

**Epistemology and the Use of Scripture in Pastoral Care and Counseling**

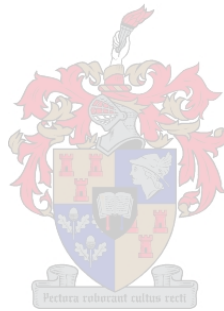
by

**Tony Michael de Freitas**

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*at*

*Stellenbosch University*



Department of Practical Theology  
Faculty of Theology

Promoter: D J Louw

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## **Declaration**

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## Abstract

*This dissertation explores the topic of epistemology and the use of Scripture in pastoral care and counseling. It examines the epistemological foundations of all theology and ministry in order to provide clarity and guidance for pastoral care within our current early twenty-first century context. The key problem that is implied in the topic 'Epistemology and the use of Scripture in pastoral care and counseling' is the following: What normative and methodological role should the Bible play in the counseling situation and what is the basis for this role? This problem essentially deals with the interaction between biblical and extra-biblical data in the pastoral encounter and how they are to be related. The following dynamics exist in systemic relationship: understanding and use of Scripture; epistemological foundations; theological method; ministry practices.*

*The key assumption is that theology and pastoral care must deal with epistemological concerns, and that failure to do so has negative consequences. An indissoluble link exists between theory and practice: the elements of epistemology, methodology and practice should be consistent and in line with each other. This serves as a vital criterion for the integrity and validity of the various theories and practices that are examined and proposed in this dissertation.*

*Pastoral care and biblical counseling are examined in terms of these dynamics. Comprehensiveness in epistemology, basic theological method, and pastoral practice is recommended. This is proposed as the best response to specific challenges posed by our current postmodern and pluralistic context.*

*This research argues that it is possible to have a comprehensive and inclusive approach to knowledge, with a related comprehensive and organic practice of biblical counseling, while retaining an emphasis on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the key normative role of the Scriptures, all within a valid epistemological grounding.*

*The issue of validation or warrant for this proposal is neither strictly foundational nor relative. It exists somewhere in between and finds its locus ultimately in God. Such a stance is firmly placed within the dynamics of faith as it interacts with reason and experience. There is therefore no ultimate, empirical proof that can be given, but this is true for knowledge and truth claims in all disciplines and realms of knowledge.*

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## Chapter 1 Introduction

This research explores the topic of epistemology and the use of Scripture in pastoral care and counseling. I will not attempt the articulation of a single basic theological method, as it will be argued that no single method can be defended as ultimately normative. The goal, rather, will be to examine the epistemological foundations of all theology and ministry in order to provide clarity and guidance for pastoral care within our current early twenty-first century context.

The topic sentence contains three key concepts: epistemology; Scripture; pastoral care and counseling. Epistemology is dealt with in chapters two, three and four. Chapter two overviews the process of knowledge as understood by the principal fields of science, philosophy and theology. Chapter three introduces the hermeneutical stance necessitated by the complexity of knowledge and chapter four deals with the issue of authority or warrant for knowledge and truth claims. Chapter five explores Scripture in terms of the epistemological issues raised in chapters two to four. Finally, chapter six explores the use of Scripture in pastoral care, attempting to integrate the conclusions drawn in previous chapters. Pastoral care is examined within the context of practical and pastoral theology and the issue of God images is briefly discussed in an attempt to apply the main arguments proposed to a specific issue within pastoral care and counseling.

The elements involved in the issues of epistemology and Scripture are diverse, complex and often conflicting. Intersystemically, for example, there is ongoing competition between science and religion as different players appeal to them as the ultimate basis of meaning. Similarly, intrasystemically, different traditions or streams within the Christian church have different ideas about which beliefs and behaviours best represent the essence of Christianity and about which theological methodologies best guarantee truth. These differences are sometimes viewed as vital and non-negotiable; the issue of orthodoxy versus heterodoxy thus immediately arises. 'Which Christian faith is meant and why is this tradition chosen?' are therefore questions that are embedded within the larger key problem. I propose that the dynamics involved in validating a specific understanding of the Christian faith (orthodoxy) before non-orthodox positions are similar to those involved in validating the Christian faith before the challenge of non-Christian knowledge claims. In dealing with both issues, therefore, it is hoped that a more comprehensive and fruitful epistemology and ministry practice will be achieved.

According to this research the way these various elements are accepted, rejected and interrelated directly impacts the way pastoral care is practiced. I will approach the topic within the context of broader concerns in order to avoid a simplistic or reductionistic answer. In other words, a systemic approach will be attempted (1.8.9), which takes into account (as fully as possible) the complexity and the divergent elements that are involved in knowledge, culture and pastoral ministry.

It is a key assumption, which will be argued in this research, that theology and pastoral care must deal with these epistemological concerns, and that failure to do so has negative consequences. Any attempt to bypass or short-circuit these problems by taking refuge in Biblicism or revelational positivism is argued to be invalid. I have assumed an indissoluble link between theory and practice: the elements of epistemology, methodology and practice should be consistent and in line with each other. This serves as a vital criterion of the integrity and validity of the various theories and practices that are examined and proposed in this research.

The arguments proposed in this research will entail examining pastoral care and biblical counseling in terms of these dynamics. The initial stance proposed is one of consistent comprehensiveness: in epistemology, basic theological method, and pastoral practice. This

stance will be tested and examined in terms of the specific challenges posed by our current postmodern and pluralistic context. These challenges are directed to theology as a discipline as well as to the Scriptures as a normative element within theology. Therefore, this challenge to theology and Scripture is simultaneously a challenge to biblical counseling, which, obviously, is done within the context of theology and which relies on the authority and reliability of the Scriptures.

### **1.1 The research problem**

The key problem that is implied in the topic 'Epistemology and the use of Scripture in pastoral care and counseling' is the following: What normative and methodological role should the Bible play in the counseling situation and what is the basis for this role?

This problem essentially deals with the interaction between biblical and extra-biblical data in the pastoral encounter and how they are to be related. This problem is clearly embedded within broader theological concerns, where different loci for theological authority compete. These, in turn, are embedded within broader epistemological concerns that deal with the interaction between theological and non-theological contributors to knowledge, culture and life. At every point the interpretation and use of the Bible is a key factor.

The following elements related to my key research question are argued to exist in systemic relationship: understanding and use of Scripture; epistemological foundations; theological method; ministry practices. As the epistemological and theological landscape changes it is possible that these different aspects evolve unequally, thus causing contradiction and epistemological inconsistency. This problem then requires one to evaluate the validity of those elements of the system that have changed as well as those that have not. For example, in certain contexts the approach to the Scriptures has evolved to seeing them as essentially human and relative documents. Yet, in those same ministry contexts the Scriptures may be used as key texts for guiding life and practice, with an accorded authority that is inappropriate for merely human documents. This represents an inconsistency.

The key challenge that is addressed in this research, therefore, is whether it is possible to have a comprehensive and inclusive approach to knowledge, with a related comprehensive and organic practice of biblical counseling, while retaining an emphasis on the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and the key normative role of the Scriptures, all within a valid epistemological grounding. I will attempt to show that the separation of epistemological and existential concerns (the legacy from the Enlightenment and key thinkers like Kant) is not the most biblical, scientific or existentially and spiritually fruitful approach to pastoral care (see 1.8.5 on Kant).

### **1.2 The current context to which the research responds**

Our current epoch is characterized by an acute epistemological and existential crisis. This research intends to show the intimate relationship that exists between epistemology and human existence and to respond to the crisis in a comprehensive and effective way.

This research also assumes that theology belongs both in the academy and the church. Furthermore, it is relevant to the public as well as the private spheres of society. Within the context of the academy, certain understandings of science and philosophy threaten the validity and necessity of theology. This struggle is not irrelevant to the church and the world, for the systemic nature of society means that the state of the battle in the academy ultimately plays itself out in the public domain, within its various aspects such as the local church and popular culture. The church has to fight to fulfill God's purpose in this world and I assume that theology's

efforts in the academy are a necessary and valid part of the struggle; the biblical admonition to 'contend for the faith' (Jude 1:3) is assumed to apply to all aspects and levels of society.

Within the church too, there is a theological crisis. We are living through an epochal shift, signaled by the 9/11 World Trade Centre attacks, which future generations may look back on in the same way we look back upon radical events like the Enlightenment or the fall of the Roman Empire. At the beginning of the twenty-first century social complexity has reached unprecedented levels, in conjunction with crushing social problems. Simultaneously, consensus regarding truth and authority is extremely low and pluralism and a multitude of beliefs and options co-exist and compete. This bewildering, break-neck speed complexity is related to the incredible technological and information explosion, which is creating unprecedented opportunities for accessing and manipulating knowledge (for good and evil), and, through knowledge, power. Living an authentic Christian identity in this changed world is a fresh theological challenge, which needs both to avoid a reactionary holding on to what worked in the past as well as a foolhardy and uncritical embracing of the possibilities of the current age.

### **1.2.1 The postmodern context**

Epistemology, theology and pastoral care have clearly not been static and the development from a premodern (precritical and fideistic) to a modern (critical and rational) to a postmodern (skeptical and relativistic) reality forms an important backdrop to this study. This situation of change and development creates the problem of expressing the faith in each new age (in the theoretical and practical sense) in a way that is faithful to context and to source (tradition, or roots). An aspect of responding to this problem is interpreting that which is culturally relative and contextually conditioned versus that which is universally normative and eternally binding in Christian knowledge and practice. Hermeneutics is thus a key issue.

The movement from a premodern, through a modern, to a postmodern situation cannot be simplistically viewed. Our postmodern reality has not simply replaced premodern and modern dynamics. It can be argued that all three worldviews continue to exist in our current situation, with postmodernism existing as a form of hypermodernism. Furthermore, postmodernism can exist in soft versus hard or extreme versions. This affects the degree of continuity versus discontinuity that can exist between our current situation and modern ideas, with hard or extreme postmodernism emphasizing a more radical break with the modernist project, yet, ironically displaying greater commonality with modernism due to its shared positivism (see 1.8.1 on positivism).

This research, therefore, argues that premodern, modern and postmodern worldviews and dynamics continue to exist and exert influence in our current reality. Our present situation consists of complex interactions between all three phases, and the Scriptures and pastoral practice can neither neatly validate nor be validated by any single one of these three phases of development, to the exclusion of the others. An appropriate alternative stance that is not arbitrarily eclectic is the challenge of this dissertation.

Wherever possible I will attempt to explain all terms and processes with reference to this backdrop of the pre-modern, modern and postmodern amalgam.

### **1.3 Objectives of the research**

This research attempts to interrelate and evaluate the following three dynamics:

- The unique claims of Christianity, and the associated normative role of the Scriptures proposed by Reformed-evangelical Christianity.
- A comprehensive, systemic and hermeneutical approach to knowledge and life.

-- The skepticism and pluralism characteristic of current culture and academia.

The objective is to show how the unique claims of Christianity and the normative role of the Scriptures can exist with integrity in association with a comprehensive epistemology, to the fullest extent possible meeting the challenge of radical pluralism and skepticism. These objectives will be pursued in chapters two to five. Chapter six will apply these conclusions within the context of pastoral care and counseling.

#### **1.4 Hypothesis**

The key hypothesis is that a comprehensive and systemic approach to knowledge is vital and that this can be successfully related to an organic and holistic approach to pastoral care and biblical counseling. Such a methodology and ministry practice can appropriately be related to a basic and valid epistemology.

Knowledge endeavors may engage epistemological issues as an end in itself: science and philosophy, by definition, seek to deal with knowledge in ways that are reliable and logical (see 2.1). In theology too, in as much as it seeks to be a science (and it is my assumption that it should seek to be a science) epistemic validity is vital. However, I will argue that it is unacceptable to remain within the bounds of epistemology and technique. Existential and ethical issues should be part of all knowledge endeavors. Therefore, just as theology should not be excused from epistemological concerns, science and philosophy should not be considered exempt from existential and ethical responsibility.

The issue of validation or justification for this proposal is neither strictly foundational nor relative. It exists somewhere in between and finds its locus ultimately in God. Such a stance is firmly placed within the dynamics of faith as it interacts with reason and experience. There is therefore no ultimate, empirical proof that can be given, but this is true for all realms of knowledge. This thus leads to the need to creatively re-envision the way that epistemological and theological problems have classically been framed, as well as the typical solutions (and impasses) that have resulted. In other words, strict dichotomies such as science versus faith, propositional versus existential truth and scriptural inerrancy versus scriptural fallibility need to be reframed.

#### **1.5 Relevance for pastoral ministry**

The epistemological investigation proposed is clearly not an end in itself. According to the comprehensive, systemic stance that is adopted there is a vital interaction between theory and practice. It is proposed that valid ministry needs to be undergirded by valid epistemology. Conversely, a valid epistemology that displays integrity will result in more appropriate and effective ministry. Numerous examples could be given of how this interaction actually takes place. For example, if a pastor becomes challenged by scholarly skepticism towards the validity of the Scriptures, her use of the Scriptures in pastoral encounters will be compromised. Hesitancy with regard to the Scripture's authority will undermine its effective use and the provision of hope and healing will be lessened. Conversely, if the Scriptures are not truly normative and universal, then their authoritative use in the pastoral encounter is arguably dysfunctional, for it amounts to leading people to place their ultimate trust in an illusion, the conclusion of secular thinkers such as Freud, Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche.<sup>1</sup> The sceptical

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<sup>1</sup> Freud (1975:107-114) viewed religion as wish fulfillment and Feuerbach (1975: 115-128) explained it as projection of human nature. Marx viewed God and religion as false, viewing them as one of many 'forms of alienation: values and institutions whose sole purpose...is to prop up the power of an economically dominant class' (Berlin 1975: 179). Nietzsche equated being a Christian with 'a definite false psychology' and claimed: 'With the insight into this aberration of reason and imagination one ceases to be a Christian' (1886: 111).

challenge to the validity of religion continues with the New Atheists, today (see 1.8.10). Issues of truth and epistemology, therefore, remain critical for all pastoral ministry.

The practical outcome hoped for is an expansion of the possible sources and processes involved in theory and practice, resulting in better knowledge and greater existential impact in the recipients of pastoral care. A related potential positive outcome is ecumenical: it is hoped that increased epistemological and hermeneutical awareness will lead to greater flexibility and openness, which will in turn lead to the removal of unnecessary barriers to unity.

## **1.6 Research methodology**

This is an academic and conceptual problem. As an academic problem it examines different arguments with regard to epistemology, Scripture and hermeneutics, and pastoral care and biblical counseling. As a conceptual problem it analyzes the meaning of different terms and concepts associated with these same areas, as well as their interrelationships.

Clearly the methodology used must match the nature of the problem. The key task, therefore, is interaction with key historical and contemporary literature that relates to the topic and problem. The different views and arguments thus represented will be considered and weighed. Unique interactions will be created between these different views. Simultaneously, my own thinking and concepts will continuously be interacting with this afore-mentioned dynamic. Where relevant, exegetical and empirical evidence may be incorporated.

The goal remains to clarify the main responses that exist with regard to this problem and to propose those solutions (as well as new permutations) that seem to be the most appropriate for our current context. This analysis and synthesis will be done according to a specific logic that is reflected in the organization of the chapters.

## **1.7 Scope and limitation of research**

The objective in this research is not to provide a comprehensive summary and understanding of revelatory and scientific knowledge throughout history, nor is it to provide exhaustive and authoritative definitions of all the possible terms that are relevant to knowledge. These are essentially historical and philosophical tasks, which are beyond my scope and ability (not having the breadth of reading and training that this requires). The more modest objective is to discern key elements in the history and philosophy of this issue and relate them to my key problem and research.

Similarly, not all aspects of Christian ministry will be focused on. Biblical counseling within pastoral ministry is the main context that will be assumed throughout the different chapters.

### **1.7.1 Other religions**

Other religions constitute clear authority claims, in direct competition with Christianity. It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with other religions, but I believe that the arguments that are being applied to defend theology and a high view of Scripture would also be effective in defending the uniqueness of Scripture and Christ against other religions. As with other fields of knowledge, this is not to suggest that there is no truth in other religions. It is to claim that they do not possess the necessary truth that is found in Christ and they cannot substitute for Jesus' necessary work of atonement. Although this may seem judgmental and oppressive, it is a perfectly valid truth claim. To suggest that it is judgmental is merely to make an alternative absolute truth claim, that there can be no absolute truth claims. It is pointless to play the



dishonest game of criticizing absolutes. All that can be evaluated is the intelligence and love with which one holds to and proposes one's claims, as well as their practical outcome.

## 1.8 Paradigmatic background: an introduction to key terms, thinkers and concepts

The following terms are directly related to the arguments proposed in this research and are used repeatedly throughout this dissertation. They have different meanings and connotations, depending on their context and by whom they are used. This section fixes the way they are understood and intended throughout this research.

### 1.8.1 Positivism: rationalism, scientism, and fideism

Positivism suggests a confidence regarding one's ability to discern and encapsulate absolute, objective truth. The term was first used by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) in his attempt to found a new science for humanity. It refers to a third stage in human development. 'In the positive state, the mind stops looking for [theological and metaphysical] causes of phenomena, and limits itself strictly to laws governing them' (Bourdeau 2008: sect 4.1 par1). Bourdeau (: intro par 1) states that Comte's positivism was 'eclipsed' by the 'neopositivism' of the twentieth century, which differs from Comte's original vision in two significant ways. Firstly, Comte's positivism did not separate science and philosophy (: sect 1 par3).<sup>2</sup> Secondly, even though positive science was the standard for knowledge it maintained a measure of relativism (: sect 4.1 par3).<sup>3</sup>

Comte is not the sole source of today's scientism. Prior to Comte a confident attitude to empirical science is already found in thinkers like Hume (1711-1776)<sup>4</sup> and, previously, Francis Bacon (1561-1626): 'Bacon believed that science consists of the accumulation and classification of observations. He insisted that induction is the easy road to knowledge: make observations, summarize them, and generalize. Discovery can be a routine and automatic process, carried out, he said, "as if by machinery"; only patience is needed, not difficult or abstract thought' (Barbour 1966: 25). Hume's positivism is continued in twentieth century logical positivism.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the epistemological untenability of positivism it is far from a spent force and it continues to fund anti-religious hubris, as exemplified by the New Atheists. In fact, what we are increasingly witnessing today, with regard to science, is a hyper-positivism that insists philosophical and theological concerns cannot constitute knowledge and exhibits confidence concerning the certainty and absoluteness of its reductionistic naturalist claims.

As understood in this research, positivism affects every part of the knowledge process. In its extreme forms it claims to be able to define all knowledge and reality and perform related knowledge acts. In other words it lays hold of almost God-like power to proclaim on the nature and extent of all that is: 'Science is humankind trying to figure out how absolutely everything in the universe works. It is that pure and simple. Science knows no boundaries. Science wants to take it all apart and say, "OK, we get it!" In an ideal universe, we will even figure out where our universe came from, and we will discover how to create new universes' (Brain 2008: 12).

<sup>2</sup> This is shown in the title of his 'seminal work': *Plan for the Scientific Work Necessary to Reorganize Society* (Bourdeau 2008: sect 1 par 3).

<sup>3</sup> 'For Comte, science is a "connaissance approchée": it comes closer and closer to truth, without reaching it. There is no place for absolute truth, but neither are there higher standards for the fixation of belief' (Bourdeau 2008: sect 4.1 par 3).

<sup>4</sup> Barbour (1966:70) describes Hume's understanding: 'The mind merely records, rearranges, and compares sense-data. Hume is thus led to assert that a scientific theory or law is simply a convenient summary and correlation of individual observation.'

<sup>5</sup> See Barbour (1966: 239-242) for an explanation and critique of logical positivism.

Each field of knowledge can make positivistic claims, but it is too simplistic to link scientism, rationalism and fideism to science, philosophy and theology respectively. Scientism, for example, the view that all reality is natural and only natural scientific methodology leads to knowledge is a form of rationalism and is deeply fideistic (believing dogmatically, with insufficient warrant).

This research also defines extreme scepticism concerning knowledge as a form of positivism, the positivistic claim that one cannot know.

It must be remembered that positivism and relativism are abstract, metaphorical constructs, which do not in fact exist in pure form in reality. These terms cannot capture the full meaning of knowledge and all approaches to knowledge contain elements of both.

### 1.8.2 Underdetermination

Underdetermination refers to the indeterminacy of data to theory: 'The claim that any theory that makes reference to posited unobservable features of the world in its explanatory apparatus will always encounter rival theories incompatible with the original theory but equally compatible with all possible observational data that might be taken as confirmatory of the original theory is the claim of the *underdetermination thesis*' (Sklar 1999:702).

According to Stanford (2009: intro par 1), underdetermination means that 'the evidence available to us at a given time may be insufficient to determine what beliefs we should hold in response to it.' The scientific understanding that 'correlation does not imply causation' means that associated variables cannot be definitively linked. Do cartoons create violent children or do violent children like to watch cartoons (: intro par 1). Underdetermination also applies in other contexts. Descartes' example of the possibility of his sensory experience being caused by a deceptive all-powerful evil demon rather than the real world is a philosophical example (: sect 1 par 1).

Quine (In Murphy 1994a: 12-13) is known for a clear and conscious break with foundationalism and used the metaphor of knowledge as a web or net, to illustrate how scientific theory is underdetermined:

[T]otal science is like a field of force whose boundary conditions are experience. A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions re-adjustments in the interior of the field...But the total field is so underdetermined by its boundary conditions, experience, that there is much latitude of choice as to what statements to re-evaluate in the light of any single contrary experience. No particular experiences are linked with any particular statements in the interior of the field, except indirectly through considerations of equilibrium affecting the field as a whole.

Underdetermination, therefore, clearly undermines positivism. Although it can be used as a basis for relativism, this is inevitable, given the nature of the concept. I will argue that it can be used just as plausibly to strengthen a balanced, hermeneutical approach.

### 1.8.3 Critical realism

Critical realism is the principal epistemological stance adopted in this research. This approach describes the belief that while 'the primary object of knowledge is the independent physical world, ... what is immediately present to consciousness is not the physical object as such, but some corresponding mental state' (Delaney 1999b: 194). In common sense language, critical realism means that even though one cannot know anything perfectly, independent reality does exist and we can know some aspects of it truly. Numerous theologians grapple with this tension

and attempt to understand truth in this way (Sire 1995: 118-119; Bloesch 1992: 21-22; Brümmer 1981: 194-196; Murray 1999: 12, 18; Cook 1988: par 5; Vanhoozer 1997: 159).

I argue that critical realism represents the most appropriate response to knowledge in all realms. It avoids the false extremes of pretensions to omniscience and pretensions of absolute scepticism. An insistence on scepticism and relativism with regard to truth only appears to be humble; it is in fact a form of arrogant omniscience.

Critical realism is openly acknowledged to be the dominant understanding operating in science today and it is the way that commonsensical, everyday knowledge actually functions. When science, for example, talks of probabilistic conclusions and inference to the best explanation it is doing this in the context of an independent reality.

#### **1.8.4 Duhemian science**

Plantinga (1996: 207) grants a qualified warrant to methodological naturalism in science based on Pierre Duhem:

If...metaphysical assumptions and notions that are not accepted by other workers in the field [are used]...to that extent his work cannot be accepted by those others; and to that extent the cooperation important to science will be compromised...[thus] Proper science, insofar as it is to be common to all of us, will have to eschew any dependence upon metaphysical and religious views held by only some of us.

Plantinga (1996: 209-210), however, warns against a simplistic application of this principle:

But it is crucially important to see methodological naturalism will be just one small part of a much more inclusive constraint: not only will science not, so conceived, employ hypotheses about God, it also will not employ any hypotheses whose cogency involves or presupposes metaphysical naturalism. Nor will it employ assumptions like those, for example that seem to underlie much cognitive science.... Instead of speaking of 'methodological naturalism,' therefore, perhaps we should speak of 'methodological neutralism,' or maybe 'metaphysical neutralism.'

In light of this understanding, Duhemian science, in this qualified sense, should be engaged in, but so should science on the basis of specific metaphysical schemes, including Christian theistic schemes, which should equally be called science (Plantinga 1996: 210-211)

#### **1.8.5 The influence of Kant**

Kant is recognized as one of the most influential figures in epistemology. His 'Critique of Pure Reason' (1787) and 'Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone' (1793) were intended to defend belief in God against the scepticism articulated by thinkers like Hume (see Castell 1963: 199-217). Kant (1968:105) clearly articulates his agenda:

Here then is a complete religion, which can be presented to all men comprehensibly and convincingly through their own reason; while the possibility and even the necessity of its being an archetype for us to imitate (so far as men are capable of that imitation) have, be it noted, been made evident by means of an example without either the truth of those teaching nor the authority and the worth of the teacher requiring any external verification (for which scholarship or miracles, which are not matters for everyone, would be required).

Kant's influence and agenda have continued through many thinkers, such as Schleiermacher in his 'On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers' (1958), who in turn have decisively shaped theology and ministry, as will be shown in chapter six. While positive approaches to Kant continue, seeing his theories as helpful to theology (see Firestone and Palmquist: 2006), many

theologians see his conclusions as highly problematic and essentially incompatible with valid theology (Bartholemew 2000; McCormick 1996; Bloesch 1992; Wolterstorff 1984, 1998).

This research agrees that Kant imposed an essentially alien epistemology on theology that we are still struggling with today.

### **1.8.6 Two senses of knowing: existential and epistemological**

Against the Kantian split, this research argues that fact and value are both fully valid and belong together. Part of this dissertation's basic epistemic methodology, therefore, is the rejection of unwarranted dichotomies. The principle rapprochement and interaction that is advocated throughout is between epistemological and existential concerns. Rather than simply stating this as a balance between life and knowledge I argue that knowledge itself should be understood existentially (knowing something in an intimate and experiential way) as well as epistemologically (knowing that we know). Similarly, life should be understood to involve experience in both the existential and epistemological senses.

### **1.8.7 Superabundance**

In this dissertation the term 'superabundance' is used quite differently from Derrida (1994: 356), where it is used to suggest an excess of meaning, which destabilizes the possibility of any fixed meaning. Rather the term intends to capture the biblical theme of God's rich nature and abundant provision in all of creation, including knowledge (Ps 119:14; Pr 3:16; Is 45:3; Rm 2:4, 9:23, 10:12, 11:33, 15:29; Eph 1:7, 2:7, 3:8, 16, Phlp 4:19; Col 1:27, 2:2,3; 1 Tm 6:17; Heb 10:35).

This concept has epistemological implications. Because of the superabundant nature of all aspects of God's creation, including knowledge, any small intersection with it can seem like one has discovered a complete truth. Even practically, a small intersection with knowledge can serve to guide and bless one's life to a seemingly sufficient extent. The areas of reality that are obviously overlooked are obscured by superabundance, for even a sliver of God's gracious creation and knowledge is more than we can fathom. But further discoveries and challenges can disturb that assumption and show that one's supposed completed puzzle picture suddenly morphs into a puzzle piece for an even greater picture. Newton's physics seemed to explain the entire universe until Einstein came along. Similarly, a faithful, evangelical pastor may feel he is living out the full gospel until he meets a Christian from a persecuted country, whose suffering has led to even greater maturity and glory (Ja 1:2-4).

This understanding of superabundance should further help us maintain perspective in all the realms of knowledge. It is false dichotomies and false connotations that disturb perspective. In addition to the false dichotomous choice between perfect omniscient knowledge and absolute relativism there is a false conflation of effectiveness and completeness. I understand this to be the subtle thought that if something really works and seems to explain all of reality then it must represent a complete understanding. This explains why the great effectiveness of science leads to scientism and the great effectiveness of various church confessions and systematic theologies can lead to dogmatism. It is almost impossible to imagine that there could be more than the amazing system out of which one operates and which seems to work so well and explain reality so comprehensively. Grace and revolution is often required to expand our horizon.

### **1.8.8 Complexity and comprehensiveness**

In addition to 'hermeneutical' and 'critically realistic', 'complex' is a principal adjective chosen to refer to knowledge and life.

The following dictionary definitions (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version) for 'complex' are relevant: 'complicated: difficult to analyze, understand, or solve'; 'made up of many interrelated parts.' The noun, 'complex', 'a group of interconnected buildings functioning as a whole' is also relevant.

This research applies these understandings (from the term 'complex') to life and knowledge in order to reinforce the other descriptions. The complicated nature of knowledge helps explain why a careful, hermeneutical and critical stance is needed. From a faith perspective, the realistic, systemic nature of knowledge is also suggested by certain senses of 'complex.'

The use of the adjective, 'comprehensive' throughout this dissertation also suggests that as broad and inclusive an approach to life and knowledge as possible is intended.

### **1.8.9 A systemic approach**

The systemic nature of reality is a key assumption in this research. Within a systemic view different elements are not viewed in isolation. Rather, it is assumed that they somehow form part of a greater, interconnected reality. The implication of this assumption is that the nature of one part of the system and any changes that occur within that part affect all other parts of the system. A further implication is that the different elements within a system can be interrelated in ways that are more or less valid in terms of the integrity of the individual parts and the system as a whole.

The image of the interconnected body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31) is a rich metaphor of systemic interdependence that can be applied to all of knowledge and creation. Just as Christ is the head of the church, He is the head of all life and knowledge: through Him 'all things were made' (Jn 1:3), 'in him all things hold together (Col 1:17), and in Him 'are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col 2:3).

### **1.8.10 New Atheists**

Throughout this research reference is made to the New Atheists and several of their views are challenged in terms of the arguments in this dissertation.

New Atheism is a term coined in the last decade to refer to a group of militant atheists who not only believe science has disproved God, but see it as their moral duty to eradicate religion from the face of the earth. This is seen in their publications: 'The God Delusion' (Dawkins: 2006); 'Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon' (Dennet: 2006); 'God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything' (Hitchens: 2007); 'Letter to a Christian Nation: A Challenge to Faith' (Harris: 2006); 'God: The Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist' (Stenger: 2007).

Their scientific credentials give credence to their claims: Richard Dawkins, for example, is a biologist at Oxford and one of the world's foremost experts on evolution, and Daniel Dennet is a philosopher at Tufts University and an authority on the philosophy of the mind. Dawkins (1986:6) explains that atheists before Darwin lacked 'an explanation for complex biological design,' making atheism questionable. Now, however, according to Dawkins (1986:6), 'Darwin [has] made it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled atheist.'

The New Atheists have a sophisticated media and marketing strategy, using books, videos, interviews, websites and conferences to disseminate their views. Dawkins, Dennet, Hitchens, and Harris support each other's views and books. In 2007 they held an informal discussion to promote atheism (viewable on You Tube) entitled 'The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.' The title is an obvious ironic and subversive allusion to the book of Revelations in the Bible, although it is possible that they genuinely believe they are like avenging horsemen, riding out to destroy religion and liberate humankind.

Most of their publications deal with scientific matters (as opposed to the specifically anti-religious polemic of the books mentioned above). Dawkins is a prolific writer and promoter of Neo-Darwinian evolution (which explains all of life strictly in terms of the evolutionary mechanism viewed from the perspective of pure chance) and he has written over a dozen books promoting this view (e.g. 1976, 1986, 1995, 2004, and 2006).

However, their scientific books are interweaved with the philosophical assumptions of atheism, completely conflating the latter with otherwise potentially valid scientific research. It is interesting to note how Dawkins concludes his 629 page 'The Ancestors Tale,' an explanation of evolution in a process he describes as a 'pilgrimage.' Dawkins (2004: 629) concludes:

'Pilgrimage' implies piety and reverence. I have not had occasion here to mention my impatience with traditional piety, and my disdain for reverence where the object is anything supernatural. But I make no secret of them. It is not because I wish to limit or circumscribe reverence; not because I want to reduce or downgrade the true reverence with which we are moved to celebrate the universe, once we understand it properly. 'On the contrary' would be an understatement. My objection to supernatural beliefs is precisely that they miserably fail to do justice to the sublime grandeur of the real world. They represent a narrowing down from reality, an impoverishment of what the real world has to offer.

It is clear that Dawkins (1995 :155) is making an enormous leap of faith by choosing this quasi-religious attitude of reverence, when one considers his other description of a purely natural world: 'The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.'

The New Atheists serve as useful conversation partners throughout this research as they represent an unwarranted understanding of both science and religion, and an irresponsible approach to knowledge. Numerous writers have challenged this lack of warrant. Some publications are written with the express purpose of addressing New Atheism (Williams 2009 ; Foster 2009 ; Zacharias 2008; Marshall 2007 ; Garrison 2007 ; McGrath 2007 ; Lennox 2007), others are general apologetic works, with significant sections dealing with New Atheism (McGrath 2010 ; Andrews 2009 ; Giberson 2008 ; Collins 2007 ; Strobel 2004).

The stance of this research towards the New Atheists is that they are not very 'new' at all, and they represent recycled arguments. They should not cause undue panic and the popularity of their books makes one think of Paul's warning to Timothy that in the last days 'itching ears' would prefer myths and untruths to 'sound doctrine', with its admonition for him to keep his 'head in all situations' (2Tm 4 :3-5).

#### **1.8.11 Unsatisfactory, but unavoidable terms for referring to the church and theology: evangelical, conservative, fundamentalist, and liberal**

Descriptions are vital for understanding, but they often fail to capture the complexity of a situation or entity, and they may often unfairly distort and insult.

### 1.8.11.1 Liberal versus conservative

The terms liberal and conservative often function in a distorting way. It is ironic that liberal can be a term of insult towards a sector of the church (implying faithless, worldly, unbiblical) and yet be used like a badge of pride by those inhabiting that sector (associating it with the ideas of being free, open-minded, cultured, loving, and respecting of diversity). Similarly, conservative can have positive connotations of respecting tradition and God, and resisting fads. For many, however, it suggests closed-mindedness and insecurity.

### 1.8.11.2 Fundamentalist

Packer (1958) suggests that fundamentalism is just a name for historical evangelicalism. Nevertheless, the term has become a signal for all that is wrong with religions since the 9/11 terrorists attacks. The term is increasingly imbued with negative connotations, as in the New Atheist descriptions of all religion as essentially fundamentalist and linked to terror or liberal and guilty for enabling the former (Dawkins 2006 :279-308 ; Hitchens 2007 :173-193 ; Harris 2007 :79-91 ; Dennett 2006 : 278-285). There is also urgent research into fundamentalism and the link between religion and violence amongst more reasonable scholars (Armstrong 2000 ; Kimball 2002 ; Stern 2003 ; Ruthven 2004).

### 1.8.11.3 Evangelical

The term evangelical has its roots in the Greek word for gospel or good news, *evangelion*, which immediately signals the importance of Scripture and salvation.

This is borne out in a dictionary definition : ‘evangelical : relating to or belonging to any Protestant Christian church whose members believe in the authority of the Bible and salvation through the personal acceptance of Jesus Christ’ (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001 : electronic version).

Although some view evangelical theology simply in terms of a reaction to theological liberalism, Rennie (1988 :par 1-6) explains that it has deep roots in Christian theological tradition, from earliest Christianity, through to the Protestant reformation and the evangelical awakenings of the 18th century.

Evangelical theology suffered a setback in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Under the ‘full force of theological liberalism.... [it] tended to move either into enervating accommodation with the new views or retreat into a ghetto, defending the received deposit and shooting at almost anything that moved’ (Rennie 1988: par 7). This defensive and enervating stance has been counterbalanced by ‘revitalization’ in evangelical theology in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (: par 10).

Rennie (1988:par2) outlines the following distinctives of evangelical theology:

the Bible is the truthful revelation of God and through it the life-giving voice of God speaks; God is the almighty creator and we are his dependent creation; God has entered history redemptively in the incarnation of Jesus Christ; God’s nature exists in Trinitarian expression; Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human, the power and judgment of sin is a reality for all humanity; God graciously takes the initiative in coming to us savingly in Jesus Christ and by the Holy Spirit; Jesus Christ is building his church; and the consummation of history will be expressed in the second advent of Jesus Christ, the general resurrection, the final judgment, heaven and hell.

A positive aspect of evangelical theology is that it is a spiritual theology: ‘The Bible is not only central to the theological enterprise, but it is meditated upon and prayed over as well as studied.

The goal of theological work is not so much to know theology as to know God' (Rennie 1988: par 11)

It is clear that there has been a steady increase in concern for and quality of evangelical scholarship, as individual and collaborative publications dealing specifically with evangelicalism indicate (Bloesch 1973; King 1973; Brady and Rowden 1996; Bartholemew, Parry and West 2003). High-level scholarship such as the 'Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation Series' (Moisés Silva, series editor) and the 'Scripture and Hermeneutics Series' (Craig Bartholemew and various editors: 2000 onwards) also bode well for the future health of evangelical theology.

The intellectual health of evangelical theology does not always translate into healthy evangelical churches. A clear distinction needs to be made between the essentially valid approach to Scripture that holds evangelicalism together and the state and practices of the evangelical church itself, many of which, ironically, cannot be grounded in Scripture. Beck (2006b: 325) provides a perceptive summation of the current state of evangelicalism, showing it to be characterized by the following: a lack of '[i]nterest in the study of theology', 'rampant' biblical illiteracy, 'fierce independence' and a dislike for 'denominationalism', increasing presence of 'mega-churches', almost non-existent '[i]nter-church cooperation in mission and service', locally controlled, staff-led congregations as opposed to democratic church governance, a love for 'the quickly changing contemporary' as opposed to tradition, a waning interest in 'eschatology.' The key defining characteristic of evangelicalism amongst all this change is 'its view of Scripture' with evangelical scholars respecting the 'various scriptural genres', yet following the grammatical-historical meaning of the text. It also 'seeks to defend biblical standards of morality (e.g., sexual, end-of-life, beginning of life) in an age that has substantially moved beyond a commitment to traditional Judeo-Christian ethics.'

Alister McGrath (1996:9-24) clarifies the hostility towards academic theology that exists within evangelical churches. In terms of this research, this is unfortunate and helps explain some of the problems inherent in evangelical and non-aligned churches.

#### **1.8.11.4 The approach taken to church terminology in this dissertation**

In line with the attempt to deal with knowledge in a comprehensive and valid way, this research will avoid simplistic labeling.

Although I locate myself within the Reformed evangelical tradition, I am arguing for a much more profound engagement with science, theology and society than is often the case in many evangelical churches. In line with this, the focus on exact definition and strong defence of the various evangelical doctrines outlined above needs to be balanced by a more critical and hermeneutical approach, which is more sustainable and fruitful.

The lack of warrant for this excess focus on doctrine and defence will be argued theologically in this dissertation, but it is also shown practically through the tension and fallout that is occurring within much of the evangelical church today, showing it to be often ill-equipped to deal with diversity in society and within the church. In terms of diversity within society, one often finds the extremes of accommodation to secular culture versus the shrill defensiveness of the culture war against secularism and pluralism. These tensions are paralleled within the church as shown by the deep divisions that are arising between the postmodern focused emerging church and more traditional evangelical churches as well as the extreme reactions to books such as Rob Bell's 'Love Wins' (2011), which challenges entrenched understandings of heaven and hell.

Within the complexity of these dynamics one cannot simply use the word liberal or evangelical and assume that it refers to a stable reality. Wherever possible, this research refers to dynamics



that underlie different churches (of all types) such as a high versus low view of Scripture and a high versus low focus on hermeneutics (with a high view of hermeneutics understood as the fullest engagement possible with knowledge and culture). In terms of these interpretive models one may find that individuals and groups within so called evangelical versus liberal churches are closer to each other than to their supposed evangelical or liberal brethren. The goal remains an expanded view of life and knowledge that does not compromise God's revelation, yet seeks to bless and benefit all sectors of the church and society.

### **1.8.12 Reference to God**

Throughout I refer to God with capitalized male pronouns ('He,' 'His,' 'Himself'). This is not to suggest that I am insensitive to feminist concerns or believe that God is male. Even though the male pronoun was accorded in a patriarchal society, it does not necessarily mean that it represents a corruption of the representation of God. In terms of a high view of Scripture I do not believe any part of it is incidental or lightly to be changed. Viewing all understanding of God as mediated by language and figurative speech, the male pronoun remains metaphorical and is not to be interpreted in terms ontological normativity and subsequent male domination. I prefer to read it in terms of the broader narrative structure of Scripture, i.e. the final wedding supper of the lamb where I will present myself as part of the bride of Christ without feeling that my masculine identity has been threatened. I recognize that the male pronoun can be changed to a repetition of God (as in Godself, God's) and I have no objection to this being done, but I am not convinced that this does not lead to a loss of narrative richness and prefer to see the very presence of the offence of calling God male as an opportunity for grace, healing and discussion.

### **1.9 General referencing**

--Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

--OT and NT are used to refer to Old Testament and New Testament

--Kilian's (1985: 58) general referencing and Bible abbreviations have been followed.

--Where electronic reference sources have been used, page numbers are not available and paragraphs, e.g. (: par 3), are indicated. In longer documents, sections are indicated along with paragraphs, e.g. (: intro par 3), (: section 2 par 3).

--References for any quotations transcribed from lectures only have the year of the lecture.

## Chapter 2 Epistemology: towards a critically realistic approach to knowledge

### 2.1 A non-positivistic understanding of key terms related to science and knowledge

This section argues that Science should be understood as a broad term synonymous with reliable and valid knowledge; it should not be conflated with natural science and especially not with scientism. The reality, however, is that the term 'science', with all its positive connotation, will continue to be associated with natural science and scientism. This is a linguistic or political coup, rather than a reflection of reality, and it means that theologians interacting with science will have to expend considerable energy clarifying terms. When confronting scientism, with its penchant for blanket statements and imprecise use of terms, it becomes vital to insist on clarifying the kind of science and reasoning that is being appealed to in a given instance. In the interests of such clarity this section overviews basic terms and concepts (from science, philosophy, and theology) that are related to knowledge. An attempt is made to clarify how the various realms can understand the same term differently.

It is possible to imagine the following interaction between various possible knowledge-related terms. Perception (arising out an interaction between internal mental dynamics –such as imagination and possible a priori mental dynamics or structures- and external physical stimulus) gives rise to data. Reason acts upon data to create patterns leading to the emergence of information. Information is further acted upon (through interaction with various theories and methodologies) to lift it to the status of knowledge (information that elicits communal consensus and that demonstrates sustained explanatory power). Knowledge may be seen as instrumental,<sup>6</sup> a useful fiction having a practical authority (in which case the process goes no further), or it can be seen as authoritative in a deeper sense, i.e. somehow transcendent and related to truth. In this case issues of warrant or a valid basis for these claims come into play. This is merely an informal attempt to imagine how these various terms can interrelate. These are not the only terms that can be used and the whole process cannot be proposed positivistically; each of the mentioned terms and imagined stages or progressions is disputed and different permutations and evaluations can be proposed.

For example, the numerous terms associated with knowledge processes can be grouped according to the degree they have connotations of 'fact' versus 'value'. 'Fact' terms are 'data', 'information', 'knowledge' and 'science'. 'Value' terms are 'norms', 'values', 'beauty', 'goodness', 'imagination', 'faith', 'wisdom', and the 'humanities'. Ambiguous terms that could be interpreted either way are 'theory', 'interpretation', and 'truth'. All these terms have potential validity and there is no clear basis for excluding any of them. I will argue that the problem arises in the dynamics surrounding the use of these terms, particularly in a positivistic or over-confident approach. This approach is revealed through the use of qualifying adjectives. Thus, within this research, terms such as 'absolute', 'foundational', 'clear', 'rigorous', 'simple', 'obvious' etc. are avoided in favour of the terms 'valid', 'appropriate', 'probabilistic', 'potential' and 'possible'. Rather than talking of 'simple truth', 'clear knowledge' and 'rigorous hermeneutics' this research will argue for 'valid knowledge', 'possible truth' and 'appropriate hermeneutics'.

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<sup>6</sup> Delaney (1999c: 438) defines instrumentalism as: 'a kind of anti-realistic view of scientific theories wherein theories are construed as calculating devices or instruments for conveniently moving from a given set of observations to a predicted set of observations. As such the theoretical statements are not candidates for truth or reference and the theories have no ontological import. This view of theories is grounded in a positive distinction between observation statements and theoretical statements, and the according of privileged epistemic status to the former.'

Therefore, against positivism, I will be arguing that a strict separation into fact versus value is invalid. Terms like ‘theory’ and ‘interpretation’ are at the very heart of the scientific method and yet they have a value connotation. Furthermore, beauty and imagination play a strong role in scientific theorizing; concepts such as simplicity, elegance, fit and beauty are relevant in the formulation of scientific theories. We are indebted to Kant (see 1.8.5) for this unfortunate separation, but it is an abstraction that does not reflect reality. The very word ‘experiment’ originated in the context of the experience of God and this is still reflected in the French language, which has the same word, *expérience*, for experience and experiment.

Materialist reductionism reduces value-linked realities like God and beauty to physical facts and sociobiological processes. Richard Dawkins, for example, in ‘The Selfish Gene’ (1976) and ‘The Extended Phenotype’ (1982) explains all of life in terms of the quest for survival. This kind of argument ‘wears thin’, however, and starts to appear implausible and simplistic when consistently applied to the complex reality it purports to explain. For example, the manifestation of beauty, love and goodness in the world seems to be a vast ‘overkill’ in terms of ensuring simple survival. In fact, the pursuit of beauty and love may threaten survival just as often as it encourages it.<sup>7</sup> Even more basically, one can question the very idea of survival, asking why one should seek to survive. If survival is chosen over non-survival, a value choice has been made. Furthermore, talk of survival inevitably involves more than brute existence; a high quality of life and a depth of meaning seem to be basic human goals and these are often associated with a pursuit of transcendence, however that is perceived and defined.

### 2.1.1 Knowledge, authority and truth

Science, knowledge and *episteme* (the root term for epistemology) were originally synonymous terms.

Philosophers have identified many types of knowledge: from propositional to non-propositional, empirical to non-empirical, etc (Moser 1999a: 273). Behind each definition lies a history of intense and protracted debate. A key issue for pastoral care is the challenge to revelation as a form of knowledge.

The term ‘authority’ has numerous related dictionary definitions (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version): ‘the right or power to enforce rules or give orders’ is a practical and political aspect of authority. On the other hand ‘somebody who is accepted as a source of reliable information on a subject, or a book in which such information is given’ is an understanding of authority that is almost synonymous with the concept of knowledge, which also suggests ‘reliable information.’ Authority can also be used as a synonym for epistemic warrant (the basis for claiming knowledge or truth status for information). This aspect of warrant will be explored in chapter four.

Truth is an age-old concern and has been varyingly associated with knowledge. Distinct perspectives can be discerned between theological and non-theological realms. In Greek literature truth has to do with the ‘real state of affairs.... real events.... real being in the absolute sense’ (Bultmann in Palmer 1982: par 3).

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<sup>7</sup> History has numerous examples of people sacrificing their lives for the sake of love, or truth, or freedom. The atheistic response that this kind of sacrifice and altruism is undertaken to ensure survival of one’s genes in future offspring merely avoids the issue and does not explain why value should be attached to survival. Furthermore, it is a speculative answer and also does not explain altruism that extends beyond one’s gene pool. The counter-response that the individual is deceived and unable to distinguish or that altruism and ideas like God serve a ‘utility function’ (Dawkins 1995: 111-155) ends up undermining all aspects of truth, including natural science and scientism. They end up sawing off the branch on which they are perched.

The classic philosophical attempt to define knowledge as justified true belief has not succeeded, and the alternatives of scientific instrumentalism and postmodern relativism are also problematic. The options of probabilistic truth, inference to the best explanation and critical realism are used by many thinkers and theorists today in both theological and non-theological contexts (McGrath 2010; Polkinghorne 2000; Wright 2005, 1992; Swinburne 1979; Chalmers 1982).

When it comes to the Bible and theology one can discern a different focus with regard to knowledge and truth. Patzia (1997a: par 3-4) explains the OT use of the word for knowing: 'yādā implies a type of knowledge that is personal, experiential, emotional and relational.' This is clearly underscored by the use of this term to refer to sexual intimacy, and it represents a strong contrast to the 'rational, theoretical and speculative' focus of Greek thinking.

Although this understanding of knowledge interacts with Greek concepts in the NT, it is argued that this vital Hebraic meaning is not lost or corrupted and the NT uses truth to refer to personal morality and reliability (Palmer 1982:par 1). As Holmes (1988a: par 1) states, 'The antithesis of truth is not just error, but a lie or deception (e.g. Rm. 1:25; Eph. 4:25; Tt. 1:4). A true statement is not just accurate, eliciting a detached kind of assent: it is reliable, worthy of personal commitment and trust.'

There is thus a clear focus in Scripture on existential involvement (on living out and manifesting the truth in one's life), as opposed to the abstract or objective focus of science and philosophy. For example, Paul uses *alētheuō*, the verb, 'to truth', which doesn't exist in English. Morris (1993a:par 6) suggests that 'truing in love' (Eph 4:15) means more than speaking the truth, but also acting and living it. The scriptural presentation of Jesus further reinforces a relational view of truth. Crump (1992: par 1) explains that in the gospel of John the truth revealed is not centrally about knowledge but about the reality of God through Christ, who 'is both the messenger and the message. Consequently, since truth is personal, acquiring truth is personal. It is not learned as much as it is accepted, with all its life-transforming implications, when one comes into a relationship with Jesus.' Jesus refers to himself as *being* the truth, in conjunction with being the way and the life. I take this to suggest that one cannot merely approach truth abstractly, in isolation from a personal journey that requires relationships and impacts all of one's life.

### **2.1.2 The inescapable influence of worldview on all forms of knowledge**

This research argues that presuppositions and assumptions exert a critical and often unacknowledged influence on approaches to truth and knowledge. Worldview is a vital concept in this respect.

Jones (1972: 79) lists various alternative terms used by writers to refer to the concept of worldview (such as 'primitive categories', 'cognitive maps', 'ethos', 'forms of life', 'ideology', 'superstyle', etc.) and explains, 'Critics suspect that a concept so variously named is itself somewhat vague...[thus] some students of culture prefer to ignore the notion of worldview altogether and to concentrate instead on the directly observable institutions and practices of culture.' Although he grants that using the concept involves sacrificing a measure of 'precision and rigor', he finds the concept valuable and attempts to counterbalance this vagueness with 'a definition of worldview in relatively operational and verifiable terms' (: 79). He develops the following definition: 'The worldview of any individual is a set of very wide-range vectors in that individual's belief space (a) that he learned early in life and that are not readily changed and (b) that have a determinate influence on much of his observable behaviour, both verbal and

nonverbal, but (c) that he seldom or never verbalizes in the referential mode, though (d) they are constantly conveyed by him in the expressive mode and as latent meanings' (: 83).

Hiebert (1990: par 1) defines worldview as: 'The most basic and comprehensive concepts, values, and unstated assumptions about the nature of reality shared by people in a culture. It is the way they characteristically interpret the universe of human experience.' He further explains, 'Precisely because worldview assumptions are so foundational, they are largely unquestioned and implicit. To challenge them is to threaten the people's faith in meaning itself. There are few fears as great as when people lose confidence that there is order and meaning in the universe' (1990:par 2).

Hiebert (1990) categorizes three kinds of worldview assumptions: 'existential' assumptions ... provide the cognitive foundations for ordering the world meaningfully' (1990:par 2); 'affective assumptions.... relate to...aesthetic styles and moods that characterize a society' (par 3); and 'normative assumptions... provide a sense of moral order: of good and evil, righteousness and sin' (: par 4). A worldview 'reinforces faith in the culture by reinforcing its deepest assumptions with strong emotional attachments that make them resistant to change. A worldview also provides a psychological reinforcement to individuals during periods when fear and anxiety rise sharply within the community' (: par 4). Despite their resistance to change sufficient 'crisis, rapid change and high cultural stress' can lead to radical restructuring or 'paradigm shift' (: par 5).

Kraft (1996:52) defines worldview as 'the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments/allegiances underlying a people's perception of reality and their responses to those perceptions. Worldview is not separate from culture. It is included in culture as the structuring of the deepest-level presuppositions on the basis of which people live their lives.' Kraft (1996:55) emphasizes that 'Worldview assumptions or premises are *not reasoned out, but assumed to be true without prior proof.*' This 'lens, model, or map' for perceiving and interpreting reality is 'seldom (if ever)' questioned '*unless some of its assumptions are challenged by experiences that the people cannot interpret from within that framework*' (: 56).

In a conference talk on worldview Willard (2003) claims: 'The bitterness of truth is its total indifference to human will and desire, together with the fact that human desire and will is set on reshaping the truth. This is the fundamental conflict in human life...between desire or will and truth.' He states that these conflictual dynamics apply to worldview questions, which deal with 'the nature of reality.... [and] what counts as knowledge of reality.' These worldview questions are vital for they determine how we 'negotiate reality and live in...relationship to it.'

An example of a key worldview question is whether conscious existence continues after the cessation of brain functioning. This is obviously a religious question, but it is equally a scientific question, falling within the field of neuropsychology. A scientific stance, as demonstrated by Sam Harris will claim that the scientific response to this question requires the belief that there is no consciousness after brain death (An investigation of the numerous articles on Harris' official website confirm his clear belief that life ends with cessation of brain functioning; <<http://www.samharris.org/site/articles/>>). Even outside of such an aggressively atheistic stance, this question will often be seen to be a matter of faith and not knowledge, thus falling outside of serious scientific consideration. Nevertheless, Willard (2003) claims that morality and logic have truth-value and he resists the trend to reduce truth questions to natural science. Therefore, despite the difficulty and complexity involved in addressing issues such as post-death consciousness, they can be broached and they have a true ontological status irrespective of what we may think about them. We can, therefore, ask whether humans are fundamentally material objects that stop existing or 'unceasing spiritual being[s] with an eternal destiny in God's universe.'

In terms of a systemic view of knowledge and reality, worldview is communicated within and through multiple arenas, such as entertainment media (with the Hollywood film industry being a significant 'powerhouse' of worldview formation), advertising media and educational institutions. If one considers that university graduates have a potentially significant influence on society, worldview dynamics within the academy are particularly important. Willard (2003) claims that much of the modern university system involves 'a secular orthodoxy that is a sociological reality not a rationally supported outlook', and is thus not responsibly defended. This involves worldview being 'modeled' rather than 'taught by explicit statement.' This implicit and pervasive conditioning occurs in multiple ways: 'body language, facial expressions, tones of voice and inflections, looks, offhand remarks about people and events, by what is permissible, by example, how we treat people...by who gets rewarded or punished in various ways in the academic or other context.' Willard (2003) claims that despite its implicit nature many universities have a 'unified worldview' that is a 'powerful...sociological reality.' When you challenge it you quickly discover that you are not acceptable.

According to Willard (2003), a logically core foundation within this secular worldview is the assumption that 'reality is the natural sense-perceptible world.' This assumption is implicitly, yet powerfully propagated through sense-perceptible reality being the only thing that 'they pay attention to.' Even while it is popular to talk about spirituality, it is not a subject of serious academic pursuit since 'the spiritual is not real and is not knowable.'

Willard (2003) insists that there is no basis for precluding the academic consideration of Jesus' answers on life questions, such as the belief that 'reality is God and His activities, including the natural world, physical and social' and that 'the person is well off who has a life deriving from God and His Kingdom.' He claims that the Christian worldview dominated the universities well into the twentieth century and the current reversal is a political coup, for Jesus' answers have not been proven false. He states that it is necessary to 'assume burden of proof' and put one's beliefs to 'the test of life' (2003).

Finally, Willard (2003) makes the important point that this state of affairs goes hand in hand with the loss of logic as a subject at universities and these truths cannot be recovered without a recovery of a sense of logic. This involves conclusions being judged by the quality of the argument, in clear distinction to the current state where arguments are judged by foregone conclusions. I believe this is a vital point that needs to be kept in mind as we examine the hermeneutical approaches to Scripture and pastoral care in later chapters.

Three examples of Christian ministry which are based on serious considerations of worldview are Christian challenges to secular humanism through cultural and political engagement (e.g. Colson and Pearcey 1999a, 1999b; Noebel 2001), a direct focus on spiritual warfare and challenging worldviews which deny this (Wagner and Pennoyer 1990; Wimber and Springer 1985; Boyd 1997; Murphy 2003), and apologetics that challenge the reductionistic and naturalistic assumptions of scientism, arguing for the compatibility of science and faith (Finlay et al 2009; Alexander 2008; Barbour 2000)

The influential yet subconscious and change-resistant nature of worldview has strong implications for approaches to knowledge and ministry. On the one hand it encourages us not to uncritically accept the seemingly valid definitions and dynamics involved in the political and academic public sphere. On the other hand it suggests that positivistic attempts at reasoning with people in order to get them to change their beliefs or advance in their spiritual growth will bear little fruit. Such reasoning needs to be done non-positivistically, in conjunction with experiential dynamics, and in a way that engages hidden worldview assumptions.

### 2.1.3 A biblical approach: wisdom

A positivistic approach to science, which is associated with a strict material reductionism and an insistence on verification, can say nothing about wisdom. Yet science needs to be associated with wisdom; it cannot pretend to be functioning in a purely objective and value-free manner. Methodological naturalism and the concept of unfettered or unrestrained research are value decisions with societal impact and they should thus be evaluated according to a wise-unwise continuum. Science, within itself, does not have the resources for wisdom and needs to be integrated with other realms of knowledge, which can provide these. This does not mean that natural scientists go hat in hand to the philosophical or theological community, asking for help. It merely means, at the very least, that natural scientists acknowledge the extent to which they are drawing on philosophical and ethical concepts when they do their work, and that this needs to be done in an honest, open and responsible matter. This counts as a further warrant against the claims of scientism to be the unique solution for the world's problems.

Philosophy, unlike strict natural science, is directly concerned with wisdom. Sahakian (1968:vii) defines philosophy as 'the critical evaluation of the facts of experience', emphasizing that, in contrast to science, which only concerns itself with truth and accuracy, philosophy makes value judgments about beliefs and behaviours. For many, philosophy is synonymous with wisdom and leads to a happy life. Aristotle and Socrates clearly viewed philosophical inquiry in this way (Joad 1952: 163). Delaney (1999a: 976) gives a further philosophical definition of wisdom as 'an understanding of the highest principles of things that functions as a guide for living a truly exemplary human life.'

After many centuries of debate and scepticism, and in today's relativistic climate, philosophy tends to make fewer claims of being able to explain and motivate the life worth living. Schaeffer (1968a, 1968b, 1976) explores this philosophical history and how it has led to despair and a division between fact and value.

In Scripture and theology wisdom is a vital and well-represented concept. A biblical understanding of wisdom deals with a correct understanding of the world and life, right judgment in terms of life and conduct, and success in practically living this out (Schnabel 2000a: par 1; Patzia 1997b: par2). These definitions have significant overlap with philosophical understandings; nevertheless, the scriptural picture remains distinctive in terms of the inextricable link between God and wisdom, as Schnabel (2000a: par 23) explains,

The entire biblical wisdom tradition acknowledges...that wisdom is a divine gift. Wisdom is never an independent human enterprise. A second important emphasis is the inscrutability of God's ways, which sometimes defy explanation from a rational, human point of view.... A third emphasis of biblical wisdom is the conviction that genuine wisdom manifests itself in proper behaviour which pleases God.

Sailhamer (1995: 896-897) similarly defines the uniqueness of the biblical picture of wisdom. Firstly, wise living is not a goal in itself but is seen as obedience to God. Secondly, creation itself does not reveal a complete picture and complete wisdom requires God's covenant and Torah. Thirdly, God's involvement is vital, and deistic understandings, where mankind independently establishes truth from creation, are wrong, the mistake of Job and his friends.

Thus, the biblical understanding of wisdom emphasizes that the locus of true knowledge is God Himself. Wisdom is personified and is intimately linked with God's creative and sustaining activity (Pr 8:27-30). Wisdom is to be sought (Pr 2:1-5) and the ultimate method for attaining knowledge is relationship with God (Is 33:5-6).

In the NT, Jesus clearly inherits and associates himself with this OT picture of wisdom, like putting on 'a garment ready made' (Ryken et al 1988a: par 12). Schnabel (2000a: par 16) states that 'Jesus himself describes his mission, and even his person, in terms of divine wisdom' and Paul clearly sees the mystery of the gospel as the ultimate expression of God's wisdom (1 Cor 1:23-24, 30, 2:7; Eph 3: 9-11).

Wisdom and reason are, therefore, in themselves good aspects of God's creation. Sin and foolishness only arise in idolatrous, individualistic and atheistic attempts to appropriate their power and benefits. The NT thus has to qualify in which sense the same Greek word *sophia* is being used (1 Cor 2:6; Ja 3:13-17).

## **2.2. Knowledge and culture: recognizing the cultural embeddedness of all knowledge**

Kraft's (2000:38) definition of culture shows how it is a complex and comprehensive concept: 'Culture may be defined as the "total life way of a people, the social legacy the individual acquires from his group, a people's design for living" (Kluckhohn 1949a: 17). Or, to be more specific...a society's complex, integrated coping mechanism, consisting of learned, patterned concepts and behaviour, plus their underlying perspectives (worldview) and resulting artifacts (material culture).'

In terms of the comprehensive and systemic approach to knowledge attempted in this research, it is vital to consider knowledge within the broader context of culture. This is done not only because cultural context affects the way that knowledge processes are carried out within natural science, philosophy and theology, but because culture itself is a valid source of knowledge. This focus on comprehensiveness also approaches Christian mission and theology in the broadest terms possible. As Bosch (1987:55) states, 'We should refuse to operate with an either-or mentality: either the word or the deed; either individual or social ethics; either conversion or humanization; either redemption or liberation; either the cry of the lost or the cry of the poor; either an other-worldly kingdom or a this-worldly utopia.' He thus recommends 'a theology of mission that wants to address the whole of life with the whole gospel' (: 55).

### **2.2.1 Considering aspects of culture that are relevant to knowledge**

Although scientism might reduce culture to an aspect within a larger scientific framework, I think it is more accurate to state that science is a subset of culture and that culture contains aspects that are beyond the sphere of pure natural science. Furthermore, as natural science draws on language and symbol to construct its models and theories, it is drawing on culture. This drawing both facilitates and limits science. Language, for example, both reveals and obscures meaning.

A factor facilitating the interaction between knowledge and culture is the relationship between academic and popular spheres. Worldviews articulated in the academy will often filter down to society at large. This process is sped up and rendered incredibly effective through the increasingly connected and ubiquitous 'media-machine' which symbiotically feeds into hardware such as cell phone and internet technology, with their multiple media sharing programmes like 'You Tube', 'Face book', 'Twitter', and related movie and audio sharing software, along with chat rooms, blogs and discussion forums. This helps explain how the relativism of academics like Foucault (1996:160-179, 1995:443-452) and Derrida (1981:3-59; 1994:347-358) has so rapidly become part of the average person's worldview. I have experienced numerous school children who have never heard of Derrida or postmodernism, but who have been immersed in popular culture, automatically respond to truth claims with 'that's your truth' or 'that's just your opinion.'

A further development has occurred; as Brockman (2003: 2) states, certain academics are communicating directly with the public, with Richard Dawkins being the example par excellence



(see 1.8.10). Apart from other forms of communication, the millions of copies of books that the New Atheists are selling are reaching a sophisticated public and have an effect beyond that indicated by pure sales. Scientism has become part of the spirit of the age, sitting inconsistently alongside relativism in an eclectic, spiritually experimental, and individualistic culture.

### 2.2.2 Premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism

Fully grasping the various issues dealt with in this research presupposes an understanding of the movement from a premodern to a modern to a postmodern context in society. It is not strictly correct to talk of living in a postmodern world. In a lecture, Guinness (1997) explains that we live in a very modern world that includes postmodern beliefs. As Smith (2004:31) observes: 'The news of modernity's death has been greatly exaggerated. The Enlightenment project is alive and well, dominating Europe and increasingly North America, particularly in the political drive to carve out "the secular" – a zone decontaminated of the prejudices of determinate religious influence.'

It may be more accurate, therefore, to describe our current context as a modern world with premodern and postmodern influences. Irrespective of exact definition, at the beginning of the twenty-first century we inhabit a very chaotic and eclectic situation that requires careful discernment for an appropriate theological and pastoral care response.

Carson (2005:88-90) provides a useful clarification of the relationship between premodern, modern and postmodern worldviews and epistemology. In a premodern epistemology human knowing is a tiny subset of God's infinite knowledge and depends on God's revelation. The problematic aspect of this period is that it is tied to an open universe where God's 'interventions may be so continuous and so unconstrained by the kinds of "cause and effect" sequences we take for granted today that a large space is opened up for superstition, magic, and fear' (: 89). The modern closed universe of cause and effect limits itself to 'explanations... that deal with matter, energy, space and time', displacing God as 'an unnecessary hypothesis' (: 89). The controlled universe of the late modern period allowed for the regularity necessary for science without displacing God or the possibility of miracles (: 90). As will be seen, a controlled universe that allows both radical freedom and determination, the exact balance of which, in any given instance, can only be expressed as a hermeneutical choice, if at all, is the stance adopted in this research.

A further useful summary of the characteristics of each stage, which serves as a starting point for further clarification, is provided by Kennard (1999:34):

Characteristics of intellectual stages.

<b>Premodern</b>	<b>Modern</b>	<b>Postmodern</b>
Established communal faith	Individual epistemology	Individual epistemology
Fideistically confident	Rationally confident	Rationally skeptical
Naïve realism	Empirical naturalism	Phenomenalism
God's order is inherently good	Knowledge is inherently good	Knowledge can be used for evil
Unified in communal truth under God and king	Culture is unified under social contract and pragmatic workability	Relativism fragmenting culture with increasing alienation
Divine right of kings	Republic	Contextualized democracy or anarchy
God structures creation	Evolution is inevitable	Increasing pessimism to surmount the magnitude of life's problems

Science is a higher activity which ordinary life subserves	Science should benefit ordinary life	The lack in science needs a transcendental object
Church calling is special	Increased status of lay, especially the scientist	Increased status of cultural heroes (e.g. actors, athletes, etc.) who can draw you into their mythical lives
Romanticism with God	Romanticism with the transcendent	Romanticism with self as transcendent
Biblical law funds ethics	Hedonism funds communal utilitarianism	Existentially choose your own morality as a self-fulfiller
Obedience begets divine blessing	Natural order establishes personal freedom, dignity, commitment & rights	My personal space is my right

Despite endless clarificatory schemes, postmodernism remains a 'slippery' concept and it clearly means different things to different individuals and groups. Furthermore, it evokes a full range of responses, from wholehearted embracing to complete rejection. Erickson (1998: 19), for example, distinguishes 'soft postmodernism', which rejects the 'naive objectivity' of positivistic, 'scientific approaches to reality' from 'hard postmodernism', which 'rejects the idea that language has any sort of objective or extralinguistic reference at all.'

The examples of modern values, which will be examined next, simultaneously serve to further clarify postmodernity, as the latter logically exists in reaction to modernism.

### 2.2.2.1 Modernism

Erickson (1998:16-17) discusses ten features of modernism: naturalism; humanism; the scientific method; reductionism; progress; nature; certainty; determinism; individualism; and anti-authoritarianism. He distinguishes 'moderate' or 'soft' modernism, which still believed in the 'rationality of the universe' and the validity of 'integrative metaphysical schemes or worldviews' from 'extreme' or 'hard' modernism, which limits 'Knowledge...to what can be known through reason and experience' (: 17-18).

Further insight into modernism is provided by Carson (2005:92-95), who identifies six elements of modern epistemology:

1. The 'finite "I"' rather than God as starting point.
2. A strong commitment to foundationalism.
3. A confidence in a 'rigorous method' for generating truth.
4. A strong belief that 'epistemological certainty is desirable and attainable.'
5. A certainty that truth is objective, ahistorical and universally true.
6. A commitment to 'philosophical naturalism'.

As Carson (2005:95) explains, the modern view is highly problematic for theology: 'This stance makes a closed universe inescapable, and ostensible knowledge about a personal-transcendent God outside or beyond the universe nothing but childish myth.' He goes on to explain that postmodernism involves a modification or rejection of each of these six elements (: 95-98).

### 2.2.2.2 Postmodernism

As will be seen, authors differ in their descriptions of postmodernism, in their positive versus negative evaluation of it, and in their understanding of its longevity (the extent to which it is seen to be a lasting versus passing phenomenon). Irrespective of one's exact definition or evaluation,

it is hard to deny that it continues to play an influential and even defining role in life and knowledge at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Kirk and Vanhoozer (1999: xv) summarize postmodern beliefs in the following way:

1. The increasing dominance of technological reason has led to a loss of human values.
2. Different rational systems for interpreting the world are seen as self-referring, and there is no superior vantage point from which their adequacy may be judged.
3. If truth claims are, by their very nature, ideological manoeuvres to achieve dominance, as French and German postmodernists assert, they will tend to squeeze out difference and ignore the inviolability of the other.
4. There is no given, stable, inner self that affords an absolute reference point for knowing.
5. An uncomplicated, univocal correspondence between an external reality and any human interpretation of it is not possible.
6. All knowledge is socially and culturally conditioned, which means that it simply expresses a point of view (never the point of view).
7. All human understanding is bound by conventional explanation and the language in which it is expressed.

Carson (2005) analyzes postmodernism from a different perspective, which clearly displays evangelical concerns. He discusses five 'correlatives' and five 'entailments' that are often conflated with postmodernism, analyzing them separately as they are not exclusively linked to postmodernism and could exist in other contexts. Nevertheless a mutual two-way reinforcing between these elements and postmodernism occurs (2005:99). These five correlatives are: syncretism; secularization; biblical illiteracy; ill-defined spirituality; and globalization (: 98-101).

Carson (2005: 101-102) concludes with the following five entailments or consequences of postmodernism: '[O]bjective morality' is challenged; evangelism is unacceptable; subjective personal and mystical experience displaces 'careful argument' in helping people adopt 'a new position'; '[P]ersonal narrative' displaces 'metanarrative'; even the 'hard sciences' are principally 'socially determined constructions.'

It is clear that theological responses to postmodernism are varied and complex. It is not a simple matter of non-conservative or non-evangelical churches adopting postmodernism in contradistinction to more conservative or evangelical churches. Many participants in the highly postmodern-influenced emerging church movement come from conservative, evangelical churches and the Bible respecting cultural-linguistic focus in theology is also deeply indebted to postmodernism. In line with the hermeneutical proposals of this research I will therefore attempt to maintain a careful, considered and sustained interaction with postmodernism.

### **2.2.2.3 A critical theological response to postmodernism**

Postmodernism has proved effective in correcting the positivism of modernism. It has shown that absolute certainty and objectivity is not possible. Instead of certainty we now have to talk of probability and consider that all knowledge is underdetermined. This means considering alternative explanations of the facts and being more open to hearing previously marginalized voices. We also have to acknowledge that any objectivity in knowledge exists in tension with subjective and contextual factors.

Despite its corrective strengths, postmodernism, especially in its extreme forms, is ultimately unsustainable. I think it is better described as a form of hypermodernism and represents an absolutism of the worst kind. I will argue that it fails logically and practically.

Extreme postmodernism is logically incoherent. The very statements that there are no absolutes or that all things are relative are self-refuting. Derrida's (1981:3-59; 1994:347-358) deconstruction simply does not go far enough. His deconstructive technique of finding the hidden and marginalized binary opposites of all words and truth claims and reintroducing them into a relationship of endless play means that there can be no 'logo-centric appeal'. But this very statement of 'no logo-centric appeal' needs itself to be destabilized in order to readmit the possibility of logo-centric appeal. True openness must admit the possibility of ultimate truth, even if it remains partial and never fully attainable. As Erickson (1998:157) claims, 'deconstruction may lead to a new form of oppression. There is a strong element of truth in the deconstructionists' contention that ideologies can be used oppressively. Deconstruction itself is not exempt from this theory, however. Such... [deconstructive stances] must [themselves] be de-deconstructed.' Vanhoozer (1997:158) talks about the textual violence of deconstruction: '[W]hen deconstruction seeks to undo not only oppressive interpretations but the texts themselves, when it pries apart textual coherence for the sake of a repressed otherness... far from protecting the text as an "other", [it] licences interpretive violence.' I believe this ideological violence will ultimately transfer to societal violence: 'Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law' (Pr 29:18). Only a naive, unbiblical view of human nature will believe that this is not so.

Secondly, I argue that extreme postmodernism is factually false and impossible to live out practically, as Blackburn (1995c: 460-461) clarifies:

A dogged resolution to see others just as producers of noise fit to be interpreted in any of a variety of different ways may just about succeed for a time. But a similar resolution with regard to myself is impossible. We may, in the study, be sufficiently baffled by the problem to believe that there is nothing outside the text, and to see linguistic behaviour as a self-contained game of producing and consuming noise and script. But such scepticism is unlivable, and will not survive long when we actually ask directions, give recipes, and tell the time.

Common sense and experience show that there is an enormous amount of understanding and communication that take place in society. The success of natural science and technology, which rely on critical realism, constitutes one of the strongest arguments against extreme postmodernism. None of this amounts to perfect, omniscient knowledge, but that is a false criterion that has no foundation. As Carson (2005: 115) claims: 'It tries to control the argument by deploying a manipulative and finally foolish antithesis, in either demanding the kind of absolute and exhaustive knowledge that only Omniscience enjoys, or relinquishing all claims to objective knowledge.'

The extreme irony is that postmodernism relies on the coherence and stability of knowledge in order to make its claims against this very coherence and stability. We have every right to reject any worldview that contradicts the way one actually lives. In a sermon Carson (2000b) recounts the experience of reviewing hundreds of postmodern writers for his book 'The Gagging of God' (1996). He followed up the external critiques of their work as well as their responses to these critiques. According to Carson (2000b), not once did they respond with a consistent postmodern stance of allowing an alternative, 'reader-response' interpretation of their work. Instead, there was an indignant reaction at being misunderstood and this reaction is clearly based on the decidedly non-postmodern assumption that their words carried the author's meaning and intent and that this meaning and intent could and should be understood and respected.

Extreme postmodernism is also false in the simplistic way it characterizes and criticizes modernism. Furthermore, there is an idealized view of the progression from modernism to postmodernism, with the latter viewed as a positive advancement. If one uses 'postmodern speak' against itself, one can state that this view ironically functions as a 'metanarrative' that supports a totalizing relativistic agenda.

Because of its internal contradictions, impracticability and existential sterility, extreme or hard postmodernism is not sustainable in the long term. Nevertheless, even as intellectuals move on from their 'irresponsible unbelief'<sup>8</sup> society is left 'holding the baby.' A *Zeitgeist* of unfounded skepticism will continue for many years to come and theology and pastoral care need to recognize this and take it into account as they act in this world.

### 2.2.3 The inextricable relationship between knowledge and power

The abuse of power is a central concern in postmodernism. In the definitions given above we see that knowledge becomes suspect: 'knowledge can be used for evil' (Kennard 1999: 34); 'if truth claims are, by their very nature, ideological manoeuvres to achieve dominance...they will tend to squeeze out difference and ignore the inviolability of the other' (Kirk and Vanhoozer 1999: xv). This postmodern concern for the rights of the other becomes a key epistemological criterion, as illustrated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005: 13): '[A]s postempiricist, antifoundational, critical theorists we reject much of what the critical realists advocate....We want a social science that is committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights.'

Nietzsche is well known for propagating the idea that knowledge is used manipulatively to maintain power over others.<sup>9</sup> Currently, Foucault (1996: 380) is one of the postmodern writers most clearly associated with the assertion that any claims to objective truth are attempts to manipulate and control; to gain power over another: "Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A regime of truth.'

The abuse of truth (or information or knowledge) is undeniable. Every tyrant and unjust regime has used propaganda and silenced contrary opinions. In terms of today's culture wars, which are taking place between anti-religious forces (described through concepts or movements such as secularism, atheism, scientism, and humanism) and religion (a battle occurring ultimately in the United States but spreading to the rest of the world, including South Africa), the conflicts are often driven by a lust for power, rather than a concern for the truth. The New Atheists are not merely against religion but against the influence of religion in society and politics. They have a very strong case against religion, given the great number of religion-linked conflicts around the world. Since the 9/11 terrorist attacks there has been a growing perception that religious fundamentalism is one of the greatest threats to the survival of society (see 1.8.11.2). As for the church, even after unfair characterizations and biased reporting are taken into account, it is undeniable that it has at many times abused its power and acted contrary to the spirit of Jesus.

Irrespective of the New Atheists' motives, it is clear that they wish to have greater access to political power. They claim that through reason and science they will do a better job of creating a just and non-violent society. The lessons of history speak against this confidence and the arrogant, careless and fundamentalist way they have gone about attacking all forms of religious belief already betrays the existence of their own seeds of violence. The relativism of postmodernism and the increasing awareness of countless examples of religious abuse and failings explain the knee-jerk reaction of many individuals against religion. Once again, this is the context that theology and pastoral care must be aware of as it seeks to act in the world.

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<sup>8</sup> In a lecture Willard (1995) states that society unfairly prizes doubt above belief. Yet belief is vital for our functioning society and doubt has clear negative consequences. He argues, therefore, that belief and unbelief equally require warrant and responsibility.

<sup>9</sup> See Wilkens and Padgett (2000: 175-177).

In terms of the postmodern logic, then, if one wishes to be for justice and humanity, one needs to be against any absolute truth claims. As will be shown, this is a complete misunderstanding since all claims and beliefs are at base absolute ; even a strong belief in relativism, cannot be half-held.

The irony of all past and present philosophical attacks on truth and authority is that these attacks expect to be exempted from their very own criticism and inconsistently accepted as truth. The only truly logical behaviour for extremely relativistic claims is recourse to violence or a retreat into hedonism, silence, madness or suicide.

There is thus no choice available between absolutism and relativism. There are only two kinds of people: absolutists who are conscious and honest regarding their presuppositions versus absolutists who are unaware or in denial. The latter are by far more dangerous for they do not see the need to develop counterbalancing virtues, to correctly deal with knowledge and power.

This research therefore rejects the twin false extremes of positivism and relativism with regard to knowledge, in favour of critical realism. Nevertheless, while critical realism, rationality, and the scientific method are necessary factors for life and knowledge, they are insufficient, for they cannot deal with the problem of evil and the abuse of power that postmodernism correctly exposes. The possibility and need of transcendent solutions remain in place ; while not proving the claims of Christ, they accord them an acute relevance.

### **2.3. The relationship between ultimate reality, sources of knowledge, and knowledge: underdetermination as a defining category against positivism**

This section examines the relationship between understandings of ultimate reality (metaphysics), sources of knowledge and knowledge. This is a vital area of examination for there is an intimate relationship between sources and epistemology.

The adopting of critical realism with respect to warrant requires a specific understanding of reality. However, the issue of realism remains highly debated in philosophy. According to Miller (2005: intro par 1) :

The nature and plausibility of realism is one of the most hotly debated issues in contemporary metaphysics, perhaps even the most hotly debated issue in contemporary philosophy. The question of the nature and plausibility of realism arises with respect to a large number of subject matters, including ethics, aesthetics, causation, modality, science, mathematics, semantics, and the everyday world of macroscopic material objects and their properties.

Miller (2005: intro par 1-4) explains that philosophers inevitably display a combination of realism and anti-realism, depending on the subject at issue.

Metaphysics, the systematic and critical attempt 'to work out the most basic structure of reality' (Sturch 1988a: par 2) is often viewed as implausible due to contradictory schemes as well as the lack of any foundation beyond mere speculation. Nevertheless, even natural science cannot avoid metaphysical presuppositions. Of key concern is the fact that views of ultimate reality directly affect approaches to knowledge.

There is a mutual two-way interaction between metaphysical presuppositions and epistemic method; almost any form of self-confirming union can be envisaged, leading to unique conclusions and theories (be they scientific, historical, philosophical or theological). For example, the atheist will be able to connect ontological naturalism with methodological naturalism in a mutually reinforcing scheme. Similarly, idealism will also lead to specific conclusions. In an idealist scheme history becomes 'the evolution of a primal consciousness'

(Bloesch 1994:18) and the theistic revelation of Scripture becomes supplanted by 'a general revelation throughout history in all peoples and cultures' (Harris 1988b: par 6).

It is beyond the scope of this research to explore these concepts in detail and I will limit myself to several relevant points.

### 2.3.1 Materialism, idealism and naturalism versus theism

Clearly the ancient Greek view that understood matter to be composed of "atoms", tiny...indivisible...bits of "stuff" (Lacey 1995a :530) has been undermined by the latest science, starting with Einstein. Energy and information are foundational in all reality. However, this has not dealt a death blow to materialism: '[V]arious materialist philosophies have tended to substitute for "matter" some notion like "whatever it is that can be studied by the methods of natural science", thus turning materialism into naturalism' (Lacey 1995a:530). Thus, naturalism, which ontologically views all reality as 'composed of natural entities' (Post 1999 :596) is equally able to absorb idealism, which describes reality in terms of mental states or ideas. Physicalism, another term for materialism, is often used in terms of mental reductionism to indicate that 'all the facts about minds and mentality are physical facts' (Kim 1995: 679).

While terms and definitions may remain ambiguous and overlap inconsistently, these views stand in clear contradistinction to theism, which, despite being equated with general belief in God, has a specific sense within theology:

[T]heism refers to the belief in a personal creator-God, distinct from the world (*contra* pantheism) yet constantly active in it (*contra* deism), who is therefore worthy of worship. As creator, the God of theism is both intelligent and powerful. As personal, he is capable of self-revelation, a moral being with just and benevolent concerns for his creatures. As alone transcendent, he is free to act sovereignly in the creation. In this immanent activity, he seeks his own good purposes for history in general and for individual persons.

(Holmes 1988b: par 1)

Theism is challenged by the extreme transcendence of deism and the extreme immanence of pantheism and panentheism, issues that will be clarified in chapter six.

The complexity of the debate about ultimate reality suggests that metaphysics cannot be conclusively determined and cannot be facily appealed to in order to prove or disprove the existence of God. Naturalism and theism both start from a belief that there is something rather than nothing. Often, the theist is caricatured as being unscientific due to believing in God. But the naturalist's assumption that there was no God in the beginning is equally a belief. There is no epistemological high ground. Contrary to the positivism of either side, ultimate reality remains underdetermined and is open to a natural or theistic explanation (Alberts 1996: 11). Furthermore, specific examinations of reality can be supernatural and natural without contradiction. As Lewis (1968: 206) clarifies with the following metaphor: a 'bulge' in one county on a map, is simultaneously a 'dent' in an adjoining county.

Although ultimate beliefs can neither be proved nor disproved, we can compare the power and quality of their epistemological underpinnings -how well they explain life and cohere with all other aspects of knowledge. We can also examine their existential fruit -the quality of life that emerges out of them. On this basis, numerous criticisms can be levelled against various post-Enlightenment approaches to ultimate reality.

### 2.3.2 Ultimate reality: the reduction of the Enlightenment and relativism

The Enlightenment is clearly linked to an exaltation of the human individual. This exaltation entailed an elevation of human reason as the arbiter of truth. It also entailed a turn towards the subject, with a degrading of the realism and objectivity of the world external to the human individual. This anthropological turn shows how the relativism (i.e. hyper subjectivity or solipsism) of postmodernism can be viewed as an advanced form or logical conclusion of modernism. Besides relativism, this turn towards the subject also helps explain the despair characteristic of the postmodern age:

The Subject becomes gorged, inflated, at the expense of the Object. But the matter does not end there. The same method which has emptied the world now proceeds to empty ourselves....While we were reducing the world to almost nothing we deceived ourselves with the fancy that all its lost qualities were being kept safe (in a somewhat humbled condition ) as 'things' in our own mind'. Apparently we had no mind of the sort required. The Subject is as empty as the Object.

(Lewis 1968: 220)

Blond (1998: 54) also eloquently captures the despair that results from the turn to the human subject: 'The postmodern realism of originless images and fatherless phenomena expresses uniquely the dreadful bankruptcy of the age, as images that once claimed to represent the divine now claim to represent nothing but themselves, and in taking this modern separation of finitude from infinity to its logical outcome, this bankruptcy represents the true inheritance of idolatry and modernity.' He concludes that 'secular minds are only now beginning to perceive that all is not as it should be, that what was promised to them –self-liberation through the limitation of the world to human faculties- might after all be a form of self-mutilation' (:1). The modern attempt to view objects in reality without reference to a transcendent creator is a form of violence, denial and idolatry (:3). He argues instead for 'theological modes of perception...[and] a theological dimension to objects, present there for all to see' (:4). 'To begin (or rather to end) in skepticism, to doubt wholly the evidence of the senses, is to warp human life and to hand us over to a curious form of despair' (:5).

Blond (1998) also argues against the postmodern attempt to ground reality in the concept of 'being'. In Heidegger's onto-theological scheme 'being' is critical for creator and creature: 'Only from the truth of Being can the essence of the holy be thought. Only in the light of the essence of divinity can it be thought or said what the word "God" is to signify' (Heidegger in Blond 1998: 33). According to Blond (1998 :12), this is idolatrous and he insists that theology and philosophy cannot be subsumed within onto-theology: 'The New Testament is on this point unequivocal; being did not precede, nor is it equiprimordial with the Most High....what is fundamental to ontology is not its own modes of self-presencing and concealment, but prior modes which it assumes and ignores: the modes of creation *ex nihilo*.'

Given the lack of absolute logical or scientific proof for a naturalistic stance, and the existential anxiety that it often entails, it is appropriate to challenge this naturalistic faith stance with the faith stance of God as ultimate reality.<sup>10</sup>

### **2.3.3 An encounter with the critique of God as the ultimate reality**

'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (Gen 1:1).

'For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together' (Col 1:16-17).

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<sup>10</sup> See Moore (2003) for an extended argument supporting Christian realism.



'By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible' (Heb 11:3).

'For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light' (Ps 36:9).

'You alone are the LORD. You made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to everything, and the multitudes of heaven worship you' (Neh 9:6).

'For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself' (Jn 5:26).

The above scriptural claims that God was before all things and therefore represents the only source of life and creation is strongly challenged by New Atheism and scientism. The spectacular advances of science and technology, often successfully pursued without any reference to God, and the explanatory power of the theory of evolution make the dismissal of God a satisfying intellectual possibility for many individuals today (see 1.8.10). I will argue that this 'successful' dismissal is based on a superficial and incomplete understanding of God, reality and reason. The two key methodological assumptions that support this atheistic stance are naturalism and rationalism and neither of them is intellectually unassailable.

Chauvinism is defined as 'an excessive or prejudiced loyalty to a particular gender, group, or cause' (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version) and it is a useful term to apply to certain epistemological prejudices. The New Atheists are particularly guilty of a blind natural or material chauvinism. Many insist that they will believe in God if they can have some irrefutable physical proof, like writing in the sky or a physical manifestation of divinity.<sup>11</sup> These materialistic metaphysical assumptions ignore the extent to which even very concrete things like stones and trees cannot scientifically be described as purely material.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, they deny the extent to which non-material realities and beliefs are an everyday part of the atheist's life. The very act of thinking and reflecting on nature cannot be conflated with that nature and points suggestively to a supernatural reality (Lewis 1968: 205)

Turning now to the issue of rationalism, I argue that a further flaw in New Atheist thinking is in terms of deciding what is rationally valid. They repeatedly dismiss the ideas of God, scriptural revelation and salvation history as nonsensical and illogical (Dawkins 2006:235-278, Hitchens 2007: 97-122). It makes no sense to their thinking and therefore it should make no sense to any reasonable, scientific person. The phrase 'making sense' really has no scientific valence. It is related to subjective factors and experience and one should not conflate it with science and reason, as the New Atheists do. Science is based on reason but not rationalism, the belief that human reason is able to pronounce on what is or is not reasonable.

The idea of God and salvation history make no sense, but neither does the way a chicken comes from an egg comes from a chicken, or the way a child is formed in a woman's womb, or the Big Bang, or that flicking a wall switch causes a light to come on, or any other reality in life.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Marshal Brain, an atheist and popular scientist (originator of the 'How Things Work' series) has a website entitled "Why Won't God Heal Amputees" <http://whywontgodhealamputees.com/>. He has made that the criterion for faith in God.

<sup>12</sup> According to Schilling (1979: 220), the latest developments in science show 'the most fundamental realities of matter, and more generally of physical reality, are relationships, processes, and events rather than bits of substance...Thus man has become keenly conscious that fundamentally matter is relational.' Related to this is the necessity of information for maintaining these relationships. DNA, the basic building block of life, for example is coded information. These examples of information-based structures suggestively point to the ultimate intelligence of God.

The physical realities that we have become used to through exposure and explanation and experiment have lost their strangeness. If one could see an isolated tribes person experiencing television or air travel for the first time, their amazed reaction would remind us how strange they are. So too, spiritual realities like God and salvation history may seem strange to us, but this sense of strangeness has no scientific valence with regard to their truth-value. It is not that physical realities are scientific and spiritual realities are unbelievable. All of life is strange and wonderful. As Francis Bacon (<sup>13</sup>) has stated: 'Let the mind be enlarged...to the grandeur of the mysteries, and not the mysteries contracted to the narrowness of the mind.'

However, this complexity concerning ultimate reality is a challenge to theology as well. As we shall see, scientific advances in evolution and neuropsychology make a simplistic dualism for explaining God and spirit increasingly untenable. At a superficial level these scientific advances seem to make materialism in all its guises more plausible. When there is no mental state that is not fully grounded in a physical neural response, it is just a step away from believing in physicalism. When there is no aspect of biological life that cannot be explained by an evolutionary process (despite the protestations of the intelligent design movement) then it requires a short step to dispense with a creator altogether. In other words, the comfortable mysterious space that existed in our knowledge allowed a form of metaphysical dualism wherein we could mentally imagine the presence of God and of human spirits (the God of the gaps). This space is all but gone and theology and church ministry need to rearticulate the faith in ways that take this new understanding into account, or else risk increasing marginalization within the academy and society.

Up to now we have looked at a broad understanding of knowledge and basic reality. This has been a vital foundational step in addressing the concerns of this research. The next step is to look at the actual dynamics and processes involved in knowledge.

## **2.4 The process of knowledge formation: a systemic and hermeneutical approach**

The term knowledge immediately suggests a process of knowing that generates this knowledge. This process implies an object (of knowing) and a subject (who knows) and the relationship between them is fraught with difficulties, as suggested by the need to use terms such as truth, error, validity and justification,<sup>14</sup> when talking of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> The critical elements of hermeneutics and warrant are dealt with in chapters three and four and this section focuses on the process of arriving at understanding within the principal fields of knowledge.

The way sources are understood, in conjunction with the manner in which the subject-object/theory-observation dilemma is dealt with, directly affects methodology and knowledge processes. If ultimate reality is seen as material or natural, then an empirical process will be valued. Conversely, a commitment to an empirical process can commit one to interpreting nature in purely natural terms, reducing all spiritual data to physical processes (The irony is that this reduction takes place on the basis of non-empirical presuppositions). On the other hand it is possible to upwardly conflate or over-spiritualize physical realities.

The complexity of these aspects of knowledge is increased when one adopts a systemic perspective. From this perspective it is neither possible to neatly separate object, subject,

<sup>13</sup> Source of quote < <http://greatmindsongodreligionandscience.blogspot.com/2009/05/sir-francis-bacon.html> > November 2011.

<sup>14</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, whenever the term justification is used in this research, it refers to a form of epistemological validation. This is in clear distinction to its specific theological understandings.

<sup>15</sup> Cook (1988a: par 1) suggests that 'There are many areas of difficulty in knowledge: e.g. knowing the self, the past, the future, universal facts, scientific laws and the facts of philosophy, aesthetics, morality, religion, logic and mathematics.'

process and result, nor to proceed in neat, linear progression from one to the other. Again, looking at the source or object of knowledge, there is a definite distancing from a pure, objective source; results become part of the subjects understanding and method and these affect how the source is perceived in future. Further complexity arises from intrasystemic and intersystemic differences and tensions that exist. For many, these complex dynamics cause scepticism regarding knowledge.

The philosophy of knowledge has delineated these complex factors and attempted to analyse them individually and in relation to each other. A grand scheme that accounts for all the factors and clarifies all these relationships has proved elusive and this section makes no claim to resolve this mystery. All that is attempted is a basic clarification of these different factors and some of the ways in which they can be interrelated.

#### **2.4.1 The relationship between method, methodology and knowledge**

Method and methodology are key elements in the process of knowledge formation. According to Louw (1988b: 2), “Methodology”, distinct from “method” (the route and various research methods), means: a reflection (philosophical) on scientific research practices, methods and techniques used by scientists. Methodology, is about the underlying logic of various research activities and the how question (how does one attain knowledge and how does one ensure reaching one’s research goal?).’

Before looking into methodology I will examine the scientific method in terms of its commonly understood steps. I will also see how this method is contrasted to method in the other realms of knowledge.

##### **2.4.1.1 The scientific method: a critical assessment**

Christensen (1997: 6-13) examines five ways of acquiring knowledge: tenacity, intuition, authority, rationalism and empiricism. He suggests that the scientific method partakes of these in a limited way, but is superior, ‘because the information it yields is based as much as possible on reality’ (:134). The positivism of Christensen’s understanding is unabashed: ‘the scientific method enables us to make observations that are independent of opinion, bias, and prejudice. Such is not the case with the other five methods’ (: 20). For Christensen, science ‘represents...a specific method to be followed in solving problems and thus acquiring a body of knowledge,’ involving five clear steps : identifying the problem and forming a hypothesis ; designing the experiment ; conducting the experiment ; testing the hypothesis ; communicating the research results (:14-18). The characteristics of control (eliminating ‘extraneous variables’), operational definition (ensuring measurability) and replication of results are also critical to the scientific method (:21-25).

It is important to note that Christensen’s (1997: xi) book on ‘experimental methodology’ is not intended for the natural sciences, but rather for psychological research. It is thus a good example of positivism in the social sciences. One must not forget that the application of the scientific method to the social sciences is far from undisputed and even the natural sciences cannot lay claim to such objectivity.

It must be stated that the scientific method, as outlined above, is true in many ways and it has led to phenomenal success and progress in knowledge. As portrayed, it is, nevertheless, an oversimplification in more than one sense. Firstly, it overemphasises the objectivity of the method and fails to clarify that there are very few contexts that will neatly fit this process. Starting from scratch, using this method, we could perfectly establish that water at sea level boils at 100 degrees Celsius anywhere in the world. Nevertheless, experiments like the boiling of

water constitute a very thin sliver of life and knowledge. Secondly, Christensen (1997: 29) admits that science must 'accept' and 'believe' in the 'uniformity in nature...Implicit in the assumption of uniformity is the notion of determinism –the belief that there are causes, or determinants, of behavior'. This basic assumption is necessary for four further assumptions or axioms that 'refer to the reality, rationality, regularity, and discoverability of events in nature' (: 29-31). All of these assumptions are the subject of significant epistemological controversies, which cannot be resolved by the scientific method.<sup>16</sup> Finally, this portrayal caricatures other methods, showing them to be unscientific and inferior, and overlooking the extent to which they too partake of the positive aspects of the scientific method.

Numerous thinkers have emphasized that knowledge is complex and cannot be approached simplistically, as is the case in the alliance of empiricism and positivism. These thinkers have underlined the fact that all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, relies on assumptions, intuition, inspiration, vision and aesthetics, which cannot be accounted for by the strict scientific method (Torrance 1996 : 131-132 ; Polanyi 1969; Kuhn 1996).

Hughes (1990: 59-61) clarifies that science relies on both empiricism and rational thought, abstractively connecting and moving back and forth between theoretical concepts and observations. It cannot claim to do this positivistically or lay sole claim to these dynamics. As Lewis (1968: 229) explains, 'The hypothesis is, admittedly, a mental construction –something, as they say, "inside our own heads." And the experiment is a state of our own consciousness...The physical sciences, then, depend on the validity of logic just as much as metaphysics or mathematics...We should therefore abandon the distinction between scientific and non-scientific thought.'

There is no single method of acquiring knowledge in any field. There are a variety of elements that go into the knowledge process and all fields partake of them to a greater or lesser extent. Oversimplification is used to marginalize religion from knowledge. As Barbour (1966: 137) states, 'For many people today the challenge to religious belief arises not from any conflict of content between science and religion but from the assumption that the scientific method is the only road to knowledge.' He contends rather, 'At the outset it should be stated that there is no "scientific method," no formula with five easy steps guaranteed to lead to discoveries' (:138). He claims that 'the work of Galileo, Newton, and Darwin...[uses a] distinctive combination of experiential and interpretive elements' (:137). Barbour's words, written in the sixties, ring even truer today, after over four decades of accumulating postmodern observation.

Nevertheless, advocates of scientism and textbooks like Christensen's continue to strongly punt scientific positivism as if this alternative interpretive history had simply not taken place. This is ethically irresponsible and, in the end, unscientific. The retreat of the social sciences and theology into a safe hermeneutical haven reinforces this positivism. Due to the practical success of science and the lack of challenge to the positivist assumptions of certain members of the scientific community (to repeat, due to the retreat of the social and theological sciences), the common human imagination generally accepts the privatisation of religion and the dominance of positivism and science in the public sphere. This has clear implications for theology and pastoral care in terms of barriers that need to be overcome.

This research argues that all sciences should participate in a complex causal-empirical and intentional-hermeneutical 'force-field'. Obviously, natural and social sciences will locate themselves at different positions on the continuum that exists between these two foci. Yet it is simply false to separate reality into unpredictable human intentionality and predictable natural

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<sup>16</sup> In addition, it can be argued that these assumptions not only resonate with a theistic perspective, they in fact require a theistic perspective for their ultimate coherence and validity.

laws. Natural laws cannot be understood apart from human interpreters and the possibility of the existence of God, who upholds natural laws and can bring more comprehensive or higher-order laws (which we interpret as miracles) to bear, means that intentionality cannot even be ruled out of nature. Obviously, natural science, as communally practiced, cannot take divine action into account, without contradicting its stated method and character, but nor can it claim to exhaust the meaning of nature with its reductionism. The scientific method, positivistically understood, will at best give a partial view of reality. At worst, it may misinterpret and distort the most important aspects of life and knowledge, in the end funding a lie.

The critically realistic perspective of this research means that the ultimate unity of life and knowledge, which involves the interrelating of incredibly complex elements, is a faith position and represents an abstract ideal, from a human perspective. A unified vision of life and knowledge exists solely within the purview of the omniscient God. The purview of any individual or group entails multiple perspectives on diverse and complex elements. These elements can be interrelated within alternative schemes that render various levels of unity versus conflict of different amounts of the elements. Added to this underdetermined reality is the fact that there is no single set of methodological principles that can be used to understand and represent this reality and knowledge.

Therefore, science and theology will not use the exact same methods and techniques in the exact same way. Nor will they produce the exact same knowledge from the exact same perspective. Yet, no a priori restriction can be made within this single (from a faith perspective) world of knowledge and no field may be accorded special privileges. Believers cannot hide behind a faith in revelation disconnected from life and atheists cannot hide behind a faith in scientism. Each field must compete in the public domain and show clarity in terms of stated abilities, scope, goals and method. This is no more an attempt to establish theology as the queen of the sciences than it is to accept scientism as king.

From the faith position of this research all true knowledge serves God and humankind, and co-operation and continuity as well as civil conflict and discontinuity between theological and non-theological approaches is envisaged. At base, all true scientific knowledge is in some way theological and all true theological knowledge is in some way scientific.

In order to support this argument I will now briefly look at further aspects of knowledge to show how they are complex and often not fully understood, and yet they are successfully used in the business of science and understanding. This complexity argues against the attempts of any single field to lay exclusive claim to them.

#### **2.4.1.2 The integral role of concepts of causation and explanation within knowledge**

Causation and explanation are key aspects of all knowledge and the various knowledge players will define and understand these concepts differently.

Christensen (1997: 26-28) suggests four objectives for science: description, explanation, prediction and control. Explanation concerns 'making something intelligible or understandable, as when we explain an event by showing why or how it occurred' (Kim 1999b: 298). This introduces the idea of causation: '[T]o ask for an explanation of an event is, often, to ask for its cause' (Kim 1999a: 125). Kim (1999a: 125) describes causation as 'the act of bringing about an effect, which may be an event, a state, or an object (say, a statue).' There 'usually are indefinitely many causal factors responsible for the occurrence of an event' (Kim 1999b: 298). An accident, for example, could be explained in terms of road conditions, faulty brakes or the fault of the driver. 'These explanations of *why* an event occurred are sometimes contrasted with

explanations of *how* an event occurred' (Kim 1999b: 298). This involves scientific explanation, using physics and laws of friction and velocity etc.

According to Kim (1999a: 125), '[T]he identification and systematic description of causal relations that hold in the natural world have been claimed to be the preeminent aim of science.' Philosophy of science nuances causation and differentiates between event causation, agent causation, backward causation etc (: 125-127). Each kind of causation can be broken down further. Event causation has been analysed in terms of the regularity analysis, which tries to explain events in terms of a covering law,<sup>17</sup> but this does not explain all events and other forms of analysis such as 'the counterfactual analysis, the manipulation analysis, and the probabilistic analysis' are also invoked (:126). The concept of causation remains controversial and unresolved, yet, it remains a vital concept in ordinary life and science. Some respond to the lack of clarity by treating it as 'a primitive', beyond further analysis, whereas others deny its reality in physics, calling it 'an anthropocentric projection' (:127).

Explanations of the interrelationships between aspects of observed reality and the role of causality involve hypotheses, laws and theories.

### 2.4.1.3 The role of concepts, laws and theories in knowledge

Barbour (1966: 139-141) clarifies the relationship between concepts, laws, theories and causality. Concepts such as 'mass' and 'acceleration' are not visible. They are 'mental constructs' and 'symbols' used to 'interpret observations' and 'organize experience'. Laws 'represent correlations between two or more concepts'. They are attempts to systematically order experience and 'describe observations in terms of regular patterns'. It is vital to note that 'concurrent variation' in the concepts in a law does not necessarily prove causation between these concepts. Theories are 'more comprehensive, connecting greater ranges of phenomena'; they explain previous laws and may generate further laws. At the same time they are 'further from direct observation', and demonstrate 'greater creativity and originality.'

A strong argument can be made for the value-laden, underdetermined, and hence provisional nature of theory, yet this is often underplayed in scientific approaches to knowledge. Christensen (1997: 35), for example, provides the following diagram of to illustrate the relationship between the scientific method and theory :

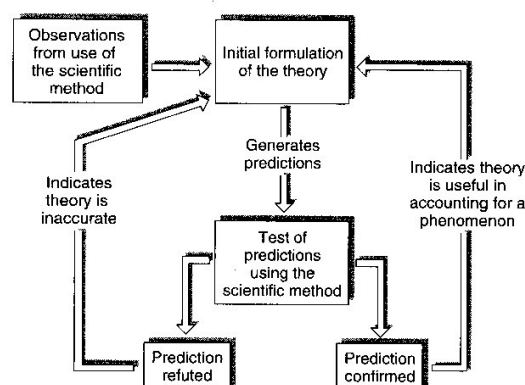


FIGURE 1.3 Illustration of the relationship between theory and research.

<sup>17</sup> In the covering-law 'model of scientific explanation, developed by Carl Hempel, a statement of particular or general fact is explained if and only if it is deduced from other statements which include at least one general scientific law' (Papineau 1995: 170).

The simplicity and positivism of this approach is striking. In this model theory is sandwiched within the scientific method. The implicit assumption is that the objective scientific method constrains the theory and that theory plays a small role in an otherwise very practical, experimental and objective endeavor. In reality, the scientific method is sandwiched within theory. It may arise out of theory or hypothesis<sup>18</sup> and it gives rise, in turn, to theory.

A strong argument can therefore be made for the complex nature of reality and the provisional and underdetermined nature of scientific methodology. As this methodology exists as the interface between reality and knowledge, knowledge, too, cannot be understood positivistically.

Scientism overlooks these problems and confidently continues to proclaim that science is closing in on all aspects of knowledge, thus conclusively nullifying the need for God. Apart from overlooking the above-mentioned provisionality and underdetermination, this confuses explanations of the mechanisms of reality with explanations of the ultimate basis of reality that make those very mechanisms possible.<sup>19</sup> It thus overlooks the issue of why our very endeavors at explanation should be possible, reliable or important. The scientific method can help in the formation of probabilistic explanations concerning the 'how' of life, but it has very little to say about the 'why'.

#### **2.4.1.4 The subject – object split: a priori versus a posteriori**

The tension between the objective and theoretical aspects of knowledge, outlined thus far, is further exacerbated in terms of classic philosophical issues such as the subject-object (idealist-realist) and a priori versus a posteriori (theory versus observation) problems.

In terms of how concepts and ideas may be acquired 'an a posteriori or empirical concept or idea is one that is derived from experience....In contrast, an a priori concept or idea is one that is not derived from experience...though the explicit realization of such a concept might still require experience as a "trigger"....[these are seen as] innate, either implanted in the mind by God or...resulting from evolutionary development. [examples of such concepts are] concepts of substance, causation, God, necessity, infinity, and many others' (BonJour 1999: 36). This problem correlates with the subject object problem and the issues of idealism versus realism. The question is, to what extent is that which the subject experiences (sees, perceives, is conscious of) determined by the object (a realist focus) as opposed to by the subject (an idealist focus).

The a priori / a posteriori distinction affects all aspects of the knowledge process: 'These two terms are primarily used to mark a distinction between (1) two modes of epistemic justification, together with derivative distinctions between (2) kinds of propositions, (3) kinds of knowledge,

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<sup>18</sup> A hypothesis is 'A hunch, speculation, or conjecture proposed as a possible solution to a problem, and requiring further investigation of its acceptability by argument or observation and experiment' (Belsey 1995: 385). '[T]he view that theories are first arrived at as creative hypotheses of the scientist's imagination and only then confronted, for justificatory purposes, with the observational predictions deduced from them, is called the hypothetico-deductive model of science. This model is contrasted with the view that the very discovery of hypotheses is somehow "generated" out of accumulated observational data' (Sklar 1999:700).

<sup>19</sup> An aspect of much naturalistic argument is to think that an additional synonymous explanation of the 'how' of knowledge explains ultimate cause and therefore explains away the possibility of a divine ultimate cause. This is equivalent to a person, who, having shot someone in a jealous rage, gives the following answer to the question, "Why did you shoot x?". "Because my finger squeezed the trigger, and the trigger released the hammer, which struck the bullet....' etc.

and (4) kinds of argument. They are also used to indicate a distinction between (5) two ways in which a concept or idea may be acquired' (BonJour 1999: 35).

It is generally accepted, even by realists, that the subject and the pre-understandings of the subject play a key role in perception. Thus, direct realism, which claims that the subject experiences a mind-independent object directly has been unsustainable, particularly for its inability to deal with the reality of 'error, illusion, and perceptual variation' (Delaney 1999b:194). Such experiences cannot be invariably correlated with the object and thus prove an object-independent aspect of the mind. Adapted forms of realism have thus developed. For example, critical realism believes that while 'the primary object of knowledge is the independent physical world, ... what is immediately present to consciousness is not the physical object as such, but some corresponding mental state' (:194).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into the details of the well-known history of this problem, where Kant attempted a synthesis between the a priori focus of rationalists like Descartes, Leibniz, and Spinoza and the a posteriori focus of the empiricists like Locke, Berkeley and Hume by creating a world of fact (for the sciences) and value (for religion). However, his solution remains problematic for all knowledge today and continues to fund the false dichotomies against which theology and pastoral care must continue to struggle. As Bloesch (1992: 26) states, 'Kant sought to limit reason to the phenomenal world, and the baneful result was an abysmal dichotomy between religious and historical truth, which still wreaks havoc in biblical and theological studies.' Kant's conclusions also explain the tensions that exist within theology today between theocentric and anthropocentric theology and between a high versus a low view of Scripture: 'If God is, in the strictest sense, unknowable, then the proper object and study for theology is not God but man's religious states and sentiments and their individual and communal expressions. Theology becomes anthropocentric.... Similarly, within such anthropocentrism, the Scriptures will be seen as a descriptive record of human religious experience, but as having no authority beyond this' (Geldard 1988:par 7).

However, numerous challenges exist to Kant's solution (see 1.8.5). The basic irony in Kant's system is that it uses a speculative mode of reasoning, which is not strictly scientific, to strictly distinguish knowledge of God from true scientific knowledge. Kant's division is therefore, not ultimately authoritative and theology and pastoral care do not need to be limited by its categories.

#### **2.4.1.5 Inference: deduction, induction, and abduction**

From the above sections, it is clear that science involves an interaction between the empirical and the rational and the exact nature of this interaction is not fully understood. Data (arising out of an interaction between a priori and a posteriori dynamics) interacts with our inner mental state causing inference, 'the upgrading or adjustment of belief in the light of the play of new information upon current beliefs' (Woods 1995: 407). Inferential knowledge, which relies on inferring something from something else is distinguished from non-inferential knowledge, which seems 'obvious and self-evident', such as the knowledge that 7 equals 7 (Davis 1999: 428).

Deduction, induction and abduction are three possible modes of inference (Woods 1995: 407). In deductive arguments the premises are thought to guarantee the truth of the conclusions and are normally limited to 'inferences that follow from definitions, mathematics and rules of formal logic' (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: *deduction* par 4). Such statements or propositions are called analytic, a priori, basic, necessary or non-inferential. The related terms in inductive reasoning are a posteriori, contingent and inferential



Clearly, for scientific knowledge to grow and for common sense human knowledge to operate, more than deduction is needed. Vickers (2008: sect 1.2 par 3) clarifies how 'inductions are *ampliative*...[expanding our] empirical knowledge' in contrast to the '*explicative*' nature of deduction, which 'rearranges our knowledge without adding to its content.'

Induction can be defined as 'conclusion based on evidence: a generalization based on observed instances, or the making of such generalizations, in the usual working method of scientists' (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version) or as 'inference from particular to general' (Cohen 1995:405).

These definitions are not at all uncontroversial. According to Vickers (2008: sect1 par1) induction as currently understood 'infers neither from observation nor from particulars and does not lead to general laws or principles.' According to Trout (1999: 939) Hume questions the assumptions of uniformity in nature, which are necessary for inductive reasoning, calling it 'question-begging or illicitly metaphysical' and Popper has equally critiqued the faith-based nature of this reasoning. Since theories can only be falsified, and can never be confirmed or verified, Popper (In Vickers 2008: sect 4.2 par 1) states, '[A] theory of induction is superfluous. It has no function in a logic of science.'

Vickers (2008: sect 3.1 par 2) suggests that Hume's dilemma is lessened due to the current expanded way of looking at causality, where 'empirical confirmation by instances is a sort of enumerative induction.' He refers to deductively established laws of probability: 'The laws of large numbers, the foundation of inductive inferences relating frequencies and probabilities, are mathematical consequences of the laws of probability and hence necessary truths' (Vickers 2008: sect 7.3 par 1). Ultimate proof and verification are impossible and become replaced with probability where 'evidence is *sufficiently* strong or ... the probability is *sufficiently* high to warrant the acceptance of the hypothesis' (Rudner in Vickers 2008: sect 6,1 par 1). Vickers (2008: sect 6.1 par 1) states that this is how inference operates in everyday life, and induction thus becomes founded on common sense, pragmatism, or practical reason (Vickers 2008: sect 7.5 par1). Vickers insists that this is not blind trust: '[W]e can winnow out the ephemera of experience to find what is fundamental and enduring' (Ramsey in Vickers 2008: sect 7.5 par1).

Vickers' (2008: sect 7.4 par 1) extended argument champions induction and, indirectly, the scientific method. He follows the well-trodden Kantian path of separating science and induction from revelation. He asks: 'Why not consult sacred writings, or "the wisdom of crowds" to explain and predict the movements of the planets, the weather, automotive breakdowns or the evolution of species?' He answers that 'The great advantage of induction is not that it can be justified or validated, as can deduction, but that it can, with care and some luck, correct itself, as other methods do not' (: sect 7.5 par 1). He leaves no doubt that induction is our best bet and it is separate from theological concerns: 'Perhaps the most robust contemporary approaches to the question of inductive soundness are naturalized epistemology and its variety evolutionary epistemology. These look at inductive reasoning as a natural process, the product, from the point of view of the latter, of evolutionary forces' (: sect 7.6 par 1).

This research argues strongly against the imagined science-religion divide and the inconsistent reasoning proposed by Vickers needs to be strongly challenged. If one follows Vickers' argument closely it is clear that he smuggles in naturalistic presuppositions, but he gives no properly scientific basis for doing so; his conclusions are mere assumptions, lacking any proof. His championing of a naturalistic worldview over a theistic one is unwarranted and faith-based.

All knowledge poses a dilemma for the naturalist. If our current reality arose from blind evolutionary, naturalistic forces, there are no reasons to hold to the regularity and meaning that science assumes. Suggesting that naturalistic evolutionary explanations are the most 'robust'

approach to induction is unfounded. Plantinga (1994), for example, has argued that a naturalized view of evolution lacks warrant.

If evolution arises out of chance and is simply about survival then truth-value is completely irrelevant. Religion, for example, is explained away as a useful fiction that aided survival. One cannot admit the possibility of useful fictions in religion and then attempt to argue for reliability and realism when it comes to science and knowledge. Naturalized epistemology is a contradiction in terms. If knowledge is in any way true it is probabilistically theological. For it to be in any way reliable it must be unchanging (not capricious, or instrumental) and coherent. Unchanging coherence and intelligibility do not prove God but they strongly point in that direction and they certainly open wide the door that exists between transcendent reality and this world of public activity and knowledge. Hume, Kant and all succeeding naturalists tried to nail that door shut but light from outside has always crept in around the edges. The time is long overdue for that door to be thrown wide open. This is not an attempt to prove God positivistically. This research merely tries to put theism and naturalism on an equal epistemological footing in the public square on the basis of the way knowledge actually operates.

