Calvin recognises the context of First Corinthians and realises that Paul was countering, with Gospel simplicity, the Corinthian desire for a 'puffed up and polished' kind of Wisdom (Calvin 1573). Perhaps his most helpful comment, for our topic, is when he recognises two kinds of foolishness or ignorance: (i) inconsiderate zeal, and (ii) individuals with high cognitive intelligence who cannot grasp spiritual things (Calvin 1573).

Synthesising the above findings one can see that the ancient writers and one key Reformation writer agreed to a large extent on the following on Godly wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2:

- Paul was not teaching a gnostic version of wisdom, dependent on elite (false) or esoteric spirituality.
- Paul was deliberately tying true knowledge and its conversion to wisdom to the mundane message of Christ crucified and its power to save and sanctify sinners.
- Paul made a strong connection between the active role of the Holy Spirit as the illuminator and imparter of true Godly wisdom (this point is less implicit in the works of Calvin).
- The Corinthian division greatly grieved Paul and he saw in their sins of pride (and its various symptomatic manifestations which he addresses throughout the epistle) a primary reason for why they were stuck in human foolishness, or worldly wisdom.

The interpretation of these four expositors essentially confirms or supports the above treatment and conclusions on 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 and the passages in Romans, Galatians and Ephesians.

3.2.4 Normative understanding of Godly wisdom

Before finally bringing this study on Godly wisdom to a summarised core, further reflection on the role of rationality is needed. Does Paul's stark contrast between Godly and worldly wisdom imply the rational mind dominates in worldly wisdom and takes a back seat in understanding and exercising Godly wisdom? In other words, is it fair to say that since the Corinthian error assigned exclusive or excessive power to natural rationality, Paul therefore rejected a place for rational thinking and decision-making in the operation of Godly wisdom? I believe not for one would be hard pressed to biblically justify the idea that Paul was anti-rational (Lioy 2009:41).

Paul's criticism in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 is not against the congregants' use of rationality, but against the *erroneous* use thereof. In other words, while Paul clearly demarcates between *Godly wisdom* (which has positive connotations: *rooted in the Gospel message of Christ revealed by the Spirit and its power experienced by the work of the Spirit*), and *Worldly wisdom* (which has negative connotations: *self-aggrandising attempts at personal exultation through dependence on the intellect, rhetoric and audience pleasing*), rationality retains a morally neutral place. In worldly wisdom, based on its view of what constitutes weakness and strength, the use of rationality will lead to deprecating conclusions about the gospel. But in Pauline epistemology, rationality can be employed with negative *or* positive effects. The Corinthians' case is an example of the former, while instances of the latter abound throughout Acts and the Pauline writings. To state this more clearly, the question of rationality in wisdom is *not really the issue with Paul*. This is because he looks beyond reasoning to the attitude of the heart. His awareness of the shortcomings of worldly wisdom's (solely rational) solutions to humankind's deepest problems and the gospel's marvellous solution leads him to advocate for Godly wisdom revealed in the gospel (Grindheim 2002:698).

Where does this leave the contemporary believer? The evangelical Christian is all too aware that through the use of rationality, demonstrated powerfully in the scientific method, great benefits have come to the human race. Our faculty of thinking and reasoning is the fruit of being created in the image of God. The only caution in its use is that it must not become the basis for an idolatry that threatens or replaces God's wisdom and supreme place in our lives. If this balance is achieved and the gospel not

compromised, it would harmonise with Paul's understanding of the need for divine intervention and revelation (showcased most powerfully in the gospel) *and* the place for using the mind in disciplined and profound reflection and application. Clearly there is no place to disdain rationality in the life and discipleship of the believer since God's wisdom and man's rationality are not irreconcilable opposite poles.

Moreland (2012) has written about the place of the mind in loving and serving God. His reflection on the recent church has led him to the conclusion that "something has gone desperately wrong with our modern understanding of the value of reason and intellectual development for discipleship and corporate church life" (2012:15). I appreciate Moreland's (pp. 67-68) distinction between "prideful use of reason" and reason itself that the problem dealt with in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 was the former. He further (p. 47) notes that key Scriptures need to be interpreted using hermeneutics if the gospel is to be clearly understood. This, combined with the biblical claim that the gospel supremely reveals God's wisdom, means Christians need to apply their minds to the study of the gospel as revealed and taught in the NT against the background of the Old Testament to discern its relevance for every area of our lives and society.

Keller (2014) also provides some valuable insight into the role of the mind in the outworking of God's wisdom in our work lives through the gospel. He argues (pp. 183-194) that God's creative work linked with his providence and common grace means that even unbelievers can display something of his wisdom in their talents, work and achievements. This supports the premise that God's wisdom is not only accessed through the normal or miraculous enlightening work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It can also be experienced through sound reasoning, mostly in Christians and to a far lesser degree in non-Christians who at different levels reject the gospel. See also the Annexure that defends the place of the use of the rational faculties of the mind in the Christian life.

Now the stage in this chapter has been reached to bring the research of Godly wisdom to a systemised summary. This summary isolates four aspects of Godly wisdom (this was anticipated in chapter 2). These four elements together show *how Paul understood, experienced, and taught the concept of wisdom in 1 Corinthians 1*

and 2 and other places. This will provide the basis for developing a theory of praxis with regard to Godly wisdom at WCC.

(1) Godly wisdom is rooted in the Gospel (it is not esoteric, gnostic or humanistic)

Paul uses gnostic-like words in 1 Corinthians 2 such as 'secretive', 'spiritual', and 'mystery' that could easily be misinterpreted as esoteric. However, I believe that this is not the kind of wisdom Paul was advocating. The sociological context of the epistle, the events surrounding the letter, and the contents of chapters 1 and 2 of the letter point in another direction: Paul was attempting to counter the Corinthian obsession with fanciful rhetoric, impressive displays of oratory and audience-manipulating presentation by using the very kind of words they revelled in and using them but in the context of true Godly wisdom (Frestadius 2011).

Paul also identifies pure, true and Godly wisdom as revealed in the gospel of Christ (Thistelton 2006). No human philosophical system can compare with this Godly wisdom. Normal human or worldly wisdom misses it and even rejects it. In other words, human wisdom does not lead to Godly wisdom. The gospel is uniquely God's answer to the human race's predicament, caused ultimately by sin and rebellion against God and his universal reign.

Since Godly wisdom is gospel-centred, it is inherently Christ-centred and missional. This is because the person and work of Christ is the only way of salvation (both for individuals, the world, and the rest of the universe all tainted by human sin) and the expansion of Christ's Kingdom on Earth. It is only through the gospel that there can be justification, sanctification and glorification. Christ assumes his followers will be participants in the *missio Dei* (Matthew 28:19), humbly sharing Christ in word and life. This means serving others in the risen Christ's strength and passion in a selfless manner, contrasting with the self-dependent and self-absorbed focus of worldly wisdom.

(2) Godly wisdom is primarily revealed by the Holy Spirit (it is not gained through pure intellectual reasoning or embraced because of its manifestation of cleverly presented human-inspired wisdom)

Gordon Fee (2009:33-48) argues that for the Apostle Paul the concepts of 'knowing' and 'understanding' were intimately related to the work of the Holy Spirit. Healy (2007:149) affirms that Paul saw reception of Godly wisdom as a spirit-empowered work by the Third Person of the Trinity who helped 'the human mind to transcend its natural capability'. The need for this divine aid and intervention to understanding and accepting the gospel is partly the result of the bent of the sinful nature towards independence of God and reliance upon human wisdom alone that finds the gospel foolish and weak - insulting to human intelligence. To therefore understand biblical truth (2:4-5) the Holy Spirit is absolutely necessary.

Not only is the Holy Spirit crucial to understanding the gospel (John 16:13). The ministry of the Spirit is also vital for growing in spiritual maturity. This involves a broadening and deepening grasp and experience of the gospel, the epitome of Godly wisdom from man's perspective. This growth in comprehension of the gospel is not divorced from the rational use of the mind. But it would imply a firm grasp that rationality builds on divine enlightenment and can never have this revelatory role as well.

(3) Godly wisdom is experiential and participatory (and not emotionally passive or primarily cognitive)

I do not believe that Paul was an anti-intellectual. However, divorcing his epistemic vocabulary from its Hebraic roots does the text a great disservice. Ingrained both in the historical context of the gospels themselves, and in the later Pauline works, was the notion that knowledge was experiential and participatory. Over and against this Hebraic worldview of 'knowledge as experience' we have the Greek concepts of knowledge as "theoretical comprehension of reality, or discovery through observation" (Healy 2007:141). Godly wisdom as supremely revealed in the gospel *does* involve a cognitive dimension (it must be understood as already argued), but it also leads to a living encounter and relationship with God that is worked out in a godly life of devotion to, and service of, God. It sets the convert on a trajectory of a deepening relationship of intimacy with God and an increasing reflection of the image of Christ in his character and mission.