Therefore, despite the efforts of those like Vickers, Hume's dilemma stands. Applying the term "law" to probability does not make it necessary or basic. The conclusion drawn that we can trust induction because it works is evading the issue. A natural part of the knowledge quest is to ask why knowledge is possible. The theologian can rightly claim that this suggestively points to God and that it makes a positivistic rejection of theology and revelation problematic. Vickers' use of terms like 'value judgments', 'trust', and 'luck' is commendable as it admits the strict positivism of objective inductive knowledge *in favour of science* is impossible to maintain. However, one of the foundation stones of positivism, the rejection of religion, remains firmly in place. This is the caricature of faith and the use of the Scriptures as blind trust. The implied attitude is that 'the scientific method may not be as objective as we thought, but it's the best we have and it's better than the blind faith that operates in religion and in the use of the Bible.'

Induction, therefore, remains problematic, especially when held to positivistically. The concept of abduction, a third kind of inference has been developed in response to this. As this is strongly tied to the issue of authority and warrant it will be dealt with in chapter four.

#### **2.4.2 The nature of experience within natural scientific and theological knowledge**

'Experience' is a term with many related meanings. This is shown in the following dictionary definitions: 'active involvement in an activity or exposure to events or people over a period of time, leading to an increase in knowledge and skill'; 'the knowledge of and skill in something gained through being involved in it or exposed to it over a period of time'; 'something that happens to somebody, or an event that somebody is involved in'; 'direct personal awareness of or contact with a particular thing'; 'knowledge acquired through the senses rather than through abstract reasoning.' (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version)

Within popular understanding, the term 'experience' is subjective and personal. In the context of the scientific method, however, it refers to the empirical method, an attempt at objectivity. The scientific experiment is a unique kind of experience where instruments, controls and, carefully operationalized statements attempt to constrain the reality under examination to its true form (eliminating interpretations, perceptions or understandings that are false). The goal is that the experiment can be replicated by other scientists and that any non-experimental factors like symbolic concepts and theories that interact with the experiment are subjected to peer review and are adapted in line with further experimental results and input from other scientists.

Within the subjective and hermeneutical approach to knowledge of this research this strict separation between subjective and objective knowledge is unwarranted. According to this approach all of the above dictionary definitions have relevance in both theological and natural scientific knowledge, albeit with different permutations. This needs to be borne in mind as we examine the distinct nature of scientific versus theological experience.

In the natural sciences an experiment/experience deals with realities that are generally measurable and that have a persistent presence in time and space. This enables similar experiments/experiences, dealing with similar realities, to be reproduced by scientists in any country, irrespective of their language, culture, values, character and attitude.

Theology does not deal with an identical subject matter. Firstly, historical events that are integral to theology (such as the Israelite exodus from Egypt and the resurrection of Christ) are by definition once-off occurrences and are therefore not subject to repeatable scientific experiment and verification. Similarly, much of theology relates to a future hope, and potential eschatological verification equally lies beyond the scientific method. Secondly, many of the key realities in theology, such as the invisible God (Rm 1: 20; Col 1: 15; 1Tm1: 17; Heb 11: 27), the church as the body of Christ (Rm 12: 5; 1 Cor 12: 20,27; Eph 3: 6, 4: 4,25) and the reality of God's work of salvation, making us a new creation in Christ, (Rm 10: 10; 1Cor 6: 11; Tt 3: 4-7; 2Cor5: 17, etc.) cannot be directly verified or reproduced with the scientific method.

The diversity of experience and interpretation, as well as the bitter conflict and aggression, within religion generally and Christianity specifically can be strongly contrasted with the far greater consistency within the natural scientific community. Whereas factors such as culture and values do not fundamentally affect natural scientific results, they seem to be determining factors in religious doctrine and practice. It is only a short step to concluding that, unlike natural science, religious or theological knowledge is not knowledge at all but merely invention or projection of previously established beliefs.

The highly interpretive and flexible nature of religious interpretation of experience also undermines claims of religious knowledge. For example, a sickness can be interpreted as a demonic attack, a punishment by God, a loving correction by God, a natural phenomenon not directly caused by God or demonic forces, or a mysterious and underdetermined experience with multiple potential causes, depending on one's religious context.

In direct contrast, the natural explanation of experience (the bio-medical explanation of sickness in this instance) is accessible to the scientific method and thus represents a stable and repeatable explanation, across different cultures and contexts (as long as they operate with the natural scientific method). This stability contributes to reductionistic, natural explanations of all religious experiences, for that which is stable and controllable is easily preferred to that which is ambiguous and elusive.

A great divide, therefore, seems to exist between natural science and religion, with the former dealing with reliable knowledge and the latter with speculation and fantasy (whether harmless or dangerous). However, several arguments can be made that challenge this neat dichotomy.

There are many good factors in this scientific understanding of experience, but, as discussed already, when applied positivistically as empiricism,<sup>20</sup> it is problematic. Empiricism fails to notice the extent that experience and controlled experiments do not operate in strict isolation from theory and hypothesis. Subjective factors such as temperament and worldview affect the type of

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<sup>20</sup> Empiricism is ultimately derived from the Greek *empeiria* (experience) and claims 'experience has primacy in human knowledge and justified belief' (Wolterstorff 1999: 262).

questions asked, the areas researched, and the nature of the methodology. Empiricism also fails to account for the subjective dynamics that occur around the underdetermination between theory and data. When the data can be matched to differing yet equally possible interpretations, the necessary choices that need to be made take us into the realm of subjective decisions, rather than strict empirical method.

The wider context of the scientific community and the mechanism of peer review clearly provide a corrective to subjective bias in scientific experiment, but it is possible for blind spots and biases to exist at communal and institutional levels as well. This is apparent in the way that a naively glorified view of experience/experiment can become the controlling ethos in movements and institutions as a whole, including their publications and journals. Out of this controlling ethos natural science (and some forms of social science) becomes the only domain that can validly lay claim to this controlled methodology, with the result that only experimentally-based sciences can claim to be dealing with knowledge.

The experience of God and spiritual realities like redemption are necessarily different from the experience of nature and the controlled and reproducible answers sought in natural science; this control and reproducibility is not possible or even desirable in theology. Nevertheless, a completely incoherent, arbitrary or unreliable picture is not suggested in Scripture or theology. The Bible contains much appeal to experience and we are not called to believe blindly (Dt 18: 21-22; Ps 34: 8; Lk 5: 22-24; Jn 7: 17, 10: 38; Gl 1: 20; 2Pt 1: 16; 1Jn 1: 1-2, 2: 21).

We can experience God and believe that He exists and that we are in relationship with Him on the basis of these experiences. This is repeatable and confirmable by anyone in any culture, but the conditions of religious experiences are very different from those for concrete, scientific experiments, as is appropriate when dealing with an intentional being, as opposed to dumb, comparatively passive matter. The context of the experience/experiment is much harder to define and control and the character of the person takes on key significance. Without the attitude of openness and humility the experiment/experience will fail. 'Show me an irrefutable sign, like writing in the sky and I will believe!' proclaims the New Atheist proudly. But Jesus replies, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah' (Mt 12:39).

God has given us evidence, which, while not positivistically irrefutable, is sufficient for abundant life and reliable knowledge. This evidence occurs through creation (Rm 1:20), in the death and resurrection of Jesus (Mt 12:39-40) and in the internal, witnessing presence of God through the Holy Spirit, who is able to interact with all aspects of our being, intellectual, emotional and volitional (Jn 14:26, 15:26; Rm 8:14-15; Gl 4:6; Eph 1:17-18; Phlp 2:13; 1Jn 5:9-10, 20). In addition to the internal witness of the Holy Spirit, Scripture also suggests that knowledge (in the dual sense of experience and confirmation) occurs as we live out the gospel in our real life contexts (Jn 7:17, 8:31-32; 1Jn 3: 18-19). As Bloesch (1992: 21-22) explains, 'the decision of faith is as important as the fact of revelation in giving us certainty of the truth of faith... we do not claim a rationally demonstrable or apodictic certainty nor even an intuitive or axiomatic certainty; instead we have a practical or moral certainty that is ever fully more realized in a life of repentance and obedience.'

Theology also has its own form of peer review. The history of theology, starting with Scripture itself, bears testimony to profound and vigorous discussion and challenge, resulting in correction and reformation of doctrine and practice.

Thus, theological knowledge is not positivistic knowledge that can be known irrefutably without faith. However, the majority of the knowledge and methodology of the natural sciences is subject to this same limitation. The neat Kantian dichotomy where we can use human faculties

and the reality of knowledge processes in natural science but not with regard to God is not scientific or ethical. Jesus' rebuke for the failure to recognize the visitation of God through the use of God-given faculties of understanding still applies today (Lk 12:54-57). Jesus referred to observing and interpreting natural elements in order to predict the weather (a form of inductive science, however primitive). In today's context the critique could be translated into a criticism of the use of God-given faculties to develop and extend the truly marvelous current corpus of scientific knowledge while refusing to use these faculties for knowing God and spiritual realities.

This defence of the validity of religious experience as a form of knowledge is not intended as a naive positivism with regard to the truth of the gospel. There are numerous difficulties and seeming contradictions and offences in Christianity and the Scriptures. Nevertheless, these can be tackled in a careful, scientific and hermeneutical manner, one at a time. But this requires openness, humility and a surrendering of false dichotomies. Furthermore, it requires a surrender of false prejudice against the possibility of experiencing God. As Plantinga (1981) has argued, our experience of God is properly basic and we do not need to doubt it any more than we doubt our experience of other minds.

This is not to hide from scientific refutation. But this refutation must occur hermeneutically and in terms of the appropriate criteria for evaluating scientific theories, such as agreement with observations, coherence, and comprehensiveness (Barbour 1966: 144-146). The experience of God and the theoretical worldview of Christianity can fulfill these criteria as long as they are fairly applied. The unfair application, which rejects the invisible, hermeneutical elements of Christianity, actually ends up nullifying much of science as well.

Every single experiment/experience of God is personal and contextual. These experiences are adapted to, as well as simultaneously constrained and facilitated by, the unique personalities, culture and circumstance of each person and group involved. In other words, diversity of religious interpretation need not always signal error; it can also signal the complex, multi-faceted nature of truth, which God adapts to our context and abilities, or, conversely, which is incompletely yet validly discerned through our context and abilities.

The common repeatable experiment that I am talking about is the experience of God proving that Jesus is Lord and Saviour. This is not naively stated apart from experience and reason. To use epistemological language, it is based on inference to the best explanation.

A theological stance can therefore validly propose the supremacy of God's grace in all areas (epistemologically and existentially) and a consistency in theological knowledge can be plausibly entertained. One person may experience God in nature and another in reading a book. Different people will experience different aspects of God at different times. But consist patterns remain possible. All people who truly experience God will talk of strongly overlapping concepts of perfect goodness and power and holiness and grace.

In conclusion, this research argues that experience, a concept that expresses the interaction between the created world and our minds and that is related to knowledge in the existential and epistemological sense, reflects a God-given, grace-filled reality which, contrary to Kant, was given as much to know God as it was to know the physical world. A strict dichotomy cannot be validly sustained. This is a faith statement, but so was Kant's conclusion. It must be remembered that experience in this general common sense understanding existed long before the modern scientific method. Modern science is therefore joining an existing conversation, in which it is but one dialogue partner among many.

### 2.4.3 Consciousness and the subjective mental ‘faculties’ involved in the process of knowledge: reason, faith, imagination, and intuition

I will now examine the dynamics and mental ‘faculties’ arising out of consciousness (reason, faith, imagination, and intuition) and their role in knowledge formation. The term ‘faculties’ is placed in inverted commas to indicate that their ontological versus metaphorical status remains mysterious. For the most part I will be talking about these ‘faculties’ in the context of natural science versus theology, as this represents one of the strongest tensions that exists in knowledge today. I will be using the term theology in an inclusive sense, intending the inclusion of spirituality and experience of God.

#### 2.4.3.1 The disputed and mysterious nature of consciousness

Mental acts (one can replace the word ‘acts’ with processes, behaviour, dynamics, faculties, etc.) such as reasoning or imagining are clearly fully integrated with the brain (as the latest scientific brain imaging technology demonstrates). However, the nature of mind and consciousness remains highly problematic.

Thinkers in all fields have long struggled with the mind body problem and dualism has generally been replaced with physicalism. Pitt (2008: sect 1 par 4) comments that many contemporary philosophers of mind, along with cognitive scientists, believe that ‘the mind can be *naturalized* — i.e., that all mental facts have explanations in the terms of natural science.... [providing] accounts of mental states and processes in terms (ultimately) of features of the brain and central nervous system.’

Searle (2007: 325-334) provides a good example of an attempt to explain consciousness as a purely biological and natural phenomenon, describing ‘biological naturalism as scientifically sophisticated common sense’ (: 324). He uses numerous philosophically dependent (!) arguments to insist that consciousness is ‘entirely caused by brain processes, it is located in the brain’ (: 329). He concludes: ‘Given the facts as we know them...and various philosophical theories, I will take the facts any time. Furthermore, I am confident that in the long run, the facts will prevail over the theories that will come to seem more and more obsolete’ (: 334). He suggests that the lack of universal acceptance of biological naturalism is only due to a false teaching tradition that invents ‘difficulty’ and ‘mystery’, concluding: ‘Once we overcome the mistakes of the tradition, I think the facts will fall naturally into place’ (: 334).

Less positivistically, Frith and Rees (2007:10-22) examine the history of the scientific approach to consciousness and claim, ‘Despite much progress consciousness remains as elusive as ever. Some difficulties have been resolved, but new ones have emerged’ (: 17).

Similarly, Tye (2007: 23-35) examines various philosophical problems of consciousness (including the problems of ownership, mechanism, and unity), and concludes that ‘These...problems of consciousness.... form perhaps the hardest nut to crack in all of philosophy – so hard that some philosophers of mind, not generally opposed to substantive philosophical theorizing, see little hope of coming to a satisfactory understanding of phenomenal consciousness’ (: 34).

Chalmers (2007a: 225-235) discusses the hard problems of phenomenal consciousness (or ‘conscious experience’), which he distinguishes from the easier, scientifically accessible problems such as ‘the ability...to react to environmental stimuli’ or ‘the difference between wakefulness and sleep’ (: 235). He states, ‘The hard problem of consciousness is the problem of *experience*.... If any problem qualifies as the problem of consciousness, it is this one. In this central sense of “consciousness,” an organism is conscious if there is something it’s like to be

that organism, and a mental state is conscious if there is something it's like to be in that state' (: 226).

Chalmers (2007a: 232-233) resists the reductionist explanation of conscious experience (even through recourse to quantum theory). He suggests that reductionist explanation only applies to 'physical *structures*.' This is logically explained as follows: 'The facts about experience cannot be an automatic consequence of any physical account, as it is conceptually coherent that any given process could exist without experience. Experience may *arise* from the physical, but it is not *entailed* by the physical' (: 233)

Chalmers (2007b: 359-368) resorts to 'naturalistic dualism' in order to support a nonreductive explanation of consciousness. He suggests that views that see the problem of consciousness as 'too hard for our limited minds' or 'outside the domain of scientific theory' as prematurely pessimistic (: 359). He proposes treating consciousness as a fundamental, an entity that cannot 'be explained in terms of anything simpler', similar to the fundamentals such as mass and space-time in physics. While no attempt is made to explain these fundamentals 'in terms of anything simpler', they can still be used in theories and as 'basic principles' used to explain 'phenomena...at a higher level' (: 359).

This research argues that physicalism is a faith position and theorists should not be allowed to proclaim it as hard science.

An example of a challenge to physicalism is mental causation (Robb & Heil 2008: Intro par 1). The exact nature of mental ontology and functioning is highly complex and disputed. According to Thomas (2007: intro par1), mental imagery 'is *quasi-perceptual experience*; it resembles perceptual experience, but occurs in the absence of the appropriate external stimuli.' He explains that the 'subjective and introspective' nature of imagery has caused some to 'question whether there is any place for a concept such as imagery within a truly scientific worldview' (Thomas 2007:sect 1.1 par 1). This serves as a further example of the blindness and circular reasoning of scientism. Rather than question naturalism and acknowledge these pointers to transcendence, scientism ends up distorting reality. If a strictly naturalistic view of life means that significant swathes of data, common-sense understanding and experience of life have to be ignored then the strictly naturalistic view should be questioned.

Thus, although reduction in neuroscience in order to focus on the physical aspects of thought and consciousness is appropriate, the conclusion that there is no transcendent reality to a human being is a metaphysical assumption and should be acknowledged as such.

I will not go further into the complexity of what I understand to be the single unified physical/mental/spiritual/transcendent/emergent/intentional nature of consciousness with its issues of will, ideas, perception, thoughts, beliefs, memory, image, proposition, etc, except to say that they quite reasonably operate as hints of transcendence. It is to this issue of reason and reasonableness that I now turn

#### **2.4.3.2 Reason**

Garber (1999: 771) explains that 'the very term "reason" is not altogether clear. Often it designates a faculty of the soul, distinct from sensation, imagination, and memory, which is the ground of a priori knowledge. But there are other conceptions...[such as Pascal's distinguishing of reason from] "knowledge of the heart," or the computational conception of reason Hobbes advances.'

The concept of reason is intimately linked to ethics and truth. In terms of ethics, rational 'actions, beliefs, or desires' are assumed to be normative and desirable. The problem is that rationality can be ascribed to competing beliefs and actions (Gert 1999: 772). In terms of truth, reason clearly plays a vital role. However, rationalism, 'the position that reason has precedence over other ways of acquiring knowledge, or, more strongly, that it is the unique path to knowledge' (Garber 1999: 771) is problematic.

Just as scientism tries to positivistically use the God-given gift of experience to establish knowledge without reference to God, rationalism does the same with the God-given gift of reason. The same problems that undermine scientism affect rationalism.

The impossibility of using reason as an ultimate foundation for truth and ethics is shown in the failure of the philosophical attempt to define knowledge as justified true belief (the 'standard analysis').

Belief is a starting point for knowledge, providing the necessary 'dispositional psychological states' out of which a knower relates to propositions, without implying assent (Moser 1999b: 274). However, for a belief to be more than mere opinion or fancy, thus qualifying as knowledge, it must somehow be related to a real or true state of affairs. This project is stifled by its strict categories at the very outset. It is unclear what constitutes a real state of affairs, or what truth is. It is also unclear how we can justify any belief as true. Although correspondence, coherence and pragmatic value have classically been appealed to, each of these criteria can be challenged and deconstructed through postmodern play. This valid challenge to positivism is often invalidly extended into the extreme of denying the possibility of all truth.

Brümmer (1981:187) further underscores how this rationalist understanding of truth is problematic. In terms of rationalism we can only be sure of indubitable, self-verifying propositions and those that deal with our own sensory experience and introspection. This position cannot justify anything that 'transcends my immediate experiences at the moment I am having them. No beliefs about the past, about the reality of other minds or about a reality beyond my direct experience could be justified...virtually all knowledge becomes impossible! Rationalism leads to skepticism.'

However, we do not limit ourselves to knowledge in this sense. Rationalists thus demonstrate inconsistency between their philosophical foundations and their real life experiences. Therefore, for rationalism the issue of justification or normativity becomes extremely difficult. A rationalist will attempt to justify everything (if reason replaces God, as it does in the rationalist scheme it is inadvertently forced to take on the role of omnipotence and omniscience.) As a consequence, the rationalist will attempt to justify his actual belief, his philosophical foundations, his knowledge conclusions (his real life experience of knowledge), and the relationship between them. But, as mentioned above, these elements do not reveal the foundationally observable coherence and connections that rationalism is seeking. One can therefore move beyond the limitations of rationalism and consider an expanded view of knowledge (faith, experience and reason, inextricably and mysteriously united on the basis of a knowledge of God, for example) or one can remain within the limitations of rationalism and embrace a skeptical, relativistic and pragmatic approach to life and knowledge, as certain forms of postmodernism have done.

I suggest that rationalism is an alien scheme that is forced upon life and reality. Reason, which is only one aspect of mental functioning, which is in turn only one aspect of a complex knowledge reality, is made to over-function in order to allow the proponent of rationalism to stand above all reality. When rationalism is applied to Scripture, for example, the latter is



misunderstood. While Scripture is highly rational,<sup>21</sup> it is also poetic and transcendent and it challenges our finite understanding. We can choose to humbly approach its mysteries and find our reason challenged and ultimately strengthened as it attains new heights of understanding. Often we would rather reduce it to our level of rationalistic understanding, domesticating it as a purely human book or discarding it as superstitious nonsense. This rationalistic a priori exclusion of theological perspectives, Scripture and ultimately God is unreasonable.

### 2.4.3.3. Faith

This research argues that all knowledge involves faith and that faith is in fact inextricably woven into the very fabric of all aspects of humanity and social processes. One finds faith in the simplest of actions, like sitting on a chair, all the way through to the highest scientific activities, which rely on faith in the laws of the universe

The relationship between faith and reason and the role of the human versus the divine agent in faith are critical epistemological issues. For Christians, however, the existential ramifications of faith are of foremost concern. Its vital role in our relationship to God and spirituality is richly attested to in Scripture and church tradition.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of non-theological views of knowledge, belief is understood to be necessary. The standard analysis of knowledge as justified true belief indicates that faith is an intimate part of knowledge. Of course, non-theological realms do not mean faith as it is meant in theology. Their understanding of belief is 'a dispositional psychological state in virtue of which a person will assent to a proposition under certain conditions' (Moser 1999b: 78).

The attempt to understand belief in non-theological terms and to attempt to justify it rationally has failed and again points towards seeing belief and all knowledge as a gift from God.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, as McGrath (2001: 238) explains, non-theological realms continue to disparage faith:

Since the time of the Enlightenment, the word 'faith' has come to mean something like a 'lower form of knowledge.' Faith is understood to mean 'partial knowledge,' characterized by a degree of uncertainty, and based upon either a lack of evidence, or evidence that is inadequate to convince

<sup>21</sup> At numerous points the Bible uses sound deductive logic (Mt 22: 42-45). Willard (1995) explains that we do not associate Jesus with intelligence, due to our own cultural and historical conditioning. Nevertheless His logic and intelligence is brilliant. Paul is also a brilliant thinker and consistent reasoner, appealing 'to reason (Gk. *nous*) by which people perceive what is good and right in specific situations (2 Cor. 10:5; Rom. 12:2; 14:5; cf. the verb *nouthetein*, "to put in the right mind, encourage", in 1 Thess. 5:12, 14; 1 Cor. 4:14; Rom. 15:14). He calls for discernment and responsible choice (1 Thess. 5:21; Gal. 6:2-5; Rom. 12:2; 14:22-23; Phil. 1:9-11). He appeals to the conscience which is, in part, rooted in God's universally revealed law and wisdom (Rom. 2:15) and which provides evaluation of one's own moral conduct (cf. 1 Cor. 4:4; 2 Cor. 1:12; Rom. 13:5). Paul does not look for blind obedience but calls for understanding, so linking his ethics with the wisdom tradition (cf. Col. 1:28; 3:16)' (Schnabel 2000b: par 21).

<sup>22</sup> In the Bible believing is a critical aspect of, and is in fact synonymous with, being a Christian. Michel (in Morris 1993b: par1) states that the vital role of faith is uniquely Christian: 'neither Qumran, nor John the Baptist, nor yet the ancient zealot movements made any explicit demand of faith'; by contrast, 'Christianity is a unique faith-event.' Although the actual word 'faith' is hardly used in the Old Testament, the relational dynamics it represents are very much present and are expressed in commonly found words such as 'believe', 'trust' and 'hope' (Morris 1996: par1). In the NT, on the other hand, in addition to similar indirect pointers to the reality of faith, the actual word 'faith' abounds. 'The Greek noun *pistis* and the verb *pisteuō* both occur more than 240 times, while the adjective *pistos* is found 67 times' (Morris 1996: par 5).

<sup>23</sup> 'A biblical aspect of man's nature, necessary for gaining knowledge of God and other people, is also required to gain knowledge of a purely scientific nature as well' (Neidhardt in Henry vol 1 1976: 169). Henry (1976 vol 1: 169) summarizes Neidhardt's view: 'Faith does not supply the data of knowledge, Neidhardt emphasizes, but it provides the "keystone idea" or pattern that best fits and explains the data.'

fully. Kant argued that faith is basically a belief which is held on grounds that are subjectively adequate, but objectively inadequate.

The New Atheists take this misunderstanding to ridiculous extremes and Dawkins (2006:6) refers to believers 'as dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads [who] are immune to argument.' The suggestion is that believers, like drug users ('pot-heads') have had their brains and mental faculties 'fried' and rendered dysfunctional through the drug of faith. This accusation is not new; Marx described religion as the opiate of the masses. Although the New Atheists caricatures are easy to refute, they merely represent the most extreme form of a general presupposition that faith is irreconcilable with knowledge and any theology or pastoral care that is done in the public sphere will have to take this false understanding into account. When theology and pastoral care avoid the difficult task of fully grappling with knowledge, as it is understood by non-theological spheres, they inadvertently reinforce this caricature of faith.

Far from contradicting experience and reason, Scripture explicitly and implicitly appeals to them. Nevertheless, the Bible does not allow one to be fooled by the false claims of empiricism and rationalism. Appropriate faith is not the fearful and irrational suppression of valid, rational incredulity. It is rather the rational, overcoming of invalid, irrational incredulity. A common perception is that doubt, in and of itself, is a virtue and is a sign of a correctly functioning mind. In this view belief and certainty become a kind of mental sickness and are even seen as evil. But such a view is self-contradictory. To be truly radical in doubt you need to doubt doubt itself and thus accept the possibility of belief. As Willard (1995) claims, neither belief nor unbelief can claim any automatic priority. Both belief and unbelief can be held rationally or irrationally and both belief and unbelief require responsibility and justification.

Faith, as it is represented in the Bible, is robust and vital. 'The language of faith ("believe," "trust," "faithful," "reliable," etc.) is essential to human relationships in general, but gains its special biblical connotations from the interaction of God with humanity, his reliability and our response of trust in him' (France 1992: par 1).

It is clear that in Scripture, faith is a ubiquitous concept that is vital for salvation and for knowledge. Furthermore, faith, knowledge, relationship and righteousness are inseparably linked. Taylor (2000: par 2) shows that faith and faithfulness are distinct in the English language, whereas in Scripture 'the difference between the concepts is minimized by a more relational framework.' This is a vital point and I argue that the intractable difficulties that secular knowledge has in trying to separate fact and value indicates that they form an indivisible unity. Unlike certain secular view of knowledge, the scriptural view does not violate common sense and our everyday experience.

Nevertheless, this single unity can be fruitfully examined from two perspectives: 'A common traditional distinction is that between *assensus*, assent, and *fiducia*, trust. While trust in God and in his Son, Jesus Christ, is of paramount importance in Scripture and in Christian experience, clearly what we believe (i.e. assent to) is also of considerable practical importance. What we believe tends to determine our attitudes and behaviour' (Martin 1988: par 5). Although faith in the Bible is concerned with believing specific facts<sup>24</sup> the focus remains on faith as a vital factor in

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<sup>24</sup> 'The verb *pisteuō* is often followed by "that", indicating that faith is concerned with facts, though there is more to it than that' (Morris 1996: par6).

knowing and being in relationship with God.<sup>25</sup> Even the facts that are to be believed are those that are vital to relationship with God, as opposed to being an end in themselves.<sup>26</sup>

The vital, foundational role of faith is further shown in the way that the verb is used in an absolute sense throughout the NT, by different writers: 'When Jesus stayed with the Samaritans many of them "believed because of his word" (Jn. 4:41). There is no need to add what they believed, or in whom they believed. Faith is so central to Christianity that one may speak of "believing" without the necessity for further clarification' (Morris 1996: par9).

It is fair to conclude that within a Christian framework faith is so critical for appropriate knowledge, inter-personal relationships, and behaviour that it almost becomes synonymous (or at least inseparably correlated) with them.

#### 2.4.3.4 Acknowledging the role of imagination and intuition in knowledge

Imagination and intuition clearly pose a difficulty to the reductionism of scientism and physicalism. There is philosophical controversy over the exact ontological status of mental images and their exact role in mental processes. Nevertheless, they remain an important aspect of knowledge.

Martin (1995: 395) describes imagination as 'the power of the mind to consider things which are not present to the senses, and to consider that which is not taken to be real. Just as the imaginary contrasts with the real, so imagination contrasts with both perception and cognition.'

Intuition is variously defined as 'an alleged direct relation, analogous to visual seeing, between the mind and something abstract and so not accessible to the senses' (Lacey 1995b: 415), or 'knowing something instinctively...without having to discover or perceive it...or [,philosophically,] immediate knowledge of something' (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version).

Imagination has played an important role in thinkers like Hume and Kant as they tried to bridge the seemingly irreconcilable gap between an a priori, rationalistic, cognition focus and an a posteriori, empirical, perception focus. It has also been turned to as a response to the dismissal of religious knowledge by Enlightenment rationalism. Hamann (In Wilkens 2000: 26), for example, states, 'Faith, is not the work of reason, and therefore cannot succumb to its attack, because faith arises just as little from reason as tasting and seeing do.'

This focus on imagination has continued today. According to Seerveld (1988: par 5), theologians such as Gordon D. Kaufman, David Tracy and Paul Ricoeur 'believe that human imagination provides a more supple context than strict analysis in which to discuss God and to imagine truly what God wants done today.'

In terms of the scientific method, imagination and intuition are untrustworthy and need to be corroborated by the said method. Nevertheless, imagination plays a role in all parts of the scientific process and the implicit presuppositions one needs to make to perform science (like the uniformity of nature) are intuitive. Philosophically, intuition strongly correlates with basic or necessary knowledge, but it can be evaluated rationally for truth or falsehood.

<sup>25</sup> 'It is a distinctively Christian feature that the verb *pisteuō* ("to believe") is often followed by the preposition *epi* ("on") or *eis* ("into").... This brings out the truth that Christians rest their faith "on" Jesus or are brought "into" union with him' (Morris 1993b: par 2).

<sup>26</sup> This can be seen, for example, in the way that Jesus refused to satisfy intellectual curiosity as an end in itself and focused on bringing people into relationship with himself (Jn 5: 39-40, 21: 22). This focus contrasts with the focus of certain Athenians and foreigners whom Paul met in Athens, who 'spent their time doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas' (Ac 17: 21).

Intuition and imagination sit well with theology and one naturally talks of spiritual intuition and the religious imagination. The presence of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit are often experienced as a form of intuition and they strongly presence themselves in our imagination. Nevertheless, Scripture does not encourage blind trust in our imaginative and intuitive faculties and encourages discernment and testing for truth-value, requiring the faculties of reason and experience (1 Jn 4: 1; 1 Th 5: 21; Heb 5: 14). Intuition and imagination are therefore vital aspects of knowledge, but they can be linked to truth or error.

Knowledge of spiritual matters like God, Heaven, and salvation cannot be accessed through our senses and the scientific method. They require an interaction between experience, reason, faith, intuition and imagination. It is easy to dismiss this as non-knowledge, pure fantasy that is out of touch with reality. But being 'in touch with reality' completely depends on how one defines 'reality', a radically disputed and underdetermined concept, to this day.

#### **2.4.3.5 A theological perspective on the role of subjective faculties within the process of knowing: acknowledging complexity and mystery**

For theology the process of knowing involves moral, existential and relational dynamics within which faith is a critical aspect in knowing. There is little controversy here.<sup>27</sup> The controversy arises around the role of reason and experience and the emphasis on continuity versus discontinuity with non-theological fields of knowledge.

Examining the process of knowledge formation from a theological perspective reveals a range of views and discerning the validity of different methodologies is complex.

Packer (1988a: par 6), for example, represents an evangelical approach to knowledge acquisition. The problem of knowledge is solved by God's faithfulness and the reliability of Scripture in association with the Holy Spirit. His theological method 'assigns ultimate authority to Scripture and "theologizes"—i.e. constructs accounts of reality and gives answers to questions about it—by directly formulating and applying biblical teaching.' The status of Scripture as 'divine instruction' and 'the incompetence of our fallen, perverse, culture-bound human minds to think true thoughts about God apart from the corrective and directive guidance of the Holy Spirit' are the justification for this method (: par 6).

This approach to knowledge will clearly not be acceptable to many theologians. The cultural-linguistic theology of Lindbeck (1984) would label it invalidly foundational and Hall's (1989: 388) contextual theology would evaluate it as invalidly non-contextual: 'God will not circumvent the human, including human rationality, volition, and discourse, in God's self-communication.... [this] permits the human knower to retain his or her integrity and dignity...God...will not overwhelm our humanity.'

There is much to appreciate in Hall's emphasis on contextualization, but I find that there is not an adequate recognition of the universal authority of Scripture. On the other hand, Packer's method is not contextual. As will become clear throughout this research, I believe that an

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<sup>27</sup> However, a measure of controversy with respect to knowledge will always exist. For example, it needs to be clarified that Christian perception does not involve special spiritual faculties, but merely normal human faculties, functioning correctly. Brümmer (1981: 119) states that the impressive characteristics which lead to faith are empirical and discerned by the senses, not requiring special intuition. The ever-growing body of knowledge in neuropsychology that shows how all aspects of human functioning are physically and biochemically grounded reinforces this idea.

appropriate theological method needs to combine valid aspects of Packer's high view of Scripture with Hall's insistence on contextualization.

## 2.5 The fundamental role of language within knowledge and communication

This section explores basic definitions and understandings of language in order to further develop our understanding of knowledge.

A key aspect of understanding language is to anchor it in the broader concept of communication, which is much more complex than Locke's simple sender-receiver encoding-decoding model, which does not account for the speaker's intent 'to produce a certain effect in the listeners' (Bach 1995: 142). Blackburn (1995c: 458) provides the following basic definition of language: 'Language consists of *words*, which come in sequences or *sentences*. With our words we express our *ideas*, and we *intend* to *communicate*. Because of our *conventions* the words of a language *refer* to things, or have *meanings*.' He states that the italicized words are highly controversial and problematic, seen by some 'as spurious and unscientific notions' (1995c:459).

Language has always been an integral part of philosophy. Beyond the necessary use of language to communicate, philosophy has always involved reasoning about the nature of language and problems of meaning and reference with respect to language have arisen from the outset.

As Blackburn (1995b: 454) explains, exploration of epistemological concepts has always gone hand in hand with exploration of the language used to explicate them and intense investigation has been undertaken concerning the relationship between 'mind and language, and language and the world.' Furthermore, the classic philosophical problems of realism versus idealism have always involved the embedded problem of the relationship between mind and language (Blackburn 1995c: 458).

Another classic debate concerns the idea of universals (the proposed reality to which all particular terms like 'green' and 'tree' refer). In contrast to Plato's abstract forms Aristotle located universals in this world within the shared characteristics of these terms or realities. Nominalism, on the other hand, rejects the idea of universals as a whole, leaving us only with particular named things.

Further complexity is evident when one considers semiotics, the general theory of signs. This is a key aspect of communication, and is researched at great levels of complexity. Lyon (1995: 821) distinguishes three kinds of signs (icons, natural signs and conventional signs) and Blackburn (1995a: 826) discusses the subtle difference between signs and symbols (such as words), with the former indicating presence of the thing signified, and the latter at best only signifying 'states of their producers rather than states of the world that they signify.' We again see how language is intimately linked with and thus cannot escape the classic philosophical problem of the relationship between the world and the subject's mind, with intractable problems remaining obstinately present: '[T]he dilemma that the philosophy of language either makes use of mysterious abstract, universal objects of thoughts or descends to the natural and the empirical but loses meaning altogether continues to dominate late twentieth-century approaches to language' (Blackburn 1995b: 456). It is precisely this dilemma and ambiguity that has enabled postmodernism to get as far as it has with its destabilization of language.

It is beyond the scope of this research to go into further detail regarding the makeup of language, except to say that it can be analyzed at increasing levels of complexity and each level has its accompanying conflict between commonsense acceptance versus scepticism.

The rest of this section will focus on key aspects of the postmodern approach to language, before considering a theological response. Here too, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss in detail the movement from a premodern referential view of language (where language actually correlates with or refers to an external reality), to a modern historical critical approach (with the ascendance of rationalism and the subject), which retained an empirical confidence in language as a fit ‘vehicle for making public our ideas, conceived of as the self-standing mental elements whereby we think’ (Blackburn 1995c: 459), through to a postmodern scepticism (where language cannot refer beyond itself and at most serves a limited, pragmatic, and conventional use, thus bypassing the realism versus idealism impasse). All that is attempted is a brief reference to key trends and an explication of their theological relevance. The key point to be noted at this stage is that the intimate relationship between language and epistemology shows why the postmodern destabilization of language leads to a destabilization of epistemology and understandings of reality.

### 2.5.1 The linguistic turn and postmodern scepticism

This latest, pragmatic approach to language is symbiotically embedded in a parallel pragmatic approach in epistemology, this complex interaction being referred to as ‘the linguistic turn’, ‘an appeal to language, to discourse, or forms of linguistic representation as the furthest point that philosophy can reach in its quest for knowledge and truth. There are no “facts” outside language, and no “reality” other than that which presents itself under some linguistic description’ (Norris 1995: 492). In other words, twentieth century philosophy believed that language is the principal partner in understanding the relationship between language, mind and metaphysics (Blackburn 1995c: 459).

Language thus becomes a new locus and end-focus, in quite clear contradistinction to classic epistemological concerns. This linguistic turn of postmodernism is understandable given the intractable problems involved in a purely rational approach to epistemology.

The implication of the linguistic turn is that philosophical issues like mind and metaphysics rise as high and sink as low as the understanding and possibilities of language. This linguistic turn clearly started out as a hopeful enterprise; not only was there a clear and workable area of focus (language), different realms could function freely according to their own language rules. This enabled philosophy to abandon the quest of the logical positivist movement ‘to render language more accurate or perspicuous by removing its various natural imperfections-ambiguity, metaphor, opaque reference, etc. - and achieving a crystalline transparency of logical form’ (Norris 1995: 492). This entailed following Wittgenstein in accepting ‘the open multiplicity of “language-games” (or cultural “forms of life”), each with its own criteria for what counts as a valid or meaningful utterance’ (Norris 1995: 492). ‘Since no facts are asserted, all religions become immune to criticism, and, equally, impossible to defend [or disprove] with apologetics’ (Sturch 1988b: par 7). ‘Problems in the philosophy of language thus collapse into internal problems about the syntax and semantics of language, thought of as a pre-existent structure’ (Blackburn 1995b: 458).

The optimism of the linguistic turn was short-lived as it became apparent that language could not be severed from mind and reality and that language had its own unique set of problems.<sup>28</sup> It is clear that language fares no better than experience and reason as an ultimate foundation and safeguard against skepticism and despair regarding truth.

<sup>28</sup> As Blackburn (1995b: 458) explains, ‘the foundations of this optimism crumbled on three ancient rocks. Firstly it went along with no coherent story connecting language with experience. Secondly, it had no description of the status of logic and reason itself.... And thirdly, it could produce no theory of the proper domain of the use of reason and experience together, certifying even the simplest movements of scientific thought.’

Blond (1998: 39) emphasizes that the linguistic turn has occurred within the context of false philosophical presuppositions inherited from Kant, insisting that not trusting our senses with regard to reality is unwarranted and this accounts for doubt regarding the ability of language to refer to reality or convey truth. He continues: 'if in contemporary philosophy language or mental mediation has taken a distance from phenomenal reality, this is because secular construals of language have been permitted to hand over the sensible realm to the description that modernity has prepared for it' (: 50). Blond's conclusion is vital and perceptive: 'For now language is thought to mitigate against the claims of the visual as soon as it speaks of it, and as a consequence images as soon as they are mediated by language become, apparently, sundered from their original, and our modern culture (founded upon the idea and hope of a certain referentiality) seems to face an ever-deepening inability to refer to anything outside of itself' (:51).

### **2.5.2 The relationship between author, text and reader**

Another key area within language is the relationship between author, text and reader. Communication clearly relies on meaning being able to be transmitted from the author through the text to the reader, yet postmodernism undermines each of these aspects. As goes language so go the author, text and reader as well as the validity of the gospel, which relies on a unique relationship between them. As Vanhoozer (1997: 136) states, 'The loss of a transcendent signifier –Logos- thus follows hard upon the death of the author....Every truth claim is dissolved in a sea of indeterminacy.'

There has been an ongoing, sustained attack on the validity and objectivity of this vital relationship between author, text and reader. Kant's subject-object distinction was attacked through structuralism and the poststructuralist movement, which included poststructuralism, deconstruction and reader-response criticism, with the following result : 'The original author has no control over...[the text] and can come back only as a "guest" who is no longer necessary for interpretation' (Osborne 1997: par 8-9).

Stanley Fish (1987:370-379) developed a radical reader response theory, where meaning is determined by the reader, resulting in as many texts as there are readers, or indeed as many texts as there are readings. 'Meaning is not discovered, but made, by the reader's rediscovered Nietzschean will-to-power' (Vanhoozer 1997: 136).

The stated intent of postmodern thinkers is to protect the text and reader from oppressively rigid interpretations and from the attempt to gain power and manipulate through these fixed meanings. It is all too clear that extreme postmodern thinking introduces an alternative violence of unwarranted presuppositions, reduction and dichotomies, which doom this project to failure from the very start. Vanhoozer (1997: 161) challenges postmodernism in this regard: 'Deconstruction does not serve the other. The message of the text is not allowed to "be" –the sense of the text is undone, ....Our polluted cognitive and spiritual environment darkens understanding –of all texts.'

### **2.5.3 The vital tension between the propositional and non-propositional aspects of language**

A propositional versus non-propositional approach to language is another key philosophical debate which has been given a unique twist within postmodernism. This issue has direct relevance for the reading of Scripture, as will be shown in later chapters.

Wagner (1999: 753) clarifies the difference between a traditional, ontological view of propositions from a more recent, linguistic meaning. In the traditional understanding a proposition is 'an abstract object said to be that to which a person is related by a belief, desire, or other psychological attitude....When I believe that snow is white I stand in the relation of believing to the proposition that snow is white'. Propositions are thus 'bearers of truth value.' In a linguistic understanding propositions merely carry the meaning of the sentence, conventionally, and are not related to external truth (Wagner 1999: 753). Nevertheless, this latter linguistic sense is not what is typically understood by a propositional view of language where 'the proposition a sentence expresses, and not the sentence itself, ... possesses modal properties such as being necessary, possible or contingent' (King 2006: intro par 1-2).

It is possible to correlate the issue of the propositional versus non-propositional nature of language with the issue of the truth versus non-truth value of language, but this is related to foundationalism and understanding truth principally in terms of correspondence. If one views truth in broader terms then language is released, as well, to operate in a more expansive way.

In this research, therefore, a qualified propositional view of language is adopted. This is funded by critical realism and the belief that language can be used to refer beyond itself. Similarly, a qualified non-propositional approach to language is also adopted. This involves embracing those perspectives which fruitfully explore the metaphorical as well as the performative<sup>29</sup> aspects of language, without denying its propositional or referential possibilities. The non-propositional approach of hard postmodernism, where any referentiality is denied, is therefore seen as invalid.

In other words, the propositional and non-propositional aspects of language need to be held in tension, for linguistic truth is more than propositional, but it is not less.

Therefore, although it is possible to enthusiastically embrace and enjoy the rich and symbolic possibilities of language in all its forms, including the Scriptures, this research argues that this delight is related to the fact that these pregnant images are also connected to that which is substantially real. They are not arbitrary. A Language and its poetic possibilities should not be focused on because reality is not substantial or accessible, but precisely because it is. For example, Vanhoozer's (1990: 278) appreciation of Ricoeur's work is tempered by recognition that 'the Gospels achieve their theological importance in Ricoeur as works of the creative imagination...[which threatens] a theological realism which contends that among the fundamental truth conditions of the Christian possibility are "the truth of propositions that might have been otherwise."'

Apart from cultural-linguistic theologians like Lindbeck and Murphy, speech act theory is integral to the work of others, like Thiselton (1992), Vanhoozer (1998) and Wolterstorff (1995).<sup>30</sup> In terms of this research, Murphy and Lindbeck have less warrant than Thiselton, Vanhoozer and Wolterstorff as the latter three grapple more directly with foundational issues of truth.

## 2.5.4 Theological use of language

<sup>29</sup> The term 'performative' derives from Austin's speech act theory, where language is understood in terms of its use in performing actions such as 'I apologize,' 'I promise,' or 'I baptize you' (Crystal 1977: 638).

<sup>30</sup> Vanhoozer (1997: 153) develops 'Barth's threefold analysis of divine revelation in terms of communicative action. God, the Author-Father, is the agent of the act; god, the Logos-Word is the communicative act; God, the Spirit-Hearer, is the communication of the Authors Word. Only some such Trinitarian analysis can respond, ...[he believes], to the death of the author and the loss of determinate meaning –the "counter-theology" of Barthes and Derrida.'



Before suggesting a theological response to the problem of language, a final issue, the theological use of language, needs to be considered.

Just as, epistemologically, theological knowledge formation does not involve additional spiritual human faculties, theological use of language is for the most part continuous with language use in other contexts. Strurch (1988b: par 2) explains that the form of religious language is identical to non-religious language. Religious language, then, is distinguished from normal language not by its actual form but by the important subject matter and commitment it involves (: par 9).

Nevertheless, philosophical problems have been raised concerning the use of human language with reference to God: 'If God is infinite, then words used to describe finite creatures might not adequately describe God' (Weed 2007: intro par 1), rendering religious praxis, which relies on language, meaningless (: intro par 2). However, the logical empiricists contention that 'statements about God do not have truth-values and are thus meaningless or unintelligible' has been weakened by the unsustainability of logical empiricism itself (: sect 2a par 1).

Other approaches to the relationship between the two senses of language have been equivocal and univocal responses. The former sees the two as entirely different, meaning that God can only be spoken of by negation; one can thus say 'God is not a body,' but not, 'God is merciful' (Weed 2007: sect 2bi). A univocal solution, on the other hand, suggests that in some functionalist aspects humans know in the way God does, though not perfectly (: sect 2bii par 3).

Aquinas' concept of analogy, maintains a tension between univocal and equivocal understandings, but Weed (2007: sect 2biii par 13) explains that most contemporary philosophers would object to the 'medieval metaphysics... [that] believes in a causal relation between creatures and God.' One needs to ask for the basis of this philosophical objection. From a faith perspective, the problem of religious language becomes far from insurmountable and some theologians follow Scripture in arguing that God and human personhood are analogous, even though God's personhood is limitless, perfect and sinless, unlike ours (Sturch 1988b: par 6; Runia 1988: par3).

Once again, this time within the context of language, we see the problem associated with trying to understand God in terms of human reason. Inevitably our human concepts raise insurmountable objections. Rather than question our human concepts, many question the existence of God. A theological response needs to challenge the validity of the unprovable presuppositions upon which these objections rest and detach itself from their unnecessary limitations. In this regard Scripture warns us against preaching the gospel 'with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power' (1Cor 1 :17) as well as against being taken 'captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy' (Col 2:8).

### **2.5.5 Language and a critical theological response to postmodern scepticism**

The belief in an unbridgeable distance between God and humankind and in the impossibility of linkage and similarity in terms of God as ultimate cause and humankind as limited effect is a faith position, representing a limited and limiting presupposition that is not commonsensical. An a-theological faith is no more scientific than a theological one.

The whole history of knowledge shows the failure of purely secular accounts of reality and knowledge, with extreme postmodernism merely representing the latest chapter in this long saga. Vanhoozer's (1998: 200) challenge to this postmodern skepticism is profound as it deals with basic presuppositions:

So-called secular literary theories are anti-theologies in disguise. As we have seen, Derrida's notion that *différance* is the ground of our beings inscribes conflict –binary oppositions- into the very fabric of human reality and is a rejection of the doctrine of creation. Christian theology...recognizes no such original violence...The created order is neither chaotic nor conflictual, but covenantal- intended and destined for joy and peace.

When theological versus naturalistic theories are consistently applied to all aspects of life and knowledge I believe that the theological positions, while not unproblematic, have more explanatory power, overall, and, in terms of inference to the best explanation, show themselves to be more scientific.

Therefore, this research argues that scepticism and the paralysing over-analysis of language needs to be balanced by recognition of its connection to God's grace and superabundance. This connection explains the sacramental and metaphorical nature of language (sacramental, because it is able to communicate divine life and meaning, metaphorical because it can only do this indirectly and imperfectly, falling far short of exhausting the fullness of God's life and knowledge).

The multivalence in communication and language need not be interpreted sceptically as leading to no fixed meaning, but rather as an increased possibility of meaning.<sup>31</sup> The inevitable presence of ambiguity and error in all human communication renders this meaning partial (necessitating ongoing 'journeying,' interpretation, correction, evolution, enriching, etc.) without invalidating human communication and its ability to mediate life and understanding and move us forward in the right direction.

A further aspect of an appropriate theological response is to match the postmodern concern for unmasking the coercive abuse of power in knowledge and language. A valid response also needs to expose the ironic failure of postmodernism in this regard. I agree with Vanhoozer (1997: 161) that correct interpretation is ultimately an ethical issue and secular approaches to knowledge do not have the resources to face, let alone correctly handle the truth:

It is the Spirit who enables us to transfer attention away from ourselves and our interest to the text and its subject matter. Understanding –of the Bible or of any other text-is a matter of ethics, indeed, of spirituality. Indeed, interpretation ultimately depends upon the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. Faith, that there is a real presence, a voice, a meaning, in the text; hope, that the interpretive community can, in the power of the Spirit, attain an adequate, not absolute, understanding; love, a mutual relation of self-giving between text and reader.

A critically realistic, hermeneutical approach can recognize and take into account the problems, power struggles, ambiguities and deception involved in knowledge and language. But it need not despair or give in to scepticism, for it recognizes that knowledge and language can also serve to bring clarity, truth, love and service. There is no foundational method to ensure this,

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<sup>31</sup> The possibilities of language are shown in the astounding extent to which communication can take place, using a multitude of texts or symbols such as image, gesture, speech, writing, sign language, etc. For example, one can communicate the intent for someone's dirty plate to be removed from your desk in a variety of ways. In speech it can be direct and neutral ('please take your plate'), sarcastic ('does my desk look like a dumping spot'), exclamatory ('plate!'). It can be non-verbal: without words a glance at the plate then at person it belongs to, accompanied by raised eyebrows, can be performed; one may brush one's fingers in the air in the direction of the plate; one may simply point a finger at the plate. One could draw a picture of a dirty plate crossed out and show it to the person etc. Of course, a less quick-witted person may not understand the subtler or more ironic acts of communication, but understanding would dawn through repetition or moving to more basic acts. As a last resort, the plate can simply be placed in their hands, with further accompanying speech acts, if necessary.

and the best that can be achieved is partial knowledge. Due to the superabundant, grace-filled nature of knowledge and language, even this 'in part' is very powerful, as is shown by experience, common sense and the teaching of Scripture. In our examination of knowledge we have noted the false dichotomy of a forced choice between omniscient knowledge and non-knowledge. In the ethical focus outlined in this section on language, the false dichotomy becomes the forced choice between perfectly selfless and honest use of language versus pure power play and relativism. All such false dichotomies must be resisted.

Therefore, for every sceptical judgment articulated by extreme postmodernism, a theological riposte of hope and truth needs to be given. This riposte must be believed, communicated and lived out. One of the strongest proofs that truth and meaning exist is to live as Christians in community in a way that reflects that truth and meaning. This may sound like Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic understanding, but I strongly resist placing the locus of proof in the community.

## **2.6 The importance of historical sensitivity in a valid approach to knowledge**

History, like language, is a vital component in understanding life and knowledge and, like language, it intersects with and parallels all the key aspects of life and knowledge. Its essential role in human existence and thought is seen, for example, in its relationship to 'notions of human agency' (Little 2007: Intro par 1).

History, therefore, helps us understand human nature and societal functioning. Current continuity and discontinuity with the past serves as a vital source of information. Tracing the historical formation of beliefs helps us gain perspective; the realization, for example, that a relativistic understanding of knowledge can be traced to specific thinkers and moments in history gives the average person (who has unconsciously been indoctrinated into that belief) pause and opens up the possibility of considering that relativism is not a universal, unchanging necessity. Finally, and most importantly, from a theological perspective, history is a source and form of God's revelation.

One's view of history, along with one's understanding of language and knowledge, depends on metaphysical assumptions. A believing versus skeptical epistemology will interact with all three of these concepts (history, language, and metaphysics) in symbiotically reinforcing or undermining relationships.

The same critically realistic hermeneutical conclusions reached with regard to knowledge and language equally apply to my understanding of history. This section will establish a basic understanding of history and will explore some of the implications of secular versus theistic presuppositions.

### **2.6.1 Defining history and historiography**

History is clearly about meaning and interpretation. Unlike straight chronicling of events, history attempts to explain and establish connections between events (Evans 2005: 4). It deals with 'those happenings which have passed through the human mind and been retained in the memory because a significance or a meaning has been read into them' (Newport 1989: 37-38).

History can also be distinguished in terms of historical method. Newport (1989: 38-39) discusses two distinct and complementary approaches. The scientific or technical approach carefully studies all available historical documents, artifacts, etc., working from primary sources and striving for 'objectivity, accuracy, and unbiased investigation'. Nevertheless, the nature of history (the irreproducibility of past events) makes it much more probabilistic and interpretive than the natural sciences. The philosophical or theological approach seeks the broader 'meaning' and

'ultimate significance' behind the facts. Newport (1989: 39-40) claims that everyone has an explicit or implicit 'philosophy of history - a viewpoint from which he or she interprets life.'

According to Phillips Long (1994: 60), 'If...as Philip Davies suggests, the term *history* were reserved for "the events of the past as a *continuum*" and the term historiography for "the selective telling of those events," much confusion could be avoided.'

It is beyond the scope of this research to examine the different views of history, beyond mentioning that strongly contrasting historical worldviews exist, from cyclical views of eastern religions, to pessimistic cyclical views of the ancient Greeks and Romans, to Enlightenment-based optimistic progress views.<sup>32</sup>

It is also beyond the scope of this research to delve into the complexity involved in the philosophy of history.<sup>33</sup> However, in order to support my proposal for a mediating position between positivism and relativism in all aspects of knowledge, including history, a brief examination of the history of a materialist versus theistic understanding of history is vital.

### **2.6.2 Choosing between a materialist versus theist presupposition within history/historiography**

Prior to the Enlightenment speculative schemes of history were inspired by religion or philosophical metaphysics. The Enlightenment focus on empirical, scientific knowledge spilled over into approaches to history: 'If natural phenomena had been thus shown to be subject to universal laws...[why not] the realm of social and historical phenomena?' (Gardiner 1995: 361). Fully applying natural scientific methods to human history has never been fully plausible or possible and numerous other emphases have arisen. Historicism developed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It 'emphasized the uniqueness of all historical phenomena', eschewing anachronistic readings. This is quite distinct from Popper's derogatory and influential use of the term to suggest untenable, false speculative schemes (Sutherland 1977: 387).

The attempt to ground history scientifically through the use of covering-law to explain events floundered due to the inability of this law to adequately deal with human 'desire, belief, and purpose.' The 'rational explanation' model, which attempts to reconstruct the rationality that made 'deliberate' historical actions seem 'appropriate or justified' has fared no better (Gardiner 1995: 365).

Various other models have been proposed, but historical explanation remains problematic as every approach relies on implicit assumptions (which can always be challenged) and specific terminology (which can always be rendered ambiguous and unstable, i.e. deconstructed). The very nature of historiography, requiring the selection of certain facts above others, renders it particularly vulnerable to the criticism of extreme subjectivity compared to other sciences. Nevertheless, positive views of the historian's task remain tenacious, as in Evans (2005 :3) definition: 'History is, in the first place, the study of the past in order to find out the truth about it....Historians...deal with fact, not fiction.'

The postmodern suspicion of metanarratives and concern for the voice of the excluded other are not simply criticisms of knowledge and language, but also of knowledge and language

<sup>32</sup> Newport outlines these different views of history (1989: 42-61).

<sup>33</sup> Little (2007: Intro par 1) states that philosophical understanding of history is very diverse and cannot be reduced to a single definition or philosophical tradition: 'This work is heterogeneous, comprising analyses and arguments of idealists, positivists, logicians, theologians, and others, and moving back and forth over the divides between European and Anglo-American philosophy, and between hermeneutics and positivism.'

represented in the form of historiography. The result is a suspicion of any ultimate explanation of history and an insistence on multiple histories emerging from different cultural-linguistic communities. This is in complete opposition to views of theology and Scripture that believe in a complex, but ultimately comprehensive and unified salvation-history.<sup>34</sup>

Christianity is a historical religion and it cannot long survive a-historicity.<sup>35</sup> The Scriptures are foundational to our faith and they are historical documents. Logically, scepticism towards history entails scepticism towards the Bible and towards Christianity as a whole.

While cosmic, transcendent portrayals of Christ abound in Scripture (Jn 1 :1-3 ; Heb 1 :2-4 ; Col 1 :15-18 ; Rev 1 :22-23) these are not given independently of the central portrayal of Jesus as a first century Jew in the Roman province of Palestine (Ac 10 :37-39). The *kenosis* and glorification theme in Philippians 2:6-11 is a clear scriptural example where Christ's humanity and actions in human time and space are inextricably linked to his exalted nature and vice versa. This is a development and fulfillment of an OT pattern. God chooses to repeatedly declare His transcendent nature through a repeated reference to His historical act of delivering the Israelites from bondage in Egypt (Ex 6 :7 ; Lv 11 :45 ; Nm 15 :41 ; Dt 5 :6 ; Ps 81 :10 ; Hs 12 :9).

Therefore, regardless of the efforts of some, like Bultmann (1958), to establish faith and relationship with Jesus independently of historicity, the Christ of faith cannot be separated from the Christ of history, neither logically/epistemologically nor existentially/in the common sense experience of believers.

A careful and critically realistic approach to history is therefore part of all theological work, yet irreconcilable tensions<sup>36</sup> will never disappear from theology.

In all these instances a mediating position is attempted in this research and I believe this has significant impact on pastoral care as one attempts to help individuals locate their life stories within a greater historical narrative.

When examining purportedly religious historical events a reductive approach is often appealed to: 'Religions seek legitimacy through sacred texts handed down by prophets or their disciples from the distant past. To treat such texts historically, however, means to put their sacrality to one side and to question them just as one would question any other historical source' (Evans 2005: 4).

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<sup>34</sup> The Bible's view of history is clearly 'purposeful and future-oriented' and God acts decisively in history (Newport: 77-84). According to Bebbington (1988: par 1): '[T]he chief biblical convictions about history are that 1. God has been shaping the overall course of the historical process from the beginning in creation; 2. He intervenes in particular events, usually in judgment or mercy; and 3. He will bring his plans to a triumphant conclusion in the last things.' Further detail is provided by Newport (1998: 83-87) who claims the following will be part of future history, according to the NT: suffering and persecution for believers; 'apostasy and competitive doctrines of salvation'; 'the work of the Antichrist'; the second coming of Jesus as 'the climax of history'. Clearly this represent conservative interpretation of Scripture and alternative interpretations completely underplay these cataclysmic events.

<sup>35</sup> In a lecture Carson (2000b) discusses how Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism would not fail if one could establish the a-historicity of their founders or certain of the members of their pantheon of Gods (in the case of Hinduism). This is not the case with Christianity.

<sup>36</sup> Numerous other theological tensions also exist. For example, Bultmann (1958; 1953:1-44; 1962:181-194) has dissociated Jesus and faith from history in contradistinction to Pannenberg (2008) who tends to conflate history and revelation. Christian interpretations of history have also often been overly optimistic or pessimistic regarding the extent that the Kingdom of God is realized in this world prior to the second coming, with theologians like Baille, Niebuhr and Rust attempting a mediating position (Newport 1998: 92-95).

It can be argued that this historical reduction is fully appropriate, paralleling the valid reduction (in the form of purely natural explanation) that occurs when natural science examines nature (see 1.8.4). Nevertheless, the necessary distinction between neutralism and naturalism in natural science, applies even more strongly in historiography, dealing as it does with the consequences of personal motives and choices.

## **2.7. 'Outcomes' of the knowledge process: representations of knowledge**

A final aspect of dealing with the nature of Knowledge is to discuss the outcomes of the knowledge process. Outcomes could be understood broadly to refer to all the cultural products that exist in society, from works of art to scientific textbooks, to Scripture itself. All of these can validly be called outcomes of knowledge when knowledge is understood in the double sense of knowing (in the experiential, expressive, existential sense) and knowing (in the controlled, scientific, epistemological sense).

However, this section limits itself to a brief examination of outcomes of the controlled process of knowledge formation that occurs within the fields of philosophy, natural science and theology.

These outcomes or encapsulations of knowledge, whether in the form of scientific laws, theories and concepts, or in the form of theological dogmatic statements and systematic works, form a crucial aspect of knowledge. Not only are they crucial in transmitting knowledge, they also constitute sources, interpretive lenses and methodological tools for further knowledge processes.

Depending on how the various aspects of truth dealt with thus far are viewed, a specific approach to encapsulations of knowledge will be taken. A positive, foundational understanding of reality will correlate with a trust in scientific theories, philosophical schemes, and systematic theologies as stable and enduring statements that correspond with reality. Such a response is completely untenable within a postmodern understanding, which sees all such formulations as limited, context-bound and dispensable. It is therefore vital to clarify their normative status. This research attempts to argue between these two aforementioned extremes.

### **2.7.1 Philosophical schemes versus scientific theories: a theological assessment**

Philosophy has suggested numerous metaphysical schemes throughout the ages. These may have been theistic or naturalistic in assumption. Often they have been self-consciously based on an a priori rational method of reasoning. At other times attempts have been made to reduce them to a purely scientific or psychological base as in the cases of Hume (1748).

Natural science has proved remarkably successful in attaining consensus on theories (evolution and the big bang theory, for example, are generally accepted, even though details of interpretation continue to be worked out). No such consensus exists in the multitude of existing philosophical issues. It can be argued that this is the very nature of philosophy and constitutes a strength. Nevertheless, in previous times, philosophers did believe reason could attain to an explanation of ultimate reality. This has failed and science has in many ways beaten philosophy in the knowledge stakes.

Today, philosophy is much humbler with regard to ultimate metaphysical schemes and more readily defines itself in terms of clarifying thought and logic in all the fields of knowledge, rather than establishing ultimate schemes to explain truth and reality. The irony remains that scientism represents a return to this old hubris.

In the same way that natural science, by its very nature, can be more clear-cut in its experiments, measurement and explanations, it can be more clear-cut in its exclusion of theories and results that conflict with its basic corpus. It can thus point to a 'purer' corpus of knowledge and results that can be waved in the face of religion.

Christianity cannot do this. It welcomes the sinner and perseveres with those who are slow and weak of faith. One of the most revolutionary aspects of Jesus' life and teaching was the welcoming of those whom society had 'written off' (Lk 15 :1-2) and the Bible shows a consistent concern for the weak (Rm 15 :1-2 ; 1Cor 1 :26-29, 8 :9,11 ; 1Th 5 :14). Christianity's openness means it cannot but contain unbelievers and anti-believers (Mt 26:14; Gl 2:4). A person is only cut off as a last resort and then only temporarily (1Cor 5:5; 2Cor 2:6-8). There is an evaluation and purification coming in the last judgment (the scientist can call it the ultimate peer review if she wishes) but only God is completely righteous and all knowing and thus capable of judging truly in the vital matter of people's souls and personhood (1Cor 4:5). Therefore, we are called to judge nothing before the appointed time and the church at any one moment is a mixed 'motley-crew' under God's grace and this invariably affects and is reflected in the imperfect accumulated corpus of knowledge that represents Christianity at any one time (whether in the understanding of theologians, dogma or the average church member).

Theology, therefore, cannot compete with natural science's more clear-cut corpus (even though it too is far from perfect) but this is not a failing and shame on the part of theology and Christianity. It is its very grace-filled glory.

However, from a faith perspective, ultimate truth and fully righteous character do exist and we are called to strive toward them. We will never attain perfect understanding or character due to our finitude and fallenness, but acknowledging this should not encourage complacency, just the opposite (Phlp 3 :12-15 ; 1Tm 4 :15-16). Nevertheless, a critically realistic already and not yet perspective must constantly be maintained (1Cor 13:9-12) and this forms the necessary backdrop when one examines dogma and theologies.

### **2.7.2 Doctrine and systematic theologies**

Dogma is a Greek word, referring to official ordinances in the areas of law, philosophy and science (Morrow 1988: par 1) and is used to refer to official church statements clarifying the faith and responding to theological controversy (:par 3). The Enlightenment, with its anthropocentric turn and historical-critical method, along with postmodernism, ecumenism, and a concern for practical social justice have challenged an extreme and positivistic focus on dogma (: par 5, 13).

Apart from specific church confessions, dogma is strongly related to creeds and councils. The lack of ecumenical consensus over later creeds and the multitude of confessions further challenges the validity of dogma. In addition 'critical scholarship has attacked the classical creeds for their reliance upon an alleged alien Greek philosophical system and an outmoded cosmology' (Demarest 1988a: par 7).

It is tempting to continue this trend and dispense with or strongly de-emphasize dogma, allowing a relativistic, eclectic mix that mirrors postmodern culture. This research rejects this option: 'One of the salient needs in academic theology today is to combat the ideal of an undogmatic theology, a theology free from the constraint of biblical or confessional norms' (Bloesch 1992: 16). Bloesch (1992: 19) helpfully distinguishes dogma from dogmatics:

Dogma might be defined as a propositional truth that is grounded in and inseparable from God's self-revelation in Christ and communicated to the interiority of our being by the Spirit of God. It signifies the divinely given interpretation of revelation. A doctrine is a propositional affirmation that

represents the continuing reflection on the dogmatic norm of faith. The doctrines of the church will not become one with the dogma of revelation until the eschaton.

Bloesch (1992: 274) further clarifies the relationship of dogma to propositions:

While dogma has an ineradicable propositional dimension, it bursts through all propositional forms. It signifies the truth of what is expressed as opposed to the way in which it is expressed. Dogma must not be reduced to propositions as statements, but propositions can convey the truth of dogma. Because dogma speaks to the human heart as well as the human mind, it is best described as a propositional-existential truth.

Approaches to systematic and biblical theologies will logically correlate with approaches to dogma and doctrine.<sup>37</sup>

Hodge (in Hall 1989: 70) represents an example of a positive view of theology: 'The Christian religion is that *body of truths*, experiences, actions and institutions which are determined by the revelations supernaturally presented in the Christian Scriptures. Christian theology is the scientific determination, interpretation, and defence of those Scriptures.'

Clearly this view is strongly challenged today. Hall (1989: 46) suggests that systems of theology (originating from 'the High Middle Ages onwards') are problematic as they 'reduce God and the things of God to a system', are inorganic and fail to do justice to our fragmentary and broken reality (: 46). He accords them a qualified validity: 'God's ways with the world, however mysterious, seem to have a rationale that now and then can be glimpsed by faith' (: 47).

I find Hall's conclusion problematic and I would argue for a greater validity and normativity with regard to systematic and biblical theologies. This research argues for a high view of Scripture in conjunction with a hermeneutical and contextual focus. In the light of this, to the extent that Systematic theologies and dogmatic statements clarify patterns and themes in Scripture, they enjoy a measure of normativity and authority, which, while not infallible, should not be lightly dismissed.

## 2.8 Conclusion

The theological conclusion this research has arrived at, up to this point, is that knowledge is complex and comprehensive, is in a qualified sense correlated to reality (critical realism), and is dependent on God.

### **An integration of the two senses of knowing (existential and epistemological)**

This chapter has highlighted the mystery and complexity involved in the knowledge process. It is impossible to perfectly isolate the different elements involved in knowing, far less determine the exact relationship and process that exists between them.

Kennard (1999: 36) argues two points with regard to faith and knowledge: '1) If a person is properly functioning, then faith and knowledge are largely synonymous. 2) Neither has priority over the other, but rather they are simultaneous.' He claims that faith and knowledge co-exist in Scripture and in the actual history of knowledge, even though this is often not admitted. He gives a table of the following 'claimed epistemic landscape' (: 37)

<sup>37</sup> 'Biblical theology plays a vital part in both biblical studies and dogmatic theology, and in fact bridges the two...it employs biblical exegesis which, by means of textual, literary and historical criticism, establishes the intention of specific texts. In turn it furnishes the materials with which dogmatic theology, aiming to establish the teaching of the church, must build' (Baker 1988: par 19).



Fideism	Faith seeking understanding	Simultaneous faith and knowledge	Understanding in order to believe	Knowledge as justified true belief
Tertullian Damian Luther Hare	Augustine Anselm Kant Hegel	Kierkegaard Wittgenstein Austin James Plantinga	Aquinas	Plato Aristotle Leibniz Descartes Locke Russell Positivism

Kennard (1999: 61) suggests that, upon closer analysis, these dichotomies are not valid and proposes the following ‘analyzed epistemic landscape’.<sup>38</sup>

Simultaneous faith and knowledge	Knowledge as justified true belief
Tertullian; Damian; Luther; Hare; Augustine; Anselm; Kant; Hegel; Kierkegaard; Wittgenstein; Austin; James; Plantinga; Aquinas; Descartes; Locke	Plato; Aristotle; Leibniz; Descartes; Locke Russell; Positivism

Kennard (1999: 60) states that even though justified true belief can be challenged as overconfident, some remain committed to it. He concludes that a mature approach to knowledge and service depends on both faith and knowledge (: 68).

Any positivism with regard to knowledge is a metaphysical presupposition and needs to be exposed as such. The strict separation of faith and knowledge is a good example of a metaphysical bias that needs to be challenged. This should be done in the public sphere, not because of its challenge to religion, but because it is bad science.

Another way of stating this goal of comprehensiveness is that existential, symbolic, cultural-linguistic aspects of truth need to be pursued and held in tension with propositional-rational aspects and that this is best achieved by a comprehensive and critically realistic approach to knowledge, both in terms of its generation and in terms of its communication and incarnation.

A useful image for holding the dogmatic/propositional and the existential aspects of theology in tension is that of stages in learning a new skill. At different stages of development (whether learning the content and skill of faith, music, dance or a language) fixed, abstracted formulations of that activity will play a different role. In the early stages each activity’s abstractions play a vital role: dogma and doctrines for faith; music theory, sight-reading rules, and scales for music; isolated actions like pliés and leg swings, as well as learning to count music, for dance; and grammar rules, verb tables; phonetic rules and lexicons for language. It is possible to suffocate the student by overemphasizing theory and isolated exercises and a good teaching method will simultaneously expose the student to emergent, higher level expression from the very start: thus Jesus never separated demonstration of the acts of the Kingdom from instruction and he sent the disciples out, while inexperienced, to perform these acts and discover the power of the kingdom for themselves; a new music student should hear full pieces, be inspired, and as soon as possible be given a simple yet attainable completed piece to play; and so on for dance and language. It is simply not true that theory and practice are opposed.

<sup>38</sup> For example, Kennard (1999: 38) suggests that Tertullian (of the famous ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem’) actually makes use of Stoic terminology and Neoplatonic concepts.

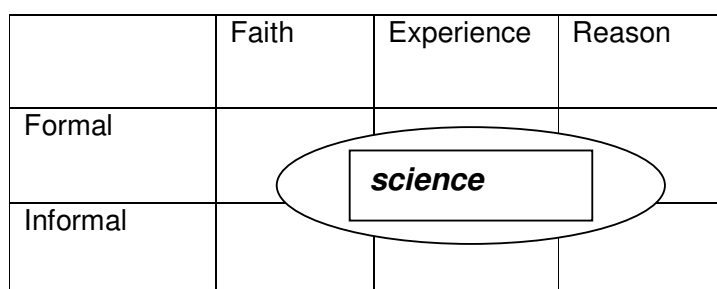
The greater the respect for the rules and theory of an activity and the greater the humility, submission and sacrifice made to absorb and integrate them into ones very psycho-somatic unity (somatic impact is shown in the concept of ‘muscle-memory’), the quicker, deeper and higher will be the free expression of that activity. Those who seem to perform in the most effortless, free manner have so mastered and integrated the rules and principles of their activity that these rules seem to disappear. Jesus is often appealed to as an alternative to legalism and as an ally in the disparaging of the OT (the interpretations of Marcion and Gnosticism). He is also pitted against Paul, the latter being portrayed as a legalistic and Hellenistic corruption of Jesus’ pure gospel message. This is false as the goal of Paul’s doctrinal focus remained love (1 Cor 13; Rm 13: 9-10; 1Tm 1: 5) and Jesus defended the law to the last letter and claimed to fulfill not abolish it (Mt 5: 17-20).

Expressions of theology, like the emerging church, that underemphasize doctrine are overlooking the dynamics suggested by the above analogies. I suggest that established Christians who turn against doctrine are like teenagers or radicals turning against parents and society. In all cases there is a forgetting that their very life and ability to think and reason and resist have in part been established by that against which they are turning, and that their very act of turning actually introduces new rules and doctrines. In fact, those claiming to operate without rules are in fact more dangerous, due to lack of awareness. Where the foundations were oppressive, to completely go to the other extreme, instead of seeking balance, is to substitute a new, untested and potentially more dangerous oppression for an existing one.

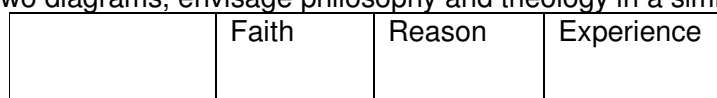
**Interaction between all the different spheres and disciplines of knowledge**

History shows that there has been undeniable interaction and interdependence between science, philosophy, theology, and culture. Currently, even when there is apparent separation, an inevitable mutual influencing still occurs. There is multiple overlap in terms of method and assumptions.

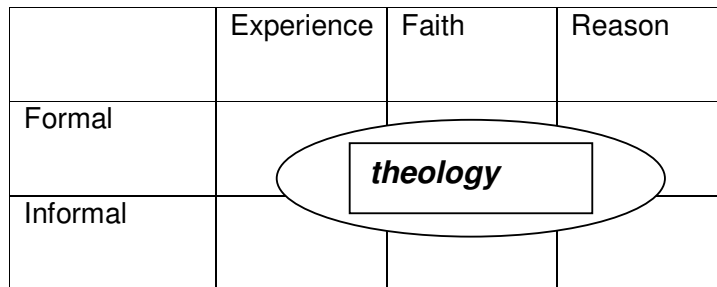
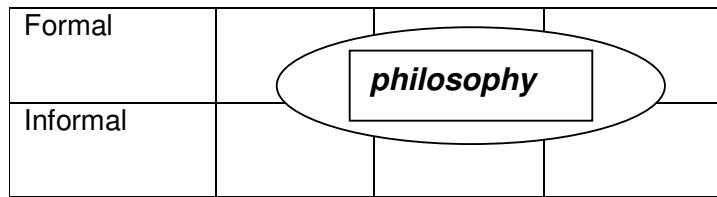
The following diagrams represent an attempt to illustrate this overlap. In the first diagram the circle represents scientific inquiry, mainly operating in a formal, experience-based sense but not fully able to encompass experience, nor able to avoid informal aspects or the methods of faith and reason.<sup>39</sup>



The following two diagrams, envisage philosophy and theology in a similar way.



<sup>39</sup> Obviously the pictures will vary for different people within the same dominant field of knowledge. For example, a believer who is also a trained theologian will encompass more of the formal field than an average church member. Similarly, a scientist who is a believer will be more comfortable in the field of faith than a scientist operating from an atheistic worldview.



The commonality between the different spheres of knowledge further argues against the Kantian split between faith and knowledge.

**Underdetermination, critical realism and humility**

It is important to be aware of the limitations of one’s own field and not say more than the data suggests. This is a practical limitation of one’s field of knowledge and it needs to be strongly distinguished from an a priori limitation. An a priori limitation suggests that there are areas of life and knowledge that are not open to scientific, or theological or philosophical exploration. This is an unwarranted assumption; in principle, science, for example, should be allowed to explore any area. The New Atheists strongly insist on this and retreating into the two worlds theory plays directly into their hands. Nevertheless, any field, if it is consistent and honest, will acknowledge its limitations and temper its conclusions. For example, a scientific or sociological statement should contain caveats to the effect that, the methodology of their field can suggest data on the biochemical or sociological aspects of worship, but pronouncing on the actual existence of God, the object of the worship, is beyond its capabilities. When proponents do so, whether pronouncing for or against the existence of God, they are doing so not as scientists but as believers.

In other words, science and philosophy can neither disprove nor generate the ontological reality of being in a worshipful relationship with God. This relies on specific practices and understandings, which, I believe, God has entrusted to the church. In a similar way, the church cannot displace or duplicate scientific and philosophical findings without submitting to scientific and philosophical method; attempts to do so result in pseudo-scientific apologetics, which ultimately undermine credibility. Authoritative testimony in the academy requires true scientists and philosophers who are believers, rather than believers who wish to dabble in science.

Although the key foundation in all knowledge is God Himself, there is an undeniable qualitative distance between God and humankind. Even if, as this dissertation argues, real, direct knowledge of God can be experienced (thanks to the Holy Spirit), our communication of this reality (i.e. our attempts to move from private to public knowledge) cannot be positivistically understood. Any attempt to do so can be and should be rapidly deconstructed (the whole history of philosophy, which argues against such a positivism with regard to sources, processes and results of knowledge cannot simply be ignored). A critically realistic stance thus remains essential.

It is a good thing that the power of objective claims is softened and that cultural and personal factors are seen to colour every statement; it becomes harder to abuse, manipulate and coerce within this understanding. This resonates with Scripture. Paul talks of seeing and knowing in part (1Cor 13:12) and in certain instances allows people to adopt opposing practices in their worship of God (Rm 14: 5-6). Implicit themes in Scripture also support this knowledge. God's being and methods are beyond the capacities of finite humans (Is 55:9; Rm 11:33; 1 Cor 2:9) and human knowledge of life and salvation is presented as process of growth in understanding (Mt 13:17; 1 Pt 1:10-11; Jn 16:12-13). It is theologically clear that we will never approach God's omniscience. As Carson (2000b) explains in a lecture, the promise of knowing fully (1 Cor 13:12) is a relational promise of unmediated access to God, not an epistemological promise.

The positivism of relativism (claiming to know that one cannot know) also needs to be resisted. For all their protestations, when one examines the actual logic of their methodology and the actual practical functioning of their method, positivists and relativists are working with a critically realist understanding. It is only by distorting the nature of their knowledge process and ignoring, caricaturing or underemphasising contrary elements that positivists and relativists pretend to exist. For example, sceptics of true knowledge delight in pointing out examples of perceptual error and ambiguity, which undermine certainty. One thinks that one sees a dead dog in the road, and it turns out to be a crumpled box. One hesitates and alternates between seeing an old woman/young woman, a rabbit/duck, a vase/two faces in a series of cleverly designed images. One thinks that 'the bat flew through the air' is talking of a flying mammal, but it in fact refers to a cricket bat that was thrown by a cricketer.

The postmoderns are surely correct that at any single moment and at specific isolated levels knowledge is uncertain. However, reality and life are made up of a series of moments and isolated levels exist within more comprehensive levels. As we take the bigger context into account, a measure of certainty does arise. We can never be one hundred percent certain and error will always occur, but for the most part understanding and communication do occur. We do in fact, walk up to the object in the road and realize it is a crumpled box and not a dead animal. We do recognize that we are looking at cleverly constructed pictures that are purposefully designed to be visually ambiguous. Nobody, to my knowledge, has walked onto a cricket pitch with a wriggling mammal tucked under his arm with which to try and hit a cricket ball.

The skill and accuracy with which we resolve ambiguity is phenomenal. Paradoxically, ambiguity can be seen to emphasize the reliability and possibility of knowledge, for knowledge processes are powerful enough to compensate for ambiguity. Knowledge, therefore, arises from a cumulative effect, which is never absolute but is sufficiently reliable to warrant our qualified commitment. Logically, the nature of justification or warrant for critically realistic knowledge need not be indubitable either. Within the perspective of critical realism, authority or justification can be hermeneutical and common-sensical as well.

I thus argue that critical realism is basic to the way that knowledge works in all realms. If critical realism is an appropriate stance, then it cannot contradict Scripture, which, according to this research, represents ultimate truth. I believe the Bible does implicitly support critical realism through the repeated theme of God creating reality and the repeated emphasis that only God is omniscient (Heb 4:13), while our knowledge remains partial (1Cor 13:9-12).

### **A relational approach above rationalism**

An insistence on the underdetermination of all knowledge, including theological knowledge, in no way weakens the call to preach the gospel and make known the great themes of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation, in the public sphere. However, fulfilling this task may at times require fully engaging science and neutralizing the hindering effect of scientism. This is not a

positivistic attempt, with a new natural theology and an attempt to re-establish theology as the queen of the sciences, replacing one positivism for another. The goal, rather, is to show the underdetermination of all knowledge; scientific data remains open to a naturalistic or theistic interpretation. The goal in other words is not to prove God scientifically or philosophically in the public square. The goal is to show conclusively that science and philosophy have not disproved God and claims to the contrary are faith statements. It thus remains fully plausible and valid to invite individuals and societies to consider the claims of the gospel and enter into an existential relationship with God, wherein the ultimate proof is relationally provided.

### Chapter 3 Complexity and underdetermination in knowledge: a hermeneutical assessment

'[W]hat you see and hear depends a good deal on where you are standing: it also depends on what sort of person you are' C S Lewis *The Magician's Nephew*.

As discussed in chapter two, the nature of knowledge, Scripture, God, creation, culture and humankind and the nature of their interactions are complex issues and involve the interrelating of perfection versus imperfection, completeness versus incompleteness, and clarity versus obscurity within tensions of continuity versus discontinuity. This makes a hermeneutical approach to life, knowledge and Scripture inevitable.

#### 3.1 Clarifying the concept of hermeneutics

Hermeneutics comes from the Greek *hermēneuō*, to 'interpret'. It is classically grounded in the understanding that there is a linguistic, cultural and historical distance between the world of the interpreter and the world in which a text was produced. This creates the need for interpretation.

The possible range of meanings for hermeneutics has changed with historical development within epistemology. For example, looking at the epistemological concept of subject/ object, Herholdt (1988: 456) states, 'The history of hermeneutical development can...be explained as a competition between subjective and objective approaches to reality.' One can thus trace shifts from the Enlightenment optimism where the subject interrogated and understood the text (object), to Barth's reversal, where the revelation of God (object) interrogates the subject, through to postmodern developments with a subjective and existential focus on the reader and the reader's interaction with the existential reality (expressed as being {Heidegger} or intertextuality {Derrida}), which transcends the text. (: 452-456).<sup>40</sup>

Current approaches to hermeneutics, therefore, need to be understood within the context of the postmodern linguistic and ontological turn. Hermeneutics now focuses on an interpretation of life, existence and meaning itself: 'With this turn towards ontology, the problems of philology become secondary. Hermeneutics now deals with the meaning—or lack of meaning—of human life: it is turned into an existential task' (Ramberg and Gjesdal 2008: sect 4 par 6). As Thiselton (1988: par 1) states, '[T]heorists are no longer content to speak of rules for the interpretation of texts, as if to imply that understanding can be generated merely by the mechanical application of purely scientific principles. Hermeneutics raises prior and more fundamental questions about the very nature of language, meaning, communication and understanding.'

One's approach to hermeneutics as a methodological choice depends on where one is located in terms of authoritative versus relativistic assumptions about truth and knowledge. It is thus possible for hermeneutics to be linked to relativism, as in Stanley Fish's (1987:370-379) radical reader response hermeneutics, where there are as many interpretations and texts as there are readers and readings. Nevertheless, such relativism is not at all entailed within any essential understanding of hermeneutics itself and less radical approaches to hermeneutics continue to make an indispensable contribution to theology. Vanhoozer (1999: 128), for example, states that hermeneutics is vital for discussing theological truth claims: 'First, hermeneutics is a viable alternative to the either-or of objectivism and relativism....Second, hermeneutics is perhaps the

<sup>40</sup> According to Osborne (1997: par 7), in Heidegger's scheme there is no separate object to be grasped by a neutral subject. The subject is replete with preunderstanding and projects this onto the object: 'Not only is the text cut off from its author, but also the reader is cut off from any purely rational interaction with the text. Instead there is a new relationship as both text and reader interrogate each other.'

discipline that best corresponds to the nature of a theological truth claim, not only because the latter concerns biblical testimony, but because it deals with the meaning of the whole. Hermeneutics thus allows us to recover a neglected theme in epistemology, namely, understanding.'

### 3.2 Hermeneutics and fields of tension

The discussion on knowledge thus far has concluded that knowledge involves diverse elements, which interact in complex systems. These interactions are not purely arbitrary or chaotic and I have chosen fields of tension within continuums as a primary model to deal with this complexity. The many complex elements that are involved in knowledge and life are often related within polar pairs, which create a field of tension. For example, there remains a tension between accounting for life scientifically versus religiously (an intrasystemic field of tension).<sup>41</sup>

Individually and within fields of knowledge there is a need to resolve tensions and contradictions. For the individual this is vital in terms of psychological stability. For critically realistic approaches to knowledge, as found within some forms of science and theology, the assumption of the ultimate unity of all knowledge requires attempts at harmonization; conflict in data is interpreted as a problem to be resolved or endured. Of course, certain philosophical approaches can make absurdity and contradiction their aim but this is contrary to human nature and reality and these approaches are not sustainable in the long term. I argue that it is possible to deal with these tensions with greater or lesser degrees of epistemological and personal integrity. The need to resolve epistemological and existential tension can become unbearable and can cause individuals to adopt simplistic and deceptive meta-narratives such as religion being a superstition that science has disproved. This kind of deception also affects entire fields of knowledge, as in the conflation of science with scientism and the sceptical, naturalistic assumptions of many universities.

Fields of tension introduce the concept of continuity versus discontinuity. Different knowledge players can in part be understood according to the extent they maintain continuity versus attempt discontinuity with other knowledge players and realities. For example, Barth, who emphasizes a lack of common ground between theological (revelatory) and non-theological knowledge, is generally distinguished from Pannenberg (2008), who emphasizes this common ground. A non-theological example is Freud, whose negative conception of religion contrasts with Jung's affirmative stance.<sup>42</sup> Intrasystemically, all the different areas of knowledge involve various tensions. In Science, for example, physicists are generally more open to ideas of transcendence than biologists. Within theology one can place thinkers on a continuum in terms of a high versus a low view of Scripture.

Tensions are thus a key factor in theology, as Hall (1991:327) clarifies: '[W]hile the core of the Christian message (*kerygma*) is discontinuous with human experience, the message is nevertheless obviously intended for human beings and must therefore in some way be, or become, continuous with their experience.' Therefore, 'an adequate methodology...would be

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<sup>41</sup> From the outset it must be noted that the image of a bipolar field of tension is a metaphorical model, which is used to expose patterns and aid understanding, without suggesting that it corresponds to the complex and mysterious reality that exists independently of our attempts at understanding. The danger of a bipolar model is that it oversimplifies knowledge, creating a new positivistic mechanical method where one merely needs to relate two concepts and find a middle ground between them. The model of a web, which is unbounded, extending in all directions, with multiple interconnections could also be envisaged and should remain at the back of one's mind as a corrective to a positivistic understanding of bipolarity.

<sup>42</sup> '[F]or Freud religion was an obsessional neurosis, and at no time did he modify that judgment. For Jung it was the absence of religion that was the chief cause of adult psychological disorders' (G. S. Spinks in Jeeves 1988: par 10).

one which kept the two poles (continuity/discontinuity; the search for common ground/the recognition of offense) in dialectical tension' (:346).

The concept of fields of tension and continuity versus discontinuity and an awareness of the difficulties involved is thus not novel. This research re-examines this concept, however, in the context of the extreme skepticism, pluralism and relativism of our postmodern culture and with specific reference to pastoral care. It examines ways in which past answers to the question of complexity have been challenged by competing approaches and it looks at the issue of the validity of the various existing options.

The way that specific players understand and define themselves is often not true to the actual reality that exists. According to Niebuhr (1952: 80), Christian attempts to be discontinuous with culture (the Christ against Culture of his five well known categories) are untenable: 'It is inadequate, for one thing, because it affirms in words what it denies in action; namely, the possibility of sole dependence on Jesus Christ to the exclusion of culture. Christ claims no man purely as a natural being, but always as one who has become human in a culture; who is not only in culture, but into whom culture has penetrated.'

Chapter two concluded that the self-imagined independence of the different knowledge players is not true to reality. Science does rely on faith assumptions and theology cannot escape the use of certain philosophical assumptions and arguments, for example.

It can be argued that using a model of fields of tension is alien to Scripture, but there is no access to Scripture independently of personal, cultural, philosophical and theological filters and theology has many classic tensions.<sup>43</sup> It is clear that theology has not invented these tensions and paradoxes; rather, they are suggested by Scripture itself.<sup>44</sup>

If one accepts that epistemology should be systemic, comprehensive and broad in scope and, consequently, that hermeneutics (in the sense of facilitating existential meaning as well as scriptural understanding) is elemental in theology, the problem still exists of appropriately interrelating the diverse intertextual and intratextual elements involved in theology and knowledge in general. The next step in dealing with this question is to examine the different basic models that exist.

### 3.3 Different models for relating to fields of tension

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<sup>43</sup> Some of the many tensions that exist in theology are the following: human versus divine agency in faith (faith as a divine gift versus a human responsibility); an epistemological (Aquinas) versus a soteriological (Luther) focus in faith. The former (a theology of glory) dealing with 'how things (especially things about God) may be known, and ...[the latter (a theology of the cross) with] how salvation may be grasped' (McGrath 2001:238). This can also be framed as a focus on the revealedness versus the hiddenness of God; God's relationship to creation understood as transcendence versus immanence; a focus on God's revelation being from below (Pannenberg) versus from above (Barth), the classic natural versus revealed theology debate; a theocentric versus an anthropocentric focus in theology and ministry (working for the glory of God versus the actualization of human potential); a focus on heaven and salvation versus earth and societal transformation; continuity versus discontinuity between God's ways and understanding versus human ways and understanding; the tension between reason versus faith, in theologizing; the tension between faith and the critical reflection on faith; and the human versus the divine in the creation and interpretation of Scripture.

<sup>44</sup> The numerous paradoxes and tensions within Scripture (the poles of which different theological traditions may emphasize and ignore, according to their own agendas), far from undermining its reliability, point towards unity in diversity and to power arising out of tension. This is shown supremely in Christ, the God-man.



In the above section, the bipolar model of fields of tension was understood metaphorically and not as a positivistic determination of reality. This equally applies to the representation of the following models. It is not possible to encapsulate reality and thinkers through watertight, independent models and one can expect various areas of overlap. Similarly, the final model proposed is not intended as perfectly true to reality and a solution to the problem of knowledge. Knowledge and life remain a gift and a mystery.

Nevertheless, the assumption and goal of this research is the desirability of the broadest scope possible for theological knowledge as well as the broadest expression of pastoral care. This involves rejecting the multiple dichotomies that exist, such as those suggesting the incompatibility (and requisite separate existence) of science versus religion or an existential versus a propositional approach to Scripture. Similarly, in pastoral care and biblical counseling, one-sided methodologies and solutions need to be rejected.

### **3.3.1 Monism or reductionism**

In monism one of the poles in a field of tension is allowed to over function, to the detriment of the opposing perspective, as in scientism or physicalism, the post-liberal concept of the text absorbing the world (Lindbeck 1984: 118), or the conservative hermeneutical concept of applying 'to thought and life today that body of universal truths about God' drawn from Scripture (Packer 1988b: par 12).

Volf's (1996:48) criticism of postliberalism's way of defining itself with respect to culture and the world is extremely relevant to all tendencies to monism. He suggest that the direction of absorption between the poles of text and world is never one directional, claiming, 'Since it is difficult to say who is absorbing whom at any given moment, Lindbeck can programmatically claim to be absorbing extratextual realities into the world of the text while at the same time clandestinely allowing extratextual realities to shape profoundly the textual world he claims to be inhabiting' (:49). He accuses Lindbeck of 'hermeneutical simplicity' and failing to recognize 'there is no pure space on which to stand even for the community of faith' (:51). He concludes that faith does not involve learning the language and behaviour of a cultural-linguistic system. Rather, 'the word and the power of Jesus Christ dwell in us by the Spirit and [we] are thereby inserted into the multiple signifying and nonsignifying relations that the world we inhabit represents' (:58).

I would argue that these criticisms also apply to Packer and the over-strict defence of biblical inerrancy and the grammatical-historical method. Both postliberalism's focus on cultural-linguistic learning and practice and conservative evangelicalism's high view of Scripture are vital and this research argues that theology and ministry cannot be less than this. Nevertheless, they need to be more than this, for ministry and theology are also to be directed to the public sphere and to a profound engagement with culture.

Our current created order is the world within which Jesus died, within which we are to live, and within which we are to test all things in order to hold fast the good. This culture is neither fully continuous nor discontinuous with God's good creation and intent and thus we need to become spiritually mature and discerning as we learn to live in this world (Phlp 1:9-10, Rm 12:2). The strict separation advocated by many hyper-conservative churches robs both the world and the church of the blessing of God that comes out of difficult interactions and discernment. Christians in these over-conservative contexts may be spared this struggle, but at great cost, as is discussed in the next section.

On the other hand, although various contextual theologies, such as liberation theology and feminist theology, raise valid and vital concerns, the danger of allowing the context to define the

theological agenda is equally problematic and results in the 'world absorbing the text.' This can be seen in the following descriptions of their method: '[R]adical theologians hold that the hermeneutical process does not begin with the exegesis of Scripture but with a prophetic "reading of the times," discerning God's act of humanization and liberation in the general historical process and in particular situations' (Nicholls 1988: par 6). Kirk (1988: par 9) states that, for theologies of revolution, 'Justice is the supreme category for knowing God...Only those who take "an option for the poor" can know him truly'. He suggests, however, that this focus is reductionistic in that it does not sufficiently account for evil beyond politico-economic realities and, similarly, it does not emphasize the need for spiritual regeneration through Jesus (Kirk 1988: par 12-13).

I argue that a concern for justice that is purely grounded in context is incomplete in terms of warrant. When the context improves (such as when previously disadvantaged people benefit from economic empowerment), it is all too easy for the focus on justice to disappear (even being replaced by greed). A biblically-based focus on justice, on the other hand, is unchanging and reliable.

### 3.3.2 Dualism

The various possible philosophical dualisms (e.g., Manicheanism) are not our concern here. This section focuses on dualism within theological method and the dialectical theology of neo-orthodoxy is focused on.

Dialectical theology (as represented by Kierkegaard and Barth) eschews attempts to synthesize religious and scientific knowledge for, as Baxter (1988a: par 2-3) explains,

Dialectical theology learned from Kierkegaard to affirm the infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity; between eternity and time, infinite and finite. It is these opposites which dialectical theologians claim have come together in an absolutely paradoxical way in Jesus Christ. There is no higher synthesis of the two sides, for the two poles remain in creative tension.... Knowledge of God depends on personal encounter; divine subject relating to human subject. This brings recognition that God is so much beyond anything known ordinarily that we are forced to talk about him in ways that seem contradictory.

This basic assumption in dialectical theology will lead to a specific theological method and understanding of authority: natural theology and continuity with other forms of knowledge are completely de-emphasized. Although this theology restores an important truth and helps to free theology and spirituality from the shackles of rationalism it errs in creating a false dichotomy between existential and rational truth. Brümmer (1981: 211-212) clarifies how the essence of Christian faith 'is belief in God, having faith in Him and living by this faith.' He continues: 'It is wrong, however, to separate this personal attitude (*fiducia*) from assent to propositional truth (*fides*). This is absurd because *fiducia* presupposes *fides*. Trust in God and obedience to God presuppose, for instance, the belief that He, in whom we trust and whom we obey, does exist and has the characteristics that make it appropriate to trust Him and obey Him' (:213).

Packer (1988c: par 4) examines the issue of ontological paradox, which is essential to dialectical theology. While he recognizes the many paradoxes in Scripture, such as the Trinity and 'faith as man's act and equally God's gift', he prefers to refer to ontological paradoxes as mysteries, as they are objective realities that cannot be resolved by our creaturely comprehension. He claims that dialectical theology's 'unwillingness to be bound by the consistent rationality of Scripture...[has] resulted in much real irrationality and incoherence' (:par 5).

I agree that one cannot simplistically and positivistically assign paradoxical status to tensions in Scripture, using this as an excuse for avoiding reason and scientific inquiry. Nevertheless, I believe both paradox and mystery are valid terms that help guard against rationalism and positivism.<sup>45</sup>

### 3.3.3 Correlation

In a general sense correlation can refer to any relating between two elements. It is used here in the specific sense of a distinct theological method, exemplified by Tillich, Tracy and Browning.

Tillich (1957: 14) proposed the correlational method, which involves 'the correlation between existential questions and theological answers.' Tillich (1957:14). clearly did not intend to allow the context to determine theological content: 'The existential question, namely, man himself in the conflicts of his existential situation, is not the source for the revelatory answer formulated by theology.' His goal, rather, is to show the vital role of the human context: 'It is equally wrong to derive the question implied in human existence from the revelatory answer. This is impossible because the revelatory answer is meaningless if there is no question to which it is the answer' (:15).

Tracy's (1983:61-81) correlational model is the defining principle in his theology: 'Theology is the discipline that articulates the mutually critical correlations between the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the Christian fact and the meaning and truth of an interpretation of the contemporary situation' (:62).

Tracy (1983:70) further distinguishes theology in terms of three subdisciplines: fundamental theology, systematic theology and practical theology. Each of these areas is mediated and therefore has elements that are positive and can be embraced as well as areas that must be rejected. This creates a 'need, therefore, for both hermeneutics of retrieval and hermeneutics of critique-suspicion.' Practical theology has a vital role to play. It is the area where true criteria for an ethical and eschatological ideal which results in transformation (all of which is itself a product of a hermeneutical process) are tested and in turn used to test the validity of the interpretations gained from fundamental and systematic theology (:62). The whole process, according to Tracy, must be carried out in the public forum in a multipluralistic arena where all are able to make a contribution and all must be subjected to critique on the basis of criteria which are themselves publicly developed (:76-79).

Browning (1983:187) serves as the third example of a theologian who champions correlation. He suggests that the social sciences can contribute to a normative judgment, especially in the area of human central tendencies and needs: 'It is the primary task of pastoral theology to bring together theological ethics and social sciences to articulate a normative vision of the human life cycle....[P]astoral theology... increasingly must express itself within a pluralistic society of diverse religio-cultural assumptions, differing cultural disciplines, and conflicting ethical patterns of life.'

Tracy and Browning's theories are highly influential within pastoral and practical theology and their correlational methodology will be examined in greater detail in chapter six.

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<sup>45</sup> Anderson's (2007) 'Paradox in Christian Theology' is an example of an argument for the warranted epistemic status of paradox within theology.

I do not believe that the correlational method has been successful. The assumptions about human nature and its common core religious experience, which makes correlation possible, are unwarranted. Lindbeck (1984) criticizes these experiential-expressivist beliefs in his 'Nature of doctrine'. Talking about the theology associated with the Divinity School of the University of Chicago from 1890 to 1940, Pointer (1988: par 2) states,

Chicago modernism celebrated the 'spirit of the age' in both its scientific and democratic dimensions. Theologically, this entailed a rejection of special revelation as the basis for theological authority in favour of an appeal to experience as the criterion of truth in religion.... [seeking] scientific legitimacy for religion by appealing to experience in the public domain—that is, that which is accessible to and verifiable by all enquirers.

The fact that this optimism was unwarranted is shown by the growth of postmodernism. More importantly, the scriptural critique of fallen human nature invalidates this optimism. A further argument against this view is the deeply fractured and divided nature of society; one need merely think of Islam versus the west or the culture wars involving religion versus secularism within the West. Even if one limits oneself to the secular West, one merely needs to imagine the conflict between an atheist capitalist and an atheist environmentalist. The imagined societal consensus is belied by reality.

I think this correlation also fails to take the transcendent nature of the scriptural revelation seriously (Is 64:4; 1Cor 2:9). Vanhoozer (1997: 143) suggests that Tracy's correlational method sees Christ as 'the manifestation of an always already possibility of an agapic mode of being in the world.... This is neither hermeneutically nor theologically appropriate to Christian faith, the incarnation and resurrection are decidedly not members of a general class!'

One of the main concern's funding the correlational method is that theology is not imposed from without. Correlation's concern to take the human situation into account and listen very carefully is not at all problematic. Scripture itself teaches us to do this; no one listened more carefully or responded more contextually than Jesus. Furthermore, the incarnation is the ultimate contextual response. Nevertheless, this is different from making the human context an equal dialogue partner, both in terms of the ultimate questions asked and in terms of proposed solutions.

I believe society is not able to consistently ask the right ultimate questions: not only is it confused and divided, it is deceived and self-seeking. I believe that Scripture does in fact contain the right questions and answers for the following two reasons. Firstly, Scripture reveals the mind of God, who alone knows the true nature of the human condition (Gn 6:5; 1Chr 28:9; Ps 94:11, 139:23; Heb 4:12). Secondly, the Bible is a very human book showing a full range of authentic human responses (both good and bad) with the necessary divine commentary on each response. The social sciences, postmodernism, common sense and Scripture tell us that humankind is able to be deceived and out of touch with its true state and need. It cannot provide the stability needed for the correlational method. With respect to the human condition one needs, therefore, to distinguish between the nuanced specific form of the questions and answers, which can only be gained from interacting with the current context, from their eternal transcendent form, which far from being guaranteed by the current context may be contradicted by it (whole societies can become captive to deception as in materialism or racism).

The ability of God to penetrate and bridge all aspects of reality means that we can place the locus of truth fully in Him, through Scripture, without losing our authentic humanity. This is captured by Barth's (1960:56) later theology:

[T]heology will attempt to see, to understand, and to put into language the intercourse of God with man in which there comes about intercourse of man with God. It means that theology will deal with the word and act of the grace of God and the word and act of the human gratitude

challenged, awakened, and nourished through it. The first will not be considered without the second nor the second without the first, and both will be approached in the sequence, distinction, and unity given by the deity and thus the humanity of God.

### **3.3.4 The interplay between Christ and culture: The model of Niebuhr**

Niebuhr's (1952) classification of the possible relationships between Christ and culture (Christ against, of, above, in paradox with, or transforming culture) has in many ways become definitive. Niebuhr does not answer the question as to which stance is to be chosen, emphasizing how the position chosen is relative to our understanding and social and historical location (1952: 235). He suggests that this relativity does not have to lead to nihilism or a retreat to dogmatism. Rather one can accept these 'relativities with faith in the infinite Absolute to whom all...relative views, values and duties are subject' (: 236). His final stance is existentialist: 'we confront our choices in the presence of Christ and culture. We must decide; we must proceed from history and speculation to action; in deciding we must act on the basis of what is true for us, in individual responsibility; we must grasp what is true for us with the passion of faith; in our decision we need to go beyond what is intelligible and yet hold fast to it' (: 241).

Carson (2008a: x) analyzes Niebuhr's work and states it is 'transparently the stance of a mid-twentieth-century Westerner steeped in the heritage of what liberal Protestantism then was.' He suggests that the contemporary challenges involved in the relationship between Christ and culture require a re-examination of Niebuhr's model (2008:1-8).

Carson (2008a: 10) claims that Niebuhr includes too broad an understanding of Christ in his historical overview, allowing the inclusion of patterns 'decisively shaped by a frankly sub-biblical grasp of who Christ is.' I agree with Carson. If one is trying to live under the authority of the Christ of Scripture and trying to relate faithfully to culture in terms of this understanding, then one needs to have discontinuity with certain expressions of theology.

Carson's critique of Niebuhr's scheme has direct relevance for the issue of the interpretation of Scripture and it will be examined further in chapter five.

### **3.3.5 Radical pluralism**

It could be argued that the solution to the complexity in knowledge is to adopt a relativistic pluralism, where individuals and groups choose the beliefs that best suit them, focusing on one aspect or eclectically mixing and matching according to need or desire. This is unrealistic for we do not live in hermetically sealed compartments and inevitable conflicts of interest require resolution. To totally bypass questions of hermeneutics and authority is not to create an environment of freedom for all but rather a dangerous environment where the strong will impose their will over the weak or where hidden insidious forces manipulate society.

### **3.3.6 Praxis and contextualisation**

Praxis and contextualization present two further concepts that need to be understood in order to correctly interrelate diversity. Context refers to the circumstances or environment within which any aspect of reality can be considered. It will be discussed (in chapter five) as a critical part of biblical interpretation, where biblical verses need to be considered within textual, canonical, historical, cultural, etc. contexts. It is also vital to understand all knowledge claims within their historical and cultural contexts.

Context is inextricably bound up with all aspects of the theological enterprise. Theologians cannot escape their context and effective theology relates to a specific context in time and space (historical and geographical sensitivity thus being essential): 'Contextualization is not a passing fad or a debatable option. It is essential to our understanding of God's self-revelation. The incarnation is the ultimate paradigm of the translation of text into context' (Nicholls 1988: par 2).

In his introductory volume to his theology, 'Thinking the faith', Hall (1989: 93) uses contextuality as a basic methodological principle which is required by the nature of its subject matter and purpose: 'Christian theology is contextual by definition...[because] (1) Theology is a human enterprise, (2) theology attempts to speak of the living God and of God's relation to a dynamic creation, and (3) theology exists for the sake of the church's confession.'

In the pastoral care situation a concern for context means understanding the person's social context: 'The systemic approach already indicated that the person within a social context is an important source for knowledge. Often it is the position of people within the dynamics of relationships and emotional experiences that creates the problem' (Louw 1998b: 62).

A concern for context naturally relates to a praxis methodology. Fowler (1995:3) explains praxis as, 'A pattern in which action and ongoing reflection continually interpenetrate' and which is distinguishable from practice: 'Practices are shared patterns of interaction that have evolved to meet the needs and serve the recurring interests of people in relation with each other' (1995:4). This is similar to Wofaardt's (1993:19) definition: 'Praxis thus has two elements: action and reflection, although the two are always linked. It is action performed reflectively and reflection on what is being done. This implies that knowledge is gained not through speculation but through a person's conscious engagement in and experience of social reality.'

According to Tidball (1988: par 3), although praxis runs the danger of reducing theology to ethics it does have some biblical warrant: 'God communicates with his world, not through a conceptual frame of reference, but in creative activity; in John's gospel knowing truth is contingent on doing it (Jn. 3:21).'

Hall (1989:21) presents a comprehensive perspective with regard to praxis: 'The point of praxis is not to substitute act for thought, deed for word, but to ensure that thinking is rooted in existence –and committed to its transformation...It means...to pledge oneself to the overcoming of the (after all, artificial) gap between thought and act, and so to become more serious about both.'

The concepts of praxis and contextualization are not necessarily linked to the correlational method. They are to an extent neutral concepts that are used in different ways by different theological systems. In terms of my concern to simultaneously affirm and correctly interrelate diversity, within appropriately structured fields of tension, praxis and contextualization are vital: the former refers to the importance of both theory and action and the latter to the importance of both text and context (vital poles, which need to be included in a comprehensive understanding of knowledge). Contextual theologies and their call for ethical involvement and praxis are thus vital in order to balance out abstract, theoretical theology.

Within themselves, however, they do not have the methodological concept which can prevent them from representing a simple bi-polar correlation (which inevitably becomes a monism). There is also a danger of underemphasizing the cognitive-propositional nature of Scripture and theology. The model of Chalcedonian interrelating provides this lacking methodological concept, as shall be shown below.

### 3.3.7 A Chalcedonian pattern of interaction.

In the context of pastoral care, Louw (1998b: 31-37) adopts Heitink's bipolar model, which accepts the tension between theology, revelation and faith on the one hand, and empirical observation, experience and reason on the other. He emphasizes that the focus should be on covenantal partnership, at the same time avoiding the danger of complementariness. Because the Godly pole is dominant he suggests the need to complement the bipolar model with a convergence model. In a convergence model pneumatology, an eschatological emphasis and a hermeneutical stance play crucial roles; the indwelling Holy Spirit provides the point of contact in the covenant and God's salvific actions provide the normative and the hope dimension. Louw (1998b: 100-101) draws on Van Deusen Hunsinger's Chalcedonian pattern-based model to undergird this interaction, allowing each pole to maintain its unique identity ('indissoluble differentiation') without dualism ('inseparable unity'), while safeguarding the priority of the divine pole ('indestructible order').

This model has much to commend it due to its connection to God's mode of revelation in Christ and its accommodation of diversity while maintaining a concern for Christian identity. It does not replace the need for hermeneutics but it is a necessary part of providing a methodological control for guarding against unwarranted hermeneutical conclusions that arise out of excessive continuity or discontinuity with other realms of knowledge. This convergence model is a good example of a paradigmatic understanding of reality in which elements are brought into association in terms of relationships and overlapping horizons of meaning.

### 3.4 Conclusion

Thus far it has been argued that knowledge is complex and Christian ministry cannot be reductionistic.

Nevertheless, this complexity needs to be systemically interrelated. Even though God through Scripture is the ultimate authority, He rules in dialogue with humankind and hermeneutical choices need to be made. Since God's concern is for the blessing of all creation, and since creation is complex, existing in a range of continuums, an approach to ministry and knowledge needs to be able to respond to this. I have argued that it is vital to maintain balance and embrace fields of tension. This involves a qualified correlation that resists collapsing into one of the poles within the field of tension. The situation is even more complex since multiple fields of tension all co-exist. However, for the purpose of clarity I am talking of a single field of tension at a time.

The issue still remains of how such an understanding is to be articulated in the public arena. If the gospel is confined to cultural linguistic communities or is offered in a pluralistic market place as one of many acceptable options, then there is no problem. The issue of the particularity and absoluteness of Christianity is, however, problematic. The conservative evangelical church insists on this particularity, whereas certain other parts of the church do not. A key issue that this research attempts to address is how this issue of particularity is to be viewed. Is it a non-negotiable aspect of the Christian gospel, the violation of which is a violation of the gospel itself? If so, how is this particularity to be related to the comprehensive, hermeneutical approach to knowledge that currently seems to be the most appropriate expression of theology? Is it possible to maintain both? The question of authority and locus in the context of these questions still needs to be dealt with and will be addressed in chapter four.

The priority of Christ and revelation cannot simplistically be resolved by a positive reading of Scripture against other realms of knowledge or of asserting Christ against culture. There is no guaranteed or pure reading of Scripture or understanding of Christ, and the presence and truth

of God may potentially be found in any aspect of creation in complex ways. For example, a secular scientist may in one research paper state a fact that resonates well with theology and even clarifies Christian truth and in the very next paper state something that is profoundly anti-theological. Similarly, a theologian may communicate something true of God in a book and in the very next sentence compromise and blur the truth. Let us not forget Peter, who was praised by Jesus for speaking a revelatory word from God (Mt 16:16-17) and shortly thereafter was chastised for being a mouthpiece for Satan and expressing that which was not of God (Mt 16:23). It is therefore important to practice responsible continuity versus discontinuity as a basic internal methodology, which can function in helping to interpret all aspects of knowledge and in making existential decisions.

I am defining continuity versus discontinuity in terms of a hermeneutical decision to relate more or less strongly to certain beliefs, people and activities. For example, if I believe that there should be strong discontinuity or separation between 'Christian culture' and 'non-Christian culture' I will not listen to secular music. If I believe in strong continuity, then I will question the terms 'Christian' versus 'non-Christian' and will listen to so-called 'secular music'. Continuity versus discontinuity can also be defined in terms of how one theoretically imagines the relationship between different aspects of knowledge. For example, if I believe that truth about people is only found in the Bible I will not use psychological research in my pastoral care interventions. The issue of continuity versus discontinuity thus operates at a practical and theoretical level and in individual, groups, societies and realms of knowledge.

It is not difficult to argue that excessive continuity or discontinuity is counter-productive. Numerous examples of excessive continuity can be found. The blind acceptance, by certain parts of the church, of Nazism in Germany, apartheid in South Africa, and materialism in the First World generally, is at odds with the Church's prophetic mandate<sup>46</sup>. Similarly, the over-identification in theological or epistemological endeavours may ultimately entail a loss of credibility.<sup>47</sup> Such attempts do not seem to sufficiently recognize theology's eschatological dimension, which, by definition, includes that which transcends all understanding and current possibilities. Such a strong correlation also ends up failing to respect the freedom of the other, whether it is the other non-Christian or the other non-theological realm of knowledge. On the other hand, as Niebuhr clearly shows in his models of Christ and culture, extreme discontinuity is not possible.

I will be using the term 'tension' to refer to the idea of continuity versus discontinuity.

A valid tension is a challenge to all parts of the spectrum in knowledge and theology. It is too simplistic to ascribe positive or negative motives to the 'opposing side.' In reality, all levels of tension can be chosen with good or bad motives. For example, strong continuity with culture can be based on love and courage and a desire to share God's love or it can be due to compromise, fear or laziness. It is not possible to escape the challenge through simplistic labeling, therefore, and all sides need to constantly strive to be in God's will. The nature of the tension will be different in different aspects of one's life and knowledge and it may change over time. At any point the challenge may be to increase or decrease the tension between different elements.

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<sup>46</sup> Interestingly, these examples find so called 'liberals' and 'conservatives' in the same camp of over-identification.

<sup>47</sup> For example, Peters (1993: 14) comments: 'Pannenberg rushes in where two-language angels have feared to tread. He does not say that spirit is like a force field. He says spirit is a force field...Historians of science are quick to point out the dangers of trying to float a theological assertion aboard a scientific ship, because the intellectual weather can change suddenly...How long will field theory stay afloat? If someday it should sink, will Pannenberg's theology of spirit sink with it?'



The belief that one is living a consistently balanced life is deception. It is important to know that one is invariably erring to the left or the right in different areas and yet it is impossible to know exactly where and to what extent. All one can do is rely on God's grace, remaining utterly humble and open to God and His guidance (Ps 19: 12-13; Pr 21:2). Far from being burdensome it is a release from the heavy burden and tyranny of needing to be right (Mt 11:28-30; 1 Jn 5:3-4). All sides, therefore, need to consider the challenge with which they are being addressed.

The discontinuity focus of excessive conservatism needs to be challenged in terms of authentic human living, freedom, creativity, and an affirmation of creation and nature. Much more dialogue and inclusiveness with respect to non-believers and non-conservative Christians is possible without this in any way representing compromise or endangering the truth of the gospel. Jesus is our model in this regard (Mt 11:19).

The continuity focus of non-conservatives equally needs to be challenged by a greater concern for truth and an understanding that love and freedom depend on judgment and separation (It is that which is different from us and disagreeable to us that requires a response of love, and true love tries to remove or place a boundary against that which is sincerely believed to be harmful). Jesus was attractive and welcoming, but equally fierce and holy. He serves equally as our model in this regard (Mt 10:34).

It is therefore important to reclaim the epistemological language of true versus false belief and the existential language of righteous versus wicked behaviour. The image of drawing a line can be used in conjunction with that of a continuum of continuity versus discontinuity between two aspects of reality. If we emphasize discontinuity with something we draw our line further away from it and situate ourselves behind that line. The line represents a boundary we will not cross with respect to the other belief or behaviour. We do not have to agree on where the lines are drawn (this exact knowledge is not humanly possible). Nevertheless, we need to be in agreement with God's testimony through Scripture that there are lines to be drawn and we need to have the integrity to place ourselves on the right side of the lines, as we understand them. We also need to challenge others concerning their refusal or inability to create lines separating truth from falsity and right from wrong. Where lines are drawn in places different to ours any challenge must be humble and Spirit-led, realizing that it may in fact be we who need to adjust our lines.

I think that conservatives are too strict and anxious about drawing lines and ensuring that everyone gets on the right side them. This is linked to a positive view of scriptural knowledge and is based on a confidence in human reason to discern this knowledge and on human will to obey it. This results in the doomed attempts to create Christian sub-cultures that are morally 'pure'. If knowledge and life is truly so clear-cut and it is possible to create 'pure' sub-cultures, it is the most natural thing to try and convince people to get on the right side of the line and into the sub-culture. However, it must be remembered that some of the Pharisees thought they were in line with God's truth and that Jesus was a law-breaker who deserved to be put to death (Jn 9:16a; Mt 26:59). Yet, Scripture clearly portrays Jesus as being in the right in contrast to the Pharisees (Mt 23:13; Jn 5:39-40). This example of a group who ardently studied the Scriptures and yet so completely misread the presence and purpose of the One that the Scriptures ultimately testify to should serve as a humbling warning against legalism and overconfidence concerning our mastery of the message of Scripture.

The solution is clearly not to go to the other extreme of relativism without any lines being drawn. Yet, the conservative focus on doctrine and being in line with the truth needs to be tempered for several reasons. Firstly, a critically realistic understanding of reality and knowledge means that absolute certainty with regard to the truth is impossible; this automatically makes the positivistic drawing of lines impossible. Secondly, if we recognize that God has made each of us different

and that we are in different stages of healing and growth in our spiritual journey, then we will allow others the time to draw and redraw their lines in terms of the rhythm God has for their lives. We should also recognize the difference between broader, indisputable matters such as divorce and murder and smaller disputable matters like attitudes to Sabbath and diet (Rm 14:1-6). Thirdly, we sometimes need to temper our response to sin, not because we condone it but because we realize that we cannot put the cart before the horse. What do we expect sinners to do except sin? And how can they stop sinning without the grace of Jesus? And how can they know this grace unless he embraces them while they are still yet sinners? I think this is a major mistake some parts of the conservative church make with regard to the world. When this third point is combined with the first two points, a critical spirit of judgment is manifest, which drives the sinner away from the very place God intended His grace to be shown.

God does not wink at sin and the liberal heresy consists in not dealing with personal sin in any depth or even not dealing with it at all. Yet it is vital to follow the model, sequence and timing displayed in Scripture. When the Pharisees objected to Jesus eating with 'sinners and tax collectors', he clearly stated, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners' (Mk 2:17). The bible states, '[B]ecause of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions' (Eph 2:4-5; see also Rm 5:8). The word 'grace' is used around 130 times in the NT and it does not mean that sin is not taken seriously, as Paul was accused of suggesting (Rm 6:15), because it is God's kindness that leads to repentance (Rm 2:4).

In conclusion, I believe that an appropriate hermeneutic courageously deals with all aspects of life and knowledge. It seeks to maintain all valid tensions and does not sidestep the issue of truth and sin. Yet this can only be done by the grace of God, for it requires the divine gifts of wisdom, sacrifice, patience, humility and endurance.

#### **Chapter 4 The quest for authority: truth and warrant within a critically realistic, hermeneutical approach to knowledge**

In chapter two knowledge was examined in terms of approaches to the following: sources and ultimate reality; method and process; outcomes or knowledge claims and encapsulations. Each of these aspects of knowledge involves decisions between different approaches and attitudes. Further decisions involve the way these different aspects are interrelated into an overall approach and understanding (taking us into issues of worldview and -often hidden- assumptions). Finally choices are also made in terms of attitude or stance to one's knowledge system as a whole: this research, for example, in chapter three, adopts a comprehensive and hermeneutical stance towards the knowledge claims (and inevitable system) it proposes. Every single one of these aspects can be challenged and takes us into issues of authority (i.e. in the sense of normativity and warrant). Authority, in other words, is not merely relevant to specific knowledge claims made by different knowledge players (such as a scientific theory or a prophecy) it relates to all aspects of knowledge and the knowledge process, those that are explicit and acknowledged as well as those that are not.

Within theology the concept of authority (in the sense of warrant) is vitally important. According to Elias (1988: par 2-3),

The resolution of the problem [of authority] forms the basis upon which every theological system is built....Differing forms of authority...underlie most...theological differences....Among the various elements involved in the discussion [of authority] are the place and role of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), the Bible, tradition, the church (catholic and local), theological frameworks and systems, reason, conscience, will, emotion or feeling and faith. When analysed, every theological position will normally allocate, consciously or unconsciously, a place and role to each of these in its pattern of authoritative criteria. Differences arise as a result of the priority assigned to each criterion and the function allocated to it in contrasting systems.

The move in previous chapters beyond a relativistic and purely practical or instrumental approach to knowledge leads to increased problems of authority. In other words, since one is claiming that one is able to deal with knowledge in a way that is normative, true or authoritative, one has to give a basis for these claims. The immediate problem of needing to give a basis for one's basis seems to shipwreck the endeavor from the start and this dilemma is explored in this chapter.

The approach to knowledge in previous chapters was comprehensive, hermeneutical and critically realistic. Continuing this approach means that all aspects of authority are examined (in the interests of comprehensiveness), complex interactions between the different aspects are encouraged (in the interests of hermeneutics) and the issue of ultimate warrant (or locus) for truth, knowledge and authority attempts to avoid positivism (in the interests of critical realism).

Issues of complexity and potential misunderstanding that arose in previous chapters are reflected in the issue of authority, and there is a mutual interaction between how one defines and gains knowledge and how one deals with the question of authority. For example, if knowledge is defined materialistically and positivistically, then metaphysical and religious claims are automatically denied any status as knowledge and validity or authority is directly related to the quality and consistency of the empirical method and the universal reproducibility of the results. On the other hand, if knowledge is placed within the more interpretative framework, then metaphysical and religious claims do have meaning and validity is related to a common-sense correspondence between knowledge and reality, wisdom and the ability of the knowledge claims to give meaning and 'deliver' pragmatically, as well as to the richness and coherence of their inter-textual and intra-textual connections.

Often, issues of authority are not seen as important, with the scientist and pastor content to operate in separate realms. Due to the changing nature of society (with increasing interaction and tearing down of barriers), the escalating culture wars, the particular truth claims of Christianity, and an ethical responsibility to know and do the truth in all its fullness, I argue that there needs to be a greater concern for epistemology, including the specific aspect, within epistemology, of authority.

This chapter will briefly explore the nature of authority (including its sense as warrant). It will then examine the nature of appropriate warrant within science, philosophy and theology. Appropriate warrant within each field will depend on how the field deals with its subject matter, methodology and outcomes within a consistent approach to knowledge, as well as how it relates these aspects to other areas of life and other knowledge disciplines. According to this research, appropriate warrant within each field will involve a comprehensive, hermeneutical, critically realistic approach. More specifically it will have the following characteristics: it will take all fields of knowledge into account, including natural and spiritual realities; it will acknowledge the diversity of its methodology (the fact that reason, faith, experience and imagination are integral to its methodology and thus to its warrant); it will be related to 'thick' comprehensive descriptions of reality; it will be correctible and probabilistic; it will relate to existential and epistemological concerns. Although this kind of appropriate warrant cannot be positivistic or relativistic, this chapter will argue that universal, public truth claims can and must be made. Finally, a key aspect of this chapter will be clarifying the continuity and discontinuity that exists between theological and non-theological approaches to authority.

#### **4.1 Clarifying the various definitions of authority**

The term 'authority' has numerous related dictionary definitions : 'the right or power to enforce rules or give orders'; 'somebody or something with official power'; 'power to act on behalf of somebody else or official permission to do something'; 'somebody who is accepted as a source of reliable information on a subject, or a book in which such information is given'; 'the ability to gain the respect of other people and to influence or control what they do'; 'knowledge, skill, or experience worthy of respect' (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version). These definitions do not fully explain the epistemological sense of authority and its related synonyms (such as justification, foundations, proof, verification, validity, appropriateness and warrant). The speech act intended by these latter words naturally occurs when one is dealing with knowledge and hermeneutics. In this context issues of truth and validity come to the fore ; the use of these terms means that one is being asked to give a valid reason for preferring one specific methodology, view of reality, theory, set of propositional claims, proposed course of action, etc. above another.

According to the arguments in this research, not all the above terms are equally suitable. Foundations, verification and proof have positivistic connotations and will be purposefully avoided. Justification will also not be used as it has unique theological meanings (distinct from the epistemological sense of justification as a form of warrant). This leaves the terms 'warrant,' 'validity,' 'appropriateness,' 'legitimacy,' and 'authority,' all of which are used throughout this research.

Compared to warrant and validity, the term 'authority' has greater resonance with theology, church history and Scripture. It covers issues of epistemological warrant common to all fields of knowledge, but it further entails unique, rich existential and wisdom dynamics that constitute the particular concern of valid theological knowledge. On the other hand, the term can create confusion when used simultaneously with the above dictionary (i.e. existential) definitions of authority.

Thus, in terms of authority as power (within the first three dictionary definitions given above), it can be confusing to talk of the authority (in the sense of warrant) for authority (in the sense of power). Similarly, when talking of authority as reliable information (the fourth dictionary definition), one can talk of the authority (warrant) for a person or book to be an authority. The fifth dictionary definition (which talks of 'influence' and 'control') triggers postmodern suspicion of coercive power and begs the question of the warrant or appropriateness of this authority. Finally, the last definition blurs the line between the dictionary or existential and the epistemic senses of authority, for 'knowledge, skill, or experience worthy of respect' contains within itself a strong sense of warrant already. This last case is a good example of the 'trickiness' involved in separating personal authority from a separate proof that validates it. Sometimes one of the main sources of authority (warrant) one has for being an authority (reliable source) is one's authority (knowledge and fruitfulness) on a specific subject matter or aspect of life.

One sees, therefore, that authority and warrant are complex concepts and their multiple senses sometimes come into play simultaneously. This research argues that this confluence is appropriate and should naturally occur within life and knowledge. It is the Enlightenment split between fact and value that has disrupted this appropriate interaction, with disastrous effects. Existential aspects of life and knowledge lose the validation *and* the correction that comes from interacting with authority as warrant. Conversely, epistemological aspects of warrant, severed from faith and their existential context become impoverished (lacking ethical sensitivity, for example). They also tend to over-function, mutating into positivistic approaches. This positivism is impossible to live up to and skepticism ultimately ensues.

#### **4.2 Positivism and scepticism in knowledge: claiming ultimate authority with insufficient warrant**

Logically, seeking ultimate authority amounts to claiming that your field can furnish knowledge concerning all of reality. Any questions that your field cannot answer are said to be one of the following: answerable by your field in future, as it develops; irrelevant or not worth knowing; or unanswerable. This need not suggest that other fields have no truth, but any truth that exists can ultimately be collapsed into your own field.<sup>48</sup> Numerous examples of this quest for ultimate authority exist, from ancient philosophers trying to work out an all-inclusive metaphysical scheme to top scientists and biologists seeking a unifying theory based on science, such as Wilson's (1998) concept of 'consilience', Aquinas's natural theology, or the work of the logical positivists.

I have included skepticism within positivism, for claims not to know can be just as positivistic and unwarranted as claims to know.

Each of the main fields of knowledge contains examples of thinkers who adopt a positivistic stance. Although each field has unique forms of positivism these may overlap with other fields. For example, although foundationalism is best explained within philosophy, the attempt to establish indubitable foundations is found within all fields of knowledge. Similarly, although natural science is the field where reductionism is most clearly seen, forms of reductionistic exclusion occur in philosophy and social science as well.

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<sup>48</sup> In a letter to 'The Independent' newspaper in 2007 Richard Dawkins argues that theology departments have no place in a university and suggests those theological departments representing glimmers of knowledge such as history and linguistics can be absorbed into the university's history and linguistic departments proper <<http://richarddawkins.net/articles/1698-letters-theology-has-no-place-in-a-university>>. Accessed September 2011.

#### 4.2.1 Positivism within philosophy: foundationalism and scepticism

Finding an ultimate basis for knowledge has not proved possible. The classic standard definition of knowledge is justified true belief; knowledge only occurs when it can be shown that a belief has a clear and provable relationship to truth. It thus becomes vital to validate the truth of that which is believed and this logically leads to foundationalism (an attempt at justification). As Davis (1999: 429) explains, inferential knowledge, based on other beliefs, leads to infinite regress or circular reasoning, both of which are deemed unacceptable; forcing one to consider the equally problematic foundationalism.

Foundationalism 'tries to anchor one's thought in basic premises that are beyond all possible doubt (indubitable) and beyond any need of correction (incorrigible)' (Bloesch 1992: 22). Such beliefs 'not only (a) have their epistemic justification *non-inferentially* (i.e., apart from evidential support from any other beliefs), but also (b) provide epistemic justification for all justified beliefs that lack such non-inferential justification' (Moser 1999a: 275).<sup>49</sup>

Rationalism thus seems unable to escape the dilemma of practically experiencing a state or idea as knowledge or truth and yet not being able to rationally explain why, thus not being able to call it knowledge. It is clear how holding to this rationalist conception of knowledge, as encapsulated in the standard analysis, inevitably leads to the skepticism and pluralism of postmodernism.

A key step in dismantling this rationalistic picture of knowledge is recognizing that the idea that belief is grounded in a rational, decision-making process is an oversimplification that arises out of the positivism of modernism, with its exaltation of reason. As Brümmer (1981: 192) clarifies, concerning beliefs: 'They are states of mind which are caused in us by the evidence that we take into consideration. We are convinced by the evidence. We do not decide to be convinced.' Taylor (in Sire: 1995) echoes this point: '[T]o believe something is to hold it to be true; and, indeed, one cannot consciously manipulate one's beliefs for motives other than their seeming true to us.'

We are not to conclude, however, that rationality has no role in knowledge. It is vital, nevertheless, to clearly distinguish rationality (the appropriate use of reason) from rationalism (a positivistic and foundational use of reason). Brümmer (1981: 193-194) correctly nuances the issue: '[T]he rationalist conception of rationality is incoherent. Being rational does not mean deciding to believe propositions only on sufficient (or irrefutable) evidence. There is no such decision possible. We are rational, however, when we adopt an open and critical attitude towards those beliefs.' He clarifies that while we cannot justify our belief we can 'justify our attitude towards our beliefs and our decision to claim the status of knowledge for our beliefs' (:197).<sup>50</sup>

Popper is well known for attempting to move beyond the unsurpassable difficulties of foundationalism with regard to authority, through his proposal of falsification as opposed to verification.<sup>51</sup> He works with soft or modest foundational beliefs, comparing theories to a

<sup>49</sup> Foundationalism can ultimately be traced back to certain of Aristotle's concerns but it is classically associated with Descartes (seeking a basis of overcoming the controversies which undergirded the bloody religious wars of his time), whose foundationalism has been severely critiqued (Sire 1995: 116-118).

<sup>50</sup> It is important to clarify the ambiguity in the phrase 'not justifying one's belief' and make sure that it is being used in Brümmer's former sense of belief and not in the latter sense of attitudes.

<sup>51</sup> 'Following the model of natural science, Popper realized that universal statements could not be verified but could be falsified by counter-examples.... Built into this move is recognition that both acceptance and rejection of hypotheses are incomplete and provisional. This procedure cannot establish the truth of

'building erected on piles...driven into...[a] swamp'. They reach no solid base and only need to be 'firm enough to [temporarily] carry the structure' (in Murphy 1994a: 12). Along with many current thinkers who sidestep metaphysical issues, Popper can be challenged on the basis of his faith assumptions. Sidestepping metaphysics rests on the faith that such issues do not need to be dealt with. To not choose to consider questions of ultimate reality is actually to make a choice about ultimate reality.

Talk of the locus of truth suggests a commitment to foundationalism, the search (as in Descartes) for an indubitable basis for knowledge. There are two problems with this. Firstly, this foundation has been sought within human capabilities, primarily reason, which has repeatedly been proved to be fallible. Secondly, assurance has been linked to perfect objectivity, which has proved equally unattainable. The foundational project has thus failed, giving rise to relativism, instrumentalism, soft foundationalism, probability, etc.<sup>52</sup>

For many, the failure of foundationalism leads to scepticism with regard to knowledge and ushers in various forms of pragmatic relativism.<sup>53</sup>

In certain forms of postmodernism, objectivity and foundational concerns are rejected. Derrida (In Erickson 1998: 132), for example, desires epistemological humility by not resorting to 'logocentric appeal to metaphysical presence.' Rorty (1996: 575), as another example, defines himself as a pragmatist in distinction to realists who are concerned with truth claims: 'By contrast, those who wish to reduce objectivity to solidarity –call them "pragmatists"- do not require either a metaphysics or an epistemology. They view truth as...what is good for *us* to believe.' He continues : '[T]he pragmatist does not have a theory of truth....As a partisan of solidarity, his account of the value of cooperative human inquiry has only an ethical base, not an epistemological or metaphysical one' (1996: 576). Rorty (in Lundin 1995:30) clearly delights in the concept of indeterminacy and the power that it allows the individual: '[A]nything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed...[The self can] seek consolation, at the moment of death, not in having transcended the animal condition but in being that peculiar sort of dying animal who, by describing himself in his own terms, had created himself.'

This extreme relativism and scepticism is not possible to live up to. In terms of foundations and proof as they are envisaged in my research I would offer the following arguments against these thinkers: Firstly, in terms of foundations, it is impossible to envisage a great divide between foundationalists and non-foundationalists, as the above thinkers seem to do (proudly viewing themselves as enlightened non-foundationalists). So-called foundationalists actually believe in a circular way, without absolute foundations. Similarly, so-called non-foundationalists have an implicit basis to their beliefs. Rorty, for example, is appealing to the self and community

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scientific laws, and says nothing about nonscientific areas such as theology and metaphysics except that they are not science' (Cook 1988b: par 8).

<sup>52</sup> More often than not the question of truth has just been ignored and the academy has been pleased to operate without dealing with it. Willard (1995) comments how logic as a field of study has all but disappeared from many universities and when a student asks about the meaning behind the symbols, etc. being used in a science class, for example, he is made to feel stupid for needing to ask. This clearly places psychological pressure on professors for the universities were based on principles of seeking truth; a certain amount of denial is required to alleviate psychological pressure and to continue lecturing.

<sup>53</sup> Montaigne states the essential dilemma which causes skepticism: 'To adjudicate [between the true and the false] among the appearances of things, we need to have a distinguishing method; to validate this method, we need to have a justifying argument; but to validate this justifying argument, we need the very method at issue. And there we are, going round on the wheel' (In Moser 1999a: 277). Extreme sceptics doubt the possibility of any knowledge whatsoever, but most sceptics merely doubt the possibility of knowledge in certain fields. According to Moser (1999a: 277), 'Contemporary epistemology still lacks a widely accepted reply to this urgent problem.'

(solidarity) as foundations. The relativists create a nihilistic picture of knowledge and reality, which none of them are really willing to commit to. Their continuing attachment to meaning (a foundational concept) is further underscored by the very fact that they are arguing a point. Although Rorty and Derrida propose an indeterminacy of meaning, apparently it doesn't extend to their own statements about this indeterminacy. The phrase 'all statements are meaningless' is self-refuting. As Lewis (1968: 231) explains, 'You cannot go on "explaining away" for ever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away', something that these thinkers have not done.

It is in terms of proof that the unwarranted nature of these thinkers' stance becomes apparent. I believe that it is a basic belief that foundations and assumptions about reality should cohere with life as it is lived out. We intuitively accept that someone's beliefs should be reflected in his or her behaviour. This intuition is formally articulated in the philosophical position that facts must have a 'bearing on our possibilities for action' (Brümmer 1981: 242).<sup>54</sup> Philosophically, this lack of coherence is termed a practical contradiction (as opposed to the more obvious logical contradictions). Thus, when non-foundationalists claim there is no foundational meaning but we see them meaningfully arguing this and living life on the basis of meaning, we have warrant for our skepticism about their beliefs. I argue that theological representatives need to challenge atheists concerning the lack of congruence between their beliefs and actions, while themselves demonstrating such integrity.

As stated in chapter 2.3, realism is one of most disputed issues in philosophy. However, this intense debate does not need to undermine claims of knowledge being critically realistic and warrant therefore being probabilistic. Philosophy, by its very nature, can never settle on an issue or give a proof of validation for anything. Philosophy's proper subject matter is correctly functioning logic and thought. In all its debate about realism, philosophy is adopting a critically realistic attitude to language, logic and thought. Every philosopher intends his or her meaning to be understood. And, indeed, many of the conclusions of philosophy, while not irrefutable, have stood the test of time and are excellent and useful within the context of a critically realistic application: deductive reasoning, logic, laws of non-contradiction etc. are used in all realms of knowledge (it matters little whether it was philosophers, theologians or scientists who initially established these ideas and principles). Nevertheless, philosophy cannot be positivistic or relativistic about reality without doing the work of science and theology better than science and theology can. If the best manifestations of science and theology are critically realistic, philosophy rejects this without proper warrant.

This reinforces my idea that knowledge is complex and one cannot neatly separate the fields of knowledge. All philosophers do scientific and theological work and all scientists do theological and philosophical work, for example. This is inevitable. The problem arises when one is not honest or aware about the mode (or mixture of modes) of knowledge out of which one is operating. This lack of clarity is very evident with the New Atheists. Hitchens (2007:87-96) suggests that the idea of a God who would use such a long, wasteful and destructive process as evolution to create a world that ends up dying out in a cruel expiration is something he cannot believe. This is clearly a faith statement and an opinion and yet, due to it being given in the context of polemics aimed at eradicating religion for all people everywhere, it is intended as a rational proof that should be apparent to all reasonable people.

#### **4.2.2 Positivism and reductionism within natural science**

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<sup>54</sup> As Anthony Flew (1979: 9) states in his famous parable, 'Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?'



As discussed in chapter two, natural science deals with measurable phenomena. This is done through a combination of methodologies, including observation, measuring instruments, mathematical formulae and theoretical frameworks. Warrant is logically related to the appropriateness of its methodologies (in terms of accurately measuring and representing reality). In terms of discrete measurements and experiments, warrant is related to the accurate reproducibility of these by other scientists. In terms of broader theories, warrant is related to their explanatory power and ability to account for the observed facts and measurements (which explains why the theory of evolution has gained such widespread acceptance). Peer reviewing and broader consensus within the scientific community are vital aspects of warrant.<sup>55</sup>

Scientific warrant, as I have described it, is not at all problematic from a theological perspective. It only becomes so when it is understood positivistically, as in scientism with its overconfidence with respect to the scientific method's ability to represent reality objectively and to account for reality in its totality.

Although positivism and instrumentalism continue to exist, they may in reality be masking critically realistic beliefs. The intense commitment and sacrifice involved in scientific work means that most scientists really do believe that their work, theories and experimental results are more than useful fictions.

Newbiggin (in Sire 1995: 119) helps clarify the tension that exists between subjectivity and objectivity in a scientist's work:

The acceptance of [a particular] vision [of reality] is a personal act, an act of personal judgment to which one commits oneself in the knowledge that others may disagree and that one may be proved wrong. It involves personal commitment. But it is not therefore merely subjective. The scientist who commits himself to the new vision does so -as Polanyi puts it- with universal intent. He believes it to be objectively true, and he therefore causes it to be widely published, invites discussion, and seeks to persuade his fellow scientists that it is a true account of reality...At no stage is it merely a subjective opinion. It is held 'with universal intent' as being a true account of reality which all people ought to accept and which will prove itself true both by experimental verification and also by opening the way to fresh discovery. It is offered not as private opinion but as public truth.

Science, as if actually functions, is therefore critically realistic. This is shown in the terms used in relation to proof or validation -inference to the best explanation, probability and confirmation. Sklar (1999:700) clarifies how confirmation cannot be used in the sense of ultimate proof: 'The alleged relation that evidence bears to hypothesis, warranting its truth but not, generally, guaranteeing that truth, is called confirmation.'

#### **4.2.3 Positivism within theology: natural theology and postmodern theology**

'Natural theology is the attempt to attain an understanding of God and his relationship with the universe by means of rational reflection, without appealing to special revelation such as the self-revelation of God in Christ and in Scripture' (Brown 1988b: par 1).

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<sup>55</sup> Barbour (1966: 146) explains three criteria for evaluating scientific theories:

1. '[A]greement with observations' or 'empirical agreement' that is 'reproducible within the scientific community' (: 144-145).
2. Appropriate 'internal relations among theoretical concepts' (: 144-145). This is expressed in terms like 'consistency,' 'coherence,' 'order,' 'symmetry,' 'simplicity,' and 'elegance' (: 145).
3. Comprehensiveness refers to 'generality, or ability...[to unify] apparently diverse phenomena. Fruitfulness or fertility...[is the ability to suggest] new hypotheses, laws, concepts, or experiments' (: 146).

Natural theology in a qualified, non-positivistic form remains fruitful and should be pursued. The error of overconfident natural theology is to assume that reason can even come close to pointing towards Christianity or even towards theism. The proofs for God's existence, for example, are relativised once one considers that they are based on assumptions that cannot be proven (Brown 1988a: par 9, 16). This does not make them worthless, merely less absolute than some believe them to be.

On the basis of natural theology, therefore, we cannot move beyond a mysterious and amorphous reality; whether we define it materialistically as matter or energy, or idealistically as mind or will. This is the chameleon god or 'ground of being' of postmodernism. There is no basis to choose between pantheism, panentheism and theism, apart from subjective individual and communal needs, desires, or beliefs of the current moment.

The principal methodological mistake of believers who imagine that natural theology is the basis of their faith, is to interpret creation on the basis of insights that have arisen from God's direct revelation, and to come to theistic conclusions as if these conclusions arose out of the pure interaction of creation and reason.

I think that an overly strict distinction between general and special revelation is misleading. In terms of this research, it is more appropriate to talk of revelation as a single concept, by which I mean all the knowledge that God reveals to us, including the knowledge which is discernible in creation, as that data is filtered through the concepts and insights which have been gained from God's previous direct speech and action and as God's Spirit witnesses to our spirit, simultaneously as we experience the data.

Another significant movement in theology (the cultural-linguistic focus of theologians such as Frei, Lindbeck, Hauerwas, and Murphy) attempts to adopt anti-foundationalism without the consequences of relativism. In rejecting foundationalism they are more in line with a coherent<sup>56</sup> position. Lindbeck (1984: 130-131) is a key founder in this movement:

Antifoundationalism, however, is not to be equated with irrationalism. This issue is not whether there are universal norms of reasonableness, but whether these can be formulated in some neutral, framework-independent language.... basic religious and theological positions, like Kuhn's scientific paradigms, are invulnerable to definitive refutation (as well as confirmation) but can nevertheless be tested and argued about in various way, and these tests and argument in the long run make a difference.... In short, intelligibility comes from skill, not theory, and credibility comes from good performance, not adherence to independently formulated criteria. In this perspective, the reasonableness of a religion is largely a function of its assimilative powers, of its ability to provide an intelligible interpretation in its own terms of the varied situations and realities adherents encounter.

Murphy (1994b: 268) further clarifies that 'Those who would claim that the new non-foundationalist (holist) theories of knowledge are the cause of relativism are making a mistake. Relativism arises for foundationalists when no single set of indubitable foundations can be found...The absence of foundations entails relativism only if foundationalism is true.' Although there is much to be commended in this cultural-linguistic focus, upon closer examination it is missing the full picture and it represents an evasion of the epistemological challenge. If postmodern schemes are too readily accepted as a strict dichotomous alternative to

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<sup>56</sup> Coherentism is an alternative to foundationalism. In coherentism 'a belief is justified for you so long as it either best explains, or is best explained by, some member of the system of beliefs that has maximal explanatory power for you. Contemporary coherentism is uniformly systemic or holistic; it finds the ultimate source of justification in a *system* of interconnected beliefs or potential beliefs' (Moser 1999a: 276).

foundationalism, it is hard to see how relativism can ultimately be resisted. As Vanhoozer (1999: 122) appropriately states, 'to restrict one's epistemological mission to showing that one is entitled to hold certain beliefs removes one of the most important reasons for believing something, namely, because it is true. The Christian theologian must today show how truth is accessible and why truth matters'

The issue, in terms of authority and justification, is not ultimately whether you can intrasystemically demonstrate coherence. Many systems, even Satanism and Nazism, can do this with sufficient creativity and intellectual adroitness. In any case, unless, as in the former examples, your system is publicly malevolent, the only people for whom such justification is necessary are those who are part of or who are investigating your system. Cultural-linguistic theology may reply 'Exactly! The truth of God was never meant to be understood apart from the context of the community of the faithful.' I would respond that this is to undermine the public, universal claim of Christianity.

Scripture identifies truth with the living and active Word of God. This truth transcends all cultures, worldviews and eras and therefore exists independently of any cultural-linguistic community. It becomes true and effective for us in our specific communities as we live it. But its truth makes us alive and able to manifest its reality in time and space; we do not make it true by living it. It is a case of the church as it is in the truth not merely of the truth as it is in the church. 2 Kings 22-23 recounts how the books of the law (Pentateuch) had been lost in the temple. When discovered and read before king Josiah he repented and instituted reforms. This is an example of the power of God's word speaking independently of an established cultural-linguistic community, which is living under the authority of the Word. Paul, before King Agrippa, without the benefit of his church community around him, continued to make a bold statement for the truth (Ac 26:19). The gospel truth is normatively shown through the church (Eph 3:10) and believers are called to be living letters (Eph 3:10), but it can be limited to no context, not even the normative context of the church. This point is especially pertinent since the church often fails to live up to its calling.

The cultural-linguistic focus is naive about the extent that dispute and disagreement and compromise inevitably arise within communities, as the occasional pastoral letters of the NT make abundantly clear. How can the community be the basis of authority when the community itself is split or backslidden? At these points, where communities deviate from doctrinal and existential truth, they lose their authority and fall under the judgment of the living and written Word, which never loses its authority. The church is then called to repent and regain its true standing and authority (1Cor 15:34; Rv 2:5).

Finally, what is to stop a member of the church from deciding that the New Age temple down the street presents a more attractive option, especially when society is in a profoundly anti-Christian phase, or when the church in question is in a decidedly difficult phase of development. Cultural-linguistic theology, as it stands, is unable to truly explain why one should be a Christian and not a Buddhist or a Moslem. According to Lindbeck (1984: 54-55), it seems one is free to choose any of these options

One can admit the unsubstitutable uniqueness of the God-willed missions of non-Christian religions when one thinks of these faiths, not as objectifying poorly what Christianity objectifies well (as Karl Rahner proposes), but as cultural-linguistic systems within which potentialities can be actualized and realities explored that are not within the direct purview of the people of Messianic witness, but that are nevertheless God-willed and God-approved anticipations of aspects of the coming kingdom.

I agree with Volf (1996:49) that 'Lindbeck's universalism with regard to non-Christian belief ("there is no damnation –just as there is no salvation- outside the church") is more extratextually

than intratextually based.’ In other words, Lindbeck’s claim to be demonstrating appropriate warrant by a valid reading of Scripture within the cultural-linguistic community of the church is belied by the unacknowledged influence of extra-biblical and extra-ecclesial influence.

If the validation and continued benefits of truth are *ultimately* linked to the effective performance of the individual or community, then relativism cannot *ultimately* be resisted; neither in the public sphere, nor within specific communities.

### **4.3 Authority and decision within a hermeneutical approach to knowledge: inference to the best explanation, common sense and faith**

In chapter two it was shown that a naive understanding of induction as the route to inferring knowledge in science is disputed. Therefore, abduction and inference to the best explanation have developed as alternatives to strictly focusing on issues of deduction versus induction. This section argues that inference to the best explanation is an appropriate form of inference within a critically realistic, hermeneutical approach to knowledge.

#### **4.3.1 Defining inference to the best explanation**

Charles Pierce introduced the term ‘abduction’. ‘He used the example of arriving at a Turkish seaport and observing a man on horseback surrounded by horsemen holding a canopy over his head. He inferred that this was the governor of the province since he could think of no other figure who would be so greatly honoured’ (Hookway 1995: 1). Woods (1995: 407) distinguishes two ways in which abduction is understood: firstly, as inference to the best explanation and, secondly, as ‘the process of forming generic beliefs from know data.’

Greco (1999: 427) further clarifies the nature of inference to the best explanation: ‘[It is] an inference by which one concludes that something is the case on the grounds that this best explains something else one believes to be the case. Paradigm examples of this kind of inference are found in the natural sciences.... [and] in everyday life as well.’

Inference to the best explanation is also used as a response to scepticism:

Do you know you are looking at a reference book right now rather than, say, having your brain intricately stimulated by a mad scientist? The sceptic carefully describes this alternative so that no experiment can refute it. The conclusion that you really are looking at a book, however, explains the aggregate of your experiences better than the mad scientist hypothesis or any other competing view.

(Sandford 1995: 407).

Inference to the best explanation and probabilistic theories of induction are functionally useful but they are subject to the same lack of foundational certitude that has accompanied all philosophical attempts to understand knowledge. According to Greco (1999: 428):

[There is] controversy...[concerning] the criteria for what makes an explanation best. Simplicity, cognitive fit, and explanatory power have all been suggested as relevant merits, but none of these notions is well understood. Finally a sceptical problem arises: inference to the best explanation is plausibly involved in both scientific and commonsense knowledge, but it is not clear why the best explanation that occurs to a person is likely to be true.

Woods (1995: 407) also states that the term ‘best’ lacks ‘adequate generalized specification’ and ‘generic inference requires a satisfactory account of when negative instances do and do not falsify generic claims.’

### 4.3.2 Inference to the best explanation: a response to skepticism

Controversies concerning why inference to the best explanation is appropriate or true can be explicated at ever-deeper levels. It is clear that knowledge remains wonderfully effective yet beyond our full power to comprehend. The conflation of naturalism with science means that compartmentalization and inconsistency is common in the unbelieving knowledge community.<sup>57</sup> Within a secular worldview creative new epistemologies are developed to enable science to continue functioning without dealing with the issue of truth. Apart from instrumentalism and the concept of treating inexplicable concepts as fundamentals (see 2.4.3.1), naturalized and constructive epistemology are two further examples: 'The most extreme view...[of naturalized epistemology] recommends replacing traditional epistemology with the psychological study of how we reason' (Feldman 2006: par1); '[T]he constructive empiricist holds that as far as belief is concerned, acceptance of a scientific theory involves only the belief that the theory is empirically adequate' (Monton & Mohler 2008: sect 1.1 par1).

To avoid the truth issue, however, is to make the implicit truth claim that truth is not knowable and this needs as much defence as any other truth claim. The gift of knowledge is used without having to face the Creator.

Members of the unbelieving knowledge community should be challenged on the extent to which they are or are not acting with reason and scientific rigour. Is the conclusion of naturalism (whether supported by atheism or agnosticism) truly an inference to the best explanation or is it merely avoiding the issue of truth out of misunderstanding, or even fear or laziness.

## 4.4 The unique concerns of authority and locus within a theological, faith perspective

This section signals a turn to more explicit theological concerns.

### 4.4.1 Continuity versus discontinuity between theological and non-theological warrant and truth claims

It is clear that this research claims that the nature of ultimate reality is theological, i.e. it involves God as creator and sustainer of life, creation and knowledge. Therefore, forms of warrant that can take spiritual realities into account (the existence of God, the spiritual nature of humans, salvation history and eternity) are argued to be more valid.

The theological perspective can account for these spiritual realities as well as for the nature and success of science and philosophy. The reverse is not true and the only alternatives open for science and philosophy are to accept a relative status or claim that the theological worldview is false. It is important to clarify that I am not trying to show the superiority of theologians and Christians to scientists, philosophers or unbelievers. It is possible for some of the latter to seem, or even be, more moral, rational and honest than the former. What I am referring to is the ultimate nature of reality and knowledge as either theistic or naturalistic, with the logical conclusion that appropriate warrant must be able to account for this.

This also means that theology does not duplicate the work of science or philosophy, in terms of their proper scope. Theology merely offers an alternative metaphysical understanding or worldview to interact with the entrenched materialistic one. Far from being a knowledge stopper,

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<sup>57</sup> Ironically the New Atheists accuse top academics who are also Christians of compartmentalizing their faith and protecting it from the necessary truths of naturalism (See 'Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse discussion': You Tube). Accessed August 2011.

this can invigorate the sciences. The marginalisation of theology to a private and subjective world is therefore not valid.

Furthermore, if this view is correct then there should be continuity and discontinuity between theological warrant and scientific and philosophical warrant; continuity because scientific and philosophical truth form part of theological truth and should be reflected in its warrant, and discontinuity because theological reality transcends science and philosophy.

The resonance between natural science and theology must be fully explored and appealed to but there cannot be perfect correspondence. Firstly, natural science cannot measure or proclaim on transcendent reality. Secondly, natural science represents a partial and shifting symbolic representation of reality, which human theology, itself a symbolic representation of ultimate theology (the reality of God), cannot be tied to.

The intimate role of God in knowledge means that the theological perspective cannot be sustained without a direct relationship with God. Contrary to natural theology, the ultimate interpretation of history, culture and reality (in other words the consistent understanding of and living out of the theological worldview) requires an ongoing presence and active engagement of the Holy Spirit in our being.

It is, in fact, far easier not to believe, than to believe in the theological worldview. There are many reasons for this: a cacophony of conflicting voices (in all realms of knowledge and in society) ; multiple areas of ambiguity and underdetermination in culture and knowledge; tensions and difficulties in Scripture; atrocities in the history of the church; the seeming absence of God, the unbelieving multitudes; the seeming ability of society to function without reference to God; the problem of suffering; etc.

Given the many challenges to a theological understanding of reality, I contend that for anyone to come to faith in Christ and to live out a consistent theological worldview is an act of God's grace, not a human capacity. Scripture supports this view (Jn 6 :65, 15 :5; 1Cor 2 :14)

I am not conceding that the theological worldview is irrational and fantastic. However, because the world is upside down and confused, it seems to be. It is also because correctly functioning knowledge processes require virtue (in the form of openness, patience, willingness to follow the knowledge process wherever it may lead and to change and sacrifice if necessary, etc.). Virtue is often in short supply within society and higher levels of education, far from guaranteeing virtue, may merely make us more sophisticated and subtle in our deviousness.

In terms of God's design, epistemological truth (the correct functioning of our faculties of reason, faith, experience and imagination, among others) is designed to lead us to knowledge of God and a correct worldview and understanding of all reality. In a fallen world, 'the world, the flesh, and the devil' (to use the language of Christian tradition) militate against the truth (in its epistemological and existential sense). We can no more attain *sufficient* epistemological and existential truth than a wounded soldier with both kneecaps shot can pull himself to his feet by pulling on his hair. I thus agree with the Reformed notion of complete depravity, which is not 'intended to imply that fallen humanity is incapable of good works, but rather that there is no aspect of human being that is unaffected by sin' (Colwell 1988 par 5). So too, humanity is capable of valid knowledge, but is incapable of grasping the complete and true theological worldview.

If this understanding is true it relativises the use of natural theology and appeals to the correlation between theological, scientific and philosophical schemes in several alternative ways: the truth of any field (including theology) is never perfect or complete; we can never be sure of

the ultimate truth of seeming correlations and we can expect these to shift; God needs to ensure that the appropriate data is matched to the appropriate person and He needs to speak through this data; the deceptive powers of personal sin, structural sin in society and demonic forces need to be controlled;<sup>58</sup> the final proof has to be the ontological presence of God within an individual's being. I thus agree with Bloesch's (1994: 20) assessment:

As evangelical Christians we can and must speak of foundations of the faith. These are not, however, a priori principles or self-evident truths but the mighty deeds of God in the history of biblical Israel, the significance of which is veiled to us until our inner eyes are opened by the working of the Spirit. The ultimate foundation of our faith is the living God himself, who acts and moves in history but who is hidden from all sight and understanding, even from human imagination, until he makes himself known in his Word.

The relational nature of theological proof means that it is deeper and more qualitative than the more superficial, quantitative apologetics of atheism. In terms of a superficial analysis of reality there are far more objections to faith, as mentioned above, than there are proofs and they are more easily stated and argued. Nevertheless, the few, deep qualitative proofs of theology outweigh them all. If one misunderstands this, one gets trapped in trying to win a point-by-point battle against atheism in terms of superficial data and one is doomed to failure. For example, when a believer tries to show that Jesus makes people better and tries to give examples, the atheist merely draws out a long list of failings and foibles of Christians, talks of data that show Christians get divorced, etc., in equal numbers and mentions how atheists are equally moral. The believer senses the atheist is playing 'fast and loose' with data but he cannot exactly prove where and how, and the more he tries to pin down specific data, the more the atheist can draw out further examples. The believer may inadvertently exaggerate and put 'spin' on his own data. It is a losing battle (just much as God cannot be proved from natural science, He cannot be proved from social science).

A better strategy is to move towards deeper assumptions and theological truths. One can ask, for a careful explanation of the relationship between blind evolutionary forces and the concept of morality as we understand it, for example, challenging the overall coherence of the atheist's worldview. More importantly, we can freely admit our own sinfulness, considering the Bible's statements that all have sinned and need to be forgiven, and personally talk about how Jesus' action on the cross has dealt with our sin and guilt. We can talk about whether the Scriptures explication of sin matches our understanding of history and current society and we can question our dialogue partner about how they see society and (more importantly!) themselves in terms of sin. We can urge them to be honest about their own stance: do they claim to be sinless (or free of evil, to use a less theological term)?; how do they deal with their guilt and failure? We can make it personal, in other words.

Theology is meant to lead to relationship with God; it cannot be reduced to a natural theology or secular science to fit in with the academy. Yet, in all its richness, it contains sufficient science and reason to interact in the academy and it is appropriate to understand what is attainable in each context. With full academic and scientific integrity, theology can interact with the best of the scientists and philosophers and challenge their assumptions, showing how theology is a relevant science in the public sphere. Nevertheless, its true nature cannot be limited to this interaction. The best that can be achieved is a proof of the underdetermination of all knowledge in terms of purely rational means and a challenge to proceed to the full meaning of theology through personal relationship with God.

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<sup>58</sup> Jesus' parable of binding up the strong man in Matthew 12: 29 and Mark 3: 27 illustrates this. The link between understanding truth and demonic deception is also captured in 2 Corinthians 4: 3-4 and 2 Timothy 2:25-26.

I believe theological truth cannot be flexible, organic and life giving without simultaneously being vulnerable and open to distortion and being ripped apart. If this is true, the lack of positivism in theological truth is not a weakness, but a necessary condition. Because of the complex, organic nature of theological truth, the theologian needs to insist on sufficient time to unpack the different elements of the multi-layered whole that it represents. The theological worldview, from any single point can seem foolish and can be attacked, by various data. It is holistically held together only in God.

Another aspect of providing warrant is to insist on distinguishing between things that count logically against the theological worldview versus those that count personally. For example, unbelievers may say it is unreasonable to believe in a God who allows so much suffering. In giving an apologetic defence, the believer may talk about the afterlife as a compensating reward. The unbeliever may reply that this does not count, as she does not believe in the afterlife and thus the irrationality of suffering stands. This amounts to negative circular reasoning and the New Atheists often argue in this way. Nothing can disprove their belief. They must be forced to admit that in terms of logic, the existence of an afterlife (whether it is believed in or not) at least serves as a partial logical justification for suffering. One cannot advance in any rational dialogue if one is not willing to temporarily bracket disbelief in order to let opposing arguments be coherently established. A presupposition that a witness is a liar makes a mockery of any reasoning process. This is also vital in terms of introducing the Scriptures to allow their self-authenticating nature to function. Similarly, therefore, for the unbeliever to a priori reject the witness of Scripture because they don't believe in the Scripture is equally a form of negative circular reasoning. They must be urged to bracket their disbelief regarding Scripture and allow the particular quote to be heard in terms of its own freestanding logic, impact and merit. This applies to all levels of theological reasoning in the public square, including the academy.

#### **4.4.2 Authority from a theological, faith perspective informed by Scripture**

The next step in developing a theological understanding of knowledge and warrant is to examine the concept of authority within Scripture and the life of Jesus. Within the scriptural context a more appropriate integration between the existential and epistemological aspects of authority is noticeable.

According to Ryken and others (1998b: par 1) 'Authority is legitimate power. It implies freedom as well as permission to decide and to act. In the human community people in authority provide leadership, direction and discipline'. Packer's (1996a: par 1) explanation of the NT word for authority further underscores this important idea that authority has moral connotations: 'The New Testament word is *exousia* meaning rightful, actual and unimpeded power to act, or to possess, control, use or dispose of, something or somebody....[it] signifies power that is in some sense lawful.'

From a theological, faith perspective the Bible reveals discernible principles, which should form the basis for our approach to authority. In Scripture ultimate authority and power reside in God as the source of all life and knowledge and as the one who relates to humankind as creator, sustainer, saviour, and righteous and wise judge. These characteristics, along with descriptions of wisdom, power, glory and honour are intermingled in various doxological utterances in Scripture (Job 12 :13 ; Is 48 :12-13 ; Dn 2 :19-22 ; Rv 4 :11, 7 :11-12, 19 :1-2). One of the clearest expressions of this repeated theme occurs in 1 Chronicles (9:11-13):

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God,



we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.

Jesus is clearly associated with God's authority. He claimed to have been given all authority 'in heaven and on earth' (Mt 28 :18). He is similarly described as having 'authority over all people,' with the ability to give 'eternal life' (Jn 17 :2 ; also Jn 5 :20-21; Mt 11 :27). Furthermore, the NT claims He is now exalted to the highest place, sharing in God the Father's authority, honour and glory (Ac 2 :33-36 ; Eph 1 :19-23 ; Col 1 :15-18, 2 :9-10 ; Jude 1 :24-25 ; Rv 5 :12-14, 12 :10).

Jesus' authority was not easily accepted or understood by the crowds or his disciples and He was 'amazed' when a non-Israelite, Roman centurion understood his authority (Lk 7 :1-10). Particularly acute difficulties arose with the Pharisees and teachers of the law, for He threatened their authority. He challenged their self-serving political structures, along with their theological justifications (i.e. self-serving misinterpretations of the law) (Mt 15 :1-9, 23 :15-35 ; Mk 7 :13 ; Jn 11 :48). This uncomfortable challenge and exposure of their lack of legitimate authority (Mt 7:28-29, 15 :7-9) helps explain their self-defensive conflict with Jesus and their questioning of His authority (Mt 21 :23 ; Mk 2 :5-7 ; Jn 2 :18, 5:15-18, 7:46-49, 8 :38-59, 10 :33).

In His interaction with the Pharisees and teachers of the law Jesus never gave in to their unreasonable demands; He never fell into their traps and He saw through their duplicity (Mt 21 :24-27). He gave testimony through his miracles (Mk 2 :10-11, Jn 10 :37-38), but His greatest appeal to authority (as warrant) was his relationship to God the Father and his death and resurrection (Jn 2 :18-19, 8 :13-19, 25-29).

Jesus' ultimate indictment of the Pharisees and teachers of the law is that they 'do not know the Scriptures or the power of God' (Mt 22 :29). Their lack of connection to God is the reason for their lack of understanding : 'Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire.... He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God' (Jn 8:43-47).

Jesus is not hypocritical in his indictment of the Pharisees and teachers of the law for he did not imitate their illegitimate use of power or their self-defensive posture. He displayed absolute integrity and security with regard to His relationship with God the Father. This relationship was the basis for His received and therefore legitimate authority (Mt 26 :53 ; Jn 5 :19-27 ;6 :27, 10 :30, 13 :3, 14 :30-31, 17 :24). This authority was reinforced by His willing obedience (Jn 8 :28-29, 10 :17-18, Jn 17 :1-4) and the use of it to serve and grant eternal life (Jn 10 :18, 17 :2). Philippians 2 :5-11 provides one of the clearest, extended statements on the link between Jesus' obedience and submission and his exaltation 'to the highest place' with 'the name that is above every name.'

Stating that there is a link between the received nature of authority and the legitimacy of this authority is based on a specific logic. If, as Scripture argues, God is the ultimate and only source of all life and knowledge (1 Chr 9 :11-13 ; 1 Cor 8 :6 ; Eph 4 :4-6 ; 1 Tm 2 :5) then any valid authority, like every good gift, has to be received from God (Ja 1 :17), i.e. there is no valid authority 'except that which God has established' (Rm 13 :1-2).

Scripture contrasts this valid authority (in the existential sense of genuine power to save and the epistemological sense of legitimacy) with illegitimate authority. In the OT, God is repeatedly exalted, with all his characteristics (of authority, power, glory, righteousness, justice and wisdom) above false gods and idols. These false gods cannot save, and through His prophets God warns His people of judgment if they continue to follow after them (Ps 4:2, 40:4; Is 45:20-24, 46:5-10; Jr 13:25, 16:19-21; Am 2:4-5).

In the NT a clear shift occurs as God's supremacy, glory, communication and authority are now demonstrated through Jesus (Heb 1 :1-4). Nevertheless, the dynamic of the conflict of truth and legitimate authority versus falsehood and illegitimate authority continues. The devil's statement that 'all the kingdoms of the world' are his to dispose of (Lk 4 :5-6), a statement that conflicts with Jesus' valid claim to possess all authority (Mt 28 :18), is at best a temporary reality (which Jesus decisively reverses), at worst a lie, 'for he is a liar and the father of lies' (Jn 8:44).<sup>59</sup>

Jesus does not compete with God the Father's authority. Scripture talks of Jesus sitting at the right hand of God (Ac 2 :32-33), reigning *together* with the Father (Rev 11 :15, 22 :3-5). The submission of Christ is clearly shown in 1 Corinthians (15 :24-28). This scripture also reveals the ultimate end of history, placing all current issues of human authority within their proper context :

Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For he 'has put everything under his feet.' Now when it says that 'everything' has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

Of practical relevance to the epistemological and pastoral care themes of this dissertation is the clear scriptural indication that the church shares in the power and authority dynamics that occurred between God the Father and Jesus.

Scripture is clear that God does not allow humankind to illegitimately usurp His authority and glory, neither for itself (as in secular humanist forms of human exaltation) (Ps 115:1;), nor for its false Gods (Is 42:8, 48:11). Nevertheless, a wonderful, undeserved, and almost unthinkable promise is given to the followers of God. Promises are made that true followers who share in Christ's suffering are 'heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ' and will 'share in his glory' (Rm 8:17; 2 Th 2:14; 1 Pt 5:1 ).

Just as Jesus received authority for a specific purpose from the Father, he passes this authority on to his disciples (Mt 28 :18-20). He states clearly, 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (Jn 20 :21-23) ; 'I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me' (Lk 22:29). The disciples received the full measure of Jesus authority (Jn 14:12-13), an authority that is suggested in the term 'apostle'.<sup>60</sup> The following promise of Jesus is another strong statement on accorded authority: 'I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven' (Mt 16:19).

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<sup>59</sup> The issue of Satan's actual authority in this world, through God's temporary granting of it for a greater purpose, as in the story of Job (1:12) or through humankind having surrendered their authority due to disobedience to God, is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Suffice to say, it does not form the focus of Scripture and positivistic explanations are suspect. The focus of Scripture (which should govern our focus) is God's ultimate, legitimate and actual authority and the way that Jesus has re-established it on the earth for salvation and the establishment of His kingdom (Lk 10: 18-20, 11: 20-22; Jn 14: 30). On the other hand, to pay less attention to demonic reality than Scripture does (1 Pt 5: 8; Eph 6: 11-13, etc.) is, if one accepts the authority of Scripture, epistemologically and pastorally irresponsible.

<sup>60</sup> An apostle is 'a person who acts as the fully authoritative representative of somebody else... Apostleship is associated with founding churches and conveys authority over them in terms of imposing discipline and also in terms of receiving and transmitting authoritative revelation, so that apostles, along with prophets, form the foundation of the church (Marshall 1998c: par 2).

Jesus 'has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father' (Rev 1:6) and we are called to follow His example of submission and suffering (Phlp 2:5; 1Jn 3:16; 1 Pt 2:21). Faithful followers of God who overcome and do God's will be given authority to rule and judge (Ps 149:4-9; Lk 22 :30; 1 Cor 6:2-3 ; Rv 2:26-29). This scriptural link between obedient submission and authority explodes the categories of understanding that are current in this world (Mat 20:24-28; Mar 10:42-45).

Just as the apostles shared in Christ's authority and suffering, they shared in his conflict and the sustained opposition to divine authority. Paul has to defend his authority against 'false apostles' who copy Satan's deception, and has to remind the Corinthians of the mark (i.e. warrant) of his apostleship, 'signs, wonders and miracles' (2 Cor 12:11). This danger of illegitimate authority through false prophets and apostles is signaled throughout Scripture (Is 44:25; Jr 14:14, 23:16; Lm 2:14; Ezk 22:28; Mt 24:11, 24; 2 Pt 2:1; 1Jn 4:1; Rv 2:2).

Just as Authority was passed from God to Christ to the apostles, it is passed on to every true follower of Christ. To the extent that believers are willing to seek as full an understanding of the message of Christ as possible and live out this message as fully as possible, they will discover God's authority to and through them.

Against dispensationalism and on the basis of Scripture, reason, church history, and current human need, this research opposes the belief that the rich scriptural depiction of authority, which included the power to work miracles, was limited to the apostles or the period of the early church. The authority given to the disciples, was passed on to the seventy two (Lk 10 :1,17) and it is disingenuous to suggest that the great commission's instruction to pass on all that the disciples had learned, did not mean just that, '*all* ! Finally, two of the grandest promises of Jesus, in terms of shared authority, were the promise of doing even greater works (Jn 14 :12-13) and the promise of overcoming and sitting with Him on his throne (Rv 3 :21). These promises seem to be universally addressed : '*anyone* [italics mine] who has faith in me' (Jn 14 :12) and 'If *anyone* [italics mine] hears my voice and opens the door' (Rv 3 :20).

This overview of themes of authority in Scripture has merely scratched the surface. Furthermore it has focused on direct mention of the terms authority and power, without delving into the concept of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is widespread and integral in Scripture and it is by definition directly related to (or even synonymous with) concepts of authority (a monarchy is a form of rule or authority). The Father and Christ have established and will bring to fulfillment a unique Kingdom, characterized by legitimate and life-giving authority (Mt 6:9-10, 12:28; Rv 11:15). This rich scriptural image of the Kingdom also radically frames our current issues of knowledge and epistemology.

#### **4.4.3 The organic and relational nature of theological warrant and decision**

Due to the complexity of the theological worldview and the cultural context, there is no simple formula for giving theological warrant. In a lecture, Guinness (1997) suggest that Jesus was immensely creative and never ministered to two people in exactly the same way. The gospel of John, the most theologically reflective of the gospels, explicates how Jesus remained in constant touch with the Father and only did what He saw the Father do (Jn 5 :19). According to the example of Jesus, the principal basis of all our warrant should be the laying down of our lives in sacrificial service of our neighbour (1Pt 2 :1,15,21 ; 2Tm 2 :10).

As will be shown in chapter six, there are a multitude of actions that can be undertaken in all ministry, including apologetics, theology and pastoral care. Epistemological actions of logical reasoning and comparing truth claims and warrant in all aspects of knowledge can be combined with actions of exegeting Scripture, prayer and prophecy. No strict boundaries can be drawn

between them. In a pastoral care situation to a believer, the most relevant action may be a careful epistemological explanation of a philosophical issue. In dialogue with an atheist, there may be an appropriate moment to say, 'may I pray for you to experience God's presence.'

Therefore, we need to be trained and ready in as full a spectrum of ministry actions as possible. With every person we engage we need to have the Holy Spirit firmly in our consciousness as we 'listen' for guidance and as we simultaneously carefully listen to the person we are speaking to. This will help us to discern what is really behind the statements or questions: a genuine intellectual issue, rebellion, pain (from life and religious betrayal)? There will be a difference in terms of our actions in the public and academic sphere, but we should not create a truncated and abstract academic theology for the academy, which is unrelated to actual ministry needs in people's real-life situations.

The above discussion may seem to so emphasize the positive role of God and the Holy Spirit that human decision is left out. This is not an issue scripturally, since there is a clear understanding that humankind can choose to accept or reject God's calling and His gifts of life and salvation (Dt 30:19; Jos 24:15; :Pr 1:29, 8:10; Ac 26:19; Rm 2:7-8; Tt 1:14; 2Th 2:10). The aspect in which I am interested is the role of humankind epistemologically. I think the answer is in the mystery that God can fully penetrate and live in and through us without obliterating our individuality and freedom. I think that this is a genuine paradox and mystery. The guarding of this freedom may be a key reason for the realities of evolution, the underdetermination of truth and the seeming absence of God for many people.

As stated in previous chapters we cannot choose to believe or not believe, we are either impressed by the data or not and the same sense-data and experience will have a different effect in different people, depending on assumptions and previous experience. Nevertheless, we can choose to be open or closed to other people and ideas; these people and ideas can ultimately influence our beliefs and cause us to discard inappropriate beliefs or correct and nuance incomplete or distorted ones.

In terms of choice it is important to realize that truth is not a once and for all moment. It is about a journey and a relationship, involving many moments and experiences over time. It is over time that scientific and theological understanding take shape and it is over time that we can exercise righteous or unrighteous responses, which ultimately affect how we know and what we believe.

#### **4.4.4 The human response to the faithfulness of God: the possibility of a locus for truth**

In terms of this dissertation's conclusions thus far, purely secular accounts of reality and knowledge have not been able to find a locus for truth. This has not stopped life and knowledge from continuing and the issue of truth has often been ignored or argued to be unimportant. However, this is not a satisfactory response. Worldviews and truth assumptions continue to operate and affect all of life and knowledge.

This research concludes that faith in the faithful God is a valid basis for life and knowledge in all its aspects. This claim cannot be positivistically proven, but it can be held with integrity in terms of appropriate criteria for knowledge and truth.

Hermeneutics, attempts to stand for truth, and claims to authority cannot be based on human potential. Rather, God is the interpreter who draws us into His meaning and guides our inquiries. He does this within the fields of tension between Word and Spirit in the Scripture and Word and Spirit in our real life context. These tensions necessitate hermeneutics, for God relates to us in terms of love and choice, not force. We therefore co-operate with Him in

undergoing a process of understanding. Nevertheless, the establishment of truth occurs from creator to creature. As Bloesch (1994: 202) states, 'Instead of a hermeneutical circle I prefer to speak of a hermeneutical magnet that draws us by grace into the work of the Spirit on the text. We become covenant partners with the Spirit in his work of interpretation.'

If one assumes God's perfect freedom, and simultaneously immanent and transcendent relationship to every single reality, then any aspect of reality and knowledge can be a potential source that God can use. The fact that creation and knowledge ultimately remain a mystery despite the best efforts of Science and secular knowledge mean that understanding God as the ultimate guarantor in this way is not at all implausible.

If one refuses the possibility of God as the ultimate foundation and rejects the way that this foundation leads to an inevitable circularity in knowledge, insisting on a rational foundationalism instead, then authority becomes impossible, forever postponed in infinite regress. No one can or does live like that and this view is rightly discarded. Acknowledging God as a foundation avoids the problem of infinite regress and the circularity of knowledge becomes logical, for God creates life and systemic interplay and the starting point or foundation for any system is found outside of itself and in God. We need to become skilled in dealing with objections to our lack of a static point of foundation and say to people, 'maybe you're right and I'm wrong, but come and taste and see. Come and join the circular hermeneutical dance of life and knowledge' (Ps 34:8).

The question remains concerning the locus of God's revelation and its relationship to the human moment of revelation. What sources does God use to reveal and what faculties do we use to receive this knowledge? I believe that the strict distinction between revelation and scientific knowledge is invalid as is the strict distinction between general and special revelation or between a secular and special hermeneutic. The locus of revelation is the communication of God, which is simultaneously a speech act, a propositionally-linked reality, and a life-changing event.

Even if one discovers a 'truth' in natural science, one does not need to subscribe to occasionalism, imagining that God is speaking that fact or causing that reality at that particular time for it to be a theological event. That scientific fact, to the extent that it reflects reality, reflects the reality that God has created; it reflects His covenant with nature and His faithful, loving character (Gen 9:13; Jer 33:25).

I agree with Bloesch's (1992: 210) description of how revelation resides ultimately in God: 'I propose a unilateral authority –divine revelation- but one communicated through various means. I see divine revelation received through Scripture and tradition and elucidated by reason and experience. Revelation does not so much proceed out of Scripture and tradition as descend into these earthen vessels. It is not based on reason or experience, but it employs reason and experience in making itself credible and effectual.'

I believe the essential dynamic described by Bloesch is relevant to all forms of knowledge. If one assumes that God penetrates all reality and in His freedom makes use of all reality, the moment of truth or decision involves all our faculties or modes of consciousness, thought and being, including faith, reason, experience and intuition. It must also involve our will. Furthermore, God can potentially reveal His truth through any aspect of reality or field of knowledge.

For example, the Scriptures clearly state that nature declares God's glory and handiwork (Nm 14:21; Is 6:3; Ps 19:1-3, 97:6; Rm 1:20). I believe there is a genuine presence of God and communication from God in these aspects of creation. Therefore, a scientist may be looking through a microscope and genuinely experience God. The same event may happen to a

mathematician reading a formula, a musician writing a note on a stave, a mother staring into her baby's eyes, a reporter witnessing a massacre, or a child looking at the picture on a biscuit tin. These 'signals of transcendence' can be powerful or faint and they can involve different combinations of our faculties.<sup>61</sup> In addition, they can trigger more or less explicit theological content, depending on what our exposure to the gospel has been. But I believe that even when there is no propositional linkage to the gospel, there is a true connection with God.

It is vital to realize, however, that all the multiple encounters with God that I believe do happen throughout all areas of life, with all human beings, are not sufficient to lead to salvation or full knowledge. Not only is the Word of God through the indissoluble unity of Jesus, Scripture and the Holy Spirit vital for giving the true meaning of these underdetermined experiences, it is necessary for providing truth and revelation that is not found, even implicitly, elsewhere.

#### **4.4.5 The relationship between the Holy Spirit and the locus of truth**

The common link between God's communication and our understanding and response is the Holy Spirit (1Cor 2: 9-16). The Holy Spirit speaks forth God's truth (Jn 16: 13-15; 1 Cor 2:9-11) and inhabits us, permeating our understanding and our speech (1Cor 2:12-16). The NT is replete with references to the Spirit's life in and through us. Through the Holy Spirit we have access to God (Eph 2:18) and our speech is intermingled with God's (Mt 10:20; Rv 22:17; Ac 4:31). And in the Holy Spirit our conscience confirms the truth of our speech (Rm 9:1).

The Holy Spirit is vital in the mysterious interpenetration of the Trinity, as it is revealed in Scripture. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father (Mt 10:10) and of the son (Ac 16:7; Phlp 1:19). Jesus is intimately associated with the Holy Spirit: He moved in the power of the Spirit (Lk 4:14; ); was anointed by the Spirit (Mk 1:10; Ac 10:38); was led by the Spirit (Mt 4:1; Lk 2: 27); had joy through the Holy Spirit (Lk 10:21); was full of the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:1); gave instructions through the Holy Spirit (Ac 1:2); and was raised to life and declared to be the Son of God through the power of the Spirit (Rm 1:4, 8:11).

The Holy Spirit is also the guarantor of the truth of Scripture, substantially (in its very design) and as it is shared and understood (2 Sm 23:2; Ac 1:16, 4: 25; 2 Pt 1:21; Eph 6:17).

So, while God can speak through many means and while we cannot isolate any single faculty in our physical and conscious make-up, identifying it as the faculty for revelation, we can identify the all-penetrating Holy Spirit as the unifying factor and voice of God to us. The locus of truth is ultimately the testimony of God in our heart (understanding 'heart' Hebraically as the centre of our intelligence, will and being): 'it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth' (1 Jn 5:6). 'We accept man's testimony, but God's testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about his Son. Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart. Anyone who does not believe God has made him out to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about his Son' (1Jn 5:9-10).

#### **4.4.6 The relationship between Jesus and the locus of truth**

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<sup>61</sup> Peter Berger (1982: 24) refers to signals of transcendence as 'phenomena that are to be found within the domain of our "natural" reality but that appear to point beyond that reality.' He suggests that ordering, play, hope, and humor are some of the many signals that exist (24-28). Os Guinness (2009a) refers to Peter Berger's concept of signals of transcendence and how they played a role in the conversion of certain figures. C S Lewis discovered joy that ached and yet was preferable to mere happiness, GK Chesterton couldn't shake off a sense of gratitude and Berger's exposure to evil (when a group of Germans in an American cinema urged on the killing of innocent women and children by the Nazis in a newsreel documentary) convinced him there must be an absolute right to counter it.

In Chapter five it will be shown that correctly interpreting Scripture and dealing with its diversity requires relating it to the central figure of Jesus. Examining Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees in the gospel of John reveals some interesting insights about how He dealt with the question of authority. Jesus appeals to the following kinds of testimony: human testimony (Jn 5:33-34, 15:27), which He does not rely on for his self-understanding, but which is of use for other humans; His self-testimony, demonstrated through His actions and mission (Jn 5:36) and his self-knowledge in terms of the Father (Jn 8:14,18); the testimony of the Father and the Holy Spirit (Jn 8:18, 15:26); the testimony of the Scriptures (Jn 5:39, 45-46).

The gospels contain Jesus' statement that no sign will be given to a 'wicked and adulterous generation' except the sign of Jonah (Mt 12:39; Lk 11:29). This refers to Jesus' death and resurrection and reinforces the fact that God does not comply with the atheists cry for a sign, whether written macroscopically in the sky or microscopically in our DNA. Jesus resurrection is sufficient proof that He is who He says He is. It is not irrefutable proof, but it is sufficient for those who have the will to know the truth. These are all relational signs and we need to be in relationship and willing to obey in order to know the truth (Jn 8:31-32).

God and humankind are united in Jesus, the God-Man. This suggests that the God-human encounter is the ultimate locus of truth. Vanhoozer (1999:122) clarifies how Jesus as the Word exists as a truth claim: 'Jesus, one might say, is God's truth claim: the divine self-revelation in history, the word above all words that can be relied on- the Word (a person rather than a proposition) whose life, death, and resurrection, taken together, display how things (ultimately) are (or will Be).' He continues, '[T]heology ...[is thus] the discipline that trains disciples how to render for themselves and commend to others (1) the utter reliability of the Word of God; (2) the meaning and truth of the claim that "God was in Christ reconciling all things to himself"; (3) the wisdom of the cross' (: 124).

I believe that one could not ask for a better revelation of God and truth for humankind than Jesus Christ. One of the greatest cries of the human heart is to know what it means to be human, and how we should live. Simultaneously, there is the need to deal with our sin, guilt, anxiety, shame, despair and confusion. We also need to know the nature of ultimate reality and the nature of God. The God-human, Jesus, is the answer to all these needs and it is an utter marvel that God has not answered from afar but has drawn as near as possible in Christ, and nearer still through the Holy Spirit (Heb 2:14-18, 4:15; Jn 14:9).

#### **4.4.7 The relationship between the locus of truth and the multiple senses of the Word/word of God**

I have argued that God is ontologically the basis of authority, and also practically the final locus of authority. Furthermore, Jesus represents God's ultimate revelation. Nevertheless, the Bible cannot be separated from what God has done in Christ and it practically remains our concrete expression of God's ultimate authority. I have purposely phrased it like this to avoid the extremes of either over identifying the Word of God with the written text or of separating them. God cannot be inconsistent and divorce Himself from His history (His acts and speech). Not only is Scripture the only reliable and transmissible record we have of God's acts and speech, it is the first instance we have of them. If the Scripture presents a true record of God's acts and speech and if God is consistent in character, speech and action, then any extra-biblical knowledge and any post-biblical perceived action and speech of God cannot contradict Scripture, properly understood. The way I have phrased it shows the vital need for hermeneutics.

Scripture, all fields of knowledge, church tradition, and the perceived present speech and action of God need to be brought into dialogue in order to determine the truth to the greatest extent possible. Our knowledge will be probabilistic but it will be sufficient to place us into an ontologically true relationship with God (salvation) and to move us forward in growth in faith and spirituality (sanctification) even as we retain a measure of sin and ignorance until the final consummation. This relativity is paralleled in scientific knowledge in the way that incomplete truth and underdetermined models still enable humankind to understand the world and use technology efficiently. The only hope that this hermeneutical process can lead to life and truth is God's grace and the penetrating power of the Holy Spirit. Once one examines the matter carefully, one realizes that God's grace is more than sufficient and that life and knowledge are amazingly accessible. Once one abandons the false dichotomy of having to choose between omniscient knowledge and relativism, recognizing both options as false and idolatrous, then one can recognize that life and knowledge spring up all around us and the least effort to engage them is rewarded. How much more will a careful, patient, courageous hermeneutical engagement reap great reward?

Because the way God, through the Holy Spirit, penetrates all aspects involved in the knowledge process (Scripture and tradition, Science and theology, text and reader, reality and perception, etc.) numerous nuancings are possible and none of them can claim to suffice or resolve the mystery. The following three nuancings are merely a further layer in understanding.

The postmodern-framed competition between author, text, and reader, for the locus of authority in the reading of any text, including the Bible, is resolved by God being involved in all aspects. All these aspects of the text have truth but the locus is in none of them. Rather it is in God as he interrelates with all three aspects. Thus, the writer of Scripture wrote out of a God-human encounter, the text sacramentally is able to receive God's presence, and the reader is able to read in the presence of the Holy Spirit (a further God-human encounter).

The Word-Spirit tension in Scripture has been designed to interact with the Word-Spirit tension in the real life context. There is not a competition where one needs to opt for a pure scriptural reading versus a reading that brings Scripture into creative tension with life. Such an interaction happens automatically and reflects God's design. Paul's writings in the NT occurred as his Scripture (the OT) interacted with his real life context to produce the NT. Once again, the locus of truth rests in God and not in human ability.

I believe the Bible can be seen in two ways that need to be held in tension. In a sense it is a storehouse of all necessary truth that needs to be understood and applied (the conservative evangelical understanding). There is such richness and variety in Scripture that one cannot reach the end of it and it does seem possible to find a relevant truth for all aspects of life. It is as if God has arranged to have almost every possible case study enacted in Scripture in order for us to access it. It seems like the Bible is able to 'absorb the world' (to use Lindbeck's famous phrase).

I believe this first sense needs to be held in tension with the understanding of the Bible as a plumb line or basic grammar, which allows us to find resonance with truth outside of Scripture. A phrase I learned in church is that 'All of the Bible is truth but not all truth is in the Bible'. I think conservative evangelicals may not realize when they are actually combining the first method with the second, unaware of their creative application of Scripture to new situations. I think that holding these two views in tension will respect the whole of Scripture and hermeneutics, both of which can be filled with the Holy Spirit.

#### **4.4.8 The truth in the preached and lived Word**



It is a trend nowadays to talk of wanting Jesus but not the church. This is simply not possible. Wherever God is manifest community is created and you are back to the church. Furthermore, there are many Scriptures that talk of the intimate union between the church and the trinity, using images of a bride, body, household and temple (Rv 19:7, 22:17; Eph 5:23, 2:21-22; Col 1:24).

My focus here is on the relationship between the church and God's truth. The church is a vital normative sphere in which God's Word is enacted and lived out. The Bible states that God wills his 'manifold wisdom' to be expressed through the church (Eph 3:10) and His glory is to be manifested through Christ *and* the church (Eph 3:21). The church is described as 'the pillar and foundation of the truth' (1 Tm 3:15).

Nevertheless, like Scripture, the church needs to exist in a hermeneutical reality. God's mission and truth cannot be restricted to the church, but it is a normative place for His truth to be manifested. Just as all manifestations of knowledge are incomplete, the church too is incomplete and imperfect but it remains under God's grace and promise.

Once this qualification is made, it is clear that the church is a unique place where the word of God is made manifest. The church is obviously an important context for the exposition of Scripture (1 Tm 4:13; 2 Tm 4:1-4). As importantly, it is the context for the lived manifestation of Scripture. Paul writes to the church in Corinth, 'You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts' (2Cor 3:2-3). Apart from this explicit Scripture the various commands to the church to be a faithful and attractive witness to the world shows that the church has this potential and responsibility to be a living witness (1 Pt 2:12; Col 4:5; 1Th 4:11-12; 2 Cor 2:14-16), communicating God's truth. The true focus of knowledge in Scripture is to foster relationship with God and each other and the church is the living spectacle of this knowledge. These goals of witness and relationship become simultaneously achieved: 'By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (Jn 13:35).

#### **4.4.9 The possibility and necessity of public claims for truth and authority**

Vanhoozer and Kirk (1999: 20) clarify the current crisis of knowledge in terms of questions of rationality versus truth: '[T]he rationality question concerns the intelligibility and justification of a theological claim; truth its reference or absoluteness.' In the context of postmodernism the truth question is often abandoned (due to intractable difficulties) and one is urged to limit oneself to rationality, eschewing all attempts to conflictually compare systems (Vanhoozer and Kirk 1999:121-122). They insist, however, that the truth question is still relevant and vital: '[T]o restrict one's epistemological mission to showing that one is entitled to hold certain beliefs removes one of the most important reasons for believing something, namely, because it is true. The Christian theologian must today show how truth is accessible and why truth matters' (1999: 122). Other theologians share this specific concern (Cook 1988b: par 9; Bloesch 1992: 12; McGrath 1996a; Carson 1996)

A further aspect of authority that is strongly denied is the claim of Jesus to be the ultimate truth and authority, along with the particularity or exclusivity that this logically entails (Jn 14:6; 1Tm 2:5). In the above section (4.4.2), the numerous Scriptures dealing with Jesus' ultimate glory, authority and identification with the Father are clear in this regard. Such claims are not made with regard to other religious leaders like Mohammed. Such a claim within Islam is blasphemous, as it was for the Jewish leaders (Mt 26: 64-66; Lk 5: 21; Jn 10: 33). Apart from particular texts, the whole narrative of Jesus' life suggests this particularity. Scripture does not

describe God emptying Himself and taking on flesh and dying on a cross after making an anguished choice (Mt 26:39) in order to be one option among many; the scriptural claim that Jesus' death is the only solution for the sins of the world (Jn 1:29; 1 Cor 15:3; 1 Pt 3:18) logically requires this particularity.

These epistemological and existential claims for authority and truth are rejected on both epistemological and existential grounds. Epistemologically, as has been discussed, truth claims are argued to be inappropriate due to the impossibility of providing indubitable proof. I feel it has been sufficiently argued that such criteria are invalid and probabilistic claims intended as public truth can in fact be made. As Brümmer (1981:214) argues,

[I]n saying 'I know that p' I do not only express my (firm) belief that p, but also claim knowledge status for this belief. I am justified in making this claim if (1) my belief that p is consistent with the whole body of beliefs for which I claim knowledge status, and (2) I am convinced strongly enough, by the evidence at my disposal, that p is true, in order to stop testing it and to add it to my criteria for testing other beliefs.

By this same reasoning Brümmer (1981:215) states that it is possible to say that others know or do not know a fact.

Existentially, particularity is an offence to modern sensibilities and is interpreted as arrogance and the source of much conflict and suffering. For example, New Atheists like Christopher Hitchens (2007:97-122) posit a strict correlation between belief in an absolute, non-negotiable Deity and the absolute, non-negotiable excesses of fundamentalist terrorists. While it is true that particular claims can fuel conflict and war, they can also facilitate peace and justice, and are in fact vital for doing so.<sup>62</sup> As already argued the whole issue of absolute versus relative claims is a 'red-herring'. All claims are absolute and need to be evaluated in terms of their epistemological and existential value.

Once again we see that the relationship between belief and action is not to be simplistically framed. It is possible to draw back from absolute claims due to cowardice, dishonesty and irresponsibility as much as because of humility and love. If Jesus is, in fact, the solution to the sins and problems of the world, then one becomes morally culpable for failing to proclaim this absolute truth (Ezk 3:18; 1 Cor 9:16).

True tolerance allows the other (whether person or idea) to exist authentically, as it truly is, not as we would have it to be. We have every right to disagree and even oppose, but not to twist and redescribe, due to prejudice and preference, ignorance and arrogance, or any other ulterior motives (Ac 20:20; 2 Cor 4:2; 2 Pt 3:16).

To deny the right and possibility of theology, Scripture, the gospel and Christ to exist as ultimate truth claims is to be extremely intolerant. The manner in which these absolute claims are embodied and communicated obviously cannot be oppressive and intolerant, but the absoluteness of the claims needs to be respected. In reply to those who are ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, C.S. Lewis (discussed in McDowell 1972:103-109) famously replied: 'A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic...or else he would be the Devil of Hell...let us

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<sup>62</sup> To be fair, therefore, one should admit that the belief in an absolute Deity who died on the cross can equally result in an absolute, non-negotiable approach to peace. It is simply obtuse to ignore the history of pacifism and its link to the gospel. In a lecture Os Guinness (2009a) comments on how the Roman Empire allowed for religious pluralism and yet it was one of the cruelest, most violent societies imaginable. Christianity has the most particular claims and yet it manifested in charity and good works, taking in those the Roman Empire had rejected.

not come up with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.'

I conclude, therefore, that not only is the pursuit of truth a possibility, it is an absolute moral responsibility. We should not merely relate to Christianity because it may provide comfort, meaning or hope (important as they are). We should pursue it because it is true. In a lecture Dallas Willard (1995) states that if there were a better route to follow than Christianity, then Jesus would be the first to tell us to take it. If He did not then we would not be able to trust Him.

According to my understanding it is a critical issue whether 'there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus' (1 Tm 2:5). The gospel message, I would propose, as it presents itself, with all its offence and challenge, stands and falls, is rendered liberating truth or dangerous deception, according to the truth value of its concepts and the historicity of its essential narrative. As Paul says, if Christ has not actually risen (in fact) we are false witnesses and to be pitied (1Cor 15:12). Secular thinkers like Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, who understood Christianity to be illegitimate and obstructing valid societal goals were in many ways correct, unless Christianity is factually true.

Proposing a domesticated Christianity that has its beliefs correlated with general societal experience and goals, as in the liberal experiential-expressivist theology, ends up misrepresenting both Christianity and society. So called Christianity, which does not take its sources seriously, historically, but which attempts to live out its higher, abstracted principles, finds this impossible and soon becomes indistinguishable from the surrounding culture, Christian in name only.

Society essentially wishes for peace and prosperity (without challenge to individualism and partisanship), a peace and prosperity that Christ ultimately promises, but not according to society's expectations and methods (Lk 12: 51). Unless God's present and future kingdom and reign of peace are factually true, then Christianity's difficult and divisive dynamics should be done away with.

Of course, many are able to be inspired by Jesus and will relate positively to many aspects of Christianity (whether as part of an individual framework for life, the cohering focus of a community, or a positive factor in inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue) without making absolute truth claims. Nevertheless, I argue that they are not relating faithfully to the true Christ of Scripture, who is portrayed as Lord of all (Ac 10:36), master of creation (Jn 1:3; Heb 1:3), the goal of creation (Col 1:16), and the one to whom every knee will bow (Phlp 2:9-11). Christianity is incoherent apart from its ultimate claims on a person and these ultimate claims are incoherent apart from the absolute intersystemic claims of Christianity.

Although authority and truth are viewed with suspicion, they are unavoidable realities. To not engage with them positively is to vacate the playing field or market place, leaving it open to unwarranted and dangerous forms of authority. Proposing an absolute view involves real danger and potential for abuse, but that is the case with any good or effective thing. Power is implicit in goodness and effectiveness and power can always be misused. For example, there is no more devastating way to hurt somebody than through betrayal within an intimate relationship. This does not mean that intimate relationships are not good and worth risking. Far from indicating arrogance, a powerful engagement with and use of authority can be the result of great humility, for the humble person can be trusted by God to correctly exercise His authority (Lk 1:52).

In terms of a hermeneutical approach to truth there is no question of trying to re-establish Christendom in society. Equally unfair, however, is the unacknowledged state sponsorship of

the religion of secular humanism. Just as scientific method needs to be based on neutralism not naturalism, political authority needs to remain neutral.

In the public sphere one can argue for neutrality and tolerance, with people being allowed to argue for public policy on the basis of religious belief. It is fully valid, for example, to argue that divorce laws need to be strict on the basis of the belief that God has made the family a means of blessing. Those who argue for lax divorce laws are being equally religious for they are arguing in terms of the unadmitted assumptions of post-Enlightenment secular humanism, where the freedom of the individual is sacrosanct. Nevertheless, religiously based argumentation needs to be adopted through democratic process and there is no place for coercion. Any truly unacceptable religious propositions simply won't get any votes. The metaphor of a market place of ideas fits in with this understanding.

This dynamics involved in the concept of a marketplace of ideas represent a fair process but liberal secular humanists demonstrate inconsistency in struggling to accept this. Carson (2008a: 11) clarifies this:

[W]hen voters choose something other than what...liberal writers want, these writers cannot conceive of it as the outworking of democracy; rather, they see it as the sacrifice of democracy. This judgment is grounded in the assumption that theological considerations cannot be admitted in the reasoning of any voters: in other words, religion is private, the values of secularism are unquestioned, and those who challenge this stance are not democrats at all.

The exact nature of the relationship between Christ and culture is a hermeneutical issue, subject to the same dynamics as any other theological decision. Carson (2008a: 115-144) examines the relationship between secularism, democracy, freedom and power and shows how there can be no naive interrelationship between Christ and culture (: 143):

[B]iblical realities make for a worldview that is sharply distinguishable from the worldviews around us, even where there are overlapping values. We cannot embrace unrestrained secularism; democracy is not God; freedom can be another word for rebellion; the lust for power, as universal as it is must be viewed with more than a little suspicion. This means that Christian communities honestly seeking to live under the Word of God will inevitably generate cultures that, to say the least, will in some sense counter or confront the values of the dominant culture...[but will also seek] sacrificially to serve the good of others –the city, the nation, common humanity, not least the poor.

Carson's conclusion resonates with the stance in this research that there needs to be a tension expressed in continuity versus discontinuity between the gospel and all aspects of knowledge and life.

#### **4.4.10 Objections to public truth claims: the lack of universal, public response to the gospel and the hiddenness of God**

This section deals with two possible objections to the gospel's universal, public truth claims: the lack of response to the gospel and the hiddenness of God.

##### **a) The lack of universal, public response to the gospel**

Christianity clearly involves absolute truth claims and yet the lack of response to these and the proliferation of other claims call these Christian truth claims into question. However, there is no necessary fact that shows that the truth must be believed by the majority (Mt 7: 13-14, 22:14; 2Tm 4:3-4).

The belief in these claims is personal and depends on God's revelation. The universality of this belief consists in the possibility of any person being similarly convinced, assuming the confluence of their willingness, God's election, and a true demonstration of the gospel. Not a single one of these three assumptions can be stated without qualification.

Firstly, it is not to be assumed that people are willing. The Bible is replete with references to people denying and rejecting the truth (Ac 13:46, Rm 2:8) and non-theological research such as Freud's as well as the critical mass of data that has ushered in postmodernism confirm humankind's predisposition to self-deception. The Scripture's reference to evil forces which blind people to the truth (2 Cor 4:4) further causes one to guard against any positivism with regard to humanity's openness to the truth.

Secondly, a true demonstration of the gospel is not to be assumed either. Often the church's witness is faulty and can even constitute a stumbling block. Scripture clearly alludes to this (Rm 2:24; 2 Pt 2:2; 1 Cor 15:34).

Finally, the Scriptures clearly indicate that nobody can come to Christ unless the Father calls him (Jn 6:44). God is the only source of the call to and the establishment of salvation. Furthermore, God is the only one who can soften people's resistance, bind the strong man who keeps them captive (Mk 3:27), and compensate for the multiple faults of the church. The problem is that Scripture is not unequivocal in terms of God's action. He clearly hardens hearts as well as softens (Ex 7:3, Rm 9:18), casts off as well as calls (Lm 3:31). This has caused theories such as a double predestination but I think them unwarranted. I think that it is necessary to distinguish a history in God's dealings with individuals and groups in which hardening and casting off are part of an ultimate movement of love to offer salvation to all (Rm 11:32). This does not suggest universalism for many will reject this offer (Jn 5:40; 2 Th 2:10).<sup>63</sup>

Ultimately, there is mystery here; we have to trust the God who will judge all men justly. Therefore, I believe that God's mandate is to go to the whole world and to every person on the assumption of the potential confluence of these three vital factors. God intends the gospel to be universally normative and binding in other words. When people reject the witness it is impossible to tell whether the witness has been inadequate, the individual is stubbornly refusing, or if God is not calling. Furthermore, the nature of conviction as a process over time, involving multiple and varied forms of evidence, indicates that we can't tell if their rejection is temporary or eternal. The fact that Jesus responded to a curious enquiry with an ethical imperative indicates where our focus should be (Lk 13:23). It is not our business to know the secret things of God; our job is to ensure a faithful witness to the gospel, becoming all things to all men (1Cor 9:22) and watching our life and doctrine closely (1Tm 4:16), all for the sake of the other's salvation and progress in God.

### **b) The problem of the hiddenness of God**

Turning now to the problem of the hiddenness of God, it is easy to imagine that this material world is all there is and that God is a figment of the imagination. Atheists suggest that a physical manifestation of God should be easy and would resolve all doubt. If the numerous assumptions in this stance are left unchallenged, all talk of God can be easily dismissed as fantasy. However, the unbeliever needs to give a fair response to at least the following four points:

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<sup>63</sup> I understand that these are controversial points and I stand to be corrected. However, it is irresponsible to approach Scripture with an a priori decision that eternal punishment cannot exist, for this is to place reason and emotion above Scripture.

Firstly, on what basis is physical, concrete matter appealed to as ultimate reality, given the latest science's blurring of the lines between matter, energy, and information and the use of symbolic models for otherwise invisible realities like atoms.

Secondly, is the physical appearance of God in our world a logical necessity? Is that not reducing the creator to the level of creature, equivalent to expecting to hold and grasp the outer boundaries of the universe within our human arm span?

Thirdly, the Christian doctrine of the incarnation claims that God has appeared physically in the body and life of Jesus. On what basis is this claimed to be impossible? What alternative physical appearance of God would be preferred? What would be the exact nature of this appearance and why would this be preferred to Jesus?

Fourthly, and most importantly, is she willing to entertain the possibility of a relationship with God, wherein God can prove His ontological reality in her very being and is she willing to partake of theology's principal scientific methodology (examining the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as described in the Scriptures and their implication for all of life).

#### **4.5 Theological claims: a comprehensive, hermeneutical approach to evidence**

This research has been strongly apologetic in its proposal of a high view of knowledge and Scripture and it has claimed to have appropriate epistemological, existential and scriptural warrant for this. This section takes a closer look at apologetics and specific proofs that are intended to further strengthen this warrant.

Apologetics attempts to make a rational defense for the truth of the gospel. Pinnock (1982: par1) explains that much of the NT is apologetic in intent and apologetics has 'stood proudly alongside dogmatics' throughout church history (: par3). The Enlightenment and the limitations it posed on religion led to insecurity but the church is recovering from this 'shock' and is increasingly responsive apologetically in the face of secularism and pluralism (: par 7-9).

The way one views the relationship between authority or warrant and proof depends on one's general epistemological stance. In a more positivistic stance the terms become conflated: in order to have warrant you must be able to prove your claims. Conversely, if one can prove one's claims then one attains authority. In hard postmodernism the issue of proof is irrelevant since discrete language games cannot be compared. Moderate postmodernism, as in postliberalism, will seek to demonstrate proof in existential, non-propositional ways.

The following examples of methodologies and ways of being, which can serve as proofs/evidence/witness for our belief are not meant to represent a final, authoritative, comprehensive understanding. They are attempts to show that the biblical emphasis on the objective, public, universal character of Christian claims to knowledge should not be made fideistically or insensitively. They operate as methodologies in three senses. Firstly, they function inwardly, to enable Christians to understand and continue in that of which they have become convinced. Secondly, they function outwardly, to commend the faith to those who have not yet become fully convinced. Thirdly they function to defend the faith against attack. In all three cases this is a pastoral care issue because the existential and relational focus of pastoral care is strongly affected by our beliefs and rationality.

The validity of the following proofs will be related to the extent to which they maintain the tensions and comprehensive focus entailed in Christian knowledge, which is ultimately founded upon God as revealed in Word and Spirit (the Christian understanding of knowledge that has been argued in this research). To the extent, therefore, that foundational significance is

assigned to anything other than God, and to the extent that comprehensiveness and tension (which are assumed on the basis of God as ultimate foundation, with His possibilities of transcendence and immanence) are not maintained, then a particular stance is believed to lack warrant.

None of these arguments are indubitable, especially taken in isolation. Nevertheless, God can use any one of them as a tool for conviction or impressiveness, and, together, they can have a powerful cumulative effect. They constitute a rich spectrum of possibilities for giving a reason for or for testifying to the hope that is within (1 Pt 3:15). Their possibilities free us from the extremes of foundationally trying to justify our beliefs (which is impossible) or non-foundationally making only weak claims for our beliefs, which turn out to be illogical or malevolent if they are not understood to be universal.<sup>64</sup> I believe, therefore, that these proofs are important and are effective, and they contribute strongly to the critically realistic method of inference to the best explanation that has been consistently proposed.

It also needs to be stated that these proofs are of secondary importance, and existential relationship with God through the Holy Spirit remains both the ultimate goal of spirituality as well as the principal means of conviction of truth. Nevertheless, rational understanding and conviction are part of one's existential make-up and relationship with God and they remain important.

Finally, not only are truth and apologetics relevant for Christians as well as non-Christians, they are relevant to all aspects of Christian ministry, including pastoral care. It is important to break down caricatures and strict divisions, as if argument and the giving of proof belong to evangelism, and caring and listening belong to pastoral care. All people are potentially the children of God and need carefully to be listened to and cared for, and all professing Christians have pockets of resistance or rebellion towards God, which exist in symbiotic relationship with false beliefs (2 Th 2:10-11), and they thus need to be challenged and convinced with the truth. Obviously the focus and method adopted will vary according to the situation.<sup>65</sup>

It is important to have congruence between how we personally experience these various evidences and how we try and witness to others about our belief. If we, for example, receive much of our certitude through the dynamics of faith, as opposed to reason, we would be ill-advised to try and witness to someone who needs God to speak to them through more rational means, attempting to use reasoned arguments that we are not skilled in applying.

Nevertheless, I would encourage a broadening of the ways that we experience God affirming our faith. For example, we could become more involved in the supernatural, in ethical obedience, and in active witnessing. This will increase our knowledge of God and strengthen our faith.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, it will make us more capable of recommending the faith to others.

Part of the broadening of our means of evidence (and consequently of our knowledge) exists in recognizing and encouraging the rich and unavoidable interconnections that exist between them. For example, reason and faith exist in interdependent tension, and eschatological verification

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<sup>64</sup> Keller (2008) explains that there is a logic in Christianity that does give it a unique status. It is the only major religion where it is not a question of a prophet telling you how to find God but of God becoming a man and coming to find you. If this is true it is clearly superior to other religions, but if it is not true it is inferior for it is exceedingly false.

<sup>65</sup> Jesus ministered to people's needs apart from the direct issue of conversion. For example, He healed all ten lepers even though only one came back and found salvation (Lk 17: 11-19).

<sup>66</sup> This connection between action and knowledge is clearly stated in Philemon 6: 'I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.'

depends on ethical commitment for its credibility (One may validly doubt, as pure speculation, an envisaged future that does not begin, at least in part, to impact the present).

I believe the basic element in all evidence is witness. This must be natural and authentic, not pushed as a trick or technique, and done with complete trust and reliance on the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:4-5; 2 Cor 4:2; 1Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 2:25). Any one of these proofs could come to the fore as we naturally share and as the Holy Spirit leads us. Although the principal dynamic is not rational argumentation but witness (sharing the story of the universal gospel and our personal experience of it, and inviting our listeners to engage with God and experience the gospel for themselves), if this is not backed up by rational truth claims and careful explanation, many listeners will believe we have had a deceptive psychological experience or they may accept our experience but feel they have no obligation to choose it for themselves. As has been argued throughout this research, worldviews play a vital role in life and knowledge; evangelism, discipleship and pastoral care all involve the process of challenging, adapting and changing worldviews (2 Cor 10:4-5).

This is an intensely hermeneutical process. Trusting God and loving our audience at every point, we need to patiently explain the truth and facilitate a 'thick' experience wherein faith can be called forth. This is far removed from trying to brainwash, win an argument or even educate. Rather, it is midwifery in the beautiful but difficult process of new birth. This metaphor is valid both for initial conversion and ongoing spiritual formation and care.

The inability to see that spiritual growth has similar ongoing challenges to those presented at conversion can decrease the effectiveness of pastoral care. Scriptures that talk of examining ourselves and making our calling and election sure (Col 2:6; Phi 1:6; 2 Pt 1:10; 2 Cor 13:5) are lost in contexts where there is an extreme focus on conversion tallies, with an oversimplified doctrine of being saved versus not saved. Willard (1995) talks of the negative effect of separating the idea of Jesus as saviour from Jesus as Lord. This is not to suggest a return to works salvation or to introduce the destructive effect of making people insecure about their salvation; it is to insist that the tensions involved in Scripture do not get collapsed for the sake of the 'easily digestible', oversimplified 'takes' of consumer Christianity, which overlooks corrective scriptural passages (Heb 4:11; Phlp 2:12; Rm 11:20-22; 2 Cor 5: 10-11).

These cautionary passages paradoxically ultimately work to ensure greater security in God. When heeded, they cause us to engage with God in full seriousness. In such engagement we are more likely to connect with the true God, rather than with distorted images in our mind and in this true engagement we discover true grace, assurance and security from the very heart of God to our very heart of hearts, the place where true life, of which security is a subset, can happen (Heb 10:22-23). Once again, false dichotomies between the love and wrath of God distort the true nature of Scripture and divine reality and rob us of the fullness of truth. We are to follow Paul's commitment to present 'the word of God in its fullness' (Col 1:25).

Another reason that this process is hermeneutical is that every person is different and needs to be treated differently:

The concept of 'proof' is person-relative, in the sense that an argument can only be a proof for some person (or persons), depending upon whether its premises are taken from among the beliefs for which that person (or those persons) claim knowledge status. If someone does not believe the premises of an argument, then that argument cannot be a proof for him. The concept of 'evidence' is also person-relative. Evidence is always evidence for somebody in the sense that it gives rise to the belief of some person or persons. Evidence is not convincing in itself. It is always convincing for somebody or other. This applies to both experiential evidence...and to argumentative evidence.

(Brümmer 1981: 196-197)



Guinness (2009b) explains how conservative Christians are ineffective in arguing the faith in the public sphere. The simple appeal to the Scriptures is ineffective since the biblical revelation no longer represents the accepted common worldview. Atheists need to be engaged in public policy debate, for example, on the basis of arguments that communicate with their concerns and worldview. It is striking to notice the variety of ministry actions that take place in Scripture, and these can be accounted for by the fact that the unique needs and understanding of the audience are being taken into account. When Paul talked to Jews in the synagogue, his custom was to reason 'with them from the Scriptures' (Acts 17:2-3). On the other hand, when he talked to Greeks who did not share that scriptural heritage, he used reason and found points of contact with their culture (Ac 17:19-32).

Against the demands for strict proof, as well as the insistence on clear cut distinctions between being saved versus unsaved and the pressurising for immediate decisions, it is more biblical to engage in a hermeneutical process where a seed grows into an ever stronger tree and yeast works its way through the whole batch of dough (Mk 4:31-32; Lk 13: 20-21). These Scriptures refer to the growth of the Kingdom of God and not to personal growth in understanding and salvation, but I believe a similar dynamic applies. In Scripture, the Kingdom is principally defined by its priestly subjects (Ex 19: 6; Rv 1:6, 5:10) and Jesus said that the Kingdom of God is within us (Lk 17:21).

The positive practical outcome of this methodology is that we will be able to engage with an unchurched, biblically illiterate generation without scaring them off with strict premature demands. Accepting people in their sin need not entail compromise. Rather, it can entail working with a relational, hermeneutical methodology that does not expect performance before the reception of grace and that waits upon God in order to know which areas of performance are to be dealt with in which order.

Clearly, the correct motive for any ministry, including apologetics, is not to win arguments or exert power over others. It should be a desire for people to enter into relationship with God and to grow into fullness within that relationship. Convincing people must be done in a spirit of love and excellence. They must have the sense that you are not trying to take away their freedom but rather open their eyes to all possibilities so they can make a true and free choice. Such sacrificial love and humility is the gospel's answer to the postmodern challenge that all truth claims are a will to power and an attempt to manipulate. On the other hand, however normative the intense gentleness of biblical witness may be (1 Th 2:7-8; Phlp 4:5; 1 Pt 3:15), we must realize that there is also a time to speak forcefully and prophetically (Ac 13:9-11, 8:20-23; 2 Cor 10:2).

The proofs or evidence below include some of the elements involved in the knowledge process, which were discussed in chapter one. Faith, reason, experience and witness are involved in all realms of knowledge and they exist in systemic interactions. Common to all true knowledge is openness to information, to persuasion and to falsification. Religion has typically been separated from science, both by those wishing to safeguard it and by those wishing to destroy it. In either case, this strict separation is false. Those who are pro-religion need to do the hard work of understanding and defending it, only holding on to it if it does satisfy conditions of knowledge and truth. Similarly, those opposing religion need to do the hard work of examining it truthfully, not rejecting it prematurely, and remaining open to its challenge and truth-value.

#### **4.5.1 Empirical experience and evidence**

Strict empirical evidence is available for very few areas in natural science. Many theories and models and the necessary presuppositions of science itself (such as the existence of laws in the universe) are not derived in a strictly empirical fashion. They involve common sense observation, are probabilistic, and arise out of inference to the best explanation. Science thus relies on many common sense assumptions (such as the belief that we really do exist and are not merely dreaming or being manipulated like a 'brain in a vat') to undergird a basic trust in the reliability of our sense perceptions and our mental interpretation of these. In terms of this kind of probabilistic truth value of experience the Christian worldview finds strong confirmation.

Worldviews can be compared to each other and to reality. The belief in truth, love, beauty and knowledge, which is the common sense assumption that operates with most people (including academics) fits the Christian worldview and contradicts the materialist one. These questions can and should be pursued in all spheres, including the academy.

#### **4.5.2 Personal experience and evidence**

'And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us' (Rm 5:5).

'For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children' (Rm 8:15-16).

As these verses indicate, experience is a vital factor in Christian knowledge. Against Kant's dualism, which would relegate religious experience to a lesser status than knowledge, we can appeal to experience as a vital proof for our faith.

A strong argument for Christian knowledge on the basis of belief is proposed by Plantinga (2000). Miller (1999: 143) explains that Reformed epistemology (as exemplified by Plantinga) argues that believing in God can be basic without appealing to objective reasoning (where reliable conclusions follow from reliable premises): 'belief in God is properly grounded in the right sort of experiences –experiences in which we encounter God's love, forgiveness, disapproval, guidance, etc. That is, such experiences tend to produce in us the belief that there is a God, and it is rational for us to believe in God under those circumstances.'

This has strong implications for witness and pastoral care in that rational argumentation needs to be balanced by invitation to enter into prayer and experience the presence of the Holy Spirit directly. This also opens up the possibility of additional evidence coming through words of knowledge and physical and emotional healing.

Personal experience thus constitutes one of the key factors in Christian knowledge. When the Scripture says that Jesus' work on the cross has removed our sin and guilt, we believe this because we experience it. Similarly, when the Bible states that his work on the cross has broken the wall of division between people, we believe this because we are acquainted with this kind of fellowship in Christian community. The examples could be multiplied.

Another powerful appeal to experience is C.S. Lewis' argument (for the existence of God and Heaven) from desire. As Kreeft (1989: 250) explains, 'The minor premise is that there exists in us a desire, which nothing in time, nothing on earth, no creature, can satisfy. The conclusion is that there exists something outside of time, earth, and creatures which can satisfy this desire.' Lewis (1968: 238) described this in the context of his marriage. After having 'feasted on love...[which left no] cranny of heart or body...unsatisfied' he still concluded, 'We both knew we

wanted something besides one another –quite a different kind of something, a quite different kind of want.’

A skeptic can always suggest that this is a form of self-fulfilling prophecy or wishful thinking, but this arises out of unwarranted prejudice. We are not morons. Just as a person who is not blind can clearly perceive the difference between night and day and between being indoors and outdoors, a Christian can discern the difference between the presence and absence of religious experiences. Further, many Christians can point to a pre-Christian period where great efforts were made to produce positive existential effects without the desired results. After conversion simple prayer and trust produce these results. The point is that there has been a ‘letting go’ and an actual decrease in effort and striving. It is quite scientifically valid to reason that the best explanation is that God really exists and is acting in our life. Jesus’ command to the heavy laden to come and find rest describes this experience (Mt 11:28). One’s relationship to God, in other words, demonstrates the real contours and textures, the genuine give and take, and the unmistakable cause and effect of any interpersonal relationship.

These powerful experiences clearly provide a personal basis for basic belief. The difficulty arises in communicating them to others. There is a clear danger in attempting to reduce our experiences to propositional categories and trying to convince others rationally. Another mistake is to focus on testifying about our personal experiences instead of testifying to Jesus, as revealed in the Scriptures, who is the basis of our experiences. Furthermore, other religions can also testify to such experiences. Philosophically speaking, experiences are a necessary but insufficient condition for witnessing. Our postmodern influenced world is experientially adventurous and ravenous. On the one hand this opens up the possibility of directly inviting people to experience God and find faith. On the other hand it can cause people to reject Christianity, as just one more experience.

Brümmer (1981) clarifies the potential versus the limitation of appealing to religious experiences. He responds to the skeptical challenge that religion is a fantasy, which makes no difference to a person’s real life by discussing the solution of appealing to the works of God in creation, ordering nature, signs and miracles and regenerating grace in individuals. Therefore, ‘even though we cannot observe God directly, His existence does through His works make a demonstrable difference to our possibilities for action in this world. Thus the Christian’s claim that God exists in fact is not without content.’ However, Brümmer highlights the ambiguous nature of these works, firstly because they are impressive experiences which may fail to impress and secondly because these impressive experiences require the presupposition of God’s existence (1981: 272-273). Although such appealing to the works of God cannot provide indubitable proof they can function as testimony and as an answer to the epistemological question of personal ground for belief in God (: 274-275).

The potential and limitation of experience is also evident in personal Christian spirituality. Experience is a vital God-given aspect of our faith (Ps 34:8; 1 Jn 1:1), but experiences can be deceptive and need to be ‘read’ in conjunction with God’s revealed doctrine in Scripture (Gl 1:8-9; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 1 Th 5:20-21; 1 Cor 3:10-11; 2 Cor 11:3-4).

#### **4.5.3 Witness and testimony**

Witnessing about and testifying to one one’s belief is a vital aspect of giving proof. Testimony (which includes but is not based upon rational argument) is the basic methodology for communicating Christian knowledge in the Scriptures.<sup>67</sup> As Vanhoozer (1999: 138) states,

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<sup>67</sup> Paul’s testimony is repeated several times in the New Testament. This is significant, for it could easily have been summarized or edited into a single testimony.

'Witnessing is the way to put the other in the position of coming to know (i.e., to believe and to understand) evangelical truth.'

Responding to the skepticism of postmodernism, Vanhoozer (1999:134) states that testimony, in the original sense of the Greek term *martyr*, one who is "giving witness" to and "giving ones life" for the truth.... is ultimately what is required in staking a theological truth claim, for it is the whole speech act of testifying and not only the proposition, that ultimately communicates truth claims about the way of wisdom.' He further explains, 'martyrdom could serve as a normative component of justified true belief...A belief is justified, in other words, when it is held by a person with epistemic virtue, who knows of what he speaks and is willing to suffer on its behalf' (: 139). Numerous thinkers such as Plato, Locke and Hume argue that testimony is unreliable as a form of knowledge. Vanhoozer (1999:142) insists that 'testimony yields not mere opinion, but evidence, even a way of knowing' and examines the unwarranted assumptions and contradictions in Hume's famous stance (: 142-144).

I agree with Vanhoozer that testimony represents a valid and essential means of communicating truth. This view is commonsensical and represents the way much of society actually functions. The extreme skeptical position actually runs against the grain of normal lived experience. The sane, rational option for life and knowledge is to trust what people say unless there are reliable indicators that deception is afoot. Even when we are deceived, these are exceptional cases and our extreme indignation about this deception arises precisely because reliable testimony is possible and normative.

When one looks at natural scientific knowledge as well, it is clear that reliable testimony constitutes a significant aspect of the endeavour. Without testimony and trust scientific exploration would be impossible. As Vickers (2008: 7.4.3 par 1-2) explains, 'Although testimonial inference may not be inductive, induction would be all but paralyzed were it not nourished by the testimony of authorities, witnesses, and sources.'

#### 4.5.4 Reason and evidence

Paul's distinguishing of rationalism from wisdom serves as a warning against expecting more of our unaided cognitive faculties than is possible (1 Cor: 1:20-25, 2:6-8, 14). This should caution us against rationalistic apologetics and attempts to prove the faith, instead of witnessing to the crucifixion. An overemphasis on reason arises from failing to distinguish super-rational illumination, which is a gift of God, from unaided human reasoning, forgetting that Christianity makes sense to us in terms of this grace.

Brümmer (1981: 208) claims that the most significant attempts to respond to rationalism in theology are rationalist theology and existential theology:

Both these attempts to meet the challenge of rationalism are founded on the assumption that the rationalist criteria for rationality are valid, so that no proposition may be accepted without rational grounds (evident to everybody alike). Rationalist theology endeavours to defend Christian belief in terms of these criteria, whereas existentialist theology attempts to distinguish Christian belief from the sort of beliefs which do require this kind of defence.

Brümmer (1981: 209-210) examines Aquinas' attempts to prove God's existence via five proofs and the church's authority via miracles and argues that neither of these proofs is indubitable and both beg the question, requiring a prior belief in God's existence. He suggests that this is quite understandable since Christianity appeals to revelation to justify belief (:210). Brümmer (1981:119) distinguishes between directly observable, dispositional and impressive characteristics with regard to the speech act of description. The revelation of God is not immediately visible or logically deducible (the first two kinds of characteristics). Instead it is

'something that we can discern or recognise in what we can see...[but these] [i]mpressive characteristics are discerned only by those who are impressed' (: 210).

I believe that Brümmer's nuancing is critical and can be applied to clear up much confusion around witnessing to the truth. While this nuancing can help guard against expecting someone to immediately see the truth of Christ as we do it need not lead to relativism. Rather it should inspire us to present a picture of Christ that is rich, deep, particular, and Spirit-led, enhancing the possibility that the person will be impressed (in Brümmer's technical sense of the term).

An over-reliance on reason is also evidenced in theological models that are based on a correlation with non-theological knowledge and culture. As Western society increasingly distances itself from the Christian tradition (the tradition that often provided the essential cultural categories within society, which made correlation possible in the first place) the untenability of this correlation is becoming increasingly apparent.

A further limitation on reason occurs when we realize that it is twice removed as a foundational method for discerning truth. Firstly, it is limited by the distance between creature and creator. Secondly, it is further impaired by the fall.

Nevertheless, in case we base our methodology purely on the first two chapters of first Corinthians (with its clear contextual focus on rebutting unbridled rationalism), we may lapse into the fideistic error and fail to give a reason for the hope that we have (1 Pt 3:15). While recognizing the limits of reason, we may still give an excellent and loving accounting of our faith. This balanced focus is captured well by Vanhoozer (1999: 124):

What is at stake in a theological truth claim, I contend is whether we can give an explicit account of those Christian convictions about the meaning of the whole that our most important practices implicitly presuppose.... Such a truth claim must involve propositions (objectivity) and passion (subjectivity). A theological truth claim will ultimately be about the Word of God and the difference it makes to human beings.

If one examines Scripture, one can see a variation in terms of continuity versus discontinuity between the gospel and human reason. At times Jesus argued in clear cognitive-propositional terms (Mt 22:45), at others his language was clearly mytho-poetic (Jn 6:53, 63). The Bible emphasizes the discontinuity between God's thoughts and ours (Is 55:9), yet the gospel is presented in rational terms, and Paul customarily reasoned from the Scriptures (Ac 17:17, 18:4). Willard (1995) comments that Jesus had a razor-sharp intellect and it is our socialization that makes us think of Him in strongly non-intellectual terms. Depending on the individual in question, personal experience of Christianity may also bear out this tension between continuity and discontinuity. God's drawing near to us in the incarnation, for example, may make more sense rationally than the act of Christ dying for our sins.

It is vital to distinguish reason, in terms of strict logic, from rationalism, which has more to do with what appears reasonable to a particular group or person. This rationalism is often quite unreasonable, when pressed hard, in terms of strict logic. It becomes clear that it arises out of emotional and cultural factors as well as unacknowledged assumptions. It is also superficial in that it may be true in a narrow sense or in a limited number of instances, but it falls apart when applied comprehensively. For example, it seems reasonable to say that one is merely a Christian because one was bought up in a Christian culture and one would have been a Hindu if bought up in India. This may be true in terms of much nominal religious adherence but it fails to explain counter-cultural conversion in hostile environments, where one may lose one's life for going against the culture. Furthermore, the same faulty reasoning would suggest that there is no difference between the racially tolerant beliefs of someone bought up in a home that emphasized tolerance and the racist beliefs of someone bought up in a racist home. All beliefs

are subjective in terms of being socially conditioned, but this does not mean that they are 'just' subjective and incapable of being compared.

Indubitable arguments do not exist. Nevertheless, arguments do make a difference, even if it is merely to level the playing grounds and prove that ant-theological and materialistic arguments equally fall short of absolute certitude.

#### 4.5.5 Faith and evidence

Faith is clearly vital to Christianity. As it's vital positive function has been dealt with in chapter two this section focuses on the problem of an overemphasis on faith, to the detriment of appropriate reason.

According to Hasker (1999: 294), fideism (as exemplified by Tertulian, Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and some Wittgensteinians) is the 'claim that one's fundamental religious convictions are not subject to independent rational assessment. A reason often given for this is that devotion to God should be one's "ultimate concern," and to subject faith to the judgment of reason is to place reason above God and make of it an idol.'

With specific reference to Kierkegaard, Miller (1999:140) explains this further. Kierkegaard had a specific rationale for basing faith on commitment and trust, in radical contradistinction to reason. In brief, the unreserved commitment that such a great object of faith as God requires cannot depend upon reason, which can never be related to with unreserved trust and absolute confidence, due to its incomplete and provisional nature Miller (1999:140) challenges this, explaining that 'low probabilities can support very high degrees of commitment', for commitment depends 'not only on the degree of the evidence, but also on the practical significance of the claim' (: 142).