The factual content of the Scriptures should always lead one to an experiential encounter with the personhood of the Trinity. The Scriptures point to Jesus (John 3:16) as the way of salvation (and do not contain salvation in itself). Thus, intellectual truths from the Bible should always be accompanied by a spiritual encounter with the God of the Bible (John 5:39). This encounter is initiated by the Holy Spirit and is certainly mystical, but not in the Gnostic sense of it being exclusive and elusive and esoteric. Truth leading to encounter, leading to transformation, is the birthright of every child of God. Godly wisdom is thus only obtained, in the true sense, once the believer has completed the process of truth leading to encounter (John 14:6). At this stage we can talk about Godly Wisdom being experiential and participatory. This is tied with the Hebraic concept that general wisdom is also acquired more through experiential means (theory applied in praxis) than through detached theoretical comprehension of reality (Healy 2007:138-139).

(4) Godly wisdom is dependent on a humble character (it is not available to the proud of heart)

This wisdom is hidden, but not because it is esoteric or only available to the self-ascribed spiritual or academic elite, but precisely because the latter frequently lack the humility to accept the simple message of the gospel (1 Corinthians 3:19). Godly wisdom by its very definition is not human wisdom. We have seen that it thus takes humility to recognise the shortcomings of worldly wisdom and be open to Godly wisdom. When wisdom is linked primarily with human initiation, independence, ceremonies, eloquence and power, it will not be open to Godly wisdom which is rooted in the knowledge and power that only God can provide. Clearly the pathway to Godly wisdom is humility. Without it God's wisdom will not be embraced. The gospel leads to boasting in God and not our knowledge, achievements and power. This is because it is only through the gospel of Jesus Christ, as revelation of God's supreme wisdom, that we can be reconciled to God and be able to successfully run our lives and the world and anticipate the fullness of God's kingdom on earth.

We have thus arrived at a definition of Godly wisdom as revealed to the apostle Paul. By presenting it in the above four dimensions it is hopefully easier to grasp and remember. The four dimensions highlight important elements with regard to Godly

wisdom and its experience. This structural presentation also provides a framework for developing a theory of praxis that will ensure that the key aspects receive separate attention. Such a theory of praxis will hopefully enhance the pedagogical process and improve a church's theological understanding of the multi-faceted nature of Godly wisdom. The above biblical depiction of Godly wisdom provides the building blocks to construct a theory of praxis that will help WCC better understand and experience Godly wisdom. To the development of this preferred operative theology I now turn.

3.3 Developing a holistic theory of action for Worcester Christian Church with reference to Godly wisdom

The normative picture of Godly wisdom that has emerged in this chapter has two implications: firstly, the general practical implications for a theory of praxis with reference to Godly wisdom for churches today, and, secondly, the specific practical implications for WCC. This section will look at both.

3.3.1 The general practical implications for churches

In the light of Paul's view of Godly wisdom, tied to the plan of, provision for, and outworking of our salvation, twenty-first Century churches should avoid all temptation to relegate the gospel to nothing more than *initial salvation*, i.e. simply declaring our belief of the gospel (especially as a once-off event¹). Far from tucking the gospel message away in a soteriological corner (and storing it for 'evangelism' or 'revival' services), a church which aligns with Paul's view of Godly wisdom will realise that the Gospel also includes sanctification and its answers for everyday decisions, problems and sins. I believe a truly Gospel-centred approach to the Christian life to be the best antidote to the creeping temptations of semi-Pelagian² 'works-based' sanctification that ignores the importance of reliance on the indwelling Holy Spirit. This focus on

¹ "We never 'get beyond the gospel' in our Christian life to something more 'advanced.' The gospel is not just the minimum required doctrine necessary to enter the kingdom, but the way we make progress in the kingdom. We are not justified by the gospel and then sanctified by obedience, but the gospel is the way we grow (Gal. 3:1-3) and are renewed (Col. 1:6)" (Keller 2009).

² "The semi-Pelagian teaches that man can make the first move toward God by seeking God out of his own free will, and that man can cooperate with God's grace even to the keeping of his faith through human effort" (Slick 2008).

the gospel as relevant to, and power for, all of life will thus need to be reflected, especially in the teaching and other ministries of the church.

The Corinthian context also teaches us that Paul's solution for dealing with an intellectually over-zealous congregation (or part of a congregation) was to avoid and devalue the very kind of ostentatious presentation they so craved (cf. Grindheim (2002:709 & 1 Corinthians 2:1). Churches following Paul's teaching will certainly need to avoid any kind of fanciful rhetoric or audience-spinning that is used for the sole purpose of creating an impression, exaggerating man's wisdom, and appealing to the natural or academic senses and appetites of the congregation. This point would not serve as argument against the modern contextualisation of a gospel presentation (which I believe is vital). It is more of a reminder to liturgists and preachers to ensure their ministry in a congregational worship meeting is truly gospel-centred as God's wisdom is superior to human wisdom and the gospel does not need to be packaged in a rhetorical veneer to make it more compatible to the unconverted. The latter will empty it of its power.

Churches striving towards alignment with Paul's view of Godly wisdom would need to carefully navigate the balance (Schwarz 2009:26-34) between the appropriate use of the rational mind and Christian mysticism (work of the Holy Spirit in revelation, enlightenment and empowerment). Paul viewed the balance of these two elements of Christian spirituality as vital for Godly wisdom: a solid intellectual understanding of the Gospel message and its application is married to the almost ethereal concept of the Holy Spirit's secret and invisible work at conversion and subsequently in the lives of the believers³

Paul's teaching on the Holy Spirit's ministry means contemporary churches would do well to employ a developed Pneumatology – one that takes into account the active role of the Holy Spirit in understanding and experiencing God's wisdom through the gospel. While all evangelical churches would in principle pay attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in sanctification, writers like Fee (2000:33-48) and Ruthven (2004:339-345) would argue that too often this attention amounts to nothing more than lip-

³ "Knowledge of another person - and pre-eminently of a divine Person - thus involves a dialectic of mystery and intelligibility..." (Healy 2007:151-152)

service. Ruthven's admonition (2004:341) for churches and seminaries to avoid the '*Berlin-method*' of knowledge acquisition which turns Christianity into an almost entirely intellectual endeavour is especially helpful. Based on personal experience and interaction with works of Pentecostal scholars, I agree with Smith (2010:2-6) that a Pentecostal philosophy of ministry could certainly enable many churches of other pneumatological views to avoid this trap.

Furthermore, the apostle Paul understood Godly wisdom to be experiential. This does not mean that Paul saw his own subjective experiences as a basis for developing theology. Lotter's (1995:549-557) balanced exegesis supports the idea that Paul valued experiences, but valued the leading of the Holy Spirit (through his experiences) much more. My use here of the word 'experiential' is to refer to the fact that Godly wisdom for the believer is not just intellectual assent to the doctrines of Christianity. It also leads to wise choices in life and a growing participation in the life of God's transforming power made possible by the gospel. Thus churches today need to ensure that this is clearly taught and experientially engaged – after all, wisdom is not just knowledge but the application of knowledge leading to a better way of life. If Paul saw theology as that which aims at the experience of the love and worship of God and the service of others, then churches should take upon themselves the burden to lead their members in this direction. One way to do this is to certainly avoid a teaching style that is primarily informational or doctrinal, leaving little or no place for actual practical application. Churches can and should also create safe spaces for members where they can exercise their God-given gifts (whether these are natural talents or spiritual gifts).

The crucial place of humility in being open to and receiving Godly wisdom has repercussions for churches today. They should value humility and appoint and employ humble leaders and ensure power-structure accountability (Leman & Pentak 2004:41-51). Pride-aversion needs to become an integral part of the life of the congregation. As Paul admonished others to imitate his example (1 Corinthians 11:1), the congregation's attitudes towards worldly and Godly wisdom will largely be influenced by the attitudes of its leadership. Humble leadership will mean the church provides a non-competitive working and worshipping environment and life-style where God gets all the glory, the only logical conclusion of the source and encounter

with the gospel. Any form of pride that exalts human wisdom in any form will mean a lack of openness to Godly wisdom or an undermining thereof (1 Cor 1:26-31; Grindheim 2002:709).

3.3.2 *The specific practical implications for Worcester Christian Church*

The research described in chapter 2 presented the position at WCC with reference to Godly wisdom. This will now be compared with the normative understanding of Godly wisdom that has emerged in this chapter and a more faithful operative theology of Godly wisdom proposed for WCC. Chapter 4 will show how to achieve the new theory of praxis at this church.

My research findings indicate that the church *does* have a commitment to the gospel and thus understands Godly wisdom. There is a strong outward focus which manifests in a variety of evangelistic ministries (see answers to question 18 of the questionnaire). This is a clear indication that WCC views the Gospel as providing the only true solutions to humanity's problems and the basis for achieving an abundant life. It thus does not look to non-biblical secular methods for solving human and societal problems (rooted primarily in sin and alienation from God) and improving the quality of living (see answers to questions 26 and 27 of the questionnaire). In this regard they do thus align themselves with a Christ-centred and missiological vision and approach that I believe Paul would have underwritten.