Numerous theologians have also questioned some of the extreme conclusions of neo-orthodoxy and the problems it raises. Its extreme emphasis on discontinuity ends up leading to skepticism about the validity of faith and the reality of God (Baxter 1988b: par 8). Richmond (1966: 145) states that the normal response to a 'belief [that] rests solely upon the conviction of the believer that he has been communicated with by God, a conviction which could neither be strengthened nor weakened, verified nor falsified by any consideration, whatever apart from the allegedly God-given conviction itself.... [is to] reject religious belief out of hand as arbitrary, irrational, subjective prejudice unworthy of serious examination or assessment.'

A balanced approach to existentialist theology is given by Brümmer (1981: 131-133). After clarifying the difference between 'constative or intellectual' and 'prescriptive or existential' beliefs, he states (: 211-212),

[T]he Christian faith is not concerned with constative beliefs that have to be justified by an appeal to evidence that everybody finds convincing. It involves, rather, the prescriptive beliefs of a view of life, and these can by their nature be justified only through an appeal to impressive experiences which lead to existential insight.... The Christian belief is not a belief that certain propositions about God are true: it is belief in God, having faith in Him and living by this faith.

Brümmer (1981:213) clearly grants existentialist theologians their point and understands that issues of truth, error, belief and knowledge are clearly placed in a relational and ethical (as opposed to a propositional or intellectual) framework in the Bible. Nevertheless, he clarifies where this is taken too far, leading to unwarranted conclusions: 'It is wrong...to separate this personal attitude (*fiducia*) from assent to propositional truth (*fides*).... If we do not accept as true the fact that God exists and that He is indeed what He is professed to be, then trust in Him and obedience to Him become absurd.'

One needs to be wary of a simplistic rejection of existential theology, by an equally unwarranted rational theology, without recognition of the former's vital role and the nuances of its representatives. Faith and an existential focus are vital; if I were forced to choose between a rational and an existential theology I would choose the latter. The whole point, however, is that we do not have to choose (whatever Kant may have said) and we are able to obey Jesus' command to 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength' (Mk 12:30). This balanced approach is crucial in today's context. Such balance allows us to simultaneously respond existentially to wounded and word-wearied people and rationally to the rationalistic arguments that are intertwined with this hurt and fatigue.

#### **4.5.6 Jesus as the principal proof**

I believe the ultimate proof for Christianity is the person of Jesus as he is perceived and experienced through Scripture, the testimony of others and our own spiritual experience. Jesus' specific words and actions impress us and make us believe that he is whom He says. For a believer, the many Scriptures that refer to Jesus' ultimacy are ridiculous when applied to any human being, yet they seem perfectly acceptable when applied to Jesus (Jn 3:35, 5:23; Col 1:15-20).

I believe each member of the Trinity serves the other and testifies to the other. A meditation on Jesus causes our heart to swell with love for the Father. This is due to Jesus' success in revealing and glorifying the Father (Jn 1:18; 12:28). The father testifies to the Son (Jn 8:18; 1 Jn 5:9-10) and the Spirit testifies to both the Father and the Son (Jn 15:26; 1Jn 5:6-8; Ac 5:32). The Spirit does not merely sway us intellectually but touches us in our deepest being, causing our emotion and will to be aligned and alive with this truth (Rm 5:5; 8:15-16; 1Jn 3:24; 4:13).

When a believer examines the scriptural testimony of Jesus going about His work, speaking, interacting with people, and dying on the cross, he or she becomes convinced that Jesus is the truth and worthy of all honour and service. This is in fact the principal discerned fact, which we can find in no other religion or cultural expression and which causes us to remain Christians. And yet, the truth of this is not ultimately rationally grasped (even though it takes hold of our reason) but involves the illumination and conviction of the Trinity, principally through the impression of the Holy Spirit.

#### **4.5.7 The resurrection**

Numerous thinkers have written about the resurrection and given apologetic proofs for it that are based not merely on the Bible but on proof and reasoning that can stand up in an impartial court of Law (Morison 1987; Strobel 1998; Jacoby 2010). It is clear that Jesus understood the resurrection to be the principal proof of His deity, as did other NT writers (Rm 1:4). For the apostles, the resurrection was the central fact in their presentation of the gospel (Ac 2:32, 4:33, 17:18; 2Tim 2:8). Appeal to the resurrection of Christ is vital, therefore, and represents the objective basis for our faith, rescuing our testimony concerning our experience of Jesus from being one more religious experience among many in a pluralistic culture. Our testimony to non-believers and our pastoral care to believers should revolve around the revolutionary fact that Jesus rose from the dead. When we do not realize that this is the central fact that changes everything, we have lost our understanding of its true meaning and significance (1 Cor 15:12-14; 1 Pt 1:3-4; Rm 6:9, 8:11,34, 10:9).

#### **4.5.8 The Holy Spirit and proof**

The Holy Spirit is the oft forgotten and grieved member of the trinity (Ac 7:51; Eph 4:30; 1Th 5:19-20; Heb 10:29). Yet the Spirit is God's active presence and power with us. All knowledge and evidence depend on the Holy Spirit and seeking to understand the Spirit's voice in all ministry and pastoral care should be our central concern (Rm 8:14).

When one reads the NT and sees how the Holy Spirit is so tightly interwoven with all aspects of Christian life, we do well to examine ourselves and ask if we are relating to the Holy Spirit in the fullness that is possible and mandated. I believe many parts of the church are still in post-Enlightenment shock and this causes the extremes of dry, controlled orthodoxy versus uncontrolled, doctrine-less spiritual experience. Yet if we fully embrace every aspect of the Holy Spirit's identity and mission we will avoid these extremes. It is not a matter of choosing between spiritual experience and doctrine for true doctrine is of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the 'Spirit of truth' (Jn 14:17, 15:26), who guides us 'into all truth' (Jn 16:13) and helps us 'guard the good deposit' of 'sound teaching' (2 Tm 1:13-14). Scripture commands us to closely watch 'life *and* doctrine' (1Tm 4:16), we are 'saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit *and* through belief in the truth' (2Th 2:13), and faith is entrusted and to be contended for (Jud 1:3).

A brief examination of only a few of the ways the Holy Spirit is shown to act in the NT will underline the Spirit's importance. The Holy Spirit is vital in all of the following ways: the creation of Scripture (2 Pt 1:21) and the reception of the gospel (1Th 1:5; 1 Cor 2:13); guidance (Ac 8:29, 10:19, 11:28, 16:6; 1 Tm 4:1; Rv 2:7); prophecy, visions and dreams (Ac 2:17); sanctification and right conduct (Gl 5:16-18; Rm 15:16; 1Cor 6:11; 2Cor 3:18; 2 Th 2:13); the power to witness (Ac 1:8, 4:8, 4:31;) and perform signs and miracles (Rm 15:19; Heb 2:4); encouragement, strength and power (Ac 9:31; Eph 3:16); prayer (Rm 8:26-27); the characteristics of righteousness, peace, joy and freedom (Rm 14:17, 15:13; 2Cor3:17; Gl 5:22; 1 Th 1:6); spiritual gifts (1Cor 12:8-11); unity (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 4:3-5); and, most importantly, knowing and accessing God (Eph 1:17; 2:18).

#### 4.5.9 The Scriptures

Numerous verses talk about the importance of the Scriptures in providing proof or evidence for our faith (Jn 2: 22; Ac 17: 2, 18: 27-28; Lk 24: 32, 44-45). The use of Scripture as a direct proof for Jesus is straightforward in these verses. The context is one where their Scriptures (what we now call the OT) were accepted as authoritative and formed part of the fabric of the culture. Direct reference could thus be made. Neither of these two factors is the case today.

Not only the Bible but also the very concept of truth are questioned today and biblical illiteracy is extremely high. In a lecture Carson (2008b) comments on how these factors directly affect the way he does talks on university campuses. He needs to spend a significant amount of time establishing the possibility of truth and facing the challenge of postmodernism and he has to assume zero understanding of the Bible. Explaining the difference between the big numbers (for chapters) and little numbers (for verses) is essential, for example. I believe he is correct when he states that to simply quote directly from the Bible is not being true to the Bible, but is rather treating it like a magic book. The scriptural witness is not irrational and does not bypass understanding.

The Bible exists in indissoluble relationship with the trinity. It also integrates and interacts with many of the other proofs outlined in this section. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are key proofs; the Bible testifies to them and they testify to the Bible. Faith, reason and experience are vital in knowledge and the Bible contains many examples of these dynamics in action, and, as we interact with it, the Bible further catalyses faith, reason and experience in our lives. Witness is vital in knowledge and the Bible contains multiple examples of witness and, as a whole, it is a unified witness to God. On the other hand, when we witness today, we refer to the Bible as a



warrant for the truth of our experience or statements and the way the Bible has worked in our lives becomes itself a separate witness. The key proof of the resurrection relies on the biblical witness. The further proofs that will be discussed also interact in these mutually reinforcing ways with the Scriptures.

It can be fairly concluded that the Scriptures occupy a unique role, epistemologically. They do not replace but reinforce all the other proofs. For example, the ultimate proof of Christianity is God; the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to demonstrate truth rather the other way round. Furthermore, the Word of God cannot be conflated with the words of Scripture. Nevertheless, the written Scriptures have a unique, separate, emergent reality. This means they must be accepted, dealt with and used ontologically, as they exist in their verbal-propositional form.

#### 4.5.10 Proof through engagement and virtue

'Wherever you go preach the gospel; if necessary use words' (Francis of Assisi).

Our current post-modern context is not defined by theoretical issues alone. The existential issues of power, suffering, anxiety, guilt, fear and despair, for example, are key concerns. Postmodernism argues that the abstract and 'objective' ethos of modernism, with its reliance on speculative and instrumental reason, is responsible for much human alienation and suffering. Therefore, it is increasingly untenable to examine issues of knowledge and truth without addressing the above-mentioned existential realities. For the Christian, therefore, a responsible and biblical response to power and suffering is an essential part of being in the truth and witnessing to the truth. A correct focus on praxis and a concern for suffering and justice are vital. The credibility of our statements depends on it.<sup>68</sup>

At the same time there is a place for challenging non-theological realities and calling them to account for the abuse of power and a lack of ethical concern; be it environmental or humanitarian. Vanhoozer (1999:125) clarifies three steps in presenting this challenge, from exposing false beliefs through to defending 'the evangelical truth claim', making the following vital point: 'It follows from the nature of the claim, however, that the person making it, as well as the proposition, must also be tried and tested.'

Vanhoozer (1999: 135) proposes the concept of 'virtue epistemology' as vital in justifying belief: '[T]ruth is acquired through acts of intellectual virtue. An intellectual virtue-such as open-mindedness, conscientiousness, and impartiality- is one that is conducive to knowledge and truth, that is, to "cognitive contact with reality" .... justification...is a secondary trait that emerges from the primary, inner traits of persons of intellectual virtue.'

It is clear, therefore, that passion and commitment are vital in terms of Christian faith and knowledge. Within God's design many truths cannot be known apart from passionate commitment and involvement. One needs to caution, however, that authority doesn't just come from ardent belief (religious fanatics ardently believe). Vanhoozer (1999: 153-154) argues that fanatics fail to witness to truth. In their lack of wisdom, obsession with their own ideas, self-inflicted suffering, and 'unregulated passion' they demonstrated 'epistemic vice' not virtue.

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<sup>68</sup>Paul clearly understood that this was a vital type of proof: 'While his opponents seek to legitimize their authority through such formalities as commendatory letters and financial support, Paul turns rather to the birth and continuing existence of a church (1 Cor 9:2; 2 Cor 3:1-2), faithful witness to the gospel (e.g., 1 Cor 4:1-2; 2 Cor 1:18; 4:5) and endurance of missionary hardships (1 Cor 4:9-13; 2 Cor 4:7-12; 6:4-10; 11:23-12:10); as the chief evidences of his own apostolic authority' (Belleville 1993: par5).

I argue, therefore, that truth comes from ardent belief forged in honest dialogue with all possible sources of knowledge and using all valid processes of knowledge, resulting in a balanced expression in genuine life, love and reason.

#### 4.5.11 Proof through miracles and the supernatural

Since Hume and Kant, a supernatural focus has been viewed by many as unverifiable and separated from scientific knowledge at best (Kant) and pure nonsense and superstition at worst (Hume), but the Bible presents quite a different picture. I agree with the scriptural depiction and believe that receptivity to the supernatural dimension of reality is vital in dealing with the existential and epistemological aspects of knowledge.

Since the Enlightenment and the exaltation of reason and empiricism, an anti-supernatural bias has taken hold of Western theology. Bultmann and Hume are characteristic proponents of such a presupposition: 'It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of daemons and spirits' (Bultmann in Twelftree 1988: par 5). 'A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined' (Hume in Brown 1988a: par 2).

According to Harris (1988a: par 5), 'Prior to 1835, biblical scholarship had examined historical and theological questions under the implicit presupposition of the authenticity and general veracity of the biblical records. With Strauss that theological perspective was completely overturned, in that no miracle was henceforth to be admitted.' This methodological presupposition characterized the Tübingen School.

Nevertheless, there is no indubitable a priori reason for rejecting miracles: 'The assertion that a "miracle" is incredible in a scientific age is as unphilosophical as it is unhistorical. It ignores the fact that science is, by definition, concerned only with regularities and can therefore make no pronouncement on their breach' (Russell 1988: par 9).

The Scripture clearly testifies to the miraculous being integral to Jesus' message, and a normal part of Christian life. The lack of miracles in our day is less related to an unreliable exaggeration in Scripture than to our lack of receptivity and our bondage to Enlightenment presuppositions. Wimber and Springer (1986: 29) make reference to a careful analysis of twenty seven commonly used theological reference works in terms of the percentage of pages devoted to the supernatural:

Out of a possible 87,125 pages reviewed the, ...the total pages (and percent of the whole) devoted to healings, miracles, and signs and wonders [are]:

	Pages	Percentage
Healings:	71	0.08
Miracles:	31.5	0.15
Signs and wonders	85	0.10

This is scandalously out of proportion with the importance that the supernatural is accorded in Scripture. With such poor backing by the theological community it is no wonder that many conclude that the Bible is superstitious. But is it not an unreasoned acceptance of materialism that is superstitious, particularly when it is inconsistently held with a supposed belief in an almighty creator who is both transcendent and immanent. There are significant links and relationships between worldviews, expectations and one's experience (or lack of experience) of the supernatural. A responsible theological community should honestly explore these relationships.

Just as Jesus did not/could not do many miracles in His hometown due to their 'lack of faith' (Mt 13:58, Mk 6:6), perhaps He cannot / will not do many miracles in Western society for similar reasons. This is a pity, for despite our sophistication and technology, our essential humanness and need is not very different from that of the recipients of Jesus' works. Therefore, just as the individualism of the Enlightenment has been refuted, its anti-supernatural bias needs to be rejected.

Naturally, there are real dangers of false accounts, illusion, unrealistic expectations and manipulation. Furthermore, a 'super-spirituality,' which dangerously rejects reason and natural processes, with dangerous consequences is a further possibility. This is all the more reason for supernatural practices to be integrated with grounded, orthodox theology. In terms of the dialogical approach to knowledge assumed in this research, this involves a fresh (unbiased) examination of Scripture, simultaneous with engaging in the practice of the supernatural (by praying for healing, asking the Holy Spirit for supernatural words of knowledge, etc.).

A critically important aspect is to learn from practitioners who have traversed further along the road. Pastor-theologian-authors such as John Wimber (1985, 1986) and Francis MacNutt (1974, 1977, 2005) are orthodox in doctrine and charismatic in practice. Their integration of scriptural exegesis and sustained practice (explained in conjunction with personal testimony and real-life examples) can help us to rediscover the supernatural in Scripture and in our real-life experience.

Many lessons can be learned from their testimony, three of which I will mention: The practice of the supernatural exists within the divine-human field of tension. Although it is ultimately a sovereign gift of God, it is also an art and a skill that can be cultivated and encouraged through expectation (arising from believing the scriptural testimony and through prayer) and through risk-taking (stepping out and trusting God to fulfill His promise). A related point is that these practices occur within the mystery-understanding field of tension. Although healing processes are ultimately mysterious (and need to be understood in the context of the already and not yet of the kingdom of God) there is a specific methodology that can be learned, just as there is a specific methodology related to counseling and preaching (which doesn't negate the sovereignty of God). Finally, an engagement with the supernatural requires humility, patience, hard work, love, perseverance, and courage. It involves risk and can be terrifying and mortifying.<sup>69</sup> But if we truly love those we minister to, we will not withhold this vital aspect of ministry from them.

In terms of a comprehensive understanding of knowledge and a bolstering of personal faith, an experience of the supernatural is important. It balances out the rational content of our faith with spiritual experience and enlivens our relationship with God (The healing God of abstract faith becomes known in actual experience).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> John Wimber truly understood what it meant to be a fool for Christ. He prayed consistently for healing in front of his congregation for ten months before God allowed his first healing to take place (Carol Wimber in Springer 1988: 9).

<sup>70</sup> My initial spiritual formation occurred in the Vineyard church. Part of their values and practices involved the priesthood of all believers, demonstrated in a clear time set aside after the worship and sermon for people to come to the front for prayer (for physical and emotional healing or for any other needs). Any member of the congregation could be trained to lay hands on others and pray prophetically. I have had many experiences of waiting upon the Holy Spirit, while actively watching the person for signs of the Holy Spirit's action (rapidly fluttering eye-lids would be one example). Often a thought or word or idea would 'float' into my consciousness. As I stepped out in faith stating, for example, 'I think the Holy Spirit is telling me... Does that mean anything to you?', many times the person would melt into tears and an effective path for further ministry would have been opened up. This kind of prayer has direct relevance for all pastoral care ministry.

In terms of a form of proof for the beliefs that we hold, supernatural occurrences play a clear role. Jesus appealed to miracles (Jn 14:11) and there is an inseparable unity between His message and His supernatural demonstration of that message; Jesus not only preached about God's kingdom, He demonstrated and actualized it, which distinguished him from other teachers (Ac 1: 1; Mk 1: 27). This basic methodology is clearly passed on to the disciples (Jn 20: 21) and the whole church (Mt 28: 16-20) throughout the ages (to those who are willing to receive it) and is clearly evidenced in Paul's ministry (1Cor 2: 4; 2Cor 12: 12).

A wonderful example of how the power of the supernatural can witness effectively is Jesus' incident with the woman at the well (Jn 4:4-42). His word of knowledge concerning the woman's adultery cut through religious argument and ended in her being blessed, along with her townsfolk.

Nevertheless, the supernatural witnessed to Christ Himself. It can no more function as an ultimate proof than any of the other proofs mentioned in this chapter. Only God, through his truth (expressed in the unity of Word and Spirit) can convince a person. Miracles do not supplant the scriptural testimony but witness to it (Lk 16: 31). The following three points further warn against any kind of positivism with regard to the supernatural in the context of evidence: Jesus often refused to grant a sign (Mk 8:12, Lk 11:29); Jesus' motivation in performing miracles was usually a gut-wrenching compassion for people (Mt 14: 14); even the miraculous is underdetermined and can be denied (Jn 12: 28-29).

#### **4.5.12 Proof through the witness of the church**

Cultural-linguistic theology clearly places great emphasis on the necessity of the Christian community for an intelligible witness to the truth of the gospel, and this is in many ways valid. The living community of Christ is another unique, emergent proof; a living letter from Christ (2 Cor 3:3).

As I discuss church I am defining it broadly, from two or more gathered in Jesus' name to a huge mega-church gathered in the same name.

The church is a vital context for understanding the truth as a believer. It is the place where the Scriptures should be faithfully expounded (Ac 11:26) and it is the place where we can mutually encourage and correct each other with regard to true belief and behaviour (Mt 18:17, 8:19-20). It should also be the place where we can experience grace, forgiveness and healing (Ja 5:14).

The church's expounding of the truth is also important for the non-believer, but this can be done outside of the church context, through individual believers (Ac 8:27-38, 13:12, 10:44-45). That which can only be done within the context of church is the important witness of a loving Kingdom community (Jn13: 35, 17:23; 1 Jn4: 7; Eph 3:10).

Unfortunately, for every single one of these positive aspects a negative version potentially exists. Parts of the church have often not stood for truth and have brought the gospel into disrepute (1 Cor 15:34; 2 Pt 2:1-2). They have demonstrated disunity (1Cor 11:18), and have been bastions of legalism, lacking grace; places where people have been wounded and condemned rather than healed, restored and accepted (1Cor 11:22; 3 Jn1: 9).

However, this double reality is present and amply witnessed to in Scripture. With full knowledge of this ambiguity, God has entrusted the truth to the church and its God-guaranteed potential remains our goal (Mt 16:18).

#### 4.5.13 Eschatological verification

The concept of eschatological verification (the idea that the future realization of the kingdom of God will be a publicly demonstrable event which will provide irrevocable proof that the claims of Christianity have been true) is critical in the theology of Panneberg (2008). For Brümmer (1981:264), too, eschatological verification is key to the philosophical integrity of his claims regarding Christian knowledge

It could be argued that appealing to future justification is meaningless because it defies verification or falsification. If asked for proof, all proof is postponed to the afterlife; such a belief cannot, therefore, be distinguished from fantastic speculation or illusion. Furthermore, any data which could falsify is absorbed into the scheme of the belief: for example, if things go well that is interpreted as God blessing you; if things go badly that is interpreted as God disciplining you for personal growth. In answer to this, I would state that the future kingdom has broken into the present and makes a real difference to our lives now; we possess and can demonstrate the first-fruits of the future kingdom in terms of character, righteous living, justice and a communal manifestation of the new people of God. This is why it is important to live out the faith that is in us as comprehensively as possible.

Of course, nothing will count as valid proof for a determined skeptic, but the believer herself needs to have personal integrity. It is possible that Heaven is just a fantasy, but to suggest that a belief can be a fantasy and simultaneously cause real experiential blessing is stretching the bounds of credulity. When a focus on an invisible, future kingdom results in our visible, present reality reflecting such an imagined kingdom, it is quite reasonable to believe that such a kingdom exists. Jesus' statement that the Kingdom of God was among us was credible because He demonstrated its reality; we must do the same.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

On the basis of my exploration of knowledge, hermeneutics and authority up to this point I conclude that life and knowledge are complex, radically underdetermined and therefore open to multiple interpretations.

The pluralism and scepticism of our current context are fully understandable. This does not mean that I have surrendered the particular claims of Christ and the Scriptures. It does mean that I view the process of any person entering into a relationship with God through Christ and having their worldview transformed as outside of the realm of human possibility. It is ultimately an act of God. Our current complex situation therefore sheds new light on Jesus' statement that no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him (Jn 6:44).

What is most striking is the realization that beliefs are not directly within our control (as if we could switch them on and off). Similarly, proof is person-relative and we cannot force ourselves or others to believe any particular evidence if it has no traction with other beliefs, values and motives that are held. Examining the volume of words exchanged (often ineffectively) between New Atheists and apologists has been instructive in this regard.

This does not mean that people do not believe lies and fall under the sway of demonic deception. Similarly it does not mean they are not able to change or be responsible for their lives and beliefs. Finally, it does not mean that truth (in its experiential and propositional forms) is not the principal means whereby God brings transformation. All of these things remain true and important: people do believe lies and fall under the sway of demonic deception (2 Th 2:9-11; 2 Tm 3:13; Jn 12:40; 2Cor 4:4), they can change (2 Cor 4:6, 5:17) and they are responsible for

their lives and beliefs (1 Cor 16:22; 2 Th 3:14). Furthermore, experiential-propositional truth remains the principal means whereby God brings transformation (Jn 8:31-32; 2 Tm 3:14-17).

What this complexity, diversity and underdetermination do mean is that the process of transformation is not simplistic and one cannot merely exchange information, expecting change. This calls into question our explanation for lack of change in those to whom we are reaching out. Sometimes we say they have rejected the truth and hardened their hearts (note the assumption that their beliefs and choices are understood and accessible to their will, in an immediate way). At other times we may spiritualize it and say 'the Lord's word never returns void' or 'we have planted a seed at least.' This may well be true, but it is also possible that we have not communicated effectively. In other words we may have failed to communicate the truth in its fullness. Willard's (1998: 251-254) understanding of Matthew 7:6 ('Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces') is instructive in this regard.

In the typical understanding of Matthew 7:6, the blame is normally placed on the pig (the unbeliever or unrepentant believer) who rejects the good message and shows himself to be unworthy. The one offering the pearls feels vindicated in the face of a negative response. Willard (1998:252) reverses this understanding and explains that the blame is with the pearl giver who does not feed in an appropriate way. He concludes: 'God has paid an awful price to arrange for human self-determination. He obviously places great value on it. It is, after all, the only way he can get the kind of personal beings he desires for his eternal purposes. And just as we are not to try to manipulate others with impressive language of any kind (Matt. 5:37), so we are not to harass them into rightness and goodness with our condemnings and our "pearls" or holy things' (: 253).

In conclusion, the point is not that warrant and authoritative claims for the gospel should not involve words. Rather it is that they should involve a full demonstration of the truth, which is not less than propositional content, but, according to Scripture, it is much more:

'My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power. We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing' (1Co 2:4-6).

'For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction' (1Th 1:4-5).

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor' (Lk 4:18-19).

'...how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him' (Ac 10:38).

## Chapter 5 The authority of Scripture within a critically realistic, hermeneutical approach to knowledge

From the perspective of secular knowledge Scripture is at very best seen as a subjective or cultural form of knowledge, on a par with other religious texts and cultural myths. Even though it may offer valuable insight into human nature and experience, this insight is partial, imperfect, and relative. At the very worst it is seen as backward and even dangerous, to be actively opposed and supplanted with true knowledge. This research holds to a high view of Scripture with regard to its authority in church and society and with regard to its relationship to truth. I agree with Phillips Long (1994: 29) that 'the Bible's truth claims (i.e., what the Bible teaches, commands, promises, and threatens) and its truth value (i.e., the veracity and/or authority of these speech acts) coincide.' This view simultaneously challenges theological and secular alternatives.

This research has argued that God is the basis of truth, and the guarantor of human knowledge. Nevertheless a completely realistic and holistic view of reality and knowledge (relating to reality and knowledge as it really is in its unified totality) is only available to God. Human knowledge remains critically realistic and critically holistic. All human knowledge is partial and intermingled with error. Scripture, as a fully divine and fully human book (it will be argued) needs to be understood in terms of these complex dynamics. This applies intersystemically when Scripture is brought into interaction with other forms of theological and non-theological knowledge as well as intrasystemically when one examines different parts of Scripture and their relationship with each other and with the canon as a whole. This complex approach to truth in Scripture is suggested by Vanhoozer's (1986: 53) question, 'What in Scripture is susceptible to being characterized as true? Is it the biblical words, concepts, sentences, propositions, beliefs, or images?', as well as his answer (1986: 85):

Because God is all knowing and omnipresent, we feel that Truth must be comprehensive and unified (at least for God, if not always for us).... However, Reality is so rich and multifaceted that it, like white light, can only be conveyed (verbally) by an equally rich 'spectrum'—diverse literary forms. While Truth may be 'about' Reality (what is), we only receive the full picture of Reality (what is) by contemplating 'true' history, 'true' parable, 'true' song, 'true' poetry. That Scripture has many literary forms is no impediment to the Truth; instead, it is the very possibility of Truth's expression. The diversity of literary forms does not imply that Scripture contains competing kinds of Truth; it shows rather that Scripture is about various kinds of fact (i.e., historical, metaphysical, moral, etc.). A sentence or text is true if things are as it says they are, but as Aristotle observed, 'Being may be said in many ways.'

This chapter will examine the nature of Scripture in terms of the discussion on knowledge thus far. Therefore, Scripture will be looked at in terms of the complexity of knowledge (chapter two), a hermeneutical approach (chapter three), and a full engagement with issues of authority (chapter four). Further issues specifically related to Scripture will also briefly be covered.

### 5.1 Scripture within the context of the complexity of knowledge

Chapter two concluded that knowledge is a complex and underdetermined entity which is directly affected by context and often-unacknowledged assumptions. Furthermore, it involves multiple players from diverse disciplines. None of these players can be facily rejected or interrelated. This section will therefore examine the complex relationships that exist between Scripture, worldview and various knowledge disciplines, from a faith perspective.

Scripture shares in the characteristics and dynamics of aspects of knowledge revealed within the diverse disciplines in the world of knowledge and it cannot be approached in isolation. The Bible does contain knowledge that can be described as historical, literary, scientific, and philosophical

and it cannot be comprehensively understood without marshalling the best resources available through these various fields. Nevertheless, this is quite distinct from buying into their sometimes-present anti-theistic and anti-revelatory presuppositions. From a theological, faith perspective the Bible *a/so* constitutes a unique and ultimately incomparable entity within the world of knowledge.

To clarify further, as the Bible deals with reality that overlaps with the concerns of science, history, literature and philosophy, it needs to compete on an equal footing with those disciplines. This needs to be distinguished from limiting or judging Scripture on the basis of scientific, historical, or other criteria. Firstly, in its emergent whole, Scripture is more than any one of those realms of knowledge. Secondly, those realms of knowledge contain disputes and internal tensions and draw on realities and foundations that transcend the very realms in question. They have no authority, therefore, to ultimately pronounce on Scripture. This is not an attempt to take refuge behind Biblicism and faith. It is rather an attempt to be true to the nature of all knowledge, including scriptural knowledge.

One must therefore bear in mind that the main focus of Scripture is existential, aiming to bring us into relationship with God and form Christ's character in us (Jn 20:31; 2Tm 3:16; Ps 119:9). It intersects uniquely with God and His communication and it thus represents a unique form of comprehensive knowledge, in itself and in its indestructible link to God's ongoing presence and communication

In terms of the macro-genre of Scripture, Phillips Long (1994: 27-28) clarifies that the Bible is not a science, history, literature, etc. book but a religious one. Nevertheless, he warns against the false dichotomies of trying to state that 'the Bible is not history but literature, or the Bible is not history but theology.' He concludes: 'The Bible is...a library of books of diverse literary genres, so that no single description will suffice to characterize it, other than such very general labels as *religious book* or *Word of God*' (1994:57). As Beaujour (in Phillips Long 1994: 39) helpfully clarifies, the Bible as a whole can be argued to transcend 'all actual genres, since divine revelation could not be generic in a logical sense of the word.'

There is thus continuity and discontinuity between Scripture and other realms of knowledge. This places the interpretation of Scripture and the question of its authority firmly within hermeneutical concerns.

It needs to be reemphasized that a utopian vision of co-operation between the different realms of knowledge is not entertained: 'The Evangelical, convinced that any faith not based on historical truth is illusory (e.g., 1Co 15:17; 2Pe 3:16), will continue to be scoffed at for failing to adopt a post-Kantian dichotomy between the religious and the scientific. This very commitment by Evangelicals, however, argues for a fearless approach to historical questions' (Silva 1986: 132-133).

### **5.1.1 The influence of worldview upon biblical interpretation.**

Dealing with worldview is a vital precursor to approaching all aspects of knowledge and culture. It is no use talking about the truth of Scripture without first dealing with the nature and possibility of some form of truth: '[I]f people are to talk to one another they must agree not only about words but about how they see the world' (Stanford in Phillips Long 1994: 43). Phillips Long (1994:171-172) states that evaluating interpretations of Scripture requires one to examine 'the fundamental assumptions (model of reality) behind the interpretation and the appropriateness of the means (methodological steps) by which the interpretation is arrived at.' In addition to one's own worldview one needs to seek to understand 'the worldview embodied in the text...[the one]



undergirding the method [being used]...and...[the one] held by other interpreters [being consulted].’

Phillips Long (1994: 167) states that most of the Bible displays ‘theological (or ideological), historical (or referential), and literary (or aesthetic)...impulses’. While different parts may emphasize one impulse, the others are still represented. He explains that the diversity of opinion on the historicity of the Bible arises out of different worldviews and subsequent methodologies of scholars, which results in one or two of these impulses being downplayed or dismissed, leading to distorted conclusions.

Other authors have pointed to the influence of worldview on scriptural interpretation. Carson (2008b) states that, interpreters with a low view of Scripture can for the most part correctly exegete the Bible. However, certain passages so offend their presupposed worldview that they inevitably misread those Scriptures.

Bartholemew (2000: 1-39) also examines the profound influence of philosophy on biblical interpretation. He specifically discusses de Wette and how the openly acknowledged influence of Kant resulted in the production of ‘a history radically different to that of the Bible itself’ (2000: 14). In contrast to de Wette, many interpreters, like Wellhausen, do not recognize or acknowledge their philosophical influences, resulting in unwarranted claims to objectivity: ‘In one fell swoop...the standard account of modernity is entrenched in biblical criticism, thereby obscuring the tradition in which this style of biblical interpretation is embedded’ (2000: 18).

As various worldviews become unsustainable, the critical approach to Scripture that they funded also crumbles, to be replaced by the next fashion. Therefore, the radical skepticism and rejection of Scripture need not be taken any more seriously than the transient, fashionable worldview out of which it arose. Unfortunately, due to naiveté about worldviews and hidden assumptions, and ignorance of the intellectual history of our current beliefs, many persist in the fruit of disbelief, even after the root of the disbelief has been shown to be rotten and unsustainable. These dynamics give extra weight to Scriptures admonitions to carefully consider our foundations and not be easily swayed (Eph 4:14; Col 2:8; 1Cor 3:10-11).

Nevertheless, one need not go to the opposite extreme of a defensive approach to Scripture in conjunction with an attempt to disprove and separate oneself from current worldviews. Most movements and perspectives in the history of knowledge have contained a measure of truth and God is just as able to work all things for the good epistemologically, as existentially (Rm 8:28). Therefore, understanding that every good gift comes from God (Ja 1:17) and following the advice of Scripture to test everything and hold onto the good (1 Th 5: 21), I argue that most movements and perspectives have added a nuancing and corrective to theological knowledge and our understanding of Scripture. For example, the humility and increased awareness of bias that postmodernism has wrought is salutary.<sup>71</sup>

### **5.1.2 The Bible within the realm of human language**

Vanhoozer (1986:92) suggest that the Bible is fully human in ‘communicating to ordinary people in ordinary language and ordinary literature.’ This clearly means that the difficulties and

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<sup>71</sup> As Carson (1994: par 54) states, concerning the postmodern context, ‘properly applied, some of the insights of the new hermeneutic remind us that human beings bring enormous cultural and conceptual baggage to the Scriptures they claim to interpret, and that this fact, allied with the Bible’s insistence that our sin and idolatrous self-focus drive us away from the light (e.g. Jn. 3:19–20), may send us to our knees in the belated recognition that the interpretation of God’s word is not merely an intellectual discipline, but turns also on moral and spiritual bearings.’

potentialities of normal human language apply to Scripture. Nevertheless, from a faith perspective, the presence of the Holy Spirit renders the Bible a sacramental and divine book, unique among all human literature. The Bible therefore needs simultaneously to be approached in terms of normal human language issues and in terms of its sacramental and pneumatologically penetrated nature.

This tension between the human and the divine is apparent when one considers the issue of genre. According to Phillips Long (1994: 44) one cannot merely directly apply understandings from extra-biblical language for the 'biblical texts may explode...[these] generic categories.' The biblical texts may also modify or blend these categories (: 57). The gospels, for example, represent a unique form of genre, that is just as discontinuous as it is continuous with extra-biblical writing, dealing as they do with the unique unrepeatable Christ event, and the same can be said for the word of God as a whole.

The issue of genre at a broader level is also problematic. The literary versus historical nature of the Bible needs to be carefully nuanced. Phillips Long (1994: 149-150) states that critical literary approaches are often '*ahistorical* or even *anti-historical*' and lack clarity over the relationship between literature and history. The gap between literature and history is traceable to modernism and the perceived need to ally history with the empirical objectivity of the natural sciences (: 151-152). Of vital importance is his clarification of the double meaning of both *fiction* and *history*. One can have 'historicized fiction' and 'fictionalized history', with the second word in each case defining the essential meaning (: 62). He finally recommends 'that two extremes should be avoided: (1) that which denies the importance of the historian's vision and creative imagination and (2) that which denies to the past any inherent/coherent structure whatsoever' (: 69-70). Describing biblical historiography as a representational art, like painting, he suggests that in both there is clear selection, creative ordering and use of specific techniques. Nevertheless, both are constrained by the facts of the subject matter (: 63-76).

Scripture thus needs to be seen as historical-literary. Ryken and others (1998c: par 1-3) state that 'conventions and literary artifice' in Scripture do not undermine historical facticity. 'In real life, and not just in literature, we constantly impose patterns on the flow of events. It is not a matter of making things up but of... selectivity and arrangement' (: par 1-3). They give an example of how sports reports or interviews follow very similar patterns and clichéd conventions and yet are dealing with factual events, stating, 'the very presence of such universal elements in the Bible makes it more lifelike, not less lifelike. There can be no doubt that the writers of the Bible carefully selected and arranged their material. The result is that the accounts that we find in the Bible are more highly structured than real life is ordinarily felt to be, with the result that we see things more clearly in the Bible than we usually do in real life' (: par 4,6).

As Alter (in Phillips Long 1994: 61) states, 'fiction was the principal means that the biblical authors had at their disposal for realizing history.... [They used] recurrent images and motifs and other aspects of narrative that are formally identical with the means of prose fiction as a general mode of verbal art.'

Myth is another important literary genre, which is relevant in understanding the historical-literary nature of Scripture. Along with figurative aspects of scriptural language (such as metaphor and parable) considerations of myth further extend the categories of scriptural language to include the mytho-poetical.<sup>72</sup> Evaluations of myth are related to propositional versus non-propositional approaches to language; a strictly propositional, conceptual view of truth and language will correlate with a negative evaluation of myth.

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<sup>72</sup> See Marshall (1988a: par 2) for a technical definition of myth.

In popular understanding, myth has the negative connotation of being untrue, unscientific, or superstitious. In an important distinction, Marshall (1988a: par 4) clarifies that myth, like parable, is a genre and to say 'a story is a myth is not to pronounce on its historical truth or falsity.... The important question about a myth is whether it is valid or invalid in the point that it makes: a myth which tells us that man is fallen is clearly valid whereas a myth asserting that man is not really sinful would be invalid.'

While it is possible to view myth negatively and deny the presence of any myth in the Bible (see, for example, Henry 1976: 68-69) the opposite problem exists of denying what is actually historically acceptable, through a complete denial of the material's validity (Strauss) or a radical and unwarranted reframing of the material (Bultmann). Discussing Bultmann's focus on the bare Christ of existential encounter (in contradistinction to the mythical Christ, enmeshed in inaccessible history), Marshall (1988b: par 1) comments that, 'It requires us to accept a bare word which is independent of history, and, for all Bultmann's emphasis on the fact of Christ, there is no real saving event and hence no real act of grace. Over against this view, which in effect confines revelation to the word, stands the view which sees revelation as taking place in words and events.' Marshall (1988b: par 7) concludes, 'It would be better to recognize that much of what is often called mythical language is really analogical or symbolical language in which we talk about the God who lies beyond the grasp of ordinary literal expressions in terms of analogy with human persons.'

An expanded view of knowledge, which affirms the figurative and symbolic aspects of language, along with its conceptual and propositional nature, is able to accept the presence of myth and historical facts together. But perhaps the very need to separate myth and fact, at most begrudgingly permitting a suspicious co-existence, comes from rationalistic categories, which dichotomise the different aspects of truth and knowledge and which insist on all our knowledge of God and ultimate reality being essentially empirical and historical or essentially existential and literary. C S Lewis (1968: 214-215), the great Christian apologist, Oxford and Cambridge scholar in medieval literature, and fantasy writer, is uniquely qualified to give a positive reading of the importance of a mythical imagination with regard to Scripture: 'As myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth. The heart of Christianity is also a myth, which is also a fact.... To be truly Christian we must both assent to the historical fact and also receive the myth (fact though it has become) with the same imaginative embrace which we accord to all myths.'

In conclusion, there need not be a strict competition between creative and factual responses to creation (including the way these responses are reflected in Scripture). Not only do these different perspectives influence and read off each other, both are influenced by the greater reality of transcendent truth, which ultimately resides in God. If God acts teleologically in space and time then life itself, from all the various angles through which it is viewed, through different realms of knowledge, will reflect narrative. In other words, products from different realms of knowledge and art will all reflect narrative and purpose. Thus we have salvation history in Scripture, the history of human life through evolution in Biological science, the narrative reporting of much historiography, and the essentially narrative structure of film and literature. It becomes as much a case of the created order imposing its narrative dynamics on knowledge as it is of knowledge interpreting the created order through narrative categories.

### **5.1.3 The Bible and history**

Just as natural science cannot discern the involvement of God in creation, the academic discipline of history cannot discern God's involvement in past human events. Both nature and history remain underdetermined and the ultimate existence versus non-existence of God along with corresponding attitudes to divine action in nature and society cannot ultimately be proven. It is a hermeneutical question.

Furthermore, The Bible, along with other writings of its time, cannot be approached anachronistically as if it were a modern history book. By today's standards ancient historiography is patchy and does not display the modern concern for chronology and comprehensiveness.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the Bible's main concern, even by ancient standards, is to function as a religious book, testifying to God's word and act and laying upon its hearers an obligation to respond, think, act and be in a specific and appropriate manner. To attain this goal, it uses a variety of genres, not all of which are intended to be historical.

Nevertheless, Christianity and the Scriptures are essentially historical in nature. God is believed to have created and acted historically and concretely in time and space. Even though we cannot escape probabilistic reasoning, clear decisions and answers are necessary concerning the historical and scientific validity of these claims.

The Bible intends its historical aspects to be taken seriously, both in terms of their theological and religious significance and in terms of their reliability.

In terms of theological and religious significance, historical facticity is often an essential ingredient. The faithfulness of God is demonstrated in historical acts of salvation (see section 2.6.2). As Hoffmeier (in Miller 1998: 10) explains, 'There is a lot at stake here. The New Testament interweaves the salvific events of the Old Testament into it in such a way that Jesus the Passover Lamb loses significance if there is no historical Passover.'

A Christianity that tries to avoid these issues has ceased to become the faith referred to in the Bible. As Carson (1994: par 19) states, 'However much the ultimate object of Christian faith is God, that faith is incoherent if it affirms faith in the God of the Bible but not in the God who according to the Bible discloses himself in history that is largely accessible and testable.'

In terms of reliability, according to Carson (1994: par 20) the later biblical writers accorded historical importance to broad salvation events as well minor details. Therefore, historicity is essential to theological import and where historical reference is intended there is attention to detail and truth. Names, dates and times are meticulously recorded and have proved historically accurate, when fair standards are applied (Neil 1979; Bruce 1981; Perrin 2007).

Correctly understanding the relationship between the Bible and history remains a hermeneutical question, therefore. Both underemphasizing and overemphasizing the historicity of the Bible need to be avoided in favour of a hermeneutical approach that sensitively deals with issues such as historical distance, the burden of proof and continuity versus discontinuity.

#### **5.1.3.1 The lack of warrant for under emphasizing the historical nature of the Bible**

Many attempts have been made to emphasize the unhistorical or ahistorical nature of the Bible. Those antagonistic to Christianity attempt to show that the Bible reports history falsely and fancifully and is thus unreliable and dangerous (Hitchens 2007: 97-122; Dawkins 2006: 235-253). Other thinkers may remain sympathetic to religion and embrace aspects of the Bible and its central message and see the relegation of history as essential to understanding it correctly or to salvaging its timeless essence from its fallible container, given the context of a critical environment that threatens to discard both indiscriminately. Bultmann's (1958; 1953:1-44) demythologising process, for example, was intended to affirm the Christ of faith.

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<sup>73</sup> This is most clear in the life of Jesus where most of the writing centers on his two or three-year ministry period. This is entirely appropriate in terms of the Bible's essentially religious aims.

Some thinkers are quite blunt in disparaging historicity: 'the historicity of the events described in the Bible is irrelevant; indeed, the idea that either the meaning of the Bible or its truth depends on its historical accuracy is probably the silliest manifestation of historical criticism' (Cooper in Phillips Long 1994: 88). Others are more subtle. A less extreme stance is taken by Frei, as Vos (in Phillips Long 1994: 90) explains, 'Central to Frei's strategy is the notion that so far from trying to regard biblical narrative as "history"...and thinking of it as "factual" or "non-factual," we should rather think of it as... "fact-like".... We should not ask of it...did this actually happen...but is this "true-to-life," is this artistically true?'

Frantic salvage operations are not needed when one realizes that critical scholarship has not truly undermined the historical reliability of Scripture, as is increasingly apparent once we move beyond the positivism of the Enlightenment. Furthermore, these attempts end up misrepresenting the true nature of Scripture. Anderson (in Phillips Long 1994: 88-89) insists that the writers of scriptures were not trying to impart 'generally valid, timeless truths' but a faith that nevertheless becomes 'false and misleading' if its historical basis is not true.

As mentioned above, C S Lewis' (1975: 108) immersion in all kinds of writings gives him a unique authority in evaluating the nature of the Bible. With specific reference to the gospels, he states,

I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this. For this text there are only two possible views. Either this is reportage...pretty close up to the facts...Or else, some unknown writer...without known predecessors or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it is untrue, it must be narrative of that kind. The reader who doesn't see this has simply not learned to read.

### **5.1.3.2 The lack of warrant for over emphasizing the historical nature of the Bible**

The other extreme of overemphasizing the historical nature of the Bible is all too common among conservative scholars: 'It is...[an] essentially *modern* theory of meaning and truth that generates literalistic interpretations and harmonizations where all parts of the Bible are read as though the primary intent were to state historical facts. Whereas Bultmann dehistoricizes historical material, fundamentalists may historicize unhistorical material' (Vanhoozer 1998: 426).

Believing the Scriptures completely transcend culture and consist of a deposit of propositional truths is problematic. One consequence is that scriptural texts, which have a specific meaning within a specific context, may be directly applied to our current context with disastrous effect. In a similar vein, such a positivistic approach may ransack the Scriptures for proof-texts to support a current status quo.

This positivistic stance will also cause blindness concerning the extent to which all reading of Scripture involves historical reconstruction, a vital aspect of all dealing with the past. It cannot be avoided, whether one holds to a high or low view of Scripture. As Silva (1986: 110) explains, *reconstruction* has a negative connotation for evangelicals, suggesting the repair of deficiency, but it need not, and evangelicals, in fact, do it when they harmonize Scripture.

The conclusions concerning genre and the relationship between history, myth, literature and Scripture, discussed above, show how a strictly propositional view is not true to Scripture.

### **5.1.3.3 Answering critical assumptions that undermine the reliability of Scripture**

The sustained critical attack on the Bible parades as a concern for truth and honesty, but closer examination shows it is undergirded by certain assumptions and methods that are faulty and

unreliable, driven by a far from honest anti-theological agenda. The following three issues merely represent examples of certain controlling assumptions.

#### **a) The issue of the burden of proof for historical reliability**

Not only is the burden of proof unfairly shifted onto theology (intersystemically) or onto those defending a high view of Scripture (intrasystemically), the criteria for proof are often unreasonable and inconsistent.

A key criticism from sceptics is that key events and figures in the Bible are said to lack credible testimony. In the popular 'Zeitgeist' video the point is emphasized that there is little extra-biblical testimony regarding Jesus, concluding, 'You would think that a guy who rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven for all eyes to see and performed the wealth of miracles acclaimed to him would have made it into the historical record. It didn't because once the evidence is weighed, there are very high odds that the figure known as Jesus, did not even exist' (*Zeitgeist* transcript).

This kind of statement is preposterous and even sceptical secular scholars would distance themselves from it. Nevertheless, I examine it because it is typical of the kind of false anti-Christian apologetic that is foisted on the general public and becomes part of their worldview, directly affecting the task of pastoral care. Furthermore, it does reflect certain assumptions that are held even by more credible scholars, albeit at higher levels of sophistication, constituting subtler forms of deception.

It firstly assumes that biblical sources are unreliable. If one places this assumption aside there is an embarrassing amount of testimony regarding Jesus. It must be borne in mind that the NT was not originally a single book but circulated in a complex, ultimately untraceable variety of written and oral sources that eventually coalesced, and that, in their independent form, constitute a wealth of corroborating testimony.

Nevertheless, even if one thinks in terms of extra-biblical testimony, *Zeitgeist* can only claim that 'not one' historian refers to Jesus by unfairly rejecting the historians that Christians appeal to: 'Josephus...has been proven to be a forgery for hundreds of years. Sadly, it is still cited as truth' (*Zeitgeist* transcript). Josephus' writings are recognized as being inaccurate but not this does not mean they are completely unreliable and therefore to be rejected.

Herrick (2004 sect III: par 2) states that while many scholars recognize Josephus as 'woefully inaccurate at times...there are many places where it appears that he has left for us a solid record of people and events.' Arlandson (2009 sect 2: par 4-6) confirms that even the most critical scholars agree: 'Josephus does not doubt that Jesus existed...Josephus was a careful enough historian to have noted whether the Jesus movement had been built on a fraud, on a zero, on a nothing, on the complete absence of a real person.'

Turning now to general critical scholarship, the historical veracity of the OT has also been severely questioned. Miller (1998: 1) talks about 'the intellectual world of the biblical minimalists, a new breed of radical scholars who would turn Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and even King David into legends and myths by the stroke of their pens.' He gives examples of quotes by four such thinkers, who occupy top academic positions: 'The actual evidence concerning the Exodus resembles the evidence for the unicorn.' 'The Book of Joshua is of no historical value as far as the process of settlement is concerned.' 'The period of the patriarchs, exodus, conquest, or judges as devised by the writers of Scriptures ... never existed.' The Genesis and Exodus accounts are 'a fiction written around the middle of the first millennium' (1998: 1).

Miller (1998: 1) soberly comments, 'Answering these skeptics, however, is not always so easy as one might expect. The fact is that not one shred of direct archaeological evidence has been found for Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob or the 400-plus years the children of Israel sojourned in Egypt. The same is true for their miraculous exodus from slavery.'

Nevertheless, Miller's article and the work of researchers he refers to do start to answer the skeptics, not positivistically and irrefutably, but clearly exposing the faulty scholarship and bias undergirding the conclusions of the minimalists. It is evident once again that theological and biblical knowledge can easily be rejected on a superficial basis, but a more careful, courageous and deeper reading reveals a different picture.

Miller (1998: 1) states, 'before anyone scribbles "Fiction" over the title page of the Old Testament, some scholars want to tell another side to the story, one that Kenneth Kitchen, James Hoffmeier, and a handful of others are meticulously piecing together.... they are exposing a fundamental problem with the conclusions of the biblical minimalists: the skeptical, narrow lenses through which they read the Bible serve them a bit too conveniently—allowing them not only to dismiss uncritically the historical value of the Bible's texts but also to avoid certain bothersome details that get in the way of their own accounts of the origin of Israel.' In addition: 'In countering the revisionist history, ...[Hoffmeier and Kitchen] bring something to the fight that Lemche and Thompson and most of the radical minimalists (with the exception of D. B. Redford) don't have: the credentials of being Egyptologists in addition to backgrounds in biblical studies and Syro-Palestinian archaeology' (Miller 1998: 3).

The rest of Miller's article details numerous areas where an increasing amount of circumstantial evidence is accumulating to strengthen the historical reliability of the OT.

As argued throughout this research, all aspects of knowledge are vital and need to be related in order to have a true witness for the gospel. Kitchen's (in Miller 1998: 10) comments on the current state of historical and archaeological knowledge in interaction with the Bible matches the approach of this dissertation to knowledge and Scripture:

The biblical record, when you give it a fair test, fits its world and the world fits it...When scholars say such things as 'We have no evidence,' that merely means we do not know. Negative evidence is no evidence. It only takes one fool with a spade to dig up a new inscription and, whoosh!, that 'no evidence' disappears. I'm just amazed over the 40 years I've been in this business how we keep blundering into things you didn't expect that tie in with the Scriptures. If something doesn't seem to fit, the answer is to wait and see, not out of cowardice, not out of escapism, but just to see what happens when you have fuller evidence.

As I understand it, in all fields of knowledge, this 'waiting and seeing' is not a passive action. One should keep pressing forward existentially and epistemologically into God's truth, wherever it may be found, and the 'waiting and seeing' should refer to the resisting of the positivistic tendency to foreclose on the hermeneutical process, whether in favour of one's view or against the opposing stance.

This section also shows the importance of not inappropriately separating the different fields of knowledge. For example, where scientific measurement is possible when dealing with history, as in the form of actual archaeological digging and measuring, speculation that bypasses this available data and method should be exposed for its lack of warrant. It is simply unscientific and irrational to give undue weight to speculative reconstructions of history or to insist that history has to appear in any specific way. Whenever it is possible to go out and see, we must do so. Where this is not possible, we need to hermeneutically consider a wide range of interpretations and only probabilistically commit to those that cohere with everything else that we know at any one time.

## **b) The problem of historical distance**

Due to linguistic, cultural, technological and chronological distance, many are pessimistic about the ability to understand or benefit from ancient texts like the Bible.

According to Lessing's (in McGrath 2001: 385) famous statement: 'Accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths and reason... That then is the ugly great ditch which I cannot get across.' This statement emphasizes the distance and inaccessibility of particular historical events, which render them unreliable, compared to the currently accessible and reliable faculty of reason (in positivistic Enlightenment terms that is). Bultmann (1984: 4) provides another example in his utterance that, 'We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament.'

There are various possible consequences for Scripture that arise out of this attitude. Scientism and rationalism may reject the Bible outright as outdated, reactionary and even dangerous. When the Bible is not rejected it may be made the preserve of specialists who are the only ones able to overcome this distance through their expertise. In addition, attempts may be made to reshape the Scriptures, either by reconstructing its history, removing unacceptable supernatural elements or syncretistically blending it with current philosophical schemes.

Although this distance is irrefutable and invalidates simplistic and positive interpretations of the past and Scripture, it can be exaggerated and unfairly used to fund skepticism.

Discontinuity with the past must not be overemphasized. The representation of today's world as radically discontinuous with previously unsophisticated and prescientific ages is not accurate and the essential human predicament and heart condition to which the gospel responds has not altered (see, for example, Hughes 1983: 173-177).

It is all too easy to falsely overemphasize the naïveté of biblical culture. Common sense and scepticism existed back then and the average person realized that a man born blind does not suddenly see (Jn 9:32). In short, scepticism existed back then and superstition exists today.

The increasingly sophisticated array of tools represented in the different realms of knowledge, including hermeneutical concepts like the fusing of horizons and the hermeneutical spiral show that distance is not an insurmountable obstacle to knowledge. It can be argued that the gap will never be fully bridged, but insisting on a complete erasure of the gap is parallel to insisting on complete omniscience in order for knowledge to be reliable or true. Just as we can be satisfied with probabilistic reference in terms of knowledge, we can be satisfied with probabilistic rapprochement in terms of separated worlds.

## **c) Continuity versus discontinuity between Scripture and context**

The historically conditioned versus the historically transcending nature of Scripture is another dividing issue when considering the reliability of the Bible. Historical conditioning can occur through conscious editorial intent as well as through unconscious cultural and personal presuppositions which the author brings to the text.

For example, there is controversy concerning the extent to which Greek influence corrupted the gospel message (Bray 1988: par 4; Cressey 1982: par 4; Palmer 1982: par 4-7). A strong case can be made that inculturation does not necessitate corruption, just as Jesus' incarnation does not necessitate sinfulness.



Nevertheless, the postmodern belief that Scripture not only reflects but also is determined by its cultural context retains a strong hold today. The arguments against transcultural meaning by relativists like Rorty and Fish relativise both the Scripture and our interpretation of it. Any universal, normative claims, on the basis of Scripture become preposterous.

A typical method in this kind of criticism of Scripture is to draw attention to parallels between elements within Scripture and similar elements in the surrounding culture, concluding that the latter explains (and explains away) the former. But this kind of argument is often unbalanced:

- Firstly it fails to clarify that on the basis of a shared humanity, most cultural elements would be held in common between the people of God and the surrounding pagan nations (it is absurd to consider that the Creator of all would need his people to be culturally distinct in most areas of basic human existence).

- Secondly, the way that cultural elements are adapted, in line with God's truth, is often not recognized.<sup>74</sup>

- Thirdly, even where untrue elements are reflected in Scripture, these are corrected within the same Scriptures;<sup>75</sup> the whole dynamic forming part of an even greater revelation than would be possible with pristine propositions.<sup>76</sup>

- Fourthly, in many ways, Scripture is incredibly countercultural, reflecting most of the culture around it (as would be expected on the basis of a common humanity) but strongly opposing culture at those essential points that truly matter.<sup>77</sup>

- Fifthly, related to the previous point, and in the light of an organic view of truth and knowledge processes, it makes more sense, in the light of what we know of God, through His revelation, that He would interpenetrate culture with his truth, slowly leavening it, in order preserve as much of the good as possible, rather than obliterating it instantly.<sup>78</sup>

- Finally, in the light of this research's assumption that God oversees all knowledge and culture, it would be expected that some of the surrounding cultural elements already reflected aspects of God's truth:

Nowadays ... people think they have somehow discredited Our Lord if they can show that some pre-Christian document (or what they take to be pre-Christian) such as the Dead Sea Scrolls has 'anticipated' Him. As if we supposed Him to be a cheapjack like Nietzsche inventing a new ethics! Every good teacher, within Judaism as without, has anticipated Him. The whole religious history of the pre-Christian world, on its better side, anticipates Him. It could not be otherwise. The Light which has lightened every man from the beginning may shine more clearly but cannot change. The Origin cannot suddenly start being, in the popular sense of the word, 'original'.

<sup>74</sup> The use of Greek concepts like *logos*, in the NT, are not corruptions of God's truth, but rather excellent contextualization.

<sup>75</sup> The wrong emphasis of Job's friends is corrected by God (Job 42:7). The chauvinism of the disciples is corrected by Jesus' response to women and children (Mk 10:14; Mt 26:10). The xenophobia of Peter is corrected by an encounter with Cornelius and the Holy Spirit and by Paul's later challenge (Ac 10:45; Gl 2:11).

<sup>76</sup> The Scriptures are not a sanitized operating theatre, wherein God operates on our consciousness and worldview. They are a real home we live in, with all the chaos of messy children, but with the safeguarding presence of our divine parent. It is God's safeguarding presence that guarantees the Scriptures.

<sup>77</sup> Thus for example, Israel's sacrificial system would outwardly resemble those of surrounding cultures but the radical monotheistic focus, in clear contrast to surrounding pantheism, is unusual and best explained by God's revelation.

<sup>78</sup> This organic approach is reflected in Jesus' parables comparing the kingdom of God to a slowly growing mustard seed (Mk 4: 30-32) and to yeast working its way through dough (Mt 13:33). God's patience in bearing with the bad for the sake of the good is clearly reflected in Jesus' parable of wheat and the weeds (Mt 13: 29-30). This aspect of God's working with his people in an evolving manner is also shown clearly in the clarified ethical demands that Jesus introduces. Jesus explains that Moses allowed divorce, for the people's hearts were hard, but this was not God's original or final intent (Mt 19:18; Mk 10:4-5).

(Lewis 1968: 226)

Therefore, if one looks at the Scriptures without assuming the false dichotomy that if they are fully God's word to us then they must be historically unconditioned or conversely that if they are historically conditioned they are not fully God's word, we are one step closer to appreciating their true nature and function.

#### 5.1.4 The interplay between the Bible and philosophy

There is a strong interaction between the Bible and philosophy. This occurs directly as philosophy proper examines religion from within its own domain. It also happens indirectly due to the philosophical assumptions that underpin other domains like science, language and history as these domains interact with theology and Scripture (including their influence through the inevitable philosophical assumptions present in theologians and biblical interpreters). Regardless of how the interaction occurs, a strong distinction needs to be made between reason and rationalism (the unwarranted philosophical assumption that independent individual human reason is able to pronounce on the truth of theology and Scripture). As one listens to the New Atheists reject the Bible in debate after debate, one can see, if one listens carefully, that proponents like Hitchens are rejecting Scripture because they find it personally offensive, not because of any universal and provable rationality. This is exactly as Scripture said it would be (1 Cor 2:14).

From a rationalistic viewpoint much of Scripture can seem like an unreal fairy tale. The idea that we will live forever and reign with God in heaven can seem like believing in Santa Claus. In addition, it is easy to make parts of Scripture seem cruel or superstitious. The New Atheists are very proficient in doing a 'rapid-fire' exposition of a series of 'contradictions', 'cruelties', and 'fantastic beliefs' in Scripture (Dawkins 2006; Hitchens 2007), which are superficial and lack warrant, but which may 'destroy the faith of some' (2 Tm 2:18).

The problem is that all reality, not just Scripture, is underdetermined and can seem contradictory or harmonious, cruel or kind, fantastic or possible, depending on a variety of factors. For example, if we are not able to understand and use language figuratively (as opposed to literally) we will find Jesus' statement that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood horrendous. Jesus (Jn 6: 61-63) clearly intended us to look deeper than pure literal reference: 'Does this offend you? What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.' Similarly, any aspect of knowledge can seem false and cruel when viewed atomistically. Jesus' (Lk 14: 26) admonition to hate self and family seems contradictory to the command to love and thus contrary to common sense. This is not just a question of not being limited to literal reference, and not being ignorant of hyperbole characteristic of Hebrew thought and writing, it is also a question of being able to view a part within a greater context. If God is creator of all and is to be obeyed, and if obeying God will ultimately bring the greatest good, and if humankind is fallen and in rebellion against God, and if following human counsel and purpose (when it contradicts God's will) ultimately leads to death and destruction, then Jesus statement to hate one's family (i.e. firmly reject it when it means choosing against God) is reasonable.

These examples can be multiplied to cover all aspects of Scripture's numerous paradoxes and difficult statements. Furthermore, it can be shown that all life and knowledge contains such difficulties and we have merely grown accustomed to them. The history of the Battle of Britain in World War 2 and the story of apartheid and the life of Nelson Mandela, for example, are stupendous and fantastic if we think about them. The way of a man with a woman and the way a seed becomes a baby and is delivered is incredible and beyond anything one would imagine.

In all these examples we have lost our awe due to familiarity. All of life is fantastic and miraculous and it becomes vacuous to accept or reject Scripture on the basis of it making sense or not. With respect to the natural world, we have realized the limits of reason and have balanced reason with experience and the empirical method when it comes to natural science. No scientist relies on reason as an ultimate criterion since empirical results are often counter-intuitive, surprising and overturning initial intuition. So too we must not accept or reject Scripture on the basis of our fickle reason; we must consider if it is true in the deepest and richest senses of the concept and reality *truth*, as this concept and reality is best represented in all the different realms of knowledge, but especially as it is brought home to our heart, mind and will by the Holy Spirit.

When sceptics rattle-off their glib and facile lists of proofs regarding the inconsistency and offensiveness of Scripture, we must insist that assumptions are made transparent and that issues are dealt with point by point. We must insist that reason not be allowed to operate without the counterbalancing effect of experience, faith and imagination. We must insist that a hermeneutical process is entered into, culminating in a reasonable and rigorous inference to the best explanation. Reason remains a good gift from God, but only when it is functioning as intended, with the correct attitude and in the correct context. The individualism of rationalism needs to be replaced with communal submission; the arrogance of imagined omniscience with an attitude that is probabilistic and open to correction; snap judgments with a patient hermeneutical focus; superficial explanations with deep investigation. Reason needs to be disciplined by an attitude of love and a hermeneutical methodology.

One needs to be realistic about the possibility of this happening, for the epistemological virtues of humility, openness, and courage that are required to follow the facts, wherever they may lead, and to see what is truly represented by events and statements (the presence of transcendence, for example) are also required in order to commit to the hermeneutical process in the first place. If one takes Scripture's statements concerning the reality of human rebellion and deception with regard to the truth seriously, we will realize that this process will be avoided more often than not.

### **5.1.5 The Bible and social science**

Irrespective of whether any particular manifestation of social science has opted for a qualitative versus a quantitative approach, an a-theological, anti-supernatural bias often operates. Phillips Long (1994: 134) explains how the historical criticism dominant in nineteenth century led to social-scientific approaches to Scripture completely disparaging divine intervention and the historical reliability of the Bible. The individual, particular, literary, historical approach to Scripture becomes replaced by a focus on 'impersonal processes' (:135-138)

These points have strong overlap with those mentioned in the section above on the Bible and philosophy. This makes sense for this view of social science is actually based on philosophical presuppositions.

### **5.1.6 Conflict versus harmony between the Bible and natural science**

Science and theology share a complex history. Science cannot facily be used to disprove or prove Scripture as many, from their respective camps, have tried to claim. However, I propose that one cannot facily protect Scripture by claiming that it is not a scientific textbook, for Scripture clearly refers to reality and overlaps and competes with science at numerous points. However, one cannot claim that Scripture competes in a simplistic way with science, for Scripture is at many points poetic and metaphorical and it is simply bad interpretation to attempt to correlate these parts with science. When Psalm 91:4 states that God will cover us 'with his feathers, and under his wings' that is clearly not a scientific statement about God's anatomy.

Literalists who insist on reading Genesis 1 and 2 as a scientific account of creation, pitting it against evolution, should, to be consistent, believe that God is anatomically similar to a bird.

Just as we cannot bypass the hard task of evaluating the different genres of Scripture in order to address questions of historicity, we cannot, escape the equally difficult hermeneutical task of evaluating different parts of Scripture for their scientific resonance. This research argues that Scripture, correctly interpreted, will, for the most part, not contradict any aspect of secular knowledge, including natural science, correctly interpreted. Since omniscient knowledge escapes both theology and science, such correct interpretation remains unreachable and there will always be numerous points of apparent, irreconcilable conflict. As science and biblical interpretation evolve over time the landscape of harmony versus contradiction will shift, with new harmonizations and conflicts arising. I believe that evolutionary and neurological science will attain a critical mass of complexity that will make facile rejections of transcendence increasingly untenable. The reductionistic 'Holy Grail' of a grand naturalistic theory of everything will increasingly be exposed as a chimera.

#### **5.1.6.1 Possible relationships between science and Scripture**

We need to remain open concerning any single part of Scripture's harmony or conflict with regard to science. I propose that there are at least five categories for an understanding of the relationship of Scripture to science: harmony; difference of category (poetic); difference of method (common sense); difference of perspective; unscientific 'error'; and transcendence.

##### **a) Harmony**

A fixed view of the universe contradicted Genesis one's statement that God created in the beginning. But this statement now resonates perfectly with the Big Bang theory. Furthermore the expanding nature of the universe as understood by the Big Bang theory has a curious resonance with numerous verses that talk of God 'stretching out the heavens' (Is 44:24, Jr 51:15). Another example is when Genesis talks of humans being made from dust. This too has scientific resonance, given the carbon-based nature of all life. One cannot prove that such resonance is not co-incidental and I prefer to stay away from attempts to harmonize such specific details.

A more solid basis for talking about the harmony between science and Scripture is in terms of foundations. The implicit scriptural beliefs that God created nature and that it is therefore stable and rule governed (Jr 33:25), that it is comprehensible, and that it is neither to be worshipped nor exploited not only resonate with science, but in fact provide the necessary foundation for science, which science itself is unable to provide.

Another resonance that exists between science and Scripture is an opposition to superstition. Contrary to the caricature that Scripture is superstitious, the Bible is profoundly anti-superstitious. The creation account in Genesis is a theological polemic against superstitious creation myths. A common sense, anti-superstitious approach operates at many points throughout Scripture and the Bible rails against myths and old wives tales (1 Tm 4:7). For example, the irrationality of using the same wood to create an idol that one uses to cook ones food is criticized (Is 44:14-20). Jesus and Paul also showed that food has no magical power to defile us (Mt 15 :10) or sanctify us (1 Cor 8 :7). Furthermore, Paul insists that 'an idol is nothing' (1Cor 8:4) and whenever the gospel comes into conflict with superstitious religion the latter is rejected, as in the conflict with Artemis in Acts 19. The belief in a rational, loving, all-powerful, covenant based, consistent creator clearly contradicts a superstitious approach to reality, and the former belief was actually key in the formation of the scientific approach (Hannam 2009).

**b) Difference of category**

As mentioned in the example of God having feathers, many parts of Scripture are metaphorical and poetic and attempts to read them scientifically (whether by atheistic literalists like Dawkins or Christian literalists) is to misread and twist them. Numerous examples can be given, from trees that clap their hands (Is 55:12) to eyes that are doves (Can 1:15). But even in the most metaphorical parts of Scripture, there is a cognitive meaning that may conflict with 'science' (i.e. scientism in disguise), for scientists cannot resist moving beyond the raw data to questions of value. The scriptural statement that God covers us with his wings has the cognitive content that God exists and that we can be in loving relationship with Him ; this contradicts a purely natural view of reality.

**c) Difference of method (common sense)**

A common sense approach to knowledge and description, where one's basic perception is not distrusted without good reason, is integral to much of Scripture. This commonsense approach, while not scientific in the modern sense, is not unscientific and even forms an essential part of modern scientific theorizing (empirical method makes no sense if there is not a common sense observation to confirm or disprove). Nevertheless, the strict scientific method that strives for rigorous objective confirmation simply does not form part of the world of Scripture.

This common sense approach to reality is more germane to normal life than the empirical method and it makes sense that Scripture reflects this, having been written for all humankind in every age (Pr 8:4; Lk 3:6). For example, scientifically speaking, it is incorrect to say that the 'sun rises in the east.' In reality the earth simultaneously spins and revolves around the sun, etc. Many people do not understand this and genuinely believe that the sun rises in the east. And even the minority of the world's population who have been exposed to these facts, and the even smaller minority of scientists who are expert on these facts, have no problem talking about the sun rising each morning. Such appropriate scientific imprecision is commonsensical and vital for normal communication. It is to be distinguished from superstition and falsehood, as in a religion that worships the sun. Of this the Bible is not guilty.

**d) Difference of perspective**

Much of Scripture talks of nature from the perspective of God's action. God sends rain (Gn 7:4, Lv 26:4, etc.), knits humans together (Job 10:11, Ps 139:13), gives all creatures their food (Ps 136: 25, Job 38: 39-41), etc. Scientism would ascribe this to ignorance and superstition, requiring such talk to be replaced by scientific explanation. But the writers of Scripture were not ignorant of natural processes like the water cycle and the common sense observation that lions seek their own food.

All reality can be talked about from multiple perspectives. If I waggle my finger it is as true to say that it is because I willed to do it as it is to say it is because of a neural process. It is also true that I wagged my finger because God directly allows me to, '[f]or in him we live and move and have our being' (Ac 17:28). It is also true to say that God indirectly allows me to waggle my finger by having created the conditions which allowed the process of evolution upon which my neurophysiological-conscious being depends at least in part.

In terms of this research, all aspects of knowledge need to be reductionist, separate and focused in order to attain their specific goals. However, they also need to interact and 'mix it up' when appropriate, in the interests of fruitful cross-pollination and synergistic emergence. There is a time to talk about Scripture and theology from a natural perspective. We know that God ultimately wrote the Bible but it is important to understand that this does not contradict Paul

having written this exact verse in response to that particular situation, with this specific theological intent in mind. In the same way, evangelicals need to become more comfortable talking about the latest scientific data from the perspective of God's ultimate control. It is quite appropriate to talk of God using the mechanism of evolution to bring about creation, for example.

#### **e) Unscientific 'error'**

At numerous points, however, Scripture is clearly unscientific and one cannot take refuge in claiming that the language is merely poetic. It can be argued that the original writers clearly believed in a universal flood, a perfect creation without death, and a three-tiered universe. It is hard to escape the conclusion that this constitutes genuine scientific error. This point will be denied by a strict inerrant view of Scripture. Carson, for example, rejects the infallibility, inerrancy distinction and says the Scripture is authoritative on whatever it chooses to talk about (2008b).

It seems more appropriate, however, to admit that writers of Scripture believed certain things that are, strictly speaking, unscientific. It seems, for example that the flood was believed to be worldwide. This is, however, scientifically impossible. Does this make the Scripture false? I argue that it does not. It is only in terms of a strict empirical method that this is the case. However, such a strict insistence on correspondence to reality will nullify science itself.

From the point of view of the writers of Scripture it was a worldwide flood. The whole world that they knew was flooded. It seems to me totally unnecessary and against the intent of Scripture for God to have brought in the scientific detail that there were other parts of the world, where other peoples were living, who were not experiencing a flood. This detail would have confused and obscured God's purpose. It would have softened the teaching impact of what God was doing with this particular group of people. It was this group that God was focusing on and through whom He was going to bring forth the first fruits of a renewed humanity. In Scripture one part of humanity is able to represent the whole (1 Cor 15:21-22). Just as one person can die locally and save the whole world, so too, a single group and locale can be judged through a flood and this can represent God's purposes for the whole world. God is free to do this as much as He is free to flood different parts of the world in turn, etc.

The outlining of strict scientific detail every time you wanted to perform speech acts would constitute bad communication. The Bible constitutes perfect communication, i.e., communication perfectly suited to its purpose. The terms 'error' and 'inerrancy' are limited when talking about certain aspects of knowledge, including Scripture.

#### **5.1.6.2 The issue of science correcting Scripture**

Because of the possibility of falsely understanding Scripture, both in terms of the genre of writing (mistaking myth for history or history for myth, for example) and in terms of intended meaning (such as mistaking hyperbole or metaphor for literal instruction, for instance in Jn 6:53 and Mt 5:29), and the possibility that the writers were operating out of a scientifically limited worldview, it is possible to talk of Science (understood as the complex of all possible knowledge, not just natural science) correcting interpretations of Scripture, or even Scripture itself (as in the case of the flood, above).

If one accepts that both Scripture and Science are under God's sovereignty, this need not be unacceptable. It should be a careful and humble hermeneutical process, which is a far cry from a triumphant and glib dismissal of major swathes of Scripture as 'unscientific'.

### 5.1.7 The Bible and theology

In the same way that secular knowledge cannot perfectly grasp Scripture, theology also falls short. The history of theology clearly shows how theology can distort the Bible in terms of traditional, personal and historical agendas (Carson 2000a: sect 2 par 3; Goldsworthy 2003: sect 5 par 3).

Theology can be positivistic in its scepticism or in its fideism with regard to Scripture. It can see diversity and contradiction where none ultimately exists, or it can force harmonization and scientific and historical reference where these are equally absent.

Biblical theology is a key factor in correcting these various distortions and it will be briefly examined.

Scobie (1991 :52-56) defines biblical theology as essentially canonical in terms of the following three senses: 'it is concerned with both Old and New Testaments together'; 'it is based primarily on the final canonical form of Scripture'; 'it seeks to deal with the full range of canonical materials...it will be resolutely opposed to any form of a "canon within the canon"'. He concludes that 'The production of such a Biblical Theology would in-deed be a daunting task; yet it could be argued that it is the greatest single challenge facing biblical scholarship at the present time' (1991:61).

The sceptical, historical-critical approach to scripture that has come to characterize theology in the academy emphasizes the human and fragmented nature of Scripture. This logically undermines the possibility of the coherent, unified approach to Scripture that is necessary for biblical theology. A high view of God, knowledge and Scripture, the understanding defended in this research, logically correlates with a high view of biblical theology.

Scobie (1991 : 32-50) discusses how biblical theology is often defined in terms of the first use of the term in late eighteenth century critical studies, to refer to the historical critical approach to the Bible, separate from the use of the Bible in the church and other theological disciplines. The nature of the methodology led to fragmentation and a demise of the approach, with separate Old and New Testament studies still existing today. Nevertheless, Scobie reasons that biblical Theology cannot be understood apart from the church and remains vital as a bridge between academic studies and the church. This is, however, easier said than done. Rosner (2000:sect 2 par 2) comments on how overspecialization and compartmentalization in theology have led to academic antipathy to 'reading the Bible as a whole.' As a result this kind of reading is left to the church context (Rosner 2000:sect 3 par 2).

A key aspect in this production of a valid biblical theology is understanding and correctly integrating the various theological disciplines that exist. Rosner (2000: intro par 1) explains that biblical theology is vital in understanding and applying the Bible and it has a distinct but interdependent relationship with the other theological disciplines. Due to its close exegetical relationship to Scripture it has 'logical priority over systematics.' It is inductive and 'lets the biblical texts set the agenda.' This distinguishes it 'from philosophical theology, which relies more directly upon reason, natural theology, which looks to the natural world and order for knowledge of God, and systematic theology, which concentrates on the contemporary articulation of Christian faith' (2000: sect 4 par 1).

Carson (2000a: sect 1 par 26) is another key supporter of the possibility and necessity of biblical theology, stating that its respect for the nature of the Bible commits it to 'rigorous and responsible historical methods' and literary sensitivity. He sees it as a vital bridge within theology stating that the direction of authority should be 'from Scripture through exegesis

towards biblical theology to systematic theology (with historical theology providing some guidance along the way),’ although, in reality there are ‘back loops’ of influence, especially from systematic theology, which is so worldview forming (: sect 3 par 2)

Goldsworthy (2003) provides a counterpoint to Carson, introducing epistemological concerns that resonate with this dissertation. He explains that we cannot facily envisage a sure method that progresses from Scripture to exegesis to biblical theology to systematic theology. Instead we need to ‘engage the hermeneutical spiral by recognizing, owning, and progressively testing our theological presuppositions’ (2003: sect 5 par 3). Neither biblical theology nor systematic theology have an independent, objective starting point: ‘Fact, logic and method are not independent of revealed truth. To grant them such independence would be to set up a natural theology in opposition to revelation. There are no self-evident rules of logic and investigation which enable exegesis to proceed safely without first submitting to the gospel by which the truth-suppressing framework of humanism is replaced by the fear of the Lord (: sect 5 par 4). Therefore ‘we must ensure that in the academy and in the local church, biblical and dogmatic theology are not only taught but are shown to be interdependent’ (: sect 5 par 2).

This selective and incomplete discussion of the way that different areas of knowledge illuminate and challenge theological understandings of Scripture reinforces the critically realistic claims of this research. From a realist perspective, valid scriptural knowledge, along with a measure of harmony with other fields of knowledge, remains a possibility against unwarranted scepticism. Nevertheless, from a critical perspective, incompleteness and error can never be fully eradicated from any field of knowledge, including our understanding of Scripture. This means that conflict between Scripture and other areas of knowledge will always exist, necessitating ongoing research and engagement.

The implication of this view for the church is that we do not need to protect Scripture and theology from full and active public and academic debate with all fields. On the other hand, we do not need to overextend ourselves in trying to make Scripture the source of all possible knowledge, harmonizing with or disproving other claims. In addition, we need not be overly concerned when other fields of knowledge seem to be contradicting Scripture at any given moment. History is replete with examples of how further development and discovery have vindicated Scripture.

Because of this underdetermination and critical realism one cannot be positivistic concerning where the problem may lie when conflict between the different areas of knowledge occurs (whether it is the scriptural and theological understanding or non-theological knowledge –or both- that most requires development and reinterpretation in any given instance). A hermeneutical perspective remains essential in this ongoing process and this forms the next area of examination with regard to Scripture.

## **5.2 Scripture and hermeneutics**

Chapter three introduced the concept of hermeneutics as a vital and valid approach to the complex and problematic nature of knowledge. Just as section 5.1 explored chapter two’s knowledge issues in relation to Scripture this section explores the complex interaction between hermeneutics and the Bible.

### **5.2.1 Hermeneutics and Scripture in historical perspective**

Carson (1994: sect 8 par 2) explains three stages in the understanding of hermeneutics with regard to Scripture. At first it was ‘understood to be the science and art of biblical interpretation: science, because there were some important rules and principles that could be applied to the



task, and art, because there were many calls for mature judgment borne of experience and competence.’ This understanding assumed that two equally competent interpreters following the rules would for the most part agree. It necessitated a strong focus on ‘grammar, parables and other literary genres, principles for studying words, how to relate biblical themes and the like’ (:sect 8 par 2). The second wave of historical-criticism used various literary-critical tools and methods in order to ‘reconstruct the history and belief-structure of particular believing communities behind the text, rather than to listen to the message of the text’ (:sect 8 par 2). According to Carson (1994: sect 8 par 3), the ‘third wave’ or ‘new hermeneutic’ appropriately exposed the subjectivity and bias that an interpreter brings to the text but inappropriately concluded that the text has no objective meaning and meaning resides in the reader.

According to Smit (1998b: 297), the twentieth century can be seen as ‘a time characterised like never before by a conflict of interpretations, a time characterised by the fact that different Christians read, use and interpret the Bible in different ways.’ Smit’s (1998b: 298-312) outline of five conflicts will serve as an understanding of the development of the new hermeneutic mentioned by Carson, above. It will also serve to outline the hermeneutical issues that currently exist and with which this research attempts to interact. The five areas of conflict are: between ‘explanation and understanding’; over ‘who may read the Bible’; over ‘what we do when we read’; over ‘the responsibility of reading the Bible’; and over ‘what the Bible is’.

Concerning the fifth conflict over what the Bible is, Smit (1998b: 313) refers to Goldingay’s explanation of some of the ways Christians view the Bible: ‘Scripture as witnessing tradition, Scripture as authoritative canon, Scripture as inspired word, and Scripture as experienced revelation’, commenting that this list can be added to or expressed in different terminology. Smit (1998b: 313) concludes that this conflict may be the most fundamental, acting as the basis of the other conflicts and constituting a key area for charges of heresy :

Somehow all the other conflicts come together in this one. The question whether people expect something from the text or not influences the conflict between explanation and understanding; the question what the text is definitely determines the conflict over the question who may read this text, to whom it properly belongs; the question whether we can do with the Bible whatever we like while reading, or whether there is a message, something in the text that readers must respect, has a bearing on the conflict over the question what reading is; and, obviously, the view of the text will impact on the notion of the responsibility of interpretation.

In terms of this dissertation’s argument concerning the importance of worldviews, I would argue that the nature of the Bible is not the ultimate question. There is a prior fundamental question concerning the nature of reality. One cannot avoid a faith assumption concerning the theistic versus naturalistic nature of ultimate reality and the theistic versus humanistic basis of ultimate personhood. This foundation ultimately affects how the Bible itself is viewed.<sup>79</sup>

Smit concludes with an affirmation of the possibility of a theological hermeneutics, which is not rendered impossible by the conflict and complexity that his analysis has revealed. It involves ‘a hermeneutics of consent, of engagement, of trust, of transformation’ with a strong respect for the ‘other’ in all its manifestations, from various interpretative traditions to the Bible itself (1998b :314).

I agree with Smit’s conclusion that it is possible to read the Bible with ‘trust, confidence, and expectation’ while still respecting other critical concerns. However, this needs to be supported by epistemological argument and a related valid hermeneutic, otherwise the Bible will continue

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<sup>79</sup> Other authors have noted the close relationship between worldview and biblical interpretation. (Osborne 1997; Smit 1998a: 275-296).

to be dismissed by many who will interpret this as only one option among many. This is not God's intent, as revealed in Scripture.

### 5.2.2 The issue of special hermeneutics

Apart from the question of a narrow versus broad approach to hermeneutics there is also the question of a special hermeneutics for Scripture, which would be different from that used in other texts. In terms of the basic rules of dealing with texts and understanding, it is agreed that there is no difference, but it is clear that the Bible cannot be treated like any other book: 'Some principles of interpretation are common to the Bible and other literature, especially other ancient literature; other principles of interpretation are bound up with the unique place of the Bible in the revelation of God and in the life of his people' (Bruce 1996a: intro par 1). If the Bible as a whole constitutes a unique emergent revelatory genre with unique purposes and claims and truths, the likes of which this world has never seen (Jn 1:18; Is 64:4; 1 Cor 2:9), then basic 'secular'<sup>80</sup> hermeneutics are necessary but not sufficient: '[T]he competent interpreter of Scripture has to learn more than how to handle texts. Biblical interpretation requires a more demanding apprenticeship. Why? Because a casual reading fails to disclose the subject matter of the text. The reader is in need not only of hermeneutical methods but of holiness' (Vanhoozer 1998: 437).

### 5.2.3 The relationship between the nature, purpose and authority of Scripture: a hermeneutical model

There are intimate multi-directional relationships between the nature and purpose of Scripture, authority, and hermeneutics. Packer (1988b: sect 4 par 1), for example, summarizes the interrelationship between the practical use of Scripture, authority and interpretation: 'What is at issue [in the question of authority] is the nature and extent of the control that canonical Scripture should exercise over the doctrine, discipline, and devotion of the church and its members.' He clearly states that Scripture is the ultimate authority over tradition and human rationality, but 'only when rightly interpreted does Scripture actually exercise its rightful authority. A false approach to interpretation will frustrate that authority completely' (: sect 4 par 1). In terms of this dissertation's focus on foundational assumptions and worldview, I would add that a false approach to truth will frustrate authority and the resultant false approach to both will frustrate interpretation.

The true nature of Scripture (a divine-human book where the transcendent Word/God is inseparable from the human words of the written text) needs to be taken into account when considering the aspects of purpose, authority and hermeneutics. Each of these aspects is directly affected by the way the tension between the divine and human poles in Scripture is resolved (its essential nature). Collapsing the tension in favour of the divine pole makes the Bible a book of dictated commands that must be unquestioningly obeyed and that can be understood with minimal interpretation; and surely some churches are guilty of acting in this way. Collapsing the tension in favour of the human pole makes the Bible an inspiring human book that has no ultimate authority and that either needs critical specialists to reveal its meaning or that can be read in terms of subjective personal or communal categories.

Assuming the context of a healthy tension in terms of the Bible's human versus divine nature, the correct functioning of each of these three aspects (purpose, authority and hermeneutics) further relies on the correct functioning of the other two. Scripture only achieves its various purposes (facilitating the God-human encounter, for example) when its authority is taken

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<sup>80</sup> The definition of secular and the associated concept of a separation between the secular and sacred are problematic. As with science, we must not forget how much literary science was first developed in the context of reading the Bible.

seriously and when it is carefully interpreted. The authority of Scripture can only be believed and it can only function correctly (neither over or under authoritarian in application) when we submit to the God-human relationship (agree to live out purposes indicated in the Bible)<sup>81</sup> and when correct interpretation takes place (misinterpreting, for example, makes the Bible seem superstitious or unscientific, thus undermining its authority). Finally, reliable interpretation requires us to be existentially engaged (purpose) and to respect the Bible's authority.

The use of the Old Testament in the New is a key example of how interpretation affects the authority of Scripture and how this understanding affects further interpretation. One argument against the authority of the Bible is the belief that the NT rips OT verses out of context (see section 5.5.2 on *sensus plenior*). This not only suggests they did not have a high view of Scripture but it implies that we can interpret the Bible in an equally uncontrolled manner. Carson (2000a: sect 1 par 43) examines this problem in the context of the seemingly problematic NT use of Psalm 2:7, arguing for a third way beyond this view and the response that the NT writers had a special revelatory authority. This third alternative assumes a more complex exegesis that involves 'interlocking typologies having to do with David, the temple, the priesthood, and other subjects.'

Wessels (1998: 261-272) provides further useful nuancing of the issue. He looks at how Scripture is reinterpreted as the OT refers to and reinterprets previous core oral and written traditions and as the New Testament appropriates the Old. He states that this reapplication was sometimes 'conservative', 'trying to preserve the "original" faith content', at other times, particularly in the New Testament 'more freedom was taken' (:266). He concludes that this tension between faithfulness and creativity should characterise our current use and interpretation : 'There is more than one correct method of interpretation and this is to the benefit of the believing community who should realize that interpretation is a dynamic, open-ended and ongoing process' (: 272).

Throughout all the debate about interpretation and authority, it must be remembered that the essential nature and purpose of the Bible are existential : 'Through the Spirit ... life under the authority of Scripture becomes...realized communion with the Father and the Son...Living under biblical authority is a prescription not only for theological rectitude but also for spiritual life' (Packer 1988b: sect 4 par 5). Ryken and others (1988d: par 11) summarize some of the many ways we are called to respond to the Word of God. Believers should:

meditate on it (Ps 1:2 and numerous passages), be instructed by it for salvation (1 Tim 3:15), obey it (Lk 11:28), continue in it (Jn 8:31), keep it (2 Chron 34:21; Ps 119:67; Jn 14:23), hear it (Jer 31:10; Eph 1:13), receive it (1 Thess 2:13), read it (Mt 21:42; 2 Cor 3:15), dwell in it (Eph 3:17), believe it (Jn 2:22), search it (Jn 5:39), praise it (Acts 13:48) and hide it within their hearts (Ps 119:11 KJV). The Word is also something that abides in believers (Jn 5:38; 1 Jn 2:14), that goes forth (Is 2:3; 55:11) and that is implanted in those who believe it (Jas 1:21).

While it is possible to argue that the indisputably existential nature of the Bible means that issues of error and a high view of Scripture are not critical, this research argues that this is not an appropriate stance and ultimately it ends up undermining the existential effectiveness of the Bible.

### 5.3. Theological approaches to Scripture

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<sup>81</sup> As stated, the greatest proof that the Bible is true (authority) is that it works, but we will only know that it works when we try it.

This sections briefly examines some of the different theological approaches to Scripture that exist in order to provide further justification for this dissertation's approach to Scripture and to show that it is not ignorant of the complexity and great difficulties that exist.

I use the interpretive framework of high versus low views of Scripture and high versus low correlation with extra-biblical sources.<sup>82</sup> The issue of correlation is epistemologically focused and does not refer to existential engagement with culture. In a Time magazine article, Karl Barth, for example, is quoted as saying 'take your Bible and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your Bible'.<sup>83</sup> Clearly Barth's low epistemological-correlation (as expressed in his antipathy to natural theology) does not equate with existential disengagement (as evidenced in his resistance to Nazism).

Talking of low views or low engagement is not meant as a judgment on any groups or individuals, or on their spirituality. It is merely the use of an interpretive grid in order to attempt understanding. Further, I am not at all suggesting that theologians can be simplistically explained and dismissed. Increasingly there is an eclectic nature to theology, which defies any simple categorization. Hall (1989), for example, displays elements of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic understanding, David Tracy's correlational approach and Karl Barth's neo-orthodoxy. Again, postliberalism's non-foundational, cultural-linguistic understanding is clearly indebted to Barth. It is beyond the scope of this research to clarify this complexity. The following reflects a limited understanding of different approaches to Scripture. These models are seen to contain strong points, but they only partially satisfy this dissertation's understanding of knowledge and the specific, God-Scripture bond that it requires.

Liberal theology, for example, readily identifies error in Scripture and concludes that it must be a human document, resulting in radical conclusions; suggesting, for example, that Christ is not the only mediator of God. Conservative scholarship understands, correctly, I believe, that Scripture is vital for revealing Christ, and concludes, incorrectly, I believe, that Scripture has to be empirically inerrant. Neo-orthodox and postliberal views attempt to chart a course between these extremes and end up, I believe, adopting an unnecessarily low view of Scripture, resulting in the same inconsistency shown by liberal theology. This error consists in interpreting Scripture as a fallible, human document and yet attempting to live out high ideals and to trust God according to specific understandings. However, these high ideals and specific understandings are inextricably based upon these very same "fallible", "human" Scriptures.

### **5.3.1. A low view of Scripture with a low (or eclectic) correlation with culture**

As will be seen, a low view of Scripture, accompanied by attempts to marginalize it, excluding it from participation in areas of life and knowledge, is not a new phenomenon and this view continues to hold sway in the public domain.

#### **5.3.1.1 Atheists (new and old)**

For old and new atheists the locus of truth is in individual and collective reason and Scripture is full of error, absurdity and immorality. Although their arguments do not deal with Scripture in a fair and nuanced way, they contain just enough truth to please a hungry public (2 Tm 4;3).

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<sup>82</sup> When I refer to a low view of Scripture I do not mean that the Bible is not cherished or used. I am referring to it in contradistinction to a high view, which insists that issues of error and verbal-propositional revelation cannot be sidestepped without affecting the reliability and authority of Scripture.

<sup>83</sup> Time. 31 May 1963. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,896838,00.html>>. August 2011.

I think much Christian response to these atheists is faulty and is done on the atheist's false terms (which represent an unholy mixture of modern and postmodern assumptions) and in the atheist's proud, argumentative spirit. We must rather follow the advice of Scripture in this regard (Eph 4:17-18; 1Pt 2:12, 3:15-16; Phlp 2 14:16, etc.)

### **5.3.1.2 A critical, reconstructionist view**

This view (as exemplified by Strauss's 'Life of Jesus') is strongly funded by post-Enlightenment modernism and its positivistic understanding of the power of human reason. Scripture is seen to be a faulty human document and critical scholarship is able to perceive and reconstruct the truth behind Scripture. For liberals the Bible is 'a fallible human record of experiences that can be reduplicated or reenacted in every age' (Bloesch 1994: 44).

While many of the interpretive tools of historical criticism are useful and have been appropriated, increasingly even by Evangelicals (Wright 2005; Bartholemew, Green and Möller 2000), rational human tools can never fully account for the 'living and active' Word of God within its textual clothing. This failure removes any warrant it may claim as an ultimate, foundational methodology for understanding Scripture, as McConville (2001: sect 3 par 1-2) clarifies:

For Watson, historical criticism has failed because it has not led to contemporary actualization of the text. That is, it fails by its own standards, namely to provide the illumination of texts necessary to their accurate interpretation. This is partly because of the multiplicity of proposed solutions to problems posed by the method, so that the promise of *progress* in understanding is ultimately illusory. Christopher Seitz argues too that the method delights in sophistication, so that proposed 'real' meanings, unearthed by historical and sociological study, run counter to what the texts seem to say on a plain reading. The consequence of this failure is that the canonical texts have a right to be heard as what they are, the Scriptures of the church.

### **5.3.1.3 A relativist, postmodern view**

Postmodernism, and responses to it, has been dealt with at several points up to now and it will not be re-explained, except to mention how it affects ones approach to the Bible. In terms of extreme postmodern relativist thinking the Bible becomes a cultural human product to be appropriated or not, according to need or desire. It can be read intertextually and made to surrender as many meanings as there are readers, and, even further, as many meanings as there are readings.

### **5.3.2 A low view of Scripture with a high correlation with culture**

As will be seen, a low view of Scripture does not logically fit well with a high correlation with extra-biblical knowledge. The inevitable result is that Scripture becomes subsumed within the latter.

#### **5.3.2.1 The correlational approach**

As discussed in 3.3.3, the correlational methods of Tillich, Browning, and Tracy are based on assumptions of correspondence, which entail a prior surrender of Scripture's unique nature. This ends up in extra-biblical knowledge exerting undue influence ; ultimately the world ends up absorbing the text.

#### **5.3.2.2 A postmodern-influenced/anti-propositional approach**

The emerging church movement, with Brian McLaren (2004, 2006) as one of its foremost articulators and pioneers, is merely one expression of a growing postmodern-embracing trend in the twenty-first century church. This intimate relationship with postmodernism directly informs approaches to Scripture.

Carson (2005) critiques the movement for its shallow treatment of both modernism and postmodernism. This suggests an insufficiently profound approach to hermeneutics and authority, and, from my understanding, emerging church leaders like McLaren have so embraced postmodernism that a valid approach to Scripture has been supplanted and the movement threatens to be syncretistic; their caricature of a confessional approach to Scripture and the resultant low view of the Bible means that God's primary provision for self-critique and balance is weakened. Therefore, many glaring inconsistencies occur, of which I will mention two.

Firstly, there is much talk of love and spirituality, but a complete underplaying of judgment and discipline, without which, the former is shallow.

Secondly, there is an inconsistent rejection of absolute truth and a suspicion of metanarrative. McLaren (2003: ix) de-emphasizes the propositional aspect of Scripture and favours reading it in terms of multiple mini-narratives. Carson (2005: 157-187) examines McLaren's approach to Scripture and exposes several inconsistencies, stating that 'He cannot responsibly duck the exegetical questions and relegate the positions of others to the ash-heap of history while he escapes scrutiny by appealing to the post-modern' (Carson 2005:166).

In a lecture Breshears (2004), an acquaintance of McLaren, affirms much about him, yet he critiques him on several points. McLaren skips over personal sin and focuses on deliverance from societal sin. Breshears also discusses McLaren's (2003) book 'The story we find ourselves in', which McLaren described in 2010 as the most important book he'd written,<sup>84</sup> describing it as a 'creative essay' or a 'dialogical essay' (McClaren 2003: xv). The book is a story involving plot and characters, yet it is clear, according to Breshears, that McLaren is doing real theological work and the theological import beneath the narrative is meant to convey a message and instruct the reader. This is similar to Plato's dialogues, which are clearly meant to represent teaching.

Throughout McLaren's story not only is common sense allowed to supplant Scripture, it is instructive to note the source of this common sense. Breshears (2004) notes that Kerry, the non-Christian seeker, is the source of the common sense that determines truth. 'Stuff that makes sense to Kerry is true, stuff that makes sense to Carol, the pastor's wife...and Dan the seminary trained pastor turns out to be false.' Further, Breshears claims that there is not one place where the Bible is opened or serves as a meaningful authority and the only reference to the church (the other potential source of authority) concerns negative statements concerning how the church has been mistaken. When questions concerning the seeming cruelty of the substitutionary atonement are raised, the pastor and his wife are dumbfounded and Scripture is never appealed to. Breshears (2004) states that through the use of narrative McLaren has 'absolutely trashed the substitutionary atonement.' Carson (2005: 166-168) examines this same aspect of McLaren's writing. He comments on how McLaren repeatedly brings the substitutionary theory of atonement into question but never examines scriptural verses or theological arguments that support it.

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<sup>84</sup> This quote is from McLaren's website: <http://www.brianmclaren.net/archives/books/brians-books/the-story-we-fi.html> (accessed December 2010)

While wishing to affirm the many true and biblical statements that McLaren and the emerging church make about Christian living, receive valid critique against conservative Christianity, and emulate their profound engagement with culture, in terms of the dissertation's assumptions, their approach to Scripture and their resultant doctrines are distorted.<sup>85</sup>

On the basis of the above arguments I think the following comments can be made concerning McLaren's work. Firstly, he is clearly doing doctrinal theology, as much as any conservative theologian. Secondly, his model of dialogue between Scripture, tradition, common sense and inner discernment is untenable. Not only does it collapse into individual human judgment, the perspective of secular culture also becomes normative. This is exactly what I have argued about a simplistic correlation approach that bypasses Scripture as the ultimate norm. I am not saying that McLaren's (2003) four elements (Scripture, common sense, church tradition, and internal discernment), along with other elements, drawn from all fields of knowledge, do not all play an important role. I am insisting that locus, by very definition, has to ultimately reduce to a single point. I believe McLaren's is misusing Wesley's quadrilateral, and it serves to disguise the fact that his ultimate locus point is common sense.<sup>86</sup>

Thirdly, McLaren's over-reliance on postmodernism is in fact a disguised hyper-modernism. The rejection of the atonement is done in terms of the assumed supremacy of human reason and emotion, according to which it does not make logical sense that God does not directly forgive us, and in terms of which it seems ethically cruel for Him to use the cross. But, as I have repeatedly argued, reason is a very fickle instrument for truth.

Anything can be redescribed and made to seem unreasonable or reasonable and many things that seem unreasonable in Scripture exist in our everyday experience; we have merely gotten used to them. For example, the suggestion that God just forgive our sins seems reasonable but from another point of view it is unreasonable. It is like saying 'Why don't we just confer degrees on everyone, without them having to go to university?' Or, it's like saying, after someone smashes into your car, killing your children in the back seat, 'Just forgive the driver and we'll pretend there's no car wreck and lost lives to deal with.'

Thinking of God's omnipotence in terms of a magic wand ability that denies human process and concrete reality makes even less sense to me. In addition, describing the cross as 'divine child abuse' (Kerry, the seeker, in McLaren's story: 2003) is simplistic and reductionistic and it overlooks the multiple ways that we sacrifice ourselves and others for a greater good, without this in any way being termed abuse. One also needs to think flexibly about the wrath versus forgiveness of God as it is portrayed in Scripture. God is appropriately wrathful as He views human sin and rebellion. This should not cause us to see the cross as God's celestial catharsis, the expression of a petulant and angry God who won't feel better until he has beaten up somebody.

Nevertheless, the presence and success of the emergent church, despite its inconsistencies, points to certain problems in many parts of the wider church: legalism; hyper-orthodoxy; a failure to engage with culture; and a failure to keep the biblical emphasis on fall in balance with that of creation. These realities, in conjunction with the false all or nothing epistemologies of postmodernism, cause hurting people to move from one extreme to another.

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<sup>85</sup> Although they would deny having a focus on 'doctrine', this is dishonest. No one can avoid having a doctrinal stance (even if one's stance is that one shouldn't have doctrine); one can only be honest or dishonest about one's absolute beliefs.

<sup>86</sup> NT Wright (2005:114-120) gives a more hermeneutically appropriate description of the relationship between Scripture, reason and tradition, which maintains the authority of Scripture, while taking reason and tradition into account.

Conservative pastor John MacArthur (in Hansen 2007: sect 4 par 2) criticizes Mark Driscoll (a pastor who combines orthodox doctrine with radical cultural engagement) for his 'infatuation with the vulgar aspects of contemporary society...[the lifestyle he models—especially his easygoing familiarity with all this world's filthy fads—practically *guarantees* that [his disciples] will make little progress toward authentic sanctification.'<sup>87</sup>

Commenting on the difference 'between missionaries who study culture and fundamentalists who try to avoid culture', Driscoll (in Hansen 2007: sect 4 par 5) states,

Fundamentalism is really losing the war, and I think it is in part responsible for the rise of what we know as the more liberal end of the emerging church.... Because a lot of what is fuelling the left end of the emerging church is fatigue with hardcore fundamentalism that throws rocks at culture. But culture is the house that people live in, and it just seems really mean to keep throwing rocks at somebody's house.

I believe that a true engagement with Scripture, informed but not controlled by extra-biblical categories like postmodernism and science, is the solution for both sides in this culture war.

### 5.3.3 A high view of Scripture with a low correlation with culture

The next possible permutation of approaches to Scripture and culture involves a high view of Scripture, with a low view of interaction with culture. I argue that, paradoxically, the lack of engagement with culture betrays an insufficiently high view of Scripture. Firstly, the highest view possible with regard to Scripture is to view it, along with culture, as secondary to God. By removing the locus of ultimate value and truth from Scripture and placing it in God, Scripture and culture are freed to be brought into fruitful but responsible interaction. Secondly, this approach fails to recognize the extent that a pure engagement with Scripture is not possible. A complete distancing from culture and other fields of knowledge actually allows unacknowledged rationalism to distort (and thus undermine) Scripture, without sufficient correction.

#### 5.3.3.1 Foundational or Biblicist approaches to Scripture

Foundational appeals to Scripture see the Bible as the ultimate authority with regard to all knowledge. This view is related to seeing Scripture as inerrant or infallible. While crude views of mechanical dictation are not intended and are carefully argued against, with a clear role being accorded to reason and the Holy Spirit (Packer 1988b: par 4), the co-inciding of divine and human words is clearly intended. According to Noll (1988: par 4), for Benjamin Warfield, 'when the Bible spoke, God spoke.' Packer (1958:47) also clearly states, 'The Bible is inspired in the sense of being word-for-word God-given.'

This stance falls under what Bloesch (1994: 44) calls a scholastic view, which grants the Bible, 'absolute infallibility and total inerrancy. The authority of the Bible is now grounded in itself, in its mode of writing or its revelatory language rather than in God's self-communication through the historical events the Bible records.'

#### 5.3.3.2 Neo-orthodox and existential approaches to Scripture

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<sup>87</sup> MacArthur's criticism sounds uncomfortably similar to the Pharisees' description of Jesus' association with 'sinners and tax collectors' (Mt 9:11; 11:19). Over familiarity with the Bible makes us forget how absolutely shocking Jesus' associations were. The challenge to hyper-orthodoxy is to consider what Jesus' behaviour would translate into today, and to reflect on the possibility that they could be on the receiving end of Jesus' correction. It must not be forgotten that the Pharisees believed that they were being faithful to God, unlike Jesus, the 'disrespector' of God's laws (Jn 9:16).



According to Baxter (1988b: par 4), in neo-orthodox theology God is absolutely transcendent and can only be known through his self-revelation in Jesus and salvation history. Scripture is a witness to this revelation but is itself a human document, containing error. The authority of Scripture lies in the fact that God uses it to bring people to a revelatory encounter with himself.

Barth (1975: 109), of course, is the key theologian behind neo-orthodoxy: 'The fact that God's own address becomes an event in the human word of the Bible is, however, God's affair and not ours. ...The Bible is God's Word to the extent that God cause it to be His Word, to the extent that He speaks through it.'

Clearly the neo-orthodox approach captures something vital and reminds us that God is our central focus, but its bypassing of certain scriptural issues is problematic and borders on a revelational positivism. Nevertheless, it is far too easy to misread Barth and not do him justice (Webster 1988: par 14). Similarly, the neo-orthodox response should not be simplistically interpreted or dismissed.

### 5.3.3.3 Postliberal / cultural linguistic approaches to Scripture

In a sceptical, critical context that seeks to undermine the Bible, the cultural linguistic focus reintroduces the importance of the scriptural text. In this approach textual stability is located within community practice and not within the text itself (Murphy 1994b: 270).

Lindbeck (1984) is a key figure and pioneer of this approach and analyzes the history of doctrine in terms of three major types, opting for the cultural-linguistic above the cognitive-propositional and experiential-expressive approaches to truth and doctrine.

Another key figure in this movement is Frei, for whom, 'What the text says is what the text is about. Its meaning...is neither "behind" it, in history, "above" it, in myth or allegory, or "in front of" it, in the experience or world of the reader' (Vanhoozer 1997: 141). Quoting Frei, Vanhoozer (1997: 142) states, 'The literal sense is a textual, not a historical sense...one can read the texts literally "and at the same time leave the referential status of what was described in them indeterminate.'"

It is clear that the cultural-linguistic focus brings back a salutary emphasis on Scripture. The Bible is approached on its own terms and is released to function normatively within the church. Furthermore, this focus has something important to say concerning the need for truth to be concrete and lived out:

[The] correspondence [of religious utterances] to reality in the view we are expounding is not an attribute that they have when considered in and of themselves, but is only a function of their role in constituting a form of life, a way of being in the world, which itself corresponds to the Most Important, the Ultimately Real...a religious utterance... acquires the propositional truth of ontological correspondence only insofar as it is a performance, an act or deed, which helps create that correspondence.

(Lindbeck 1984: 65)

In so far as this goes it makes perfect sense. The Bible clearly warns against rationalism and mere intellectual assent to God's truth (Ja 1:22). The Scriptures clearly establish that the witness of the church community is a vital factor in the credibility of the gospel (Jn 17:23). Furthermore, the unity of the church is related to its experience of power and blessing, and this power and blessing is again a vital factor in effectively witnessing to the truth (Ps 133:1-3).

A focus on getting on with being the church without having to first justify our existence to the world or without having to correlate our unique understanding of reality with that of the world is fair and appropriate. We need to be something before we can witness to it. Vanhoozer (1997: 147) gives a positive reading of this theology in this respect: 'To say that the text absorbs the world is not necessarily to retreat into canon and commitment; it is rather a means by which the church can make public truth claims without first having to buy into some general conceptual scheme.'

My problem is that this valid 'without first having to justify our existence or correlate our unique understanding' easily becomes 'without ever having to.' In this sense I agree with theologians who stress the importance of taking the gospel into the public domain rather than 'retreating into a cultural-linguistic fortress' (Bloesch 1994:28) or 'trying to hide behind our ecclesial skirts' (Vanhoozer 1997: 143).

In terms of the approach within this research, all aspects of knowledge (reference, coherence, and pragmatic value) need to be dealt with in interaction with all realms of knowledge, within the church *and* in the public square.

Even if one believes one does not have to justify Scripture in the public square, one still has to face the question of the justification for a specific reading of Scripture within the church (at all levels, from local to global, a key issue in terms of church unity and functioning, as history clearly shows).

It is in terms of this question of authority that the cultural linguistic approach to Scripture becomes most problematic, as will be shown in section 5.4.4.

#### **5.3.4 A high view of Scripture with a high correlation with culture**

The approach to Scripture and knowledge argued for in this research logically requires a maximally high view of Scripture with the highest correlation possible between all realms of knowledge. As will be argued, this high view of Scripture is to be distinguished from a hyper-propositional or empirically inerrant stance. As for correlation, this is not viewed naively as a simple 50-50 interaction. The asymmetrical Chalcedonian pattern discussed in section 3.3.7 is assumed. Two concepts which are in line with this approach are the Reformed understanding of a theology of Word and Spirit and a sacramental approach.

##### **5.3.4.1 Hermeneutical approaches associated with a high view of Scripture**

This section will examine hermeneutics involved in a high view of Scripture. My understanding is that while knowledge and hermeneutics entail more than is commonly understood by a conservative theology and its high view of Scripture, it does not contain less. The orthodox grammatical-historical approach to the interpretation of the Bible (and the science that is associated with it) has been carefully and rigorously developed. It needs to be taken seriously, even though it, itself, needs to engage with knowledge in a broader way. An engagement with the concerns of the new hermeneutic cannot displace the following common-sense idea: 'The purpose of biblical interpretation is to make the meaning and message of the biblical writings plain to their readers' (Bruce 1996a: intro par 1).

Numerous hermeneutical rules and principles have been worked out with regard to a high view of Scripture; the basic grammatical-historical approach. These are numerous books devoted to this (Bloesch 1994; Ramm 1979; Fee and Stuart 1993) and I will limit myself to mentioning some general points here.

Various evangelical authors outline the classic two-step Reformed-evangelical understanding of interpreting Scripture, where the meaning of Scripture is determined (in its full grammatical, historical and Christological context) and then applied in equivalent terms to modern hearers (Packer 1988b: sect 4 par 2-4; Klein 1998:333).

Further detailing of this evangelical method is well established. For example, an evangelical hermeneutics pays attention to the following: '(1) literary context, (2) historical-cultural background, (3) word meanings, (4) grammatical relationships, (5) and literary genre' (Klein 1998b: 333). Among many other established methodological principles are the interpretation of the OT by the NT and the interpretation of obscure parts by clearer parts' (Bloesch 1994: 192-195).

In terms of a broader hermeneutical conversation, the directness of the evangelical method can be challenged as being over positive. Nevertheless, the caricature of evangelical hermeneutics as incorrectly focused on cognitive propositional facts and betraying a lack of concern for existential and relational aspects of Scripture and interpretation is simplistic. As argued throughout this research, these two poles, far from contradicting each other are symbiotically related. As Klein (1998b: 335) states, although the Bible is clearly intended to provide 'comfort and guidance.... We must know the meaning of the Bible's message before we can expect that meaning to perform what God intended.'

Nevertheless, while extreme relativism is unwarranted, this method does need nuancing and a greater engagement with broader epistemological and hermeneutical concerns. Bloesch (1994: 195) attempts this nuancing. He explores the Reformers understanding of the interpretation of Scripture and suggests that the Reformers recognized the 'hermeneutical principle...[of] the freedom of the Word of God' but later Protestant orthodoxy lost this understanding due to its 'equation of God's Word with Holy Scripture.' Bloesch (1994: 204) breaks down a false dichotomy between faith and criticism which unnecessarily isolates 'the church from modern scholarship. Faith itself gives rise to criticism, for faith is discriminating.... The truth of the Word of God is not self-evident even in the Bible, and it must be dug out through diligent searching that is at the same time faithful and critical'. Bloesch's (1994: 208) stance clearly stands in tension with Packer and the latter's more straightforward understanding of hermeneutics involving the 'unshelling' of universal biblical truths:

I do not share the vision of much traditional orthodoxy that the Bible is impregnated with universal, unchanging truths that are waiting to be discovered and formulated. Instead I hold that the Bible is filled with the Spirit of God, who brings new light to bear on ancient wisdom.... The Scripture does teach truths, but these are fresh truths applied to the situation in which we live and work. These truths do not contradict the ancient wisdom contained in the Scripture but amplify and illumine it.

Bloesch (1994:178-179) describes a 'fourfold process' for 'Coming to know the Word of God' in which 'reverence...humility...[and] prayer' play a decisive role.' Interpretation cannot be guaranteed by any 'technique or formula' and it remains 'a gift to be received' (180). He describes this as neither a 'critical or precritical' hermeneutics, but rather as a 'postcritical, pneumatic approach' (: 181). He refuses to let the revelatory meaning of Scripture be over-identified with authorial intention or historical referent for it is implausible to expect a correspondence between the author's intent and understanding, the need and understanding of the immediate receptive community, the situation of later audiences and the intention of God (: 189-190). I believe this is a vital point and any hermeneutics which does not recognize this remains radically vulnerable to postmodern deconstruction, and unnecessarily so.

Therefore, in line with Barth, Bloesch (1994:190) sees meaning as revealed in an event, making 'a clear-cut distinction between the historical meaning of the text and its revelational or spiritual

meaning.... [which] refers to the pneumatic or revelatory meaning that the text assumes when the Spirit acts on it in bringing home its significance to people of faith in every age.' This meaning, 'God's self-revelation in Jesus', can only be discerned by those 'who are in experiential contact with the realities to which the text witnesses.... (1Cor 2:14).'

I am in agreement with Bloesch, without believing that he has perfectly articulated the issue or solved the problem of the relationship between truth, Scripture, interpretation and authority. In terms of the critically realistic approach to knowledge in this research, this is not possible. In parallel fashion to a critically realistic approach to epistemology, a critically realistic hermeneutic will seriously engage with propositional aspects of Scripture, choosing certain understandings above others and committing to them as true, even while it recognizes that the understanding gained is incomplete and that different cultural situations and historical eras will require different formulations and emphases.