Further, WCC *does* seem to have a well-founded, developed pneumatology that takes into account the active role of the Holy Spirit with regards to Godly wisdom: in understanding Godly wisdom, the need for it, and living according to its vision and dictates through the Spirit's work. This can be clearly seen in WCC's stress on the necessity of personal and church involvement in missions (in both the narrower, evangelistic sense and the broader perspective of mercy ministries and justice). WCC is not guilty of obsession with 'human wisdom' manifesting in fanciful rhetorical displays of oratory genius as was the case at Corinth. The church also seems to value humility by being open to Godly wisdom and appreciating a healthy, non-competitive leadership structure so that there is only boasting in the gospel. WCC

therefore currently, to a large degree, reflects a biblical vision of Godly wisdom that aligns with that of the Apostle Paul.

However, throughout the analysis of the survey results a clear, subliminal anti-intellectualism could be detected. While survey participants (as representatives of the entire congregation) certainly valued the mystical aspect of Godly wisdom (the illuminative role of the Holy Spirit), they also undervalued the role of the human intellect. I suspect a strong reaction against worldly wisdom that is marked by sophisticated rhetoric and intellectual understanding – a possible over-correction to the Corinthian error. There is an apparent perceived dichotomous relationship between the spiritual/sacred and the intellectual/rationality/common sense present in some of the participant responses.

This view of the role of the Holy Spirit with reference to Godly wisdom has placed an exaggerated emphasis on the revelatory/enlightenment role of the Holy Spirit in Christian life and ministry. It has also downplayed the value of a deeply cognitive understanding of the gospel and its application through careful consideration and thought⁴. It seems there is a mistrust of the legitimate role of the use of the mind within the context of Godly wisdom and an over-emphasis on a mystical approach to Godly wisdom.

My study of Godly wisdom, as summarised in 3.2.4, has demonstrated that the Apostle Paul understood the importance of balancing Christian intellectualism (a thorough cognitive doctrinal grasp of the tenets of the Christian faith and their relevance for life and service) with Christian mysticism (the enlightening, guiding and empowering role of the Holy Spirit in life and ministry). While the Corinthian problem was likely more related to the former than the latter, the opposite appears to be the case at WCC. I therefore believe that WCC does not sufficiently display this balance.

WCC can be accused of interpreting Paul's understanding of Godly wisdom as anti-intellectual and hyper-spiritual. Participants unfortunately seem too eager to view

⁴ In this regard participants views' line up with that of early Pentecostals who "... also perceived that an intellectualisation of the Christian faith was resisting or even suppressing the work of the Holy Spirit, while the life of the Spirit and the demands of intellectual labours were seen as opposites that do not readily mix" (Nel 2016:7-9).

God-given intellect and natural reasoning as largely unhelpful or even completely unnecessary when sourcing Godly wisdom. At the Pentecostal seminary I previously studied at, lecturers referred to the latter as neo-Gnosticism where much Godly wisdom is sourced through a direct more mystical experience with the Holy Spirit.

A thoroughly balanced study of the Apostle's life, only briefly covered earlier in this chapter (3.2), shows these anti-intellectual descriptors of him are incorrect. They are not in line with Pauline (or New Testament) epistemology (Smith 2010:15). Clearly Paul integrated his understanding of the Spirit's mysterious workings with the need to apply the mind in working out God's wisdom, the gospel, in day-to-day life (cf. how the debate at the Jerusalem council recorded in Acts 15 leads to a conclusion that is attributed also to the Holy Spirit - see. v. 28). He did not associate anti-intellectualism with Godly wisdom. To some degree, though, my research at WCC has pointed to not only this being true, but that it is also celebrated.

Developing a holistic theory of action for WCC to address its shortcomings regarding Godly wisdom is thus required. It will demand a greater focus on a deeply cognitive understanding of the gospel and how to live it out in our lives and societal context and a more balanced view of the enlightenment/guidance of the Holy Spirit. This will require a better understanding of the role of rational processes in Christian growth and ministry. As part of this process, it will also be necessary to underscore the importance and necessity of the scientific method in Christian life and enquiry. This means that even non-Christians, because of the remnants of the image of God in them and God's common grace in the world, can contribute valuable extra-biblical knowledge and practical wisdom. But evangelicals would argue that this never makes the gospel redundant, since the gospel is the supreme and only remedy for the ills of the human race and its inability to live truly fulfilled human lives.

3.3.3 Crafting a theory of action tailored to Worcester Christian Church

It has already been noted that many aspects of the four dimensions of Godly wisdom have been met at WCC. I believe this needs to be applauded. Therefore the theory of action will concentrate on the area where there was a deficiency. However, it should include a reminder to continue manifesting the other areas of Godly wisdom.

Christian Schwarz (2009:26-34) has written much, on both popular and academic levels, regarding the important role of 'balance' with regards to church planting and church growth. He coined his own term 'radical balance' (2009:16-19) in order to express a kind of ministerial balance that is willing to identify shadow areas (or blind spots) in one's liturgy and style, particularly as revealed through interactions with Christians of other styles. The process moves one from an antagonistic view to a less dogmatic view, and then to a more open approach with regards to those from the 'opposite' spiritual camp. This allows two approaches to be held in union, though they may appear (initially) radically incompatible. This process is certainly aided by realising that learning a new spiritual language does not require forgetting your mother tongue (cf. Schwarz 2009:16).

Schwarz's sociological model enables churches to categorize their main spiritual style. This helps them identify potential shortcomings or unbalanced tendencies that result from refusing to learn from spiritual styles that are different to theirs.

To combat this Schwarz encourages Christians in general, but especially congregations through their leaders, with his approach: to engage in the distinctly uncomfortable task of regularly interacting with those who find themselves on the opposite side of one's "Spiritual Style" on the spectrum (2009:16-19). Through a willingness to learn outside of traditional denominational boundaries one may arrive at a more "balanced radical" theology which better reflects all aspects of God as revealed through both the Old and New Testaments.

Schwarz's work enables me to provide the necessary framework for deriving a theory of action with reference to the shortcomings in WCC's understanding and experience of Godly wisdom. From my personal journey in ministry in a variety of international, inter-cultural and inter-denominational settings, I have found Schwarz's idea of 'balanced radical' theology helpful and I believe it is applicable to the situation at WCC.

In terms of Schwarz's approach, WCC can be defined as a church whose primary spiritual style is Charismatic or pneumatological with a strong reactive tendency towards intellectualism. The result is a false dichotomy between spiritual and natural modes of knowledge acquisition and application (2009:126-132), seeing them as two

apparently drastically opposed positions. The church has inadvertently promoted a dichotomy between natural and spiritual means of wisdom acquisition. I believe the remedy for this situation lies in the area of balance.

I have already made the case earlier in this thesis (cf. 3.2.4) that the Apostle Paul was both an adherent to, and promotor of (i) the intellectual aspect of the gospel (the doctrinal dimensions and working out the implications in daily life), and (ii) the mystical aspects of the Gospel (understanding it and experiencing its transforming power through the Holy Spirit that equips the believer for life and godliness). Thus it logically follows that any epistemology using Paul's teaching as a foundation would attempt to discard the unnatural dichotomy between the 'natural vs. supernatural' in the realm of Godly wisdom.

The theory of action at WCC thus requires the need to address the deficiency in WCC's approach to Godly wisdom and Schwarz's model is helpful in doing this. The church leadership (in liturgy, preaching, teaching, structure, and personal example) would need to promote a more 'radically balanced' view of Christianity with reference to intellectualism and mysticism. The church must not lean towards the mystical side of the faith *to the detriment of natural intellect*. It must embrace and espouse a more holistic picture of Christianity that is also intellectually rigorous and apologetically sound.

3.4 Defence of the new praxis

In this section the defence of my operative theology for WCC with regards to Godly wisdom is four-fold. It covers the balance in using Schwarz's idea of radical balance; it is built on a biblical understanding; it harmonises with Christocentric and mission-centred lenses (see 3.4.3) for interpreting Scripture; and finally it applies the truths that the gospel (a display of Godly wisdom in the life and work of Christ) reconciles sinners to God and empowers Christians to build moral, caring, stable and prosperous lives, families and societies.

3.4.1 The use of Schwarz

The value of Schwarz's radical balance is that it makes possible (i) an openness to another position and thus learning from it, and (ii) appropriate adjustments to each

position by not avoiding either extreme, but bringing them together in a balanced way, thus enriching the situation. Christians from non-traditional Charismatic churches will likely balk at the idea of ‘intellectualising’ their vibrant version of the faith. And similarly those from the opposite ecclesiastical camp might strongly resist any attempt towards ‘emotionalising’ their cognitively rigorous faith and opening it to special dynamic and revelatory encounters with the Holy Spirit. But radical balance will benefit both Christian groups leading to a more faithful biblical position. From an evangelical perspective this makes the theory of action defensible.

3.4.2 *Founded on a biblical view of Godly wisdom*

Evangelicals hold the Scriptures in the highest esteem and accept their divine inspiration and therefore final authority (Light 2012:9-11). Since I am an evangelical and since this thesis is directed at evangelicals, the position arrived at for an operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom can be defended as it is built on exegesis of Scripture and systematic theology. It is faithful to biblical epistemology.

3.4.3 *It is faithful to Christocentrism and a mission focus*

Christocentrism is where one interprets all Scripture through the lens of Jesus’ teaching and the impact of his life and ministry (Peppler 2012:120-123). For the evangelical, Christ is the key to interpreting the Old and New Covenants. This is because Jesus Christ is the ultimate self-revelation of God and thus reflects the values, will and purposes of God in the clearest sense. Therefore, in interpreting – for instance – 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 it would be assumed that we will also turn to the Gospels for additional help as we would assume there should be a coherent unity between the two. This is how we would handle any apparent dissimilarities to ensure a coherent exegesis and theology. My hermeneutical method is thus distinctly “Christocentric” – where all Scripture is interpreted through the lens of Jesus’ teaching.

My solution to the WCC shortcomings with regards to Godly wisdom makes use of Schwarz’s notion of ‘*radical balance*.’ This can be shown to reflect the Christocentric principle. Christ himself argued for this ‘*radical balance*’ in an encounter with the Sadducees in Matthew 22:29: “You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God.” Christ desired and still desires that his followers

“must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). His entire life and ministry as portrayed in the Gospels show a keen acquaintance with the supernatural and mystical but also a rigorous intellect that frequently had his opponents astonished, even at the tender age of 12 (Luke 2:41-53).

The Corinthian chapters imply that the gospel is the wisdom of God for the human race’s dilemma with sin and ensuing problems. The fact that Paul brought it to Corinth shows the Corinthian need to be mission-minded. The shortcomings of worldly wisdom thus only accentuate the need for evangelism in the world and discipleship in the Christian faith and life.

My approach in seeking a biblically faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom for WCC includes both the Christocentric and missional focus (the latter has been described in point 2 on page 46). For evangelicals then my proposed praxis can be defended.

3.4.4 The value for reconciliation to God and transforming society

A fair reading of the New Testament shows that reconciliation to God can only be achieved through the salvific work of Christ. This in turn leads to lives committed to righteousness (love of God and one’s neighbour), harmonious families and godly children, and stable and successful societies. Sadly it can be demonstrated that Christianity as envisaged in New Testament teaching is not always realised. But this can be shown to be the fault of not fully appropriating the benefits of the gospel. This view does not mean that extra-biblical knowledge derived from using human reasoning in research and not related directly to undermining biblical revelation is not useful and necessary. If all truth is God’s truth, then biblical and extra-biblical truth need to be harnessed to bring about better societies (see Annexure).

In the light of the above four points I believe the operative theology espoused in this chapter for WCC has been adequately defended.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I developed and defended a theory of action for WCC that attempts to rectify deficiencies in its understanding and practice of Godly wisdom. I did this by first looking in systematic fashion at Paul's understanding of Godly wisdom,

especially as taught in 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. A literature review of current works on the topic was followed by the unification of biblical and historical theology materials, resulting in a clear understanding that from a human perspective Godly wisdom is rooted in the gospel and requires humility and the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit to be accepted and experienced. This Godly wisdom is the key to an abundant life through providing reconciliation and fellowship with God and fellow human beings. It is the key to successful families and societies and the ultimate restoration of utopia in a world of perfect righteousness and love and intimate union with God.

In the second part of the chapter I brought this finding into correlation with my understanding of WCC's expressed epistemology as presented in Chapter 2. Having identified the deficiency of an anti-intellectual tendency, I then proceeded with constructing an actual theory of action that attempts to address this shortcoming. The chapter ended with a defence of the more faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom for WCC.

The stage has been reached in the mini-thesis to take up the matter of transforming the operative theology at WCC with regard to Godly wisdom into one that aligns more faithfully to the biblical picture presented in this chapter. The praxis-theory-praxis paradigm of practical theology moves from the descriptive phase of the current situation (chapter 2 of this mini-thesis), to the normative phase that results in a more biblically sound situation that takes into account some insights from the human and social sciences (chapter 3 of this mini-thesis), and finally to the pragmatic phase that provides a strategic plan to transform the current praxis into line with the new theory of praxis (chapter 4 of this mini-thesis which answers Browning's fourth question in his strategic practical theology: *What means, strategies, and rhetoric should we use in this concrete situation?*).

The next chapter thus constructs a strategic plan to help WCC align its operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom more closely to a more biblically faithful one.

CHAPTER 4:

Developing a strategic plan to improve the operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom at Worcester Christian Church

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I demonstrated that WCC largely adheres in ministry and practice to an understanding and application of Godly wisdom as taught by the Apostle Paul. However, a primary deficiency was identified: a tendency towards anti-intellectualism and undermining and under-appreciating the role and importance of reason in matters of faith. This is probably linked to a neo-Gnosticism (more mystical) view of gaining divine wisdom. To address this I suggested embracing a model of 'radical balance' as outlined by Schwarz (2009:16-18). This chapter is thus an attempt to provide practical suggestions to show how the church may be aided and leadership helped in correcting this error. It will thus complement the issue of stressing to the church the need to continue with their essentially biblical operative theology for Godly wisdom. In other words, I would encourage that in addition to the strategic plan below that the church faithfully ensures the four dimensions of Godly wisdom argued in chapter 3 be well taught and undergird the life and ministry of WCC.

This chapter relies heavily on the results of chapter 2 since the deficiencies identified there (within the current operative theology of WCC) are now to be addressed on a practical level. These deficiencies were delineated when the results of chapter 2 were compared with the normative view on Godly wisdom argued in chapter 3. The conclusions drawn from this correlative exercise provided the seed from which liturgical, homiletical and educational suggestions can be formulated for full transformation of the current praxis to the new praxis at WCC. Thus in terms of Browning's 'model' for practical theology, the last stage (last question) has been reached that will be answered in chapter 4: *What means, strategies, and rhetoric should we use in this concrete situation?*

In dealing with the one area of concern with reference to WCC's operative theology, in addition to Schwarz' approach, I draw on a combination of my pastoral experience and the work of other writers in the field of Practical Theology. I have attempted to keep these suggestions feasible, realistic and applicable for the context of this local church. This goal has been made easier because I am somewhat familiar with this church, having visited its Sunday services and other events a few times.

I provide suggestions for a balancing of the intellectual and spiritual/mystical aspects of Christianity in the following areas of ministry: (i) Homiletics, (ii) Education, specifically adult bible school training, (iii) Liturgics - Worship and Service Structure, and (iv) Children and Youth. These recommendations can show the church how to promote a holistic view of Christianity that is intellectually rigorous *and* spiritually vibrant, not espousing one aspect of the faith to the detriment of another. I believe this will strengthen the praxis of the church to display a fuller, more holistic version of Godly wisdom as envisioned by Paul.

The scope of this chapter will not include a communicative strategy designed to gain acceptance of the operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom arrived at in this thesis. This would only be relevant if I was a member of this church.

4.2 Homiletics

4.2.1 Making use of expository preaching

I firstly recommend that the church leaders, specifically the pastors and teaching elders, embrace an expository preaching style (exegesis of a Scriptural passage and application) as a valid and helpful tool alongside their current topical method. I believe this will advance the biblical knowledge of the members and influence the current congregational culture to being more 'pro-theology'.

The value of expository preaching is manifold and well-documented (Chapell 2005:30-33). My personal experience however (confirmed by others such as Magruder, 2006) is that Pentecostal and Charismatic church leaders overwhelmingly favour a topical preaching style. This is also true in the case of WCC as in the approximately two dozen services that I attended, the preaching style was nearly always topical. While I am not in favour of a homiletical approach that is *exclusively*

expository or exegetical (with the latter leaving *application* by the wayside), I do believe that incorporating expository sermon series into the preaching calendar will have a positive effect on the spiritual maturity of the congregation. By expository series I am referring to the style of preaching that takes a single book or chapter of the Bible, preaching through it verse by verse, in the time frame of a few weeks or even months.

Examples of expository series of sermons could include:

- A six-week series covering the letter to the Galatians
- A four-week series covering the book of Jonah
- A six-week series on the armour of God in Ephesians 6
- A ten-week series on the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew 5-7

These are examples of expository preaching from my personal life that I have found to have the following benefits for a congregation:

- (i) It forces congregants to deal with portions of Scripture they would normally avoid. A very important point for my study is that topical preaching allows the preacher to essentially pick and choose verses or chapters to highlight, usually covering the favourite topics of the pastors/s, church or the Charismatic movement. This does not lead to a balanced biblical and theological understanding. An expository style does not allow this freedom and congregants are essentially forced to deal even with those portions not favoured within their denominational setting. This leads to dealing with Scripture in its totality (Chapell 2005:59-82).
- (ii) It increases Biblical knowledge. Expository preaching teaches congregants the Bible – its stories, structure, history, progression of revelation, and interpretation. It does so in a way that topical sermons or spiritual experiences simply cannot do.
- (iii) It teaches Theology. Consequently, expository preaching emphasises the fact that the Bible is a book to be studied *and* experienced (Chapell 2005:83-101).

- (iv) It reinforces the idea of Scripture interpreting Scripture. An expository style emphasises the fact that feelings and ideas should be submitted to Scripture since Scripture itself is the best interpreter of all theology, including the experiential side.