#### **5.3.4.2 The possibility of a biblical theology within a high view of Scripture**

A further relativistic challenge to the Bible is the affirmation that it is not a unified whole. It is said to rather represent multiple and conflicting theologies and perspectives and the tools of historical-criticism are used to emphasize this diversity. Here too, the problem has been overstated and there remains a strong unity in diversity. Taking the Scripture seriously, on its own terms clearly opens up the possibility of biblical theology, which recognizes the ultimate unity between the two testaments and all their constitutive parts, as all ultimately testify to a single salvation history undertaken by God.

Rosner (2000: sect 4 par 1) clarifies five assumptions of biblical theology:

1. the tools of the trade are analysis and synthesis;
2. the building materials consist of both biblical concepts and biblical words;
3. the bridge to be constructed is a single span across the whole Bible;
4. the building plans follow the blueprint of the Bible's 'storyline'; and
5. the foundation and pinnacle of the structure is Jesus Christ.

Biblical theology is, I believe, vital for all aspects of ministry where the Bible is used. Adam (2000: Sect 8 par 1) comments that most preachers have been trained to read the Bible contextually in terms of respecting genre and literary context (from verse to paragraph to book etc.). However, there remains a weakness in terms of reading Scripture within a theological and biblical theological context, which involves asking specific question such as how a specific text is related to the Bible's progressive revelation and other specific themes. This is clearly more demanding, but it is the only way to avoid 'misusing the Bible', as when, for example, 'a stirring call to build the temple...[is] applied to the church building programme' (: Sect 8 par 2).

#### **5.3.4.3 The sacramental nature of Scripture**

Sacramental approaches to Scripture provide interesting possibilities for safeguarding God's transcendence with regard to Scripture, without allowing one to see the Bible as a purely human (and ultimately relativized) document. According to Bloesch (1994: 40-41) the sacramental approach sees the Bible, church and sacraments as instruments of God : 'It does not deny the infinite qualitative difference between divinity and humanity but insists that the human is capable of bearing or conveying the divine....A distinction is often made between the sign (the letter of Scripture) and the thing signified (God's self-revelation in Christ). We do not have Christ apart from the sign, which, by the power of the Spirit, is effectual in communicating the mystery of Christ to us.'

I concur with Bloesch (1994: 43) that, 'The Bible does not have infallibility within itself, but through the power of the Spirit it carries the infallibility of the very truth of God...through the ongoing illumination of the Holy Spirit.' Bloesch's (1992: 13-14) approach thus seems to integrate positive aspects from both foundational and neo-orthodox stances as shown in his careful nuancing of the matter. He recommends

a theology of Word and Spirit, signifying the unity of truth and power evident in both the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and the biblical rendition of this event....The word derives its efficacy from the Spirit, and the Spirit teaches what he has already disclosed in the word of Scripture...in later orthodoxy the paradoxical unity of Word and Spirit was sundered, being replaced by an objectivism of the Word....When I speak of the Word and Spirit, I am not thinking primarily of a book that receives its stamp of approval from the Spirit... I am thinking mainly of the living Word in its inseparable unity with Scripture and church proclamation as this is brought home to us by the Spirit in the awakening to faith. It is not the Bible as such but the divine revelation that confronts us in the Bible that is the basis and source of spiritual authority.

Bloesch does not show the concern for interaction with all the other realms of knowledge argued for in this research, but this basic approach to Scripture is the necessary stance upon which this interaction can take place.

An over identification of the Word of God with the human words of Scripture places an unnecessary stumbling block in the way of interacting with other realms, like natural science. On the other hand a low view of Scripture has no mechanism for preventing the biblical revelation from being corrupted by or subsumed within purely human understanding. The reason for this is that it is spiritual truth that only makes sense when believed and received as the Word of God. When it is treated as human words it is foolish and weaker than the 'wise' human words in secular culture.

Just as issues of authority needed to be addressed within a general consideration of knowledge, a defense of the warrant for the critical role of Scripture, specifically a high view of Scripture, needs to be considered as our next step.

#### **5.4. The warrant for integrating a high view of Scripture with a critically realistic, hermeneutical stance**

As shown in chapter four, authority is a key issue in all knowledge claims. A high view of Scripture constitutes an ultimate knowledge claim and needs to deal with the problem of authority. Intersystemically, there is the issue of the challenged authority of theology and Scripture with respect to other realms of knowledge. Intrasystemically there is the problem of authority within theology.

A basic overview of the history of theology shows that, in addition to Scripture, church tradition and human capacities compete as loci for authority. For conservative evangelical theology Scripture remains the supreme locus of truth and source of knowledge and authority. It is 'the written record of what God has spoken and still speaks to his people.... both complete (sufficient) and comprehensible (perspicuous)' (Elias 1988: par 6). This does not ignore the importance of the Holy Spirit, reason and tradition, but theological options that place the locus in the latter two are rejected (Elias 1988:par 7-9). Clearly, this view is not accepted by all parts of the church or all streams of theology. Nevertheless, although it needs to be nuanced and qualified in order to make it more faithful to Scripture itself and better equipped to relate to our current social and knowledge context with greater integrity, I believe it is valid and represents the orthodox position of the church throughout the ages.

In terms of placing authority in Scripture the issue arises of the relationship between the eternal Word of God, the temporal fixed word of God in Scripture, and other forms of God's revelation (in nature and human consciousness, for example). Within Scripture itself the issues arise concerning the authority of the authors, of different parts of the Bible versus the whole, and of the interpretive method and conclusions.

The issue of the reliability of the Bible in terms of being sure we have a close approximation of the original text in our various translations is so well established that it is not an issue, even for critical scholars; it thus need not be dealt with here (Neil 1979; Bruce 1981; Perrin 2007). In fact, the embarrassingly rich number of biblical manuscripts and the proximity of their writing to the original events, compared to any other ancient documents, points to the reality of the God events that prompted their writing.

#### **5.4.1 Challenging scepticism towards the possibility of revelation and the authority of Scripture**

Skepticism with regard to Scripture is often linked to reason as is shown historically in the clear correlation between the exaltation of autonomous human reason and the suspicion of Scripture from the Enlightenment onwards.

This sceptical approach to faith and revelation conflates the two and denigrates them through circular reasoning. If faith is about revelation and we know revelation to be a false concept, then faith is worthless. Similarly, if revelation depends on faith, then revelation cannot count as knowledge for we know that faith is not a true form of knowledge. These assumptions are false.

The autonomy of reason (rationalism) has been questioned by its repeated failures to explain and serve as a source for life and knowledge. This is a main reason for the emergence of postmodernism. Although postmodernism has allowed Scripture to be considered as part of culture once again, it is a domesticated and relativised Scripture that is invited back in.

Skepticism, therefore, remains the 'default setting' in our current culture, and theology and pastoral care need to constantly challenge its barrenness, impracticality, apathy and fideism.

It is possible to argue that revelation, appropriately understood, is not alien to human life and knowledge. Most of our human communication and interaction requires us to reveal inner thoughts and motivations that would otherwise remain hidden. Even though external observation might infer what someone is thinking, misinterpretation can only be corrected by revelation and vast areas of inner personhood are simply invisible and inaccessible. Similarly, faith, in terms of a basic trust in human relationships and the stability, consistency and intelligibility of the created order, constitutes a vital part of human life and knowledge.

Sceptics need to give an account concerning what would count as valid evidence for the truth of Scripture. One will inevitably find that such evidence has not been thought of (and this proves that the rejection of Scripture is done on an a priori assumption), or else one will find criteria for evidence defined extremely positivistically, in a way that natural science itself cannot live up to.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> It also needs to be stated that anything can be made to look ridiculous if described in superficial, pseudo-rational terms, making use of crooked thinking such as false connotations and false dichotomies. Scripture is especially vulnerable to pseudo-rationalism as it makes the greatest claims and deals with life from the broadest perspective. God has made it to be organic and participative and thus open to exploitation. Only a comprehensive and fair approach to knowledge can see the Bible's true nature and understand it correctly.

Once knowledge is more honestly understood we can agree that both natural science and scriptural knowledge function with clear criteria and that both can lead to probabilistic knowledge.

Although this view does require faith and bracketing of skepticism it is not unreasonable. If one accepts the presupposition of an omniscient, omnipotent God and a clear distinction between God and human finitude and partial knowledge, then discontinuity is emphasized. On the other hand, if one considers that God created us in His image then continuity is emphasized. Therefore, any communication of God's presence and ultimate knowledge is going to require a critically realistic response. The possibility of partial, non-omniscient knowledge is envisaged. Nevertheless, it will inevitably disturb, stretch and seem to contradict human understanding. Some tensions and contradictions may be resolvable with careful, humble hermeneutical work, but many will stand. It is therefore not unreasonable to find that the Bible seems illogical, contradictory or even cruel at certain parts. In this instance we must do patient, humble hermeneutical work. But more importantly we must put human hubris aside and examine our heart. God may offend our mind to reveal our heart. Conversely our impure heart may see intellectual offence where there is none.

Therefore, we do not judge the Bible, it judges us (Heb 4:12). This is a common sense approach and only needs to be stated so laboriously because so much historical-critical and postmodern reading of the Bible has been so non(common)sensical.

#### **5.4.2 The crisis of authority for a 'low' view of Scripture**

The use of the term 'low view' is not meant to suggest that the Bible is not cherished or used. I am referring to it in contradistinction to a high view where issues of error and verbal-propositional revelation are seen to be critical for the reliability and authority of Scripture and cannot therefore be side-stepped.

Herholdt (1998: 459) distinguishes four 'different varieties of Postmodern Theology': constructive or revisionary; deconstructive or eliminative; restorationist or conservative; and liberationist. He states that views that maintain a tension between the subjective and objective poles in knowing are more feasible. Deconstruction, for example, is self-refuting, unlike the more viable 'postmodern trend of constructionism...[where] truth is neither objective or subjective but relational.' Herholdt (1998: 460) sees this relational approach as the hermeneutical equivalent of critical realism in epistemology: 'Participative dialogue is in line with a critical realist epistemology with its basic presupposition that truth is constructed, but that it truly refers to some objective reality. Theories in a critical realist sense are taken to be representations of the world as reality, but not as mirror images of reality.'

According to Herholdt (1998: 460), in a postmodern, critical realistic approach 'The role of metaphors in constructing are very serious epistemic devices...they refer in an ontological way to reality as an epistemic way of expressing the unknown by way of the known.' In the light of this theory a term like 'Father' is 'not a pure objective designation' due to our pre-understandings. Therefore: 'there is no fixed meaning in the Bible, no eternal truths that can be uncovered, because truth is historically contextual' (: 460). Herholdt claims that this does not equate with relativism since critical realism does make 'ontological claims', unlike instrumentalism (:460). He describes a postmodern hermeneutics (: 468):

The postmodernist is also a post-critical person who trusts in non-conceptual ways of knowing. This means that spiritual experience will intuitively be relied upon to guide the reader into relevant meanings...the Bible does not serve as a fixed record of God's communication, but as an example of the way in which people experienced and understood God in the past.

Herholdt (1998: 468) uses the following terms to describe the postmodern reading of Scripture: 'contextual', 'ecological', 'not so much analytic as poetic; not so much technical as creative; more pre-occupied with narrative than trying to delve into the original meaning of the text', 'holistic'. 'There are no clear boundaries or final statements, and consequently the God who speaks in the Bible, speaks again when we speak into our own situation on the basis of what we read in the Bible' (1998: 469).

I believe that Herholdt is misusing the concept of critical realism, conflating it with a postmodern approach. Critical realism is used in the sciences to soften hard-edged objective claims and to show the underdetermination of theory, where more than one model or theory seems to account for the facts. But the concept does not merely guard against unwarranted objectivity. It places a limiting constraint on the nature of our constructions, and this guards against excess subjectivism and relativism in our interpretations. This constraining and guarding is not evident in Herholdt's use of the term; far from balancing objectivity and subjectivity, he seems to have allowed objectivity to become swallowed up. A more appropriate understanding of critical realism is articulated by Wright (see section 5.4.9.1).

There is an essential inconsistency in having an epistemologically low view of Scripture and yet continuing to use it in a 'high' manner, existentially, as an authoritative text, whether privately, communally, or publicly. The inconsistency of this approach is often overlooked and it is dealt with in an ultimately untenable manner, as I suggest Herholdt has done. One should not be surprised, therefore, when many choose to reject the challenge of the gospel when it is backed up by this epistemology. This inconsistent epistemological stance cannot with integrity respond to the following attitude: 'I'm glad the Bible is true for you, but it is not true for me.'

#### **5.4.3 Niebuhr's Christ and culture within the framework of the canon: a critical assessment**

According to Carson (2008a:40) Niebuhr categorizes historical figures in terms of his five categories without realizing that certain of them do not neatly fit, and Carson suggests that 'merging of patterns sometimes brings greater fidelity to the biblical revelation.'

The same problem occurs when Niebuhr tries to ground his five patterns in Scripture, which is seen to contain 'a number of discrete paradigms. We are being faithful to Scripture so long as we align our choices with any one of these paradigms, or perhaps even with some combination of them' (Carson 2008a:40). In opposition to this view, this research argues that the canon as a whole is the authoritative voice of God and no part of it can be treated discontinuously except by the clarification of Scripture itself. This is the view of contemporary conservative biblical theology.

I therefore agree with Carson (2008a: 44) that there are certain discernible non-negotiable themes that appear in the canon which need to be part of any consideration of a Christ and culture model: '[T]he dismissal of such realities as creation, fall, incarnation, Jesus' death and resurrection, the coming of the Spirit, and the final judgment and consummation, places one outside the Christian camp...however loyal one judges oneself to be to Jesus, it is difficult to see how such loyalty is a mark of *Christian* thought if the Jesus so invoked is so domesticated and selectively constructed that he bears little relation to the Bible.'

In a vital point, Carson (2008a: 59) states that these non-negotiable 'biblical-theological points...must control our thinking *simultaneously* and *all the time*...It will not do to adopt some configuration of a select few of them...and then call it *one* of the Christian options.' He gives further, specific criticism of problems in each of the categories (:60-61).



Holding on to all of Scripture is a much more difficult epistemological, hermeneutical and existential challenge than selecting parts that fit with your personal or cultural understanding. It does not mean applying all of Scripture in every situation, but the selection must be done responsibly, knowing that the equivalent contemporary meaning of any part of Scripture that has not been rendered discontinuous by Scripture itself (e.g. the sacrificing of animals) may be applicable in a given moment. As Carson (2008a:62) states, 'We will be wiser if we refrain from distinguishing discrete patterns or paradigms or models of the relationship between Christ and culture, and think instead of wise integration, with different aspects of the whole clamoring for more attention from time to time.'

This means that we have to hermeneutically choose in terms of the correct emphasis between different parts of Scripture with respect to specific concrete situations. The charge can be leveled that this is impossibly subjective. This overlooks the counterbalancing factors of a faithful reading in community (Mt 18:19), a consideration of how other Christians (in different historical periods, cultures and traditions) have faced certain (possibly similar) situations, and, most importantly, the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Jn 16:13). The objection is also tied to a postmodern understanding that creates a chasm between partial subjective knowledge and omniscient objective knowledge, making the latter impossible choice the only criterion for truth, and thus, logically, making truth impossible. Finally, this charge of subjectivity is a problem in all knowledge claims, including the very claim concerning problematic subjectivity.

It is possible that we do choose falsely, but having to make a choice seems to be the way God has designed life and knowledge. Subjective probabilistic knowledge seems to be the best we have and it seems to be good enough for God, for there is no indication He has provided any other alternative. Theological truth, then, emerges out of a hermeneutical interaction between the human subject (individually and in tension with community), a specific (cultural, social, historical) context, the Holy Spirit and Scripture. God is faithful in leading us, through the Holy Spirit, into as much truth as we need to live as He intended, through the Holy Spirit. *But this cannot happen if we do not believe that His Scripture is completely faithful.*

#### **5.4.4 The lack of warrant for a cultural-linguistic approach to scriptural authority**

Within a cultural linguistic approach the problem of scriptural authority is answered by the concept of community consensus. Vanhoozer (1997:145) explains that for Frei, 'The proper context for determining the literal sense...is no longer literary, but sociolinguistic... The community consensus on the Scripture thus becomes the stabilizing force for the notion of the literal sense.'

Even more strongly, Lindbeck (1984: 101-102) argues that a certain type of truth or infallibility is available by consensus of skilled cultural-linguistic practitioners within the community: 'The reliability of their agreement in doctrinal matters may not improperly be called infallible....In reference to the locus of infallibility, our [cultural-linguistic] model suggests...that this locus is the whole community of competent speakers of a language.'

Vanhoozer (1997: 146) sees the location of authority (the correct interpretation of the literal sense of Scripture) within the community's consensus as unwarranted optimism. It ignores how Scripture and church history shows the church often to be 'unbelieving or confused.' It provides no guarantee against the possibility of the church's 'misuse of Scripture' (Vanhoozer 1997:146), corporate malfunctioning (drawing on Plantinga's distinction between normal and proper functioning), or the possibility that the church's 'beliefs are anything more than mass opinion' (Vanhoozer 1997:137). In a similar vein, McGrath (1996b:38) states, 'The possibility (which Lindbeck seems unwilling and unable to consider) is that the discourse which he identifies

Christian doctrine as regulating may be based on ... a serious misrepresentation, or even a deliberate falsification, of historical events.'

The church is clearly intended to take the gospel and its model of life into the world as a comprehensive witness. When it does this, the problem of basing its authoritative understanding of Scripture on community consensus becomes apparent. Within the confines of specific communities, weak, false, or unwarranted readings of Scripture may allow the church to function, if the whole community buys into the reading. But this will not pass muster in the broader church or in the public sphere.

Lindbeck (1984: 32) has a clear understanding of what it means to witness in society:

How ...does one preach the gospel in a dechristianized world?...The postliberal method is bound to be unpopular among those chiefly concerned to maintain or increase the membership and influence of the church. This method resembles ancient catechesis more than modern translation. Instead of redescribing the faith in new concepts, it seeks to teach the language and practices of the religion to potential adherents.

I assume that the cultural linguistic school is confident that people will be drawn to the reality of the church community and the presence of God and I am sure that this may happen. Nevertheless, this method does not answer the question of why one should buy into the cultural linguistic system being presented. I think the current age is immensely sceptical and relativistic and is quite happy to allow the church to exist, while ignoring it. This scepticism and relativism may function as a barrier and means of explaining away the doubtlessly real spiritual realities represented in the cultural-linguistic communities. As Vanhoozer (1997: 150) explains : 'To replace sola scriptura by "Scripture in tradition" –which is to say, by community conventions- is to use the wrong strategy at the worst time. We live in an age where deconstruction is exposing, and exploding, social conventions.'

I believe the cultural-linguistic focus serves as a vital corrective to an overconfident trust in apologetics and reason, which ends up trying to reason people into a relationship with God, or into healing and wholeness. This is particularly relevant in our current twenty-first century world, which is fatigued by an excess of words lacking integrity. Our technologically advanced society makes the generating of excess, superficial communication far too easy and the inevitable fatigue, cynicism and resistance is understandable.

Nevertheless, reason and apologetics may be the next step needed in someone's spiritual progress. Furthermore, in terms of balanced personal spiritual growth and a holistic community witness in society, they ultimately need to be introduced.

In other words, I believe that this scepticism and relativism needs at times to be challenged in order to create openness for the gospel and that this is part of our scriptural mandate (2 Cor 10:5; Ac 17:2; 1 Pt 3:15). This involves dealing with the issues of the authority of Scripture (and its relevance, sensitively and hermeneutically understood, to all realms of knowledge) as well as the referential reality of our God-talk. In a clear challenge to the cultural-linguistic focus, Carson (2000a: sect 1 par 50) emphasizes the necessary link between referentiality and salvation:

Some members of the so-called Yale School write energetically and challengingly about being more 'biblical', but they find it difficult to confess to much extra-textual referentiality: *i.e.* there is a great deal of biblically informed God-talk, but it is less than clear that one is to think in terms of a God who is actually 'there', a God who is to be thought of in biblical terms. After all, it is what God has accomplished on the cross that saves us, not the biblical ideas about what God has accomplished on the cross.

In conclusion, against the lack of warrant for scepticism and the limited warrant for postmodern and cultural linguistic approaches, I continue to insist that while truth is personal and hermeneutical, it is also normative and one can make a rational choice for truth above error. As Bloesch (1992: 15) states, 'revelation and salvation have to be understood as objective-subjective rather than fundamentally objective (as in evangelical rationalism) or predominantly subjective (as in existentialism and mysticism)'. Bloesch (1994: 201) further clarifies his view:

Against existentialism and the new hermeneutics, I hold that the subject-object polarity is not transcended in hermeneutical understanding but instead accentuated. God is not an object alongside other objects, but he is objective to our understanding in that he exists as an absolute subject...God cannot be reached by our attempts to objectify him, but he can objectify himself – that is, he makes himself an object for our understanding so that we can really know and believe.

A low view of Scripture contradicts Scripture's self-understanding and the understanding of most of the church throughout the ages. It also contradicts the priority assigned to Scripture in theology and the church. Scripture judges premodernism, modernism, postmodernism, and whatever else may follow. Each of these movements may have overlap with scriptural truth but none of them can act as a locus. To do so, as happens when one talks of 'postmodern interpretation of Scripture' is to fail to acknowledge Scripture's transcendence, due to its indissoluble unity with God. Relativism and a low view of Scripture are responses to objective positivism, but they ironically represent a new form of positivism.

#### **5.4.5 The locus of truth with regard to Scripture**

Once one accepts the Bible as the ultimate authority there is still the issue of locating the locus of truth with respect to the text. Numerous options are available. The ultimate locus might be found: above the text in God, in terms of a revelational positivism; outside the text in terms of cultural-linguistic communal use and consensus; behind the text in a historical reconstruction of the sources and contexts that created the text; within the text in terms of the structuralist search for meaning in the interrelationships of the parts of the text or in terms of narrative theology's focus on the narrative of the text; in front of the text in terms of the context of the reader as he or she interacts with the text.

This research argues that all of these approaches have a part to play, but none in isolation. In terms of the above understanding of the various meanings of the Word of God I believe that God is the ultimate basis of all revelation, including Scripture. While God can and does communicate directly to individuals through their senses and consciousness, He has chosen the Scriptures as a primary and very practical means of communicating, not least because of the way this fixed form addresses human frailties (such as forgetfulness and tendencies to distort). While it is foolish to consider having the Scriptures without the living presence of God, there is also a qualified sense in which we can say that we cannot have God without the Scriptures. This latter point is open to misinterpretation and accusations of Bibliolatry and limiting God, but it is intended in the context of the numerous qualifications advanced throughout this chapter.

In short, therefore, an intimate and inseparable connection exists between God and the Scriptures and this connection has been consistently and severely challenged. Packer (1988b: sect 1 par 7) explains how much modern theology has asserted

there is, properly speaking, no such thing as communicated truth ('propositional revelation') from God; revelation is essentially non-verbal in character... [and the] Bible is not, properly speaking, revelation, but a human response to revelation...But this is to say in effect that the biblical idea of God speaking (the commonest and most fundamental revelatory act which Scripture ascribes to him) is only a misleading metaphor.

Yarbrough (2000: sect 2 par 4,6) explains that the complexity of the process of the discernment, recording and transmission of God's words in the OT 'are more complex and vast than we can comprehend (much less reconstruct in detail).' Nevertheless he claims: 'the overall claim of the Old Testament writings to be mediating faithfully the very words and spoken will of God is undeniable' (: sect 2 par 4).

Clearly the Bible contains human response to revelation. This is obvious at an explicit level, when authors are clearly self-consciously expressing their own human thoughts and understanding (Ac 26:19; 1 Cor 7:12). Even Scripture that records God's direct speech represents a human response. The problem occurs when this description is used to describe the emergent genre of the Bible as a whole. A choice needs to be made whether it is a divine document, the Word of God, or a document that is merely human, however much one may be able to encounter God through it. In the latter case an eclectic relativising of certain parts of Scripture would seem inevitable.

I would thus resolve the issue of appropriate authority in theology by relating it to the transcendent Word in intimate and inseparable association with the written word, as revealed in a God-human encounter through the Holy Spirit. The term 'Word of the Lord' thus simultaneously refer to the living God and the written text, emphasizing that God communicates verbally and that His presence makes the Bible alive. Certain verses in the Bible refer to God and the Scriptures in this kind of association (Heb 4: 12-13; Ps 33:4; Mk 12:24). To use an analogy, the Scriptures are simultaneously biography and autobiography with respect to God. And as divine bio-autobiography they are not read independently of God. The ultimate author of this bio-autobiography is always present alongside the reader, explaining what was ultimately intended. Thus, as the ultimate author and subject matter of the text, God is the ultimate source of the ontological authority of the Bible.

This intimate connection is consistently challenged and needs further defence. I will mention two ways in which the revelation of God cannot be separated from the written text.

Firstly, to separate the Scriptures, as witness to God's speech and act, from God is equivalent to separating God from Himself. Personhood is anchored in what one says and does, and this is quite plausibly applied to God.<sup>89</sup>

Secondly, according to Scripture, God's character and purpose are stable, transcending the vagaries of human existence and the fickleness of human nature (1Sm 15 :29 ; Heb 13 :8 ; Ja 1 :17). This faithfulness and stability extends to God's communicated Word (Ps 93 :5, 138 :2), which, as has been argued, is intimately connected with His written word of Scripture. The stability and faithfulness of God, His eternal Word and His written word in Scripture should not be separated as together they form the basis of our assurance of his promises and blessings (Nm 23:19 ; Psa 110:4 ; Mal 3:6 ; Heb :17-19), as well as of our heeding His warnings (Jos 23 :14-15).

This intimate unity between God and Scripture does not mean one does not discern the shades of meaning within the Bible. It is possible to distinguish parts that belong to a specific epoch or context and no longer directly apply versus those that remain universally applicable or at least potentially applicable to us within our current situation. Nevertheless, this valid hermeneutical sensitivity, which is based on Scriptures own testimony and internal logic, is quite distinct from the assumption that human reason is able to pronounce on which parts of Scripture are valid and redeemable, compared to those that are toxic and discardable. Stating that not all Scripture speaks in the same way in every age is quite different from saying that those parts were not

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<sup>89</sup> Jesus' logic that a human characteristic reflects a divine characteristic (Lk 11:13) is being applied here.

intended by God, representing mistakes and immoral interpolations to be excised. As Packer (1988b: sect 2 par 5) states, 'If documents designed to make God in Christ known to all generations are untrustworthy and thus inadequate for their purpose, God has indeed failed badly.'

#### **5.4.6 The quest for authority within the canonic framework of the OT and NT**

A choice needs to be made concerning a theological understanding of God's intent with regard to the Scriptures operating as an authoritative canon. It is fully plausible that the way the Scriptures have functioned authoritatively within the church has been God's original purpose. The historical and complex process where the verbal texts in all their stages of development (from the first oral and written forms of the Mosaic message through to Christian testimony in the NT) co-existed and mutually interacted with written texts, ending finally in the written, canonical form of the two Testaments may seem difficult to reconcile with the idea of God's authoritative speaking. But this intellectual difficulty is due to indefensible and ultimately arbitrary assumptions. To validly challenge the canon with this kind of reasoning (i.e. rationalism), universal principles on why canon should not be formed in this way would need to be articulated. Furthermore an alternative means of God's authoritative communication would need to be proposed along with authoritative universal principles validating this alternative. No such principles exist (even though individuals do tend to conflate their limited reasoning with such imagined principles).

It may seem that my reasoning is guilty of the same rationalism that it critiques. I suggest that this is not the case. I am not trying to prove the authority of the canon rationally, I am merely insisting that unaided reason (subjective rationalism) can neither prove nor disprove the canon-based nature of biblical authority. Therefore, in analogous fashion to the natural sciences, we must deal with the facts as they are presented to us (a complex canonical process that claims normative status).

In other words, it is fully plausible that an omnipotent and omniscient being foresaw and intended the authoritative usage (of all the oral and written communicative fragments) and therefore ensured that they would have a specific textual form, within the canon, including the emergent form of the canon as a whole. The nature of this process must exist on a continuum somewhere in between a dictation theory and free and variable choice by the author. Different parts of the Scripture will be closer to one side of the continuum than the other. The Ten Commandments are closer to dictation, whereas Paul's distinction between the Lord's and his own speech (1 Cor 7:12) is closer to the other side of the continuum. No extreme side is ever attained. Even the most directly quoted speech of God takes place in human, cultural language and even the most mundane verses, like Paul's advice to Timothy to drink a little wine for his stomach (1 Ti 5:23) have theological import (God cares about the mundane aspects of our lives; leaders should be in touch and caring; being a Christian is not an exclusively 'super-spiritual' affair, etc.). Even if there was choice in terms of the exact words an author chose, these were bounded by the context of God's revelatory presence, speech, and present or past action. Even in terms of human events, without divine overshadowing and boundaries, we see this. Different witnesses to a car accident will all have a different testimony. Furthermore, the same person could have chosen different words and will actually do so with different retellings. Nevertheless the objective reality of the event constrains the diverse witness. No one will suggest that it involved an airplane or that it was a movie or an art sculpture. An omnipotent, omniscient God is able to constrain the witness even more.

While there is clear hermeneutical work to be done and decisions to be made concerning which parts of Scripture apply when, where, how and to whom, this is distinct from attempts to find a

canon within a canon or to suggest that parts of Scripture were written against God's will, thus requiring the purification of Scripture.<sup>90</sup>

#### 5.4.7 The necessity of a fixed canon

The fixed, transmissible, translatable nature of the Scripture has numerous positive practical effects. The fit between the fixed, authoritative form of Scripture and the communicative and transformative goals of the gospel points in the direction of this fixed, authoritative form being necessary. Sceptics need to explain why God wouldn't have communicated in this form and provide a more valid means of communication.

Firstly, the essentially fixed nature of the Bible means that it is the concrete common aspect of our faith that links all people involved in the God-human encounter, past, present, and future.<sup>91</sup> History and our current experience prove this to be true. It is our common point of inspiration and instruction for worship and mission.

Secondly, Scripture's relatively fixed nature resists the development of inappropriate forms of faith. Its concrete, unyielding form fits it to be the arbiter of dispute and the corrector of error. Scripture, with its fixed nature, is the supreme force for anti-ideological critique, in exact contradiction to postmodernism's understanding. Jesus used Scripture in this way - 'haven't you read...' (Mt 12:5; Mk 12:10; Jn 7:42), and the church throughout the ages has used it to challenge heresies in orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Of course Scripture has been used to fund oppression and lies, but this is to misuse it and to go against its natural dynamic. Scripture, itself, prophesies, critiques and provides power against this misuse (2Ti 2:15; Mat 5:19; Jer 23:36; Act 20:30; Ps 119:9).

Thirdly, Scripture's fixed form makes it highly translatable and dispersible, providing all people access to God's revelation, and a sure, accessible and usable source for wisdom and power for every aspect of life.<sup>92</sup> Scripture only truly performs these vital functions when it is accepted as the ultimate practical authority through which God has chosen to rule. Even if they are believed to be ultimate, the other options of tradition, reason, experience, etc. cannot even come close to performing the same functions. At best they may work for a small group, for a temporary period. God's revelation and rule, however, are intended for all people, in all eras.

#### 5.4.8 The Bible within broader culture: towards a comprehensive perspective

In terms of the broad interactive approach to truth and knowledge in this research, the authority of Scripture does not only have relevance for theology and the church. There is ultimately one critically realistic truth that is authoritative in all aspects of life. Jesus said the gospel would be preached before kings and rulers (Mt 10:18; Lk 12:11) and Paul's statements before King

<sup>90</sup> This has been done in terms of a hermeneutics of suspicion by thinkers like Jürgen Habermas and feminist and liberation theologians. '*Ideologiekritik* views tradition with a hooded-brow of suspicion, tantamount to "seeing tradition as merely the systematically distorted expression of communication under unacknowledged conditions of violence"' (Bilimoria 1998: par 1). Bilimoria (1998) examines the tension between Gadamer and Habermas' hermeneutics of suspicion along with Ricoueur's mediating position of a creative hermeneutics of suspicion.

<sup>91</sup> This is not bibliolatry, displacing God. It is the action and love of the Trinity that is the basis of our unity, but the Bible is the practical, concrete, historical, linking point.

<sup>92</sup> Commonsense, current experience and historical testimony show how true this is. There are innumerable stories of how individuals and communities have found their physical Bibles to be a source of wisdom, comfort, guidance and relationship with God and how the Bible has functioned powerfully from the individual through to the societal level.

Agrippa (Ac 26:25-29) belie any idea of the gospel being practised privately in a neat Kantian or Wittgensteinian corner.

However, since ultimate truth and authority reside in the faithfulness of God and not in the written text of Scripture or in any secular field of knowledge, it is not a question of the biblical 'text absorbing the world' or the 'world absorbing the text'. God transcends and potentially affirms and judges all aspects of life and knowledge. From this perspective, valid progress can only be attained through a courageous, diligent hermeneutics, where, by faith and with active participation, we can experience God drawing all aspects of life and knowledge together into unique patterns involving a dynamic of fruitful hermeneutical interpenetration.

#### 5.4.9 Towards an organic view of scriptural authority

At this point in this dissertation's argument it is appropriate to introduce the term 'organic' to supplement the term 'hermeneutical' with regard to Scripture and scriptural authority. Out of a variety of possible definitions, I have chosen the following meanings of organic as useful for suggesting the imagery or conceptualization that is necessary for appropriately understanding Scripture: 'relating to, derived from, or characteristic of living things'; 'occurring or developing gradually and naturally, without being forced or contrived'; 'consisting of elements that exist together in a seemingly natural relationship that makes for organized efficiency' (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version). These definitions applied to Scripture remind us that the Word/word of God is 'living and active' (Heb 4:12), is 'God *breathed*' (2 Tm 3:16) and is able to nourish (1 Pt 2:2; 2Tm 3:15). This section will examine several concepts that resonate with this organic, hermeneutical approach.

##### 5.4.9.1 Critical realism

N T Wright and Vanhoozer serve as two examples of an appropriate use of critical realism to help clarify scriptural authority.

Wright (1992: 32-46) adopts critical realism as the epistemological foundation for his NT studies. I believe that his careful use of the term entails a better understanding than Herholdt's (see section 5.4.2) and does in fact succeed in balancing objectivity and subjectivity. Wright's stance is also clearly informed by the latest epistemological developments, with their focus on 'fit' and 'inference to the best explanation.'

Wright (1992:34) talks about 'the positivist trap, the false either-or of full certainty *versus* mere unsubstantiated opinion.' He comments on critics who 'have made a great song and dance about the fact that the details of Jesus' life, or the fact of his resurrection, cannot be proved "scientifically;" philosophical rigour should compel them to admit that the same problem pertains to the vast range of ordinary human knowledge, including the implicit claim that knowledge requires empirical verification' (: 34). He fully acknowledges the challenges posed to objectivism (:35-36) but focuses on the role of worldview and stories, along with the concept of 'fit' to defend his critically realistic stance.

While scientific method is correct in terms of being based on 'hypothesis and verification/falsification' it is incorrect to imagine that hypotheses are formed exclusively out of sense-data: 'One needs a larger framework on which to draw, a larger set of *stories* about things that are likely to happen in the world....Equally, verification happens not so much by observing random sense-data to see whether they fit with the hypothesis, but by devising means, precisely on the basis of the larger stories (including the hypothesis itself), to ask specific questions about specific aspects of the hypothesis.' The crucial question is how 'large

stories and specific data arrive at a “fit” (Wright 1992:37). In short, ‘human beings tell stories because this is how we perceive, and indeed relate to, the world’ (:40).

Wright’s (1992:41) focus on narrative is more valid than the typical postmodern use of it as he does not use it to sidestep issues of objectivity and truth: ‘The reason why stories come into conflict with each other is that worldviews, and the stories which characterize them, are in principle normative: that is, they claim to make sense of the whole of reality.’

If stories are normative and refer to reality, albeit in a critically realistic fashion, then conflict between different stories can happen and one story can cause another to be adapted or abandoned. I believe this concern for normativity is vital and is not safeguarded by Herholdt’s understanding, described above. Wright (1992:42) uses the image of a ‘sliding scale’ to explain what occurs when stories from different groups are brought into contact. Between the extremes of ‘direct confirmation’ and ‘direct confrontation’ stories can also ‘modify or subvert’ each other, while it is also possible for the conflict between two stories to be resolved through ‘yet another story explaining how the evidence for the challenging story is in fact deceptive.’ He concludes that ‘There is no such thing as “neutral” or “objective” proof; only the claim that the story we are now telling about the world as a whole makes more sense, in its outline and detail, than other potential or actual stories that may be on offer.’

The typical objection to positivism in science is captured in the phrase, the ‘theory-laden’ nature of science. In terms of Wright’s exposition I believe it is possible to talk of the ‘story-laden’ nature of theory. Wright (1992: 42-44) explains that hypothesis, sense-perception, the objects perceived and interpretation all occur within the context of events and stories, which grant specific meanings. The empiricist framing of the question of knowledge as a dialogue between subject and object is inadequate, in both its ‘optimistic’ and ‘pessimistic’ forms. Rather, ‘we have a dialogue or conversation between humans (not merely neutral or detached observation-platforms) and events (not merely detached or meaningless objects). And on both sides of this dialogue we therefore have stories’ (: 44).

In what I believe to be an absolutely critical statement, Wright (1992: 44) concludes that ‘The hard-and-fast distinction between objective and subjective must be abandoned’. It is ‘less misleading...[to] think in terms of “public” and “private” knowledge. The publicness of certain sorts of knowledge is not threatened, but rather enhanced, by the fact that particular people are doing the knowing.’

Vanhoozer (1998: 322-323) also validly nuances the concept of critical realism, showing how the underdetermination of theory should not be equated with relativism:

To say that there is a truth to the world or a meaning in the text is not necessarily to commit oneself to one interpretive scheme only...the world is there, independent and determinate, yet it is indescribable apart from interpretive schemes and only partially accessible to any one scheme. Yet the concepts we use in describing the world or the text are not wholly arbitrary either.... It is not that our descriptive frameworks construct reality, then, but rather that certain aspects of reality only emerge or come to light under particular descriptions....One cannot describe the workings of parliament, for example, with the categories of particle physics....While we inevitably come to the text with an interpretive scheme, it may nevertheless be the text’s meaning that comes to us, and not only our own reflection. Our knowledge of what is there –in the world, in the text –though partial, can still be true. Critical realism thus stands as a middle position between epistemological absolutism (‘there is only one correct interpretive scheme’) and epistemological relativism (‘every interpretive scheme is as good as any other’).

#### 5.4.9.2 Probabilistic reasoning



The conclusions from chapter two that knowledge (in terms of assumptions, processes and conclusions) needs to be defined as complex, integrated, critically realistic, hermeneutical and probabilistic refer to all aspects of knowledge, including Scripture. Talking of all knowledge as probabilistic should not be mistaken for relativism. Probabilistic reasoning does not only function intrasystemically, but also intersystemically. Stating that the Bible represents ultimate truth, compared to all other final worldviews is probabilistically stated as an inference to the best explanation, but it is still intended as an ultimate truth claim. The implications for approaching Scripture are that the positivism of Biblicism and scepticism are equally unwarranted.

Positivistic approaches to scriptural warrant over-emphasize (and excessively defend) detailed doctrines of biblical authority. Such approaches tend to imagine they have for the most part correctly resolved the issues of Scripture and authority. This leads to a focus on self-explanation as a principal means of ministering to or persuading people.

The detailed work entailed within these rational approaches does need to be done and it needs to be stated that it exists. But this knowledge should function as a levelling of the playing fields, not as ultimate, irrefutable proof. It should take the form of probabilistic arguments which merely need to challenge alternative skeptical arguments against Scripture and free us up to receive more appropriate evidence about Scripture's reliability.

In addition, this positivistic approach often goes hand in hand with a separation from other realms of knowledge or an unnecessary attempt to prove the Bible against science, etc. It is clear, for example, that Science has corrected false interpretations of Scripture and that, over time, most of the church changes its position. The interpretation of the time-span of creation in the book of Genesis is an example of this. When the above over-emphasis on authority, defence and separation is practised, it is understandable that sceptics and advocates of scientism perceive that science is steadily gaining victories over theology and Scripture. In terms of the approach in this dissertation all glory for scientific progress goes to God as He ultimately funds science. God's two books (Scripture and nature) are merely being used to correct each other. There is no aspect of creation that is off limits to its creator and consequently there is no such thing as purely secular knowledge or profane reality.

Therefore, in terms of proof and certainty with regard to the authority of Scripture, a special distinct epistemology is not fully valid, although this statement needs further clarification.

Faith, experience of God and the role of the Holy Spirit are vital in theological proof and in a trust in the Scriptures. In addition, explicitly and implicitly, deductive reasoning from the nature of God to the reliability of the Scriptures is vital for a high view of the Bible. An assumption of God's ability and intent to communicate, His love and faithfulness, His purposive nature etc., are vital to believing in an authoritative Scripture. This seems to be very distinct from scientific proof and sceptics accuse us of circular reasoning.<sup>93</sup> However, as has been argued in chapter two, various deductive aspects that are involved in holding to Scripture's authority (circularity, faith, resistance to falsification, creative interpretation, bracketing of disbelief, and common sense) are actually part of all aspects of knowledge, including natural science. It is granted that each realm of knowledge will have them operating in different ways as is appropriate to the object of the science in question.

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<sup>93</sup> The beliefs in God's character that fund our belief in the Bible are said to be gained from the Bible. This is far too simplistic. Nevertheless, the over-conservative view that so ties God to the written text does experience a real logical challenge in this regard. A hermeneutical view that sees God transcending all things, including Scripture can deal with this challenge more coherently.

In addition, there are certain inductive similarities between science and theology. Just as the scientific method operates to correct false human intuition and perception regarding reality, Scripture and the science of hermeneutics operate to correct false understanding of ultimate meaning.

There is thus no question of holding to the Bible in terms of blind faith or wishful thinking and Scripture can thus be falsified when it is shown not to correspond to reality. More importantly, Scripture can be falsified if it can be said to fail in its stated goals: making us 'wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus' (2Tm 3:15); guiding us in life (Ps 119:105); keeping our lives pure (Ps 119: 9), etc. The continued trust in the authority of Scripture is maintained because it is true to its word as we experience its power in our life.

Nevertheless, it is vital not to overemphasize the similarity between Scripture and science. Because Scripture deals with the transcendent gracious God, who is unlike anyone whom 'ear has perceived' or 'eye seen' (Is 64:4) and because it prophetically anticipates a God-prepared future that 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived' (1Cor 2:9), it cannot be positivistically approached through reason and the senses. Utter reliance on God, a reliance that God permits science to ignore, while still producing results, cannot be ignored in theology without producing utterly unreliable results in terms of the true message and purpose of Scripture. Scripture is so complex, over-arching, and organically relational that the role of God in showing its truth needs to be absolutely fore-grounded, in contrast to Science.

Schnabel (2000b: sect 4 par 2) explains that the inductive emphasis of natural science in the 17th to 19th centuries led to the claim by, opponents of a high view of Scripture, that only inductive approaches focusing on 'historical, literary, theological and ethical' aspects of the biblical texts were valid 'in serious study of the Bible', in contradistinction to deductive approaches which should be limited to the church's dogmatic and faith claims. The authority of Scripture becomes radically undermined as such critical inductive study reveals 'errors and contradictions' and leads to the conclusion that 'human reason...[is] the only valid criterion in questions of interpretation,... that there is no absolute standard for truth and that Scripture might err in theological and ethical matters as well.' However, Schnabel insists that in science, as much as in the study of Scripture, induction and deduction play a role and 'it is perfectly reasonable to begin one's enquiry with the nature of God and the state of humankind' (2000b: sect 4 par 2). He discusses the reality and reliability of God as communicator as a basis for the reliability of Scripture (2000b: sect 5-10). Carson (1994: par 3) also insists on a vital link between understanding the Bible and understanding the God behind it.

The role of the Holy Spirit is thus vital in this approach.

#### **5.4.9.3 The Holy Spirit: the Pneumatological dimension of scriptural authority**

I agree with Schnabel (2000b: sect 14) about the ongoing validity of the Reformer's view, based on John 16:13, that the Holy Spirit convinces us that the Bible is the authoritative, unified written word of God.

Vanhoozer (1997: 163-164) further elaborates how, in addition to this first convicting act, concerning the authority and unity of Scripture, the Holy Spirit secondly '*illuminates*' the illocutionary meaning of the text and thirdly *sanctifies* us to 'accept what is in the text instead of preferring our own interpretations.'

The key role of the Holy Spirit is often superficially understood, leading to an undermining of this role.

Begbie (1992: 260) examines the problem of inspiration in Scripture, which leads to intractably opposing positions. One extreme focuses on the divine nature of Scripture and its unity, the other focuses on the human side and its diversity. This debate is strongly linked to the key text of 2 Timothy 3:16 and the term *theopneustos*. He suggests that 'a deeper problem' that is overlooked, both in current debate and in 'many of the classic accounts of biblical inspiration' is the issue of 'who (or what) is the inspiring Spirit?' He agrees with John Muddiman (in Begbie 1992: 260), that the 'proper theological method...is to move from the work and doctrine of the Spirit to an understanding of the inspiration of Scripture.' The lack of a 'trinitarian doctrine of the Spirit [with regard to inspiration] ...[causes] an impoverished view of the Scriptures and the way in which God employs them in his church' (Begbie 1992: 261). Begbie (1992: 262-275) examines the work of Warfield and Barr, two representatives par excellence of the respective positions of inerrancy versus non-inerrancy, to prove his point, concluding: 'both scholars would have benefited from pursuing more rigorously the question: who is the God who inspires? For all their dissimilarities, when it comes to biblical inspiration, both tend to collapse God into an undifferentiated Spirit who in some manner impinges upon our lives' (276).

Begbie (1992:277-282) talks about five aspects of the Spirit's dynamic that can help us understand inspiration in a better way: Firstly, the 'atoning and relating character of the Spirit's ministry...[means that] biblical inspiration is but one moment in the Father's work of reconciling wayward human beings to himself by his Spirit through his Son' (:277). Secondly, 'the ecclesiological dimension of the Spirit's acts...should remind us of the corporate character of biblical inspiration' (:279). Thirdly, an understanding of the 'liberating work of the Spirit' corrects the eclipse of the human in Warfield and of the divine in Barr (:279). Fourthly, 'the eschatological character of the Spirit' helps us to understand 'the "finality" of Scripture in a "proleptic" way' (:281).<sup>94</sup> Fifthly, we need to understand 'the variety and particularity of the Spirit's work' (:282).

### **5.5 Further issue involved in defending a high view of Scripture**

The next step in proceeding in my understanding of Scripture is to examine certain scriptural issues, which are vital in dealing with the way Scripture is to be understood, as providing true knowledge, and used, in situations of ministry and pastoral care.

Exponents of both high and low views have been guilty of positivism, epistemological simplicity and sloppiness, as well as an ungracious and closed-minded attitude, which is far removed from Jesus and Paul's example in Scripture.

In general, however, it seems to me that those who hold to a high view of Scripture tend to have been more consistent and profound in their engagement with Scripture and with other realms of knowledge, dealing with issues point by point (this makes sense, given that their high view of Scripture means that everything is at stake in terms of Scripture's reliability). Opponents of a high view of Scripture are often selective in the writers they engage with, overlooking the most profound and persuasive confessional literature, and sometimes glaringly ignoring decisive counter-evidence. Nevertheless they remain credible to a gullible public and damaging to the gospel (Carson 1994: 36; Silva 1986: 132).

Counter-arguments are often not engaged with due to a variety of presuppositions, including a principal one that truth must be simple. This is a misapplication of Ockham's razor and an overlooking of the scholastic context that made his stance necessary. The belief that creation is

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<sup>94</sup> Through a future-oriented doctrine of the Spirit, an anchoring of our faith in the final, perfect self-revelation of God in Jesus of Nazareth *and* an openness to God's future (already realised in Christ) can both be maintained (Begbie 1992: 281).

an ordered, intelligible product of an almighty creator led to a serious, profound investigation of nature by the scientific method; this method has priority over superstitious or speculative approaches to nature. In the same way, the belief that Scripture is an ordered, intelligible product of an almighty creator leads to a serious, profound investigation of Scripture by scientific hermeneutical methods; these methods have priority over simplistically sceptical approaches to Scripture.

It is beyond the scope of this research to explore in depth the key foundations that have been developed in a Reformed-Evangelical view of Scripture. Nevertheless, they will be briefly outlined, in order to show that a high view of Scripture is not simplistically held.

### 5.5.1 Inspiration and illumination

Many think of the Bible as being inspired in terms ascribed to other great literature, i.e. containing inspiring ideas and an inspiring message. However, the term has a unique theological meaning, which the reformers applied uniquely to Scripture.

The word 'inspiration' comes from the translation of *theopneustos* in 2 Tim. 3:16, translated 'given by inspiration of God' or 'God-breathed' (ISV, NIV, Message). Packer (1996c: intro par 1) explains that '*theopneustos* means *out*-breathed rather than *in*-breathed by God—divinely expired, rather than *in*-spired.' This means: 'It is Scripture —*graphē*, the written text—that is God-breathed...Scripture has a double authorship, and man is only the secondary author' (1996c: sect 1 par 1).

Carson (1994: 34) explains that the concept of inspiration 'speaks both of God's action, by his Spirit, in the human author...and of the nature of the resulting text.' Although the church fathers referred to some aspects of each other's work with the same term they still had a distinct understanding of Scripture, which is captured by more current theological clarification through the use of two terms, 'inspiration' versus 'illumination' (:35). He states that inspiration incorrectly becomes 'swallowed up' by illumination in the neo-orthodox proposal that the Bible is not inspired in and of itself but rather 'becomes the word of God whenever the Holy Spirit illumines it to the individual' (:38).

This research agrees with Packer and Carson that, from a faith perspective, the actual finished text is inspired. This logically has clear implications for hermeneutics and the use of Scripture in pastoral care. If the text itself is inspired, then one may not exclude parts of it at will. One may also not reformulate or reinterpret parts of it in ways that clearly move away from the commonsense, literal meaning.

### 5.5.2 *Sensus plenior*

The tension between a literal, grammatical-historical approach to Scripture and a symbolic, allegorical approach goes back to the beginning of theology and the formation of the Alexandrian versus Antiochan schools. It remained a key issue through the reformation as grammatical-historical hermeneutics developed to correct medieval interpretive abuses and this counterbalancing was pressed to an extreme as the historical-critical method forced an even greater reductionism upon Scripture. These tensions remain alive today and are reflected in different approaches to Scripture within different streams in both academy and church.

The problem of *sensus plenior* (or fuller sense) originates in Scripture itself, in terms of the relationship between the New and Old Testaments. A common argument against a high view of Scripture is that the NT authors used the OT without respect for context or original authorial intent, thus betraying a low view of Scripture. Moo (1986: 180) describes Achtemeir's stance,

which is typical of this view, in the following way: 'The New Testament authors'...habit of reading into...[the Old Testament] meanings obviously not intended in the original demonstrate clearly that they did not regard the Old Testament as an eternal, unchanging, inerrant document.'

A classic definition of *sensus plenior* is given by Brown (in LaSor 1978: 54): 'The *sensus plenior* is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of a biblical text (or group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation.' The fuller meanings gained through *sensus plenior* can be prophetic or theological. According to LaSor (1978: 54) the problem with this understanding is that '[i]f it is a deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, then we cannot discover it by using grammatico-historical exegetical methods.' The problem of 'objective control' and not reading in one's 'pet idea' becomes acute (LaSor 1978: 51).

These issues are relevant to the use of Scripture in pastoral care. Because many carers are at pains not to harm the counselee through an undisciplined and subjective use of Scripture, much creative, but nevertheless valid, use of Scripture may be rejected. An imaginative yet uncontrolled use of Scripture is problematic as it can lead the counselee astray, inspiring beliefs and actions not intended by Scripture and ultimately harmful to the counselee. On the other hand, an over-controlled, reductive use of Scripture may equally end up distorting Scripture as difficulties (which might be solved by a correct understanding of *sensus plenior*) remain, causing one to reject and not use certain passages. In addition, the richer sense of other passages may be overlooked. In both cases the counselee experiences a reduced experience of God's truth and life through the Bible.

This section will briefly examine four possible approaches to the problem of *sensus plenior*.

### 5.5.2.1 Allegory

In allegory 'characters and events are to be understood as representing other things and symbolically expressing a deeper, often spiritual, moral, or political meaning' (Encarta World English Dictionary 2001: electronic version). It aimed to render that which seemed 'intellectually or ethically unacceptable in its literal sense...acceptable' (Bruce 1996a: sect 2 par 4).

Numerous sources are available for a richer understanding of allegory.<sup>95</sup> In terms of our current concern as a solution to the issue of *sensus plenior* it remains highly problematic. As Bruce (1996a: sect 2 par 4) states, this method 'in fact obscured the mind of the Spirit and obliterated the historical character of biblical revelation.'

### 5.5.2.2 Typology

Bruce (1996b: intro par 1) defines typology as '[a] way of setting forth the biblical history of salvation so that some of its earlier phases are seen as anticipations of later phases, or some later phase as the recapitulation or fulfillment of an earlier one'.

Typology is viewed with suspicion by many. Bruce (1996b: sect 2 par 7) states that it 'must be used (if at all) with caution and restraint.' The wariness arises out of the conflation of typology with allegory, and Bruce's warnings are only relevant to the latter. Ramm (1977: 221-223) explains that there is controversy over the distinction between typology and allegory and the

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<sup>95</sup> See Bloesch (1994:184-192); Deist and Burden (1980: 71-79); Ramm (1977: 24-45); Woollcombe (1957).

identification versus separation of the two terms can have 'vested theological interests', concluding that they are distinct practices.

Once typology is rescued from the bad reputation of allegory and the inappropriate restrictions of critical biblical scholarship (with its reductionism that lacks categories for dealing with it), it can be recognized as a normal and vital aspect of correctly handling Scripture, which has fruitfully functioned in Scripture and throughout the history of the church (Lampe 1957; Ng & Clark 1998).

### 5.5.2.3 Double fulfillment

'The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness' (Rm 4:23-24).

Blomberg (2002: intro par 3) uses the concept of 'double fulfillment' as a vital key to understanding the Bible. He insists it is not a synonym for *sensus plenior*, but he clearly conflates *sensus plenior* with allegory, which I have not done.

Blomberg (2002: intro par 3-4) clearly distinguishes double-fulfillment from typology and straight fulfillment of prophecy, stating that Matthew has examples of all three:

[I]n a number of texts from the latter prophets cited by Matthew, and especially in Isaiah, the results of an ordinary grammatico-historical exegesis of the OT text point clearly to a referent within the time frame of the OT books. Yet those same passages, especially when read within the context of their immediately surrounding paragraphs or chapters, disclose a further dimension of meaning never approximated by any OT-age event....It seems plausible, therefore, to affirm that the prophetic author consciously looked both for a relatively immediate referent and for a more longer-term eschatological fulfillment. Usually Matthew provides more information about the nature of that fulfillment than the prophet could have been expected to know.

Blomberg's (2002: sec 11 par 2-3) nuancing is vital for helping to bridge the gap between conservative and critical scholarship. He states that at least in some texts, like Isaiah, 'neither the older, classic conservative model of straightforward prediction and fulfillment nor the critical consensus' claim of no messianic intent proves adequate.'

### 5.5.2.4 Fulfillment of prophecy

LaSor (1978) discusses the relationship between prophecy, inspiration and *sensus plenior*. He defines prophecy as 'the phenomenon that is presented in the Bible, when one of God's servants, under the inspiration of God's Spirit, confronts a person or group of persons with a message suited to that particular time and circumstance' (LaSor 1978: 50). *Sensus plenior* refers to 'the "something more" that was given by God in the divine inspiration, that makes the message equally valid as the word of God to succeeding generations' (: 50). The problem with *sensus plenior* is that if the original author was not aware of the extra meaning why should we be able to pronounce on it and what guarantee is there that we are not reading in our own interpretation. LaSor's (1978: 55-56) solution lies in a correct understanding of biblical prophecy:

Prophecy in the biblical sense, however, is not merely the prediction of a future event; rather, it is the revelation of God's purpose in the present situation and in its on-going character. God's redemptive purpose....is an age-long outworking of His will.... It is capable of more and more filling until it is entirely fulfilled. It is precisely in this context that I prefer to use the term *sensus plenior*.... In one sense, it lies outside and beyond the historical situation of the prophet, and therefore it cannot be derived by grammatico-historical exegesis. But in another sense, it is part of the history of redemption, and therefore it can be controlled by the study of Scripture taken in its entirety.

Matthew 2:15's use of Hosea 11:1 is an example of a text critical scholarship claims is ripped out of context. But as LaSor (1978: 58) explains, God was 'working out his redemptive plan' in the Israelites and Hosea was 'inspired by God's spirit...to express his words in a form that was capable of a fuller meaning.' LaSor (1978: 57) clarifies the logic that necessitates the idea of *sensus plenior* being essential to the very fabric of Scripture: '[A]t any moment ...[God] has the end in view, and in any generation He has future generations in His purpose. The very inscripturation of the prophetic word implies as much, for unless the prophetic word was intended for future generations there was no need to cause it to be written down.'

### 5.5.3 Perspicuity and sufficiency

Packer (1988b: sect 4 par 1) states that the 'necessity, sufficiency, and clarity'<sup>96</sup> of Scripture' are three 'classic themes'. His following description of Scripture clarifies the concepts of perspicuity (clarity) and sufficiency:

It is a record and explanation of divine revelation which is both complete (sufficient) and comprehensible (perspicuous); that is to say, it contains all that the Church needs to know in this world for its guidance in the way of salvation and service, within itself. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit, who caused it to be written, has been given to the Church to cause believers to recognize it for the divine Word that it is, and to enable them to interpret it rightly and understand its meaning.

(Packer 1958:47)

Bloesch (1994: 192) provides a careful nuancing of the meaning of the perspicuity or 'inherent clarity' of Scripture. This refers to the message not the language of Scripture. It refers to 'Scripture as a whole, not to any particular passage', that may remain 'obscure even to the scholar'. It was also 'correlative with faith'.

Clearly this understanding of Scripture has been challenged in our critical age. Ward (2001: 155) attempts a reconstruction of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture in terms of the speech-act theory of Austin and Wolterstorff and its application by Wolterstorff, Thiselton and Vanhoozer. He 'identifies three fundamental elements in the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture: the underlying theological claim that God speaks, and that Scripture is a medium of his speech; the material aspect—that Scripture contains everything that a person needs to know to be saved; the formal aspect—that the supreme authority in biblical interpretation is the Bible itself' (2001: 156). The sufficiency of Scripture is therefore not a 'self-sufficiency' of the text. Scripture is materially sufficient for the performance of the divine illocutionary act of calling us to trust Christ for salvation. This active divine 'semantic presence' becomes divine 'personal presence' through the perlocutionary action of the Holy Spirit in us' (:158). 'The canon of Scripture, it is then argued, is to be conceived of as sufficient for the continued performance of the illocutionary act which God once performed in the preparation for, in the witness back to, and in the actuality of, his self-revelation in the Word made flesh' (:158). A faithful formulation of the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture does not claim to guarantee faithful belief and practice; rather, by confessing the doctrine the church acknowledges the 'supplement' it always needs from beyond itself, as God speaks to us in and through a Scripture which we never fully possess (:159).

### 5.5.4 The debate over inerrancy

The issue of error in the Scriptures is another major concern that correlates with different overall theological stances. Much has been written around this specific issue, dealing with specific sub-

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<sup>96</sup> See Rossouw (1963) on clarity and interpretation within a relational approach.

issues in great detail. I do not intend to revisit the whole debate, but rather to relate one or two points to the concerns of this research.

For skeptics, Scripture is full of error and to be dismissed, along with any unique claims concerning Christ. Neo-orthodox and postliberal theologians freely accept that the Scriptures contain error but still affirm it as having a vital role in linking us to God's revelation in Christ. Within the Reformed and evangelical camp a high view of Scripture is generally held but many opt for the concept of infallibility rather than inerrancy.

A neutral observer may wonder what all the fuss is about. For the anti-inerrantists it is an issue of refusing to contain God and His revelation within human categories. For inerrantists, as they frame the issue, the very truth of theology and stability of faith are at stake. There are many aspects and sub-issues related to this argument and they are argued in detail by both sides. In addition, both sides defend their views as scriptural and orthodox. It is also possible to envisage positive and negative motives as well as adequate versus inadequate engagement with the issues from both sides; the matter thus remains complex.

#### **5.5.4.1 Defining inerrancy and infallibility**

According to Feinberg (1979: 294) 'Inerrancy means that when all the facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical or life sciences.'

Packer (1988d: par 2) explains that the terms infallible and inerrant developed to counter the invalid, 'post-Enlightenment interpretation which, rating the text as less than God's infallible and inerrant instruction, is regularly selective, picking a canon within the canon; impressionistic, disregarding much data when generalizing about the Bible's main thrusts; relativistic-reductionist, diminishing biblical teaching to fit supposedly definitive perceptions drawn from secular culture; and existential-illuminist, constantly drawing from the text challenges that historical exegesis does not warrant while ignoring some that it does.'

While not necessarily agreeing with Packer's exact stance on inerrancy, I agree with his critique of Enlightenment-influenced interpretation. This research argues that it has impacted theology, ministry and pastoral care in profound and destructive ways.

In contrast to inerrancy, infallibility makes the more limited claim that the Bible 'makes no false or misleading statements on any matter of faith and practice' (Davis in Feinberg 1979: 288). This stance clearly allows for human error. Berkhof (1979: 88), for example, states, 'Faith...perceives in all these fallible human words the echo of the voice of God. It knows that it is placed in the presence of the living God through, and in spite of, these human reactions with all their limitations.'

#### **5.5.4.2 The debate: Biblical error versus reliability**

As discussed at length, many view the Bible as error-laden and unreliable, to be relativized or even rejected as counter-productive in society. This stance is obviously made by atheists or non-Christians. I have argued against these claims and stated that there is no absolute reason on the basis of science or any other realm of knowledge to necessitate this. Such a stance is a faith claim.



Within the Christian camp it is possible to find a low view of Scripture, which I argue has equally failed to be substantiated in any irrefutable way by any aspect of knowledge. In this case, however, the approach to Scripture is contradictory in the light of the following claims.

Firstly, Scripture is vital to the Christian faith and our current practices would make absolutely no sense apart from it: our translation into a new ontological state in Christ did not occur apart from the Scriptures and it would never have occurred without the Scriptures; our existence within the realm of theology would not make sense without the Scriptures; the major themes which constitute our Christian reality (the trinity, the resurrection of the dead, Jesus' triumph over death via the cross, the existence of heaven and hell, and many others) are held to by faith in the testimony of the Scriptures and not by experience or evidence. From a purely rational point of view most of these beliefs are ludicrous; they would never have come into being inductively. Furthermore, the NT makes no sense apart from the OT, and Christ Himself, though the perfect revelation of God, used the Scriptures. These first points can be accepted whether one is within the inerrantist or an infallibilist camp.

Secondly, it is vital to accept the importance of the verbal and propositional nature of Scripture. The themes mentioned above are all related to propositions and their existential import cannot be separated from these said propositions. In addition, the NT uses Scripture to argue issues in such a way that the conclusion depends upon the propositional sense of a sentence or even a single word. Jesus also underlined the importance of the cognitive-propositional nature of Scripture (Mt 5:18). In the practical living out of the Christian faith, as portrayed in Scripture, propositional meaning is not separated from existential reality, the latter often following upon the former (Rm 10:8-9, 17). As Bloesch (1992: 20) states, 'An evangelical dogmatics is based on the supposition that God's Word is at the same time God's act. This Word is both conceptual and personal, propositional and existential.' In contemporary Christian experience, as well, we explicitly and implicitly relate to the propositional nature of Scripture. Even views that de-emphasize the importance of propositions in Scripture often do so by using propositions from Scripture.<sup>97</sup>

Thirdly, in addition to accepting the propositional nature of Scripture it is important to accept the full scope of Scripture (2Tim 3:16). The intensely historical nature of the canon is used by many to argue against its full acceptance and section 5.5.8 responds to this challenge.

Points two and three can still be accepted by both inerrantists and non-inerrantists, although it starts to become problematic for the latter. Thus far it seems a high view of Scripture does not need to entail inerrancy. A closer examination of inerrancy versus infallibility is required to further clarify the issue.

#### **5.5.4.3 Arguments against inerrancy and for infallibility**

Numerous evangelicals distance themselves from the term inerrancy for a variety of reasons, from a suspicion of rationalism to a concern for maintaining Christ as focus. Numerous arguments are invoked.

##### **a) Inerrancy as a modernist imposition**

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<sup>97</sup> Thus liberals who urge a doctrineless Christianity in favour of love and reality end up trying to actualize these goals by recommending realities and methods that seem suspiciously dependent upon propositions, and these propositions bear a suspicious resemblance to those clearly stated in Scripture.

Inerrancy is viewed by some as a modernist corruption of the traditional Christian position. Two significant proposals that have argued for inerrancy as an Enlightenment-based invention are the Ernest Sandeen (1970) and the Rogers and McKim proposals (1979).

Woodbridge and Balmer (1983, 1986) represent a strong evangelical challenge to these proposals. They show that the fact that the term inerrancy is recent and that new articulations of inerrancy can be pinpointed to post-enlightenment dates and movements does not prove that Scripture and early Christianity did not hold to a similar view.

Nevertheless, the simplistic, historically naive view continues to hold sway. Current theology that is heavily influenced by postmodernism, such as the emerging church movement, represented by Brian McClaren (2003) among others, ultimately<sup>98</sup> holds to this view. The irony is that this is a simplistic meta-narrative of the kind that postmodernism claims to oppose.

### **b) Inerrancy as a category mistake**

This is related to the previous point and suggests that to insist on inerrancy is to treat Scripture empirically. Questions of strict factuality are inappropriate in questions of human relationships and should not be allowed to dominate the approach to Scripture, creating unnecessary difficulties, forcing us to harmonize it with science<sup>99</sup>

This idea has much to recommend it but it can be taken to the extreme of separating fact and value and too easily adopting a post-Kantian dichotomy between science and religion. We cannot escape the hermeneutical task of discerning what each part of Scripture intends in terms of factual reference.

### **c) The inevitability of human error**

A strong argument made against inerrancy is that the Bible, being at least in part a human document, must contain error, for error is inevitable in human functioning. This does not logically hold. Humans may err but may also get things right, especially through the presence and support of the Holy Spirit. This is not to suggest that the writers of Scripture were above human error in other areas of their lives. All that is needed is for God to have guaranteed their reliability when producing that which He wished to become part of the Scriptures.

### **d) Inerrancy contradicting the organic nature of Scripture**

Berkouwer (1975: 182), who strongly affirms the human and historical nature of Scripture, without denying its divinity and effectiveness, adopts an infallible view and argues that through a formalized doctrine of inerrancy 'the relationship of the organic, God-breathed character to the organic unity of and scope of the total testimony of Scripture is almost totally ignored.'

It is undeniable that Scripture needs to be approached organically: in terms of the interrelationships between each part, every other part and the whole; in terms of its interrelationship with the Trinity; in terms of its interrelationship with its readers; and in terms of the interrelationship of all the previous elements. But this organic nature does not require the

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<sup>98</sup> McClaren's nuanced approach to Scripture, wrestling to find a third way between over-conservative and relativistic approaches is commendable (1999: 231-246; 2004:159-171), but in terms of this research it still constitutes a low view of Scripture that lacks warrant.

<sup>99</sup> For example, see Bloesch (1994: 36-37).

acceptance of non-inerrancy. It seems that the term inerrancy is being conflated with a rigid, scholastic approach and it is not at all clear that this is the only way to hold to an inerrant view.

#### **e) Inerrancy is rendered meaningless by all its qualifications**

Statements on inerrancy are inevitably accompanied by a series of qualifications.<sup>100</sup> It is argued that needing to qualify the term so heavily renders it meaningless. However, this does not follow. There is no a priori reason that truth cannot be complex, requiring in depth qualifications. Complexity underlying our simplest actions, like eating, is real and vital and needs to be related to at key points (as when the food needs to be analyzed for food packaging labels or medical science needs to be consulted in the case of food poisoning).

#### **5.5.4.4 Arguments in favour of inerrancy**

In order to make a reliable hermeneutical choice, it is also important to examine various arguments in favour of inerrancy and against infallibility.

#### **a) Scripture itself claims to be inerrant**

There is no doubt that Scripture claims an extremely high view of itself as the word of God. This is clear in the way it refers to itself. The phrase 'the word of the Lord', for example, is repeated over two hundred times in clear association with the words of Scripture. The high view of Scripture is also affirmed by Jesus' affirmation and quotation of the OT and by the attitude of the writers of the NT to the OT. Grudem (1983) indisputably clarifies the high view of Scripture's self-attestation in an in-depth essay.

Nevertheless we need to ask if the high view held in Scripture is identical with the inerrant view espoused today. As Bloesch (1994:34) fairly asks:

The paramount question is whether the Bible itself teaches its own inerrancy. A second critical question is whether those who employ this terminology always mean the same thing. The truthfulness of Scripture is indeed espoused by the prophets and apostles, but it must be kept in mind that they were using 'truth' and 'truthfulness' in the Hebraic sense of faithfulness and veracity rather than precision and absolute factual accuracy, as in our modern empirical milieu.

The question still needs to be asked if the basic pre-scientific perception and reportage of that day best translates into the scientific precisionism that is wished for by inerrancy or into the imprecisionism of infallibility.

#### **b) A honourable conception of God requires inerrancy**

No Christian can have a lowly view of God. For inerrantists this logically correlates with a specific view of Scripture. Packer (1988b: sect 3 par 2) claims that God's truthfulness and Christ's sinlessness must correlate with an inerrant Bible and while Carson (1994: par 18) qualifies the analogy between Christ and the Bible, he still finds it useful. Grudem (1983: 53-57) provides six arguments which reinforce the belief that anything less than inerrancy brings God's character and lordship into question.

Bloesch (1994: 38) challenges Grudem's 1983 essay:

[He] confound[s] the biblical understanding of truth with a modern empiricist understanding that conceives of scripture as directly and immediately the words of God rather than the Word of God

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<sup>100</sup> See Feinberg, for example (1979: 299-302).

mediated through human words. Grudem can therefore make the astounding claim that scripture in itself is 'unchanging and eternal.' But even Jesus of Nazareth was mortal and temporal. Grudem ignores those passages that speak of the discontinuity between human speech and the Word of God (cf. Is 55:8-9; Ps 139:6; Job 42:3; Rm 11:33).

I agree that in defending a high view of Scripture inerrantists like Grudem have gone too far. The mistake of many theologians is to interpret the relationship between the Word of God and the written words of Scripture too loosely. The opposite extreme of inerrantists is to completely identify them. This constitutes a form of unintended idolatry and forces the Scripture to do empirical work that it is not able to. In fact this is the kind of empirical work that the best science cannot do. All human knowledge and communication is fallible and changing and to completely tie the Word of God to human words is to inevitably undermine it.

### **c) Scripture's intrasystemic functioning requires inerrancy**

A strong argument for inerrancy is the way some NT writings rely on individual words and letters when exegeting the OT, such as Mt 22:44-45 (see Grudem 1983: 40-41) and Gal 3:16 (see Feinberg 1979: 286).

The argument proposed by Grudem and others clearly invalidates any kind of excessive distancing between the concept of the Word of God and the words of Scripture. It is clear that Scripture's very words are reliable and it is my view that every single word and letter in Scripture is useful and potentially revelatory.

However, this still does not mean that we need to adopt an empirical inerrancy view. The two examples given above have to do with faith and practice and they were hermeneutical choices made by the NT writers under the inspiration of God. Furthermore, they were in line with the overall revelation of Scripture, and both witness to the Lordship of Christ.

Not every verse of Scripture is open to this kind of *sensus plenior*. Attempting this leads to distorting and obscuring the Bible, as happened in the excesses of the allegorical approach. Each verse in Scripture has to be approached with hermeneutical sensitivity and must be allowed to function in a way that is true to itself. Just as one cannot arbitrarily force every verse to reveal a *sensus plenior*, making theological conclusions on the basis of single words and letters from just anywhere in the Bible, one cannot force every verse to represent empirical, inerrant reference.

One cannot escape a hermeneutical stance, in utter reliance upon the Holy Spirit.

### **d) An error in any part of Scripture destabilizes the whole**

A central presupposition of inerrantists is that if any part of Scripture contains error, the whole of Scripture becomes unstable and unreliable. Packer (1988d: par 3-6) rejects Berkouwer's proposal 'that since biblical infallibility focuses on salvific guidance (showing God in Christ and the path of devotion) historical, geographical and scientific details might be substantially false without infallibility being lost...as the thin edge of a wedge' leading to the undermining of essential theology.

I think that Packer has overstated his case. It is, for example, possible to draw a line between empirical reference statements and matters of faith. There is no guarantee of perfect agreement but broad distinguishing is possible. This kind of hermeneutical work is inevitable and inerrantists end up engaging in it anyway, often with great over-stretching and implausibility, in having to harmonize Scripture with science.

In addition, Packer's statement is essentially rational, not scriptural, and is linked to an over-propositional understanding of Scripture. If Scripture is a deposit or storehouse of rational statements, which can be accessed by reason and organized, then, clearly, admitting error does destabilize the whole structure. It is inconsistent to say that the error is limited to matters that don't deal with faith. The inerrantists are absolutely right; there is no way of guaranteeing that matters of faith are not likewise subject to error.

However, Scripture is not essentially rational and systematic. Scripture is a history and a mystery; a revelation and a relationship; a world and an adventure; a record of God's 'past' thoughts, attitudes and intentions and a present overlap with God's current thoughts, attitudes and intentions.<sup>101</sup> It completely depends upon God for its coherence and meaning.

In the same way that natural theology does not recognize how it is dependent on God's pre-given revelatory voice for its perception of God in nature, inerrantists and overly rational theologians do not realize the extent to which interpretation and perception of harmony in Scripture are events that are intensely creative and utterly dependent on the Holy Spirit. Such order and harmony does not always obviously exist in Scripture itself, but in God's explanation of and ongoing association with Scripture.

In other words, just as creation is underdetermined in showing itself to be theistic in origin, so too is Scripture underdetermined in showing itself to be a single, harmonious whole with a divine origin. This is not to say that creation and Scripture are not divine in origin and ultimately reflecting a single harmonious whole. Neither is it to say that the arguments and understandings that we use are weaker than those of skeptics (whether they be cosmological atheists or literary deconstructionists). I am saying that, at every point, faith and God's presence are required. In the light of this, just as naive realism is inappropriate in terms of referring to perception of reality, so to naive inerrantism is inappropriate for referring to Scripture.

#### 5.5.4.5 Scripture as fully reliable

My conclusion is that the terms 'error' and 'inerrancy' are both inappropriate when talking about Scripture, unless very carefully qualified. I appreciate Bloesch's (1994: 27) comments in this regard: 'I am not comfortable with the term inerrancy when applied to Scripture because it has been co-opted by a rationalistic, empiricistic mentality that reduces truth to facticity. Yet I wish to retain what is intended by this word – the abiding truthfulness and normativeness of the biblical witness.' 'We must never say that the Bible teaches theological or historical error, but we need to recognize that not everything reported in the Bible may be in exact correspondence with historical and scientific fact as we know it today' (: 36-37).

The term 'inerrant' constitutes an over identification of the Word of God with the human words of Scripture. Grudem (1983:58) refers to numerous verses which talk of Scripture being 'free from all impurities (Ps 12:6)...eternal and unchanging in heaven (Ps. 119:89)...[having] unique and unlimited perfection (Ps. 119:89)', etc. I think that the full sense of these expressions cannot be referring to the human words of the Bible, but neither can they be separated from them.

I think that the analogy of Jesus as perfectly human yet without sin can be instructive here. The over identification of the Word of God with the human words of Scripture would be similar to saying that Jesus was not only sinless in his humanity but that his human genetic code did not display the same inconsistencies, dead ends and errors that science has revealed in the human

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<sup>101</sup> If one considers the complex question of the relationship between God and time, then talking of God's past thoughts cannot simply be understood in the exact same way that we would talk of a human being's past thoughts.

genome. At the same time, the genetic code imperfection is irrelevant in any person's reasonable human functioning, and especially that of Jesus' fully Spirit empowered human functioning. It merely becomes an issue if a person (including Jesus) is expected to display superhuman functioning in terms of not getting tired, not getting old, not having limits to knowledge, etc. Jesus' kenosis placed him fully within these human limitations without Him losing his divine status. Nevertheless, he had to function in utter reliance upon the Father through the Holy Spirit.

In a similar way, the human words of Scripture are subject to human limitation without losing their divine status. They, equally, are utterly dependent on the eternal, transcendent Word/Mind/Truth/Presently-Speaking-Reality of God for their divine status. Equally, too, their human limitation is irrelevant in their normal functioning as the sacramental vehicle for God's Word/Mind/Truth/Presently-Speaking-Reality. Any limitation merely becomes an issue when the Scripture is expected to display super-epistemological functioning such as in empirical inerrancy. As Barth (in Bloesch 1994: 39) stated: 'We know what we say when we call the Bible the Word of God only when we recognize its human imperfection in face of its divine perfection, and its divine perfection in spite of its human imperfection.'

At the same time this research opposes the practice of interpreting any single part of Scripture as irrelevant, open to dismissal, or open to critical reconstruction. I believe that the actual structure and propositional content of Scripture, down to the last letter, fall completely within God's will and cannot be tampered with or bypassed. If my above understanding is in any way correct then Jesus' warning against changing 'the least stroke of a pen' (Mt 5:18) can equally be spoken against empirical inerrantists and reconstructive fallibilists.

This dissertation attempts to be true to the tensions inherent in all of God's dealing with humankind and in all human endeavours. In this light it seems useful to me to talk of two poles with regard to scripture. One can approach the word/Word of God in terms of perfection in the very design of Scripture versus perfection in the Holy Spirit enabled interpretation of Scripture. At this point I have to take refuge in mystery. It is no more clear to me how these two poles are related than it is clear how a human created by God can be a separate person, capable of returning or refusing God's love, nor how Jesus can be fully God and fully human. The complexity is increased if one considers that at each pole (design and interpretation) there is a further tension between the divine and the human, with each pole involving a God-human interaction.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that God is sovereign (encompassing and sustaining all tensions) and has designed the reality of a dynamic interaction between a substantive design of Scripture and a creative and powerful interpretation by the Holy Spirit. In God we can therefore confidently use the Scripture as a foundation and authority, being sure of its design and of the interpretative dynamics that we undertake in relating to it, down to the last letter.

I fully identify with the inerrantists' concern to maintain a high view of Scripture that is completely reliable and normative. It is vital to respond to the numerous attacks by a-theistic, a-theological worldviews masquerading as true science, literature and history. The models and methods involved in the science of a high view of Scripture, such as harmonization and in-depth word studies, are valuable and to be pursued.

However, we do not need to go beyond what God has established in Scripture and we do not need to place the locus of truth in the very word and text of Scripture, in conflict with extra-scriptural knowledge. As argued throughout, placing the locus of knowledge in God resolves this problem. Ironically, trying to maintain a high view of Scripture by fighting an empirically inerrant battle ultimately leads to the discrediting of Scripture. It is a losing and unnecessary

battle and is actually contributing to the ‘trashing’ of Scripture by society. This is happening most acutely today in the culture wars, with the unnecessary insistence on a literal reading of Genesis, with an unwarranted rejection of evolution. Augustine’s (in Alexander 2008:352) comments, written centuries ago, remain highly relevant today:

Now it is a disgraceful and dangerous thing for an infidel to hear a Christian, presumably giving the meaning of Scripture, talking nonsense on these topics...the shame is not so much that an ignorant individual is derided, but that people outside the household of faith think our sacred writers held such opinions, and, to the great loss of those for whose salvation we toil, the writers of our Scriptures are criticized and rejected as unlearned men.

Working within the assumption of the faithfulness of God assuring the trustworthiness of the text, this research opts for a tension between a confessional and a constructive, critical hermeneutical position. It works with the dynamic of the text within contexts in order to determine the ‘meaning’ of the text for life. The goal is the edification of life through the methodology of wisdom thinking.

### 5.5.5 Unity versus diversity

The issue of unity versus diversity is a key battleground in the Scripture wars and it obviously directly correlates with the issue of inspiration. In terms of a high view of Scripture, an inspired or inerrant Bible cannot contradict itself. Conversely, for those with a low view of Scripture, contradictions in Scripture serve as one of the strongest proofs that it is not inspired or inerrant.<sup>102</sup>

Contradiction can be an issue within an individual book of the Bible but the diversity versus unity debate usually refers to the relationship between different authors and supremely to the relationship between the two Testaments. There is a complex interrelationship between the Old Testament and the New as already indicated in the section on *sensus plenior*, and I shall examine different approaches to this interrelationship.

#### 5.5.5.1 Perspectives against and for the unity of Scripture

Blomberg (2000: par 1) sees the post-Enlightenment focus on hearing ‘each book and each author [of the Bible] in its own terms’ as ‘salutary’ but states that this has led to a denial of unity and canon itself. As Goldsworthy (2000: sect 1 par 2) explains, biblical theology assumes a unity of the whole Bible, but most biblical theologies written since the mid nineteenth centuries have been theologies of OT or NT, treated separately. This is in contradiction to ‘the conviction common to all the New Testament authors that their message has its roots in the Old Testament.’

Nevertheless, this kind of diversity is required by postmodernism, which rejects all metanarratives. This directly rules out the possibility of canon and the unity of Scripture (Goldsworthy 2000: sect 1 par 4). Watson (2001: 162) states that, ‘Modernity holds biblical unity to be no longer credible, and postmodernity deems it to be ethically offensive.’ Walter Brueggemann (in Watson 2001: 162), for example, believes concern for biblical unity is an expression of ‘the pervasive Western, Christian propensity to flatten, to refuse ambiguity, to lose density, and to give universalizing closure’—a propensity that may be traced in part to ‘the Constantinian establishment of Christianity, whereby the political purpose of the religion is to provide reliable legitimacy for the claims of power.’ I do not accord theological statements like

<sup>102</sup> ‘The refusal to regard the Bible as Scripture, i.e. as the word of God, reflects the belief that the biblical documents, being historical in nature and diverse in outlook, do not constitute a coherent and established canon. As a result, biblical theology is thought to be impossible’ (Schnabel 2000b: sect 3 par 1).

Brueggemann's undue authority for they sound like a parrot-like repetition of postmodern hubris, without sufficient attempt at nuancing and balance.

Blomberg (2000: par 1) explains that church history has typically emphasized Scripture's unity, harmonizing seeming contradictions with typology, allegory and the 'rule of faith', with 'clearer texts being used to interpret more opaque ones.' Carson (2000a: sect 1 par 38) insists that despite the complexity and debatable nature of the way different parts of Scripture interact, those with a high view of Scripture insist that what gives the canonical documents their unity is that, for all their enormous diversity, one Mind, one Actor, stands behind them....the unity here envisaged is a unity of substance in the source documents themselves.'

Goldsworthy (2003: sect 1 par 3) summarizes the following points over which most evangelicals find agreement concerning Scripture:

- 1.The inspiration and authority of the Bible.
- 2.The unity of the biblical message within its diversity.
- 3.The continuity of certain basic biblical themes.
- 4.The organic relationship of the Old Testament to the New Testament.
- 5.The fulfilment by Christ of all Old Testament expectations.

Goldsworthy (2003: sect 1 par 3) notes that there is 'a range of approaches' to these points and a 'readiness...to think through some of the issues of theological method.' This is indeed true, and many evangelicals engage deeply with all aspects of Scripture from an ever more rigorous perspective. The above five points are generally dismissed outside of evangelical circles, but there has not been sufficient engagement with the deductive and inductive method, science and results of a high view of Scripture, for this dismissal to be conclusive.

When one takes a common sense approach to the Bible it's unity is more striking than its diversity: 'In no other literature besides the Bible do some forty authors or editors, writing in a period of over a thousand years, in places and cultures as widely separated as Rome and Babylon, succeed in developing a body of literature that even at a first inspection gives an indication of being a unity' (Fuller in Blomberg 2000: par 26).

Academic study is by nature divisive and critical (in the non-pejorative sense of the words, i.e. dividing and critiquing in order to analyze and understand), but this approach easily becomes divisive and critical in the pejorative, subjective sense.

A simple analogy serves to show how common sense reading should not be unnecessarily displaced by a concern for critical and complex investigation.

Imagine a person receiving a letter from a loved one and instead of reading and responding to the letter they immediately entered into research concerning the background of the postman, lab analyses on the nature of the ink and paper, graphic analysis on the handwriting style, etc. This would be absurd and ridiculous. The analogy cannot be pressed too far for the biblical writings are separated by culture and time and such investigation is vital in order to understand the message. Furthermore, it requires faith and conviction to recognize the Bible as a unified communication of love and invitation from God. Nevertheless, I believe the metaphor makes a point that needs to serve as a corrective to unbridled scepticism and complex investigation. It also shows that one cannot ultimately correctly relate to the Scriptures in isolation from a relationship with God.

All research should contribute to an understanding of the basic illocutionary intent of the Bible, i.e. invitation into relationship. When it is used to unfairly undermine the text and invalidate the possibility of this invitation it is operating out of bad faith.



### 5.5.5.2 Perspectives in favour of unity in diversity

I agree fully with Blomberg (2000: par 28-32) that the enormous diversity that exists in the Bible needs to be respected. This includes diversity between the Testaments, between different books and within individual books, as well as diversity of themes, genres, sub genres and literary forms. Thiselton (1992) and Vanhoozer (1998) also argue for respecting this diversity.

Blomberg (2000: par 38) eloquently summarizes the challenge and clarifies the consequences:

In short, the unity and diversity of Scripture must be acknowledged and held in a delicate balance. More liberal scholarship tends to focus so much on diversity that the unity disappears. More conservative scholarship tends to focus so much on unity that the diversity disappears. Without a recognition of the unity of Scripture, the canon in its entirety cannot function as the authoritative foundation for Christian belief and practice as historically it has done. Without an appreciation of the diversity that comes from hearing each text, book and author on its own terms, one risks misinterpreting Scripture and not discerning what God intended to say to his people at any given point in their history. Theologically, the unity of Scripture marks out clear limits of thought and behaviour beyond which individuals or 'churches' may not legitimately be called Christian. On the other hand, the diversity of Scripture demonstrates how no one sect or ecclesiastical tradition has a monopoly of the truth. One can become heretical by being either too broad-minded or too narrow-minded!

The more neutral aspects of critical scholarship need to be engaged with, without buying into the associated unwarranted scepticism. This is vital in order to receive necessary correctives in order to understand the true nature of Scripture (Blomberg 1986: 161; Goldsworthy 2003: sect 2 par 3).

### 5.5.5.3 Means of suggesting unity

Numerous approaches exist for arguing the unity of Scripture. Obviously these need to be performed in a hermeneutically responsible way that maintains a correct tension between unity and diversity.

#### a) The quest for a unifying centre

The search for a unifying centre has been a key response to the problem of diversity in biblical studies. Themes such as 'covenant' or 'the mighty acts of God' in the OT and 'kingdom' or 'Christology' in the NT have been proposed (Blomberg 2000: par 5-6). In order to find unity between the two testaments broad themes like promise and fulfillment and salvation history have been proposed. No themes have been accepted by all and the danger remains of marginalizing certain material or creating a canon within a canon, which contradicts claims that all of Scripture is relevant (2Tim 3:16) (: par 10).

I believe that it is not necessary to focus on any single unifying theme and multiple themes should be engaged with in order to appreciate the richness of Scripture. Nevertheless, while no single description is possible, it is irrefutable that a God-human relationship is a theme and goal that runs throughout Scripture and more precise sub-themes should not distract us from this reality (Jr 24:7; Jn 14:20).

#### b) Harmonization

Harmonization is not an illegitimate tool forced upon the biblical text. It is a basic aspect of common sense living and knowledge. All aspects of knowledge, including science and

worldviews involve the harmonizing of conflicting facts. Accepted theories are based on inference to the best explanation and all tensions and inconsistencies are reduced to acceptable levels, but they are never done away with. Harmonization is thus a neutral concept and it can be done in a valid or irresponsible way.

Carson (1983) and Blomberg (1986) provide sound guidelines for responsible harmonization. A key principle that has emerged in recent scholarship is that the original context and intent of a passage needs to be respected.

The imperfect and developmental nature of all knowledge means that the unity of Scripture should not be disparaged upon encountering difficulties. Blomberg (2000: par 33) suggests it is legitimate to leave certain questions open, particularly in the light of the vast amount of information about the ancient world which is simply unknown. Individuals have given up on the Bible and faith due to seeming contradictions within the text and between the text and history. Later literary and historical discoveries have vindicated the Bible and shown that the sceptical response was premature.

### c) Development

A common sense approach to the Bible shows that God has been forming a people for Himself over centuries. The fact that the exact nature of God's revelation to people would unfold and grow in depth of understanding is quite reasonable. The most dramatic shift occurs in the superseding of the sacrificial temple system in Jesus and we are left with the hermeneutical question of continuity versus discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and respective covenants. Without understanding this dynamic the Bible does indeed seem contradictory and arbitrary. For example, the New Atheists, for the most part ignorant of Scripture's internal logic and economy, refer to Scripture as full of contradictions and suggest that believers pick and choose (rejecting the sacrificial system for example) according to an extra-biblical factor such as common sense.

The concept of development is intimately linked to other factors that have been discussed, such as *sensus plenior*, and it too can be simplistically applied to illegitimately overlook Scripture's tensions and difficulties:

[The best model to illuminate the concept is the] organic one (seed leads to plant)...We are dealing with the growth of a single specimen, not transmutation into new species. It follows that systematic theology is possible, in the same way that the botanical description of a tree is possible. That there is growth and development in revealed truth within the canon requires, not the abolition of systematic theology, but treatment that is sensitive to the nature of the object being studied

(Carson 1983: 83)

### d) Jesus and the gospel

Watson (2001: 161) discusses how 'biblical unity may be grounded in the process of divine inspiration which is believed to have generated these writings, or it may be grounded in a theory of providential ordering.' In terms of the inspiration theory, human agency is subsumed within God's agency: 'On this view, scriptural unity is grounded in a doctrine of inspiration which traces all the scriptural texts back to a single divine authorship ...[making it] authoritative, ...sufficient and...non-contradictory' (:163-164). According to Watson (2001:164) the inspiration approach is not actually scriptural. It arises out of 'a series of *a priori* deductions from the fundamental equation of scripture and Word of God'. The providential ordering approach is an '*a posteriori*, inductive approach ...[giving] greater weight to the individual character of texts and genres, and

thus to the *mediated* character of the divine Word' (:164). In this approach unity arises out of 'a *providential ordering* of scripture that ensures that each part has its particular role in the divine self-communication' (:164).

While finding much of value in both approaches Watson (2001: 165-166) states,

neither...can truly be said to be *evangelical*.... both... operate within the framework of a self-contained, foundational 'doctrine of scripture'...[which] is almost entirely *formal* in character, and has little to say about the *content* or *subject-matter* of the biblical testimony. The result is that God's action in relation to scripture is removed from its proper context within God's overarching, comprehensive action of reconciling the world to himself in and through Jesus, together with everything that leads up to it and that flows from it. It is, of course, precisely *this* divine action of which the gospel speaks.

Watson (2001:166-177) examines the conflict between Paul and the legalists in Galatians and the way that Paul, on the surface, seems to be reading the Old Testament 'against the grain' in line with his own personal agenda as argued by some non-evangelicals. He concludes that this is not the case when the law is examined closely to show its connection with the gospel. 'The gospel accords with the scriptures only when the scriptures are read or reread in the light of the gospel. But this rereading must show itself to be, in broad outline, a plausible interpretation of the fundamental dynamics of the divine-human relationship as attested in scripture' (:182).

#### **5.5.5.4 A hermeneutical approach to unity and diversity**

In response both to an over-sceptical approach to diversity in Scripture and to excessive attempts at harmonization to explain this diversity, it needs to be said that all of life displays this kind of diversity and may not be able to be harmonized. In science, for example, one has the particle and wave nature of matter as well as tensions between determinacy and indeterminacy, as in Heizenberg's indeterminacy principle, resulting in chaos theory. In normal history and life a superficial examination of events will turn up seeming contradictions until more information is brought to light.

Seeming contradiction does not just happen in terms of incomplete information; it also occurs when categories are confused or when the data is looked at out of context. For example, a person piercing another screaming person with a knife may be mistaken for a murderer until we step back and realize it is a father trying to remove venom, due to a snake bite to his young son's arm. Or let us imagine an artificial being, able to reason but with no knowledge of human relationships, being told John is Paul's father. In the next moment he may hear someone referring to John as a son and imagine a contradiction has taken place. Upon further education on the complexity of life and society this being will realise that there is no contradiction, for the complex pattern of human life means that the same person can simultaneously be a son, a brother, a father and a grandfather.

Just as anachronistic evaluation of Scripture is faulty (as when the Bible's historiography is judged in terms of the standards of modern historiography), so too, what could be termed a misapplication or chauvinism of holism is equally wrong. I understand this to mean the judging of a part in a bigger process, for not having the capacities and logic of the completed process. This is what happens when parts of Scripture are termed cruel, chauvinistic, or superstitious. The direction of any point of Scripture in relation to its context needs to be taken into account. Thus it is quite wrong to say that Paul was being purely chauvinistic for saying that 'A woman should learn in quietness and full submission' (1 Tm 2:11). Given the patriarchal context, where women were not generally educated, this verse, talking of women learning, is a radical step in the gospel's blessing and freeing of women. These ideas are strongly relevant to difficult sayings and 'texts of terror', which will be dealt with in chapter six.

In conclusion, it is the witness of many believers that they genuinely experience the Bible to be a single, coherent whole and they believe that they experience the same God in all parts of the Scripture. Innumerable conflicts and contradictions do arise but they get resolved in ways that are not implausible and that lead to a greater depth of faith and a greater trust in the Bible and in God. This is my experience and I believe it arises both out of the unity that is inherent in the Bible and the interpretive presence of the Holy Spirit, these two aspects always occurring in conjunction.

From my perspective, cognitively, the unity exists in a dynamic of tension. Parts of the Bible intellectually cohere in ways that seem irrefutable by any rational standards and far more plausible than the comparatively flimsy arguments of sceptics. However, at other parts tensions arise that transcend my rational capacities and faith and trust in the character of God play a much greater role; this is the case in terms of reconciling a loving God with the existence of hell. If all parts of the Bible were cognitively comfortable we should very much suspect it to be a purely human book.

### 5.5.6 The propositional versus existential nature of Scripture

In all types of language, from straight poetry to technical texts, at all levels of society, from highly erudite to barely educated, language is used in a figurative sense. Scripture, science and everyday life are replete with poetic, symbolic and metaphorical language: 'Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy' (Ps 98: 8); 'Dad blew a fuse when I told him about the car'; 'A magnetic *force field*' (even within its own domain, science has a necessarily metaphorical character).

This recourse to metaphor and simile suggests a surplus of meaning in life that needs to burst the confines of straight conceptual language.<sup>103</sup> This points to reality having richer textures and vaster dimensions than those that can be conceived by the empirical structures of science with its reliance on the contingent structures of language. It can be argued that this is exactly what one would expect if this finite world is the creation of an infinite creator. If the greater is transposed into the lesser, it is expected that the lesser will be forced to combine its limited elements in creative ways to try and recapture and express that eternity which has been placed in its heart (Eccl 3:11), yet which has not been given to its conceptual structures, like treasure in a jar of clay, pointing beyond itself to its origin (2Cor 4:7).

The vital role of imagery is clearly expressed in Scripture as well:

[T]he Bible is much more a book of images [T] and motifs than of abstractions and propositions....The stories, the parables, the sermons of the prophets, the reflections of the wise men, the pictures of the age to come, the interpretations of past events all tend to be expressed in images which arise out of experience....The Bible is a book that images the truth as well as stating it in abstract propositions. Correspondingly, the truth that the Bible expresses is often a matter of truthfulness to human experience as distinct from ideas that are true rather than false.

(Ryken et al 1998e: par 1-2)

This reinforces the idea of the comprehensive nature of knowledge as it reflects the richness of God's creative mind. This richness is not only reflected in our language but in our very mental processes with the left hemisphere of the brain focusing on language and the right on images.

<sup>103</sup> 'Ricoeur proposes that it is poetic or creative language which best expresses the surplus, the "more than actuality," of human being. Poetic language responds to this surplus of being with a surplus of meaning' (Vanhooser 1990: 8).

It is also useful to clarify the relationship between symbolism and imagery. Ryken and others (1998f: par 1) define an image as 'any word that names a concrete thing...[or any] object or action that we can picture.' Symbols, on the other hand, signify, represent or stand in for something. Furthermore, a symbol 'draws together facets of meaning of that which it symbolizes, concentrating or compressing them in a pregnant fashion....The provisions of the Old Testament dispensation, seen from the vantage-point of the final revelation in the New Testament, are symbols. They foreshadowed that which was to come, the reality of salvation in Jesus Christ, anticipating it in germ' (Knudsen 1988: par 1-2).

In Scripture, a concept or reality like water can function as an image, as in the water that flowed when Moses struck the rock, with its connotation of sustaining life (Ex 17:6), or equally as a symbol representing eternal life (Jn 4:14) (Ryken et al 1998f: par 5-7). Ryken et al (1998f: par 5-7) caution that symbolic or metaphorical use of concepts 'need to do justice to the literal qualities of the image, remembering that metaphors and similes are images first and comparisons secondly.'

Ryken et al's (1998g: par 1-13) discussion of motifs and archetypes also helps to shatter unnecessary divisions between myth, historical fact, and the literary and figurative representations of that fact. Motifs are sets of 'conventions—ingredients that recur so often in similar situations that they become expectations in the minds of writers and readers alike' (:par 3) and archetypes are 'an image or pattern that recurs throughout literature and life...[they are] the universal elements of human experience...[their presence makes the Bible] a primal and elemental book' (1998g: par 1).

A false dichotomy is often created between focusing on the importance of the propositional nature of Scripture versus de-emphasizing this aspect in favour of Scripture's existential meaning. Inerrancy obviously correlates with the former.

#### **5.5.6.1 Understanding the term 'proposition' as used with reference to Scripture**

I have already dealt with the concept of propositions as an aspect of language, in section 2.5.3. This section will continue looking at it with closer reference to one's understanding of Scripture.

Referring to Ronald Nash's view, Vanhoozer (1986: 57) states that 'propositions are the minimal vehicles of truth and that propositional revelation is the divine communication of knowledge and truth.' He explains that the term developed in the context of 'the neoorthodox attack on the idea that divine revelation is rationally communicated to human beings' (:57). In the words of McDonald (In Vanhoozer 1986: 57), 'revelation is personal encounter, not propositional disclosure.' However, although the term 'propositional' is recent, the focus on cognitive truth that it emphasizes dates back to earliest Christianity.

There is immense controversy involved in the term 'proposition', both philosophically and, consequentially, even amongst evangelicals, some of whom locate propositional truth beyond sentences, whereas others link it inextricably to sentences, talking of 'conceptual-verbal' revelation (Vanhoozer 1986: 57-62). The relationship between proposition and sentence links inextricably to the philosophical issues of the relationship between mind, language, ideas, and reality. As I understand it, the same issue repeats itself throughout different areas of knowledge. For example, consciousness cannot be reduced to biochemical processes yet it does not exist unless grounded in or emerging from specific biochemical processes. In the same way, meaning cannot exist apart from propositions, which in turn cannot exist apart from language and sentences, even though propositions and meaning have a reality beyond the concrete limitations of words and grammar.

### 5.5.6.2 Objections to a propositional view of Scripture

Vanhoozer (1986: 64) explains that modern theology distrusts the Evangelical focus on propositions, worrying that it renders revelation 'abstract and lifeless', as well as objectified and thus susceptible to manipulation.

There is much truth in this concern. It is clear that the concern for propositional truth makes many Evangelicals unnecessarily wary of reading the Bible in a poetic and literary way. Vanhoozer states that Evangelicals are especially wary of 'legend, myth, midrash, and saga - genres that appear *prima facie* to vitiate Scripture's truthfulness'. This makes them vulnerable to claims such as Barton's 'that Fundamentalists are seldom students of the humanities and mainly read nonfiction and that consequently they do not know how to read the Bible' (Vanhoozer 1986: 75).

Hyper-orthodoxy is a severe problem in many parts of the church today. Jesus' main opponents were the Pharisees and the spirit that animated them still exists today, manifesting itself in similar legalism. However, it must be remembered that an anti-propositional or anti-doctrinal approach is not the solution. Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees was not that they held too strongly to the Scriptures, but precisely that they had set aside the commands of God for mere human tradition (Mk 7:8-9).

Arguments given in defence of a high, propositional view of Scripture have a valid role to play; yet they can incur similar problems to statements of inerrancy. In the same way that theories and models in science are vital for referring to reality, these statements are necessary in order to clarify Scripture's high view of itself, which many try to obscure. However, scientific models fall short of reality and are not to be confused with it. So too the written words of Scripture cannot be conflated with the living Word.

### 5.5.6.3 Objections to an anti-propositional view of Scripture

The solution to hyper-orthodoxy or hyper-propositionalism is not to attempt a doctrineless Christianity. Those who think they've moved beyond doctrine have in fact just driven their doctrine dangerously underground. Hidden presuppositions and worldview are far less honest and far more dangerous, like reefs hidden under water. It is simply not possible to have life without truth, or truth without doctrine, or doctrine without propositions. This is the situation, irrespective of how one nuances and uses the term 'proposition;' whether one uses an alternative term, or whether one denies one's use of the concept.

Nevertheless, there is a strong resistance to both the term and the concept. Vanhoozer (1986: 67-75) discusses 'the "heresy" of propositional paraphrase.' Arguing strongly for propositions, Henry recognizes that biblical truth can be expressed in various genres but states that 'Regardless of the parables, allegories, emotive phrases and rhetorical questions used by these writers, their literary devices have a logical point which can be propositionally formulated and is objectively true or false' (in Vanhoozer 1986: 69). For literary critics this is a "'propositional heresy" –the belief that the content of literature can be restated in nonliterary form' (Vanhoozer 1986: 72). Vanhoozer (1986: 70) explains that it is axiomatic for modern literary critics that '[l]iterature is...an autonomous realm...hermetically sealed off from "external" questions of history or science.'

### 5.5.6.4 Arguing for a propositional-existential unity within the realm of pastoral care

'All you need is love' (the Beatles).

'Watch your life and doctrine closely' (1Tm 4:16).

In line with the complex, hermeneutical approach of this research I argue that a valid existential focus in theology and spirituality cannot be divorced from propositional-doctrinal concerns. Christianity simply is not that kind of religion.

McLaren and the emerging church movement were discussed in section 5.3.2.2. They will be examined further in the context of approaches to Scripture and doctrine. McClaren focuses on abundant Christian living rather than getting orthodox doctrine right (2004, 2006). This is salutary in terms of a corrective to hyper-orthodoxy, but it does not represent a balanced response. It has been argued that proponents of the Emerging Church movement arise out of extreme legalistic church traditions and thus go to the opposite extreme (Breshear 2004).

I would argue that truth and doctrine are in fact vital, for this is a critical aspect of doing and being good. Paul admonishes Timothy to watch his life *and* doctrine closely (1 Tm 4:16), Jesus criticizes the Pharisees for being ignorant of *both* the Scriptures and the power of God (Mt 22:29), and the *word* planted in us is able to save us (Ja 1:21). McClaren's 'Generous Orthodoxy' contains many wonderful statements on 'doing and being good' but it has an amazing dearth of scriptural referencing. Many of McClaren's statements are scriptural, but they remain idealistic gas when not grounded in objective revelation and they will be dispersed and dissolved over time by the harsh winds of scepticism and human rebellion. As will be discussed below, 'waxing lyrical' about spirituality and love and brotherhood is the easiest thing on earth. It is the hard, unglamorous, doctrinally-linked solutions that are difficult, in fact impossible, except through Christ and what he has objectively achieved. I fully support Sayer's (in Carson 1983: 94) trenchant comments in this regard:

[I]t is worse than useless for Christians to talk about the importance of Christian morality, unless they are prepared to take their stand upon the fundamentals of Christian theology. It is a lie to say that dogma does not matter; it matters enormously. It is fatal to let people suppose that Christianity is only a mode of feeling; it is virtually necessary to insist that it is first and foremost a rational explanation of the universe. It is hopeless to offer Christianity as a vaguely idealistic aspiration of a simple and consoling kind; it is, on the contrary, a hard, tough, exacting, and complex doctrine, steeped in a drastic and uncompromising realism. And it is fatal to imagine that everybody knows quite well what Christianity is and needs only a little encouragement to practise it.

I argue, therefore, that any theology or pastoral care that does not engage to take seriously and do the hard work needed to maintain a balance between life and doctrine, and between the propositional and non-propositional aspects of Scripture, lacks warrant and should only be used as part of a more comprehensive and balanced scheme.

C S Lewis' life and work were immersed in language. He remains, therefore, a valuable resource for learning to deal appropriately with language on its own terms. Vanhoozer (1986: 75-78) approvingly examines Lewis' approach to the Bible, and Lewis' distinguishing of 'two modes of knowledge: *savoir*, or propositional truth (descriptive knowledge about reality), and *connaître*, or participatory truth (knowledge by personal acquaintance). When we are loving the person or bearing the pain, we cannot also be intellectually apprehending personality or pain' (: 76). Lewis also believed that some ideas are reached through metaphor alone or not at all, placing 'a nonmetaphorical or propositional, paraphrase...out of the question' (: 77-78).

Opting for a hermeneutical model that maintains tensions has significant implications for ministry and pastoral care. For example, recognizing the limits of cognitive propositions means that one will not try and 'reason someone into the Kingdom' or 'verbally convince someone out of their

pastoral problem.' At the same time one will not try and facilitate transformation without dealing with people's beliefs through engagement with Scripture.

In the interests of moving from the abstract to the concrete situation of pastoral care I will briefly outline some examples of areas where existential and proposition concerns cannot be separated.

### **a) Faith and salvation**

Faith as a leap in the dark or emotional wishful thinking (the caricature that sceptics have of religious faith) is seen as 'mindless', although there will always be propositional content, albeit unconscious. Faith as understood in Scripture, on the other hand, requires propositional content. Our salvation is based on faith in Jesus and in what Christ has done. These are objective historical facts.<sup>104</sup> Salvation and non-salvation are ontologically distinct states, which are linked to distinct propositional beliefs.

The Bible links salvation to believing certain things (Rm 10:9). Yet believing is never portrayed in Scripture as a merely intellectual event. We are called to watch our life and doctrine closely (1 Tm 4:16). You simply cannot separate the two. These beliefs are not arbitrary or interchangeable, any more than the exact nature of the medicine one may take for one's heart condition or the exact number of the boarding gate one needs to go through to take one's flight are arbitrary and interchangeable. The very fact that these analogies seem unreasonable ('They don't apply for they are talking about something quite different!') shows how we still suffer under the spell of the post-Kantian distinction between issues of fact versus value.

### **b) Personal relationships**

One cannot have genuine relationship without acknowledgement of past and present actions, thoughts and words, and these can only be related to in terms of some sort of propositional understanding. Without these there is no person left to relate to.

### **c) Love**

Contrary to the Beatles song, 'All you need is love,' and a myriad of other prophets of popular culture, one needs more than vague, emotionally based, idolatrous conceptions of love. Love as an abstract concept has no existential valence or purchasing power. Love is made manifest through specific deeds (Jn 3:16).

God's love is shown in specific historical acts. As we read the propositional record of these acts in faith, we are connected with that reality in God's being and the propositional content is burst and superseded in a spiritual encounter that surpasses understanding and impacts every aspect of our existence.

We must move beyond propositional content but we must not despise it for it is a necessary and mysterious link within a greater relational reality. Conversely, even if we could directly enter into this reality in some sort of direct, proposition-bypassing encounter (as does seem to happen in Scripture and ministry), this encounter would impact our whole life and it would filter into

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<sup>104</sup> Carson's (2008b) criticism of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic programme is that it does not commit to any objective reference for Scripture. He states that Lindbeck actually falls prey to Bibliolatry for salvation becomes linked to believing in the Bible and using it rather than believing in the salvation events that the Bible refers to.



propositional categories that are part of our everyday life. For example, we would reflect on this event and this reflection would introduce propositions.

#### **d) Creativity**

Creativity and freedom are often posited as alternatives to propositions and doctrine. This is quite false. Creativity without discipline and form is impossible. Musicians, dancers and artists all have their theory and exercises that undergird their free expression.

#### **e) Service**

Waxing lyrical about service goals is quite vacuous in and of itself. A Communist and a Western economic system will both have prosperity and maximal growth as stated goals. In the same way a medical doctor and herbalist will both talk about health and healing as stated goals. Yet no one will arbitrarily accept the one as being as valid as the other, on the basis of these stated goals. One knows through commonsense and experience that real and irreconcilable differences do exist between these different systems. Relating to their propositional expressions is a vital way of experiencing and choosing between these systems. The propositionally-linked reality of their distinct ontologies, values, priorities and methodologies is acknowledged to be vitally important, really making a difference in the long run.

Similarly, all religions and all streams of Christianity talk of being blessed and connecting with God. But the propositional or doctrinal content underlying each approach really does exist (whether admitted or not) and really does make a world of difference.

#### **f) Knowledge and communication.**

All knowledge and communication involves content and propositions and choices are made between different sets of these. The most ardent arguments against proposition and referential reality, assume the very things against which they are arguing. On the other hand, it is not necessary to go to the other extreme. This research does not view propositions positivistically with a strict understanding of correspondence. Rather they are normative assumptions/statements functioning as 'sign-posts' for the dynamics of hermeneutics.

### **5.5.7 The relationship between revelation, event, word, and text**

Once one accepts that the propositional-existential unity of Scripture should be respected, an expanded understanding of the Word of God can be entered into. Each of these understandings is vital in order to have as complete an understanding of Scripture as possible, in order to correctly handle 'the word of truth' (2 Ti 2:15), not as an end in itself, but in order to fulfill the two great commandments.

#### **5.5.7.1 The Word as communication in general**

The possibility of intelligent communication between God and humankind is assumed in the OT (Fanning 2000: sect 1.2 par 4) and the communication of God is 'always in a context of initiating and pursuing a relationship with people' (sect 1.3 par 1). God communicates in diverse ways and His word is expressed in multiple forms, including 'self-disclosure', 'law' and 'blessing'; through His word God reveals His nature and purpose and His expectation of humankind (: sect 1.2 par 3).

### 5.5.7.2 The Word as natural theology

A key issue in revelation is whether humankind has an innate knowledge of God. This affects the possibility of natural theology and the roles of general versus special revelation. According to Pinnock (1988: par 3), Barth's denial of revelation outside of Jesus is unscriptural. In conscious contradistinction to Barth, he states that God can be perceived in creation, in God's sovereignty over human history, and in the moral and religious aspect of human nature. Pinnock (1988: par 5) does, however, highlight the limitations of general revelation in that 'while it calls attention to a moral and religious defect in us, it does not highlight a solution for it', thus necessitating special revelation.

I would argue, against Pinnock (1988), that the necessity of God's revelation is vital for creation as well, thus weakening the claims of natural theology. If one accepts that creation has meaning in terms of God, then does God not have to tell us about the meaning He has for all of creation. And does postmodernism not show that multiple interpretations of the meaning of creation are possible? So why believe the positive or theistic interpretations of creation? I think that an over-optimistic view of creation as a revealer of revelation stems from not distinguishing the extent to which creation is being viewed through post-conversion spectacles and on the basis of values and assumptions that have been forged through God's special revelation through Word and Spirit.<sup>105</sup> The difficulty involved in distinguishing these dynamics suggests that the very terms special and general revelation may be inappropriate.<sup>106</sup>

A further argument against natural theology is given by Blond (1998). Although he claims that it is vital to be a realist concerning God's phenomenal presence in creation, he rejects natural theology for it attempts to base proof of this reality on a secular understanding of the world: In natural theology reality is known through the senses and the possibility of knowing God occurs through the sensible appreciation of his creation. However, in this scheme, a measure of correspondence or similarity is necessary for the creature to know the creator (1998: 5). As a result, the disastrous move, where theology surrendered to a secular scheme, occurred with Duns Scotus (1266-1308), who 'elevated being (*ens*) to a higher station over God, so that being could be distributed to both God and His creatures' (: 6). Blond (1998:8) suggests that this threatens 'a complete erasure of God by the creature'. 'The qualitative analogical perception of God's difference from us has been supplanted by a quantitative understanding of His differentiation', leading humankind to feel powerless before a malign and utterly powerful God, resulting in 'modernity's demand for human self-assertion' (: 8-9).

Blond (1998: 7) argues that this idolatry must be rejected for 'things themselves belong to God; they are utterly donated givens, gifts whose phenomenology is saturated with their origin in God.' We must reject the 'idea of any reality existing outside and apart from God...[with the resultant] idea of a world of self-sufficient independent ontological entities whose phenomenology reflects only this.'

<sup>105</sup> According to Runia (1988: par 8) although Protestant theology accepts the idea of general revelation it rejects the concept of natural theology: 'Using the 'spectacles' of Scripture (Calvin), the believing theologian then also recognizes this self-revelation of the God and Father of Jesus Christ in the world around him. But it never becomes a separate source for the knowledge of God. Scripture remains the only source of all our theo-logy.'

<sup>106</sup> Berkhof (1979: 75) argues that the overlap between these supposedly distinct terms makes their use problematic, suggesting that revelation is too strong a term for the indirect light in nature, which is so 'diffuse that one can have the most diverse ideas as to its source' and continuing that 'any context where God communicates is an encounter event and is thus special: "general revelation" is then a contradiction in terms.' Bloesch (1992: 164) is in agreement with Berkhof when he states that the term 'general revelation' should be abandoned because of its 'ambiguity and imprecision.'

This research argues that there is ultimately one truth and one single body of knowledge. All forms and realms of knowledge are ultimately theological. This has been shown to weaken the strict separation of science and theology. In the same way it weakens too strong a distinction between special and general revelation.

### 5.5.7.3 The Word as revelation

Packer (1996b: sect 1 par 1) explains that 'reveal' comes from the Latin *revelo*, which is the translation of the Hebrew *gālā* and the Greek *apokalyptō*. While the OT uses the word in a non-religious sense the NT reserves it for theological contexts, giving it a 'quasi-technical status', also making use of other words such as *phaneroō* (manifest) to suggest it.

Pinnock (1988: par 9) clarifies the necessity of revelation: 'When it comes to self-directing persons as distinct from inert objects, revelation can only proceed if the willingness to share one's inner thoughts is present.' This is in clear contradistinction to human rationalism, as in Aristotle's concept of 'an inactive God whom man can discover by following out an argument' (Packer 1996b: sect 2 par 1). Revelation is necessitated by God's transcendence and man's sinfulness (Packer 1996b: sect 3 par 6). Furthermore, this revelation is not presented as 'information without obligation, but as a mandatory rule of faith and conduct' (Packer 1996b: sect 1 par 3), centred around God's 'purposes' and 'person' (Packer 1996b: sect 1 par 4).

### 5.5.7.4 The Word as divine presence

According to Ryken et al 'The most customary way God reveals his presence and purpose is through appearances to human beings' (1988h: par 3). The OT is replete with such events and in the NT God appears through Christ (: par 3-5). The required human response throughout is recognition (: par 4).

Once we recognize that God is intimately present in all of creation we can see that all other forms of the word involve continuity with divine presence.

### 5.5.7.5 The Word as event

Fanning (2000: sect 1.1 par 1) clarifies the relationship between word and deed in the OT. Much scholarship suggests that Hebrew thinking conflated both utterance and the objective reality referred to and utterance and 'deed or effect' (what is produced). Although 'utterances are personified as a figurative way of expressing personal involvement', especially 'In the case of the faithful, sovereign God', it is a misunderstanding to conclude 'that ancient Hebrews understood words to possess a magical power or concrete existence in themselves' (: sect 1.1 par 2). This is indicated by the OT use of these concepts in a distinct non-conflated way at numerous points (: sect 1.1 par 2). I believe this is a vital point in arguing for a high view of Scripture. If it is true that the Hebrews had this magical view of the Bible it becomes easier to dismiss a high view of Scripture as magical and unreliable. Nevertheless, as Fanning explains, since the words uttered in God's name are seen to 'come from the almighty God, his command and his action to accomplish what he desires are sometimes identical: the first implies the second; God's word accomplishes his will' (: sect 1.4 par 3).

Morphew's (2001:20) explanation of the Hebrew notion of a word-event clarifies this further. The meaning in the formula 'the word of the Lord came to' is that the word 'was to', became 'effective', occurred or 'became active reality with'. For a word to be spoken from God is for an event to occur. An essential aspect of the relationship between word and event is the cycle of promise and fulfillment. The promises to the patriarchs are fulfilled in the liberation from Egypt. During that event more promises are given through Moses. These two sets of promises are then

fulfilled in the conquest and establishment of the Davidic monarchy. Further promises are given and fulfilled, throughout the OT, pointing to the Messianic promises which found partial fulfillment in the first coming of Christ and await complete fulfillment in His second coming (: 21). This sense of ongoing fulfillment also links to the concepts dealt with in the section of *sensus plenior* (see section 5.5.2).

Firet's (1986) 'Dynamics in pastoring' provides a final vital example of an emphasis on the event-based nature of the Word of God. Firet's (1986:14) basic 'point of departure is that pastoral role-fulfillment [the act of pastoral care] mediates the coming of God in his word.' Firet (1986:15-39) develops a rich understanding of the meaning of the word of God, which includes the word as 'the form of the Lord's presence' (: 15), 'the revelation of the name [of God]' (: 18), 'the revelation of the truth' (: 23), and the actualization of salvation (: 29). The dynamic nature of God acting in the pastoral care situation makes pastoral role-fulfillment equally dynamic. Beyond the necessity of interpreting (the hermeneutic moment leading to understanding), Firet (1986: 99-101) talks of the 'agogic moment' to fully capture the dynamic nature of the pastoral encounter and emphasize that it leads to change and transformation. Firet (1986: 101) clarifies that when talking of the agogic moment, 'we now have in view a motive force inherent in the coming of God in his word and therefore in its intermediary, pastoral role-fulfillment. It is a motive force which activates the person on whom it is focused, so that that person begins to change.'

#### **5.5.7.6 The Word as speech**

It is important to note that God's handiwork in creation and his presence and action in history and through Jesus are accompanied by His speech and explication, without which the meaning of these remains hidden, partial or ambiguous (Fanning 2000: sect 1.2 par 3; Yarbrough 2000: sect 2 par 4; Packer 1988b: sect 4 par 1; Morphew 2001:20).

It makes sense, therefore, that the most common image for referring to God's communication in the Bible is word (Ryken et al: 1998d: par 2; Taylor 1996: par 1) with many other images such as law, book, scroll, lamp, sword, mirror and indirect references through referring to God's voice, mouth and, lips also abounding (Ryken et al 1998d: par 4-10; Packer 1998b: par 3; Fanning 2000: intro par 2).

These images have a measure of continuity with our human use, clearly linking God's communication to propositional forms of communication without being reduced to them.

#### **5.5.7.7 The word as written/Scripture**

Historical-critical and grammatical-historical studies reveal an interesting, complex (and disputed!) history and relationship between the oral forms of God's revelatory speech and human response and their later fixing in written form.

The arguments advanced for the validity of Scripture despite the complexity of process and result, in areas such as canon and the unity of Scripture, are relevant in this issue of the problem of oral transmission and its relationship to the final, fixed form of Scripture. One will find that objections in this instance are equally founded on unquestioned and invalid presuppositions.

The key factor is that God intends to speak to His people through his chosen prophet. A search in the NIV Bible lists the phrase 'the word of the Lord came to me (or name of prophet)' 98 times in the OT. It is clear that when the person to whom the word of the Lord came shares the message, orally or by writing it down, it does not cease to represent the truth and authority of God. The very phrase 'the word of the Lord came to me' is uttered in the context of sharing with other people.

It is equally clear that God intended His speech to be communicated to succeeding generations (Ex 17:14; Ps 78:4-6, 102:18; Jn 20:31; Rm 15:4; 1Cor 10:11). Writing it down is for the purpose of continued authoritative sharing. It in no way represents a corruption of the message or lessening of the authority. The OT contains clear examples of the written record of God's word representing God's authoritative communication and it being revered as such (Dt 28:58; 30:10; Jos 1:8; 8:32; 23:6; Neh 10:34, etc.).

In the NT the authority of the written word is multiply attested by the many ways the OT 'Scriptures' (or the synonymous 'law' or 'words of Moses') are authoritatively referred to as truth and are used in the current situation to settle questions of truth. One finds the following: authoritative reference to the phrase 'Moses wrote' by Jesus, the Pharisees, and the disciples (Mar 10:5; 12:19; Lk 20:28; Jn 1:45; 5:46; 5:47); pointing back to the law as a deciding authority ('haven't you read...') (Mt 12:5; Mk 12:10; Jn 7:42); talk of fulfilling Scripture (Lk 4:21; Jn 13:18; 17:12); the statement that the Scripture is unbreakable (Jn 10:35), etc.

#### **5.5.7.8 The Word as Jesus**

The typical OT formulas of the word of the Lord coming to people are seldom used in the NT since the focus shifts to the word coming through Jesus as indicated in Hebrews 1: 1-2 (Fanning 2000: sect 2 par 1). Jesus' full authority is indicated through direct statements (Mt 28:18) as well as implicitly in his general words, attitudes and deeds (Mat 9:6; Jn 10:38). His formula, 'I tell you the truth' (NIV) is repeated over 70 times in the gospels.

Fanning (2000: sect 2.4 par 2-4) explains that *logos* or Word is sometimes used directly as a title for Jesus (John 1:1, 14; Rev. 19:13) and this usage, in context, emphasizes Jesus identification with God, creation and humanity.

#### **5.5.7.9 The Word as the gospel**

The authority of the message in the incarnated Word of God, Jesus, is not diluted as the Word of God now becomes associated with the written and spoken words of His followers. Jesus sends the apostles as he was sent (Jn 20:21) and Paul, for example, expects his testimony to be received 'not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God' (1 The 2:13). As Fanning (2000: 2.2 par 1) explains, in Acts and the epistles the focus shifts from 'the word of God through Jesus to the word of God about Jesus', with this gospel mostly being described as 'word of God', 'word of the Lord', or simply 'the word'.

#### **5.5.8 Arguments for a high view of canon**

The issue of the scope of the canon and, in fact, of the very validity of the concept itself is directly related to the concerns of this research and the way that the Bible is used in pastoral care.

Packer (1988b: sect 1 par1) explains that the word canon, from the Greek *kanōn*, meaning a rule, measure, or standard is the primary sense in which the Bible is understood to be 'canonical'. In this sense 'Scripture expresses and mediates the authority of God...[and contains] the sum total of declarations and directives by which he requires us to live'. Canon as the defined list of books that make up Scripture is the 'secondary and derivative' meaning. Packer's terminology of 'sum total of declarations' shows that his view is inerrant and views Scripture as a deposit of propositional truths. Although I would wish to add the nuancing from earlier in this chapter I agree with this high view of canon and his following statements: 'The church has always known, more or less clearly, that it did not create a canon by discretionary fiat

but received the canon that God created for it' (Packer 1988b: sect 1 par 1). 'The Church no more gave us the New Testament canon than Sir Isaac Newton gave us the force of gravity' (Packer 1979: 109).

Numerous resources exist for investigating the history of canon (I have relied on McDonald 1995, Gillingham 1998, and Dunbar 1986) and clear criteria exist for including books in the canon (Packer 1988b: sect 1 par 1).

I am holding to the Protestant canon of 66 books.<sup>107</sup> This is done in terms of a probabilistic inference to the best explanation.

A high view of Canon and Scripture are logically interdependent. The fact that canon is indisputably linked to a complex historical process causes many to reject the possibility that it can reflect the true scope of God's scriptural revelation. The resolution in section 5.1.3 of the historically conditioned versus transcendent nature of Scripture in favour of transcendence is also relevant to arguing that the canon reflects God's chosen scope.

In addition, the issue of unity and diversity between the Old and New Testaments and how it is resolved directly affects the issue of canon. Proven contradiction would clearly undermine the notion of canon. Arguments that have been made for approaching knowledge in terms of a complex unity within diversity are assumed in this section, without being repeated. This section argues that a fixed list of authoritative books faithfully reflects the written word of God. I will be examining arguments against and for this view.

#### **5.5.8.1 Responding to arguments against the possibility of canon**

Numerous arguments exist against the possibility of an authoritative canon.

##### **a) A historical-critical focus.**

One of the criticisms of canon is that its formation reflects normal historical vagaries, precluding its authority from depending on a high view of its fixed form (Berkhof's view; 1979: 79, 83).

However, if God speaks precisely in and through our historical context there is no reason to place a limit on just how convoluted and difficult this process might be. Anti-historical revelation is the stuff of false myth like the golden tablets delivered to Joseph Smith, constituting the Mormon scriptures. In addition, the sceptics of canon overemphasize the historical 'inconsistencies' (although 'inconsistency' is a loaded and unhelpful term if one accepts that there is no a priori limitation to how God can deliver His revelation). The point is made, for example, that Luther's rejection of James was done on the basis of a high view of canon (Packer 1988b: sect 1 par 2; Carson 1994: sect 5 par 2).

Another critical-historical objection is the question of historical influence, and, ultimately, causation. McDonald (1995: 252) asks whether canon is unChristian, contrary to the freedom of the Christ event, reflecting rather the alien 'idea of a perfect guide (from the divine, as in Plato) in the Hellenistic world, or of peace and harmony in the Roman world?'

The fact that the NT canon was fixed in the fourth century is said to suggest that it is a late fabrication of the church and that the concept of canon was alien to the early church. Here too, the lines are drawn too sharply and it is clear that some concept of canon was held by the early

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<sup>107</sup> For a list of different canonical lists in church and Jewish history see McDonald (1985: 268-276) and Gillingham (1998: 50,53,61)

church, with regard to the Hebrew Scriptures (Goldsworthy 2000: sect 5 par 1; Carson 1994: sect 5 par 2-4; Balla 2000: conclusion par 3).

A final objection is that the lack of universal church agreement on the canon undermines the concept. Gillingham (1988: 46-71) surveys the different canons that have existed in early and later church history and concludes that our reading of the bible 'has to be influenced by a recognition of the uncertain nature of the Canon' (: 66).

However, the following question needs to be asked: 'How universal does agreement need to be, for canon to be authoritative?' It is a huge philosophical assumption that there has to be agreement by all parties. This is the typical all or nothing dichotomy of postmodern argument, similar to the all or nothing of omniscient knowledge or relativism that has been discussed.

Without in any way claiming that those who don't agree with the 66 books of the protestant canon are not part of the church, it is simply false to believe that the church will agree on everything and that all claims to knowledge must be suspended because of this lack of agreement. This would be equivalent to saying that the emancipation of slaves in England and America could not be proposed until all the churches agreed. Once this false criterion is laid aside the agreement concerning the canon is phenomenal and arguably miraculous (Carson 1994: sect 5 par 5)

Nevertheless, evangelicals can err in underemphasizing the complexity of the process (see, therefore, McDonald's -1995:20-21- necessary nuancing of canon 1 and canon 2.)

#### **b) A postmodern focus: respecting diversity**

The 'rule of faith' and the early creeds were clear responses to heresy. It has, however, been argued that this process actually involved vanquishing alternative and equally valid voices, rather than standing for truth, as in Walter Bauer's research (see Demarest 1988b: par 5).

Similar attitudes are shown towards the canon, especially where postmodern assumptions are in force, as Vanhoozer (1998: 134-135, 380) explains. Gillingham (1998: 66-63) and McDonald (1995: 257) are examples of authors emphasizing the importance of reading other writings that represent alternative canons in conjunction with the typical protestant canon.

McDonald (1995: 254-256) completes his in-depth study on the formation of the canon with seven provocative questions:

1. Whether 'the church was right in perceiving the need for a closed canon of scriptures'.
2. Whether 'the present biblical canon has not legitimized practices...[such as] slavery or the...subjugation of...women...[becoming] an enslaving canon that distorts the true liberating Gospel'.
3. Whether a closed canon 'limits the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the church'.
4. Whether the church should be 'limited to an OT canon to which Jesus and his first disciples were clearly not limited'.
5. Whether, 'if apostolicity is still a legitimate criterion...2 Peter, the Pastorals, and other nonapostolic literature of the NT [should still be accepted]'.
6. Whether 'a canon that emerged out of the historical circumstances in the second to the fifth centuries CE...[should be made] absolute for all time'.
7. Whether the fact that 'the Spirit inspired only the written documents of the first century...[means] the same Spirit does not speak today in the church about matters that are of significant concern, for example, the use of contraceptives, abortion, liberation, ecological irresponsibility, equal rights, euthanasia, nuclear proliferation, global genocide...and so on.'

McDonald (1995: 256) suggests that 'it may be that the time has come for the church to examine anew the above series of questions and others...to do so, of course, would be to open up "Pandora's Box," and it is doubtful whether we could ever hope to arrive at a consensus in the church on precisely what books should make up any new canon.'

I welcome all seven of McDonald's questions, for I feel that a high view of canon can be defended and can answer each of those questions fully and with integrity. On the other hand, I believe the logic of the questions themselves and the critical and postmodern assumptions and methodology that are behind these questions, perhaps unconsciously, will not fare so well.

Although it is not possible to respond to each of these questions in depth, a brief response is intended to indicate that the case against canon is not clear-cut. Questions 1 and 6 are philosophical questions and there is no clear scriptural or logical a priori reason that they cannot be answered affirmatively, depending on other evidence. Questions 4 and 5 are historical critical issues that have been dealt with above. Questions 2, 3, and 7 simply represent false dichotomies between freedom and order. An immersion in the Scriptures and an engagement with the tension between law and gospel is the recommended medicine for such inflexible thinking. Order and boundaries, far from limiting freedom, are the necessary prerequisites to it.

Responding to the postmodern critique that canon is an ideological tool, as exemplified in question 2, above, Vanhoozer (1998: 380) states,

On the contrary the canon has often proved to be an effective check against the hegemony of human institutions and traditions (cf. the Reformation!). The canon, in other words, functions as an instrument of ideology critique...[it] provides an interpretive framework by which the past can illumine the present. The canon generates not an absolute, unchanging static tradition but rather a dynamic tradition of critical reinterpretation.

McDonald's seven questions also betray a false understanding of Scripture. The canonical texts of Scripture represent a miraculous world of narrative and proposition and spiritual presence that is inexhaustible. It contains more existential and epistemological resource and balance and tension than could ever be lived up to in a thousand lifetimes. In this positive sense Lindbeck is correct in saying the text absorbs the world. But, this textual reality does not oppress or reduce the world; rather it catalyzes it. The fixing of the canon does not minimize or compromise this gospel potential. The opposite is true. Placing these texts within a boundary synergistically increases their power and glory in that same way that boundaries in all activities, from sport to music, increase their power and glory (a soccer match, for example, without rules would very quickly degenerate into an uninteresting brawl).

Vanhoozer's (1998: 349) approach to canon reinforces this argument. He emphasizes respect for the diversity of genre in Scripture.<sup>108</sup> Furthermore, he suggests that the canon itself constitutes a kind of genre:

[T]he various literary genres in the Bible themselves have only a relative independence, for they are taken up or appropriated in to a larger communicative purpose. In the context of Scripture, each of the literary genres of the Bible has an additional illocutionary force, namely, 'confessing faith' or 'testifying to Christ.' Being part of the canon, in other words, allows yet another level of complexity to emerge: the level of 'bearing witness'...With respect to canonical intention, we may have to invoke divine authorship. Accordingly, we could say that the canon represents divinely

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<sup>108</sup> 'My case for literary knowledge rests to a great degree on the centrality of literary genre' (Vanhoozer 1998: 349).



appropriated human discourse; taken together, the various books of the Bible constitute the Word of God.

A fixed canon works against oppression in another sense. The starting point for dealing with evil and oppression in this world is within each individual, himself or herself, with a full admission of personal sinfulness and deception. Being deceived and deceiving we often seek a way out. Faced with a fixed canon we have nowhere to hide and nowhere to run. We have to deal fully with God's wrath as well as His grace. We are forced to admit that there is an unyielding truth that we cannot manipulate and the only solution is to submit. The terror and confusion of this painful process give way to joy and true life as Jesus promised (Mt 10:39). With a fallible canon we can always find a loophole, we can always explain away a difficult command, and we can ultimately avoid the cross we are called to bear (Mt 10:38). This is not to say that many people with a low view of Scripture do not have a deep spirituality or live a life of sacrifice. It still remains possible, however, that those aspects of Scripture that they call into question could be the very area where they need to submit.

A final point needs to be made concerning the tone of the seven questions and the reference to a 'Pandora's box'. Those who hold to a high view of Scripture and canon are almost made out to have been involved in a conspiracy of untruth or denial. We are sitting on a time-bomb and it is only a matter of time until the truth catches up with us and then...and then what?! Which better Scriptures and truths and realities are there, waiting to rush in and replace our 'false' orthodoxy. Alternative books like the gospel of Thomas are freely available. The Jesus seminar is actively trying to change the canon. The fact is, this image of conspiracy and manipulation is false. The main reason for the success of the Protestant canon is its self-authenticating power, not the suppression of alternatives. Packer (1979: 112) makes this point clearly:

A number of spurious books ascribed to apostolic authors exist for comparison with our new Testament and the drop in intellectual, moral, and spiritual caliber is very marked, as are the theological lapses into worlds of commonplace fantasy and magic. In the light of this comparison, there is no reason to think that anything unauthentic crept into the New Testament, or that anything available by a genuine apostolic writer was negligently left out.

Much scholarship holds an ambiguous attitude to canon, denying it full authority, yet holding to it for pragmatic or traditional reasons. Berkhof (1979: 85), for example, emphasizes diversity in Scripture to the point of accepting contradiction and he clearly does not hold to a high view of every part and aspect, yet he values it as the 'horizon' within which God's revelation has consistently been encountered (1979:86). Brueggemann (1991: 132) also insists that 'canon is not a settled truth' and suggests that the interaction between voices in the centre versus the margin determines the nature of canonical interpretation (1991: 125-134).

Dunbar (1986: 356) trenchantly states that viewing canon as lacking 'divine or apostolic sanction...[is] disastrous. While many nice things may still be affirmed about the Bible...in the end it remains no more than the fallible witness of a fallible church. It is this that constitutes the ongoing crisis of modern Protestantism.'

### **5.5.8.2 A critically realistic approach to Canon**

In terms of the above discussion I do not think that a convincing argument exists for ultimately ruling out the possibility of canon, any more than for denying the possibility of the Bible being the word of God. If it pleased God to have his communication associated with human words, rendering them sacramentally divine and granting them a unique status among all human words, it could equally please God to establish a definite boundary concerning which books fall within this first category.

There are several pragmatic reasons for the necessity and truth of canon. An authoritative canon simultaneously provides assurance, guidance, comfort and challenge. As Vanhoozer (1988: 265) argues, it is vital for God's full communication: '[T]he "fuller meaning" of Scripture – the meaning associated with divine authorship- emerges only at the level of the whole canon. As Wolfhart Pannenberg has argued, meaning in general –whether of words or events- largely depends on the relation between part and whole.'

In conclusion: 'the Christian must ask himself, not whether he has reason enough to accept the Church's canon, but whether he has reason enough not to. In reality, he never has' (Packer 1979: 113).

## 5.6 Conclusion

This chapter attempted to understand the Scriptures in terms of the conclusions on knowledge from chapters two, three, and four. The conclusion of this chapter is that the Bible has a valid authority, when understood within a critically realistic, hermeneutical framework. This framework avoids positivism and relativism with respect to the Bible. The basis of the biblical authority is the faithfulness of God and the interpenetrating presence of the Holy Spirit. Within the context of pastoral care this interpenetration extends to the Scriptures, the people involved and the broader life and knowledge context. The Holy Spirit is the connecting, penetrating and integrating source of life and understanding, who makes the hermeneutical and pastoral care endeavor possible.

Authority within this critically realistic hermeneutic is asymmetrical. While it incorporates all possible sources of knowledge and methodology, the revelatory pole, represented by the Scripture and the Holy Spirit (a Reformational understanding of a theology of Word and Spirit) retains the normative locus. Authority with reference to the care-giver and the interpretation of Scripture is related both to a valid handling of Scripture and to the dynamic of faith edification, i.e. a valid practice and interpretation is shown to have warrant by the life that it brings forth and the faith edification that it encourages.

This basic methodological understanding is assumed within the following further conclusions.

### **The Bible cannot be isolated from other forms of knowledge**

The overlap of all forms of knowledge with faith, revelation and textual communication makes a biblicist, magical approach to Scripture unnecessary. Nevertheless, this is all too common. The Bible is often treated like a magic book that does not need to interact with other forms of knowledge and that does not need to be interpreted through correct rules. Although Biblicists are often in the truth and able to receive much benefit from Scripture, this is by God's grace and in spite of their method. Much of the time dangerous misinterpretations arise and the extent to which interpretation and extra-biblical assumptions are operating is simply not acknowledged. An equally serious problem is that this approach is not able to reach a sceptical public; a public that rejects fideism, but for whom the Bible is nevertheless equally intended. Of course, Biblicists are often forced into to this approach by the cavalier, offhand way secularists define Scripture and the dichotomous choices proposed: either accept knowledge and reject Scripture or hold to Scripture by blind faith. Both approaches are equally fideistic and false.

Nevertheless, the main thrust of Scripture is simply beyond science and all other forms of secular knowledge. The following facts are the essential content of Scripture and completely transcend anything that purely secular knowledge is able to discern or judge: God is the Almighty creator of heaven and earth; He is perfect love and created us to glorify and enjoy him for all eternity; He is perfectly holy and will judge all humankind; Jesus is God in the flesh; He died for our sins and has accomplished salvation and reconciliation for us; we are able to have a

relationship with God; we are able to cooperate with God and see God's miraculous intervention in the created order, etc. Of course natural science will refuse to accord these statements the status of 'fact' and may ultimately label them nonsense. The miracles in Scripture have provided a consistent stumbling block for the acceptance of Scripture, from Strauss to the New Atheists. Yet, for a believer these are not only 'facts,' but also the most important facts that anyone can know, compared to which all secular knowledge pales into insignificance. These facts are not unscientific and do not contradict any secular knowledge, properly understood. But this proper understanding is not possible, given human finitude and fallenness.

### **The Bible is an intensely historical book**

The Bible clearly is a historical and culturally conditioned document. Taken in isolation various aspects can seem to be untrue, cruel, etc. But in terms of a high view of Scripture, no single part is meant to be taken in isolation, neither from the context of the whole canon, nor from the context of the Holy Spirit and a relationship with God. Hermeneutics and a relationship with God are required and that is not due to a deficiency in Scripture, but rather due to its very design.

From a historical perspective, correctly approaching the Scriptures is an intensely hermeneutical process. The starting point is to work with the latest findings in all relevant fields (the New Atheists tend to work with the now defunct findings of past decades). It is also vital to avoid prejudice with regard to the truth claims and historicity of each aspect of Scripture and to enter into a hermeneutical process with each part and with the whole.

### **The Bible is a relational book**

If one understands the intensely relational aspect of God then a more accurate relational understanding of Scripture, which Scripture itself testifies to, can be discerned rather than overlooked (Jn 5:39-40). In addition, if one examines Scriptures that link God's word with God's action and if one recognizes that God's action primarily establishes relationship, then the link between Scripture and relationship is further emphasized.

### **No part of Scripture is unintended by God**

This research adopts the faith position that every part of Scripture falls within God's will. This does not mean that certain parts could not have been written differently, depending on the situation of the human author, nor even that the author could not have committed an empirical error. At the same time, it is possible that God could have preserved the whole of Scripture from human error. I do not think that ultimate proof exists either way. Nevertheless, the basic assumption is that there is no error and every effort should be made, using the valid science developed by a high view to demonstrate reliability and harmonization. The rejection of empirical inerrancy is not done in order to reject portions of Scripture but to avoid unnecessary battles, which are impossible to win and which ultimately undermine the Bible.

What is essential is that all of this is within God's control and the final form of Scripture conforms perfectly to God's purpose. We can hermeneutically relate to every single word and letter of Scripture and allow God to reveal its intended meaning and to use it to actualize His purpose in our lives. There is thus an inseparable link between Christ, the Holy Spirit and the actual text of the Scriptures. There is a double confidence involved in approaching the text. First I am confident that God has overseen the design of the text and established it in creative tension with the Holy Spirit. The text is designed to yield to a faith-filled reading, in reliance upon the Holy Spirit. Secondly, the Holy Spirit oversees and penetrates the reading process, providing the ultimate safeguarding in interpretation.

### **The Bible is fully divine and fully human**

The conditioned, human nature of the Scriptures reflects not only God's love (allowing humanity to commune and to co-work with Him in the matter of revelation) but also God's delight in adventure and challenge (that challenge and adventure of guiding His revelation through the risky terrain of human participation). It is possible that God has designed a revelation that can only be understood within the dynamics of ongoing loving communion and adventurous participation. Of course, if this is true it would mean that God has designed revelation not only to impart information but principally to transform us to be like Him.<sup>109</sup>

The difference between God and the Bible needs to be maintained in order to avoid Bibliolatry. Yet a reconstructive or dismissive approach to Scripture on the basis of this distinction is simply false. While God cannot be limited to the words of Scripture they have a unique and authoritative status and sacramentally link us to God. I argue that God has associated himself with the written Scriptures in a unique way and this cannot be said of any other human text.

God has in fact chosen not to be known apart from these written Scriptures and we cannot have relationship with God independently of them. This sounds like Bibliolatry and a limiting of God's freedom, but this is a superficial judgment. The point is that the Scriptures testify to the very actions of God and contain his implicit, and, in many parts, explicitly expressed thoughts. To try and relate to God apart from the Bible is like trying to relate to a person apart from what they have done and thought in the past in continuity with their present thoughts and actions. There is simply no person left to relate to. It is in this sense that we cannot logically have God apart from the Bible. If every single Bible in the world were suddenly destroyed God would still be the person who had performed the actions and spoken the words testified to in the Bible and the truth would still exist.<sup>110</sup> There is no more getting around the substantive, historical nature of revelation than there is of getting around the historical and concrete nature of all personhood.

This clearly does not agree with liberal responses, which focus almost exclusively on the human element in Scripture, insisting that the propositional form is relative and open to selection and reconstruction. Furthermore, it seems to chart a course between neo-orthodox views, which clearly distinguish the revelation of God from the Scriptures that testify to it, and conservative evangelical views, which seem to conflate the two, making the Scriptures, rather than the Trinity, the actual basis of revelation.

### **The Bible requires a relational and hermeneutical response**

As a human book the Bible is intensely literary and historical, thus requiring literary and historical interpretive tools. Its multiple genres will also require sensitivity in reading it with respect for the intended genre in any particular instance. Furthermore, understanding that Scripture was created in a relational and historical process means not using it as a magic book or a source for proof-texts. Finally, as it is not a science book, forced or excessive harmonization with science should be avoided.

As a divine book Scripture's self-testimony needs to be taken seriously. This means believing it is God's word and seeking to obey it, to respect it, and to read it honestly and carefully.

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<sup>109</sup> I argue that God's word is in part an intellectual and existential boot camp not a plush media centre or retirement home.

<sup>110</sup> King Jehoiakim demonstrates ignorance of this fact in his vain attempts to burn the scrolls on which the Word of the Lord through Jeremiah had come to him. This merely resulted in God redictating His message through Jeremiah to the scribe Baruch (Jeremiah 36).

Since Scripture talks so clearly and deeply about the sinful and deceptive nature of humankind (with a propensity to deceive and be deceived), it is vital to acknowledge and guard against our propensity to distort all truth. I believe the ultimate quality of our reading of Scripture is determined by will and character more than anything else. Scripture clearly talks of 'distorting' the word of God (Jr 23:36; Ac 20:30; 2Cor 4:2; 2Pt 3:16) and the context of each of these verses clearly shows that the issue is not a problem of intellectual misunderstanding but of unrighteousness and political motives. World history shows how this is a perennial temptation. Scripture has been twisted and used as a justification for everything from materialism, to apartheid to slavery. This should not lead to scepticism with regard to truth or Scripture or human nature. The very fact that we are able to point to these distortions and see them as wrong and change them points to the grace of God, which is able to sufficiently support truth, Scripture and human nature for them to validly function in achieving God's Kingdom purposes. In this regard, it is Scripture itself that has provided much of the truth as well as much of the human inspiration and motivation, which have been vital to combat the distortions and injustices.

A vital aspect of Scripture that I am arguing for is that all parts of it are appropriate for the life of faith. A responsible hermeneutics thus needs to interact honestly and carefully with the whole of Scripture, seeking the truth and blessing of God in all its parts. Every single word and letter is to be dealt with for its revelatory potential. Any aspect of Scripture that is treated discontinuously (i.e. as not applying to our current age or to the reader personally) needs to be done so responsibly and honestly. An incomplete reading of Scripture occurs when we ignore certain parts, reduce the full impact of other parts, or twist still other parts to distort their meaning. Opposing this reduction requires reading in community as opposed to individually, with other cultures as opposed to exclusively within one's own community or sub-culture, in dialogue with all the eras of the historical church, and, where appropriate, taking the findings of other realms of knowledge into account (these practices clearly resonate with postmodern concerns).

There are blind spots and chauvinisms at each of these levels and seeking the broadest interaction possible is vital. For example, women can help men to see overlooked aspects of God's nature, Western Christians need the voice of Africa to better see the community themes in Scripture, ministers and theologians who don't believe in supernatural healing should go do some apprenticeship with missionaries and pastors who do it, and Christians from a pre-modern age (through their writings) can expose some of the cynicism and consumerism current Christians may inadvertently fall prey to. I believe strongly that discontinuity with Scripture in terms of rejecting parts of it as untrue and not willed by God is a false hermeneutic (once this type of hermeneutic is entertained, there is ultimately no way of preventing all of Scripture from being relativized in the same manner). Where genuine discontinuity is required, Scripture itself needs to be the basis (as in the superseding of animal sacrifice –Heb 10:10-, a change in dietary laws –Ac 10- or a restriction on divorce practices –Mt 19:7-9).

I believe, therefore, that true biblical hermeneutics responds to all of Scripture. It remains as open as possible in the interpretation process, in order to build up thick, complex understandings. It makes courageous choices on the basis of this interpretation, but it remains ever open to change and growth in understanding. This respect for the otherness and complex wholeness of Scripture requires courage and sacrifice. Biblical hermeneutics is therefore a hermeneutics of love.

Another aspect of respect for Scripture means respecting the relationship between the parts and the whole. To only read 'a promise a day' or one's favourite underlined verses is to violate the nature of Scripture. It should be read in broad swathes. One should cover books in their entirety and strive ultimately to perceive the whole of salvation history. The numerous audio Bibles available facilitate this. They enable the whole Bible to be listened to as we drive to work or do our housework, etc.

This comprehensive type of listening enables the grand narrative to emerge and sometimes one perceives an aspect of God that is otherwise overlooked. I remember clearly an afternoon listening to an audio recording of one of the OT books. The extended listening meant I heard the repeated refrain of 'I am the Lord who bought you out of Egypt.' Through that holistic, extended listening, the voice behind all the multiple events and human words was fore-grounded in a powerful spiritual experience; the most important aspect, for me, was a perception of the divine emotion and personality which lay behind the repeated refrain. An encounter with the ultimate author behind Scripture is often missed in a piece-meal approach.

The ultimate purpose of Scripture needs to be kept in mind. It is clearly meant to lead to a relationship with the Trinity. This relationship in turn brings healing to all other relationships: with ourselves, each other and creation. Therefore, this relationship should be the primary purpose of our reading and our understanding of Scripture should be sought in the context of that relationship. In addition, the main means God has used to bring about these relational goals, His communication through Jesus (Heb 1:2; Jn 1:17), needs to remain central. Goldsworthy (1998: intro par 1) clarifies how our understanding of Scripture and Jesus is intimately linked:

[T]he history of how Christians have read and applied the Bible is most instructive, especially if we take note of what was really happening in the various historical developments. What we find repeatedly is that when people were asking, 'What do we think about the Scriptures?' they were really asking 'What do we think about Christ?' This is because what we think about the incarnate Word of God, Jesus Christ, will run parallel with what we think about the inscripturated Word of God, the Bible.

I agree with Goldsworthy's (1998: sect 7 par 2) conclusion:

The apostolic answer to the hermeneutical question is the correct one: Jesus Christ is the God-man, saviour and Lord, to whom the apostles and all the Scriptures testify. This means that the objective historical Jesus is in fact the content of the gospel message and the gospel is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16).... we can't think about hermeneutics without thinking about Christ.

## **Chapter 6. Towards an epistemology within the hermeneutics of pastoral care: the organic approach**

This chapter examines pastoral care in the light of the conclusions reached in the previous five chapters. It will therefore adopt an approach to pastoral care that is in line with a full engagement with all realms of knowledge (chapter two), while simultaneously holding to a high view of Scripture (chapter five). Hermeneutics (chapter three) and a relational approach to authority (chapter four) will play a key role throughout.

In addition to these epistemological and scriptural concerns, pastoral care and counseling will be examined within the broader context of pastoral theology, practical theology and theology in general. The approach taken to the issue of the relationship between theology and practical theology directly affects understandings of pastoral theology. This is a vital area to examine for pastoral theology constitutes the theological basis and rationale for specific methodologies and practices within pastoral care and counseling.

As this is an attempt to contribute to foundational theology, specific counseling models will not be proposed and the key concern of God concepts and God image is chosen to illustrate my epistemological and hermeneutical proposals. The focus is on basic method and authority and the specific values and priorities that can inform pastoral care and biblical counseling.

Critical realism is assumed as a basic approach to reality, the context within which pastoral care takes place. This means that all proposals are held humbly, recognizing that they are invariably incomplete and/or distorted (i.e. lacking truth and containing falsity). Therefore, while the specific methods of natural science are not appropriate, and while these proposals are not falsifiable in the same way that natural science and qualitative social science theories are, the potential truth-value of all proposals is understood to be a possibility and they are intended as truth statements. The word 'potential' suggests that they remain open to correction, yet at the same time worthy of appropriation and defence, using theologically appropriate methods such as resonance with Scripture, inference to the best explanation, and an evaluation of their effect in terms of faith edification and healing.

A key presupposition that arises out of the truth concerns of this research is that details matter. To stay within the generalities of wishing to help people, enabling them to survive crisis and live an abundant life is uncontroversial and epistemologically uninteresting. It would be hard to find any form of helping, be it secular or religious, Christian or from other faiths, which would not subscribe to these general goals. As a criteria for evaluation and choice, they are too general to be of use. It is similar to saying that communist and capitalist economic systems are equally valid because they both have the stated goal of increasing the wealth of the nation.

Therefore, this research intentionally foregrounds specific understandings of truth and pastoral care, since what is proposed and sought is not a general theory of helping people. What is sought is a theory of pastoral care that is consonant with the gospel of Jesus Christ, as it is understood from a high reading of Scripture.

The authors and movements referred to in this chapter are related to in terms of continuity versus discontinuity with specific aspects of their stances. An uncritical rejection or embracing contradicts the hermeneutical approach that is attempted. The specific criteria for determining this continuity versus discontinuity is the way they deal with truth, Scripture and hermeneutics, rather than the broadly defined pragmatism of much postmodern-influenced theology and pastoral care.

In terms of truth, the evaluating grid is the tension between positivism and relativism. In terms of Scripture, the issue of a high versus low view of Scripture is used. In terms of hermeneutics, the authors will be understood in terms of a low focus on hermeneutics (whether through excessive discontinuity or excessive continuity between pastoral theology and practice and non-theological theory and practice) versus a high focus on hermeneutics (where the unique identity of both theological and non-theological knowledge is respected, even as the strongest interaction possible between them is sought). Clearly, misunderstanding and misrepresentation will take place and all conclusions are understood to be provisional and open to revision.

In terms of the theological approaches to pastoral care, the basic conversational partners that have emerged out of the literature review are conservative or evangelical and mainline or liberal, with very few authors, like Capps, publishing in both camps. According to my conclusions, both camps offer vital contributions to pastoral care and both camps typically exhibit understandings and methods that are problematic, in terms of this dissertation's conclusions. Therefore, my proposals stand in continuity and discontinuity with both camps, although my overall focus still defines me as an evangelical.

## **6.1 The relationship of pastoral care to epistemology, Scripture and hermeneutics**

One's understanding of epistemology, Scripture and hermeneutics radically affects one's approach to pastoral care. This understanding determines what is allowed to count as knowledge and truth (epistemological concerns). This, in turn, determines, which ideas, attitudes and actions will be communicated in the pastoral care encounter and how they will be communicated (methodological concerns). Furthermore, this affects the recipient's mental, emotional and imaginative experience of the pastoral care encounter. Different experiences of the pastoral care encounter will impact the individual's life differently (existential concerns).

### **6.1.1 Epistemology**

Firstly, in terms of epistemology, I believe a profound engagement with knowledge issues is vital for pastoral care. Incomplete or false epistemologies lead to problems like dualism and reductionism and these ultimately undermine faith and cause trauma. For example, a dualistic approach to life may cause believers unnecessary psychological tension as they find faith increasingly irrelevant to significant areas of life.

In terms of scientism, for example, whether people are directly employed in areas of science or merely living in this science-saturated society, they are exposed to the presuppositions of scientism and are subject to its faith-eroding dynamics.

Many of the atheistic arguments are complex and beyond the average untrained believer's skill level. It will be easy for most atheistic apologists to mentally tie most untrained believers in knots. That is why apologetic training and an understanding of the truth of what we believe are important. It also needs to be noted that not all believers will be affected in the same way by atheistic reasoning. Three types of response can be imagined. The first (and desired) type is represented by believers who have a deep understanding of reason. They know the limits of rationality and do not need to prove the faith, but they understand that it is in fact the most rational option. They are able to refute atheistic polemic and end up with a strengthened faith. The second type concerns believers who do not have the rational answers, but, due to their psychological make-up and the strength of their relationship with God, their faith remains unshaken. The third type deals with believers whose faith becomes severely shaken by these polemics.



If people doubt the truth and validity of their faith the existential power and comfort they experience will be severely compromised. The skeptical challenge may end up gnawing away at faith, creating emotional fatigue and depression. As a result, they may doubt, become reticent in living out their faith in public, or even abandon their faith altogether (Some New Atheist websites contain accounts of people expressing relief due to them being able to give up their faith and commit to an atheistic life).<sup>111</sup> In extreme cases, people's faith can be shaken to the extent that they commit suicide. A reasoned defence of the gospel is therefore a valid aspect of pastoral care and can be seen as one of the actions of the shepherd to protect defenceless sheep.<sup>112</sup> C S Lewis' (1975:34) comments in this regard (from a sermon in 1939), remain highly pertinent in today's aggressively anti-religious climate:

To be ignorant and simple now –not to be able to meet the enemies on their own ground- would be to throw down our weapons, and to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defence but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen. Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered....Most of all, perhaps, we need intimate knowledge of the past....to set against the present, to remind us that the basic assumptions have been quite different in different periods and that much which seems certain to the uneducated is merely temporary fashion....the scholar has lived in many times and is therefore in some degree immune from the great cataract of nonsense that pours from the press and the microphone of his own age.

Apart from the ability to defend believers' faith against the unwarranted assumptions of faith-eroding scepticism, a solid epistemology is vital in terms of methodological effectiveness. If one is unduly swayed by naturalism, for example, one will not research or engage with areas like healing and the demonic. Vital knowledge and skills will lie fallow and potential blessings and healing will be lost.

This urgent concern for defending particular truth is much less evident in liberal theology, where truth remains important, as in the ethical concern of Browning's critical correlation method, but where greater diversity and alternative understandings are tolerated and even encouraged. Clearly, the unique difficulties involved in defending a particular view of Jesus and Scripture fall away. I argue, however, that this stance is in fact highly particular (about its diversity) and this requires just as much epistemological defence.

A concern for epistemology, therefore, need not at all be at odds with a focus on human pastoral care. Louw (1998a: 3) states that, 'Pastoral care will be existentially focused, dealing with the anxiety guilt and despair characteristic of humankind.' However, a coherent

<sup>111</sup> Richard Dawkins' website has a section called 'Converts Corner' <<http://richarddawkins.net/letters/converts>> (accessed November 2011), with testimonies by individuals, expressing thanks to Dawkins and other New Atheists for help in understanding and accepting an atheist worldview. I have included three examples (accessed 27 November 2011): 'I cannot express in words the profound influence you have had on myself and many others. I was raised Christian conservative and always believed that the word "atheist" was synonymous with "evil." After taking a few steps back and observing my beliefs from a neutral point of view, I concluded that, actually, the word "faith" is indeed synonymous with "ignorance." After a year or so I finally decided to inform my devout parents of my loss of ignorance.'; 'It was not until after I read your book that I was able to begin to tell my family and friends that I did not believe in a god and finally accepted myself as an Atheist. I cannot tell you the kind of weight I felt was lifted off of my chest. Your book made me realize that I am not wrong for what I believe. That it is o.k. to not have religion in your life. Pieces of the book seemed as though they spoke directly to me...'; 'I am writing you from Kicevo from Macedonia and I am SO glad to inform you about the fact that after reading the God Delusion, me and my whole family removed unnecessary religious dogmas from our lives. Thanks for helping!'

<sup>112</sup> Apollos serves as a scriptural example of a minister whose learning was of pastoral benefit to less educated believers (Ac 18: 24-28).

understanding of life is part of God's design, and intellectual understanding is therefore a vital human need. To be existentially focused is to minister to the whole person in his or her whole context. Plausible intellectual explanations for all aspects of life should be given. This necessitates the attempt to interact with science, philosophy and psychology to the fullest extent possible.

A concern with epistemology need not be obviously and directly communicated with the recipients of pastoral care. It is, however, vital for the pastoral carer to think through epistemological issues to the best of his or her ability in order that the best understanding and methodology possible can be used.

### **6.1.2 Scripture**

In our postmodern climate, the term 'pastoral' is no longer exclusively linked to the Christian faith within the context of the church. It may refer to the general care of humanity within a variety of religious and non-religious contexts within the thematic context of ultimate concerns. This is evidenced by the increasing adoption of the more inclusive term 'spiritual' in much of the journal literature (see 6.2.1).

However, 'spirituality' can be a vague term, open to being filled with any subjective content. Pastoral care, as understood in this research, is care with reference to the Christian faith. Therefore, Scripture, which is integral to Christianity, must be integral to Christian pastoral care.

The proposed role of Scripture in pastoral care argued for in this research seeks to be consistent with the understanding of Scripture articulated in chapter five. As a result, this proposal will stand in tension, to a greater or lesser extent, with existing models, proposed by diverse practitioners.

If, as I argue, a deep and appropriate engagement with Scripture is a key aspect of being a good person and living a good life (two vital concerns for many people) then an essential goal in pastoral care involves helping the individual to understand and relate to the Bible correctly. This is an increasingly urgent goal in an increasingly biblically illiterate society. If God has given the Bible as a key means of communication, understanding, and blessing, then receiving all that Scripture has to offer is vital in order to achieve appropriate existential goals. Receiving all that Scripture has to offer necessitates a valid hermeneutical approach, the third aspect examined in previous chapters.

### **6.1.3 Hermeneutics**

The importance of hermeneutics has been discussed in chapter three and its vital role extends fully into pastoral care and counseling. There are various ways in which a hermeneutical focus is seen to operate.

Hermeneutics is obviously vital in the classic sense of 'correctly...[handling] the word of truth' (2 Tm 2:15), applying appropriate interpretive principles whenever the Bible is used in pastoral care. In addition to this foundation, the following hermeneutical dynamics are proposed for the pastoral encounter.

Firstly, hermeneutics is vital in developing a thick, comprehensive knowledge base, drawing on all fields of knowledge. Hermeneutics, in this instance, refers to an openness to truth, wherever it may be found. The knowledge base refers to the variety of data, images, beliefs, values, skills and methods that can be used in the pastoral care context. This knowledge base cannot be viewed in isolation from assumptions, worldview and bias, which are often hidden or

unacknowledged, but which influence and thus form part of the knowledge base. These factors and their influence need to form part of valid hermeneutical considerations.<sup>113</sup>

Secondly, hermeneutics is essential in making valid decisions concerning one's potential knowledge base. A comprehensive focus on knowledge and Scripture generates a wealth of conflicting data, worldviews, models and images. Decisions need to be made regarding which elements should be adopted versus rejected, either due to being incompatible with the Christian gospel, as understood, or due to being inappropriate for that particular situation.

Models, images and understandings of God, humanity, creation, supernatural forces, pastoral identity and the pastoral care process, for example, are vital realities or sources of knowledge that can be considered or ignored. When one considers images of God, for example, a diverse range of often conflicting understandings exist and decisions need to be made concerning which images to adopt and encourage versus reject.

In this case, hermeneutics is related to discernment and warrant (warrant being necessary both in terms of what is rejected and what is accepted). I argue that the decisions regarding inclusion or exclusion (i.e. continuity versus discontinuity) cannot be arbitrary, capricious or purely pragmatic, for they have real consequences and establish a real relationship of faithfulness versus betrayal to God and the gospel, and therefore, ultimately, to humanity. This results in genuine blessing versus cursing of individual and social existence (1Tm 4:16).

Thirdly, hermeneutics is critical in the pastoral care encounter, so that the person receiving ministry is fully heard and accepted and so that the carer can be open to the fullest extent appropriate. In this case, hermeneutics has to do with love, openness, and engagement.

The pastoral encounter simultaneously involves hermeneutics in all of the above senses. One needs to be gaining understanding from the person being ministered to and from God. At the same time, one needs to be making decisions concerning the truth or validity of these understandings as they interact with previous understanding that the carer brings to the situation. Finally, an engaged, loving stance is by definition characteristic of pastoral care.

In conclusion, therefore, the richer the framework of knowledge and practice, the more options, freedom, and power there exist for both the giver and receiver of pastoral care. Both epistemological and existential results are improved.

The complexity and potential for appropriate engagement (understanding appropriate continuity and discontinuity to be equally valid) with every single one of these developments and dynamics is increased if one accepts that they are not only theoretically grounded but also relationally grounded, through the potential and commingled influence of the divine, the human and the demonic. This makes discernment even more critical.

## **6.2 Contextual and definitional concerns in pastoral care**

### **6.2.1 Literature review**

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<sup>113</sup> Epistemology and awareness of worldview and bias is particularly relevant in pastoral care as it interacts so strongly with psychology, where worldview plays a strong, but under-acknowledged role. Myers and Jeeves (1987:11-23) discuss the role of bias in psychology and refer to research, which suggests that psychologists are 'among the most irreligious academics' (: 12).

The context of the literature reviewed is principally the United States as most of the development and research that informs the pastoral care issues this dissertation investigates has arisen from that context.

Apart from certain key texts that were consulted, the journals described in this section were used in order to gain an understanding of the state of the field of pastoral care. Brief comments will be made on each journal, placing it in theological context.

The most recent available decade within each journal was reviewed (journals that were not reviewed up to 2011 were not available, usually due to an embargo).

Upon examination of the journals, certain emphases emerged, which reinforced this dissertation's argument that worldview and assumptions directly affect methodology and knowledge claims. Furthermore, this interpretation of the journals in terms of discernible, distinct emphases preceded the writing of this chapter and directly informed its structure.

Examples of two or three articles are given with each journal, to illustrate its nature. Rather than listing the articles in the bibliography I have given the full title of the article in a footnote. This is for clarity of argument and because the titles in question are merely being used as examples to clarify the literature review, rather than as part of the main structure/argument of this dissertation.

All websites relevant to the journals were accessed in the month of November 2011.

### **6.2.1.1 Conservative journals emphasizing dissociation between pastoral care and psychology**

#### **a) Journal of biblical counseling**

History of the journal: 1977 – 1992; as Journal of pastoral practice. 1993 – current; as Journal of biblical counseling.

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 1993 to 2007.

Johnson and others (2010: 31-32) discuss the history of the biblical counseling view, out of which this journal was birthed. Jay Adams published 'Competent to Counsel' (1970), which severely criticized psychology as 'fundamentally opposed to Christianity.' His *nouthetic* counseling approach (which focuses on biblical admonition leading to repentance from sin and which is performed principally by pastors) led him to found the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation (CCEF) in 1968 and the 'Journal of Pastoral Practice' in 1977. The journal underwent a name change to the 'Journal of Biblical Counseling' in 1993, and the editorship shifted from Adams to David Powlison. Greater diversity and openness to a critical use of some aspects of modern psychology along with a questioning of certain aspects of Adams' *nouthetic* counseling model led to Adams leaving in protest (:31-32). It must be noted however that Adams continued to publish in the journal after 1993 (e.g. 'Biblical interpretation and counseling.' Jay Adams 1998: 16(3)).

The journal is not peer-reviewed and it does not appear on intervarsity journal databases. It draws on a more limited pool of authors than the more academic journals and this is a weakness as diverse and enriching points of view are less likely to be heard.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Within the articles I selected for this research David Powlison, the editor, contributed 28 articles (apart from editorials), Paul David Tripp contributed 8 articles and Edward T Welch contributed 10 articles (this is apart from other articles they may have written, but which I did not examine).

Numerous articles dealt with the following four themes: a) the sufficiency of the Bible for counseling and a critique of psychology; b) a focus on God; c) a direct application of the Bible and biblical themes; d) practical guidance in counseling.<sup>115</sup>

Although I was not able to find copies of the journal after 2007, the CCEF website (<http://www.ccef.org/>) represents a hive of counseling activity. The site contains Lane and Powlison's (2010:1-7) official statement on the history, theological foundations and counseling model of CCEF.

Further problems associated with this approach will be dealt with in section 6.4.

### **6.2.1.2 Evangelical journals focusing on integration between pastoral care and psychology**

#### **a) Journal of psychology and Christianity**

History of the journal: 1982 – current. Published by Christian Association for Psychological studies (CAPS).

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2002-2011

The official website (<http://caps.net/who-we-are>) explains that CAPS is a professional association of Christians who serve as psychologists, marriage and family therapists, professional counselors, pastoral counselors, psychiatrists, professors and researchers, etc., and that it exists 'to encourage understanding of the relationship between Christianity and the behavioral sciences at both the clinical/counseling and the theoretical/research levels.'

The website clearly outlines its statement of faith (<http://caps.net/statement-of-faith>): 'The CAPS Statement of Faith delineates our shared belief in: God the Father, who creates and sustains us, Jesus Christ, the Son, who redeems and rules us, the Holy Spirit, who guides us personally through God's inspired Word, the Bible, our infallible guide of faith and conduct, and through the communion of Christians.'

It is clear, therefore, that this journal is located within the evangelical tradition and seeks to provide practical guidance on issues of integration of faith and psychology (integration being the term used in the journal) for Christian counselors practicing in various contexts. Out of approximately two hundred articles that I selected as relevant to this research over half were directly related to issues of integration.<sup>116</sup>

#### **b) Journal of psychology and theology**

History of the journal: 1973 - current.

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2000-2011

<sup>115</sup> For example: a) 'Critiquing modern integrationists.' David Powlison 1993: 11(3). 'The sufficiency of Scripture to diagnose and cure souls.' David Powlison 2005: 23(2); b) 'Recovering God in the age of therapy.' Gary Steven Shogren 1993: 12(1). 'God's glory is the goal of Biblical counseling.' John Piper 2002: 20(2); c) 'The bondage of sin.' Edward T Welch 1999: 17(2). 'The cross and criticism.' Alfred J Poirier 1999: 17(3); d) 'Homework and Biblical counseling.' Paul David Tripp 1993: 11(2). 'Opening blind eyes. Another look at gathering data' Paul David Tripp 1996: 14(2).

<sup>116</sup> For example: 'The Practical Face of Integration.' Bryan Ray 2006: 25(1); 'The integration of psychology and theology: an enterprise out of balance.' James R Beck 2003: 22(1).

The Journal of Psychology and Theology is a publication of the Rosmead School of psychology, which is a department of the Biola University, a private Christian university in Southern California. Its home web page (<http://www.biola.edu/>) defines Biola in terms of 'Biblically centred education.'

The journal has its own web page (<http://journals.biola.edu/jpt/about/>), which describes its purpose: 'to communicate recent scholarly thinking on the interrelationships of psychological and theological concepts, and to consider the application of these concepts to a variety of professional settings. The major intent of the editor is to place before the evangelical community articles that have bearing on the nature of humankind from a biblical perspective.'

This is equally, therefore, an evangelically focused publication, like the Journal of Psychology and Christianity. However, the diversity and academic sophistication seems to be more developed than the latter journal. Although there are articles on integration, they are part of a much broader focus, and the journal seems to represent a more assured exploration of varied and in-depth research. Relative to the Journal of Psychology and Christianity, the articles are more empirical, ecumenical and directly engaging with diversity, culture and science.<sup>117</sup> This is understandable as the journal is located within a top university, producing American Psychology Association accredited graduates. In terms of this dissertation's argument for comprehensiveness, Rosmead's strong focus on both theology and psychology accords it a strong measure of warrant.<sup>118</sup>

### **6.2.1.3 Non-evangelical journals with varying levels of emphasis on praxis-based practical theology, public theology and postmodern understanding**

#### **a) International journal of practical theology**

History of the journal: 1997 – current.

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2003-2011

This journal is published by De Gruyter publishing, an academically sophisticated publishing house.<sup>119</sup> This journal is also given an A ranking by the European Science Foundation (<http://www.degruyter.de/journals/ijpt/>).<sup>120</sup>

<sup>117</sup> For example: 'A phenomenological model for therapeutic exorcism for dissociative identity disorder.' Dennis L Bull 2001: 29(2). 'Feeling humans and social animals: theological considerations for an evolutionary account of human emotion.' Michael J Boivin 2001: 29(4). 'The nature of gender: gender identity in persons who are intersexed or transgendered.' Hessel Boum, III and Heather Looy 2005: 33(3).

<sup>118</sup> According to the Rosemead web page (<http://www.rosemead.edu/programs/>) it has been accredited by the American Psychology Association since 1980 and it offers both a Ph.D. and a Psy.D. Degree in Clinical Psychology, both courses taking five to six years to complete. It claims to 'produce practicing psychologists who possess strong clinical skills and an ability to integrate their faith and their field.' It further states that its psychology and philosophy educators hold biblical degrees. Its 'coursework is founded upon a distinctly Christian worldview' and students 'graduate with a minor in theology and biblical studies in addition to...master's and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology.'

<sup>119</sup> A proud tradition is proclaimed from De Gruyter's website (<http://www.degruyter.de/cont/glob/ueberUnsEn.cfm>): 'For more than two-hundred and sixty years the name De Gruyter has been synonymous with high-quality, landmark publications in the humanities and natural sciences.'

<sup>120</sup> The website heading (<http://www.esf.org/research-areas/humanities/>) of the European Science Foundation claims to be 'setting science agendas for Europe.'

The journal's website page (<http://www.degruyter.de/journals/ijpt/>) gives a comprehensive explanation of the aims and scope of the journal:

The journal contains contributions on an empirically descriptive and critically constructive theory of ecclesiastical and religious practice in society. Primarily, it deals with descriptions of religion as it is practised. Religion in this context can be understood in the broad sense of the word according to which all appreciative tendencies towards an ultimate view of oneself and of the world can be described as being religious. Thus the many different forms of religion as they are lived today are applied in a critically constructive manner to the normative self-image of churches, ecclesiastical groups and denominations. As contributions towards practical theology, they ultimately pursue the structure of practically orientated theories of ecclesiastical and ecclesiastically conveyed religious practice. *The International Journal of Practical Theology* is neither the organ of a specific theological school nor of a particular ecclesiastical organization. The journal does not aim to present biased opinions of theological schools or confessional organizations but rather place in the foreground of discussion the differences between ecclesiastical and ecclesiastically conveyed practice of religion, the documentation and discussion of its development within its regional context, its international interweavement and different normative orientations.

This journal is the clearest example of a constructive, praxis-based, public theology, with concerns that are quite distinct from ecclesial concerns, especially those represented by the evangelical stream of the church.<sup>121</sup>

### **b) Journal of pastoral care and counseling**

History of the journal: 1947 – 2003; Journal of Pastoral Care. 2003 – current; Journal of Pastoral Care and counseling.

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2003-2011

This journal is published by the Journal of Pastoral Care Publications (<http://www.jpccp.org/>). Its mission page (<http://www.jpccp.org/mission.htm>) explains how various pastoral organizations coalesced to form the Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) in 1967, the organization to which the journal's ownership was transferred. The same page explains the journal's mission: 'To advance theory and professional practice through scholarly and reflective literature on pastoral and spiritual care, counseling, psychotherapy, education, and research.'

The website gives a further description of the articles it publishes (<http://www.jpccp.org/jpcc.htm>): 'Concrete and detailed reports of significant areas of pastoral/spiritual care work, with discussion.... Articles that explore the distinctive as well as the common characteristics of Ministry/Spiritual Care in relation to other helping professions and/or institutions.'<sup>122</sup>

### **c) Journal of pastoral theology**

History of the journal: 1991 - current. Published by Society for Pastoral Theology (established in 1985).

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2003-2011

<sup>121</sup> For example: 'Toward a Constructive Practical Theology: A Process-Relational Perspective' James Newton Poling 2009: 13(2). 'Practical Theology as Empirical Theology1.' Hans-Günter Heimbrock 2011: 14(2).

<sup>122</sup> For example: 'Revisiting the living human web. Theological education and the role of Clinical Pastoral Education.' Bonny J Miller McLemore 2008: 62(1-2). 'God-Talk in Therapeutic Conversation.' Peter L. VanKatwyk 2008: 62(1-2).

The journal's website ([http://www.jpccp.org/j\\_past\\_theol.htm](http://www.jpccp.org/j_past_theol.htm)) states its mission:

- to further the understanding of pastoral theology as a theological discipline and to clarify the nature of the discipline.
- to maintain a view of pastoral theology as a constructive theology growing out of the exercise of caring relationships, with attention both to present lived experience and to knowledge derived from the past;
- to provide an intentional forum for the voices of diverse persons, women and men, of many cultural and ethnic backgrounds;
- to foster multi-cultural understandings of issues in the discipline;
- to promote and encourage multi-discipline/multi-cultural research in the field of pastoral theology;
- to provide for the construction of sound theological principles for guidance and critique of pastoral practice; and to work creatively, synthesizing and constructing, to define the frontiers and parameters of the discipline.

The shift from the clerical paradigm to issues of praxis, diversity and public theology is revealed in this mission statements as well as the articles published.<sup>123</sup>

#### **d) Journal of pastoral counseling**

History of the journal: 1966 - current.

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2000-2009

This journal is published by Iona College a Catholic higher education institution started by the Christian Brothers movement in 1940 (<http://www.iona.edu/about/history.cfm>).

According to its web page

(<http://www.iona.edu/academic/artsscience/orgs/pastoral/scopemission.cfm>), 'The journal continues to reach for interdisciplinary connections and interpretations when attempting to understand human behavior and thought.' Its original 1966 statement of purpose clarifies this further: 'The Iona Journal of Pastoral Counseling aims at providing a forum for the exchange of broad ideas and information on Pastoral Counseling. It publishes articles written from the various perspectives of psychoanalysis, psychiatry, psychology, social work, counseling and guidance, clinical sociology, cultural anthropology, pastoral ministry, theology, etc...'<sup>124</sup>

#### **6.2.1.4 Journals representing both mainline and evangelical concerns**

##### **a) Journal of spirituality in mental health**

History of the journal: 1997 – 2007; American Journal of Pastoral Counseling. 2007 – current; Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health

Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2000-2011

<sup>123</sup> For example: 'Pastoral theology as public theology in relation to the clinic.' Larry Kent Graham 2000: (10). 'Pastoral theology as public theology: participating in the healing of damaged and damaging cultures and institutions.' Homer. U. Ashby, Jr 2000: (10). "Honoring rising voices: pastoral theology as emancipatory practice.' Sharon G. Thornton 2000: (10).

<sup>124</sup> For example: 'The efficient cognitive process of moral realism and its connection to evolutionary psychology and neurobiology.' Kevin Barry 2007: 42. 'Adult images of God: Implications for pastoral counseling.' Jeanne M. Peloso 2008: 43.



The aims and scope of this journal are described as follows

(<http://www.tandfonline.com.ez.sun.ac.za/action/aboutThisJournal?show=aimsScope&journalCode=wspi20>):

*The Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health* is an interdisciplinary professional journal ... that is devoted to the scholarly study of spirituality as a resource for counseling and psychotherapeutic disciplines.... [through] interdisciplinary dialog that crosses the disciplines of psychology, spirituality, theology, sociology, cultural analysis, and other fields....contributors explore the impact of cultural life patterns within issues of race and gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and relational structures as they contribute to both human wholeness, and to its loss and therapeutic recovery.

The strength of the journal is its diversity and its representation of a broader spectrum of authors than simply mainline or evangelical.<sup>125</sup> This diversity is reflected in its editorial structure. It has eight international advisors (from *Canada, New Zealand, Ireland, Brazil, South Africa, Korea, and Hungary*), as well as *twenty-six editorial consultants* (<http://www.tandfonline.com.ez.sun.ac.za/action/aboutThisJournal?show=editorialBoard&journalCode=wspi20>).

## **b) Practical theology in South Africa**

History of the journal: 1985-2009. 2009 – current; Incorporated into HTS theological studies  
Years reviewed for this dissertation: 2002-2009

In a similar way to the *Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health*, this journal is also diverse, as reflected in its 12 member editorial board, representing six South African and two Dutch universities ([http://www.journals.co.za/ej/images/practheo\\_edit.pdf](http://www.journals.co.za/ej/images/practheo_edit.pdf)).

The diverse scope of the journal is described as follows ([http://www.journals.co.za/ej/ejour\\_practheo.html](http://www.journals.co.za/ej/ejour_practheo.html)): 'Practical Theology is at home studying communication acts that serve the gospel of the Kingdom. These are not only communication acts of the congregation but also actions of the faithful outside the formal context of the congregation. In fact the field of study touches on the actions on the congregation in worship, the congregation in training and the congregation in its functioning.'<sup>126</sup>

This brief overview and categorization of various journals is not proposed positivistically. It is an informal categorization, which recognizes that misrepresentation may have happened. The two main aims, however, have hopefully been achieved. The first was to gain a valid overview of the principal concerns of the field, broadly speaking. The second was to note discernible differences within this broad field. Without insisting on exact demarcations, it is valid to say that pastoral care and counseling is performed on the basis of different assumptions and values, which give rise to different methodologies, practices and outcomes. The broadest discernible difference is between a conservative, confessional focus on the Bible and the church (most clearly represented by the 'Journal of biblical counseling') and a non-conservative, constructive focus on praxis and public theology (best represented by the 'International journal of practical theology' and the 'Journal of pastoral theology').

<sup>125</sup> For example: 'Pastoral Counseling in Multi-Cultural Contexts.' Emmanuel Y. Lartey 2002: 5(3-4). 'The Postmodern Life Cycle and Pastoral Care and Counseling.' Kirk A. Bingaman 2006: 9 (1). 'Looking More Deeply at "Evil."' Reverend J. Jeffrey Means 2002: 4(4). 'Development of a Holistic Model of Spirituality.' Martin Rovers 2010:12(1).

<sup>126</sup> For example: 'The challenge of postmodernity for church ministry: A practical theological view.' C J Hugo 2009: 24(2). 'The healing work of spiritual direction.' M Naidoo 2006: 21(3).

It is easy to use simplistic labels, such as conservative versus liberal or evangelical versus mainline, in order to relate to this complexity. However, while labels are sometimes unavoidable<sup>127</sup> this research argues that it is more helpful, wherever possible, to deal with the complexity in terms of epistemological and hermeneutical dynamics. Out of this kind of description, hidden patterns and alternative explanations may emerge. For example, on the surface, the 'Journal of biblical counseling' and the 'International journal of practical theology' are worlds apart. However, in terms of an unwarranted positivism regarding the ability to discern truth they are very similar.

A focus on epistemological and hermeneutical dynamics can also have positive consequences in terms of theological enrichment and ecumenical rapprochement. In terms of labels, groups and individuals may seem radically distinct and unable to interact. However, individuals within so-called evangelical and liberal churches who seek to pursue truth in all its diversity may in fact have more in common with each other than with certain forms of their respective traditions. From this perspective possibilities of interaction and the emergence of useful 'third ways' are more likely.

### **6.2.2 The relationship between liberal and conservative pastoral streams in the American context**

As shown by the above literature review, pastoral theology and care is heavily defined by its location within liberal versus evangelical traditions. It is important to briefly consider these two streams, which represent two distinct (for the most part hermetically sealed) realities with distinct organizations, methods and goals.

The Association for Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) and the American Association of Pastoral Counselors (AAPC) as well as the Society for Pastoral Theology, along with associated journals service the mainline churches and the American Association of Christian Counselors (AACC) and the Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) are competing evangelical bodies.

Townsend (2004 : par 58). clarifies the distinct values of the different traditions :

[The] integrative approach sets pastoral counselors apart from Christian Counselors. The American Association of Christian Counselors is an evangelical alternative to AAPC bound together by a common statement of faith and a mission 'to equip professional, pastoral and lay caregivers with biblical, theological and psychological truth that ministers to the soul of a hurting person and helps them move to personal wholeness, interpersonal competence, mental stability, and spiritual maturity' (AACC, 2003). Christian counseling is 'Christ-centered, biblically based, and oriented toward the eternal more than the immediate' (Crabb, 2003). In contrast, pastoral counselors learn a methodological frame through which a therapist manages tensions between psychological theory, ministry activity, and diverse religious belief systems.

Burc and Hunter (1990 :868) further describe the distinctive characteristics of those outside of mainline Protestant care. They describe them as 'neo-evangelicals' who talk of 'integrating' psychology and theology. 'Generally, conservatives attempt to distinguish practical methods and empirically verifiable theories from the deeper philosophic and value assumptions of contemporary psychology, adopting the former and rejecting aspects of the latter; and they try to combine psychology with a dualistic nature-supernature worldview and an emphasis on the authority of Scripture.' Unlike the mainline protestant pastoral care movement, which started a generation earlier through Hiltner and was heavily influenced by the depth psychology of Freud

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<sup>127</sup> For example, authors within the journals often use terms like 'liberal' or 'evangelical' to describe themselves, and it seems paternalistic to eschew their self-descriptions.

and Jung and the humanistic psychology of the likes of Rogers, the conservative movement has an 'empirical, cognitive, and behavioral orientation' (1990: 868).

If one examines further descriptions of the evangelical counseling movement I believe a certain bias and misunderstanding is betrayed. According to my interpretation there seems to be an assumption that the evangelical movement is fearfully stuck in the past in an increasingly indefensible position.

'Members of AACC are unified not by standards of clinical competence but by the members' shared commitments to an evangelical, Christ-centered, and biblically based faith.... AACC responds to the challenges of postmodernity by embracing pre-Enlightenment understandings of the self, epistemology, and ethics' (Ramsay 2004 : sect 5 par 1). '[W]hereas European practical theologians are troubled about Christianity's decline, many mainstream pastoral theologians in the United States worry more about the growth of conservative evangelical forms of Christianity' (Miller-McLemore 2004 : par 6). There is a 'difference between the interfaith efforts of pastoral counseling and the more conservative, biblically literalist, evangelistic perspective of' AACC....The wider public appreciates pastoral counseling and the AAPC precisely because of its recognition of diversity and its efforts to inform rather than convert the public to any particular Christian position' (: par 47).

While I believe the evangelical movement needs to heed many criticisms and learn much in terms of public theology and societal engagement from mainline theology, its principal methodological commitment to the authority of Scripture is not a reactionary refusal to face reality, but a coherent position. The fact that it can be held in a legalistic, reactionary and unloving way does not invalidate it as a basic methodology.

While the evangelical church has many problems (see section 1.8.11), I believe the liberal focus on radical pluralism and its relativistic approach to Scripture is ultimately incoherent and unsustainable. It lacks appropriate warrant, in other words.

Faithfulness to Christ and the gospel involves a complex integration of aspects from both traditions. Hunter (2006), writing from within the mainline tradition, discusses the relationship between these two streams, producing an analysis that represents a step in the right direction.

Hunter ( 2006:20) examines the emergence of liberalism and the way it 'split academic pastoral theology in a deep and comprehensive way from which it has never recovered....The liberal turn toward experience and to social and psychological reality as the locus of the divine' involved a 'pastoral turn toward the promotion of healing, health, social adjustment, and social justice as the essential work of ministry.'

The evangelical stream is conspicuously absent from the liberal pastoral structures (the Society and journal of pastoral theology) and has followed its own line of development and engagement with and use of psychology. Hunter (2006:20) acknowledges that liberal streams 'have found ways to ignore or repudiate the evangelical tradition rather than engage it' to the detriment and mutual error of both. He engages in a sustained description of their mutual 'heresies' (:22), respectively undergirded by an extreme focus on either an immanent or transcendent understanding of God (:20-28). A conservative focus on transcendence in extreme form can lead to 'harsh, punitive, aggressive practices of Christian living and ministry.... legalistic literalism.... authoritarianism.... a domineering spirituality ... slavish obedience, self-rejection...exploitation... exclusion, rejection, repression, condemnation, and ultimately violence' (:22).

On the other hand, an extreme liberal focus on immanence can lead 'to a boundless and amorphous identification of God with the world...[with God ceasing to be] a concrete actor and covenant partner' (Hunter 2006:23). Liberal 'identity becomes diffuse, accountability to God and neighbor is weakened, ... personhood becomes narcissistic and deluded into a false, uncritical identification with the Infinite...[leading to] arrogance and egotism ... tyranny, domination, and oppression... social and moral consequences ...as horrid and cruel as any conservative authoritarianism' (:24). 'The liberal model of pastoral care has found it difficult to specify what relationship to God means beyond a very broad, unbounded, quasi-mystical notion of trust, sense of mystery, and feeling of gratitude' (:23).

Hunter (2006: 28) concludes:

To the extent that academic pastoral theology remains one-sidedly committed to the principle of divine immanence it risks losing its identity in relation to the various psychological and other helping disciplines, and it risks becoming irrelevant to the actual, concrete spirituality and life of religious communities. We see this occurring already, as I have noted, in the groundswell of interest in spiritual direction and courses in spirituality in many of our seminaries. Whatever we think of these courses, they do suggest a failure of our own field to pursue a well balanced theological conception of our task, a problem rooted in our history and especially in the great division of traditions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I believe there remains an impossible divide between mainline Protestantism and evangelicals, based on clear, mutually exclusive foundations as they currently exist. For this reason, continued efforts to examine our epistemological foundations and revisit the complex histories out of which they were birthed remain vital.

Liberal and conservative representatives may ignore the life of God that is active in the activities of the other, making their perceptions increasingly outdated and caricaturistic (as change arising out of valuable nauncing and development is not accounted for). This is similar to how Barth's thought is sometimes disregarded. A valid epistemology should not disregard anything without appropriate warrant. Part of the conservative error is to disparage the diversity and continuity with culture that liberal traditions embrace (not recognizing that diversity can be defended as a theological imperative on the basis of Scripture and not recognizing the extent to which it is itself highly influenced by culture). Part of the liberal error, on the other hand, is to fail to appreciate the coherent biblical foundations of the conservative, not recognizing how much it itself needs valid foundations, blind to the fact that it is trading on assumptions and building an edifice on a sinkhole.

### **6.2.3 Basic definitions of pastoral care**

This section provides certain basic definitions of pastoral care as the context for its exploration. I will simply list a series of definitions according to date, concluding with brief observations.

Hiltner (1958: 64) examines the traditional understanding of shepherding as involving discipline, comfort and edification and rejects these terms in favour of healing, sustaining and guiding. He defines healing as 'the restoration of functional wholeness that has been impaired as to direction and/or schedule' (: 90).

According to Clinebell (1984: 26): 'Pastoral care is the broad, inclusive ministry of mutual healing and growth within a congregation and its community, through the life cycle. Pastoral counseling, one dimension of pastoral care, is the utilization of a variety of healing (therapeutic) methods to help people handle their problems and crises more growthfully and thus experience healing of their brokenness.'

Thayer (1985:15-30) examines the interplay between modern and postmodern forces in society and how this has affected therapy and pastoral care. He insists pastoral care must enable 'the community to engage in compassionate social action for justice and liberation' (: 69).

Switzer (D K 1986:14) explains that caring is common to all human experience, but pastoral care is distinguished by its unique 'motivation and context....It is the conscious acting out toward one another of the love that God has shown to us in Jesus Christ, and it is done within and also as a representative of the community of faith...counseling is a dynamic personal relationship in which both persons participate and both persons change.'

Fowler (1987: 21) places pastoral care within the context of the church, which he sees 'as an ecology both of care and transformation....From this perspective, pastoral care consists of all the ways a community of faith, under pastoral leadership, intentionally sponsors the awakening, shaping, rectifying, healing, and ongoing growth in vocation of Christian persons and community, under the pressure and power of the in-breaking kingdom of God.'

Hunter (1990:42) explores seven perspectives that inform a 'clinical pastoral perspective.' It 'sees life "from below"- "clinically"-in the sense of focusing principally on the aspects of hurt, need, conflict, and failure present in every human situation.' While not denying 'social, systemic, political, economic, and cultural aspects' it 'focuses on human situations in their personal and interpersonal dimension' (:42). It accepts "'the priority of being," "presence," "relationship," and the "potentiality," over "doing"-over actual decision and action' (:43).

'The practice of pastoral counseling is defined in the statement of purposes in the Handbook of the AAPC as the "exploration, clarification and guidance of human life, both individual and corporate, at the experiential and behavioral levels through a theological perspective." Pastoral counseling requires, according to AAPC, "knowledge of theological and behavioral sciences and their integration at both theoretical and operational levels."' (Patton 1990:1223).

Hurding (1995: 81) defines counseling as 'that activity which seeks to help others towards constructive change in any or all aspects of life within a caring relationship that has agreed boundaries.'

Goodliff (1998:10) defines pastoral care as, 'the healing, sustaining, guiding, personal / societal formation and reconciling of persons and their relationships to family and community by representative Christian persons (ordained or lay), and by their faith communities, who ground their care in the theological perspective of that faith tradition and who personally remain faithful to that faith through spiritual authenticity.'

Louw (1998a: 6) distinguishes four relevant terms that fall within pastoral care: 'pastoral encounter' ('between God and human beings'), 'pastoral conversation' (or 'dialogue'), 'pastoral counseling' ('the procedures, attitudes, and responses...introduced'), and 'pastoral therapy', which 'signifies the healing dimension resulting from God's gracious action towards his people.' It includes the dimensions of support, change and growth as an inherent part of the consoling and transforming event of the fulfilled promises of the Gospel (promissiotherapy).

'Pastoral counseling includes the supernatural destiny of the counselee and counts on the power of divine grace to achieve it. Its aim can be described as an interpersonal relationship aimed at helping free a person's capacity to live his / her life as a child of God, grow as a person and mature in Christ. It assists people in finding solutions to their daily problems in the light of the Christian faith and commitment' (Kiriswa 2002: 5).

'Christian counseling, at its best, is a Spirit-led process of change and growth, geared to help others mature in Christ by the skillful synthesis of counselor-assisted spiritual, psycho-social, familial, bio-medical, and environmental interventions' (AACC ethics code : 2004).

'[C]ounseling is all about change. It's about people who want to change, people who don't know how to change, people who need help to change, people who resist change, and people...who seem unable to leave their current circumstances and accept the help of others to change. Counselors work with those who are overwhelmed by the circumstances or changes in their lives, people who have no idea how to cope or what they can do to bring about change' (Collins 2007:3).

Louw (2008: 75-77) identifies the following functions of pastoral care and counseling: healing, sustaining, guiding, reconciling, nurturing, liberating, empowering, interpreting.

The obvious stance of care, support, healing and growth is implied in all fourteen definitions, even though different terminology is used. For example, only six definitions mention healing and five mention growth. It would be wrong to conclude that the other authors did not believe healing and growth are important. For example, Switzer (1986) does not mention healing, but the use of words 'love' and 'change' imply healing.

The dynamic of differences in assumptions leading to differences in methodology and outcomes in pastoral care (see sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2) clearly plays out in these definitions as well. A more direct focus on biblical and church concerns is found in authors such as Switzer (1986), Fowler (1987), Goodliff (1998), and Kiriswa (2002), as well as in the AACC ethics code. A mainline focus on praxis, diversity and public theology is more apparent in Thayer (1985), Fowler (1987), whom I intentionally place in both categories, and Patton (1990).

Here too, the goal is not to over-categorize, over-simplify, or misrepresent. Nevertheless, in terms of this research, greater warrant is due to stances (understood richly in terms of assumptions, method, practices and outcomes) that are more comprehensive, such as Fowler's (1987:21) focus on both 'care and transformation' within the rich concept of the kingdom of God, as well as Louw's (2008:75-77) extension of the classic functions of healing, sustaining and guiding to include 'reconciling, nurturing, liberating, empowering, [and] interpreting.'

According to the hermeneutical stance of this research, definitions are metaphors and tools which should facilitate engagement and experience of the inbreaking Kingdom of God (the praxis ideal of theory and practice working together). I believe a healthy sign of a valid praxis is when our experience gives surprising and even overwhelming meaning and content to our definitions. Even further, a valid praxis should result in definitions having their bounds burst, necessitating richer reformulations. The dynamics of fixed interpretations and definitions conflicting with newer, richer meaning and reality is illustrated in Jesus' life and ministry. His authoritative demonstration of the values and practices of the Kingdom of God (which involved epistemological and existential challenge) was difficult to accept as it challenged existing knowledge and value systems, which needed to be upgraded (which is always a difficult and painful process). These dynamics are illustrated in Jesus parable of new wine bursting old wineskins, thus requiring new wineskins, a reality people were loath to accept (Lk 5:37-39). Furthermore, these dynamics are relevant to all theological systems and worldviews, be they so-called conservative or liberal.

### **6.3 The relationship between pastoral care, theology and church**

Part of adopting an approach to pastoral care that has integrity in terms of epistemological and scriptural concerns is to understand its historical, academic and ecclesial contexts.

### 6.3.1 Christian tradition

Pastoral care is as old as the first encounters of God with humankind. When Israel blessed Joseph's sons on his deathbed he asks 'the God who has been...[his] shepherd all...[his] life to this day' bless them (Gn 48:15-16). The theme of God's love and kindness to his people laying upon them the obligation to treat all others similarly occurs in Scripture as one of its most significant and irrefutable themes (Dt 10:18-19; Jn 13:34; Mt 5:44-45; 2Cor 1:3-4).

Clearly then, the church, to a greater or lesser extent, in its different manifestations of greater or lesser faithfulness to God and Scripture has been defined by its love and pastoral care. In a lecture, Guinness (2009a) states that it was its ethos of care in clear contrast to the cruelty of the Roman empire that was a critical factor in its ascendancy relative to the empire's decline.

The church's role in societal care continued, reaching its acme in Medieval times. Therefore, when love and pastoral care is absent it makes perfect sense to hear people say, 'That's not very Christian of you.'

Apart from shifts in degrees of faithfulness, the changing cultural and historical contexts within which the church finds itself directly colour and shape the nature of its pastoral care, causing a range of forms of care to be 'expressed from and through the range of Christian traditions' (Hurding 1995: 80). As Clebsch and Jaekle (1964: 32) specifically clarify:

The four pastoral functions of healing, sustaining, guiding, and reconciling have alternately and variously risen to prominence, amidst the changing cultural, psychological, intellectual, and religious circumstances of men and women throughout the Christian Era. Although in any given historic epoch one function polarized the entire pastoral endeavor around itself, it has been seen that in each era all the four functions remained in operation.

The context of church and care since the Enlightenment has given rise to specific issues and dynamics, specifically around the natures and interrelationship of theology and practical theology.

### 6.3.2 Theology and practical theology in historical context

The debate that rages around the nature and status of practical theology needs to be understood within our current social context, which itself needs to be understood in terms of the dynamics and understandings of previous contexts, which continue to define and influence contemporary theology and ministry.

In terms of recent context, the last thirty to fifty years have seen a rising pace of constant change in society, resulting in a chaotic mix of increasingly militant secularism and eclectic spirituality. Within this pluralistic, postmodern reality Christianity's key normative role in society is no longer taken for granted. This has caused a crisis for all Christians and congregations. Liberal Protestantism has been particularly hard hit, showing radical drop off in attendance, relative to conservative churches (see Finke and Stark 2002). It makes sense, therefore, that much of the development in practical theology has taken place within a liberal Christian context. As Cahalan (2005: 63) explains, 'The decline of mainline Protestantism has been a major impetus for the revitalization of the field of practical theology in North American theological education since the 1980s.' This crisis is expressed in the urgent question of how 'local congregations [can] be communities of vitality and faithfulness' in this challenging context. In the light of the move 'beyond the clerical paradigm' the question of 'who will lead [these] post-Christendom congregations' becomes pressing (2005:63). This context explains the strong focus on issues of practical theological training and formation in much of the journal literature.

In terms of previous contexts, Farley's (1983) seminal essay provided an incisive reminder of the history of theology and helped set the agenda leading to the shifts we have inherited today.

Farley (1983:22) distinguishes four different meanings of theology as a genre. Originally, the term theology was 'appropriated' from Hellenistic philosophy, conserving its sense of 'the knowledge of God...an *episteme*, a *scientia*, an act or cognitive disposition in which the self-disclosing God is grasped and disclosed...[it] is simply what Christian faith is all about, for knowledge of God in this sense and salvation coincide' (:22).

Up to the Middle Ages this essential understanding remained stable: 'theology [was] a *habitus*, a disposition, power, act of the soul itself....an existential, personal act and relation of the human self –namely wisdom' (Farley 1983:23). A shift occurred leading to the emergence of a second genre. This occurred in the universities of Europe where theology became 'one, single science' in similar fashion to other disciplines like philosophy (:23).

Following the Enlightenment criticism of faith and theology, theology splintered and became a cluster of independent sciences (Old Testament, New Testament, dogmatics, and church history). This led to the problem of 'how to relate them to each other in unity and coherence' (Farley 1983: 24).

The fourth understanding of theology reflects the situation in today's universities. Theology has become conflated with the subdiscipline of systematic theology. Theology *habitus* has disappeared and the closest one comes to it is the modernist concept of 'theological understanding', the 'postures' and 'cognitive disposition appropriate to faith.' This has been further 'narrowed to something yielded by hermeneutics...[leading to] insight, existential knowledge, [and] understanding' (Farley 1983:24).

Schleiermacher is the key figure involved in the resolution of the relationship between the different theological disciplines in theology's third phase, which was vital in order to justify theology's existence in the university.

For Schleiermacher theological studies in the university were to be applied to 'clerical responsibilities and tasks' (Farley 1983:19). This is clearly the genesis of practical theology. Schleiermacher's 'position was that theology, philosophical and historical, be the over-arching rationale for all that is done in practical theology as aided by the human sciences' (Loder 1990 :1265). Philosophical theology was to be the 'root', historical theology the 'body' and practical theology the 'crown' (Burkhart 1983:43). Although he understood that one could begin with any part and saw them as interdependent he understood 'the most natural order' to be from philosophical, through historical to practical theology (Burkhart 1983:43-44).

A problem with Schleiermacher's solution has been the division it creates with 'Bible, church history, dogmatics, and ethics...[falling] on the theory side...[and] practical theology on the practice side' (Farley 1983:28). A further related criticism has been his application of theology to practice, in one direction, failing 'to notice that practice determines theory and actions inform thoughts' (Thandeka 2005 : 197). '[H]e sees practical theology, finally, as consisting in the consequences and applications derived from thought done elsewhere. Hence, it tends to technique....[lacking] any systematic understanding of the interpretive dimensions of *praxis*' (Burkhart 1983 :53). This degeneration into 'mere technology' is also problematic in the way it forces aspects of practical theology to adopt an 'auxiliary discipline or science...[to accord] academic or scholarly respectability. Accordingly, the auxiliary science moves into the center of the subdiscipline and tends to become both its norm and content. Thus, [for example]



psychology controls pastoral care' (Farley 1990: 935). Practical theology today still struggles with the identity concerns bequeathed by Schleiermacher.

The anthropological and practical focus of much of today's practical theology also finds its roots in Schleiermacher. A key aspect of his thought in his monumental 'Brief Outline' (1811) is that any area of study can become 'explicitly theological through the theological interest brought to them....The criterion for inclusion or exclusion is use....[with] no fixed lines between sacred and secular, since God is the ground of all reality' (Burkhart 1983 :51).

Furthermore, Schleiermacher's concept of *Affekt* (affect), a key foundation in his system, has become the 'structural foundation of modern theology' (Thandeka 2005:197). He 'makes affect [*Affekt*] the organic link between feeling [*Gefühl*] and doing [*Tun*]' (:205). *Affekt* is understood to be a 'fundamental structural device' in all humans (:205), making it clearly distinguished from Luther and Calvin's use of conscience as 'an innate *religious* capacity implanted in human nature by God' (:206). Thandeka (2005: 207) concludes:

[Schleiermacher] separated theological reflection on pious feeling from the affective based, neuropsychological dispositions (affect) to which they refer. This gap between theological reflection and a foundational neurobiological human experience is the space of liberal theology, the place where every theological claim becomes a culturally determined description rather than an invariant God-ordained definition of the human condition to which it refers. Schleiermacher thus sends the readers of his theology to his work on ethics to find the content of his theological propositions shorn of church dogmas and religious disquisitions.

Gräb (2005:197) examines the necessary nature of practical theology that is continuous with 'the spirit of Schleiermacher'. 'When it comes to issues of 'normative criteria' one cannot rely solely on dogmatics and it is necessary to clarify 'a general concept of religion as well as one that specifically rests on the theory of Christianity' (:196).

With a general concept of religion as a guideline, practical theology has to try to find answers to: why society needs the church as an institutionally established space for symbolic communication; how to speak about shared concerns and differences in regard to the other great religions; how to discern what is truly Christian and make that visible in religious life; and finally how the religious quest outside of the institutionally established religious systems can be understood as being religious, more specifically religious in the Christian sense, and how that can be related to religious communication that takes places inside the church.

(Gräb 2005:197)

### 6.3.3 Attempts to heal the divisions inherited from Schleiermacher

Numerous attempts have been made to resolve the division and mono-directionality that resulted from Schleiermacher. Farley (1983:29-31) refers to three attempts to 'rehabilitate' this division and regain *habitus*: the 'therapeutic' (related to 'personal-existential' practice, theology *habitus*, a Cartesian-Kierkegaardian stance), 'extracurricular programs' (related to 'ecclesiastical' practice, and Schleiermacher) or 'cultural criticism (related to 'social-political' practice, a Marxist stance). 'The problem is, in theological education, the...clerical paradigm has so dominated as to exclude the other two, not totally from the life of schools, but as paradigms that affect the structure of theological study' (: 31).

Farley's (1983:31-40) further analysis clarifies the unique problems involved in the discipline of practical theology. He urges a reclaiming of the first two senses of theology (:37-38) and examines how to make 'praxis in the social and political situation' part of this single reclaimed theology (:38). The critical issue is defining 'a region, an inclusive reality to which theological

understanding and theological science are correlated' (:38). The obvious fact that God is that reality does not do away with the problem of designating 'how that reality is so available as to order educational undertakings' (:38). He suggests that 'ecclesial presence' that exists in 'history and the world' and that is 'normative', 'redemptive' and 'world-transforming' is the necessary region (:38-39). This presence faces the challenge of being 'redemptively pervasive of any and all social, political, and cultural spaces, without itself becoming identical with any of them and developing official and timeless ecclesial-political institutions. This problem and theme is the province of practical theology. Ecclesiology in the narrower sense and themes of the church, its ministries, and tasks of ministry should have their thematization within this larger theme of the world-transforming character of ecclesiality' (:39).

Browning, the key figure in correlational theology, will be examined later and it will be clear that he stands in direct debt to Schleiermacher and wrestles with the exact same concerns as Farley, yet finds his region in general ethics rather than ecclesial presence.

It is my hypothesis that Schleiermacher has exerted undue influence and has locked practical theology and pastoral care into a specific focus and method that is in many ways self-limiting. I have in mind, specifically, their almost exclusively inductive and anthropocentric focus. Alternative understandings, including Barth's (1982) critical engagement with him need to be taken into account and allowed to influence the core assumptions and methodology of practical theology and pastoral care.

#### **6.3.4 Practical theology at the turn of the twenty-first century**

Tidball (1995 :42) explains that practical theology has moved beyond 'the practice of theology' or 'application of doctrine in pastoral settings' to 'the theology of practice,' 'a critical dialogue between theology and praxis.' While older understandings of practical theology as application and technique clearly still operate today, especially in the non-liberal streams of theology and church, this focus on praxis has clearly assumed centre stage in practical theology in the academy, even as it continues to struggle with issues of method, authority and identity.

Moore (2006: 163) comments on a series of essays in a volume of 'the international journal of practical theology' as a basis for tentative comments on the current state of the discipline. She talks of 'confusion', 'creativity', and 'wide compass' in the field (:163) and the challenge of finding a 'centre' and building 'coherence' with regard to the very broad 'scope,...sources, and...methods' in this field (:164). Despite this diversity she identifies the following commonalities in terms of focus, concerns, assumptions and method: the engaging of 'issues of cultural or religious practice with tools of systematic analysis...[with reconstructive] proposals for the future of theological theory and/or religious practice'; 'a commitment to empirical methods'; 'dialogue between the human sciences and theological traditions'; 'ecclesial interest... rethinking ecclesiology or...reshaping church practice' (:164); 'a concern for the relevance and adequacy of religious practice in a pluralistic, secularized world' (:165); 'the identification, testing, and reconstruction of religious practice' (:166); 'the evaluation of culture in relation to religious values and current religious practices' (:166).

These concerns and essential approaches are echoed by other authors (Farley 1990: 934-935; Browning 1991; Cahalan 2005:86; Marshall 2004). This involves a praxis methodology in order to attain these interpretive and ethical goals. This is seen in one of Farley's (1990 :934) definitions of practical theology: 'An area or discipline of theology whose subject matter is Christian practice and which brings to bear theological criteria on contemporary situations and realms of individual and social action.' A key question and problem concerns 'the genus or genre of practical theology. Is practical theology a term for a teaching area in clergy education or is it an immanent aspect of all theological thinking?' (Farley 1990: 935).

A key label which is repeatedly used to describe this theology is 'constructive' which stands in direct tension with 'confessional' approaches.

These issues, and others, are captured by Dayringer (2005:1) as he suggests the following trends and recommendations for pastoral counseling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

1. Pastoral counselors will have to publish more empirical, outcome/ cost effective studies to maintain credibility.
2. Psychiatry, psychology, social work, and marriage and family therapy will increase their interest in religion/spirituality.
3. Third party payers will utilize pastoral counselors more frequently.
4. Integrating theology into pastoral counseling will demand more thought.
5. AAPC has been a liberal Protestant movement and will need to become more inclusive.
6. Pastoral counselors should become more involved in bioethics.
7. Pastoral counselors should seek opportunities to teach in medical schools.
8. Pastoral counselors need to market themselves to physicians as well as to the church.
9. The term 'Spiritual' will replace the word 'pastoral' for clarity.
10. Brief therapy techniques will become more widely used by pastoral counselors.

### 6.3.5 The inductive, empirical approach

Since the enlightenment the need to analyse Christian practice has been emphasized. Nineteenth century theologians such as Schleiermacher 'proposed the branch of "ecclesiastical statistics" – knowledge about actual affairs within Christianity' (Heimbrock 2005 : 274) and the term 'empirical theology was coined by Werner Gruethn in the next century ( :274). After the 1950s theologians drew on 'the logic of modern empirical sciences' (:274). It is clear that the commitment to experience and doing theology that arises out of experience is thought to go hand in hand with a commitment to an empirical, evidence-based methodology, although I will argue that this has been understood too positivistically.

Empirical theology is 'a method of inquiry that presumes to find knowledge and its verification by appealing to experience' (Meland in Poling 1990:356). This 'distinguishes empirical theology from other forms of theology which find their authority in revelation or the realm of ideas' (Poling 1990: 357). In contrast to 'deductive, rational methods' it is inductive, moving 'from the richness of concrete experience to generalizations about the structure of experience' (:357). 'Persons committed to an empirical method start with human experience as the source of the knowledge of truth and return to experience as the verification of generalizations about the structures of experience' (:357).

In terms of the epistemological discussion in chapter two this wholehearted commitment to the inductive method, opposing it so strongly to a deductive and revelatory pole is highly problematic.

Poling (1990:357) defines experience in empirical theology as 'the felt, bodily, psychosocial organic action of human beings in history...[which] is not reductive to psychological categories' and includes knowing 'Gods presence...[as] immanent in experience and...at least partially knowable.' Experience also remains distinct from generalizing about it. These attempts are 'tentative...correctable....abstractions which facilitate understanding... but inevitably distort and diminish experience.'

Poling (1990: 357-358) sees an empirical focus as vital in dialogue between theology / pastoral care and the human sciences. His commitment to empirical theology and Browning's method of revised critical correlation are clearly self-reinforcing.

Heimbrock's (2011: 154) explanation of the nature of practical theology as empirical theology betrays how empiricism, praxis and practical theology have become interlocked in a mutually reinforcing scheme: 'Practical Theology participates in overall theological reflection on faith, culture and life... in a bottom-up way, starting with praxis in order to confront the imperialism of idealistic constructs of a "pure faith" with reality and lived life and in order to contribute to responsible practice of religion in the midst of everyday life.' He states, 'the formal object of Practical Theology as Empirical Theology is Christian praxis within the life world as action and as aesthetic praxis, centred in the first-person-perspective' (:167). 'Practical Theology focusing particularly on "lived experience" helps theology in general to profile...[its] indispensable role within the academy...[this] epistemological reasoning provides secular arguments to enlarge an understanding of life and reality beyond restricted ideals of natural scientific objectivity' (:169).

There is clearly a conflict of interest involved in providing 'secular' arguments' about spiritual matters (Schleiermacher's intent, continued principally through Browning).<sup>128</sup> The assumption that a common methodology can be used for secular and religious exploration is recognized as a problem by many.

Burc and Hunter (1990:872) ask 'how behavioral scientific research methodology should function in pastoral theology (if at all). Are these methods too narrow, superficial, or "objective" to speak to theological and spiritual questions, to give voice to women's, minority, and oppressed perspectives, or to inform an essentially practical theological discipline?'

Florell (1990:356) asks a similar question. It is questionable whether 'even the best social science ... [can] ever be entirely adequate to the unique needs of pastoral research. Pastoral work of all kinds intends to relate to people at the deepest levels of their existence in the context of relationships to the whole human community, the cosmos, and ultimately to God....if this profound, wide-ranging intentionality is taken seriously as fundamental to pastoral care and counseling, and hence the one aspect of it that most requires diligent study? Can it be studied empirically? If so, how?'

Heimbrock (2005: 273) examines the empirical approach to theology and talks of a 'growing need to reflect on the theological impact and consequences of using concepts and research models from the humanities in religion research.' He examines Van der Ven's understanding of the theoretical intention of empirical theology, criticizing it for overlooking the theory-laden nature of the process (:278-280). He recommends a phenomenological approach to complement Van der Ven's understanding. This understanding and application of phenomenology shows clear postmodern concern to expose naive objectivity and focus on difference (:281-293). In terms that resonate with Browning's (1991) correlative methodology. Heimbrock (2005:293) states, 'life world is a foundation for normativity. Phenomenological research draws heavily on implicit pre-reflexive normativity within the praxis of life worlds. Reflecting on these normative layers makes it possible to identify them and to discuss how they are related with explicit values within ethics, ethical research, and theology. Of course, these normative layers are all debatable within Christian faith.'

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<sup>128</sup> Therefore, when a publishing house like De Gruyter publishes the 'International Journal of Practical Theology' with the same ethos and methodology as the books in the other disciplines, such as law and natural science, proudly distinguishing itself from confessional approaches (see section 6.2.1.3a), there is a problem. Of course such publications have the right to exist and they contribute something vital to the discussion. However, when they claim to be or are viewed as being normative (the 'industry standard' so to speak), then secular understandings of knowledge have swallowed up revelation, without appropriate warrant.

This dissertation proposes that practical theology and pastoral care need to consider epistemology in a more profound way. This includes tracing the history of our current epistemological understandings in order to challenge the validity of the key assumptions that undergird our methodology. The conclusions reached in chapter two, that knowledge is complex and needs to hold a strong tension between all the various dynamics (such as deductive versus inductive approaches and revelation versus experience) should inform our current methodology. These criticisms relate to praxis based practical theology, which has its strongest expressions in the mainline liberal churches and non-confessional academic settings. This does not mean that confessional, evangelical expressions have 'got it right,' for they have equally failed to maintain necessary tensions, by going to the other extreme.

### 6.3.6 The anthropological focus

The shift to religious experience as the object of theology with its prerequisite commitment to the empirical, inductive method clearly goes hand in hand with an anthropological shift. It is human experience which can be submitted to practical theological enquiry. 'Our field is historically committed in its theological methodology to the centrality of human experience in all forms, religious and non religious, not to a transcendent revelation. This commitment to experience, however, is a hallmark of the liberal theology from which it sprang, from Schleiermacher onward' (Hunter 2006:19). Hunter (2006 :24-25) explains this further, exposing a central problem in this focus:

[The] inclination...[is] not to articulate or challenge people with the question of their relation to God (as the old antebellum pastors did and evangelical pastors do today), but to encourage people to listen to their deepest selves and, empathically, to each other — to listen to their own and each other's *experience*. But what if listening to experience is ultimately a narcissistic or self-deluding trap? What if we can only truly listen to ourselves and learn from our experience — that is, to the whole social and historical process as well as to our individual depths — only if we are encountered by another who is not identical with ourselves, whose identity is in part truly *other*, and whose ultimate purposes are not really known to us?

Clear evidence that the anthropological focus caused a loss of contact with our classic spiritual roots by the end of the twentieth century was provided by Oden (1988 :17-20). He argues that a clear classical pastoral care tradition has existed in the church as evidenced in the pastoral writings of key figures in church history. He chose ten representative figures (including Chryostom, Augustine, Luther, and Calvin) and performed a literature study of the 'frequency of reference' to these ten key writers by 'representative nineteenth-century pastoral writers,' coming up with 314 references (:20). In a comparative study of reference by twentieth-century pastoral writers (including Hiltner, Clinebell, and Oates) he did not find a single reference (:21). However, these same writers made 330 references to modern psychotherapists such as Freud, Jung, Rogers, and Fromm (:22). He urges earnest endeavors to recover pastoral care's lost identity through 'a wholesome reconstruction of pastoral care that is informed by Christian theology' (:27). This does not entail the rejection of modern insights or a reactionary retreat to the past: 'The task that lies ahead is the development of a postmodern, post-Freudian, neoclassical approach to Christian pastoral care that takes seriously the resources of modernity while also penetrating its illusions and, having found the best of modern psychotherapies still problematic, has turned again to the classical tradition for its bearings, yet without disowning what it has learned from modern clinical experience' (:27).

### 6.3.7 Practical theology and pastoral theology and practice

As stated in the introduction to this chapter, the way one interrelates theology and practical theology directly affects the approach taken to pastoral theology. Burc and Hunter (1990:867)

state that the lack of clarity over whether practical theology is a clear discipline in its own right has made its 'relationship to pastoral theology...either ambiguous or inconsequential.'

According to Hunter (2001: 20), the 'classical paradigm' for pastoral theology operative 'throughout most of the church's history... concentrated primarily and often exclusively on the gospel message. It disregarded the concrete particularities and individuality of persona and contexts and tended, as Patton said, to "universalize its understanding of human problems and express them in exclusively religious terms."

When the term 'pastoral theology' was first used around 1750 it referred to specific church practices. 'Advanced study in pastoral theology as graduate education' only occurred around the 1930s and 1940s with the development of secular psychological sciences upon which these pastoral programmes 'were heavily dependent' (Mills 1990: 865). In the late 1950s leaders such as Oates, Hiltner and Boisen insisted on a return to 'the concrete data of the minister's practice' (Mills 1990:866).

Hiltner (1958: 20) considers 'shepherding as a perspective,' making pastoral theology the bringing to bear of this perspective 'upon all the operations and functions of the church and the ministers...[and the drawing of] conclusions of a theological order from reflection on these observations.' He insists it is not merely 'study of practice' as it needs to develop 'fundamental theory' (:22). Therefore, it cannot be a one-way application of theology, nor is it identical to pastoral psychology or sociology (:23). We see here the first expressions of pastoral theology being seen as synonymous with practical theology, with the consequent need for it to be a form of theologizing in its own right.

Hunter (2001:20) explains how the most significant change beyond the psychologically dependent clinical pastoral paradigm occurred in the last decade of the twentieth century in the form of the 'communal-contextual paradigm' (Patton's term 1993). 'In today's liberal seminaries, the pastoral themes are social and cultural : gender, race, ethnicity, aging, together with their associated forms of oppression, abuse and violence. Closely related is a strong emphasis on fostering community that is inclusive, just and caring' (2001 :20). Hunter (2006:13) compares this current postmodern contextual focus to the great impact of depth psychology: 'What psychotherapy had meant as praxis of liberation to a previous generation has broadened to include prophetic social critique and transformation as major, and sometimes principal pastoral theological agendas in our own.'

This fundamental concern for pastoral theology to be truly theological in a constructive way is accentuated by this postmodern communal-contextual turn with its need for praxis-based understanding and action in contexts requiring pastoral care. This provokes the fundamental question posed by Burc and Hunter (1990 : 871-872), 'whether pastoral theology will see its task primarily in traditional terms as one of applying theology to pastoral situations and developing theories of pastoral care—essentially regarding the discipline as a branch of ecclesiology or ethics—or that of doing theology itself, contextually, or of the pastoral situation, in a pastoral mode or perspective.' The latter choice makes it a praxis discipline where 'pastoral experience serves as a context for the critical development of basic theological understanding' (1990:867). Many writers and practitioners answer this question in the affirmative, following the praxis-based practical theology methodology of key figures like Farley and Browning in their understanding of pastoral theology (Hunter 2006:7; Jennings 1990: 863; Ramsay 2004 : ch7 par8; Marshall 2004 : sect 1 par7-8 ; Cahalan 2005:93).

Practitioners in the liberal tradition clearly understand that this stance diverges from conservative approaches, as Ramsay (2004 sect 1 par 9) clarifies:

For evangelical Protestants it continues to be the case that full reciprocity between Christian and theoretical resources is not expected in pastoral theology. Rather, pastoral theology more often functions as the application of biblical and theological resources to inform a faithful use of secular psychological wisdom. The behavioral sciences are integrated into the practice of care in ways that preserve the integrity of a particular theological or biblical perspective (Johnson, 1997).

This praxis-based pastoral theology involves a specific method, which Jennings (1990:862) outlines. A vital starting point is to clearly define and not confuse the different types language that operate in the situation. He distinguishes between first, second and third order religious language. The first refers to the 'phrases...narratives...[and] liturgies' used in relating life to God. The second is theology, 'the explication and critical evaluation or appropriation of...[the first's] basic meaning... yielding a theological judgment or proposal' and doctrine when there is communal consensus. 'Theological method, including pastoral theology is a third order reflection....concerned with an evaluation of the sources, norms, and procedures of theological judgments.'

Jennings (1990:862) explains that the act of pastoral care itself involves theological reflection. Care involves 'assisting the person who comes for help to explicate and critically evaluate assumptions concerning the meaning of faith and the life of faith' and this must be distinguished from using and encouraging the use of first order language in the counseling situation.

Theological evaluation in the counseling situation also involves the issues of truth and normativity and the evaluation of faith statements and assumptions in terms of their coherence, consistency, correspondence to reality and accepted theological authority (Jennings 1990: 862-863). The locus of truth is clearly linked to practical use: 'Pastoral practice provides a norm as well as a source for theological reflection and formulation. Theological or doctrinal assertions regarding the structure and dynamics of human brokenness and bondage (e.g., formulations of original and actual sin), as well as those concerned with the basic process and goal of transformation and growth (e.g., justification, reconciliation, sanctification), must be tested in clinical or pastoral contexts. Only if they prove to be actually illuminating of such contexts do they retain the general interpretive power which is necessary for second order discourse' (:863). A vital part of this normative reflection is dialogue with the human sciences, using appropriate second order theological concepts which are not psychologically reductive, following the example of the dialogue between theology and philosophy with its fruitful, mutually beneficial history (:864). This second order discourse must be 'focused upon the common subject matter... [which] is not the existence or nature of God but the nature and possible transformation of human existence' (:864).

Empirical theology clearly shares a close history and focus with certain conceptions of pastoral care and practical theology: 'Empirical theology and pastoral care share an interest in the immanence of God within concrete experience. Pastoral care has had difficulty finding literal and metaphorical ways of speaking about God within the clinical context. Empirical theology can contribute a philosophical basis for God's immanence and theological guidance for speaking about God in concrete terms' (Poling 1990 :357).

In terms of this dissertation's argument the above explication of pastoral theology is highly problematic in at least three ways. Firstly, while this kind of theology-science dialogue is vital I believe it needs to involve theology in a less limiting manner. This involves dealing with God (as the very term *theo logy* suggests) as well as human experience of and response to God, however difficult this kind of discussion may be. Secondly, while a perspectival focus, limiting our inquiry to purely human realities should happen as a part of theology, its validity is linked to an understanding of its limited, reductive nature, understood to be part of a greater and indivisible deductive-revelatory/inductive-experiential theological project. I do not believe this is happening in this form of theologizing, which claims to be foundational and ends up, I believe,

whether intentionally or inadvertently, defining the limits of what is possible. Thirdly, this understanding of the normative locus falls outside of my understanding of the normative locus residing in God and available only through revelation in the Holy Spirit through both Scripture and experience. Reflecting typical liberal theology (in its foundational, practical and pastoral forms) this understanding of normative third order reflection stands in danger of becoming a rational human capacity, representing a return to the failed project of rationalism and ultimately closer to the spirit, goals and practices of secular humanism than those revealed by the gospel.

### **6.3.8 Pastoral care as ministry within versus outside of the church**

Strunk (1990:1203) explains that specialization in pastoral care is as old as the history of the church, for 'pastoral care has [never] been limited to a parish or a parochial setting.' At the same time 'It is new in the sense that contemporary secularization and its resulting technologies in the helping professions have forced the church to develop specialized forms suited to the new conditions of society.' Beyond specialized techniques there is also a great and ever-expanding variety of specialized contexts. 'Hospitals, jails, prisons, mental institutions, military service, schools, homes for disturbed children, pastoral counseling centers, and business and industrial complexes' merely represent the surface and one also finds, for example, chaplains at police forces, racetracks and sports teams (:1204). This trend is reinforced by a change from the overseas conversion, missionary paradigm to mission as 'a service-oriented project in secular society' (:1204). In line with developments in evangelical understanding, this research accepts that mission has shifted to one's neighbourhood and needs to regain a strong emphasis on service, yet it rejects the loss of focus on conversion.

The reality of specialization raises deep issues concerning the relationship between these specialized practices and traditional church ministry. Positively, specialization challenges 'parochial' understandings of ministry and fits with the concept of the church reaching out into 'every nook and cranny of the world', forcing the church to strongly consider the validity and relevance of its culture and practices (Strunk 1990:1204). Again, in line with my hermeneutical understanding, church and society interrogate each other under the broader affirmation and judgment of God.

Specialization also leads to focused theological education (as in the Clinical Pastoral Education movement) and the establishment of guilds and accreditation bodies (Strunk 1990:1204). This results in the distancing of specialized practitioners from traditional church authority. In one sense this can lead to greater freedom and effectiveness. Nevertheless, this raises significant issues. Practitioners often are more directly accountable and loyal to an intervening secular structure than to their faith tradition, as in the classic case of an army chaplain. The issue of theological integrity arises as well as the practical issues such as those of church based pastors comparing themselves to specialists who are free from ecclesial control and yet earn significantly higher salaries (:1204-1208).

Examining the relationship between government legislation and pastoral care in the United States shows how economic and political factors directly influence the nature and method of pastoral care, which further impacts on the relationship between those forms of pastoral care practiced within versus outside of a formal church context.

The clinical pastoral paradigm of the 1970s and 1980s means that 'pastoral counseling emerged as a specialty that moved away from the historic congregational context of pastoral care and toward a model of therapeutic medicine' with the majority of pastoral counselors working in 'counseling centers or private practice' (Townsend 2004: par 31). Hospitals were a key area of chaplaincy and a careful relationship was established between providers of pastoral care, secular practitioners and the medical establishment. However, the American 'reorganization of



healthcare' in the 1990s challenged the place of hospital chaplaincy and its associated CPE programmes. Parish pastors were much cheaper and secular medicine and psychiatry also claimed to treat spiritual and religious problems' (: par 29). The greater demand for justification of added value means that '[h]istoric commitments to inductive learning and relational ministry were partly displaced by empirical and pragmatic tasks' (:par 30). 'Severed from traditional connections to hospitals, mental health centers, and health insurance payments, pastoral counselors struggled against extinction. Training became less important than gaining competitive licenses and maintaining clinical practices' (: par 32).

Since the turn of the century the postmodern turn and the partial resacralization of society with an increasing acceptance of spirituality has clearly breathed new life into pastoral care in these extra-ecclesial contexts. As I will argue, from an evangelical perspective this new found acceptance is not unproblematic.

To support its lobbying for the inclusion of pastoral counselors 'in Medicare's roster of approved caregivers, AAPC commissioned a national political survey' in 2000 which confirmed the desire of people for the integration of spiritual and medical care (Miller-McLemore 2004: par 49). Vandecreek & Burton (in Townsend 2004: par 34) describe a related development, the 'White Paper' of 2001, a 'landmark...joint statement prepared by the five largest healthcare chaplaincy organizations in North America representing over 10,000 members.' It rationalizes the presence and benefits of chaplains, within a pluralistic context as "'spiritual caregivers" who may also offer pastoral care,' meeting the needs of the person who 'is more than a mere physical body and requires more than mechanical care.' The White Paper sees "'spirituality" as a contemporary bridge ... between religion and medicine' (Townsend 2004: par 34-35). The link to and training by religious communities is de-emphasized as practitioners are seen as 'spiritual specialists in medical contexts' (Townsend 2004: par 35).