4.2.2 Addressing a common objection to expository preaching

Contemporary preachers (especially from non-Reformed schools) frequently object to exegetical preaching on the basis of it being too scholarly and dry – not greatly engaging or exciting for contemporary audiences. It's perceived as stifling and un-contextual (Magruder 2006). Congregants arrive on Sundays with real-world problems, heartaches and deep questions born out of the complications from living in a fast-paced, hyper-connected and uncertain age. For a preacher to then delve into the details of Greek etymology, structure, history and other specifics of a Bible verse (followed by only more verses) which potentially have no bearing on the congregants' situation seems unwise. This objection, however, is misleading and shallow once one is again reminded of the sufficiency of Scripture which evangelicals hold dear. Charismatics, especially with their belief in personal inspiration, should be able to testify to how the Holy Spirit takes seemingly unrelated Biblical material and ties it to the heart of a situation in a way a topical sermon seldom can. Also, on a more practical level, those interested in embracing expository preaching, but wish to avoid the pitfalls of producing dreary content, have masters from whom to learn – expository giants who gladly share their experience and know-how. I personally have found the work of preachers like Timothy Keller (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York - <http://www.timothykeller.com/>) and Chip Ingram (Venture Christian Church, San Jose - <http://livingontheedge.org/>) extremely helpful for moving exegetical preaching beyond a tool for knowledge transfer to a style that's contextual, engaging and similar to topical preaching in other regards. Since the Bible books themselves are often topical, preaching from them in expository fashion means that these topics are made alive for congregants.

4.3 Education

4.3.1 *Studying Church History in a Bible school setting*

I recommend the study of church history on a more formal level as part of an in-house Bible school curriculum or small-group study material. I believe this will have the balancing effect of which Schwarz speaks (2009:16-18). In our current post-modern climate, a strong individualistic and ahistorical mind-set is the order of the day (Allison 2012:24-26). Christians need to be constantly reminded that unlike many Eastern Religious or Western New-Age adaptations thereof, Christianity is a *historical* faith – rooted in real life events that took place in space time and affect how we live today. This in itself can be a good deterrent to a hyper-spiritualisation of Christianity whereby one disembodies the relevance of the work of Jesus (and other doctrines) to successful Christian living to major on the non-material or mystical aspects of the faith. A broad study of church history is also a good deterrent against anti-intellectualism that sees theological study as unnecessary.

A popular cartoon illustrates the importance of church history. A Sunday school teacher stands in front of a white board trying to explain something to his students. The white board features an extremely complex diagram showcasing the 2000-year history of Christian churches, denominations, groups and the various splits and divisions that led to the complex situation we have today. At the very end of this diagram, one of the tiny blocks represents the church of the students and teacher. It is in between the multitude of existing church-groups born out of centuries of tradition. The teacher concludes the lesson by saying, “So this is where our movement came along and finally got the Bible right.” Clearly this accentuates the value of studying the many other traditions and not thinking that they are all wrong or irrelevant. This smacks of pride which will shut the door to further Godly wisdom.

Revivalist movements are frequently reactionary in nature. Allison (2011) provides ample examples. It is easy for anyone who is part of a new movement to feel that the current group has ‘finally got the Bible right’. This is especially true if it seems to correct so many of the errors of previous more traditional churches. This is to some extent the case at WCC which was initially founded as an alternative to the Dutch Reformed churches of surrounding areas. Nothing is as damaging to this concept

(‘We finally have the Bible right’) as the study of church history. It is humbling to realise that any movement or reactionary group is after 2000 years of church history merely repeating a process that has occurred dozens of times before. Studying church history thus has the dual benefit of promoting the intellectual study of Christianity (illustrating its importance) and encouraging humility among students to be able to learn from other traditions.

4.3.2 Providing exposure to teachers from different backgrounds

Inherent to Schwarz’s model of a radically balanced Christianity is the concept of inter-denominational exposure. Section 4.3.2 is a more specific application of 4.3.1. Schwarz’s point of departure is that different protestant denominations differ in style, liturgy and non-core doctrine because they reflect different aspects of the Trinity and the fullness of the Godhead (Schwarz 2009:20-24,40-42). In order to move towards a balanced centre, churches should thus be willing to learn from those on the opposite end of the liturgical spectrum. This is a sure-fire and thoroughly uncomfortable solution for identifying blind spots and areas of weakness in one’s own ministry style and learning from the strengths of others. It will enable WCC to address deficiencies in their praxis of Godly wisdom.

A personal story will illustrate this. A few years after obtaining my Bachelors in Theology from a prominent Pentecostal seminary in South Africa I started ministerial work in a multi-cultural and multi-denominational environment outside of my home country. Here I was exposed to individuals from very different church backgrounds with strong convictions about their particular (non-Pentecostal) expressions of Christianity. They in turn exposed to me writers and theologians I had had very little experience with up until that point – despite four years of full time theological training. While none of these encounters or books changed my views on Pentecostalism, it certainly *broadened* it and I was completely taken by surprise a year or two later when, speaking to some of my old-classmates, I realised they too knew none of the names of any of these books or authors that I had recently read. I found it hard to believe that one would deliberately read only those authors who fell clearly within one’s theological boundaries. However, I realised that up until recently I had been in the exact same position. Had it not been for my inter-cultural ministry, my position would likely not have changed.

I therefore recommend the leadership of WCC to deliberately expose themselves and congregants to teachers who do not teach within the boundaries of what everyone expects and is used to on a Sunday. I am of course not recommending unorthodox doctrine or allowing the heretical into the pulpit, but some familiarity with different views on non-core elements of the faith Evangelicals hold. Examples, specific to WCC, may include:

- Allowing a preacher from a traditional denominational church to take the pulpit one Sunday will foster unity in the town. It will also expose congregants to different ideas.
- Prescribe small-group material where the different ecclesiastical views on a theological topic are overviewed. This may help members think more critically on issues in order to arrive at a well thought out standpoint for themselves.
- Read through the biographies (or preach on the lives) of famous churchmen and woman who laboured for the Kingdom throughout history but were not a part of one's specific group or denomination. This may broaden congregants' views of the work that God is doing throughout the earth.
- Work through a book of an anti-charismatic (such as John MacArthur) in a Bible school setting. This will help congregants view the gifts and charismatic phenomena more critically, not so that they may disregard them but to employ them more wisely by being aware of excesses.

4.4 Liturgics

4.4.1 Explaining the spiritual gifts

I recommend that the leadership at WCC take steps to clarify the reason and intellectual justification behind the spiritual gifts and their operation. Paul's discussion of the Charismatic gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 is aimed at helping churches like the Corinthian one to practice spiritual *mindfulness*. Paul was clearly against any manifestation of spiritual chaos and/or irrationality. Though admitting that the gift of tongues (as an example) is necessary (14:39), it is an intellectually

fruitless exercise on its own (14:14). Further, he clearly intended it to be used in orderly fashion during congregational meetings if there was interpretation (14:40).

Paul's approach to the gifts here is an argument against the invisible division frequently erected by believers between the spiritual/mystical and rational aspects of the faith. Clearly Paul was interested only in combining the two by requiring his churches to employ their *mystical/supernatural* gifts in a *rational* manner. I thus recommend a similar approach, encouraging church leaders to destroy this false dichotomy by teaching on the mindfulness of the spiritual gifts. This should be done when the gifts are employed during worship. An example of this could be a one-minute explanation from the pulpit on New Testament prophecy with biblical references after the gift was exercised by a member of the congregation (contributing a prophecy is a fairly normal occurrence during Pentecostal worship). It could also be taught and explained in literature freely available after/before the service. This has two distinct benefits:

- (i) Firstly, it provides context for new visitors coming from non-Charismatic churches. These guests frequently seek answers to questions like the following that long-term members of Charismatic churches have since forgotten. What does the laying on of hands entail? What are tongues? Why do congregants lift their hands and shout? Why are flags involved in the worship service? Why does the service order seem so unruly compared to my previous church? Taking effort to explain these phenomena and the biblical backing behind them is only fair to visitors.
- (ii) Secondly, and specific for our purpose, it addresses these same questions for believers explaining that the Charismata are not synonymous with irrationality. The gifts and accompanying manifestations should never be seen as anti-intellectual – something involving the unction/leading of the Holy Spirit but nothing else. Instead, in keeping with Paul's admonition that the "spirit of Prophecy is subject to the prophets" (14:32), it should be taught that the spiritual gifts do not supersede human intellect and ability, but are operated in conjunction with it.

4.4.2 Promoting a culture of study

Small things can be done and employed during the worship service to eradicate the idea that intellectual Christianity stands over and against the work of the Holy Spirit, and that concepts like 'theology' or 'critical thinking' are inherently bad or anti-Christian. In order to cultivate a love for theology, some churches employ a 'Theological Word of the Week' in their service bulletins or make book recommendations from the pulpit. These are tiny changes that nonetheless can have a positive impact on the views on the congregation, especially when coming from senior leadership.