Townsend (2004:par 36) refers to Anderson's concerns over this fundamental shift which is 'part of a larger cultural revolution' that embraces spirituality yet refuses 'to tie spiritual practices to identifiable communities of faith.' According to Anderson this fundamental redefining of chaplaincy 'has taken place without full consideration of long-term results...."spiritual care" rests on a shaky foundation of popular spirituality with little grounding in tradition or community. It does not provide a metaphor rich enough to meet the depth of "the human and the divine story."' Townsend (: par 43) raises important 'epistemological and ecclesiological questions. Who defines the spiritual dimension of human experience? How is it identified, especially when distanced from specific religious expression or connections with traditional communities of faith?'

A further key development which directly impacts the relationship between church, society and care is the concept of theology as public theology, a key focus of Tracy's (1981) theological programme. Within the understanding of public theology, praxis (as reflection and action) takes place within society; as has been seen, this is a growing theme within the mainline literature.

Couture (1995: 70), for example, suggests pastoral care and counseling can play a vital role in helping 'public health develop more realistic ways of approaching religion and health' helping to overcome the alternative problems of disillusionment and cynicism towards faith communities or unrealistic, idealistic expectations in terms of their righteousness and ability to help. Following Browning's Fundamental Practical Theology she proposes a method with 'four distinct moments: descriptive theology, theological and ethical reflection and decision making, theological interpretation and reinterpretation, and transformed theological and ethical practices of love and justice' (: 72). A key part of the process is foregrounding the implicit theological views that exist within all the role players : 'Groups in both ministry and public health may be skeptical about the idea that something theological is going on in the practice of public health. All groups have

organizing metaphors of ultimacy, however, and in a historical review of a localities' public health practice, one can often find explicit religious warrants' (:73).

If pastoral care operating out of the mainline liberal church sometimes exhibits excessive discontinuity with the traditional church structure and excessive optimism about what can be achieved in public theology, parts of the evangelical church have often fallen into the opposite extreme of remaining within church structures and missing opportunities to creatively enter all spheres of life with the care of the gospel.

### **6.3.9 The relationship between pastoral care, modernity and postmodernity**

Ramsay (2004) writes about the parallel shifts that have occurred in society and pastoral care in a sweeping analysis of the decade and a half following 1990, which is understood to be a hinge period for the major shift from the clinical paradigm. A variety of pastoral writers are referred to, illustrating how typical postmodern concerns have become essential to their understanding of pastoral theology and practice. These concerns include the following: a 'widened range of conversation partners'; 'an enlarged vision for the scope of ministries of care'; a 'heightened appreciation for the particularity and social location of those practicing care, the complexity of context, and the asymmetries of power in the processes of care' (Ramsay 2004: sect 1 par 8); 'values...[and] judgments that are ... relative rather than based on supposedly universal ethical or metaphysical standards'; 'accepting some range of ambiguity and relativity' (: sect 1 par 11); a mirroring of public theology's concern with social, economic, political, and ecological issues (:sect 2 par 1-10); a focus on issues of 'difference and power' and a challenge to the locus of normativity and power in the white, male, middle-class, Protestant, heterosexual individual (:sect 3 par 12); a critique of exploitation through globalization with a focus on alternative concepts of internationalization and indigenization (: sect 4 par 2); valuing 'relationality and community' and appreciating 'particularity and difference' (: sect 6 par 1).

Numerous other authors examine this same period, emphasizing and nuancing different aspects of it, yet generally agreeing with and embracing the above pronouncements.

Marshall (2004 : sect 7 par 1-13) overviews the writings of the following previously 'under-represented' groups 'who are now actively changing the methods used in pastoral theology, care, and counseling: European American women, women and men of diverse racial and cultural heritages, international scholars, and lesbians, gays, and other persons whose experiences of sexuality are more diverse.' She states that pastoral care will be shaped by '[a]nthropology, ethnography, sociology, feminist epistemological theories, and contributions from a wealth of resources' and 'will have to undertake sophisticated qualitative work, while at the same time maintaining quantitative research' (: sect 8 par 4).

Miller-McLemore (2004 : par 20) extends Boisen's 1950 metaphor of people as a 'living human document' and chooses the metaphor of a 'living human web' to 'depict a major change in the field as a whole....Genuine care now requires understanding the human document as necessarily embedded within an interlocking public web of constructed meaning. She argues : 'Pastoral theology remains accountable to particular persons in need. But now it involves analyzing power and social constructions of selfhood, giving public voice to the socially marginalized, and arguing for alternative theological understandings of the social context as essential for adequate care not only in congregations but also in society at large' (: par 64). In the light of this shift to a public theological focus she talks of a 'new delineation of pastoral care's central functions.' While 'healing, sustaining, [and] guiding' remain important, they need to be extended by the public 'priorities...[of] resisting, empowering, and liberating' (: par 59).

According to Neugeur (2004 : par 1), 'The dynamic of power and difference is a central concern of pastoral theology in the postmodern context. No other topic has received more attention over the past twenty years of research in this field.' Neuger (2004) examines how power and concepts of difference are used to justify and entrench unfair privilege and disenfranchisement. Within this postmodern perspective the analysis of power and difference becomes integral to pastoral theology and practice: 'Practitioners began to recognize that their well-loved theologies and clinical theories needed to be held in suspicion and that they were likely to do harm if they didn't learn how to deconstruct the foundations of their practices through the lenses of diversity, power, and difference' (2004: par 35).

Cahalan (2005) is helpful in discerning some patterns in this ferment of postmodernist shift. She uses Lakeland's (1997) analysis of postmodernity with his three categories of response to the crisis of modernity - the late modern, the countermodern, and the radical postmodern- to clarify what she understands to be a parallel responses in practical theology: 'For late moderns, reason's power is modified and constrained not by its own self-imposed critical capacities, but by a community of engaged subjects in dialogue seeking understanding. What is foundational or universal is not necessarily the content but the capacity for conversation and dialogue that moves toward truthful engagement in and with the world' (Cahalan 2005:65). Don Browning's revised critical correlation methodology expressed in his proposals for a fundamental practical theology (1991), exemplifies this approach (:66).

Unlike late moderns, countermoderns are discontinuous with modernity and rather believe that 'integrated communities and community-dependent truth claims' existed before modernism and these can be reclaimed (Cahalan 2005: 65-65). Cahalan (2005:66) explains that according to Lakeland countermoderns (who include fundamentalist, neo-conservative and post-liberal positions) share a concern about 'ethical relativism and the subsequent loss of religious authority....[expressed in] individualism, secular humanism, moral relativism, loss of community' and various other social problems.

For true or radical postmoderns there is nothing to reclaim in either premodern or modern schemes as both represent 'totalizing discourses that distort, corrupt, and oppress people, cultures, and communities' (Cahalan 2005:66). Clearly this position is difficult to operate out of and, as discussed in previous chapter in this research, it is ultimately self-refuting. Nevertheless this context of oppression and the questions and issues it raises can be taken seriously. According to Cahalan (2005:66), this focus is integral to 'praxis-based theologies, in particular liberation, feminist, and contextual theologies.'

Cahalan (2005:86) suggests that these approaches have much in common: they all engage critically with modernism; they focus on 'practical...everyday realities' using 'biblical, historical, moral, and systematic theology...to a large extent in service to the practical'; they are focused on community and the 'subject-in-community' rather than the 'isolated autonomous subject'; they seek to reform theological education, sharing 'Farley's concern to retrieve *habitus* as its central form and purpose' (:87).

This open-ended, pluralistic focus raises issues of authority for the diverse discourses that are inevitably generated: 'Pastoral theology increasingly reflects this struggle with criteria for authorizing normative claims and particular strategies especially in an increasingly plural religious and civil context' (Ramsay 2004: ch 7 par 11). There is a concern for the key goals of focusing on 'the particularities of experience in constructive pastoral theological work without dismissing the ability to generate more universal claims' (Marshall 2004: sect 8 par 2) as well as maintaining 'a genuinely integrative and interdisciplinary approach without collapsing fields and disciplines into one another' (Marshall 2004: sect 4. par 6).

Neuger (2004 : par 4) suggests that pastoral theology is living in 'an in-between time.' Pastoral care and theology clearly relies on '[t]he belief in individual rights and in the pursuit of liberty [which] is part of a modern legacy,' yet she agrees 'that value and truth claims have been based on criteria grounded in the ordering of power in the culture,' a key postmodern insight.

In line with this postmodern shift, multicultural, intercultural and cross-cultural issues have become a key concern in the literature and methodological considerations. This has involved looking beyond the American context to critically consider the effects of globalization and more justly embrace international influences.

Lartey (2004: Par 7) suggests that pastoral care and counseling has echoed the dynamics and unjust consequences of economic and social globalization. This entails 'the exportation...in whole or in part, of the worldview, values, theological anthropology, lifestyle, paradigms, and forms of practice developed in North America and Western Europe, as when 'a counseling center is established in a non-Western context and the accreditation, recognition, inspection, standards, and models of practice in this enterprise arise in the United States' (: par 8). Two opposing trends have been internationalization, which aims at 'dialogical engagement, where American understandings interact with non-Western ones in a quest for practices that are more contextually appropriate (: par 9) and the even less common process of indigenization where 'models and practices indigenous to non-Western contexts are beginning to be re-evaluated and utilized in pastoral practice' (: par 12).

In surveying pastoral care undertaken around the world Lartey (2004:86) observes that that 'the appropriateness of therapeutic and transformative interventions has been based on how well they fit cultural and social assumptions' and concludes that 'pastoral identity needs to be seen in multivalent and corporate terms....The pastor in this view is a facilitator of difference' (:par 87). For example : 'The belief in the influences of the unseen world of spirits and powers is strong and needs to be taken seriously in pastoral counseling' (: par 40).

This raises issues of dealing with possession, and restoring harmony in this spiritual ecosystem. I do not believe the naturalistic paradigm of much western counseling will be able to interact with these spiritual systems and dynamics with integrity and an eclectic postmodern cohabitation does not fit the integrative vision of practical theology either. This again points in the direction of examining the naturalistic bias of our western pastoral care if true dialogue is to take place.

### **6.3.10 Formation, pastoral identity and pastoral care**

Practical and pastoral theology and practice, according to their praxis definitions need to exist and take place within concrete contexts of care and communication concerning the God-human encounter. Their more obvious and historical location is within the academy and seminaries. In addition to the relationship between practical/pastoral theology and theology, the relationship between academic, church and social contexts is a complex and disputed issue. Irrespective of this complexity, the postmodern concerns for diversity and openness directly affect the ferment concerning the goals and methodology of training that is taking place within the academy. Specific understandings of these dynamics should directly affect the goals and structure of formation within the respective educational institutions, although lags and discrepancies clearly occur.

A clear difference can be seen in the concerns of mainline liberal formation with its concerns for public theology and training in constructive praxis-based theology and diversity issues versus evangelical formation with its focus on integration that remains faithful to the gospel as it integrates psychological data. Mills (1990:866) quotes Hunter's 1980 distinction of the discipline understood either 'humanly and descriptively in terms of its social task and function, institutional

location, [and] what its practitioners do' or 'ideally in terms of its intellectual problematic and principles of procedure.' The later clearly correlates with the liberal, correlational method. Mills (1990: 866) categorizes institutions like Boston, Fuller, Claremont, Rosemead, Loyola of Baltimore, and Southwestern Baptist as pursuing the former understanding and Chicago, Emory, Princeton, and Vanderbilt the latter'<sup>129</sup>

While both evangelical and liberal streams interpret and value the current social ferment differently, both recognize that adaptations need to be made in formation programmes.

Focusing in this section on the liberal perspective, two principal themes seem to be the need to address the loss of the theological perspective in pastoral care and the need to fully engage with postmodern issues of diversity.

The secular captivity that characterized the clinical pastoral paradigm in the second half of the twentieth century is shown in Hunter's (1990:41) reflection on his eight-year role in editing the 'Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling.' He comments that most of the articles submitted 'lacked theological, ethical, or other normatively critical reflection...[showing] how utterly psychologized... [the] field... [had] become....the normative angle of vision had virtually disappeared from the consciousness of the great majority of persons writing on general pastoral topics. The therapeutic... [had] indeed triumphed.'

The Clinical Pastoral Education movement which served the mainline church has declined. According to Townsend (2004: par 53) 'creative dual-focus training programs that defocus clerical paradigms and teach pastoral counseling as a "bridge discipline" are flourishing.' However, most participants lack 'a foundation in CPE, parish ministry, or a strong endorsement as a minister from their faith tradition. Consequently, supervisors must shift their focus from teaching basic clinical skills to ministers and instead teach basic ministry and theological reflection skills to clinicians' (: par 54).

It is clear, however, that the theological content and methodology that is desired, in order to respond to the urgent lack within the diverse pastoral care services that exist, will depend on one's location in the liberal versus evangelical streams of the church.

The mainline liberal stream has strongly pursued public theology, with correlation as the principle methodology. According to Miller-McLemore (2004:par 13) 'prominent scholars in the "Chicago school," such as Tillich, Tracy, James Gustafson, and Don Browning, influenced pastoral care and counseling toward public theology through their sway over doctoral students' with the majority of 'pastoral theologians and counselors today employ[ing] some version of this [correlational] liberal model, however modified by revisionist, liberation, or postmodern theology.'

Marshall (2004: sect 9 par 1-19) comments on the need for pastoral formation to follow this focus on diversity and inculcate the necessary associated skills. Similarly, Ramsay (2004: sect 10 par 4) claims: 'Not only has our focus widened so as to comprehend more fully the contextual realities of a social, cultural, and political self, our own self-understanding as pastoral theologians and caregivers must also reflect a similar complexity and range. Formation is at once more difficult and crucial.'

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<sup>129</sup> In terms of formation, see the 'Journal of Spirituality in Mental Health' (Volume 8, Issue 3-4, 2007) for examples of a diverse range of perspectives, with a focus on praxis concerns, and the 'Journal of Psychology and Christianity (Volume 23 Issue 4 2004) for overviews of the integration focus of major evangelical institutions offering psychology courses.

The envisaged complexity of formation in this context is captured by Townsend (2004 : par 53) : 'This approach requires programs to teach a variety of therapy models, establish a broad range of supervisory expertise, enhance interdisciplinary collaboration, and creatively teach theological engagement with clinical theory and ministry practice.'

In an article dealing with the teaching of practical theology, Cahalan, Hess and Miller-McLemore (2008:81) analyse the diversity and ferment that surrounds pastoral education in our new context through examining six perspectives and conclude that a specific kind of knowledge being pursued within the formation programmes is 'emotional, psychospiritual, experiential, affective, intuitive, kinesthetic, and focused on images rather than only concepts.... activist.... improvisational....chaotic, messy, ambiguous, concrete, tangible, and quotidian....[requiring] a "capacity for vulnerability and risk" rather than certainty....[depending] on a practiced ability to "read"... situations and the [surrounding] cultural context....It comes from "loving" or "disciplined" attention to the multiple meanings of "what is going on." Teachers use multiple and creative methods to develop this knowledge, from showing films to analyzing church websites, and these 'conflict with traditional knowledge and methods.'

The focus on diversity and correlation which is taking place in the spheres of practice and formation is necessary and laudable. My principal critique will be that it is problematic in terms of balance, foundational assumptions and relationship to alternative understandings of the gospel.

### **6.3.11 A critical response to praxis-based practical theology and pastoral care**

It is vital to understand how far from its original meaning academic theology, in all its forms, has drifted. A sustained critique needs to be applied, for I believe a lot of the reformulations and reconstructions, which attempt to resolve the inherited problems, as shown in the ferment in the field of practical theology, unconsciously continue to accept the secular humanist assumptions of the Enlightenment and are attempting something that is impossible. This impossible task is to attempt to take a form of knowledge/life (theology as *habitus*), with its inextricably associated manifestations (Scripture and Christian mission, both affirmed by Christ our founder), a form of knowledge/life which depends on God (and which is best described as wisdom), and to try and work with it in foundational ways without primary reference to God (when Scripture clearly links respectful relationship with God and wisdom: Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Pr 1:7,9:10, 15:33; Is 33:6). Where God is allowed into the picture it is through levels of human mediation, using terms that can be generally accepted in the academic community (talking not of revelation, but of human communication about revelation, for example), a general acceptance which Scripture clearly states is impossible (1Cor 1 :17-18 ; 2 :12-14 ; Col 2 :8).

It can be argued that this reduction is necessary as theology works in a Duhemian sense (see 1.8.4) within the general public context. While this may have some validity this Duhemian understanding easily over functions and becomes normative. This lesser, permissible reduction mutates and excludes classic and more coherent forms of theological knowledge.

While I recognize the naiveté of this position, I do not believe it is obscurantist (and Jesus' teaching that we cannot enter the Kingdom of God –interpreted here to mean epistemological and existential fullness- unless we receive it like a little child –Mk 10:15-, suggests that sophistication and scepticism need to be held in check). The intent is not a 'science stopping' constriction of academic pursuit in the interests of a simplistic application of Scripture. The intent is integrity in terms of assumptions, foundations, method, practice and knowledge.

My further critique of praxis-based practical theology deals with three issues : basic assumptions in method and relevance to church and ministry ; an insufficiently critical engagement with postmodernity ; the problem of complexity and specialization.

Because I am focusing on critiquing and fine-tuning foundational issues, the impression can be created that the positive aspects within a praxis understanding of theology and pastoral care are not recognized. Indeed they are and there is no suggestion of replacing these dynamics with their opposites, such as a naive rejection of postmodernity, a limiting of ministry to church, and a reduction of hermeneutics to an exegesis of Scripture. A complex interaction between all factors involved in life and knowledge remains the goal of this research and consequently the basis of this critique.

It is an acknowledgment of how radical this complexity is, which causes me to believe it is impossible unless it is grounded in God. Within God this complexity is not only made possible but is simultaneously chastised. Removed from its position of ultimate locus (a position only God can occupy), complexity is not denied but is placed in context within a tension between complexity and simplicity. God not only becomes the guarantor of this structure but our potential guide in enabling us to sufficiently locate our understanding and practice in our concrete situations to ultimate truth and reality, in their epistemological and existential sense (the terms 'potential' and 'sufficiently' are intentionally chosen to maintain a critically realistic focus over positivism).

Farley (1990:935) talks 'of the problem of the genus or genre of practical theology. Is practical theology a term for a teaching area in clergy education or is it an immanent aspect of all theological thinking?' In line with the general understanding of practical theology that has been outlined above, he clearly argues that it is the latter, yet he comments that 'practical theology as a general theory of Christian practice involving a theological hermeneutic of situationism is rarely taken up in clergy and church education' (:936). Speaking from the perspective of the evangelical church, I believe the reason for this lack in uptake is that the basic praxis method of practical theology contradicts the following commonsense spiritual intuition and understanding of Scripture : the essential basis for Christian ministry is God speaking to and through us. Despite all the problems of authority and interpretation inherent in this understanding, which postmodernism correctly raises, I believe this needs to remain the fundamental methodology. I argue that this can accommodate practical theology's appropriate concerns for diversity and contextualization but the reverse is not the case.

In terms of the second critique I believe the almost euphoric eagerness with which mainline pastoral care has embraced postmodern concerns of diversity is not based on a full and careful consideration of the incompatibility in essential foundations of these different perspectives and the inevitable reduction and absorption (with loss of true Christian identity) that will result when one considers future trajectories. Postmodernism may seem like a wonderful gift, but it may be a Trojan horse.

Neuger (2004 :par 43-48), for example, describes the work of pastoral theology from a postmodern framework :

Since pastoral theology still has much work to do to end its collusion with dominant cultural discourses that harm marginalized individuals and groups, all who engage in pastoral care and counseling should continue to carry a strong hermeneutic of suspicion into the practices of our work....Seminary teachers need to face their fears of risking "doctrinal purity" as they boldly explore what it has meant for the Church to take shape in cultures organized around designations of normativity and difference....The hermeneutic of suspicion is our greatest ally and that suspicion needs to be aimed at all who participate in generating knowledge and norms for the field.

However, as I have argued, one needs to be suspicious of suspicion as a foundational criterion. Embracing postmodernism in this way is similar to setting one's furniture alight to stay warm, yet naively believing that the fire will be contained and will not consume the whole house.

Nevertheless, the belief remains that one can be 'trained to maintain an integrative tension between the therapeutic cultures of "borrowed" counseling theories and critically examined religious and theological foundations... Without [which], the line between pastoral counselor and "spiritually informed mental health professional" disappears' (Townsend 2004 : par 57).

I believe the balancing of this tension is not within our human capabilities and the very need to focus so strongly on it betrays a turn from a mysterious and faithful interaction with the divine as the basis of our understanding of life and ministry. This focus on God chastens not only our basic methodology, but also our goals. Within the mystery of God we cannot be absolutely sure of how society really is within its full non-reductionist reality, much less how it should be. Multiple factors in the true nature of life and society remain hidden and in terms of goals we merely have metaphorical pictures of the coming Kingdom, the full understanding of which escapes our senses (1 Cor 2 :9). At best we are like people groping in the dark as we attempt to match our goals and practices with this metaphorical vision, co-working with God for His heavenly Kingdom to be manifest on earth (Mt 6 :10). In the light of this understanding, I believe the correlative method's intense focus on sophisticated technique may often reflect a naive positivism.

As theology and ministry became strongly anthropocentric following the Enlightenment, human capacities have over functioned leading to an excessive focus on objectivity and control. Just as those engaged in the intense historical-critical efforts in biblical scholarship had their bubble pricked when Schweitzer (1954) concluded that they were projecting themselves onto the so-called retrieved historical Jesus, I believe extreme postmodernism will show that many of the conclusions of a hermeneutics based on critical correlation unduly reflect the worldviews and assumptions of the interpreters.

This takes us well into the third concern, over the complexity and specialization involved in this focus. Authors working with the critical correlation model refer to the need for a depth of skill and knowledge in the scientific and theological poles requiring correlation, as well as highly developed skills of critical analysis and interpretation. While all of this may be appropriate for some I do not believe it represents the core understanding and normative qualifications for ministry revealed by Jesus in Scripture. I believe it is driven more by the concerns of the secular academic community and represents a parallel development to the extreme technical focus of liberal, historical-critical biblical scholarship, which led to a sense of insecurity for the average Christian and minister in terms of accessing and using Scripture. Within a postmodern paradigm the text for interpretation has become the communal web, but the same assumption of requisite technical expertise continues to function.

Sophisticated scholarship and methodology have a place as one aspect within the body of Christ, but I do not believe they are the normative standard and point of access for effective ministry. The quality of one's relationship with God remains the basis of qualification. Ministry borne out of this relationship is normative and is open to all, irrespective of intellectual capacities. High-level scholarship, I believe, has its validation in the extent that it can be interpreted and used within this basic norm of ministry. Paul is a model of this. As a highly educated Pharisee acquainted with secular knowledge he was entrusted with the writing of much of the NT, yet the depth and authenticity of his relationship with God enabled him to place his learning in the service of the least.



#### 6.4 Relating Christ and culture: issues of correlation, integration, hermeneutics and authority

Due to their lack of focus on praxis, evangelical authors did not feature in section 6.2. A greater understanding of the evangelical approach will be possible in this section, dealing as it does with the main evangelical concern of integration.

In terms of the relationship with current culture and psychologies, Hurding (1995: 80) states, 'Christian response may yield to, resist or enter into debate with the pervasive views of the day, and that response will colour pastoral emphasis.' The situation is rendered more complex by considering the diversity that exists within 'Christian response.' As already noted there is a clear difference in theological method between liberal and evangelical streams of the church, which directly affects the degree of continuity versus discontinuity with secular knowledge.

Further analysis shows that there is even greater complexity. Within the evangelical stream a range of traditions exist, from those that emphasize discontinuity, attempting to establish an independent and exclusively biblical form of counseling, to those that urge a high degree of integration with psychology. Similarly, within the mainline churches one finds a range of responses with greater versus less emphasis on remaining faithful to the Christian tradition, as shown in the Chicago-Yale debate where 'the Chicago school gets accused of compromising Christianity's distinctiveness in its revisionist efforts to participate in public deliberations. The Yale school, on the other hand, is charged with lacking a genuine public theology in its postliberal attempts to preserve the unique language and rules of the Christian narrative and community' (Miller-McLemore 2004 :par 12).

The very framing of the issue, as a relationship between Christian versus secular spheres is problematic, for it overlooks the way God is active in all spheres of life (making the terms 'secular' redundant in many ways) and how the origins of healing and medicine are located within church history (Clebsch and Jaekle 1964: 42).

Park (2006) outlines three distinct methodologies, which are critically distinguished by the way they combine Christian tradition and culture.

'Pastoral reflection methodology' consists of 'theological reflection on pastoral practice' (Park 2006:13). It bridges theology and pastoral practice by emphasizing 'biblical and theological traditions as primary sources for pastoral reflection' and involves 'describing pastoral practice with theological language.' Park (2006:15) associates Bonhoeffer, Thurneysen (1962), Oden (1980, 1984), Oglesby (1980), Capps (1981), and Wimberly (1990, 1994) with this method.

The correlational method 'regards psychological concepts as data to be explained or understood in theological terms and vice versa,' although theorists are often more comfortable in the world of psychology than theology (Park 2006:16). This method has three distinct approaches. '*The therapeutic approach*' interprets the Bible and theology in psychological categories and language (:16). '*The metaphoric approach*' colours 'psychological theories and concepts with theological language.' Psychological concepts like acceptance, health and neurosis are used to explain, respectively, God's love, salvation and sin. The 'underlying postulation' in the understanding of thinkers like Browning and Oden is that these secular therapies 'have hidden moral and religious assumptions derived implicitly from the Jewish and Christian traditions' (:17).

A third approach borrows 'secular psychotherapeutic concepts and techniques' reinterpreting and 'blending' to create methods and techniques for ministry with 'theological foundations' (Park 2006:17).

Loder (1990:1265) also examines potential ways of relating theology and psychology. He suggests that 'semantic connections', thinking one establishes a bridge by finding 'the same word in both disciplines' is to 'be rejected as trivializing and distorting.' A word like 'anxiety', for example has different content and connotation in the two disciplines. Equally problematic is reductionism, whether from the theological side as in the early Karl Barth's reduction of 'all secular disciplines to total ignorance where the truth of God and humanity were concerned' or 'Jung's attempt to make Christ a symbol of the self...[,] a reduction of the ontological reality of his nature to a psychic phenomenon.' Loder (1990:1268-1269) then examines seven more plausible methods of relating : Tillich's correlational method ; Hiltner's perspectual method ; Lonergan's transcendental neo-Thomism where 'the intelligibility of Being is the foundation for transcending disciplinary boundaries'; Phenomenology, as used by Edward Farley, for example ; the new hermeneutic, where 'no discipline has any reality in and of itself' and language, as the fundamental reality of all disciplines becomes the basis for possible 'interplay'; structuralism with the essential stance 'that all thought including the discipline of psychology and theology is governed by innate structural potentials.' Loder (1990 : 1269) defines Tracy and Browning's revised correlation method as 'derivative from or revisions' of the above methods. He states that relating theology and psychology is difficult and 'responsible connections' require that implicit 'methodology' and 'philosophical assumptions' be made explicit, barring which 'reduction or a vague methodological syncretism' ensues. He concludes that 'no single methodology will do the job satisfactorily' and the task is best seen as an 'effort to make connections between the disciplines explicit, cognitively reversible, and subject to public scrutiny.'

From an evangelical perspective, Johnson and Jones' (2010) 'Psychology & Christianity: Five views' provides descriptions of five different approaches to the relationship between psychology and Christianity by key proponents, with responses to each view from the other four respective views: David Myers defends a levels of explanation view; Robert Roberts and P J Watson defend a Christian Psychology view; Stanton Jones defends an integration view; David Powlison defends a Biblical Counseling view, and John Coe and Todd Hall defend a transformational psychology view. Beck (2005:52), dealing with the 2000 edition of the book ('Psychology & Christianity: Four views') dates 'The biblical counseling model to 1970 with the publication of 'Competent to Counsel' (Adams, 1970), the integration model to 1970 with the founding of the Rosemead Graduate School of Psychology, the levels-of-explanation model to the publication of 'Psychology & Christianity: The View Both Ways' (Jeeves, 1976), and the Christian psychology model to the publication of 'Wisdom and Humanness in Psychology: Prospects for a Christian Approach' (Evans, 1989)' (2005:52)<sup>130</sup>

Different ways of framing the issue are therefore clearly apparent between liberal and evangelical streams. Furthermore, while correlation is the term typically used in the liberal context and integration in the evangelical context, Beck (2005:52) states that the use of the term 'integration' to describe the interaction between Christianity and psychology is not undisputed since 'major players in this broad project are not interested in integration.' Some suggest that terms like 'synthesis,' 'interaction,' 'dialogue,' or 'interface' are more 'precise.'

#### **6.4.1 General arguments in favour of interaction/ integration between all sources of knowledge in the context of pastoral care**

This research has argued for the most comprehensive approach possible to life and knowledge, necessitating the fullest interaction possible between all possible sources and dynamics.

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<sup>130</sup> It is interesting to note developments in the field. Johnson and Jones' first edition (2000) dealt with four views (missing the transformational psychology view) and Gary Collins represented the integration view.

The popular, pragmatic focus on self-help literature and techniques, along with subjective, eclectic spirituality clearly represents a thin intersection with the truth. Yet, even within the church the respective reductions of the liberal and evangelical streams also exclude important areas.

Due to the superabundant (see section 1.8.7), interconnected nature of reality, a reduced focus can still have spectacular results, but this should not serve as an excuse not to seek the fullest epistemological understanding and experiential expression possible.

The use of all aspects of human culture and knowledge is not simply an issue of useful techniques towards an end. This research has argued that the attempt to separate from human culture and create a sanitized Christian subculture is invalid. Not only is this relevant in terms of using all appropriate aspects of human culture and learning in the counseling situation, it is relevant in terms of the goal of healthily integrating the counselee in his or her life context. The skills necessary for living in appropriate continuity versus discontinuity with one's society are a key pastoral care goal.

Beck (2006a :101-108) considers five questions on integration, which need to be answered in order to determine the theological validity of the integration enterprise. He answers the first question of whether we can 'articulate a theological foundation for the collaboration' by a discussion of the sovereignty of God, which leaves no area of life outside of his, and consequently our, concern and purpose, as thinkers like Calvin and Kuyper understood so well. The doctrines of creation and the unity of truth as well as common grace provide further validation, while the doctrine of sin tempers any presumption (:101-102). The second question of whether we can 'find biblical precedent' is answered by the example of Daniel, in the Bible (:103-104). The third question of whether 'the history of the church contain[s] example' is also answered affirmatively and even naysayers like Tertullian are found to oppose collaboration by using 'rhetorical forms that had been elaborately developed by the very philosophers he railed against (:105). In answer to the fourth question regarding 'evidence for mutual benefit to both disciplines' Beck suggests collaboration helps us 'build our Christian worldview....understand our shared object of study....[and] identify embedded distortions with greater clarity.' It also provides 'missional opportunities' (:107-108). In answer to the final question of whether 'such collaboration is doable' Beck suggests there are many examples of this being successfully done, pointing principally to the example of Abraham Kuyper (:108).

This section will put forward several additional reasons for seeking comprehensive, strong interactions.

#### **6.4.1.1 The nature and intent of God**

Various aspects of God's character such as sovereignty, creativity and love point in the direction of not merely begrudgingly tolerating an interaction between the various aspects of life and knowledge but actively seeking this interaction, however difficult and risky this may be. This leads to the fullest development of knowledge and humanity possible, which is ultimately to the glory of God.

As Hiltner (1958: 22) states, 'Material of tremendous potential significance for the questions of theology is now available in the personality sciences. When pastoral theology studies this material, as it pertains to the perspective of shepherding, it is following not a nontheological or an extratheological method but something that is part of method in every branch of theology. Faith can remain faithful and relevant only when it is in constant and discriminating dialogue with culture.' 'The new knowledge that is coming from psychology, from psychiatry, from

anthropology, and from other sources is not easy to assimilate; but its riches are such that no thoughtful person can set them aside' (: 25).

#### 6.4.1.2 A fuller, safer truth

Interaction and mutual influence is not only necessary, but also unavoidable. As argued in chapter three, there is no neutral, unaffected ground which can be kept pure or used as the highest vantage point to objectively analyse all other realities. When this is acknowledged a more honest, safer expression of each discipline ensues.

Furthermore, refusing the possibility of ultimate, critically realistic truth leaves us with isolated, fragmented data, ready to be co-opted by the most powerful or persuasive. The enormous wealth of data on the psychobiological aspects of humankind is an example of this kind of data. The attempt by corporations funding research to copyright and exploit the human genotype, for example, is ethically problematic. Theology has the vital prophetic function of reminding society of our true spiritual nature and inviolable dignity, as the image of God.

Nevertheless, this core prophetic function of theology is often squeezed out, as Bidwell's (2009:150) investigations indicate. He conducted a frequency analysis of 'references to psychologists, psychological schools, and psychological theories in a sample of the contemporary literature' (67 books between 1976 and 2001), 'followed by a content analysis to determine the degree to which psychological perspectives have been appropriated (as opposed to merely referenced) by spiritual direction theorists.' On the basis of his interpretation of the literature, Bidwell comes to specific conclusions, which are very pertinent to this research. He suggests there is 'blindness to particular aspects of human identity and experience and blindness to social and material manifestations of the divine... We miss—and what is more troubling, we dismiss— aspects of God because of our psychological assumptions... particularly true when our psychological assumptions uncritically reflect European, European-American, and middle-class socioeconomic norms that privilege autonomy, individualism, and independence over interrelationship and communal identities.'

Bidwell (2009:155) suggests that 'contemporary literature of spiritual direction almost wholeheartedly adopts a psychodynamic understanding of the human person. Human beings are viewed as primarily motivated by the unconscious.' This is understandable, given Jung and Freud's primacy as psychological sources (:157). '[P]sychodynamic discourse provides the psychological norm...[for evaluating] human behavior and relationships' (:158). The 'language and ideas of early psychodynamic and depth psychologies' are so pervasive' that it is taken to be normative and a representation of how reality is and should be' (161). He describes the last three decades of North American spiritual direction in terms of captivity 'to early psychodynamic thought, a deficit-based (and epistemologically problematic) discourse' that entrenches unjust power relationship through the care giver's expertise and ability to discern and diagnose what is really going on relative to the helpless and blind care receiver.

In Kelsey's (in Bidwell 2009: 163) words, these dynamics of 'exclusion' cannot avoid expressing 'a fundamental attitude of contempt...no matter how unconscious, subtle, even genial the contempt may be.' The 'prescriptive-normative' rather than 'descriptive-critical' use of these theories means using 'a particular and limited perspective in a universal way' leading to 'covert forms of social control' which directly contradict the spiritual direction goals of increased freedom (Bidwell 2009:164). The 'embedded psychology of contemporary spiritual direction' can marginalize various 'forms of spiritual experience.' Focusing on 'intrapsychic experiences of individuals can eclipse spiritual experiences that occur between (rather than within) individuals and it can privatize spirituality, overlooking 'public behavior as one barometer of spiritual understanding.' It can overlook 'times when God acts within or through the direction relationship

to create an experience that is neither intrapsychic nor entirely personal.' Thus the affirmation that 'God is present and active during spiritual direction conversations' is not backed up by 'theological and psychological resources for understanding and making use of those experiences.' In short, 'an artificial limit on the types of spiritual/religious experiences that directors are prepared to address with directees or to engage in their own lives...[results in] blindness to certain dimensions of human identity and manifestations of the divine' (:165).

While Bidwell (2009:148) is critiquing this perspective in the context of spiritual direction, with a concern for failure to focus on the communal-contextual and intercultural paradigms, I believe this blindness occurs within much of practical and pastoral theology and practice as a whole, with the major themes of Scripture being excluded. Thus, while the communal-contextual and intercultural paradigms are vital correctives to the bias exposed by Bidwell, they themselves are blind to vital concerns portrayed in Scripture. The lack of a God-focused, supernatural, historically purposive reality, integral to the broad narrative of Scripture, was generally evident across the pastoral journals consulted for this research.

#### **6.4.1.3 A richer, more effective ministry**

Focusing on God and redressing anthropocentrism does not mean the human situation becomes less important. The opposite is true. If God is ultimate, His intents and purposes become authoritative and should be pursued to the best of our ability. Creation and incarnation, salvation history, the actions of the Trinity and agents of God (such as Joseph and Daniel, in the Bible), and clear statements of Scripture (Jn 3:16 ; Mt 23:37) clearly indicate a deep concern for humankind in its concrete situation.

The deepest understanding and fullest interaction with this situation is required, which necessitates the interactive use of all possible resources. A hermeneutical, comprehensive focus aims at thick descriptions and strategies in order to improve these desired existential results. Furthermore, people's problems can have multiple and interlacing roots. A reduced epistemology is more likely to deal with only some of the problems at a surface level.

Reason and truth are critical as sources and aspects of methodology. However, rationalism must not rule out experiences of reality and God that do fit our rational categories or that are not easily explained propositionally. The experiences of God through moves of the Holy Spirit as in the so called 'Toronto Blessing,' for example, are often dismissed as human fleshly enthusiasm or even as demonically inspired (MacArthur 1992). However, this is too simplistic a judgment. A broader hermeneutical process needs to be engaged in. For example, just because demonic and occultic practices may involve uncontrollable physical movements, that suggest a loss of God-given human autonomy and self-control, one cannot a priori rule out God acting in that way. This may simply be cultural prejudice, arising out of a hyper-rationalistic stance that is uncomfortable with any sense of a loss of physical control.

This does not mean that we should accept all physical manifestations uncritically or that we should seek them out (seeking God, however He is experienced, needs to remain our focus). Nor does it mean that fleshly and even demonic activity may not co-exist in the same ministry space as genuine moves of God. It does mean that we should be slow to criticize and slow to potentially quench a healing act of God. The fruit of such manifestations remains a key criterion and many individuals have testified that they experienced deep inner healing through this experience (see Chevreau 1994).

#### **6.4.2 The liberal approach: Browning's critical correlation**

Browning is a key influential figure and is referred to and evaluated positively by many authors (Hestenes 2009; Miller-McLemore 2004 ; Marshall 2004). His many works focus clearly on outlining a basic practical theological method for correlating different sources around an ethical locus (1976, 1991) and several focused correlations have been described (1966, 1987). To a greater or lesser extent, his correlational method is used and adapted by many of the authors working in mainstream pastoral theology.

Browning (1991: 2-10) bases his work on a full range of practical philosophers from Aristotle to Habermas, who 'share one fundamental idea, that is, that practical thinking is the centre of human thinking' (:8). He clarifies the point that his proposal for a fundamental practical theology is not a 'subspeciality' of theology. It is his 'proposed model for theology as such...Christian theology should be seen as practical through and through and at its very heart' (:7).

Browning (1991:9) claims that this theological method of moving from 'practice to theory and back to practice' is the very 'nature of human thought....Theory is always embedded in practice. When theory seems to stand alone it is only because we have abstracted it from its practical context. We have become mentally blind to the practical activities that both precede and follow it.'

Browning (1991:10) focuses on practical reason in order 'to answer the questions, What should we do ? and How should we live ?' and he clearly intends to defend the role of religious communities in answering this question in our world. But this is done in terms of a specific method which is clearly distinct from either believing that they 'are bearers of the relation and will of God and this revelation sets aside all use of human reasons' or seeing them as superstitious and ignorant.

Critical to Browning's (1991: 10-12) method is the core of his understanding. He claims 'that practical reason has an overall dynamic, an outer envelope, and an inner core....It's overall dynamic is the reconstruction of experience. When inherited interpretations and practices seem to be breaking down, practical reason tries to reconstruct both its picture of the world and its more concrete practices' (:10). This is a 'hermeneutic process' of interpretation and reinterpretation (:11). 'The outer envelope of practical reason is its fund of inherited narratives and practices that tradition has delivered to us and that always surrounds our practical thinking...practical reason is always tradition-saturated.' The 'inner core to practical reason' is found in Jesus' love command to love neighbour as self (Mt 19 :19) and the 'analogous golden rule' (Mt 7:12 ; Lk 6:31). In Christianity this inner core is shaped by but is distinguishable from the 'outer narrative envelope...about God's creation, governance, and redemption of the world....[and] how the life and death of Jesus Christ furthers God's plans for the world....It constitutes the vision that animates, informs, and provides the ontological context for practical reason' (:11).

Browning (1991:11-12) claims

Because there is always some kind of narrative envelope around practical reason, the fact that Christianity has its specific envelope puts it in this respect on the same level as all other concrete forms of practical reason. The difference between so-called secular and religious forms of practical reason is not that the former is irreligious and the latter religious. The difference is between systems in which the religious framework (or at least the framework of faith) is explicit and where it is implicit. Practical reason is always surrounded by images of the world that are grounded on faith assumptions. Narratives and metaphors carry these faith assumptions. Some are vague and almost imperceptible. Others are explicit and clearly articulated.

At this fundamental level this research differs clearly from Browning, who stands in the Schleiermarchian tradition of finding common ground between religion and culture. While

aspects of this correlation are invaluable, to allow it to function as the core or fundamental method or theology lacks warrant. It ends up, reducing theology to that which can be correlated. For example, Browning places the second greatest commandment (love of neighbour) at the core of the common experience, which forms the basis of his correlational method. However, the second commandment in Scripture is dependent on the first commandment (love of God) and this aspect of theology is not clearly articulated in Browning's method. Browning thus follows the limitations of the Enlightenment, with its anthropocentric turn. This kind of theology needs to be held in greater tension with perspectives like Barth's where the transcendent objectivity of the Word of God remains a possibility, by God's grace.<sup>131</sup>

Browning (1991:44-45) clearly opposes this alternative. He criticizes Lindbeck's 'Nature of doctrine' with its three approaches (cultural-linguistic, experiential-expressive, and propositional-cognitive): 'Because the questions that we bring to our Christian classics are ambiguous and shaped by a variety of sources, we should acknowledge the inevitable correlational nature of all theology. Lindbeck does not. He, like Barth, seems to envision the possibility of listening to our religious narratives and hearing them and only them' (:46). I believe that Browning has created a false dichotomy between either hearing only 'our religious narratives' or following his correlation approach. The Word of God as living and active (Heb 4 :12) is able to accommodate comprehensive correlational concerns at the same time as maintaining a normative base in Scripture.

Browning (1991:45) claims that Tracy's critical correlational approach (upon which Browning self-consciously builds) fruitfully draws on all three of Lindbeck's categories and he affirms Tracy's 'revised' or 'critical' correlational method for its focus on listening to all sources (contra Lindbeck and Barth). The term 'revised' distinguishes it from Tillich's, due to its radical mutuality (:46). However, Browning differentiates himself from Tracy in that the latter tries to establish 'cognitive and metaphysical grounds for judging the relative adequacy of religious statements about God', making verification 'cognitive and transcendental' (:46). While Tracy equally builds on Gadamer and Ricoeur, Browning feels he does not seem to 'acknowledge that philosophical hermeneutics suggests [rather] a fundamental practical theology' (:46). Browning therefore adopts a 'critical correlational practical theology' (:47). Agreeing with Tracy that fundamental theology 'determines the conditions for the possibility of the theological enterprise' Browning sees his own fundamental theology's necessary conditions as constituting 'the normative and critical grounds of our religious praxis' (:47).

Browning (1991: 47-54) outlines three initial movements in his understanding of theology – descriptive theology, historical theology and systematic theology in preparation for his fourth movement of 'a strategic or truly practical theology', which he develops in detail (1991:55-74). He outlines 'four basic questions that drive us to practical theological thinking' (1991:55-56) and claims that his five dimensions of moral thinking (1983:16-17 ; 1991: 105-109) is a Habermas-inspired 'reconstructive science' based not on 'logical and a priori structures of the mind....[or] on

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<sup>131</sup> Cahalan (2005:88) sees Browning's method as an extension of 'the late modern project.... Whether or not one agrees with his extension of the Kantian tradition, he offers churches (particularly the mainline community) one model for engaging a social ethic.' She claims that a 'serious limitation of Browning's version of fundamental practical theology... is that it is not nearly theological enough. While he has enriched our understanding of anthropology, there is little explicit connection between his anthropological claims and Christology or ecclesiology. In other words, what implications do these claims about human persons have for our understanding of Jesus and the church?.... Because he spends considerable time explaining how the community engages practical reason toward a social ethic, he fails to explain in theological terms God's relationship to practical reason. Browning claims that, "God is always finally the agent of transformation. All other agents of transformation - community, minister, lay leader - are metaphors of God's deeper transformative love," but he tells us little about how we are to understand God as an agent of transformation' (: 89).

the ordering of collections of empirical observations of events' but on systematically reconstructing 'the intuitive knowledge of competent subjects. These reconstructions, according to Habermas "like all other types of knowledge have only a hypothetical status." They are tested by how well they order our experience.' (1991:108).

Even while Browning's work is foundational in much theological work, particularly in mainline theology, numerous theologians express tensions with certain of his emphases.

Farley (1983 :164-165) expresses appreciation for 'Browning's leadership toward the recovery of normative foundations for pastoral care' but, relative to Browning, stresses the 'ecclesial' and 'education' context of practical theology.

Lapsley (1986:121) self-consciously stands in tension with Browning's mutually critical correlation. In discussing the relationship of theology to other non-theological disciplines he challenges the belief that it is possible to 'take only facts from these disciplines and not their values.' He continues, 'The very diversity of these publics seems to me to make problematical the effort to create a discipline in the philosophical mode which could serve as a basis of communication with them all' (:122). He suggests it is 'wisest.. to admit openly that we commonly incorporate theories about human beings...[yet] do this as carefully and critically as we can, employing such criteria as relative congruence with our vision of what is central in the tradition, coherence, and consensual validation' (:121-122).

Burc and Hunter (1990 :867) explain that a criticism of Browning by authors like Lapsley and Hiltner is that his practical theological 'approach overstresses normative reflection at the expense of the analysis of actual human dynamics, the discipline's most distinctive and valuable point of contribution.'

While I believe that Browning's method is an invaluable contribution to critical reflection and practical theology it needs, itself, to be subsumed within a greater critical correlation with the normative Word of God in its spiritual and textual representations. Browning's reliance on the systematic reconstruction of the 'intuitive knowledge of competent subjects' is strongly challenged by postmodernism, and, even more importantly, by the declarations of Scripture concerning our sin-darkened capacities (Eph 4 :18 ; 1 Cor 1 :18-21). Again, this is not to suggest that theologians with a high view of Scripture have sure, unmediated access to truth and that correlational theologians are in ignorance. All knowledge is mediated, but at the level of basic assumptions all of us are working with an absolute normative core and an honest acknowledgment needs to be made about whether one's core locus is human capacity or God's enablement. Furthermore, one needs to defend this locus in terms of coherence and fruitfulness.

#### **6.4.3 The conservative approach of dissociation**

Some see the integration of psychology and Christianity as impossible, and even as a betrayal of the gospel (MacArthur 1991 ; Ganz 1993).

Adams (1993:4-9) claims that the sovereignty of God is the only basis of comfort and understanding amidst the pain and difficulties of life. Because God has sovereignly revealed His will in Scripture, alternative explanations or solutions to life's ultimate problems are illegitimate: 'Because of the teaching of the Scriptures, one is forced to conclude that much of clinical and counseling psychology, as well as most of psychiatry, has been carried on without licence from



God and in autonomous rebellion against Him....because the Word of the sovereign God of creation has been ignored' (1993:8).<sup>132</sup>

While Thurneysen (1963: 200) acknowledges psychology as an 'auxiliary science' necessary for the knowledge of man which is needed in the pastoral conversation, he rejects 'the essentially alien philosophical presuppositions inherent in psychology which could impair...[pastoral care's] own understanding of man derived from Holy Scripture.' Thurneysen's (1963: 201) starting point is 'the self-sufficiency of true pastoral care....[it] is a discipline of its own, unexchangeably distinct and different from psychology and psychotherapy.' Furthermore, 'Over against...scientific literature, it must ultimately be asserted that the decisive knowledge of man and his predicament comes to us from Holy Scripture itself. The Word of God opens up a wide and deep view of man and all things human which no psychology can replace let alone surpass. Rather, psychology could gain important insight from it' (1963: 205).

Pastoral conversation places under the judgment of the Word of God the whole field of human life with all the psychological, philosophical, sociological, and ethical explanations and critical interpretations pertaining to it. Therefore, a breach runs through the whole conversation which indicates that although human judgment and evaluation and the corresponding behaviour are not invalidated here they are recognized as provisional. Since man does not submit to this relativization and its attendant restriction of his natural judgment, but resists it, pastoral conversation becomes a struggle for the priority of the judgment of God in man's salvation.

(Thurneysen 1963: 131)

Bettler (1997) bemoans the loss of concern for truth in evangelical churches. He addresses a particular caution to helping ministries: 'we are often confronted with so much human pain that we rush in to help without first inquiring of the Lord... "Is the advice biblical?" or "Will the God of truth be pleased with this course of action?"' (1997:3). He insists on an 'apologetic awareness' in biblical counseling, which involves drawing 'the antithesis between God's truth and Satan's error by carefully analyzing all "helping ministries" against the standards of God's Word....Our counseling and discipling methodology must always emerge as an alternative, not an accommodation to the world of error.' Counseling ministry thus becomes 'the battleground where the victims of culture's latest dalliance with error fight to survive, which makes it explosively public and potentially universal' (:4).

Welch (1997 :3) defines biblical counseling in terms of basic biblical images of friendship and states that it 'is built on a simple, enduring principle: *the triune God has spoken to us through the Scripture.*' and 'the biblical teaching on creation, the fall, and redemption provide specific, useful insight into all the issues of life.' He clearly distinguishes biblical counseling in terms of its content, the gospel and 'its implication for living,' its process, instruction by the Holy Spirit, and its counseling relationship, which is defined as a reciprocal process of mutual sharpening by members of the church rooted in Christ's love. The norm is non-professional relationships in normal contexts of life. This is in clear contrast to the professional, inegalitarian relationships in clinical settings (:4-5).

Clearly this extreme dissociative stance can be challenged in many ways. For example, Adams' understanding of the sovereignty of God is impoverished, for, biblically understood, God's sovereignty is the very basis for confidently seeking out truth in all spheres of life. This positivist, settled view also removes the difficult and ambiguous, yet adventurous and thrilling nature of living life and seeking knowledge, which seems to have been God's intent given that this is the way life seems to work.

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<sup>132</sup> Adams has written prolifically and has over seventy publications (Johnson et al 2010:32).

Another serious problem is the potential for doing harm to people in one's care, by a simplistic and direct application of the Bible to all life situations (an ultimately unbiblical practice!), causing further complication of genuine psychological problems. In the context of analysing the biblical counseling movement Johnson and others (2010:33) talk of 'a growing realization that some conservative churches were misusing the Bible and doing damage to people in their authoritarian subcultures (something also acknowledged by those in biblical counseling).'

Yet it would be wrong to overlook the vital contribution this stance makes through focusing so strongly on Scripture and church, areas which are too easily overlooked in other approaches. De Oliveira and Braun (2009) represent this balanced approach as they examine the concept of biblical sufficiency as it is used by conservative evangelicals to support an anti-psychological stance, whether it denies the validity of psychology at all (Adams, MacArthur, Jr), or, more moderately, denies its role in caring for people (Welch, Powlison). They claim that this 'rejection of psychology on the grounds of biblical sufficiency reflects poor exegesis, theology, and logic' (2009:20). They examine two supportive texts (2 Tm 3:16-17, 2 Pt 1:3) (:14-19), showing that where these texts talk about the Bible fully equipping a person for ministry they in no way argue that 'the Scripture is self-contained, having everything needed for the production of every good work and dispensing with any other tools of ministry' (:15). They also claim that this stance is illogical and inconsistent as 'one can easily find ...psychological principles in their writings and practice, although usually in disguise' (:20).

De Oliveira and Braun (2009 :20) do acknowledge the positive motives and contributions of this stance as it draws the church's attention to 'the overpromotion, overuse, and overvalue of psychology' as well as 'flagrant metatheoretical and theoretical conflicts between some types of psychology' and Scripture. In addition, they highlight 'important principles from Scripture that are relevant to every life situation and can make one competent for counseling.'

Considering history is vital in helping to gain necessary insight in order to reform lack of balance in one's present understanding and practice.

Serrano (2006) examines the history of conservative Christians in psychology in the context of the Christian Association For Psychological Studies (CAPS), examining its history from 1954 to 1978, focusing on the issue of integration with psychology. CAPS was started by members of the Dutch Reformed tradition and experienced a period of evangelicalization from 1973 to 1978. Serrano (2006:302) states that the evangelicals' late start and ineffectiveness in the integration process, in contrast to the Dutch Reformed participation, can be explained by its contrasting theological heritage: 'it is the comprehensiveness of the faith worldview of the integrator that determines the success of the integration process.' The Dutch Reformed link to Kuyper's neo-Calvinism and concept of 'principalism' provided the necessary foundation and optimism for making 'a significant, transformative contribution—one that could stand alongside and hold its own against or with secular versions of psychological science' (:295-296).<sup>133</sup>

The Evangelical traditions, on the other hand arose out of a history of 'heresy trials, denominational debates, and church schisms' (Serrano 2006:297). '[T]he fundamentalists left the evangelicals of the late 20th century' a problematic heritage. Combating historical-criticism through the formalization and defence of doctrines of inerrancy went hand in hand with a stance 'that focused Christian life on individual salvation, neglecting a comprehensive or thoroughgoing vision for culture or society' (:297). Serrano (:298) explains that the problem was not with a high

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133 Principalism is an 'ideological tool of analysis... a belief that all human action and systems of human action were based on the elaboration of a principle or principles—principles that ultimately were religious in nature in that they were either in concordance with God's will or in utter opposition' (Serrano 2006: 295).

view of Scripture but the modernist assumptions that were used to defend it: 'This constricted...worldview of evangelical faith...was only able to speak to its theological critics and quite ineffectively to the sciences.... In the case of psychology there was an added disincentive for communication for evangelicals in that psychology was perceived as being anti-religious and as encroaching on the church's role as provider of spiritual-emotional healing.'

#### 6.4.4 A biblically informed argument against the excess discontinuity of dissociation

I believe the dissociative methodology used by representatives of biblical counseling cannot be challenged without dialoguing on the basis of Scripture and the broader assumptions about the relationship between this world and the next. These represent important issues for those within the biblical counseling movement and it is simply unreasonable to challenge anyone without understanding their core values and taking them into account.

Of practical importance to pastoral care is the fact that this dissociative epistemological approach goes hand in hand with an ecclesiological and spiritual methodology that attempts to create a morally 'pure' sub-culture within which the church can exist. Much energy is focused on criticising the world and constructing and defending this sub-culture. Although Scripture clearly teaches us to be separate from the world it does so in a complex and nuanced way.

Numerous Scriptures, especially in John's writings, give serious warnings with regard to the world: we will be hated by the world (Jn 15:19, 17:14); we cannot love both this utterly corrupted world and God (1 Jn 2:15-16); Jesus clearly stated his 'kingdom is not of this world' (Jn 18:36); and true religion involves keeping 'oneself from being polluted by the world' (Ja 1:27). These warnings should keep us from being over-confident about our ability to interact in unfettered freedom with the world.<sup>134</sup>

Nevertheless, Scripture does not paint a one-sided picture of the world. God 'made the world and everything in it' (Ac 17:24), and the people of God are heirs of the world (Rm 4:13). Just as Scripture uses a single word, *sophia*, to describe Godly and ungodly wisdom (requiring contextual clarification and linguistic modifiers) so too the same Greek word (*kosmos*) is used in almost all the references to 'world'. We therefore need to nuance the possible meanings in concepts of 'world' and apply appropriate epistemological and existential continuity versus discontinuity. It is clear that there cannot be a simplistic, Gnostic denial of the world.

An obvious qualification is to distinguish two basic senses of '*kosmos*'. Firstly it can refer to false human philosophy, values, culture, priorities, objectives, etc. that arise out of rebellious and sinful self-distancing from God. On the other hand it can refer to God's good creation and those aspects of human culture that reflect the image of God, however distorted, due to common grace. As stated in the Lausanne Covenant (in Bediako 1988: par 3), '[B]ecause man is God's creature, some of his culture is rich in beauty and goodness. Because he is fallen, all of it is tainted with sin and some of it is demonic (para: 10).'

Numerous Scriptures show that keeping ourselves from this world involves purity of heart and attitude, not a dissociation from creation, society and culture. This is impossible and the product of our attempts at creating a 'pure' Christian sub-culture may be just as worldly, distinguished

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<sup>134</sup> I think these are warnings which theologies and movements that emphasize continuity with the world need to take more seriously. The emerging church, for example, embraces postmodernism, methodologically insists on seeing truth from the culture's perspective, and emphasizes dialogue and inclusivity. Not taking the dangers shown by Scripture seriously enough, it lacks the necessary balancing principles and methodological skills of discontinuity.

only by a Christian veneer.<sup>135</sup> Paul's warning not to associate with the sexually immoral is qualified not to mean 'the people of this world' for then we would have 'to leave this world' (1 Cor 5:9-10). We are not forbidden to 'use the things of the world', but are enjoined not to be 'engrossed in them' (1 Cor 7:31). The motivation for this is that 'this world in its present form is passing away' (1 Cor 7:31).

This scriptural focus on this world passing away and the promise of a new heavens and new earth (1 Jn 2:17; Is 65:17; 2 Pt 3:13; Rv 21:22) is one of the strongest motivations in conservative theology for a denigrating of this world and a lack of motivation for engagement and it is a genuine stumbling block in terms of encouraging engagement with society. At the very least, however, it is hard to dispute that the commands to do good and live out the gospel (Eph 2:10) are to be lived out in the context of society; Jesus prayer is not that we be taken out of this world (Jn 17:15) for he sends us into this world, just as He was sent (Jn 17:18). But, I think that Scripture hints at more than this and the images that talk of the destruction of this present creation (Heb 1:10-12; 2 Pt 3:10-13) need to be read alongside those that suggest 'the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God' (Rm 8:19-21). The issues of harmonization and not pressing Scripture too hard as a scientific account, dealt with in chapter five, are relevant here. This is especially the case as the description of the transition between the ages requires the use of poetic and apocalyptic language.

I believe that there is a strong continuity that can be emphasized between this world and the next. It does not refer to the sinful denotation of '*kosmos*', mentioned above, and we can rejoice that those aspects will be utterly destroyed and shut out from God's new creation. The obvious continuity, that conservatives will agree with, is that the actions that are done in this world will be remembered and appropriately recompensed in the next (2 Cor 5:10; Rv 22:12). Yet, I think we can think of a richer continuity and this can motivate us in our engagement with creation, society and culture, knowing that we are not just wasting our time in temporary or transient matters, investing in realities that will ultimately be destroyed.

Paul's seed metaphor for the resurrection (1 Cor 15) emphasizes that the resurrected reality will be as unrecognizable from this world as a plant is from its seed, but a tree is continuous with and affected by the quality of the seed. I believe all positive engagement and cultural endeavor done in God's Spirit may find expanded expression in the new heavens and earth and are not just a waste of time. An analogy may help to harmonize Scriptures that talk about total destruction versus those that talk about liberation from decay (1 Cor 15:53-54). A novelist or composer may be told that in a new age there will be no paper for it will all be destroyed in the fire of transition. Should this discourage them from writing and composing and sharing their work? Not at all; for the reality of their cultural product and its effect on others transcends and can endure beyond the temporary 'vessel' of paper. The passing away of 'prophecies', 'tongues', and 'knowledge' does not mean that they should not be committed to now, for it is the reality that they refer to that is of main concern. These things will pass away because that which they refer to will exist in full and unmediated expression: 'when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears' (1 Cor 13:10).

These are mysteries and I am not attempting to solve them, merely to show that a simplistic disengagement with the world and culture is not necessitated by Scripture. I believe that

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<sup>135</sup> Further criticisms are the following: these cultural products are often of inferior quality to those existing in general society and they rely on a captive, undiscerning Christian market; they often constitute entertainment for an already overfed church; they are often disconnected from and irrelevant to non-Christians in society. I am not suggesting that creative work should not be done from a uniquely Christian perspective, for the church. I am merely arguing against the extreme practice, which is linked to a clear methodology of separation from 'the world'.

Scripture calls us to responsible, mature, discerning engagement and that simple disengagement works against the important goal of becoming mature in Christ. Paul's call not to 'conform any longer to the pattern of this world' is so that we can 'test and approve what God's will is' (Rm 12:2). This is an instance where *kosmos* is not used. The Greek word is *aiōn* (age), which suggests that we are not to be taken in by the 'spirit of the age' or *zeitgeist*. This reinforces the idea that it is not simply culture and creation that are the danger but the corrupt motives and attitudes that penetrate society. This distinction is clear in the following verse: 'We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us' (1Cor 2:12). Here too the goal is not disengagement but discernment and the living of an alternative life. In 1 Thessalonians, the call to 'avoid every kind of evil' (1 Th 5:22) is not done in the context of simple disengagement: 'Test everything. Hold on to the good' (1Th 5:21). In Philippians 'righteousness' is linked to 'love', 'knowledge', and 'depth of insight', not disengagement (Phlp 1:9-11). In Hebrews, too, the 'solid food' of 'teaching about righteousness' is 'for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil' (Heb 5:13-14).

Although every Christian needs leaders and the church community in order to live out the Christian life, I believe the Bible encourages individual responsibility and growth in maturity and discernment and it trusts God to enable His people for this process through the Holy Spirit (1 Jn 2:27; Jr 31:31-34). The individual responsibility for personal spiritual growth and the leadership responsibility for facilitating this through teaching and pastoral care need to be done in the context of solid engagement with all aspects of society and knowledge, through a hermeneutical dynamic and a methodology of continuity versus discontinuity.

#### 6.4.5 The Evangelical approach of integration

An increasing number of evangelicals (sometimes called 'neo-evangelicals') are less dissociative in their approach to all aspects of culture, including psychology, and they represent a significant force within evangelical pastoral care.

Collins (1988: 127-128) is a key figure in the integration stance and outlines a clear defense of integration:

Integration makes no attempt to elevate psychology to the level of the Word of God. Integration does not try to recast theology in psychological terms, water down or contradict the truths of Scripture, infiltrate the church and weaken the gospel message, or substitute methods of psychology for the work of the Holy Spirit. Integration instead refers to 'the uniting but not the fusing, of psychology and theology...both disciplines retain their own identity while benefiting from each other's perspective and communicating the same truth.'

Collins (1988 : 128-129) clarifies that although 'integration is not always wise', as in the case of psychological conclusions that flatly contradict Scripture or are immoral, it is often unavoidable, for theology and biblical counseling overlap with psychology in our actual lived experience. He further explains that science and psychology do not contradict the 'true and unchanging' Word of God but fallible human interpretations. '[S]ometimes theologies are found to be in error while the findings of science stand as firm as the Copernican theory. The conclusions of those believers who attempt to integrate psychology and theology may in time appear not nearly so heretical as some modern believers suggest' (:129-130).

##### 6.4.5.1 Integration at the level of theory formation

Struthers (2005) examines the integration of psychology and Christianity at an empirical, theory-formation level. In contrast to the Duhemian, neutral sense of scientific methodology (see 1.8.4) he talks of the 'Kuyperian view of science...[where] the theoretical basis of any scientific theory

can appeal to theological propositions in their construction...[as] the most comprehensive form of integration' and outlines Plantinga's 'six distinctive ways in which Christianity might enter into the manner in which natural scientists do their research ranging from hypotheses of God's direct action to indirect action' (2005:199).

Struthers (2005:200) examines the four types of relationship dealt with in Johnson and Jones' 'Psychology and Christianity: Four Views' (2000) and finds none of the views deal with integration at this level. Christian psychology and biblical counseling clearly are non-integrative and, furthermore, are focused on the clinical therapy, non-research context. The third view of levels of analysis and nonoverlapping realms, while more open to psychology and psychological research, is also by definition non-integrative (2005:200-201). Looking at the fourth level of integration proper, Struthers (2005:201) quotes Collins' understanding that the stated goal is "'to combine the special revelation of God's word with the general revelation studied by the psychological sciences and professions," or to place psychology on a different foundation, one that is "consistent with and built upon the Bible" in order to develop a "biblically based psychology.'" The starting point can be an explicitly psychological or theological topic (or a neutral one), but the process intends to move towards integration. Struthers notes, however, that integration acts as an interpretive 'filter' after data has been generated: 'At no point do theological or biblical commitments enter into the generation of research hypotheses.'

Struthers (2005:202) refers to Jones' (1994) article 'A constructive relationship for religion with the science and profession of psychology', published in 'The American Psychologist', where Jones argues that beyond the 'critical-evaluative' and 'dialectical' approaches, both of which are challenging integrative approaches in their own right, a 'constructive' approach that works at the basic empirical and theoretical level in the sense suggested by Kuyper and Plantinga is possible

Struthers (2005:202-205) analysis of articles from the last thirty years of the 'Journal of Psychology and Theology' and the last twenty years of the 'Journal of Psychology and Christianity' revealed that very little integrative, experimental research is being done). Numerous possible dynamics may explain these findings and they emphasize the difficulty of doing integrative work in the constructive sense. The possibility that integration is happening philosophically in the implicit worldview of empirical researchers, 'not necessarily revealed through the data but...embedded in assumptions underlying the methodology' reinforces the levels of analysis and nonoverlapping realms' critique of integration, that it cannot add anything to a necessarily separate realm (:206).

Christian psychologists still wishing to pursue constructive integration face numerous difficulties. Apart from resistance within the community of faith (not all Christian psychologists favour integration and most 'Christian institutions.... which offer graduate degrees in psychology generally offer clinically-oriented degrees') and skepticism from the scientific community, the 'daunting task' of developing expertise in theology, philosophy and experimental psychology' may be the main reason experimental psychologists do not attempt constructive integration (Struthers 2005:208).

Struthers (2005:207) suggests 'the preferred manner in which to frame integration is to examine how it affects research in either an implicit or explicit fashion and not as a broad discipline-wide program but at a local/individual level.' If empirical psychologists approach integration in terms of the broad approach taking place in Christian clinical psychology constructive integration will be missed and the level of research necessary for a neuroscience journal will not be attained. Struthers (2005:208) concludes that 'each Christian in psychology will make their own decision' about accepting the Duhemian parameter and rules versus attempting constructive integration, 'but their decisions will be revealed by the literature that they produce.'

#### 6.4.5.2 Present and future challenges for integration

Beck (2006b) examines the state of integration in the evangelical church, past, present, and future. The current context of an 'exponentially expanded...research base' in psychology, and the co-existence of modernism and postmodernism creates new challenges for integration. Current integration requires 'a more sophisticated use of biblical and theological categories...and a massive effort to communicate our work to churches, church leaders, theologians, and biblical scholars' (2006b:321). The current open attitude of psychology to religion represents an about turn compared to fifty years ago: 'Now it is acceptable, advisable, and ethical to deal with religious issues in psychotherapy' (:324). This clearly fits in with the postmodern turn. Beck claims a significant factor was 'the presence of theists and their writings in the major mental health organizations.' Their 'research-based critiques' of the myth of psychology as 'value-free' clearly helped level the playing grounds (:324).

Beck (2006b:325) predicts some of the changes that are likely in the next fifty years with respect to psychology, theology and integration. In terms of psychology challenges will include: the issue of service delivery to marginalized, 'undeserved' groups; dealing with diversity and 'non-Western models of personality'; integrating neurological research; proving empirically-verified value in the context of limited funds. It is also hoped that scientism will be chastened. On the theological side he suggests that theology and care will become increasingly rich in its spirituality and societal care. Furthermore, 'Evangelicalism will either develop stronger connections between church life, mission, education, and service or it will falter and fail' and theology 'will increasingly face the challenge of helping the church bear effective witness in the context of hostile and unwelcoming environments' (:325). In terms of integration there will be a challenge for Christian therapy to broaden psychotherapy to include 'coaching, spiritual formation, and discipleship.' There will be an increased need for empirical research, understanding of the latest research in the sciences, and more sophisticated use of biblical and theological resources. There will also be progress in integration in the form of 'synthesizing what now seem to be distinct models of integration' (:328).

#### 6.4.5.3 Clear competition between God, pastoral care and psychology

Depending on the broad area of psychology in questions as well as the values and particular methods involved there is the potential for fruitful interaction (continuity) as well as the challenge of incompatibility and competition (discontinuity). Hurding (1995: 81-82) outlines four broad streams in secular psychologies: behaviourism, psychoanalysis, personalism, and transpersonalism. While behaviourism is easier to integrate with evangelical Christianity, the other streams represent increasing competition. In transpersonalism, for example, 'fulfillment is sought beyond the personal in the realms of the higher Self, Unity Consciousness, the Cosmos or God....[it has been a particularly] powerful force in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, not only in counseling and psychotherapy but in the wider fields of complementary medicine and the alternative therapies' (: 82). This clearly represents an alternative worldview for life, which can be described as religious.

As Roberts (1995: 66) clarifies: 'Most psychotherapies go far beyond being merely medical technologies for helping heal bona fide diseases, and are full philosophies of life offering ideologically-based ways of dealing with human "problems" and general guidance in the conduct of life. In the present age psychotherapists have taken over the role formerly played by philosophers of supplying frameworks that supplement, clarify, and sometimes distort church teaching and nurture'. He insists that the ideological basis of all secular therapies means that 'their techniques and diagnostic models [must be] carefully detached from any ideological commitments incompatible with Christian thought and practice. This is a difficult and important

task, requiring theological and philosophical skill as well as a knowledge of the psychotherapies' (: 67-68).

Roberts (2006) examines the Christian concept of wisdom, with specific reference to forgiveness, showing how it distinguishes pastoral care from secular psychotherapy. According to Roberts (2006:127) psychologists and their concern 'to help others live well' are not novel and stand in continuity with ancient philosophers. 'Christianity came into a world well-populated with psychotherapies' and this provides the context for Paul's insistence on the 'distinctiveness of... Christian wisdom,' a point, which is often forgotten today. Roberts (2006:135) contrasts Freud's understanding of psychoanalysis as a 'long process... aimed at systematic and holistic overhaul' to today's 'quick, problem-centred, and "pragmatic"' therapy, which is atomistic, stating that Christian counseling should resemble the former. 'Christian wisdom too sees the soul as an organic unity. Sin is systemic, and so is virtue.' Therefore, the 'individual's presenting problem' is not so much 'the object or rationale of...therapeutic efforts...as an occasion of Christian nurture.'

Roberts (2006:135) takes the example of how evidence shows that it is easier to motivate forgiveness by getting the counselee to remember an instance of being forgiven by another human 'than by appealing to the fact that Christ died for her sins.' He states that the easier, pragmatic option does not make it better or more successful in terms of the greater aim of Christian nurture and character. Without eschewing the easier, but lesser motivator, the therapist must work to strengthen the Christ-based motivator, leading to a true Christian forgiveness motivated by understanding self and offender as equal recipients of God's sacrifice and grace. Therefore, in terms of Christian wisdom, psychological problems are understood to be 'aspects of a larger human dysfunction.' Problems become 'an opportunity for Christian nurturance.' Although they are attended to, this is not done 'in isolation from the larger context of life's meaning' and the 'larger task...[of] reorientation of lives from folly to wisdom and from vice to virtue.'

Roberts (2006:135) insists that while secular therapists can recognize 'the healing power of forgiveness and adapt it to their purposes... only Christians are in possession of the whole context to which forgiveness belongs—the cross of Christ, the doctrine of general human depravity, the love of God, the fellowship of the church, the hope of eternal life.' Christian therapists need to be 'well-trained in general Christian theology and spirituality' to avoid following secular therapy in facilitating a pragmatic, thin, isolated version of forgiveness. A systemic approach means that forgiveness will be encourage in systemic relation to all the other Christian virtues of Galatians 5, Philipians 2 and Colossians 3 (2006:136).

Nevertheless, the problem of psychology versus Christianity cannot be simplistically resolved. I intentionally headed this section 'competition between *God*, pastoral care and psychology' rather than simply 'competition between pastoral care and psychology.' The evangelical use of cognitive psychology may create goals and understandings that are in competition with the expression of the gospel that God desires in a particular context. Similarly, the focus of transpersonal psychology may take people into territory that resonates more strongly with the form of the gospel that God wants expressed, territory that remains off-limits for many cognitively focused evangelical pastoral carers.

Therefore, while integration as described by Collins remains a fact and necessity, it is important not to overlook the clear multiple levels of compatibility versus incompatibility that may exist between psychology and the gospel. It is questionable whether integration is itself an appropriate term. It is possible to interpret integration as a human capacity to objectively understand and control. This terms therefore needs to be held in tension with other terms such as 'interaction' in order to more appropriately describe the situation between psychology and



Christianity as one of inevitable overlap and mutual influencing within dynamics of continuity versus discontinuity.

#### **6.4.6 Further hermeneutical approaches**

The complexity involved in interrelating the therapeutic or pastoral care aspects of Christ and culture means that simple descriptions of correlation or integration do not capture all the possibilities involved in facing this challenge. Several authors expressly talk of hermeneutics, which is not a simple alternative to correlation or integration, but represents significant nuancings.

##### **6.4.6.1 William Hathaway**

Hathaway (2002) proposes a hermeneutical-realist approach to integration. He envisages a movement 'from assimilation through productive tension to expanded horizons....[which] is presented as an alternative to the non-realist skepticism characteristic of both positivism and postmodernity' (2002 :205). He distinguishes this from 'previous integration models' in that 'the various integrative postures are construed as fluid moments in a developing continuum of understanding rather than as competing orientations' (:214). The 'regulative vision' that 'a unified perspective is available for all truth, since god is the author of all truth' does not naively suggest we can attain an 'omniscient state of understanding, [but] it constitutes a powerful and progressive regulative ideal for the pursuit of understanding' (:214).

##### **6.4.6.2 Samuel Park**

Having examined the history of pastoral theology, care and counseling and the way it is currently defined by the quest for 'a new identity and... method, which fits in a postmodern, pluralistic, and interdisciplinary environment', Park (2006:12) concludes that the heart and challenge of pastoral methodology is hermeneutical. Pastoral theology involves creating 'a hermeneutic bridge between the two worlds, which is significant for their identity as well as methodology.' He describes three sources used to 'construct a theory of pastoral care and counseling and a pastoral theology—(1) pastoral contexts in which human conditions and pastoral practice meet together, (2) the Christian tradition, and (3) cultural perspectives' (:13).

Park (2006:17) criticizes pastoral reflection and correlation approaches to interrelating these sources as ultimately one-directional and therefore reductive. He considers Hunsinger's asymmetrical Chalcedonian correlation (:19), but ultimately views Gerkin's hermeneutical approach as having the most integrity, resulting in genuine 'two-way correlation (:20). Gerkin's 'dialogical hermeneutical process' (1984) 'seeks a pastoral counseling paradigm that is both "authentically theological" and "scientifically psychological."' According to Park, Gerkin's hermeneutics connects 'second-order languages from both perspectives' in a correlation and critical evaluation of 'analogical theological and psychological concepts' in a way that is genuinely bi-directional and mutual (:20-21).

##### **6.4.6.3 Daniel Louw**

For Louw (1998a; 1999) pastoral counseling is essentially a hermeneutical process of interpreting and understanding the Christian faith within human contexts with a comprehensive focus on healing as the healing of life (2008).

Louw (1988a: 61-66) shows clear concern for epistemological issues of method and theory in designing his pastoral model. He relates the theological and human sciences in terms of a convergence model which resists both theological and empirical reduction as well as a 50-50

bipolarity. Convergence refers to the way the theology and empirical poles are interrelated within the eschatological horizon of God's 'fulfilled promises regarding salvation' (: 65). This eschatological perspective brings the full meaning of all that God has faithfully achieved into the present pastoral encounter, giving it its unique identity. This clearly resists secular reductionism but, because God's actions are historical, theological reductionism is also avoided: 'Pastoral care which takes place outside the context of everyday human existence, is contrary to the intention of the eschatological perspective' (: 66).<sup>136</sup> The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in making this integration of eschatology with epistemology possible (: 63). Further control in the interdisciplinary relationship between pastoral care and the human sciences is given by Louw's application of an asymmetrical Chalcedonian pattern (:100-110).

Drawing on Kranenburg's insights, Louw (1998a: 247) states that 'Pneumatology adds another dimension to the pastoral conversation: it becomes more than a dialogue – it is a triologue...It is not the person and his/her communication and counselling skills who is the third factor in the pastoral conversation, but God, in dialogue and operating via Scripture and creation. The pastor fulfils a hermeneutical function with regard to the third factor. This explicit interpretation of Scripture is the proprium of the pastoral conversation.'

Within Louw's (1998a: 96) approach hermeneutics plays a role in terms of integrating pastoral care and the empirical sciences, but its more essential meaning is in terms of the central role that the God-human encounter plays as the focus of practical theology and pastoral care: 'To help practical theology to retain its theological character, we choose the hermeneutical model...[which] has a theological character when the object of practical theology is not primarily communicative faith actions, but rather understanding the meaning and significance of the covenantal encounter....The hermeneutic event is a process through which the truth of the Gospel is interpreted and declared within a process of understanding human existence in the world.'

While Louw's (1998a: 248-250, 259) methodology clearly integrates the social sciences with theology in a careful asymmetrical model, he clearly defines the unique nature of pastoral therapy as opposed to psychology. I have summarized some of these differences in the following table (:250):

<b>Pastoral care</b>	<b>Psychology</b>
Method of promissiotherapy	Method of psychotherapy
Trialogic and covenant-oriented	Dialogic and communication-oriented
Man created by God and dependent on God	Man as an autonomous being
Transformation of the person towards mature faith and spirituality in the context of <i>koinonic</i> relations	Goal of healing human self esteem within relations
Revelation and its confessional and prescriptive implications are central	Observable human action and behaviour are central
Distress arises out of sin (guilt), transience (death), and despair (meaning)	Distress arises out of psychopathology and disorders
Growth is through conversion and transformation through Christ and the Holy Spirit	Growth equals development of personality and potential

<sup>136</sup> Louw (1998b: 25-28) discusses how *kerygmatic* and client-centred models in counseling respectively entail theocentric and anthropocentric reductionism.

Louw's (1998a: 235) careful nuancing of the description of a 'psychology of faith' maintains a careful balance:

A 'psychology of faith', and, more especially, 'a psychology of grace', implies something other than merely the religious experiences described by psychology of religion. It does not attempt to explain religious images and symbols within the framework of human behaviour and psychic needs, as an empirical model would do. A psychology of grace is concerned with the transforming effect and consequence of grace on a person's psychic functions. Its aim is to describe the influence of God's undeserved grace on human conduct and relations.

I believe an inability to follow this balance explains much of the confusion in the faith / psychology debate, where, in reaction to the reductionism described by Louw, conservative representatives may resist looking at faith from the useful perspective of psychology.

#### 6.4.6.4 Warren Brown

Brown (2004) proposes a resonance model for relating science, psychology and faith. He suggests that the problem of integration is 'broader and deeper' than suggested by current integration 'discourse,' which overlooks additional factors such as 'societal and religious' 'cultural traditions' and 'subjective experiences of persons' (2004:110). 'Genuine integration involves the discovery- of and articulation of the common underlying principles of both psychology and the Scriptures. It is this discovery of the one overarching configuration or set of principles that constitutes the deepest level of integration, not simply lining up of parallel concepts from two distinct disciplines' (Carter and Narramore in Brown 2004:111).

Due to the 'major differences between domains in their presuppositions, epistemologies, and sources (all relevant data)' simplistic integration risks 'some degree of violence to the epistemological integrity of various fields of enquiry and scholarship' (Brown 2004:112). Brown (2004:112) examines the 'levels of explanation' or 'perspectivalism' approach where different domains describe human nature from different and non-competing 'points of view.' Perspectives can differ in terms of 'closeness or distance' as in the difference between the 'microscopic' view of 'cellular physiology' versus the 'macroscopic' view of 'sociology or theology.' Similarly, 'external observations' can be differentiated from 'internal subject experience.' Brown (2004:112) levels two critiques at this view. Firstly 'levels-of-explanation' imply 'hierarchy' and there is a danger of higher levels disregarding incompatible lower level theories or of lower level explanations reductively explaining away higher levels. Secondly, this view reinforces the 'conceptual apartheid' of the 'nonoverlapping magisteria' approach or the postmodern 'differing narratives' approach. Possibilities for synergistically generated new information and nuancings are thus excluded.

Brown (2004:113) adapts the Wesleyan quadrilateral, with its four interactive loci of Scripture. Experience, Rationality, and Tradition by separating Wesley's understanding of rationality into Science and Rationality and by providing lacking specification on 'how the domains interrelate.' He extends the model through an 'auditory/acoustic metaphor' of five radios arranged in a circle, projecting sound into a common centre. The resonance sought 'refers to the amplification or enrichment of sound when two or more auditory signals vibrate together synchronously or harmonically' (: 113). Statements from different domains 'would be considered *resonant* if one is directly predictable from the other, or if one is reasonably probable given the other. Similarly, two such statements would *not* be considered *dissonant* if they are not directly contradictory, or if their inescapable deductions or implications are not contradictory; or if the implications of one does not make the other significantly improbable' (: 114).

A strength of Brown's (2004:116) model is its flexibility concerning the role players, depending on the matter under investigation. If a highly specific natural science problem is at issue (such

as 'the molecular structure and function of the membrane of a neuron') then 'the science of neurophysiology' becomes the relevant voice. Furthermore, '[t]he exact number and designation of critical domains' is flexible. 'Tradition' could be divided into 'culture' and 'religious tradition' and 'Science' could be differentiated in terms of 'physical science' and 'natural science.'

The 'arbitration of differences' does not consist in forcing the domains to 'say the same thing' or in direct competition, with a win-lose outcome (Brown 2004:114). Rather, it consists in seeking resonance, through 'tuning' the radio 'knobs' *'within the range of interpretations that are permissible within a particular domain.'* to help resolve the 'misinformation or misinterpretation [dissonance]...being broadcast from one or several sources' (: 115).

Brown (2004:116) carefully considers the label to apply to the resonant reality generated in the centre. While terms like 'theory' or 'hypothesis' avoid positivism, they suggest the 'outcome of the model' cannot be acted upon 'with confidence.' Although terms like 'knowledge' and 'understanding' are '[r]easonable alternatives,' he adopts the term 'truth' in a critically realistic sense 'to reinforce...[his] presumption that properties of the world and of human nature are largely constant and at least partially knowable.' Nevertheless, the image of truth in his metaphor 'should be depicted in some fuzzy and indistinct graphical form, representing the idea that we only know "as through a darkened glass." Our comprehension is always partial and incomplete' (:114). The balanced integrative nature of this approach means that 'this model is not entirely modern (it gives an equal place to personal experience and cultural traditions), is not entirely postmodern (it escapes objectionable forms of cultural relativism by granting that important information about truth comes from science and rationality), and is not secular (it gives a critical voice to the authority of scripture, as well as to the wisdom of religious traditions)' (:116).

This model obviously implies dialogue between role-players and sources from the different domains and depends on non-positivistic humility and good will. However, to the degree that these are absent, as in the case of dealing with scientism, resonance can still be sought from the theological side, accessing the scientific data directly, but this requires care to ensure that one's fine-tuning of the scientific data does not go beyond the acceptable bounds of science, as seems to be the case in intelligent design and certain of Pannenberg's (2008) conclusions.

#### **6.4.7 Method, truth and the locus of authority in pastoral care**

In chapters two, three and four, a specific logic was followed in dealing with the issue of knowledge. The complexity of knowledge (chapter two) necessitated a hermeneutical approach (chapter three). Because a specific asymmetrical, faith stance is proposed in this research (a high view of Scripture and the particularity of Jesus Christ), issues of warrant cannot be bypassed and this was dealt with in chapter four. This logic is repeated within this chapter. The complexity of pastoral care and the necessity of a hermeneutical approach have been argued up to now. On the basis of the conclusions from previous chapters, a high view of Christ and Scripture is assumed to be relevant and vital in pastoral care as well. This needs appropriate defence and warrant and leads us to examine the issue of authority in the context of pastoral care, specifically examining the important mutual influence that exists between method and understandings of truth or worldviews.

There is no neutral ground and specific understandings of truth lead to specific methods : 'In bracketing out their own values, therapists are not value-free. In fact, the very act of doing so implies an important value: the client must direct their own life, be in control of their own decisions. The underlying assumptions are the modernist, liberal autonomous human agent in control of his or her own life' (Goodliff 1998:96).

As Brown (1990 :1271) states,

The practice of pastoral care and counseling presupposes an undergirding theory or theories in regard to the nature of the human being in relationship to God, the meaning of human distress or dysfunction, and the factors involved in enabling persons to move toward health and wholeness. The theory, whether examined or unexamined, is always operating and involves the functions of analysis, perspective, praxis, and comprehensive understanding, or interpretation, all of which interact simultaneously.... If a pastor thinks that volition is the key to wholeness, then he or she will exhort. By contrast, if the pastor believes that understanding leads to constructive solutions, then he or she will instruct or seek to draw out insight. Again, if the pastor is convinced that reconciliation is essential for renewal, then he or she will seek to facilitate forgiveness.

Conversely, specific methods lead to specific conclusions, which affect understandings of truth: 'The simple fact that particular questions are asked while others escape thought, that some disciplines are consulted and others are not, or that certain perspectives and concerns are given greater attention while others shift to the background reflect the impact of our methods upon the actual practice, research, scholarship, and writing of pastoral caregivers and counselors' (Marshall 2004: intro par3).

This research argues that truth does matter. It really does matter whether you tell your client to act out desires for sexual experimentation outside the marriage versus seek sexual fulfillment exclusively within the marriage. It really does matter whether you tell a counselee to submit to an abusive husband versus seek separation versus seek divorce. These are distinct, propositionally describable possibilities and it makes a real difference whether one sees them as all being valid possibilities or not, i.e. as contenders for the status of being true or false for all versus specific situations.

#### **6.4.7.1 Method and theory within praxis-based and postmodern-influenced approaches**

Numerous authors writing principally within the liberal stream of practical and pastoral theology focus a lot of attention on issues of method and the related problem of authority. According to Marshall (2004 : sect 6 par4), 'The integration of theory and practice has had an impact on method as more practitioners and scholars construct pastoral and practical theology in ways that move beyond applied theology or correlating theology with psychology.'

Jennings (1990 :862) uses the term methodology to describe 'The critical evaluation of the procedures for arriving at theological judgments, proposals, or assertions.' This falls within theology's 'task of explicating and critically appropriating the language of faith....[which] includes all of a community's religious phrases, gestures, narratives or rituals.'

Marshall (2004 :sect 1 par 1) provides an extended description of the importance of method and the dynamics involved in dealing with it: 'When used in the context of pastoral care and counseling, the term method usually refers to one of four aspects, all found in various entries in the Dictionary: (1) the techniques one employs in the practice of care and counseling; (2) the tools utilized in the teaching or training of pastoral theologians and caregivers (both for pastoral-generalists and for the care specialist); (3) the articulation of the relationship between particular fields and disciplines; and (4) the process of constructing a pastoral or practical theology and the various elements for consideration in such a construction.'

Marshall (2004:sect 1 par 11-12) concludes :

What holds these various approaches together is their attention to five distinct constitutive elements that are present in every methodological position. For a method to have integrity, it must attend to and account for: (1) the explicit or implicit role of theology; (2) the relationship to various

fields and disciplines outside of religion or theology, especially the social and behavioral sciences; (3) the awareness of the import of communities and context; (4) the integration of theory and praxis; and (5) the role of the experience of individuals and communities in the construction of theological and faith claims. Two dynamics undergird these constitutive elements and provide the integrative framework that brings cohesiveness to any particular method. First, the particularity of an individual and the faith community in which one is grounded reflect the central role of formation and identity in the establishment of one's methodological principle. Second, the development of authoritative criteria that assist the pastoral theologian and caregiver in the integration of theory and practice provide the basis for concrete responses to particular situations....While each of the constitutive elements is always present, the emphasis changes contextually and is often dependent on the particularity of scholars, teachers, practitioners, students, and clients.

This focus on theory and praxis has taken place within a postmodern climate and many pastoral theologians self-consciously adopt the principles of postmodernism as key foundations in their approach to method.

According to Ramsay (2004:ch 7 par 20), '[P]astoral theologians embrace postmodernity critically asserting approximations of justice and truthfulness and a value for human rights. However, the criteria for such values now must be heuristic rather than an assertion of a particular tradition.' Ramsay (2004:ch 7 par 13) also states, 'Pastoral theology as practice involves an epistemological shift that considers knowledge as discursive practices that carry transformative potential. Practical wisdom is measured heuristically rather than by pre-existing criteria in Tradition (Graham, 1996). Faithfulness is less an outgrowth of prior theological and ethical teaching and more a shared, lived engagement that enacts an identity, values, and knowledge that sustain such a theological and ethical vision. Change then is carried in the practices of individuals and communities at least as much as in more abstract ideas (Chopp, 1995).'

Neuger (2004 : Par 17) states,

These various dialogue partners in pastoral theological method, that work together to generate our theories and practices of pastoral care and counseling, are in very different stages of critique, deconstruction, and reconstruction. Thus, we can often engage in harmful counseling practices, even when we think we are committed to postmodern and liberationist ideals, because we have inherited unexamined assumptions from one or more of the conversation partners of our discipline—often psychology or clinical method, sometimes theology and Scripture, or even unexamined life experience.

Neuger (2004 : Par 16) further claims:

Pastoral theology has a complex methodology that is helpfully explored through the use of a spiral image. The methodological spiral that characterizes pastoral theology is one that begins in particular and cultural experience and then uses that experience both to critique and utilize the traditions and theories of pastoral theology. Those traditions and theories include insights from Scripture, church traditions and doctrines, the social sciences, and clinical theories. From that dialogue between experience, understood broadly, and theory/theology, new and relevant pastoral practices are generated. Those practices are brought into the pastoral care and counseling process with the particular individuals and situations to see if they are, indeed, useful in offering liberating, empowering, and healing directions for those seeking help.

Cooper-White (2007: 50) provides a further example of a focus on theory in pastoral care from a postmodern perspective : 'Unarticulated theories...can be as harmful to clients as rigidly guarded conscious formulations.' The key criterion for a good, 'thick' theory is its 'explanatory power to help illuminate both what is happening to the client internally and in his or her relationship to others in the world, in terms of some larger patterns that are common to human behavior, and why' (:52). It is vital for theoretically aware pastoral counseling to be in dialogue

with pastoral theology and practical theology with its praxis concerns as articulated by Browning and Geertz (:52). The postmodern foundation of her method is clear as she states that the key in thick theories is not 'accuracy' but the power to generate more and better questions, which can deal with the unfolding complexity of human life, culture and the science of psychology (:53). She refers to Derrida's 'reflections about the slipperiness of words' and talks of 'an irreducible gap between the act of naming and whatever may exist,' quoting Derrida's words that 'things come into existence and lose existence by being named' (:54). However, while a client's 'reality' escapes full knowledge 'its contours may be traced and given meanings in the ongoing dialectic between the therapist's and client's respective theoretical knowledge/ speculations, and the [growing] narrative they construct together' (:54). In the interest of working with thick theory she recommends inculcating 'a lifelong habit to read widely in clinical, theoretical literature, both contemporary and historical' at the same time as working at being critically aware of one's 'theoretical sources' and one's emotional reactions to 'theoretical formulations' (:63).

My critique of a praxis-based approach to practical theology and pastoral care (see 6.3.11) extends into the issue of method and authority, and the problem of uncritically embracing postmodern categories becomes even more apparent.

The approaches to method and authority in this section display the strengths and weaknesses of postmodern thinking. To the extent that they challenge positivism and naiveté about one's assumptions they are salutary and form part of the necessary moderate postmodernism advocated in this dissertation. Nevertheless, I believe the stances are ultimately self-contradictory and have not fully considered the ramifications of using postmodern categories as basic foundations. Using Cooper-White's (2007) description as an example, if there is such an irreconcilable gap between reality and language, then what is the basis for discerning between all the multiple 'contours' that are possible and even if specific 'contours' are agreed upon, what is the basis for believing that they are not illusory, dysfunctional or even evil. Furthermore, while her concept of thick descriptions with great explanatory power is vital and in line with the hermeneutical stance of this research, the fact that the locus for generating these descriptions is in an immersion in psychological literature and in dialogue with praxis-based practical theology is problematic. Once again, the issue of ultimate locus has not been dealt with. Complicated descriptions of the hermeneutical process are mistaken for explanations of ultimate warrant.

#### **6.4.7.2 The significance of revelation for method and authority**

The possibility of revelation as a solution to the problem of method and authority has generally been excluded in liberal theology, practical theology and pastoral care, yet the postmodern emphasis on diversity is causing a re-examination of its possibility and role.

Scalise (1999 : 91) examines 'the puzzle of the lack of significant discussion of revelation in modern pastoral theology.' As Stroup (in Scalise 1999 :91) observes, 'The failure to attend to these issues is surprising because so many of the unresolved questions in the contemporary discussion of revelation have obvious significance for the practice of pastoral care and perhaps could be illumined by some of the insights of pastoral counselors.'

Accounting for revelation is critical for pastoral care : 'Without the thoughtful examination of the place of revelation in narratives of care, pastoral theology will be unable to differentiate itself as a discipline from other explicitly non-theological disciplines such as psychotherapy and social work' (Scalise 1999:97).

Scalise (1999 : 92-94) traces the history of revelation starting with the pre-Enlightenment situation where 'revelation was a background belief—a belief which is assumed to be so basic that it does not require explicit proof and upon which numerous other beliefs depend' (:92).

Kant's challenge to the knowability of God led to attempts to justify knowledge of God and the accompanying elevation of 'the doctrine of revelation to major importance.' This response to 'cultural pressure' lasted till the middle of the twentieth century where 'revelation-weariness' and 'disillusionment' set in, paving the way for postmodernism (:93). Within a postmodern context 'the preoccupation of Western Christian theology with revelation becomes a pluralistic perplexity' (:94). The above-mentioned lack of attention to revelation makes sense within this historical context.

Scalise (1999:95-98) sees a way forward in Lindbeck's focus on function and distinguishes three 'fluid' interpenetrating types of revelation in order to facilitate an understanding of how revelations functions in the context of pastoral care. 'Revelation 1 is revelation as individual subjective appropriation....[It] may be something as dramatic as hearing voices or seeing visions or ... as simple as experiencing the presence of God while praying or meditating.... Revelation 2 is revelation as illumination through communal tradition ....[referring] to a historical experience (e.g., Israel experienced God in the Exodus) or a present experience (e.g., our church experienced God's presence during worship last Sunday).... Revelation 3 is revelation as recognition of authoritative community traditions and practices' such as the Bible ( :95).

Scalise (1999:98) concludes that the counselee's narrative should be analyzed in terms of these three 'rough types of revelation', allowing 'pastoral caregivers to explore the dynamic in...[the person's] relationship with God, rather than simply offering competent psychological diagnosis. The rough types of revelation can provide a linguistic bridge connecting the first-order religious language of ...[the individual's] experience with the second-order language of theological reflection.'

Gorsuch (1999:45) outlines '[t]hree understandings of revelation... in relation to their meaning and role in pastoral theology: a cooperative view of sensing and laboring with God's presence in creation, the notion of collision between Christian and personal narratives, and the analogy of interpersonal communication which reclaims mutual relationship and its ongoing development as the content of revelation.' She urges 'further exploration based on practice of ministry' and personally views a 'pastoral theology influenced by feminist thought and narrative theory' as able to maintain 'a critical continuity with the Christian tradition, including an emphasis on human freedom and its ambiguity, and a stronger notion of God's freedom and power, as well as God's pathos' (:45).

Couture (1999) examines the issue of revelation in pastoral theology from a Wesleyan perspective. Following the well-know Wesleyan quadrilateral she states, 'The overarching category of God's revealing is not Scripture, tradition, reason, or experience; rather, each of these aids the action of God's grace' (1999:22). God's prevenient grace is a vital factor, representing 'the activity of God in our lives that precedes our knowledge of God. It is the nature of God through prevenient grace to invite us into relationship, always to reach toward us. God also prepares us to extend ourselves toward God. God is quickening our spiritual senses, opening us to the possibility of religious experience' (:22). The reaching out to God is a participation 'in the means of grace....[through] works of piety ... such as reading the scriptures and writings of tradition, prayer, and participating in the sacraments...[and] works of mercy [,which] involve ministry and mission; visiting, caring with, and advocating for those in need, such as the poor' (:22). In the Wesleyan understanding God is known 'through religious experience that is analogous to knowing the world through the biological senses' (:23). 'The experience of sin and the experience of grace are both religious experiences....Furthermore, our experience of sin, depravity, or evil in the world simultaneously intensifies and loses its power over us as we look back on it through the illumination of grace' (:24). '[T]he renewal of God's image in us is the primary purpose of the action of grace in our lives' (:24). According to Couture (1999: 25), this 'therapeutic emphasis in Wesleyan theology makes it a deeply pastoral theology,



one whose vision of healing resonates with the clinical therapeutic tradition.' In terms of conflict in different experiences, Scripture is primary in the interdependent interaction of experience, Scripture, tradition, and reason. In terms of conflict within Scripture Wesley follows the practice of interpreting 'obscure and conflicting passages...in light of more prominent ones; and all interpretation must be consistent with..."the whole tenor of Scripture.'" This means interpretation 'in light of "the analogy of faith... summarized in the Doctrines of Original Sin, Justification by Faith, and the Holiness consequent thereon. In Runyon's words, "these doctrines name, the human condition, describe the divine response to it, and spell out the means to renew humanity.'" (:25).

While direct appeals to Revelation, God and Scripture are made by proponents of biblical counseling, those involved in integration struggle with the issue of authority when conflicts between theological and psychological interpretations arise.

Porter (2010:3) examines the problem of conflict in integration, where 'our best interpretations of Scripture conflict to some degree with our best interpretations of the psychological research' and believes an 'epistemological argument' can be established 'for the higher authority of well grounded theological claims.' After examining various solutions he concludes that separating the authority of Scripture from theology, with inerrant authority being granted to Scripture but not to theology, is invalid for 'Scripture cannot operate as queen of the sciences unless theology operates as queen of the sciences.' However, the problem remains that 'neither the function of Scripture within the church, nor the linguistic nature of Scripture, nor the inerrancy of Scripture serve to ground theology as queen' (:9). Beyond the 'crucial assumption...that Scripture is, in some meaningful sense, God's word about the matters it addresses' Porter's argument that theology should have preference in conflict 'is due to the fact that God's epistemic credentials are superior to the psychological communities' epistemic credentials' (:9). Furthermore, 'Even though the theological claim might be erroneous in that it could be based on a misinterpretation of God's word, it should still be given pride of place for it is at present the best understanding of what it is believed God has to say about the matter' (:10).

Sandage and Brotim (2010) reject Porter's conclusions. They suggest that when comparing 'the relative authorities of theology and psychology, we should not compare God's voice and authority directly to that of that of the psychological community as Porter does. Instead, we should compare special revelation and general revelation,' the biblical/theological and psychological/social science poles. We should also recognize that neither 'uniform agreement' nor 'unmediated access to the sources they study' exists in either community (2010:21). They claim that Porter overlooks the human side of the Bible 'making Scripture coterminous with God's word,' leading to an 'ahistorical and acontextual' understanding of Scripture' (:22). They conclude that privileging 'theology over psychology as a way to begin...conversations (or to conclude them) does not seem to fit the phenomenon of human subjectivity...or the basic affirmation of Christian scholarship that all truth is God's truth, whether seen in the pages of the Bible or in the pages of a psychological journal' (:25).

Entwistle (2010:27) critiques the narrow focus of Porter's claim and prefers exploring 'how a Christian worldview should frame our understanding of psychology.' He states, 'What puts theology at a special disadvantage is that the method by which God's message has been transmitted gives us positive reasons for doubting that our best interpretations of Scripture carry the same authority as God's (more) direct communications to the authors of Scripture.... [undermining] the advantage it has on account of its relation to God's perfect intellect' (:29). Therefore, 'this leaves room for doubts about the transmission process, both of the physical texts across time and place and from copy to copy, and of their meanings from mind to mind—not to mention doubts about the processes of canon-formation. It also leaves room for differing estimations of the epistemic value of God's self-disclosure in Scripture relative to other forms of

Divine self-disclosure (in creation or reason, for instance)' (:30). He continues: 'It is the ... proposition—that theology is uniquely informative of a worldview from which psychology is approached—that...is the strongest ground upon which to grant theology supremacy in the integrative enterprise,' further contending that 'many apparent conflicts between psychology and theology can be traced to rival worldviews' (:30). He also distinguishes 'an epistemic right' from 'an epistemic duty' when it comes to privileging 'theological claims over those of other domains' (:31). 'Where there appears to be conflict, it is a conflict of interpretation. Thus we need to exercise epistemic humility, re-read both books [i.e. Scripture and the book of nature], and resolve discrepancies in a nonimperialistic manner when we can. When such resolution is not apparent, we must be content to live with the ambiguity and uncertainty that is part and parcel of human experience' (:31-32).

It is interesting to note the diversity of opinion with regard to revelation and authority. Those writing within a mainline journal -Scalise (1999), Gorsuch (1999), and Couture (1999)- are not focused on issues of integration. In contrast, those writing in an evangelical journal -Porter (2010), Sandage and Brotim (2010), Entwistle (2010)- directly deal with issues of integration. Nevertheless, simple categorizations are not possible. Couture's (1999) faith stance and Entwistle's (2010) critical stance are in tension with much of the tenor of their respective journals, indicating an increasing diversity within all traditions, leading to the possibility of greater dialogue.

#### **6.4.7.3 The need for a critically realistic stance to transcendent objectivity: faith seeking understanding**

All thinkers and traditions operate out of an ultimate locus for decision and belief with regard to method and authority. Where this is not recognized or admitted, it is fair to surmise, that when all the dust of complex dialogue, sophisticated hermeneutics and critical correlation has settled, it is the autonomous human individual (whether operating out of rationalism or the more emotionally based romanticism) who is making the final decision. In direct opposition to this form of locus, this research recommends that the locus of authority for pastoral method (while acknowledging the important role of human subjectivity, reason and emotion) is primarily in the *experience of God and the living narrative world of Scripture*. From a theological, faith perspective, the faithfulness of God and His participation in human affairs remain vital. This brings us to a critical examination of solutions to method and authority based on revelation and a high view of Scripture.

Nevertheless, this stance also intends to recognize the critical aspect of critical realism. Therefore, it does not invalidate the efforts of human knowledge and correlative efforts like Browning's. Rather, it is the basis of them existing as anything other than wishful thinking.

In terms of my conclusions from previous chapters the focus should not be on a competition between pastoral care and secular care (which challenges the high integration focus of some evangelical journals). God as the locus of truth judges and affirms both. Both, therefore, have potential truth-value and both may need change and reformation. At any single point in time either one of these fields may prove to be the principal means of providing a vital truth. One cannot, therefore, afford to ignore either field.

It is possible to embrace diversity and context, without uncritically embracing the categories, values and focus of extreme postmodernism. Scripture does not need to be twisted to support this affirmation. Theoretical abstractions, dissociated from real-life contexts are alien to the basic worldview and method of Scripture and ministry should fully enter into the life and world of people.

Therefore, all possible conversation partners should be brought into the hermeneutical conversation. Here too Scripture's many examples of collaboration and images of the diversity in the body of Christ resonate. Strong arguments can be made for immersing oneself in the realities and literature of other points of view, for then osmotic influence leading to shifts in understanding may occur and these are not possible from a distanced, 'objective' approach. Christ remains the model of entering into our life to achieve genuine understanding as a basis for helping (Heb 2 :17-18).

Intense research involving the wisdom of all the theological, natural and social sciences and culture in general in order to understand humanity and society may be vital at certain key points in ministry. For example, an accurate understanding of socio-political dynamics and power structures is vital before transformation can occur. The critique that the evangelical church is often distanced from this understanding and from engagement with these realities has weight.

The objection to liberal method is not, therefore, in the basic principle of embracing diversity and context, but rather in their role as ultimately foundational and based upon human capabilities.

I believe that cynicism about the possibility of revelation and transcendent meaning within Scripture ultimately has to lead to the conclusion that meaning is not possible and cannot be rescued by sophisticated hermeneutical methods. To state that those closest to the revelation event misunderstood it, but that we distanced from it are able to discern it more truly is wishful thinking.

A subjective understanding of truth is woefully inadequate for pastoral care. Destructive desires and addictions, for example, will seem true and thus irresistible to an individual unless there is an opposing truth and belief. In the midst of addiction and desire this opposing truth is not subjective but needs to be external and authoritative, as in God's revelation through Scripture. Deception and the theological breaking of deceptive spells are key issues in epistemology and pastoral care (Rm 3:3-4; Mt 24:24; 1Cor 3:18-19; 2Cor 4:4, 10:5).

The cumulative evidence concerning the limited, perceptually and cognitively fallible nature of all human knowledge is irrefutable and continues to grow. Similarly, the way we distort the truth according to our brokenness, emotional neediness and selfish agendas is hard to deny. The skepticism of postmodernism was not simply an intellectual coup carried off by select academics. It is the inevitable result of the repercussions of social reality grabbing hold of our social consciousness.

My principal criticism of the postmodern approach to method and authority in pastoral theology is that it does not take its own presuppositions seriously enough. To be utterly consistent, a suspicion of all meta-narratives and power plays should cause it to suspect itself and therefore face the alternatives of total meaninglessness, artificially constructed meaning or the possibility of transcendent meaning. While postmodernists will agree that all meaning is constructed and therefore artificial in that sense, I believe they do not go all the way and refuse to see that if we really believed meaning was artificial in this way it would lose its value as meaning. I believe transcendent value is still implicit in the conclusions we reach. If it were merely a case of artificially constructed pragmatic beliefs we could choose far more practical and easy solutions. Furthermore, the generally accepted belief that solutions should benefit the greatest number of people is not an obvious fact. Far from it : it is impractical and contrary to the idea of survival of the fittest.

The correlative efforts of thinkers like Browning clearly do believe in transcendent meaning and God, yet their focus on immanence and the ability to humanly discern the best truths for ethics or church practice raises the same concerns. To repeat, if the writers of Scripture, those closest to

the initial revelation events of the Trinity, were deceived in their belief that Scripture represented transcendent authority, it seems presumptuous to imagine that our beliefs concerning the outcomes of our correlative intellectual efforts should have any more traction.

#### **6.4.7.4 The vital role of Scripture in method and authority**

'For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them' (Jn 17:8).

'Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law' (Pr 29:18).

While Scripture does not obviate human knowledge endeavors, including those that deal with understanding and helping people (contra the understanding of Biblical Counseling) it is the concrete source that God uses for ultimate authority in all of life and knowledge. The written text cannot be conflated with the living Word of God and it need not be perfect in itself for it to represent the best and principal instrument in the hands of God for leading us into all necessary truth in the context of our hermeneutical efforts with all human sources of knowledge.

The power of Scripture to impact people, changing their understanding, healing their whole beings and providing a context for encountering God is not magical or mystical. It forms part of a specific method used by Jesus and the disciples and the church across the ages. The specific method consists simply in finding out what God has to say to us through the Scripture and responding appropriately. This does not supplant other knowledge processes and it does not suggest that it can be carried out in any simple, pure, unmediated fashion. Nevertheless, despite all the complexity and subjectivity involved, hearing God through Scripture as the key element in all our hermeneutical endeavors is an established and coherent method which is essentially marginalized in postmodern and liberal hermeneutics.

This means that inconsistency becomes inevitable in all methodologies that marginalize Scripture. At times, through intent or coincidence, conclusions will be reached that resonate with scripturally grounded interpretations. Nevertheless, at key points, through ignorance of the possibilities for life and knowledge revealed in Scripture or through full awareness of what Scripture says and a conscious choice to choose a conflicting cultural understanding, there will be a divergence from God's potentially revealed will in Scripture.

This understanding of the vital role of Scripture is in terms of the conclusion in chapter five that all of Scripture represents God's will in some potential form, in the past, present, or future. Any discontinuity with any part of Scripture therefore needs to be done in terms of a responsible hermeneutic based in Scripture itself. Failing to take the whole of Scripture as authoritative means that at critical points one will fall back into the correlation method, which is based on human discernment as the ultimate locus.

#### **6.4.8 Conclusions on biblical theistic hermeneutics in pastoral care**

'Comprehensive understanding is that function which pulls together analysis, perspective and praxis into a single, meaningful whole, and thus constitutes one's most inclusive, overarching principle of practice' (Brown 1990 :1271).

A hermeneutical approach allows one to have a comprehensive understanding and intervention in pastoral care encounters. Instead of reductionism one is open to physical, psychological, spiritual and social factors. Each of these can be subdivided further. Spiritual factors can take into account the influence of God and the demonic. Social factors can look at family networks and unjust economic structures. Different factors can have greater or lesser influence

depending on the people and situations involved, but an openness to all possible factors will help counteract incorrect or incomplete understanding.

#### **6.4.8.1. The practical relevance of hermeneutics to pastoral care**

Hermeneutics is vital in the pastoral care process.

It is firstly vital in terms of intellectual and spiritual preparation; the richness of a person's hermeneutics determines the quality (in terms of breadth and depth) of understanding, sources, skills, actions and spiritual 'capital' (of character) that the carer brings into the pastoral care situation.

Hermeneutics is also vital in terms of a careful listening to self, God and the counselee, in order to know which mixture of information and action needs to be applied at each given moment. A wide variety of means of communication is vital in order to touch the complex human reality. As people are complex beings with a diverse range of faculties, comprehensive communication will increase the chances of reaching the whole person, thus increasing the chances that genuine heart change (in terms of the rich scriptural understanding of "heart") will take place, resulting in a changed life.

Hermeneutics is also vital in terms of the overall process of a pastoral care encounter. A field-of-tension / hermeneutical approach has enormous practical value in this process. It enables one to engage the person at any point and move slowly forward, completing the circle of wholeness to the greatest extent possible. It also allows for admitting mistakes, changing and adapting with greater ease. A positivistic counseling model ends up putting 'all one's eggs in one basket'. This over investment can cause one to be rigid and slow to change and adapt when necessary. One may even complete the process and fail to recognize the extent to which the person has not really been helped. It goes hand in hand with a hit and miss approach. Finally, and most seriously, it can do real harm when serious problems, such as chemically based depression, are overlooked or misdiagnosed.

This flexible, perspectival, process-linked, relational approach to pastoral care depends on a similar approach to truth. In terms of perspectives one can emphasize that truth can always be viewed from different angles. As already argued this does not mean that there are different truths that can be arbitrarily chosen above others. From a faith perspective, all truth is one but we can profitably engage any one of its facets and move in from that position. This is extremely relevant to a more open-ended, hermeneutical approach in pastoral care. The process-linked nature of truth, where truth is a journey, with accumulating perspectives contributing to a more full-orbed understanding and experience is microcosmically enacted in the pastoral encounter. The relational nature of truth means that obstacles to truth are often to do with will and emotion, rather than intellectual difficulties. Only in relationship with God can a person enter into the aforementioned journey into truth.

Hermeneutics in the pastoral situation is not just about the interpretation of the person in their concrete situation. It is, equally importantly, about changes in behaviour and thinking that are required to move to a more-desired situation. The defining of this situation as well as the nature of the steps towards that situation should equally be hermeneutical processes demonstrating the same flexible, complex understanding.

The critique I have leveled against the over-complexification of knowledge in praxis-based liberal pastoral theology seems equally applicable here, as I labour the complexity of the pastoral care situation. The difference, I believe, is that I openly acknowledge that the nature of complexity drives knowledge beyond the possibilities of human control and capabilities. An eclectic

methodology is ultimately unstable and will not work when faced with true diversity, as I believe mainline practical theology will discover if truly engages with diversity in our postmodern and global context. I believe this complexity can only validly be incorporated in a relationship of utter dependence upon God.

Given the complexity of every situation and the multiple factors of human limitation and sin, the pastoral process is an impossible task (equally for pastoral care of an individual and for pastoral care of society and nature) and God's grace and superabundance rather than the pastor's skills are the key in the hermeneutical process. God as a skilled craftsman performs a valid work with a blunt or warped instrument. Nevertheless, such an instrument may hinder even a skilled craftsman. Our goal should be for God to be able to work with us as instruments in the best possible condition (2 Tm 2:15, 20-21; Eph 2:10).

The idea of God ultimately guiding us does not at all mean that we do not use our human capacities to explore and grow in understanding and experience. The more we know and experience, the more God can guide us in those ways. God may very well be speaking to us in multiple ways but our reduced understanding and capacities make us deaf. For example, if we do not believe in physical healing, we are unlikely to hear God speaking to us to lay hands on a sick person as we visit them in hospital. The Holy Spirit may be like a co-pilot wishing to instruct us to take certain roads to reach certain destinations. But if our existential and epistemological terrain is undeveloped, potential roads remain rough terrain and we cannot be guided in those directions.

Hermeneutics is not only the vital stance required by the pastoral carer, it is a basic skill to inculcate in all believers. It is understood in the biblical commands to learn to tell right from wrong (Heb 5:14; 1Th 5:21-22) and to make the best choices in order to live a truly blessed life that is pleasing to God (1Th 4:1; Phlp 1:9-10; Rm 12:2). It is increasingly urgent to emphasize this skill in an increasingly chaotic and pluralistic world that no longer supports the Christian worldview (looking at our Western historical context). In the past the consequences of remaining untrained and hermeneutically immature, mindlessly following the flow of society were less severe than today. Although one would be missing out on a truly active and vibrant journey with God one would not be carried along by consciously anti-Christian forces to the same extent as today. Today, hermeneutical naiveté is a luxury no Christian can afford. It will result in a loss of faith or a fearful retreat into Christian subculture, which, ironically, will be another form of worldliness, with a Christian veneer.

Hermeneutical training means teaching people to deal with the complexity and mystery involved in Scripture and all of life. It means inculcating skills that enable thick understandings of all aspects of reality, as they impinge upon one's life, and that encourage deep, mature responses. Most importantly, it means learning to increasingly discern and obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit in all areas of life.

#### **6.4.8.2 Examples of hermeneutical tensions that need to be respected**

Apart from the obvious global tensions which have been discussed thus far, such as between Christ and culture and the written word of God and the living Word of God, the following interpretive tensions are relevant in a vibrant hermeneutical approach to pastoral care.

##### **a) Inductive and deductive circularity**

Rather than the typical praxis approach of moving from concrete situation to theology and back to concrete situation I propose that truth is a circular process that can start at any point in the inevitable circularity and interpenetration that exists between the empirical/ practical /inductive

pole and the intuitive / abstract / deductive pole. God cannot be bound to one or the other through unbalanced understandings of immanence or transcendence.

It is fully possible for God to take hold of our minds in a reading of Scripture and a meditative experience and place ideas and images there which have no immediate correlation in our practical experience for He is the God who spoke the world into being out of that which is not visible (Heb 11 :6), who calls the things that are not as though they were (Rm 4 :17), who reveals things not otherwise knowable by the senses (1 Cor 2 :9-10), who calls those blessed who at times believe without seeing (Jn 20 :29), and who tells us to pray for his heavenly Kingdom to be manifest in our space and time (Mt 6 :10).

At the same time the whole of creation pours forth God's speech (Ps 19 :1-4 ; Rm 1 :20) and this physical creation is the arena where we are to think and act to the glory of God.

### **b) Hermeneutics as an anthropological versus divine possibility**

Clearly God has endowed humankind with the capacity to think and act in highly creative and effective ways. In evolutionary terms He has created the conditions that have made it possible for us to evolve to the point of consciousness in order to bear His image. His grace and gifts are so effective and superabundant that it is possible to think that this capacity rests in us as a human potential and to be satisfied with a meagre harvest, which we imagine to be abundant. Nevertheless, Scripture clearly states our dependence on God, who is the sole source of life, truth and authority (Jn 15 :5, 19 :11 ; Rm 13 :1 ; Ac 17 :29), and while it is possible to use or hoard God's gifts without acknowledging God, this is a temporary situation (Lk 8 :18 ; Rm 14 :12 ; Heb 4 :13 ; 1Pet 4 :5). In the light of this, life and knowledge without reference to and dependence upon God is an impoverished state in many ways. Firstly, even when we manage to attain knowledge that is in itself reliable, it is impoverished, for the systemic reality that this truth is made possible by God and is to God's glory is not acknowledged. Secondly, the truth itself may suffer through reduction ; rich comprehensive understandings are actively denied, leading to impoverished understanding, such as the belief that humans are merely sophisticated animals. Thirdly, it may lead us into dangerous mistruths, such as the belief that might is right.

### **c) Excess continuity and discontinuity versus shifting tensions**

Encouraging excess continuity or discontinuity between the counselee's spiritual worldview and social or cultural context can lead to pastoral care problems. Excess discontinuity leads to legalism, which ultimately ravages the soul and causes one to end up embittered towards God. Excess continuity ultimately ends up leaving the person injured by demonic forces in culture, the seriousness of which has been downplayed. There is increasing pain and confusion as the church currently faces these tensions and many churches are experiencing a hemorrhaging of membership as postmodern influenced members struggle to find meaning in old church structures. Written exchanges in the virtual global public forum of the internet testify to seemingly irreconcilable positions as those who stay faithful to the church and those who feel forced to flee its confines face each other in bewilderment, misunderstanding and sometimes acrimonious judgment.

### **d) Reduction versus shifting degrees of comprehensiveness**

A hermeneutically solid understanding of all aspects of creation and reality is vital for engendering spiritual health and maturity. This involves challenging simplistic understandings and replacing them with God's truth, which will often be paradoxical, involving tensions. This will enable the individual and community to find peace in their current situation and to have the wisdom to know when to accept the situation versus strive for change. For example, a complex

understanding of wealth versus poverty, suffering versus pleasure, obscurity versus recognition, and realization (of goals and desires) versus patient waiting will involve knowing that, beyond certain extremes, which clearly fall outside of the acceptable possibilities of moral and loving behaviour in the kingdom of God, a great variety in authentic expressions of Kingdom living is possible. Individuals and groups are freed to discover God's will for them in each situation, knowing that we will all be called to account for all our life choices.

While comprehensiveness remains a goal, reduction is inevitable. Firstly, this is due to lack in the particular carer : no individual can have all the knowledge and skills required by another. This is also due to time constraints : every situation involves time limitations and only a small part of the person's need can be met in that given moment. This also involves chronological restraints : each individual's healing and growth represents a personal history unfolding over time. People may need to be in a particular stage of development before they can receive specific truths or make specific decisions required for the next stage in healing. Related to this is the impact of social and geographical context; what is difficult or impossible in one culture, social set-up or work situation may become possible when these are changed.

#### **e) Excess complexity or simplicity versus divine balance**

The incredible complexity that is generated by postmodern play on meaning and deconstruction is not the responsible complexity that should occur in a valid hermeneutic. The radical tendency to analyze and deconstruct is often irresponsible, the metaphorical equivalent being a mechanic expertly taking apart someone's means of transport, and not providing any alternative, leaving them stranded. Deconstruction itself needs to be deconstructed and reversed. As much as every stable tension can be deconstructed to reveal endless complexity, endless complexity can also be synthesized to stable choices. This simplification becomes a pastoral tool, helping people locate themselves and make choices in a chaotic environment. For example, within all the confusion surrounding truth and meaning people can be reminded that there is a basic choice to be made : there is or isn't an intelligence behind it all. If people accept there is an intelligence, then a further choice is to believe that this intelligence can and will communicate etc., leading to the point of believing that God either does love you and have a plan for your life or not. It is a case of counteracting the inability to 'see the wood for the trees' to help people see that all those trees do add up to a woodland of life.

This kind of synthetic thinking is not meant to deny the necessity of diversity and complex analysis. The two movements towards simplicity and complexity need to be held in tension and a hermeneutical pastoral care decision needs to be made in terms of the appropriate direction that needs to be encouraged in a given situation.

#### **f) Positivism versus divine mystery and sovereignty**

The concept of underdetermination is relevant to pastoral care. People's situations are underdetermined and can be read in widely varying ways. Theistic versus atheistic interpretations and solutions can be proposed. Similarly, within theistic frameworks, the dynamics of God versus human centredness and high versus low approaches to Scripture come into play. There is also no simple observable correlation between the view and strategy chosen and the value of the results. The true effect of strategies may take time to manifest. In addition, a truly valid and blessed intervention may initially appear to bear no fruit or even negative fruit, before its wisdom is revealed. For example, in terms of a superficial modern secular analysis Jesus' intervention with the rich young ruler was a failure for 'he went away sad' (Mt 19:22), and for all intents and purposes Jesus' presence on the cross signaled utter failure. This reinforces the fact of our utter dependence on God in pastoral care as we engage with the mysteries of life, including the mysteries of human rebellion, repentance and healing.



An acceptance of complexity, mystery and paradox leads to a greater God-dependence and focus on hermeneutics (in contrast to the humanistic positivism, independence and atheism of modernist thinking). Further arguments that shows that this complexity, mystery and paradox are essential to reality (rather than false concepts arising out of an impoverished epistemology) are the theological concepts of the already and the not yet of Jesus' Kingdom, the mixture and ambiguity arising out of humanity being God's good creation yet corrupted by the fall, and the idea of adventure, freedom, plurality, and variety as a reflection of God's character and intent, which He has imprinted within the basic DNA of the created order.

No one gets to hold the ultimate big picture or blueprint of life and knowledge except God. All human knowing is mediated and partial. This should lead to freedom, for rather than expending unnecessary energy in trying to perfect systems of truth or tightly constrained therapeutic models (the equivalent of building sandcastles before the tide) we are freed to risk and explore and adapt. This should also not lead to passivity, but rather a peaceful yet vigorous holy striving.

### **6.5 The Bible and pastoral care**

It seems redundant to say that the Bible is vital to Christianity and pastoral care, yet because of the post-Enlightenment dynamics described in this research, its role cannot be taken for granted. The use of Scripture in pastoral care ranges from almost complete eclipse in favour of secular knowledge and therapies to attempts to perform pastoral care out of an exclusively biblical base, with inevitable secular influence going unacknowledged.

Wright (2005 : 106-110) clarifies how those on the 'right' and the 'left' are both guilty of misreading Scripture and as proof produces two equal lists of 'misreadings [that] are now so common that they are taken for granted in large segments of the church.' In terms of the liberal side of the readings Wright states that they believe these misreadings are 'the result of modern scholarship, and that any attempt to challenge it at any point represents a return to an anti-intellectual premodernity - which would put in jeopardy the status, the credibility and quite possibly the salary of the challenger. The result has been remarkable ignorance of what scripture is and teaches ; an inability to use it in serious, mature and indeed Christian ways' and, of course, a reaction by "conservative" Christians, who, seeing this, and rightly associating it with other cultural and social factors with which they also have quarrels, define themselves explicitly in opposition' (:111).

The way the Bible is used is related to the way it is understood, and vice versa. Pastoral care has a very different character when Scripture is taken seriously. Values, priorities and practices are directly affected. Key scriptural themes such as glorifying God and opposing demonic forces do not register on any secular agenda and will be completely downplayed in pastoral care unless a high view of Scripture is adopted. This does not mean believing the Bible in the face of contrary experience. However, experience is radically underdetermined and can be made to fit directly opposing worldviews. When the Father spoke to Jesus some said it thundered –a naturalistic explanation- and others said it was the voice of an angel –a supernatural but theologically uninformed explanation (Jn 12:28-29). One must therefore be honest and consistent in terms of one's stated foundations (God's revelation through Scripture) and one's interpretations and practices.

Without in any way claiming to resolve the mystery of God and Scripture, this research attempts to avoid unnecessary extremes in order to achieve a faithful understanding of Scripture for its application in the context of pastoral care

The following section will propose a series of suggestions concerning Scripture in pastoral care in the light of the conclusions from chapter five and the issues raised in this chapter.

### **6.5.1 The Bible is anti-Biblicist**

I believe the Bible itself is the strongest evidence that a positivistic Biblicist view is invalid. In a positivistic stance a clear, authoritative interpretation and application of Scripture is assumed. Issues of subjectivity and error are naively overlooked. Furthermore, the assumption is made that the Bible is all-sufficient, leading to attempts at radical discontinuity with psychology and science in matters of human identity and well-being at the very least. In addition, the written text is conflated with the living Word of God.

Apart from specific verses that differentiate the scriptural text and the life or power of God (Jn 5 :39-40 ; Mt 22 :29) the NT descriptions of scriptural interpretation (using their scriptures, the OT) indicate a rich hermeneutical process, which is quite distinct from Biblicism.

For example, Jesus did intensive scriptural exposition with the disciples on the way to Emmaus, yet it was his symbolic act of breaking bread which finally opened their eyes (Lk 24 :13-32). In Acts 15 a church split is averted over the issue of circumcising new believers by a combination of discussion, appeal to Scripture and guidance by the Holy Spirit. The NT was thus often written out of an interaction between the OT Scripture, present circumstances and the illumination of the Holy Spirit. A rich, hermeneutical approach involving an interaction between authoritative text, present context and Holy Spirit is part of the very fabric of Scripture and serves as a model for our current ministry of pastoral care.

### **6.5.2 The Bible is a fully propositional and metaphorical book**

The use of imagery, metaphors and symbols drawn from Scripture and all aspects of knowledge and culture is valid in pastoral care. This is a vital counterbalance to an excessive focus on words and propositions in much evangelical practice. This focus is important in terms of sources introduced in pastoral care as well as practices encouraged. Thus one needs to introduce actual imagery and the practice of seeing truth in this way. If one reads Scripture with an eye for this focus one is struck by its prevalence. We need to be reminded that all Scripture is God-breathed and useful and we need to be aware of the extent that it is possible to gravitate towards the propositional parts of Scripture, such as Paul's doctrinally-focused letters.

There are many opportunities to move beyond static to dramatic or symbolically enacted representations of truth. Besides the obvious repeatable symbolic enactments of baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the anointing of oil, Scripture has many examples of God causing truth to be dramatically enacted. For example, God commanded Isaiah to go 'stripped and barefoot for three years as a sign and portent to Egypt and Cush' (Is 20:3) and the prophet Agabus tied Paul with his own belt to symbolize how the Jews of Jerusalem would hand him over to the Gentiles (Ac 21:10-11). The pastoral care situation presents many opportunities for this kind of powerful communication, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, the full understanding of the Word of God argued in chapter five remains relevant to pastoral care. In pastoral encounters one must communicate the living presence of God and facilitate the life-giving God-human encounter, along with the propositional content and explication of these. These two poles cannot be severed, nor can a legalistic pattern (where scriptural exposition is always placed before encounter with God, for example) be established.

Two extremes, therefore, need to be avoided. The first treats the Bible as a vague model of love, with dim glimmerings of God and a low-focus on propositional detail. This allows one to fill

in the missing detail with one's own imagined understanding of truth. The other extreme involves an over-detailed application of biblical data to all the areas of life. There is no space left for discovery and filling in one's own detail, or for applying the latest developments in science and knowledge. Inevitably distortion and error arise when answers are assumed for every situation. Biblical truth exists in between these two extremes (of vague principles versus detailed facts and instructions) in the form of detailed principles, necessitating a hermeneutical engagement. The complexity of the hermeneutics is also related to the fact that different parts of Scripture will be able to render more or less detail depending of the situation.

When approached hermeneutically Scripture has specific, detailed things to say about all aspects of modern life, from nuclear threats to biotechnology. When we approach any complex issues we cannot expect to apply Scripture without God's real-time wisdom, communicated through the Holy Spirit. We can, however, expect God to speak in relevant, life-giving ways that speak into every detail of every situation and that will be in continuity with the supernaturally chosen examples of His past interactions, as recorded in Scripture.

### **6.5.3 Propositional and metaphorical models for relating to the truth and mystery of Scripture**

The Bible cannot be reduced to a single controllable reality. Its intimate connection to the Trinity makes it mysterious and transcendent. We do not master it, but God masters us and blesses us through his living Word which sacramentally operates through the written text (Heb 4:12; 2Tm 3:15-16).

While the Bible is a book full of imagery and its truth value cannot be reduced to the criteria and categories of modernist objectivity I disagree with authors who argue that the truth value of its metaphors is not an issue for this is to go to the opposite extreme of relativism; a measure of critical realism applies to the Scripture as well.

One cannot escape issues of truth; potential images that could be used in pastoral care cannot be severed from certain propositional realities which ultimately contradict Scripture. Nevertheless, there is a need to challenge the hyper-orthodox position that has very low tolerance for right-brain, creative imagery which is felt to be unbiblical. As soon as one talks of energy (a popular New Age term) or uses contemporary images, a cry goes out that one is dealing with unbiblical, New Age, demonic realities. This arises out of a misunderstanding of Scripture and truth.

Hyper orthodoxy rationalistically reduces Scripture to a 'safe' set of definable categories. Difficult concepts that burst the bounds of rationalism (not rationality, for acceptance of mystery is a rationally defensible stance) are either overlooked or related to in a dynamic where familiarity has obscured their original (and ongoing) shocking impact. A clear example is Jesus command to eat his flesh and drink his blood. The dynamics around his statement and His response remain extremely relevant (Jn 6:57-63).

Numerous authors appeal to the rich, complex nature of Scripture.

Oates (1953: 15) explains that 'The Bible has an overwhelming symbolic strength' and this is often overlooked. The pastor can use it 'As a symbol of authority...a sword and a shield...[to express] hostility and [as] a means of protection when...threatened' (:18). For many believers 'the Bible has a positive, healthy, and precious meaning. It represents comfort and strength in the presence of life's typical crises' (:20).

Louw (1988a: 377) states that 'scriptural truth does not function apart from other truth models and sources of knowledge.' He states that the 'knowing', 'doing' and 'being' models all 'have a place in counseling' but the unique nature of pastoral care requires a 'sacramental truth model.' He thus interprets Scripture sacramentally in terms of this model with three implications. Firstly, 'Scripture is metaphorical...[It] points to the transcendental dimension of human existence and links creation to Creator, human being to God'. Secondly 'Scripture creates a unique relation of fellowship between God and people...[creating] a covenantal influencing' towards choosing faith or unbelief. 'Thirdly, *sacramentum* implies that Scripture not only communicates the gift of grace, but is a gift of grace.'

According to Louw (1988a: 378), 'A sacramental stance views the biblical term 'word of God' as the communication event and encounter with the Gospel. "Word" is more comprehensive than the biblical text. it refers to the presence and faithfulness of God, as this is related to humankind by means of a covenantal encounter established by the Spirit (the pneumatological mode of the Word). It also refers to both revelation (transcendence) and to communication (God's condescendence and embodiment through human actions in history).' Louw (1988a: 379) concludes : 'Promissiotherapy therefore operates in pastoral counseling by using the biblical text as proof of God's faithfulness: "I love you unconditionally"...The text itself is the promissory reality within the context of human faith and is a working event within the power of the Holy Spirit.'

#### **6.5.4 The Bible as fully divine and fully human**

The Bible as a human book is beyond dispute and this is the normative and almost exclusive understanding within which much theology and pastoral care is trapped. It is vital to recover the understanding that the Bible in its emergent whole exists with integrity as a divine and faithful book.

If one understands the Bible to have limited authority, merely serving as a set of general principles or examples to point one in the right direction, it is clear that it will be used inconsistently. Even when it is understood to have final authority there is no guarantee that it will function authoritatively. It is easy to theoretically articulate the importance of scriptural authority, but one needs honesty and courage to actually conduct the counseling process in submission to God's authority through the Bible rather than ultimately placing the authority in the counselor or counselee.

#### **6.5.5. The illocutionary intent of the Bible**

The Bible cannot be read or applied appropriately in the pastoral care situation if its true nature is not appreciated. When approached on its own terms it becomes clear that a the rationalistic approach in terms of both its critique and defense is in many ways missing the point.

##### **6.5.5.1 The Bible is a relational book**

If, as argued in chapters one to five, the God human encounter is the practical locus of truth then the Scriptures cannot be used in a non-organic fashion, listing proof-texts as prescriptions for living and solutions to problems. The scriptural testimony in dialogue with the human situation in dialogue with the Holy Spirit is practically normative. The organic use of Scripture is captured in the following verse: 'let the word of Christ dwell in you richly' (Col 3:16).

Furthermore, if worshiping God is the ultimate goal of humankind as well as the key means of attaining growth and healing, Scripture is vital. We need to know who God is in order to relate

correctly to Him. The multiple expressions of God's self-explanation in Scripture ("I am the Lord your God who....") are intended to directly affect the recipients understanding and action.

### 6.5.5.2 The Bible is a pastoral book

In terms of biblical roots Tidball (1995: 43) draws attention to the important fact that 'the biblical documents themselves are in many cases written as pastoral documents.' Some of the pastoral content is implicit and requires 'excavation' but it is there nonetheless (:43-44).

Many verses are explicitly pastoral and serve as a whole pastoral methodology in themselves (Rm 12 :2, 15 :13 ; Eph 3 :16-19 ; 2Pt 1 :5-8, Phlp 4 :4-9, etc.)

### 6.5.5.3 The Bible is a transformative book

A key principle for Capps (1988:53-54) in correctly understanding and using the Bible in pastoral care is its nature as a 'change agent.' '[W]hatever use is made of the bible in pastoral care and counseling, it should be informed by the counselor's awareness that biblical texts have the power to change attitudes, behaviour, and perceptions.' This is directly related 'to its disclosive power. The bible...discloses a world in which God is actively engaged. This disclosure challenges us to perceive our situation in terms not only of what *is* happening, humanly speaking, but also of what *may be* happening : divine activity....One sees life differently when one sees it from the perspective of God's real presence in the world.'

According to Wright (2005:30), to understand biblical authority 'It is enormously important that we see the role of scripture not simply as being to provide *true information about...*the work of God in salvation and new creation, but as taking an active part *within* that ongoing purpose.' He suggests that terms like 'revelation,' 'conveying information,' 'divine self-communication,' or 'record of revelation,' for understanding Scripture arise out of 'an older framework of thought, in which the key question was conceived to be about a mostly absent God choosing to send the world certain messages about himself and his purposes. That usurped the richer biblical picture of a present, albeit transcendent, God, celebrating with the rich dynamic life of his creation and grieving over its shame and pain' (:30-31). "[T]he authority of scripture," when unpacked, offers a picture of God's sovereign and saving plan for the entire cosmos, dramatically inaugurated by Jesus himself, and now to be implemented through the Spirit-led life of the church precisely as the scripture-reading community' (:114).

Telford Work's (2002) 'Scripture in the Economy of Salvation' is a significant work, which responds to issues of authority by 'rooting Scripture in the Trinitarian economy, rather than merely in human epistemology' (2002 :212). It serves as one more example of an encouraging movement, within parts of the church, which holds to a high view of Scripture on the organic basis of God's faithfulness and action, rather than sterile rationalistic schemes.

### 6.5.6 The full scope of the canon

In terms of this research every part of Scripture is intended by God. While certain parts of Scripture clearly no longer apply and the same relevance cannot be accorded to every part of Scripture in all situations, every part continues to have revelatory significance and continues to form an essential part of the whole. For example, while the OT sacrificial system no longer applies to us, it continues to form an essential part of salvation history and continues to reveal aspects of God's holiness and patient execution of His salvation plan. It would be invalid to suggest that it was a mistake or a human misinterpretation of God's will.

I will argue that suggesting that any significant theme or narrative in Scripture, including those themes and narratives involved in the so-called texts of terror, is false in this way, i.e. a mistake and not part of God's permissive will, does constitute such a misinterpretation and ends up destabilizing the whole of Scripture. Once one accepts error in any key scriptural theme or narrative, there is no way back to validly recovering other parts of Scripture that one chooses to believe are not in error.

Therefore, I believe the totality of scripture addresses us in the totality of our being. No simple correlation is possible for determining which aspect of Scripture addresses which aspect of our reality at any one time. Patterns and correlations (as in Capps' and Peterson's approach to genre, below) can be established; not positivistically, but rather under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that the use of a pattern is itself a hermeneutical decision and event.

### **6.5.6.1 The part versus whole complexity of the Bible**

The organic use of Scripture means that the whole biblical revelation forms the backdrop of understanding (as opposed to individual proof texts) and this comprehensive backdrop is related to all parts of creation and the counselee's situation. God through the Holy Spirit is the only possibility of consistent truth and life emerging out of this complexity.

This focus on the whole of Scripture needs to be held in tension with a respect for its individual parts and genres.

Capps (1988:45) distinguishes approaches to Scripture in counseling that focus on biblical themes versus those that focus on biblical forms. Thurneysen, for example, focuses on the 'unifying theme of conviction of sin and assurance of forgiveness, and all biblical texts are to be viewed in the light of this theme that, for him, is the very gospel itself' (Capps 1988 :45). Similarly Oglesby perceives the 'unifying theme...[of] how God is acting for and with humankind toward reconciliation and restoration' (Capps 1988:47). In a similar fashion to Eugene Peterson, Capps focuses on 'literary forms' rather than the 'thematic unity' of the Bible, with each form entailing 'different pastoral care and counseling goals.' For example, '[t]he lament form relates to pastoral care of the bereaved, in which the goal is to comfort ; the proverb form relates to premarital counseling, whose goal is to provide moral guidance.' On the basis of Ricoeur's hermeneutical theories Capps is guided by the following 'theological consideration' concerning the Bible's literary forms: 'a given literary form makes possible certain kinds of divine revelations or disclosures and precludes others' (:48). Furthermore, '[b]ecause the Bible consists of a great variety of literary forms, it is difficult to think of the Bible as having an essential unity' (:49).

While the need to focus on genre is vital in terms of not misinterpreting and misusing the Scripture I believe the individual genres need to be held in tension with the overall genre of the salvation history revealing word of God. This will ensure that the appropriate pastoral care goals of ministering in an effective and specific manner in the counselee's detailed, real-life context are held in balance with the ultimate need and goal of the counselee, which is to be drawn up into God's overall purposes of salvation for all of creation. This is only revealed at the global level of the genre of the Word of God, which includes every part of Scripture. Jesus' statement that that 'until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished' (Mt 5:18) suggests that all of Scripture (and that can be extended to the NT through its equally valid connection to God's revelation through Jesus) remains of direct pastoral use until salvation history is accomplished. This view obviously stands opposed to approaches that dismiss or marginalize Scripture. However, it also stands in tension with orthodox views that take the Scripture revelation with the utmost seriousness, yet do not believe that all of Scripture operates in this way.

### 6.5.6.2 Relating to all of Scripture

A close reading, memorization and application of small pericopes of Scripture should be encouraged, but needs to be balanced with an ingestion of broad swathes of Scripture, where the grand narratives become foregrounded. The fragmentation of Scripture destroys its true nature as a unique, complex, but unified genre of the historical, recorded form of the Word of God (whether through holding only on to a collection of favourite comforting Bible verses, or through the critical dismantling and opposing of 'contradictory' discrete elements of Scripture, with a rationalistic option for certain elements above others). The use of audio bibles is vital in terms of absorbing broad swathes of Scripture.

### 6.5.6.3 Texts of terror and the wrath of God

Texts of terror and the wrath of God are often treated as discontinuous, creating a 'non-canon' within the canon. This issue is dealt with in the section on God images, where it will be argued that this is an invalid approach to the canon of Scripture.

## 6.5.7 Examples of the use of Scripture

### 6.5.7.1 Insufficient hermeneutical complexity due to over or under applying Scripture

#### a) Jay Adams

Adams is often referred to as an example of an un-nuanced direct, over application of Scripture : Clinebell (1994: 127) states that the Bible can be misused to 'manipulate counselees to conform to rigid moralizing, and justify life-constricting attitudes toward issues such as sex and divorce.' He categorizes Adams as following this approach and mentions three flaws. 'It is poor counseling because it does not integrate the biblical wisdom with contemporary wisdom from the human sciences and the psychotherapeutic disciplines. Second...[it] encourages authoritarian advice giving, reinforced by biblical authority...Third, the rigid biblicism of this approach tends to prevent people from discovering the Bible as the living Word that speaks to their particular situation in transforming ways.'

Other authors voice similar concerns: 'Adams wants to apply Scripture to all human problems. The danger exists that the Scripture may serve as a collection of texts used to solve all psychic and social problems' (Louw 1998a: 30). Adams 'treats the Bible...atomistically, virtually as a vast collection of individual verses' (Capps 1988:45).

Adams (1973: 18) positivism is evident in the way he believes there is one single counseling method that can be clearly discerned from Scripture: 'If there is anything that must be maintained at all costs, it is the integrity of the Scriptures as the authoritative standard for Christian counseling. All ideas of relativism must be abandoned. It is only upon biblical presuppositions that counseling may be based, and these are necessarily the same for every Christian counselor. The fundamentals of method, insofar as they inevitably grow out of these presuppositions, again will be the same.'

#### b) Eduard Thurneysen

Thurneysen (1963: 11) defines pastoral care as 'the communication of the word of God to individuals', the basis for all 'legitimate' church functions. '[I]t is an act of sanctification and of discipline by which the visible form of the community is constituted and kept alive and by which the individual is redeemed and preserved in spite of his degeneration and corruption' (:32). 'Like the proclamation of the church generally, pastoral conversation has as its only content the

communication of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. For it is the conversation in which man in his totality is addressed with full authority as a sinner under grace' (:147). In the light of this Thurneysen (1963: 83) explains : 'Now it becomes clear what pastoral care alone means and can be: It can no longer mean and be anything but the work of communicating the absolving, gracious Word to the individual.'

### c) Biblical Counseling

Biblical counseling is strongly represented by Welch (1997), Powlison (2000), and the 'Journal of Biblical counseling.' The following statements on biblical counseling clearly demonstrate its positivism and dissociation from all extra-biblical influence and knowledge.

Powlison (2000:18) locates his definition of biblical counseling within the utter seriousness of the self-inflicted human condition of sin (Eccl 9:3), which creates the need to '*know* the sheer glory and goodness of what our Father has given us in Jesus Christ.' There are further things we need to know: 'the stunning wisdom of the Word of God. God speaks profoundly and comprehensively to the concrete conditions of every person's life' (:18). 'We must *know* our calling as children of such a Father' (:18) 'We must know that God's way is qualitatively different from everything else available in the bazaar of options, of other counsels, other schemas, other practices, other systems' (:19). He explains that these affirmations are controversial: 'a mental health system that knows no Christ dominates the counseling landscape and shapes the mind and practices of the culture. Even the "Christian" counseling field has largely taken its cues from the secular psychologies, as if Scripture did not really have much to say beyond religiosity and morality. But...Scripture is *about* counseling: diagnostic categories, casual explanations of behaviour and emotion, interpretation of external sufferings and influences, definitions of tangible and workable solutions, character of the counselor, goals for the counseling process, configuring the professional structures for doing counseling, critique of competing models. These are all matters to which God speaks directly, specifically, and frequently. He calls us to listen attentively, to think hard and well, and to engage in a worthy labor to develop our practical theology of face-to-face, conversational ministry' (:19). He insists that the Bible 'intends to specifically guide and inform counseling ministry' in identical fashion to 'preaching, teaching, worship, mercy, and missions' (:19). He denies that this amounts to simplistic proof-texting, and rather requires 'ongoing practical theological labor in order to understand Scripture, people, and situations' (:19). Powlison further emphasizes how the therapeutic culture functions as a competing and irreconcilable system with respect to the gospel (20-25). 'God's story is not about finding refuge and resources in yourself, or in other people, or in psychopharmacology. It's about finding Christ in real times and real places, the only Savior able to deliver you from what's really wrong with you and your world' (:23).

### d) A naive relationship with science

De Oliveira (2004: 14) purports to represent a reformed evangelical approach to the relationship between psychology and the Bible. He supports the principles of integration, stating that 'anti-integrationists do not seem to realize... that biblical principles, although indispensable and relevant are often too general' making specific learning, including that developed in psychology necessary in order to apply these principles fully in our life context. Nevertheless, 'Christian psychology scholars are encouraged to test their research agenda against the biblical canon in order to determine whether their theoretical formulations, focal questions, methodological approach, and interpretation or application of data are valid' (De Oliveira 2004:12). This simple framing of the issue is problematic as it bypasses hermeneutical complexities. Lawson and Wilcox (2005:242) criticize de Oliveira for not fully recognizing that 'errors occur in the complimentary data between theology and science...because these two disciplines contain imperfect man-made observations, extrapolations, and traditions....scientists and theologians



risk making false assumptions and assertions that ultimately invalidate theories and conclusions' as happened in the Galileo trial and the support of slavery in the Southern United States on the basis of 'a biblical mandate from God.'

Misinterpretation clearly happens when de Oliveira (2004:16) rejects Darwinian 'cross-species continuity' because Genesis talks of God creating 'man and woman after he had created all the animals, "each according to its kind" (Genesis 1:24-27; 2:4-25).' He states that this repeated phrase stresses 'the distinctiveness of each species' and 'places humans in a separate group.' This is a misreading of the biblical text. It takes a poetic form describing the Lord as a labourer doing a week's work,<sup>137</sup> and tries to extract from it detailed scientific information. It unnecessarily stumbles over a phrase 'according to its kind,' which merely represent good empirical scientific observation for that era, no more to be pitted against the scientific precision of a later era than is the statement that the moon is a light (Gn 1:16). The final set of irrefutable evidence for cross-species continuity occurred through the genome project, therefore this literal reading of the text forces one to reject Scripture or else see it as sporadic in its truth.<sup>138</sup> When read on its own terms, all of Scripture remains valid and true. A high view of Scripture remains possible, but it is a view that needs to be defended afresh in each new era. Relying on past formulations and bypassing current scientific and cultural challenges ultimately leads to a very low view of the Bible.

#### **e) The correlation and client-centred approaches of clinical pastoral care**

Clinebell (1994: 124-125) suggests five ways to use the Bible in pastoral care and counseling: 'to allow biblical wisdom to inform the process, spirit, and goals of caring/counseling relationships'; 'to comfort and strengthen people in crises'; 'as a means of diagnosis'; 'to help heal spiritual pathology and change pathogenic beliefs'; 'as a key resource in the teaching and growth-nurturing dimension of pastoral care.'

Hiltner (1958: 29) states that one cannot simply apply Paul's experience to our situation. We need to avail ourselves of 'new tools...available for the study of processes that were previously unexaminable.' He suggests Paul may be 'normative...[and] right without being adequate' and an appropriate stance involves 'observing our pastoral experience, generalizing on it theologically, and checking it against the wisdom of the Christian ages.'

These are merely two examples of the very well-represented anthropocentric approach. This approach does not contain the necessary safeguards to respect the particularity of the gospel and the marginalization of the Scriptures, resulting in a lack of deep theological content has occurred.

#### **6.5.7.2 A more complex hermeneutical use of Scripture**

A God-focused, Trinitarian counseling does not always require the direct use of the Bible in the counseling situation. It involves being led by the Holy Spirit to speak and act the truth and love of the Trinity as revealed directly by the Trinity in conjunction with the Bible. In a counseling

<sup>137</sup> A large part of the intent of this text is to reveal God as the only Lord, against competing pagan religion. See Finlay and others (2009:31-55) and Alexander (2008:151-168).

<sup>138</sup> 'Molecular biology has made it possible to reconstruct the "universal tree of life," the continuity of succession from the original forms of life, ancestral to all living organisms, to every species now living on Earth. The main branches of the tree of life have been reconstructed on the whole and in great detail.... The virtually unlimited evolutionary information encoded in the DNA sequence of living organisms allows evolutionists to reconstruct all evolutionary relationships leading to present-day organisms, with as much detail as wanted' (Ayala 2009:333).

session one may be led to operate strongly out of the written Scriptures, but this should ultimately lead to a direct engagement with the Trinity in the session and outside of it. In a similar way one may be led to operate without the written Scriptures in a specific session, but a genuine engagement with the Trinity will ultimately lead to a profound interaction with the written Scriptures both within and outside of the pastoral care session. The ultimate model of pastoral care remains Jesus, who didn't simply go around quoting Scripture. He drew lessons from his immediate natural context and social situation (Mt 6:26; Lk 13:14-15) and He clearly stated that the Scriptures were not an end in themselves but were there to direct people to a relationship with Him (Jn 5:39-40). Nevertheless, he consistently appealed to Scripture and His revelation of His resurrected self to the disciples on the road to Emmaus was solidly grounded in Scripture (Lk 24:27).

A further vital tension is between simplicity and complexity in terms of one's approach to truth and Scripture. The holding of this tension allows either simplicity or complexity to be appropriated in a healthy, non-destructive fashion. A simple faith and obedience to certain plain commands of Scripture is the correct response in many situations. The royal official who took Jesus at His word received healing for his son (Jn 4) and Jesus clearly expected people to put his basic instructions into practice rather than theorize about them (Mt 7:24). Paul also warns that quarreling about words ruins those who listen (2Tm 2:14). Nevertheless, Scripture also expects a serious and profound engagement with truth and the complexities of Scripture (Ezr 7:10; 2 Tm 2:15; 2 Pt 3:16; ) and it is this engagement which prevents the previously mentioned child-like faith from being simplistic and dangerous. Oversimplifying Scripture and rendering it too complex thus represent opposite, but equal dangers. The exact level of complexity versus simplicity that needs to be articulated in a pastoral care situation is thus a hermeneutical choice.

The following are some examples of nuanced approaches to the use of Scripture in pastoral care

#### **a) Larry Crabb**

Crabb (1987: 21) explains three assumptions that define his approach to biblical counseling: 'If properly approached, the Bible is sufficient to provide a framework for thinking through every question a counselor needs to ask; relationship with Christ provides resources that are utterly indispensable in substantially resolving every psychological (i.e., nonorganically caused) problem; the community of God's people functioning together in biblical relationship is the intended context for understanding and living out God's answers to life's problems.' Crabb (1987: 29-40) examines intuition, rationalism and empiricism as means of attaining knowledge and carefully argues that they are insufficient as sources of knowledge for guiding the counselor.

Crabb concludes (1987: 44): 'As I seek to develop a model of counseling, I begin with the conviction that my study of God's written Word must be allowed to control my thinking more than any other data. Where the Bible speaks, it speaks with authority. Where it doesn't speak, we may look to other sources of information for help'. Crabb (1987:48-63) distinguishes three points of view to clarify the manner in which the Bible is not only authoritative but also actually practically sufficient for all aspects of counseling. The first position holds that 'The Bible does not directly answer every legitimate counseling question. It is therefore necessary and right to turn to the data and theories of psychology for help' (: 48). Crabb (1987: 48-54) examines this approach and its consequences. Counselors may turn to psychology to answer the most important questions or they stick closely to the biblical text, focusing on promoting orthodoxy and conforming behaviour and simply ignoring people's real-life problems. The second position holds that 'The Bible directly answers every legitimate question about life and is therefore a sufficient guide for counseling' (: 54). The problem with this approach is that the text becomes misinterpreted and over applied beyond its original scope. In addition people's problems

become reduced so as to fit in with the text (: 54-58).<sup>139</sup> Crabb (1987: 63) personally holds to a third position: '[T]he Bible is sufficient to answer every question about life, but not because it directly responds to every legitimate question. The idea of biblical sufficiency for counseling rests on the assumption that biblical data support doctrinal categories which have implications that comprehensively deal with every relational issue of life.'

#### **b) Gary Collins**

According to Collins (1988: 94): 'Even though the Bible is all true, it does not follow that all truth is in the Bible.' 'All truths discovered by human beings must be tested against and proved consistent with the revealed word of God...the Christian tests psychology against the Bible, not the Bible against psychology' (: 95). 'Often principles of behaviour can be inferred from the Bible and applied to modern problems' (: 96). However, he states that the Bible does not cover all possible problems and psychology can be used by God to bring truth 'he has not chosen to reveal in the Bible. This does not assume that psychology is replacing Scripture or that the Holy Spirit can no longer bring healing' (: 96). 'The Bible speaks to human needs today. It always will. But God in his goodness also has allowed us to discover psychological truths about human behaviour and counseling that are never mentioned in Scripture but are consistent with the written Word of God and helpful to people facing the problems of living' (: 97).

#### **c) Wayne Oates**

Oates (1953: 71) states that 'The most effective statement of the proper and positive therapeutic use of the Bible is stated in Rom 15:4 "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope."' He emphasizes how the pastor needs to pay attention to his own appropriation of the Bible as well as the life situation of the counselee in order to be able to provide 'the right word' for the moment. 'The biblical revelation has almost a startling relevance when the pastor (who has steeped his own mind in the thought forms and encompasses his spiritual perceptions in the redemptive design of the whole Bible) confronts the critical situation that occurs between him, a person in need, and the living God when he ministers to the needy person in his crucial hour' (:89). Simultaneously, 'He needs to develop (through astute observation and disciplined listening to his parishioners' individual complaints) an over-all understanding of the troubles that tend to be characteristic of their community and culture, and to know his parishioners personally so that his use of the Bible can be appropriate and well timed to their particular hours of need' (: 91).

#### **d) Daniel Louw**

The Bible plays a vital role in defining the theological aspect of pastoral therapy. In terms of an interdisciplinary hermeneutical model, '[P]astoral therapy is closely linked to the Word of God, the history of the fulfilled promises of God...the communication of the gospel through pastoral dialogue creates a horizon of meaning, which in turn equips people to deal with life issues in a constructive manner' (Louw 1998a: 63). Louw (1998b: 369) adopts an organic approach to the

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<sup>139</sup> It is not difficult to imagine scenarios where this happens. In this methodology two wives struggling with their husbands will both be told to submit according to Ephesians 5:24. This bypasses the hermeneutical process that should bring the full witness of Scripture, the full data from the social sciences and the full understanding of their situation into dialogue and that may lead to two completely different interpretations and solutions in each case. Following a hermeneutical model the first woman might be told, indeed, to submit, and this may lead to a restoration of harmony and the husband becoming convicted and drawing nearer to God. Following the same model the second woman may be told to resist and separate from her husband in order to protect herself, from serious abuse. One cannot legalistically apply a single solution to every case.

use of Scripture to emphasize 'that the introduction of scriptural truths or scriptural themes arises from the dialogic and communicative nature of pastoral conversation.' Louw (1998a: 370) further emphasizes,

This approach does not mean that the human text and its context determine the content of the scriptural text...The revelatory truth about the character and essence of our being human is the first and fundamental factor, while the phenomenological field of knowledge is the second....The scriptural text is not merely a formula or a prescription for the human text and its context, nor is it a doctrine to be announced. The scriptural text discloses the ultimate destiny regarding people and their world. It reveals the horizon of meaning, within which people discover their origin, limitation and future. The interaction between scriptural text and context is thus crucial in the process of dealing with human problems.

#### e) Richard Averbeck

Averbeck (2006:111) appeals to Calvin's concept of 'double knowledge' to 'help us understand the relationship between psychology (knowledge of the human person) and biblical studies/theology knowledge of God).' "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves" (Calvin in Averbeck 2006:125). Out of this understanding Averbeck states, 'True wisdom is bringing the knowledge of God and people together in the midst of the mess which we are and in which we live. This is what both the Bible and counseling are really all about' (2006:111).

While God is Calvin's natural starting point for theology, and the human person in their situation is the natural starting point for counseling these two types of knowledge cannot be separated. In Calvin's theology God cannot be understood without understanding humans, nor humans understood without considering God (Averbeck 2006:112). Averbeck (2006: 112) insists that this is not 'dual knowledge' with its connotation of separation, but 'double knowledge,' suggesting the image of 'a two-way double lane road, the ends of both ending up together at either end. God and people can meet together at either end, or at any location along the way.' Therefore 'biblical theology and counseling psychology come at the same thing...from its two opposite ends' (:113).

Further reinforcing the connection functionally is 'the story character of both' (Averbeck 2006:113). Averbeck (2006:117-122) examines the story of the fall, showing how it summarizes the essential human condition, which is integral to counseling. He describes the scriptural account of the Fall as 'archetypal...not in the Jungian sense...but in the sense that this story (like many others in Scripture) is not only about what happened, but what continues to happen' (2006:117). The problems and solutions portrayed in Scripture connect with our current situation. Taking these portrayals and solutions in Scripture seriously enables us to recognize and experience them in our own lives: 'the goal of counseling is to move the person to see and experience their story more dynamically as it relates to God's story so that they see how God's story really does explain and enable them to deal more effectively with their own story and, therefore, their ongoing life' (2006:122).

Averbeck (2006:122) suggests a useful interpretive grid for understanding the Bible and applying it in the pastoral care situation:

one of the most natural ways of understanding the fundamental overall theology of the Bible is in terms of two poles: creation-corruption-foolishness theology and redemption-sanctification-wisdom theology. The energy of biblical theology is generated by the constant interplay between these two poles historically and in the lives of people, as reflected in biblical narratives, psalms, wisdom sayings, letters, and so on....Creation-corruption-foolishness theology provides guidance for meeting people where they really are, whether they know it or not. Similarly, redemption-

sanctification-wisdom theology gives guidance for helping people move from where they are to where they need to be in their life with God and people.

### **6.6 The notion of God in a pastoral hermeneutics: the interplay between God concept (ontology) and God images (subjective internalisation)**

This section will examine the relationship between God, God concepts and God images according to the assumptions of this research. The goal is to apply the assumption that a high view of scripture in complex interaction with all possible fields of knowledge ensures the most effective theology and practice within pastoral care.

Moriarty and Hoffman (2008: 1-2) clarify the difference between the God concept and God image: 'The God concept is an abstract, intellectual, mental definition of the word "God" (Lawrence, 1997; Rizzuto, 1979). It represents what people think about God rather than what they feel about God...The God image, on the other hand, is the complex, subjective emotional experience of God. It is shaped by a person's family history and causes their experience of God to resemble their relationship with their parents.' An experience of 'distant, critical, and judgmental' parents correlates with a similar God image.

There is much debate about methodology and the possibility of distinguishing 'the emotional or relational experience of God from religious cognitions or beliefs' but much of the literature in this regard has been in the context of the modern paradigm, with its limitations (Moriarty and Hoffman 2008:3). This clearly opens up the possibility of an expanded understanding, which allows other aspects of the experience of God to emerge.

Grimes (2008:13) states that the lack of clarity concerning the God image versus God concept complicates any literature review to determine the state of the field with regard to God image. Numerous difficulties surround the methodology used in determining people's God image. Most researchers use 'quantitative surveys, checklists, or questionnaires' with an unfortunate lack in 'qualitative and/or experiential methods.' Various writers are highlighting aspects of God image that cannot be accounted for with quantitative methods. These include: 'the dynamic relational factors of the construct'; its 'flexible and shifting' nature; the fact that it cannot be simplistically equated with 'conscious conceptions of God' and is related to 'unconscious processes' which need to be revealed; it may change over lifespan; it can 'change, at least partially, due to the environment and contextual cues.' (:29)

Gibson (2008) also discusses measurement issues in God image research and practice. There is confusion and lack of consensus surrounding the use of terms such as God concept, God image, and God representation in terms of clear meaning and consistency (2008:228-229). The key factor is to be able to measure and work with 'two types of content regarding God, one that is propositional or doctrinal in nature ("head knowledge") and one that is emotional and experiential in nature ("heart knowledge"). Psychologists of religion have tended to focus on the former, neglecting the latter (2008:229). Gibson (2008:229) accepts the use of 'God concept' for propositional knowledge, but prefers the term schema for affective knowledge as this is the dominant term used by social and cognitive psychologists working with information processing in general. It also avoids the potential misunderstanding of thinking of 'literal pictorial images,' which is clearly not intended. According to Fiske and Taylor (in Gibson 2008:230), a schema can be defined as 'a cognitive structure that represents knowledge about a concept or type of stimulus, including its attributes and the relations among those attributes.'

A qualified use of the term 'God image,' then, arises specifically within the context of psychology and pastoral care and, as I will argue, is underdetermined with respect to the ontological reality of God; one can deal with God image from a theistic, pantheistic or atheistic perspective, in other

words. I have argued that the valid empirical reduction that occurs in practical theology has over functioned, making it seem that an empirical focus is the normative reality and thus marginalizing a healthy, commonsense talk and experience of God and His presence. The same danger is particularly acute in terms of 'God image' and the valid perspective of examining the personal psychology of faith can easily mutate and marginalize a confident and commonsensical talk of God and the God reality. On the basis of a critically realistic approach to life and knowledge it might be more appropriate to always talk of the God reality and the God image or concept together.

I will be using the terms in the following way. God image refers to the psychological, neurologically linked, emotional experience we have of God. The plural use 'God images' still refers to the same reality and is distinguished from images of God, which I take to be synonymous with God concepts, the more conscious and cognitive propositional, pictorial, or metaphorical understandings we have of God, although 'images of God', suggests the pictorial rather than the propositional or abstract understandings. 'God' and 'God reality' are the terms I use to refer to the ontological reality of God, who is never known except through the mediation of God images and concepts. It is difficult to maintain this distinction and the literature seems to merge the two concepts. For example Louw (1998:330) uses both terms (image and concept), but does not seem to distinguish them (:330-349). My understanding is that it is useful to reserve the term 'God image' for the emotional, neurologically linked filtering experience we have of God. Therefore, I will attempt to only use the term 'God image' in isolation, when I intend this specific meaning.

I will not restrict the terms 'God image,' or 'God concept' to the psychological discussion in order to emphasize that all our knowledge of God in every context is mediated. At the same time I will freely use the term 'God' and 'God reality' in all three domains in order to emphasize the realistic aspect of the critically realistic tension.

In terms of a comprehensive, hermeneutical approach to knowledge all relevant aspects of knowledge need to be brought into fruitful interaction. In terms of God/ God concepts this involves creating interactions between scriptural images, psychology (as well as neurobiology and neurotheology), culture, science (particularly the discussion on divine action and natural theodicy), and the lived experience and perceptions of individuals within the pastoral care context.

It is beyond the scope of this research to examine all the different areas mentioned in detail and this section will briefly examine God and God concepts from three perspectives: psychology, the Bible, and natural science. A further delimitation will occur within each of the perspectives. The following aspects will be briefly examined: within psychology, the neurobiology of attachment theory; within Scripture the issue of texts of terror and wrathful images of God; within natural science the issues of divine action and natural theodicy.

### **6.6.1 God images within psychology and pastoral care**

There has been a general lack of focus on God images. Moriarty and Hoffman (2008 :2) state that there is a lack of resources 'that directly address the God image' beyond a brief mention, with no 'detail how therapists can assess and change it through the therapy process.' Their 2008 publication, the 'God Image Handbook: Research, Theory, and Practice', responds to this lack in an attempt to provide a postmodern, multi-perspectival practical starting point. Moriarty and Hoffman have overlooked Louw (1998, 1999, 2008) whose hermeneutical pastoral theology is integrally related to God image issues.

This lack of attention to God image is possibly due to the nature of the methodology involved in more liberal versus conservative versions of pastoral theology. In liberal versions the anthropocentric focus on the client and the disappearance of God through an extreme immanent approach leaves little room for discussing God. In a conservative focus a more positivistic understanding of God results in the conflating of images/concepts of God and the reality of God, which also leaves little room for a consideration of God image.

Freud, Feuerbach, and Nietzsche clearly established specific atheistic parameters for understanding God as human projection (see 1.5). Rizzuto's (1979) more neutral extension of Freud's theories was a ground-breaking, seminal study which added impetus to a psychological and empirical approach to God images.

The issue of God concepts/image is slowly becoming more prevalent and one can predict that this interest will exponentially grow, particularly under the pressure of postmodernism, evolutionary science and neurobiology. God has always been a debated topic, but framing God issues in terms of God image/concept suggests a subjective construction, which perfectly matches postmodern understandings. The postmodern focus on the relationship between beliefs or narratives and power and justice naturally leads to an interest in examining and deconstructing God image/concept. However one chooses to frame the issue, understandings of God have clearly been used for good and evil throughout history and continue to be a key factor in today's social ferment at every level, from interdenominational conflicts to the global issue of terrorism.

God image/concept is also directly relevant to race, sexuality and gender issues and one can therefore logically expect focused theologies such as feminist theology to take the lead in dealing with God image/concept (e.g. Stone 2005).

God image/concept and God image/concept therapy therefore introduces the issue of authority and ethics. If one proposes a specific God concept, issues of authority for this proposal obviously arise. The normative stance in pastoral care is to eschew the idea that there is a correct way to view God. Moriarty and Hoffman (2008:6) state that the concern, rather, is 'that many people distort their experience of God in a manner that causes unnecessary psychological and spiritual suffering.' According to Louw (Louw 1988a:331), 'A pastoral diagnosis should not make an ethical issue of a "theological analysis." It should not moralize, nor should it be concerned with the question whether it is a good or bad, right or wrong concept of God. The main focus of a pastoral diagnosis concerns how a certain image of God is associated with scriptural metaphors and life experiences. An inappropriate understanding of God can give rise to dysfunctional or pathological faith behaviour.' The critically realistic approach of this research suggests that these statements are not unproblematic. While it is understood that all discussion and talk of God is mediated and metaphorical and that extreme issues of truth and objectivity are not appropriate in a therapeutic context, the danger remains of going to the opposite extreme and a careful nuancing will be explored in this section.

If God image/concept is a key aspect of spiritual health then it is integral to the process of pastoral care. The epistemological and hermeneutical conclusions with regard to knowledge, including a need for a high view of Scripture, need to be applied to God concepts as well. The process and goals involved in changing and improving one's God image/concept need to be comprehensive, hermeneutical and in line with Scripture, in other words.

Louw (1998a: 320) describes the complexity of God images/concepts and the caution required in dealing with them:

[God-images] do not reflect the essence of God in terms of an ontological paradigm, but reflect God's actions and style (his mode) as experienced by believers according to real life events. God-images are also determined by hermeneutics: the understanding and reading of scriptural texts. The quest for criteria for identifying and assessing God-images must be undertaken with extreme care. God-images are a complex issue, within which important roles are played by cultural concepts, ecclesiastical confessions and dogmas and questions about philosophical and anthropological concepts. This complexity means that no 'pure' concept or image of God exists which could communicate God credibly and meaningfully.

### 6.6.1.1 God image and therapy

Moriarty, Hoffman and Grimes (2006) explore the relationship between attachment theory and God images. Attachment theory is a 'theory of development' positing that 'one's early interactions and relationships with primary caregivers influence...understanding of self, others, and ...relationships' (2006:46). Early attachment is to the mother but a 'state...of safety and security' is the goal not the mother herself. This state is related to proximity and responsiveness of the parent (:45). The 'working models' that develop in these early years carry over into 'future relationships' (:46). The complexity of the relationship between attachment theory and God images suggests that 'compensation models' where 'God functions as an ideal or substitute attachment figure in the absence of a real-life healthy attachment' or 'correspondence models' where God is experienced in a way that corresponds to earlier attachment experiences need to be combined in a 'complex model' (:47). For example, a harsh early experience of parents may lead to corresponding experiences of God 'at the unconscious, subsymbolic level' causing 'emotional discomfort' of 'depression, anxiety and fear' and the use of a compensational view of God as an 'ideal parent' at the 'conscious verbal level' in order to cope (:48). The latest research also emphasizes the role of 'diversity including cultural and gender differences' as strong influences on God image (:48).

Comprehensive reading of literature reveals 'complex relationship between religion, spirituality, and psychological health' and this applies to God images as well. The complexity and admixture of simultaneously experienced 'conflicting feelings... can be true with the experience of God' and 'a healthier, more genuine spiritual relationship' arises out of helping 'individuals...make sense of these complex emotions' (Moriarty, Hoffman & Grimes 2006:49). Accepting the general consensus that one's attachment-influenced 'internal working model' of relationships corresponds with 'emotional experience of God' they suggest that relational dynamics that occur in the counseling situation can help improve God images (:49-52).

According to Stone (1995:2) psychotherapy tends not to focus on God images and 'pastoral counselors are in a unique position to relate to and assist in the transformation of God images, which are inevitably connected to self images.' Paradigm shifts away from the extreme modernist focus on rationality and objectivity, as exemplified by quantum theory, are reclaiming 'the irrational, imaginative, mystical dimension of life' leading to the potential to 'expand and liberate the God images' of care receivers.

Johnson (2008) outlines the application of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) (an approach to Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) to God image issues. REBT 'posits that the tendency to make devout, absolutistic evaluations rests at the heart of psychological disturbance.' These 'absolutist demands' are expressed in 'dogmatic musts, [and] shoulds' and this 'irrational thinking' obstructs well-being (2008:157-158). Challenging these beliefs creates 'cognitive or orthodoxy dissonance' (:166) which 'creates unpleasant internal arousal' motivating the client 'to reduce dissonance by modifying their beliefs or...behaviour' (:167).

'In exploring instances of God-talk, differences between substantial and surface use of the name of God readily become obvious' in the great variety of terms in use, from 'personal names



such as “Allah,” “Jesus” to seeing God as ‘nameless, envisioned as “Spirit” -an all-encompassing spiritual presence from which the believer’s life derives its chief meaning and fulfillment’ (Van Katwyk 2008 :63). ‘The description “speaking theologically” defines God-talk as a relational dynamic (2008 :65). Van Katwyk (2008 :66) concludes :

The implication is that human identity is relational: we do not so much have but are those relationships, hence our essential relationships. God as God representation is not the external, other one, but an essential relationship, deeply embedded in our emotional life. This God presents himself, at times herself, in God-talk and, like any other object relations such as with a parent, can be investigated as to what kind of a character this God has and what influence he or she wields in the psyche. In therapy, the God of God-talk has no special privileges but is assessed and measured to determine whether this God does or does not help.

### 6.6.1.2 Psychology, neuroscience and God images

The exploding field of neurobiology has provided an empirical base for integrating and reinforcing psychological understandings of God image.

According to Rizzuto (Rizzuto 2008: xix), rather than seeing ‘the expression God image... as a “construct”... an internal reality in its own right.... It is useful to understand this construct as living and modifiable mental processes. The God image names an extraordinarily complex set of neurological and psychodynamic memory processes organized around the perceptual and fantasized conception of experiential realities and human relationships which have become linked to the individual’s mode of connecting with or of avoiding the divinity.’ The God image is not only based in ‘retrievable memories but also...memory processes embedded in modes of relating and of perceiving oneself and the realities of everyday life’ (2008: xx).

Garzon (2008: 140) explains that the rapid advancement of neuropsychological investigation of ‘religiospirituality’ has ‘lead to the subfield of neurotheology... defined as an exploration of how the mind/brain operates in regards to one’s relationship to God.’ ‘[N]eurons’ and ‘neural networks’ constitute ‘the building blocks of neuroscience’ (:141). When neural networks fire together they are strengthened causing standardization since neurons ‘that activate together essentially link together.’ The concept of ‘neuroplasticity’ means that ‘under certain circumstances’ neural networks can be modified or rewired, forming ‘new connections with other neurons.’ Even though ‘relationships in early development lay the groundwork for future interpersonal attachment’ this modification can occur throughout life. Research shows that thinking of God stimulates ‘a variety of neural networks associated with authority figures, primary caregivers, etc.’ (:142). This provides an empirical basis for attempting to change God images through human interpersonal therapeutic dynamics.

Cognitive neuroscience distinguishes explicit, conscious memory, which ‘involves the recollection of autobiographical events, facts, and concepts or ideas’ that the client is aware of and discusses, from implicit memory, which ‘is not in the client’s awareness but can be observed in his or her behavior’ (Garzon 2008:144). Procedural memory is a form of implicit memory involving ‘how to’ knowledge like driving a car, which recedes from conscious attention to the level of automatic, unconscious response as the skill is mastered. Relational skills are learned in a similar fashion and appropriate versus negative automatic responses are learned in early relationships. While explicit memory ‘is mediated through... the hippocampus, implicit memory encodes these interpersonal learnings through the amygdala and related brain structures’ (:144).

A vital fact is that relatively advanced right brain development in the first three years means that ‘much procedural memory coding for how relationships work takes place without the benefit of language and is encoded subsymbolically and nonverbally’ (Garzon 2008:145). This seriously

challenges an exclusive focus on verbal therapy as it is practiced in clinical pastoral care: 'Therapy that is primarily focused on insight strategies mainly engages the left brain of the client.... The assumption...that these tremendously intricate, multidimensional neural mechanisms can be accessed sufficiently and processed primarily through the unidimensional verbal channel of the left brain is questionable' (:146). Although 'the therapeutic relationship and insight-oriented techniques can produce God image change, such transformation may occur at an unnecessarily slow rate because of the principal strategies used' (:146-147).

Garzon (2008: 146), suggests that although the therapeutic relationship, insight techniques and verbal communication remain 'foundational to change' these should be integrated with '[e]clectic, integrative treatment methods that engage the right brain and implicit processes, such as art therapy, psychodrama, gestalt therapy, emotion-focused, and experiential strategies.' (:146). He recommends a comprehensive approach that facilitates 'dual processing of the neurologically distinct pathways of God image and God concept' (:152).

While matching negative (or positive) God concepts and God images occur, there is often 'a discrepancy, commonly being a disconnection between their positive theologically based concept of God as loving and caring, and their more affectively based negative experience of God as harsh and condemning.' Information on differently mediated neurological pathways and distinct brain structure encoding helps clarify this dynamic (Garzon 2008: 152).

Noffke and Hall (2008:58) integrate 'attachment theory, emotional information processing theory, and affective neuroscience in order to provide a theoretical framework for understanding the development and transformation of God image.' They state there is 'a substantial body of research' (:58) supporting the basic theory that '[r]epeated relational experiences with primary caregivers are encoded subsymbolically as "implicit relational representations" or a visceral sense of what it is like to be a self with others. These implicit relational representations then function as templates for interpreting subsequent interpersonal interactions and organizing individuals' characteristic approaches of relating to others, including God' (:57). These 'psychological processes and mechanisms...[operate] automatically and nonconsciously' (:58).

Noffke and Hall (2008:58) propose focusing on verbal and nonverbal dynamics in the therapy situation, working with cognitive beliefs and neural structures: 'In therapy, adaptive relational experiences recruit new neural networks, establishing the neuronal basis for different ways of experiencing, representing, and being with God' (:58). 'Benner (1998) refers to this relationship between psychological and spiritual functioning as the "psychospiritual unity of personality"' (:58). Specifically, impoverished early caregiving correlates with perceptions of 'God as controlling, less accepting and nurturing, and/or distant' (:63). This impoverished history also leads to 'an impaired sense of felt security, prompting the insecurely attached to rely on maladaptive, compensatory strategies to re-establish homeostasis' (:63). One strategy is dissociation from these 'painful, gut-level experiences of God.... to avoid the disorganizing affect elicited when divergent images...are experienced simultaneously' (:63). According to Bucci (2003) (in Noffke and Hall 2008), the 'subsymbiotic, affective core of an experience' is separated 'from symbolic processing' (:66). In other words the negative emotions arising out of this damaged core are experienced but their source is not consciously recognized. The 'structural change of the maladaptive schema occurs through referential activity or the process of linking subsymbiotic experience to images and words...the client must communicate the contents of the schema, and the therapist must understand and generate an intervention that connects words or imagery back to the client's emotional core' (:66). '[S]ubsymbiotic knowledge can only be modified as a result of experiencing new information presented in the same code' (:67). In other words the positive relational experiences that the person experiences from God, the church and in the therapy situation is blocked through the faulty schemas and dissociation dynamics.

Noffke and Hall (2008:68) suggest that the development of healthier 'attachment-related neural networks...[requires] drawing clients' attention to their experiences that are felt to be dangerous and are, thus, avoided. In helping clients to experience their unsymbolized emotions, the therapist interrupts the dissociation and provides the insecurely attached with the novel experience of receiving contingent emotional responses to their emotions. Such emotional synchrony establishes neural networks corresponding to an experience of attunement to difficult feelings and, consequently, the expectation that others, including God, will be available during distress. As a result, believers begin to consolidate images of themselves as lovable and/or of God as loving.'

Noffke and Hall (2008:68) make a vital distinction between 'symbolic and subsymbolic levels of spiritual functioning. Symbolized, or explicit spirituality, refers to the beliefs and practices maintained by believers that they can verbally describe and over which they exert a considerable degree of control.' 'Subsymbolic, or implicit spirituality' on the other hand refers to the 'nonverbal', nonconscious, internalized patterns that have been discussed. This distinction has significant practical impact. It means that 'frequency of religious behavior or the content of theological beliefs' do not guarantee '[l]asting therapeutic change in believers' images of and relational patterns with God...[therefore,] the power of emotion, metaphor, and the therapeutic bond' become vital in accessing 'subsymbolic experience of God' leading to genuine transformation (:69).

The neurological basis of all human behaviour has radical implications for pastoral care. The glee-filled atheistic suggestion that this does away with God and the conservative response of rejecting or downplays this research are both unwarranted. The dynamics are similar to those involved in the evolutionary debate.

As discussed, science cannot prove or disprove God. It does, however, have radical implications for our understanding of how God normally seems to act in the world. The latest research contradicts dualistic understandings and full integration and immanence seem to be indicated.

This reinforces the need for an experiential and practical approach to pastoral care. This does not mean that the deductive, transcendent aspect is neglected. As I have argued, deductive and inductive realities occur in indissoluble circularity. The point is that within this circularity, concrete reality is a given and all pastoral care must take this into account.

Therefore, a rich interaction will be sought between neurological and theological understanding. This implies therefore reading Scriptures that talk of being 'made new in the attitude of your minds' (Eph 4:23) or of God putting his law in our minds and writing it in our hearts (Jr 31:33) with a richer understanding of how experiencing God actually changes our neurological structure. Conversely, we will be able to see healing and changes in neurological structure as manifestations of God's work of salvation and renewal. We will be freed to work at God's single work of salvation in this single spiritual-natural world from multiple, mutually beneficial perspectives towards the same goal.

In terms of specific pastoral methodology, neurological information provides vital information for reinforcing or modifying pastoral goals and practices. For example, Garzon (2008: 142) states that in a counseling situation 'the therapist represents an authority figure; thus, the neural networks associated with authority figures (parents, other significant caregivers, current bosses, etc.) become activated in the relationship.' This reinforces the importance and influence of the pastoral relationship. Garzon (2008:143) also states that there is evidence that 'brain systems involved in using one's imagination are the same as made active through real perception.' This has vital implications for pastoral care, for it means that in addition to verbal therapeutic actions,

'imagination, Scripture meditation...[and] contemplative prayer' can activate relevant neural networks leading to God image transformation (Garzon 2008:143). Noffke and Hall's (2008) distinguishing of right and left brain functioning and emotional and cognitive neural structuring also reinforces the complex, diverse approach to knowledge in this research.

### 6.6.1.3 The relationship between God images and the ontological reality of God

In terms of God images Schmidt (2008:282) suggests 'the classic question for the field of Psychology of Religious Experience...[is whether] the God-experience is always mediated (via standard structures of consciousness or experience), or is...ever unmediated, i.e., direct and "unfiltered" ...? In other words, is the God image a representation only, and can it ever bypass standard emotional or relational pathways?' Some argue against the limitation of relational experiences with God to the framework and psychic structures arising out of and involved in human relational experiences. For some 'the experience of God-love is not simply akin to loving another love-object, but is more like becoming one with love-itself. This seems to move us beyond representational object patterns toward "being" patterns, in this instance a oneness with Being known as love.... and yet experiential realness is nevertheless claimed by practitioners of states of oneness.' This suggests that psychology experiences the 'limits of language and logic' and cannot 'penetrate into these mysteries' even while it remains 'an indispensable resource for describing the interwovenness of all psychic life, including encompassing and value-laden states of consciousness.... This is where Psychology must engage the conversation partners of Philosophy, Theology, and Spirituality, so that these explorations can be framed within the grand panorama of spiritual experience across the wide sweep of Spiritual traditions across the ages' (Schmidt 2008:283-284).

Jones (2008:52-53) discusses two approaches to God image in psychoanalysis. Spero's 'God relational approach.... concerns itself with the complex correspondence between such object representations of "God" and the individual's genuine evolving relationship to...God....[this] perspective is explicitly theological in that it inquires after the specific theological contents of a person's belief and presupposes the patient and the therapist can speak directly about a normative concept of God.' Freud and Rizzuto's 'faith relational perspective...focuses... upon *how* the representational world functions, regardless of content...[and] eschews normative discussions of God's nature.' It draws on more general and inclusive religious material from 'religious studies or the study of comparative religions' as opposed to 'confessionally theological' resources. The faith relational perspective is clearly a match 'for therapists working in religiously pluralistic or secular settings.'

Examples within both emphases can be found.

Mirman (2005:42-53) represents an example of psychological reduction in terms of belief in God, which nevertheless allows this belief a positive psychological function. 'An attitude of faith is the basis for the transcendence of ordinary, ego-based consciousness.... [and is] characterized by the sense of being a part of something larger than one's self, and a sense of awe and wonder toward a world that feels mysterious and magical' (:53). Nevertheless, God is presented as optional, because 'the maturing of one's sense of self' can achieve the same positive effects of transcendence, which is describe as 'liberating' and a solution to the entrapment of a fearful, selfish state (:53).

Doehring (2008:215) describes her self-consciously understood liberal Protestant postmodern approach to dealing with God images: She distinguishes her correlation method clearly from the integration method of evangelical therapists who 'implicitly use a premodern approach to religious sources of authority, like Scripture...[which] provides an epistemologically privileged starting point.'" Her liberal Protestant approach allows her to choose 'among many available

psychological and theological perspectives' being 'guided' by the three criteria of '[c]ontextual meaningfulness.... [i]nter-disciplinary meaningfulness....[and] [p]ragmatic usefulness.' with 'healing and justice' being a critical factor in valid meaning and use.

O'grady and Richards (2008) examine God images from a theistic perspective. While acknowledging that 'God image development is a complex process that may include influences from family, peers, culture, gender, age, religious theology and tradition' they state that an 'individuals' actual relationship with God can have the greatest impact on God image development' (2008:183). Referring to the key seminal figure in God image research, Rizutto, they explain that while she rejected Freud's view of God image as dysfunctional, she accepted his basic assertion of God image originating 'in reaction to the Oedipal complex' and conducted her research on a naturalistic basis (:188). This has set the tone for much of the 'atheistic-naturalistic assumptions of scholars in this domain,' as evidenced in Lawrence's (in O'grady and Richards 2008: 189) quote: 'A representation of "mother" is formed from one's experiences of mother, and so forth. The God representation differs from other representations, however, in several ways. First, it is not based directly on experiences of God . . . . Further, the God representation, because it is not tied to direct personal experiences, can be more freely adapted by the individual as needed' (in O'grady and Richards: 189). The typical language associated with God image betrays this reductionistic approach. God is typically referred to as 'a projection intended to meet internal needs', 'a "transitional object," "compensatory figure," or "substitute attachment figure" generated to help people cope with developmental challenges' (:189). O'grady and Richards (2008 :192-193) affirm, rather, that it is quite plausible to suggest that God images arise out of genuinely encountering God, with changes in God image reflecting changes in this genuine relationship, in an analogous fashion to other relationships.

In terms of the conclusions of this dissertation, O'grady and Richards (2008) view has greater warrant, compared to the problematic stance of Mirman (2005) and Doehring (2008).

Mirman's (2005) belief that concepts of God can be based on illusion, yet still function positively is potentially paternalistic. Generally, clients genuinely believe in God and find this the basis of their comfort. If they thought that there was no God they would often wish to face that fact, however painful. The therapist assumes the position of paternalistically allowing clients their illusion, due to its supposed benefits, like a parent indulging a belief in the tooth fairy.

Similarly Doehring's (2005) extreme postmodern stance, which allows enormous flexibility with regard to God images on the basis of pragmatic criteria (however close to Scripture those criteria may seem) is ultimately unstable and cannot provide a safeguard against both her criteria and her resultant God image becoming socially pressured into directions that fall outside the acceptable boundaries of what is Christian.

In both these cases the post-Kantian split between fact and value is operating. While a positivistic approach to truth, pastoral goals and God image is untenable, a complete dissociation from issues of truth is equally problematic. A critically realistic approach argues for the unity of creation. Therefore, issues of value and truth, ontological reality and metaphorically mediated perception ultimately have to bear some relationship to each other, without assuming a simplistic and easily attainable strict correlation.

These dynamics reinforce one of the key concerns of this research, the fact that worldviews play a critical role in current theory and practice. Schmidt (2008:283) comments on the fact that in the psychological study of religious experience 'no claims about God are intended or even allowed.' While this may appear as the 'noble and necessary' conservation of 'scientific purity' it allows researchers and practitioners not to 'own their theological or spiritual assumptions....what is at

stake here within the field is the wider question of which experiential pathways are allowed for study and examination.’

I believe that our assumptions need to be foregrounded and consciously integrated and displayed within our theories and practices, causing them to perform with integrity or be exposed as contradictory, thus causing all theorists and practitioners to be more accountable for the overall coherence and validity of their thought and practice.

In conclusion, this research argues that God image is a real filter that affects our interaction with the ontological reality of God. Nevertheless, God is ontologically real irrespective of our image regarding His reality or absence. He relates to us through our God images and these limit or expand our ontological experience of God. This view avoids the extremes of reducing God to an image in our brain or conservatively ignoring the reality of God image and positivistically believing that one is interacting with the direct ontological reality of God in an unmediated or unfiltered way.

However, I believe our mental constructs are only one part of our being and God can interact with us spiritually, this representing an ontological reality, even if it cannot be cognitively expressed or is cognitively expressed in a limited or even inaccurate manner. God’s interaction and the transformation it causes in us are real irrespective of our awareness or interpretation. For example, it is quite possible for God to presence Himself to people, impacting their lives through healing or inspiration, leading to great creative output, and for this to be ascribed to themselves or a pantheistic or panpsychic reality. Their false God image or Atheist Image does not invalidate the reality of the experience, or its transformative effect. From a faith perspective, every good gift (acknowledged or not) comes from God (Ja 1:17) and we will have to give an account to God for our interpretation and use of His bounty, including the bounty of His presence.

‘Therefore consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what he thinks he has will be taken from him’ (Lk 8:18).

### **6.6.2 God and God concepts in Scripture**

The most important understanding of Scripture is not as a science book or an objective propositional storehouse out of which we can create positivistic schemes explaining aspects of reality, including God. It’s most important nature is as an instrument of the Holy Spirit through which we experience God or as a narratively structured world where we can equally enter into relationship with God, merging our story and world with His.

Nevertheless, propositional concepts, images and metaphors abound in Scripture and these do not conflict with the previous relational understandings mentioned. This may be clarified with an extended analogy.

Firstly, no one would suggest that reading a recipe can replace the experience of eating a meal, that looking at the notes on sheet music can replace the experience of listening to a full orchestra, or that looking at a printout of 0s and 1s can replace the experience of using an interactive computer programme. Clearly, these abstractions and representations of reality cannot replace and are not to be confused with the reality. Nevertheless, no one would say that they have no function. A person may discover, cook and enjoy a meal without a recipe, as they experiment in the kitchen. Similarly a piece of music may be played without representing it on sheet music paper. However, can higher levels of discovery progress without some form of recording and representation (the simple tune being worked into a full concerto)? Can that person be sure of remembering that creation for a future repeated enjoyment? And, most

importantly, can that experience be disseminated and shared without this abstraction, recording and artificial representation? As for the computer programme, it cannot exist, except from the bottom up through accumulating abstract code.

Secondly, no one would suggest that the act of abstracting the experience and reality of the meal and music, representing them as a recipe and score, destroys the reality. The truth is that someone following, the recipe and score has a high chance of experiencing a very similar reality. Of course errors may have crept in, affecting the product. The nature of the person and their circumstances may also affect the successful reproduction of the experience. An illiterate person may not be able to read the recipe or their oven may not cook evenly. The person playing the piece may not be as skilled and their musical instrument may be out of tune. But none of these circumstantial factors have anything to say about the possibility of the abstraction or representation being able to sacramentally transmit the real experience. If the musician reading the representation of the music cannot play, it is most disingenuous to suggest that textual stability is a chimera. Two separate issues are at play. If all circumstantial errors are minimized the miracle of sacramental encoding and decoding does indeed take place and experiences are sacramentally stored and repeated (if not perfectly, at least recognizably, and perfect duplication is not necessary or even desirable). This is the kind of world that God has allowed to come into being.

Thirdly, no one would suggest that one could arbitrarily change the numbers on the recipe, or choose to play every second note or scramble the order of the 0s and 1s in the computer code as one wished, to no ill effect. While small changes might not destroy the creation, and while alternate expressions might be allowed (changing grams for ounces, for example), one would not have to change much before serious distortion occurred, making the recreation unrecognizable.

I believe this analogy has validity for understanding Scripture. The written word of God is not to be mistaken for the living Word of God and the realities of life in God. Nevertheless, it shares a miraculous sacramental connection to that reality and is able to represent and actualize it as we engage with the written text. I believe the whole text is relevant to the whole salvation history reality and nature of God, which it is meant to represent. While absolute inerrancy is not required, one cannot ignore or rewrite significant themes and narratives that are part of its essential fabric without radically distorting it and consequently damaging the experience of the life of God that it is meant to represent and actualize.

Two aspects of the written text of Scripture which are dealt with in just this way are the texts of terror and the wrathful images of God. The propositions, metaphors, images and narratives associated with these realities are so integral to scripture that ignoring them, explaining them away or suggesting they are human distortions which are illicitly interpolated into God's true narrative (which can only be recovered by excising them) is the equivalent, in my analogy, of putting every second ingredient into the recipe or playing every alternate note.

#### **6.6.2.1 Texts of terror and wrathful images of God**

The Bible is full of difficult verses, concepts and events that many find problematic. These include: the conquest of Canaan, with the destruction of men, women and children; the stoning laws of Leviticus; the sacrifice of Isaac; and the concept of eternal punishment.

These are not questions of seeming historical, geographical or scientific contradiction that need to be justified or harmonized. They are seemingly ethical contradictions; it is argued that they are incompatible with a God of love.

The New Atheists glory in referring to these texts to suggest that the Bible is superstitious and cruel, using them to dismiss its validity (Hitchens 2007:97-122; Dawkins 2006: 237-253; Harris 2006:7-23). Others who are less anti-religious or who are still committed to the Bible in one way or another often dismiss these texts as incompatible with God's love. Karen Armstrong (2007:76), for example, suggests 'A thread of hatred runs through the New Testament' and describes the book of Revelation as 'toxic.'

I believe, firstly, in terms of my conclusion that all Scripture is God breathed it is not possible to dismiss these texts. This is not the same as holding on to empirical inerrancy. These texts are woven into the very fabric of Scripture and constitute a theme of judgment throughout the whole Bible. It is also false to say that such verses belong to the OT, for judgment is a central theme in the NT and there is no suggestion that God's judgment is superseded in the same way that the sacrificial, temple system is superseded. One simply cannot reject these texts without ripping the Scriptures apart. God is presented in terms of both grace and judgment. This is not in terms of a continuity, as if one could choose to believe in a more grace-filled God (higher up on one side of the continuity) versus a God of judgment (on the other side). Grace and judgment are both fully represented and our difficulties with integrating these two aspects are due to our human limitations (analogous to our limited understanding causing the wave and particle nature of light to seem contradictory). If one rejects the aspect of judgment in favour of grace there is no basis for objecting to someone else using the exact same methodology to reject the aspect of grace in favour of judgment (imagine Hitler as a theist).

The complex hermeneutical approach that has been used to show that Scripture is reliable and trustworthy can be applied in this instance as well. The simplistic dichotomy between God's love and judgment needs to be rejected, and creative, expanded ways of looking at the issue need to be entertained. For example, just as a simplistic rejection of faith is invalid on the basis of it actually forming an essential part of all aspects of knowledge, judgment cannot simply be rejected.

When scientism rejects the judgment presented in the Bible it needs to be shown how it is being inconsistent. The rejection of judgment is equivalent to the scientific community saying that it will not reject any scientific paper submitted for peer review because it does not wish to be judgmental. This is nonsense and would mean the destruction of science. So too, a view of love and life without judgment is simplistic and ultimately nonsensical.

Nevertheless, a simplistic appropriation of these Scriptures is bad hermeneutics and talk of God's judgment from an aggressive, self-righteous stance is simply false. As Os Guinness (2009b) states in a lecture, Jesus threatened hell to those who were most confident of going to heaven, to others he was full of grace.

As for feminist and liberationist readings of Scripture, I believe they need the same approach that I have suggested for interacting with science and other forms of critical scholarship. They serve as valid correctives to help us find out what Scripture truly says and to expose how we use it falsely to support rather than challenge our violence and self-serving use of power. Nevertheless, they lose warrant when they interpret Scripture in ways contrary to its own logic and self-testimony. It is no more valid to twist Scripture for supposedly higher ethical purposes (as in liberation and feminist theology) than it is to do so for clearly base ones (as in a 'gospel of prosperity'). This is to presume to have greater wisdom and ethical understanding than God's, as displayed in the Scriptures. Rationalism places human reason above Scripture and forgets that 'the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight' (1 Cor 3:19) and 'the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom' (1 Cor 1:25). Such supposed ethical superiority comes from the same root of human sin and independence that funds rationalism and is itself a form of rationalism.



These liberationist readings of Scripture seem to gain a short term ethical benefit, but by doing violence to the text they betray the fact that the true root of all violence, humankind setting itself up as wiser and better than God, has not been touched. The essence of human sin is not the multitude of oppressive acts performed against men, women, children, homosexuals, the poor, and the politically disenfranchised; important as it is to acknowledge and combat these abuses! The essence goes back to story of the fall; independence from God. The Bible reflects this in making the first and greatest commandment the love of God (Mt 22:38). Also, David, after ruining so many lives through his adultery could yet say to God, 'Against you, you only, have I sinned' (Ps 51:4). It must be insisted that God is of greater worth and importance than humankind. He is the source of love and life and personhood and any worth in humankind comes from our relationship with God.

It is, in fact, the priority given to God that establishes human worth. In terms of the Bible's testimony it is precisely due to loving God first that we are able to fully love our neighbour. The first command is immediately followed by and linked to the second (Mt 22:39) and, repeatedly, love of God is shown to be false and illogical if there is not a corresponding love of neighbour, who is made in the image of God. The statement in 1Jn 4:20, 'If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen', is echoed elsewhere in Scripture (Gn 9:6; Mt 6:15). Nevertheless, the love of God is placed above the love of humankind. This does not minimize the latter, but gives it its only possible foundation and guarantee of genuineness. Only when we submit fully to God and allow our sin and rebellion to be dealt with are we in any position to love our neighbour in a way that satisfies God's requirements for love.

The difficulties with the texts of terror arise out of ignoring the above-mentioned dynamics. If mankind, rather than God, is ultimate, then, clearly, God does not have the right to life and death. His command to sacrifice Isaac becomes cruel and Jesus' suggestion that we hate our family rather than put them before God (Lk 14:26) is oppressive. If human sin is not radical and rooted in independence from God then many of Scripture's commands and records of God's dealings with us are false burdens to be rejected.

However, if we accept the Bible is authoritative and complex as argued throughout this research then so called 'texts of terror' form an essential part of God's revelation. They need not reflect God's ultimate will and we may need liberationist critique to understand them in balance with the rest of Scripture, but it is ultimately Scripture itself, not extra-biblical rationalistic humanism that is required to interpret them properly.

The following analogy is an imperfect attempt to show how any event can be seen from different perspectives, which should caution us against a simplistic rationalistic dismissal of any part of Scripture. If it is true that the ultimate issue in sin is our rebellion and that all our sins against each other stem out of this, then the seeming moral ambiguity in Scripture may represent God's concern to destroy the root cause of sin and suffering (ultimate rebellion against God), while seeming to ignore or even promote the external human sins (the Israelites killing the Canaanites, for example). This would be similar to a law enforcement officer ignoring all the petty criminals in order to get close enough to the crime kingpin. When he is caught, all the petty criminals will fall with him. Someone who didn't know the law enforcement officer's character may have thought that he didn't care about crime, but it is precisely because he cared about it so much that he tolerated its lesser forms in order to deal an ultimate death blow to its root.

Therefore, when I read of God's harshest judgment and punishment in the OT and it stretches my cognitive and emotional comfort zones, I do not conclude that God is cruel or those parts of Scripture false. This is the perspective of self-righteous, independent humanity. Rather, I allow

the belief that God is holy and that humankind needs to be correspondingly holy to have priority over my limited emotional and intellectual habits, and I allow this belief to enrich and render all the more profound my understanding of the amazing and wonderful love and grace of God shown in the cross of Christ.

Ultimately, I think that doing violence to the texts of Scripture (whatever one's motives) betrays a misunderstanding of God. I think that our attitude to the authority of Scripture is a reflection of deeper worldview issues and these in turn are a reflection of a deeper, ultimate question. Who is at the center of all life, the individual human being or God?

In terms of pastoral care the norm in almost all the literature is to focus on God's unconditional acceptance and emphasize God's caring, loving side. I believe this is a highly reductive approach and is paradoxically less effective than dealing with all of Scripture as it stands. The totality of Scripture has potential pastoral care value and it needs to be applied to the totality of human existence. There is no legalistic formula for correlating text and context. A hermeneutical approach, which depends on commonsense, wisdom and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, remains essential.

### **6.6.3 Science and God, evolution and divine action**

This research has argued that it is vital to interact fully with all aspects of life and knowledge. In terms of God images and God reality this principally involves a strong interaction between theology / Scripture and psychology / neuroscience. A less obvious, but nevertheless important interaction is between theology / Scripture and natural science, specifically physics and biology. Issues of cosmology in physics and evolution in biology have direct implications for public understandings of God and thus fall within the concerns of pastoral theology.

It is beyond the scope of this research to examine these natural scientific issues at the same level as neuropsychology was examined. I will limit myself to brief comments, with the goal being to show how a hermeneutical approach to knowledge and pastoral care cannot simply ignore these issues.

#### **6.6.3.1 Evolution and its implications for theism**

Gregersen (2006:6-26) examines different views concerning the evolution of complexity in nature and their implications for theology. A Neo-Darwinian view (emphasized by Gould and Dawkins) emphasizes natural selection as an independent, contingent phenomenon 'where seeming complexity and progress arises out of chance within the sheer magnitude of possible events' (Gregersen 2006:13). Clearly this suits Dawkins' atheist worldview. Conway Morris (2006) represents the opposing view of convergence, where 'even though contingency does play a role in determining the origin and survival of specific lineages, there is an overall trend towards the emergence of properties such as feeling and consciousness,' as proved by the independent development of similar structures in nature (Gregersen 2006:13). This clearly supports a more theistic view of evolution being like a 'search engine' within a potentially transcendent reality.

One immediately notices the underdetermination of scientific data and the lack of consensus around the exact nature of evolution and its relationship to physics, making any simplistic correlation between science and theism or atheism impossible.

#### **6.6.3.2 Divine action**

Directly related to evolution and impacting concepts of God, is divine action, how God is perceived to act and be present in this world. All possibilities need to be explored. The revivalist

understanding of God breaking forth in mighty, measurable acts is a vital part of Scripture and church history and needs to be part of pastoral care's hope. Nevertheless, the dysfunction as well as the possibilities associated with this understanding need to be dealt with.

Our understanding of God's character and way of being with us directly affects our understanding of the nature and purpose of creation, including humankind. A distant deist God correlates with an anthropocentric view, for example. This research argues that God is deeply and intimately present in creation and His values and priorities take precedence over imagined human values and priorities. When we are fully reconciled to God, reflecting our true nature as the image of God, the conflict between these will cease.

Wildman (2004) summarizes the main concerns and conclusions of the 15 year Divine Action Project (1988-2003) co-sponsored by the Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences in Berkeley. The DAP represents a careful dialogue between theology and science, represented by 'traction', which requires 'theological assertions that are vague enough to be consistent with several competing scientific theories' yet 'specific' enough to 'conflict directly with scientific assertions' (2004:37). Theism was discussed in terms of the understandings reflected in the following table (:42).

Table 1  
Types of Theism

	God can be changed by the world	God remains unchanged by the world
God is complete without the creation	Personalist theism	Classical theism
God is incomplete without the creation	Panentheism	

The key issue dealt with in the DAP is Special Divine Action (SDA) and the issues of theodicy that it involves. According to Wildman (2004:63), 'the tendency to affirm universal divine action, whether in process metaphysics (Barbour, Birch, Haught) or in personalist theism (Murphy, Russell) seemed motivated in part by the desire to minimize, without eliminating, the severity of the theodicy problem.' The 'concept of kenosis' was also 'invoked' outside its original Christological context 'to explain why God does not act more often to ease pain and to educate us wayward creatures who so obviously need more guidance than we get. In this way, kenosis was used to strengthen the best-world, free-will, and free-process defenses of God's goodness that various participants articulated' (:64). Other participants (Edwards, Moltmann, Russell) 'argued for a return to one traditional Christian approach (not strictly a solution) to the problem, which has God somehow sharing in the suffering of the world through the incarnation and crucifixion of Jesus.' Other participants (Drees, Wildman) 'regard the problem of theodicy as crippling to all proposals of SDA and so propose interpretations of ultimate reality that reject the idea that God can form intentions and act specially at all' (:64).

Plantinga (2008) challenges the non-interventionist thinking of much discourse concerning the action of God in the world, questioning the major conclusions of the divine action project. He discusses the commonsense biblical and traditional Christian understanding of the many ways God freely acts in His world (2008:370-371). This clearly radically contrasts with the understanding of God encapsulated in the DAP. Plantinga examines the statements of the likes of Gilkey, Bultmann and Macquire which suggest that in our modern times it is impossible to

imagine God acting in our world (2008:372-373). As Gilkey (in Plantinga 2008:373) states, 'The causal nexus in space and time which Enlightenment science and philosophy introduced into the Western mind . . . is also assumed by modern theologians and scholars; since they participate in the modern world of science both intellectually and existentially, they can scarcely do anything else.' Plantinga (2008:372) exposes this as an exaggeration for many scientists and academics do not feel forced to disbelieve in God's involvement in the world and this has no ill-effect on their science.

Plantinga (2008:375) clarifies that Newton's classical mechanics laws 'describe how things go when the universe is causally closed, subject to no outside causal influence. They don't purport to tell us how things always go; they tell us, instead, how things go when no agency outside the universe acts (beyond creation and conservation) in (or on) the universe.' There is nothing stopping God from acting in His world. In such an instance the system would not be closed and no laws would be broken. The formalization of the world as a necessarily closed system is 'a metaphysical or theological add-on' which can't be 'experimentally verified.' It derives from the formalization of the 'law' by Pierre Laplace (:376-377). Therefore the 'hands-off theologians' who 'think of themselves as expressing allegiance to science' are not following 'classical science' (:380).

Looking specifically at the DAP Plantinga (2008:383) notes most of the participants 'believe that a satisfactory account of God's action in the world would have to be noninterventionistic.' Clayton (in Plantinga 2008: 384), a participant, states 'it is very difficult to come up with an idea of divine action in the world in which such action would not constitute "breaking natural law" or "breaking physical law"', an objection that is unnecessarily bound to a false picture of scientific laws.

Plantinga (2008:385) deals with further concerns that undergird their noninterventionism. In terms of the problem of evil Ellis' concern is that it's difficult to reconcile God acting miraculously at some times, as in the resurrection, yet being inactive at other times, in the face of Auschwitz, for example. Plantinga (2008:385) replies simply that 'God will intervene if and when he sees fit,' but he also responds to the deeper meaning implied in Ellis' objection, 'that we can't sensibly suppose that God intervenes unless we have "some kind of rock-solid criterion of choice underlying such decisions to act in a miraculous manner:"' 'Surely that's asking far too much? God will intervene (if that's the right word) when he has a good reason for doing so; but why suppose we human beings would be in a position to know when he does and when he doesn't have a good reason? Perhaps we are in a position like Job's: what happened to him was a result of mysterious transactions among beings some of whom were wholly unknown to him. Couldn't something similar hold for us?'

In a similar fashion Plantinga (2008: 385-387) replies to the further objections that nonintervention is necessary for us to be able to 'exercise free will' and that intervention represents 'arbitrariness and inconsistency' which contradicts the kind of world God has made. I believe Plantinga successfully shows that these objections have nothing to do with true science, but are unfounded, rather, and based on poor reasoning and subjective presuppositions. As Plantinga (2008:388) suggests,

Many seem to think of God as like a classical artist, one who prizes economy, restraint, discipline. But perhaps God is more like a romantic artist; perhaps he revels in glorious variety, riotous creativity, overflowing fecundity, uproarious activity. Why else would he create a million species of beetles? Perhaps he is also very much a hands-on God, entering history regularly and often, time and time again, in order to lead, guide, persuade and redeem his people, bless them with the 'Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit' (Calvin) or 'The Internal Instigation of the Holy Spirit' (Aquinas) and confer upon them the gift of faith. None of this so much as begins to compromise his greatness and majesty, his august and unsurpassable character.

Another corrective to the sterile rationalism of non-interventionist assumptions is provided by Hefner (2007:142), who claims that a healthy respect for paradox is vital in appropriately dealing with evolution: 'The energies of God are both various and paradoxical. There are not just a few works of God; rather, they are innumerable. Moreover, they appear to us, not with unambiguous impact and meaning, but under the conditions of paradox.' He lists many paradoxes in evolution such as the way that the deterministic aspect of evolution 'gives rise to creatures who are hard-wired for freedom' while out of its 'randomness...emerge creatures who are hard-wired to seek meaning and who live their lives as if driven by purposes' (:142). These are in continuity with similar paradoxes in Scripture (:142). Consequently: 'We must be careful when we try to construct concepts of God that can accommodate our knowledge of evolution. It is ipso facto impossible, for example, for our minds to construct concepts of God that can account for both freedom and determinism, for both chance and necessity, for mind and spirit emerging from matter.' Past philosophical attempts at this endeavor 'are interesting and provocative for speculative purposes, but they do not produce knowledge in the ordinary sense of that term' (:143).

I believe that the divine action project has been inappropriately constrained by the standards and constructs of science, causing it to be overly cautious in talking of God's involvement in the world. Plantinga and Hefner provide a much needed corrective.

Issues of evolution and divine action naturally lead to questions of God's immanence versus transcendence with respect to creation, an area of intense discussion (Schaab 2007; Fagg 2008; Guthrie 1999; Yong 2005). It is important to move away from an interventionist view of God to a view of God as intimately sustaining all of creation. This has implications for increased intimacy with God and recognizing God in culture and creation, without conflating God with these realities.

### 6.6.3.3 Theodicy

Evolution clearly poses a problem for belief in God, not only because some take it to be a sufficient explanation of life, doing away with the need for God, as Dawkins argues (see 1.8.10), but also because it seems to involve unacceptable cruelty as David Hull (in Ayala 2009: 329) expresses:

What kind of God can one infer from the sort of phenomena epitomized by the species on Darwin's Galapagos Islands? The evolutionary process is rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain and horror [ . . . ] Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural selection may be like, he is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not. He is also not the loving God who cares about his productions. He is not even the awful God pictured in the Book of Job. The God of the Galapagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.

Russel (2006:32) considers 'the sharpest challenge to theistic evolution...[to be] the role of "natural evil" in the evolution of life.... referring to suffering, disease, death, and extinction in nature....[which] is constitutive of life and not a consequence of original sin.' 'Natural theodicy' refers to the problem of 'God's relation to' this specific kind of evil. The classic "free will defense" or "free will theodicy" cannot be used (at least without significant reformulation) when free will itself is not operative before the evolution of humankind.' He suggests 'our best (only?) hope for responding to the problem of evil is through a theology of redemption based on the cross of Christ....extending the redemption of humanity to include all of nature through eschatology of "new creation" that includes the transformation of the universe and with it the end of natural evil' (:132).

On the other hand, Fagg (2007:233) suggests that the concept of evil needs to be limited to human, moral evil, and not applied to the natural world:

As a physicist observing the material world, I wish...to make the case for positing that natural phenomena, however dangerous to humans, are not inherently evil.... With this narrowed definition of evil as a basic assumption, I am led to posit that such material phenomena as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, and forest fires sparked by lightning, although very perilous, should not be seen as possessing the focused malintent characterizing evil. Similarly, I reason that the tendency in much of nature to proceed to greater states of disorder, which is physically measured by entropy, is not evil, as some have claimed. A tree grows and flourishes, provides food and shelter for birds and animals, then dies and decays to ultimately serve as nutrients for other life. I see no evil in this decay.

Ayala (2008:189) suggests that evolution 'provides a possible explanation' for natural evil. He believes that 'defects, dysfunctions, cannibalism, parasitism, predation, and other common mishaps of the living world' can be attributed to 'natural processes rather than...the direct creation or specific design of the Creator.' Ayala (:189) recognizes that this merely shifts back God's culpability, for He, as sovereign, chose to create the kind of world where this suffering is possible. He is therefore not discharged from 'responsibility for the dysfunctions, cruelties, and sadism of the living world' (:189). This is the objection leveled against the free-will defense argument in terms of human, moral evil. The answer Ayala (:190) gives is that God could have created beings who would not sin, but they would be robotic and incapable of freely entering into relationship with God or truly bearing His image. In the same way: 'God could have created a different world. But that would not be a creative universe, where galaxies form, stars and planetary systems come about, and continents drift causing earthquakes. The world that we have is creative and more exciting than a static world.'

Tracy (2011 : 258-259) suggests that the 'hands-off model,' which de-emphasizes divine action, even in the non-interventionist sense, as a response to natural theodicy is not as effective as imagined : 'it is important to note that the moral plausibility of this view depends upon making the case that a policy of divine inaction is itself consistent with God's perfect goodness. It is not enough just to appeal, for example, to the autonomy or integrity of the natural order. The burden of argument is to show that an autonomously developing natural order is (1) an intrinsic good and/or a necessary condition for an intrinsic good, and (2) that this good is great enough to be worth having even at so high a price in suffering and loss. This case is usually not made very fully (if at all), and in the absence of such arguments, we should not assume that a hands-on God of the sort Russell envisions is in a morally worse predicament than the hands-off God who may be more familiar in modern accounts of divine action. In either case, natural suffering presents a profound challenge to evolutionary theologies.'

Burns (2006:279) suggests there is a lack of honesty in much of the theodicy debate in terms an attempt 'to excise from [nature] . . . violence and indifference to suffering simply because it does not suit our theological systems.' She attempts a 'cautious retrieval of Martin Luther's God Hidden/God Revealed in order to allow for a more honest appraisal of suffering in this evolutionary universe.' 'To reclaim violent models of God is simply to be honest about the universe we live in and the cosmic, natural powers that seem to 'brood and light' within it' (:280). 'The problem for a theologian is how to take up the call for honesty about God and the indifference of the universe to suffering while remaining faithful to Christian claims that God is Creator, Sustainer and Self-Giving Love' (:280).

In Luther's thought on the crucifixion 'the paradox of God's annihilation is that it opens the way for rebirth....For Luther, God is the creative source of all life and the destructive power of the cosmos that seems indifferent to us' (Burns 2006: 285). She reinforces this with a quote from Tracy (in Burns 2006:285): "It is "self-destructively sentimental for Christians to allow their

understanding of the God who is Love to be separated from the Hidden God.” Burns (2006:285) therefore suggests that ‘The instability of evolution can be interpreted as a manifestation of the *deus absconditus*: in it we catch a glimpse of the awesome, terrifying power of God.’

This brief overview of diverse perspectives on the issue of theodicy and evolution reinforces the argument in this dissertation that knowledge is complex and varying worldviews and assumptions lead to diverging conclusions.

#### **6.6.3.4 Conclusions and implications for pastoral care**

Although the theory of evolution poses problems concerning the character of God (issues of wastefulness and suffering), it solves as many problems as it raises. Haught (2008:174) provides a positive interpretation of evolution in this regard:

In fact, an evolutionary theology might agree with Teilhard that the idea of an instantaneously complete creation is theologically unthinkable. Any universe that might conceivably burst into being fully formed could never have become truly differentiated from its creator. It would not have had the time or opportunity to become a world that stands out distinctly in dialogical relationship to God. Such a “world” would be a purely passive mirroring of the divine will. Indeed, it would not be a world at all, but instead an eternal dimension of God’s own being. A universe sculpted to finished perfection in the first instant of its existence would be frozen in place forever. It would have no future, since it would already have been finalized. It could not give rise to beings endowed with freedom or even with life, since by definition living and freedom-endowed organisms are inherently selftranscending realities whose very nature is to move beyond their present state of being.

Haught (2008:175) extends the positive implications of evolution to include creation: ‘The evolutionary character of life, when placed in the context of an unfinished universe, invites us to extend our hopes to include the whole cosmos. We should not separate our preoccupation with human destiny from an overarching concern for the perfection or fulfillment of life and indeed the entire universe.’

Direct creation views of God contain alternative problems and solutions, and we must realize that all views of divine action have to deal with the problem of suffering. The theological response of human freedom and the passion of God through Christ remain the profoundest answers available.

An important envisaged aspect of God, which can inform our God concepts, is adventure and freedom. This is implied in the process of evolution and salvation history and in the wild, untamed nature of the created order. It is also part of human nature and desire. The suppression of this characteristic may cause individuals to seek its expression in the demonic realm. Nature and creation remain underdetermined and the atheistic definition of ‘nature red in tooth and claw’ (which contradicts their awe regarding nature at other points) can also be rephrased as nature wild and free. Nature is clearly underdetermined, due to epistemological problems of human perception and due to the reality of the fall, thus suggesting a limited role for natural theology.

The way divine action is understood is highly relevant to pastoral care. The divine action project does away with the concept of a feely-acting, miraculous God and reinforces the anthropocentric, immanent spell that affects so much theology, practical theology and pastoral care. Different views on divine action will lead to different pastoral actions (such as praying versus not praying for physical healing) and different content within similar actions such as prayer (which may operate as human comfort versus a genuine expectation of God’s supernatural intervention).

The scientific and mathematical issues of chaos versus order (freedom versus contingency) directly affect our understanding of God's action in the world and have direct pastoral care impact in terms of a counselee's understanding of what they can expect from God in terms of personal protection and ordering of life. The scientific data is underdetermined and an openness and flexibility needs to also be maintained in terms of what is taught in the pulpit and in the pastoral care situation. A tension between prayer actually changing ontological reality versus being a form of intimacy with God that changes our hearts needs to be maintained.

#### **6.6.4 Hermeneutics, God, God concepts and God images**

It is not necessary to overreact against understandings and images of God revealed through other religions, philosophy, science and cultural expressions. These can be related to in terms of continuity and discontinuity. Continuity is of value in order not to unnecessarily alienate others and in order to gain insight that one may have overlooked. Nevertheless, the revelation of God given through Christ needs to be brought into strong interaction with all these understandings. Paul's discussion with the Athenians in Acts 17 is a model in this regard. While Paul acknowledges certain very basic aspects of their understanding, he strongly corrects false images and challenges them to relate to the personal God revealed through Christ. A current example would be talking to someone who believes in God as a spiritual force or energy in all of life. One can fully affirm and explore this positive concept of energy, but challenge this impoverished understanding with the clarity of the personal, historical God revealed in Christ.

Creative understandings and approaches to God can be entertained as long as they do not become idolatrous or supplant other scriptural understandings. For example, the issue of maleness versus femaleness in humankind and God is a fruitful area of exploration. Although an overgeneralization, compared to men, women can be characterized by beauty and a need to have this beauty affirmed. Furthermore, they represent mystery and they desire to be approached, understood and responded to through careful, attentive watching as an essential part of an equally important passionate pursuit. The frustrated male response that urges them to be direct and say what they mean may be unfair to their true nature. If this is in any way a true reflection of women, it has bearing on our understanding of God. If male and female collectively represent the image of God then part of an appropriate response to God may be to be enraptured by His beauty and to attentively seek and watch as part of our pursuit in order to enter into His mystery and receive the fruits hidden there. This also has bearing on the issue of the perceived absence of God. The fault may lie with our misunderstanding and inappropriate approach. These female characteristics need not contradict or be played off against God's aggressive, direct characteristics. We must be content to let God be the complex, mysterious unity that He is and respond appropriately in each situation. A positive byproduct of this understanding is an affirmation of women and their unique way of being in this world.

Personality and culture directly affect what we are comfortable with in terms of images of God. Intimate language talking of God as 'lover', in certain worship songs, for example, is difficult for many to articulate, but may not be theologically inappropriate.

A wide range of metaphors that do not conflict with Scripture need to be entertained concerning our understanding of God: God as Father, Mother, King, Servant, Warrior, Lover, etc. Each of these presents dangers and possibilities for misunderstanding, but each of them also resonates with aspects of Scripture and can reveal a significant part of the reality of God and help facilitate specific aspects of our healing and growth. For example, a powerful, monarchical image of God can easily be exploited for oppressive purposes, but it is vital in terms of understanding God's power and justice and needs to be held in tension with other imagery.



Apart from direct Scriptures concerning God, implicit understandings are also important, but need to be subjected to similar scriptural control. The long and difficult process of salvation history, recorded in Scripture and experienced in post-scriptural church history implies that God is patient and values human freedom, participation and choice. Similar conclusions may be drawn from the process of evolution.

The tension involved in holding together conflicting understandings of God is part of the glory and excitement of being in a loving relationship with God.

All intellectual understanding of God is incomplete and limited by underdetermination. An encounter with the living God, which can surpass all our limited knowledge, is vital. This encounter is subjective and open to sceptical attack as well. It cannot be defended beyond the extending of an invitation for all to have this encounter. Thus, while acknowledging its personal and non-communicable nature, it still remains the vital basis, beyond intellectual understanding, for each person's subjective knowledge of God. A worshipful encounter needs to shape and control our theology and our theology needs to inform and shape our worshipful encounters.

An issue in God images is the source that funds them. Attempts to replace the 'outdated' language of Scripture with currently acceptable modes are problematic, as in Tillich's attempt to talk of 'a ground of being'. The philosophic assumptions in our replacement language show that they are not neutral or better suited to represent God; they remain intensely metaphorical and subjective, in other words (the blindness of scientism to the intensely metaphorical nature of natural science obscures this fact). Any creative use of imagery and language needs to be in submission to Scripture.

Finally, in terms of a high view of Scripture the nature and ratio of different images concerning God is not arbitrary and the balance and weight of Scripture in this regard needs to be taken into account.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

This research has confirmed the importance of a solid engagement with epistemology for all aspects of Christian knowledge and ministry.

The intense need that exists in all areas of society and the incompleteness and lack that is characteristic of all parts of the church suggests the need for multiple, shifting relationships to be formed, strengthening and enriching knowledge and practice, as appropriate.

The basis for this impossible task is a trust in God, in all His fullness, as He is revealed through Scripture in all His paradoxical glory. On the basis of our relationship with God, as He meets us in all of life in association with the controlling criterion of Scripture, we can engage all of life and knowledge with humble confidence. A critically realistic stance enables us to create multiple, complex interactions of continuity versus discontinuity. Science, psychology, philosophy, culture, theology, Scripture, etc., can all be involved in complex interactions that can reveal truth. Inductive and deductive methods, individual and group insight, subjective and objective perspectives, etc., can all contribute to life and knowledge in God.

Placing this ultimate authority and locus in God, as He is revealed through Scripture, is no more positivistic or unrealistic than any other locus. Whether acknowledged or not, all methods and areas of knowledge, and all groups and individuals operate out of assumptions and an ultimate criterion or locus. However, only God, as revealed in Scripture, as further illuminated by science and experience, and as related to in His full transcendence and immanence, can fit the

description of ultimacy that is required to suggest the unity of all life and knowledge, which is required for critical realism.

This confidence in God and the Scriptures does not remove the need for dialogue, hermeneutics, praxis, and various other human engagements. It provides the very basis and rationale for these.

The locus of God and Scripture means that the basic methodology and point of departure, however, is not praxis / practice or practical context, but prayer, worship and immersion in Scripture. As we immerse ourselves in and saturate ourselves with the reality of God and the narrative structure and worldview of Scripture, we are more able to go anywhere in life and the world of knowledge, adopting a theoretical and practical hermeneutic of continuity versus discontinuity. This is distinct from the alternative methods of trying to shut out this world (certain forms of biblical counseling), create correlations with this world in terms of a locus other than God through Scripture (certain forms of praxis-based pastoral care), or integrate this world into a scheme that we can control (certain forms of integration between theology and psychology). This is best defined as wisdom and its spirit is the opposite of one that positivistically controls and manipulates. Its spirit, rather, is one of service and suffering for the sake of truth.

Further clarity on the benefits of a critically realistic hermeneutical approach can be gained by considering how it can critique and support each of the three approaches to knowledge and ministry described above (the biblical, praxis and integration stances). It is acknowledged that each approach constitutes a vital aspect of pastoral care and this critique is intended to help integrate the approach into the comprehensive approach to life, knowledge and ministry that this dissertation has tried to defend. It must be borne in mind that I am referring to critical realism as it has been defined in this research; there is always a danger that we use terminology in a superficial way, as mere jargon, an empty shell that we can fill with unwarranted and unacknowledged meaning. The term 'critical realism' is intended to signal a high view of Scripture, praxis and integration, within a hermeneutical scheme. The possibility of the resultant comprehensive stance depends on the faithfulness of God. The warrant for it is related to the faithfulness of God, equally, as well as its resonance with Scripture and its ability to produce faith edification.

In terms of the biblical counseling model, this critically realistic stance is able to affirm the former's theistic and scriptural focus. The dismissal of this movement as hopelessly naive and reactionary by certain praxis-based theologians is unwarranted and the defensive response of those within the biblical counseling movement is understandable. Ironically, this kind of unbalanced criticism, confirms and reinforces the central tenets of the movement, that other forms of theology and counseling are inimical to valid forms of Christianity. By affirming its central concerns within a valid epistemology, it is more likely that growth will occur within the movement, and one can then address its highly problematic epistemology, hermeneutics and pastoral practice, which have been discussed in this chapter.

The idea of supplying what is lacking in someone's faith is scripturally valid, but only from within a humble, prayerful stance: 'Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith' (1Th 3:10).

This critically realistic stance is also valid for critiquing theologies that are praxis based. While their concern for diversity and public theology are vital, their inconsistent epistemology means that they will not be able to engage with diversity within the public and global space in a way that is valid and sustainable in the long term. A true engagement with the public and global space will have to be able to deal with radical pluralism, a strident insistence on self-determination, intense hostility to the gospel, and unimaginable evil and horror (from the rape of babies to the

attempts to exterminate whole populations). I argue that only the theistic, scriptural focus (which holds grace and judgment, as well as the already and not yet nature of the Kingdom of God in tension) of a specifically understood critical realism will be able to engage with this public reality.

An example of the ability of the gospel to impact and utterly transform heavily demonized (the valid scriptural perspective) and sociologically broken down (the valid social science perspective) communities is given in the 'Transformations' documentary video (Viewable on YouTube, under 'Transformations documentary video.' 60minutes in length). This documentary gives several case studies of heavily broken down communities, enmeshed in insurmountable problems such as drug trafficking, gang violence and domination, alcoholism, and occultic practices. In each case a miraculous, Kingdom inbreaking renewal occurred, resulting in empirically verifiable transformation, inexplicable in purely natural terms. In each of the five case studies certain common factors occurred, which can be interpreted in terms of a specific methodology for ministry. Each time God worked through specific individuals who were deeply moved by the social breakdown, spiritual emptiness and evil. Months of prayer and discernment ensued. Unity in the divided body of Christ (the various denominations in the area) was a first priority and area that God addressed. Intense resistance occurred, requiring further discernment and pressing in with prayer (in the first case study, the Colombian pastor who initiated what became a city wide revival resulting in the expulsion of the drug barons was murdered). The praxis based approach is fully valid in helping to analyze complex social reality, but I do not believe its extreme, naturalistic forms are able to respond to the deep social evil and breakdown that increasingly characterizes our current global reality.

Finally, considering the integration focus, it must be borne in mind that the broad heading, 'integration, can disguise a variety of approaches, from positivistic approaches that are still entrapped by Enlightenment agendas to postmodern-influenced stances that lack a valid critical, hermeneutics to maintain an appropriate pastoral theology. I am referring to integration in terms of a desire to use the best of psychological theory in a way that does not undermine faithfulness to the gospel. I believe that this essential framing of the integration agenda still indicates a modernist entrapment, and significant energy is spent on 'getting the exact balance right.' In terms of this dissertation's critically realistic, hermeneutical approach this is not possible. By submitting *both* theology and psychology to the broader affirmation and judgment of God (which requires theoretical categories of mystery and paradox to be held in tension with the rationalistic focus of modernism, and vice versa for the diffuse understanding of radical postmodernism), this energy can be applied more directly to pastoral ministry.

A critically realistic stance is also relevant to the issue of unity within the body of Christ. From this perspective we can re-explore ecumenical issues of unity, which have receded into the background since the end of the twentieth century, perhaps because of the intractable difficulties involved, especially within the context of the epistemological crisis that defines our age (if truth is a chimera and multiple perspectives are the only possible norm, from a postmodern perspective, this naturally translates into a radically diverse and disunified expression of the concrete form of the church). Within a critically realistic perspective, unity (the understanding that there is ultimately one body of Christ, one Lord, and one *missio dei*) can be envisaged and pursued, leading to a more valid ontological reality (Jesus prayed that the church would be one in order to reflect the ontological unity of the Trinity; Jn 17:11) and greater effectiveness (Jesus stated that this unity would lead to the world believing that He was sent by the Father; Jn 17:21). This focus on unity can be held in tension with diversity, both because diversity is scripturally acknowledged (1Cor 12:12) and because we fall short of God's ideal of unity, which will not be realized until the *eschaton* (1 Cor 3:12).

Therefore, for *all* streams and traditions within the body of Christ, there is no limit to the areas that are ripe for exploration and engagement. By engagement is meant a full exploration

through participation, through qualitative and quantitative research (where possible), through deductive and inductive stances, and through any other relevant means possible. Furthermore, these different areas can be approached in various orders and in various combinations, creating mutual service and enrichment.

The following are a few areas of engagement that can be explored and brought into interaction: God, God concepts, God image, Scripture, theology, philosophy, natural and social science, society (in its social, political, and economical spheres), the pastoral care encounter and process, the church, human identity, pastoral identity, the supernatural realm, demonic influence (over individuals and territories), healing (physical and emotional), etc.

The content of each person and church's 'list' and the nature of the interactions between the elements will differ. And this unique configuration will interact with other configurations. This may seem impossibly vague and uncontrolled, but enough history has elapsed to show that attempts to positivistically define and control life and knowledge have borne little resemblance to what is actually happening in reality. The following verse should not halt our knowledge endeavors, but it should put them in context:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen (Rm 11:33-36).

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