I believe that promoting a culture of study is not only scriptural and historical, but vital for the development of mature faith. Dunham (2011:21-22) calls our current era "the most anti-intellectual period in the history of Western civilization." I wholeheartedly agree with his exclamation that Christian "passion must resist with intensity the anti-intellectual spirit of the world." He proceeds to explain how the onus for such a movement rests with clergy and how the style and method of preaching has a large impact in this regard (as per 4.2.1 above). According to Dunham, thoughtful preaching that embraces the mind's rational process proceeds from deep encounters with Scripture (both for the preacher and congregants) and need not be stifling and uninspiring (2011:22).

Another reason for promoting some form of theological study as a normal and necessary practice of the Christian lifestyle has to do with witness and cultural engagement. McGrath (2011:133-145) argues correctly that the Scriptural vision of Christianity is glorious in as much as it has the power to attract outsiders morally, imaginatively, *and* rationally. Failure or unwillingness to engage rationally with one's own beliefs leads to a sub-par witness and even, in some cases (as per 4.5 below), a waning of faith. McGrath recounts a story of attending an evangelical meeting shortly after the publication of one anti-Christian bestseller by one of the new-atheists. He was severely frustrated at the believers' inability to offer serious rebuttal and engage intellectually with this anti-God publication. Instead, the general consensus seemed to be that quoting Psalm 14:1 (*The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'*) was all that was necessary (2011:135). This attitude should be recognised for what it is: non-Godly wisdom!

For more practical suggestions I recommend Moreland's (2012) work on the necessity of the Christian mind, which has an entire chapter (*Chapter 10: "Recapturing the Intellectual life in the church"*) dedicated to this topic. Regarding the practicalities for promoting a study culture in ecclesiastical circles, he writes in detail on the roles of the pastor, elders, liturgical forms, Bible schools, etc.

4.5 Children and youth: Apologetics

I recommend that the leadership of WCC makes use of apologetics, especially for younger Christians, as a tool to promote the importance of intellectualism within Christianity. Christian Apologetics, usually defined along the lines of "*the attempt to defend a particular belief or system of beliefs against objections*" (Beilby 2011:11-36), is traditionally employed (as the definition suggests) to try to persuade those who disagree with it. I have found through personal experience and observation that Apologetics is however often of more use to believers than non-believers (pp. 92-93). This is because apologetics cannot guarantee faith when a non-Christian hears a solid intellectual defence of the Christian faith (cf the discussion of 1 Cor 1 and 2). Apologetics specifically involve a building of rational defences against the intellectual onslaught on Christianity. It thus forces the apologist to lay aside "blind-faith" (i.e. the kind that accepts but refuses to question validity) and approach his/her own beliefs from the perspective of a secularist.

When young Christians raised in Christian schools, churches and surrounded by (mostly) Christian friends first encounter aggressive secularism at university level, it can often have devastating effects on their faith. Here, deeply-held beliefs that were assumed as sacred and automatically truthful (and therefore never questioned) are critiqued and even ridiculed by learned people. The result is frequently an unfortunate waning of faith or destruction of professed faith.

Exposing young Christians to apologetics is thus aimed at countering this problem. I believe it should not be seen as optional and will have the following benefits:

- (i) When approached correctly it naturally strengthens the faith of the young believer and places him/her in a position where aggressive anti-Christian sentiment or tactic is not faith-shattering. Instead it provides an opportunity for

dialogue and strengthening in the faith as the weaknesses and illogicality in the agnostic or atheist or humanist positions are exposed.

(ii) Consequently it forms a vital part of the intellectual part of discipleship as it trains young believers to share their faith (1 Peter 3:15) in a world (Western-context) that has moved beyond an automatic belief in the authority of Scripture. Their faith needs to be defended in the midst of a mixture of philosophies, e.g. postmodernism and religious pluralism.

(iii) Within the church context, apologetics instruction refuses to uphold the imaginary rift between 'spiritual' and 'intellectual' Christianity. It shatters this delusion by teaching young Christians (and the congregation as a whole) that strong enduring faith has a vital and vibrant spiritual/mystical part with an underlying and rigorous intellectual foundation.

By way of example I refer to the work of a Canadian friend of mind, a young apologist who frequently visits church youth-groups to discuss the importance of apologetics and readying oneself against the anti-Christian onslaught. As part of his presentation he would initially playact the role of the visiting atheist, presenting all the logical reasons why he does not believe in Christianity or religion of any kind. My friend would then later reveal his true persona – as a *defender* of Christianity. His performance usually ensures that great discussions follow. This is an interesting and engaging way to expose Christian youth to apologetics and strengthen their faith. There are of course other practical ways in which one could do this.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an application of Schwarz's concept of radically balanced Christianity to WCC with reference to improving its operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom. Schwarz's practical theology approach does not entail uniformity between churches (2009:32). It was been applied to WCC in the areas of homiletics, education, liturgics and youth, to assist it in reaching a more faithful understanding of the role of the mind with reference to understanding and displaying God's wisdom. It can be seen that it will, if accepted, bring a greater balance between rationality and the mystical in regard to Godly wisdom. This is especially so as God's wisdom is

supremely revealed in the gospel and growing in understanding of it and in living it out. This requires a highly disciplined thinking mind.

Radically balanced Christianity as proposed by Schwarz certainly does not entail that Charismatic churches such as WCC lay aside their neo-Pentecostal foundation. Instead, building upon an already laid theological and liturgical base, one may employ methods and ideas such as those mentioned above, to deepen one's discipleship and thus eliminate blind spots within one's own tradition. In this way the glory, including the wisdom, of God can be more clearly displayed through churches.

This mini-thesis has thus reached the end of a practical theology journey using Browning's strategic practical theology approach. The structured framework of Browning's 'model' works methodically and logically from a current praxis to an improved theory of praxis and finally to the new praxis. This integrated approach to practical theology ensures that a current practice or situation in the life of the church is transformed into a preferred one, which for the evangelical reflects a more faithful reflection of God's character and will.

CHAPTER 5:

Conclusion

5.1 Reviewing the objectives

In the introduction chapter of this mini-thesis I indicated that the research question was how can WCC as an evangelical Charismatic church be helped to have a biblically faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom? Thus the primary objective of the study was to *formulate a theologically-informed strategic plan to help Worcester Christian Church be more biblically faithful in its praxis of Godly wisdom*. The three secondary objectives, with a chapter devoted to each, helped achieve the primary objective of this study by breaking the main goal into three smaller ones:

1. *Interpret the operative theology of WCC with respect to Godly wisdom, especially with reference to 1 Corinthians 1-2 and Pauline religious epistemology in general.*

This empirical aspect of the study was completed in chapter 2 with the aid of mixed-method questionnaires presented to congregants and analysis and interpretation of the data.

2. *Determine and defend a biblically faithful operative theology with respect to Godly wisdom for WCC in its context.* This systematic theological aspect was completed in chapter 3 where I presented a study of Paul's view of Godly wisdom and related it to the current praxis at WCC.

3. *Develop a strategic plan to strengthen the operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom at WCC.* This practical aspect was completed in chapter 4 where I presented a strategic plan for strengthening the praxis of the church with regards to Godly wisdom.

Browning's approach to theology influenced the design of this mini-thesis. The structure was based on his strategic practical theology (his fourth movement) and the four questions it raises. By answering them sequentially with reference to my topic at

WCC, and drawing on his other three movements, I was able to achieve my secondary goals and thus the primary one for my project. A more detailed review of the arguments and findings follow below.

My mini-thesis is thus a reflection of a practical theology project based on the praxis-theory-praxis paradigm used by most practical theologians today. Practical theology according to Smith (2011:10) is the discipline in which “we study God’s revelation, seeking to contextualise it so that we might live and act in ways that are faithful to his will.” He argues that this is best achieved through the above paradigm.

5.2 Tracing the argument

In order to develop a biblically faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom at WCC, it was necessary to start with discovering the current operative theology (the first secondary objective). Making any future changes would require understanding the current situation and the underlying theory and the factors that influenced it. Browning’s first step in his strategic practical theology deals with this. This entailed an empirical and hermeneutical research project. Chapter 2 provided the details and assessment of the data gleaned from both a small-scale qualitative and quantitative research of a sample group from the membership of WCC. I first explained the methods for the empirical research, justifying my selection of candidates and a mixed-methods approach. I then presented a summary of the data from the questionnaires in the form of abridged answers to the open-ended questions and a statistical analysis of the answers to the multi-choice questions. The interpretation of the data gave me a good insight into the operative theology with regard to Godly wisdom at WCC, including in its evangelism and missions programmes.

The next part of the thesis dealt with the second secondary objective of the thesis, namely ascertaining a biblically faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom for WCC. Before any changes were made it was imperative to seek an understanding of a biblically faithful praxis theory. The second question in Browning’s strategic practical theology covered this requirement. I achieved the objective through a systematic study of Paul’s view on Godly wisdom, with special focus on what is taught on the topic in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16. This was an integrative study

covering a brief literature review and exegetical, systematic theology and historical perspectives. After systematising the findings from these sources I presented a normative understanding of Godly wisdom based largely on 1 Corinthians 1-2. The final part of chapter 3 was taking this biblically faithful operative theology and formulating a holistic theory of action for WCC. This theory of praxis was designed to bring WCC's operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom fully into line with the biblical vision. Browning's third question deals with a defence of the new praxis. Chapter 3 provided this. The praxis that emerged in chapter 3 for WCC was heavily influenced by Schwarz's work on 'radical Christian balance'.

The third secondary objective was to find a strategic plan to bring into operation at WCC the new more biblically faithful praxis of understanding and experiencing God's wisdom. Browning's fourth question to be answered in his strategic practical theology takes up this practical matter. The final part of the thesis was thus the most practical. In chapter 4 I presented a strategic plan with applicable suggestions for centring the church's focus on Godly wisdom as the Apostle Paul did. I provided concrete steps in the areas of Homiletics, Education, Liturgy, Children and Youth to achieve a more biblically faithful operative theology in regard to Godly wisdom.

The argument of the mini-thesis thus followed the praxis-theory-praxis paradigm for practical theology. It used Browning's 'model' that strictly follows this paradigm. It consists of four movements culminating in the fourth movement which is strategic practical theology. The last movement is structured around the answering of four consecutive questions. Browning's fourth movement provided the structure for my mini-thesis and effectively enabled me to achieve my primary objective in conducting this mini-thesis to answer my research question.

5.3 Summarising the findings

A correlation of chapters 2 and 3 indicated that there was one main area where WCC's operative theology had shortcomings and the new theory of praxis had to compensate for this.

Browning's *Fundamental Practical Theology* (1991:55-56) outlines four questions to be addressed by practical theological research. Since this formed the framework for this thesis, I will summarise the findings of the answers to the four questions yielded.

Question 1: How do we understand the concrete situation in which we must act?

The findings regarding the operative theology (theory-laden practice in Browning's words) with reference to Godly wisdom at WCC was largely (save for one area) aligned with that taught by the Apostle Paul. The members agree with Paul that Godly wisdom is rooted and irrevocably connected to the Gospel message itself; and its understanding, acceptance and experience is only through humility and the Holy Spirit. However, they revealed an unhealthy tendency to anti-rationalism by partly underplaying the value of natural reasoning. The connection between human/natural reasoning and Godly wisdom was largely ignored or downplayed by participants in the research. This essentially entailed a false dichotomy between spiritual and natural modes of knowledge acquisition. I found that to some degree congregants at WCC embraced anti-intellectualism in their understanding and pursuit of Godly wisdom. I then concluded that the remedy for this lay in the area of balance.

Questions 2 and 3: What should our praxis be in this concrete situation, and how do we defend it?

The research into a more biblically faithful operative theology with regards to Godly wisdom, especially as seen from a human perspective, revealed four distinct aspects:

(1) Godly wisdom is rooted in the Gospel. This means it is not esoteric, gnostic or of human origin. Man can take no credit whatsoever for this wisdom.

(2) Godly wisdom is primarily revealed by the Holy Spirit. This means it is not understood and appreciated through pure intellectual reasoning or embraced because of its intellectual appeal. This can only happen through the revelatory ministry of the Holy Spirit.

(3) Godly wisdom is experiential and participatory. This means we are dealing with true wisdom and not just knowledge which falls short of wisdom. This implies we are not mere spectators of God's wisdom. We are not emotionally passive or only

affected cognitively. It is knowledge that is active and that transforms our lives through divine action and human cooperation. This means there is an important place for the exercise of mental faculties in the Christian life.

(4) Godly wisdom is dependent on a humble character. This means that it is not available to the proud of heart. Pride will always be a stumbling block to accessing Godly wisdom. Pride will not accept that the human race is intrinsically flawed and under God's judgement and needs salvation. Human pride believes man is inherently good and simply needs to apply human solutions to solve the human race's problems. Thus pride cannot contemplate the need of God's wisdom manifested in the gospel.

The empirical research exposed that in aspects 2 and 3 there was some confusion at WCC. The result was a lack of balance between the rational and spiritual/mystical aspects of Godly wisdom. I believe Paul embraced the importance of balancing Christian intellectualism (a thorough cognitive doctrinal grasp and defence of the tenets of the Christian faith and their relevance for life and service) with Christian mysticism (the enlightening and guiding role of the Holy Spirit in life and ministry). These two aspects are not opposites, but work in unison to produce Godly wisdom in the life of the believer. I found that WCC did not afford the former an adequate place in their Christian walk; also that the church overemphasised the latter (spiritual enlightenment). To put it more frankly, the sampled members and therefore probably the majority in the church, implicitly or covertly embrace an anti-intellectualism that flies in the face of a holistic Godly wisdom as outlined by Paul.

Question 4: What means, strategies, and rhetorics should we use in this concrete situation?

The final section of the thesis dealt with practically how to achieve a more biblically faithful operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom. This answers Browning's last question which brings the practical theology project to a logical climax: transformation. Here I provided a strategic plan for this purpose that would impact a number of areas in the life of WCC (embracing expository preaching; studying church history in in-house Bible school and cell groups; exposing the congregation to teachers from other evangelical traditions; explaining spiritual gifts; promoting a culture of study; and teaching apologetics at children and youth levels). The hope is

that these structural and organisational arrangements and relevant ministries will enable the church to attain a 'radical balance' between the mystical/spiritual and the rational/intellectual aspects of the Christian faith. If this were to be successfully implemented WCC would achieve the operative theology presented in chapter 3 leading to significant spiritual growth in the Body of Christ at WCC.

5.4 Limitations of this research and future research

It's fair to acknowledge that the study's biggest limitation lies in the rather small sample group of its empirical research component. As explained in chapter 2, due to the nature of the topic it was decided that a purely quantitative approach (whereby larger parts of the congregants could be sampled with multiple choice questions) would not provide sufficient depth for a truly '*thick*' description of the congregation's current operative theology in the specific area of God's wisdom. On the other hand, using the mixed method questionnaire with larger numbers of people would also have proved impractical due to time restraints and the fact that this was a mini-thesis. However, the results were clearly representative of more than the eight interviewees as they represented the views of the most influential people at WCC whose example would heavily impact the other members. Further, the proposed operative theology with reference to Godly wisdom for WCC would be for the benefit of all the members: bringing those into alignment with a more faithful operative theology where necessary and confirming and further establishing those already holding this position.

For future research on the topic of this thesis or any other one related to the local church, I would recommend that one retain the mixed method, but perhaps also include a focus on the operative theology of the congregational *leadership*. Since leaders, especially teaching leaders, are the primary theological and ministry influencers in a congregation, researching their theory-laden practices could prove especially helpful. It would make it possible in answering Browning's fourth question to include an effective communicative strategy suited to gain the leaders' support of a more faithful operative theology on Godly wisdom or any other issue. This could even be done on a denominational level if a church is part of one for greater impact.

I accept that my thesis has limitations. However, I do believe that it presents a sound case for showing how to improve WCC's operative theology in the area of Godly

wisdom and consolidating it where it already conforms a biblically faithful one. I would hope that WCC will consider my work and seriously and make a decision to inaugurate the strategic plan suggested in chapter 4.

ANNEXURE (cf. pp. 45 and 58; this document by Light, 2015, provides additional supportive material on an aspect in 3.2.4 – see also 3.4.4 – that deals with a normative understanding of Godly wisdom)

Relationship of the Bible and theology to human reasoning, especially in relation to the natural, human and social sciences

This document seeks to defend that the Bible can be supplemented by significant amounts of knowledge gained in the physical, human and social sciences that are driven by disciplined, intensive human reasoning. This means if the role of the rational use of the mind leads to the growth of extra-biblical knowledge, it should be expected to play a role in all the disciplines of theology. This means that God's wisdom should not be expected to negate the role of the mind in Christian and ministerial growth. But then if this is the case, what is the valid relationship of the role of the mind to the source of divine knowledge and wisdom? It must be that the limitations of the human mind imply that we are dependent on divine revelation for the latter. This document is more focused on the role of rational thought in the discipline of practical theology which is interdisciplinary, i.e. it engages not only with the other fields of theology but also other fields.

Much of the knowledge flowing from the physical or natural sciences have clearly proved to be most accurate, and profound human mental application has primarily led to these discoveries and advancement in human knowledge. The human and social sciences study human and societal functioning in order to better understand such behaviour – its nature, causes and purpose. The goal is to improve situations, especially where there is human and societal malfunctioning. Practical theology practitioners also study Christian behaviour and its reasons and motivations in order to improve Christian living and the church's functioning so that they are more faithful to God's will and purposes. It can thus be seen that there is some overlap between these sciences and practical theology. But the question still needs to be faced: If Scripture according to evangelicals is divinely inspired and therefore inerrant and authoritative and human research is not similarly inspired and authoritative, how are they to be related?

From what we can discern from human history, it appears that the human race did not start off with the knowledge it now has. God clearly created us with minds to

study the world and thereby to accumulate further and more accurate knowledge of the physical universe and other related areas of reality and the human race. History certainly substantiates this. Even if we can point back in history to previous civilisations that did have advanced learning which was lost, it is still obvious that human knowledge can be extended through reflection and research.

We know that, after the Fall described in Genesis 2, knowledge of God through nature (natural or general revelation) was limited to an awareness of his existence and creative power and our conscience concerning what is morally right and morally wrong thus informing us that God must be holy. However, our experience has been that we cannot obey the conscience consistently or perfectly. The sinful nature also unfortunately adds to and twists or even rejects natural revelation. Thus there were two reasons why special revelation (the Bible) was necessary: the limitations of natural revelation (e.g. it contains nothing about salvation from sin) and the sinful nature (its inability to obey the conscience/God and its distortion of natural revelation, the latter problem also unfortunately would affect how special revelation would be handled).

Evangelical Christians have argued that the biblical revelation is sufficient for its purpose, but is not exhaustive knowledge, especially in non-salvation areas. We know this when we come to, for example, mathematics, photosynthesis, pollination, the atom, the size of the sun, electromagnetism, what causes the heart to beat, the nervous system, hermaphrodites, etc., which are not covered in the Bible. The question facing every Christian is how much of the knowledge the human race has accumulated can be accepted as true? A related question is how much of this knowledge, and the technology much of it has spawned, may a Christian use?

There are great areas of human knowledge and resultant technological and other creations that have drastically affected the Christian's lifestyle. For instance, we buy motor cars, we take modern medicine, we use the skills and knowledge of the dentist, the plumber, the mechanic, the engineer, etc., and accept and appreciate books on animal biology, aeroplanes, electricity, history, etc. But the facts are that in these areas unbelievers have been largely responsible for discovering the knowledge and developing the skills needed to produce these technological marvels.

The scientific method, in which human reasoning plays a crucial role, has been extremely effective in gaining new knowledge. Essentially in this method experiments are done and a theory is propagated that best explains the results. The theory is then tested and if it consistently and accurately explains or correctly forecasts actual results it is accepted until a more accurate theory based on many more experiments or other forms of research can be developed.

Now whether we like it or not, the Christian's knowledge, apart from the Bible, has come through many unbelievers. And where believers have added to our extra-biblical knowledge the same methods that unbelievers use have been applied.

Somebody has said all truth is God's truth. In the light of the above, this means that where unbelievers advance humankind's knowledge they have stumbled across God's truth or knowledge in their research. I think Christians would say that knowledge about God's world unearthed by non-Christians can and should be thankfully used by Christians.

Of course the real problem or challenge comes when Christians have to decide whether some area of humanly acquired knowledge is part of God's truth/knowledge or not. Let's take psychology, one of the human sciences. Much of psychology deals with human functioning, learning processes, and solving learning and other personality/psychological problems after extensive study of sometimes thousands of cases. In the old SA each white school had a school psychologist that ran the IQ tests and helped diagnose and remedy children's learning problems and behavioural and emotional problems. Occupational therapy, another human science, overlaps areas of psychology to help improve working performance.

Let's take sociology and anthropology next, two of the social sciences. This is the study of societies (e.g. institutions, economic systems, governments, the family, etc), and people groups (their cultures and worldviews) respectively. Thanks to these realms of study Christians know a lot more about human societies, and cultures and different peoples, information not found in the Bible. Much of this knowledge is useful in improving city planning and how to better understand and communicate with other cultural groups. Significant aspects of this knowledge are used positively in missions,

e.g. how to better communicate the contents of the Gospel to other cultural-ethnic groups.

There are many Christian psychologists whose view of humanity is biblical, but who have studied the views of many secular and Christian psychologists and drawn on these in areas where they are not contrary to the Bible and where they are clearly valuable (and therefore from common grace - I would put the scientific method in this category where its results are not contrary to biblical revelation). This approach is really the same we apply to other areas of knowledge.

We go to doctors, frequently unbelievers, to help us achieve maximum health for our bodies. When we benefit from their services this does not make us more acceptable to God or obliterate our guilt stemming from being sinners by nature and practice. In the same way, we may go to a psychologist or psychiatrist to benefit from their expertise to get our mental, psychological and relational functioning (internal and external) on to a healthier footing. Again, this better functioning emotionally, relationally and mentally does not make us more acceptable to God or take away our guilt as sinners. Further, these services from general practitioners, specialists, psychologists and occupational therapists do not help us get right with God or make redemption from sin, its power and God's judgement unnecessary. They do not make sanctification unnecessary, i.e. achieve what sanctification is meant to achieve. The unbeliever needs the Gospel even after using the best medical help for mind and body; and after this help the believer still needs the means of grace for growth in sanctification.

I think it is helpful to put all the knowledge science has provided that harmonises with or does not contradict biblical revelation in the category of natural revelation. But natural revelation cannot provide redemptive revelation; nor would special (biblical) revelation undermine or replace genuine natural revelation. The two revelations complement each other. Where theories deduced by science or rebellious human thinking contradict the Bible, they do not belong in natural revelation and need to be categorically rejected. However, it needs to be remembered that the findings of scientific research (which can never, by the way, be fully objective study) are not divinely inspired as the Scriptures are.

So we can come to the following conclusion. While God's Word teaches the truth, there are legitimate truths about the world God created, including humankind, that are not recorded in Scripture; and much of this knowledge, as noted above, has flowed from scientific research. For this reason, thinking practitioners are judicious to critically engage and assess credible knowledge that can be found in the natural, social, and human sciences. In practical theology, it is mostly the human and social sciences that are consulted because of their relevance to human and group functioning and their improvement.

My understanding is that empirical research in the human and social sciences normally does not only look for what actually takes place in some concrete area of life, but also seeks explanations. Similarly, empirical research into Christian life or service, i.e. where the kingdom of God is being worked out in our Christian lives, also attempts to probe the reasons for the praxis – the why of our behaviour. In interpreting the why of any secular or Christian praxis, the researcher's and the interviewee's descriptions and reasons regarding the praxis are important. So clearly secular and Christian empirical research overlap. The empirical researcher now has three sources to work with:

- (i) a picture of the concrete action or situation (the what),
- (ii) how the researcher interprets the praxis (the why), and
- (iii) the respondents' own explanation of the action or situation (also dealing with the why).

Now the empirical researcher seeks to bring these areas of knowledge into dialogue in order to arrive at a theory that best describes and explains the action. A secular researcher would lack the background of the church's tradition (biblical knowledge, theology, and practices) and the place of the Bible in it, and would not possess a solid biblical knowledge or an understanding of the importance of sound hermeneutical principles when interpreting the Bible. Such a researcher would also not understand the dynamic and direction of the Christian life. This researcher is clearly in no position to critique a Christian action and best explain the theory underlying the action. For the evangelical the Bible is crucial for understanding God, this world, and the goals of God's kingdom in which the church is intended to play a

special role – in short, how we are to live, i.e. to be and do. But the role and understanding of the Bible is always linked to a church tradition, which plays a major role in Christian praxis. Clearly the unconverted researcher is not equipped to work with understanding and improving Christian and church behaviour.

Yes, for evangelicals the Bible is normative for our beliefs and behaviour in this world. But there is more than the Bible and the way we interpret it that explains our lifestyle, namely our upbringing and background and the culture and society in which we live. So this also needs to be studied in order to better understand a claimed Christian action (an area of Christian praxis) – the what and the why – and how to ensure a praxis that is not negatively influenced by the world (in the biblical sense of the word). Such critical reflection is important if our lifestyles are to reflect the wonderful qualities of a truly Christ-like life. Because the Gospel is meant to be lived so that unbelievers are attracted to it, Christian praxis must accommodate where possible this need. This is where the importance of an authentic, non-hypocritical, effective Gospel living comes in and the need to also attempt to vindicate our faith in our societies.

The following comment from a student shows the importance of exploring and studying our Christian praxis from different angles, the methods for which are well-worked out in the social sciences.

This reminds me of my research of the incidence and coping strategies of pastors in relation to stress and burnout. Taking a purely empirical/analytic approach, I found that although the incidence of stress was as high compared to other helping professionals (psychologists, teachers, nurses etc.), the incidence of burnout was much lower. In understanding and explaining this, I found the interpretive approach most valuable. This was a group of Indian Pentecostal pastors and the phenomenon of stress and burnout was meaningfully interpreted in the context of not only pastoral roles and responsibilities but also in the context of Pentecostal theology and in the context of Indian culture.

It was necessary to use both approaches. The empirical/analytical allowed me to compare and contrast stress and burnout amongst this unique

group with the extensive body of research on this topic. The hermeneutic or interpretive approach allowed me to appreciate the phenomenological reality of this group of pastors and how their belief in the working of the Holy Spirit served as a mediating variable in their experience.

Clearly the human and social sciences can be helpful tools in practical theology. They are not a final or authoritative source of knowledge. But they can and surely should be used as a servant and partner in the process of steering God's church into a more faithful expression of its calling and commitment to him. Further, this role need not in any way undermine the final authority and inspired nature of all Scripture. It honours the fact that the human race was created in the image of God (though now significantly lost), meaning it is capable of making great strides in opening new areas of knowledge that can complement biblical revelation and not undermine it.

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