

A HERMENEUTIC OF LEARNED HELPLESSNESS

The Bible as Problem in Pastoral Care

by

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Mini-thesis presented for the
Degree of Master of Philosophy (Biblical Interpretation)
at the University of Stellenbosch

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December 2005

DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this mini-thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any University for a degree.

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Signature

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Date



ABSTRACT

This paper attempts an exploration and description of a hermeneutic of learned helplessness. Drawing on insights from both psychology and theology, it problematises the interaction that an individual believer can develop with the Bible and living a life of faith. Attempts to account for this situation involve biblical interpretation, the church and the pastoral care context.

The body of the paper consists of four chapters, describing the four pillars supporting a hermeneutic of learned helplessness. The first chapter highlights certain of the difficulties that develop when the authority of the Bible is abused. The second chapter looks at the vocation of the pastor, and notes how lack of accountability and limited self-awareness can result in inadequate and harmful biblical interpretation. The third chapter highlights the negative effects of the neglect of emotion on individual faith and interaction with the biblical text, referring specifically to women. Finally, the fourth chapter identifies the tendency to regard morality as expressed primarily through behaviour, and to use the Bible as a book of rules. The combination of these four factors generates an environment in which a hermeneutic of learned helplessness can quickly develop in a Christian believer.

This paper is an attempt to more clearly define my observations following work in the context of pastoral care and counselling. It is hoped that by clarifying the nature of the problem, this will prove to be the first step toward finding possible solutions.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie poog om 'n verkenning en beskrywing van 'n hermeneutiek van aangeleerde hulpeloosheid te doen. Deur uit beide die insigte van die sielkunde en die teologie te put, word die problematiek rondom die interaksie wat die individuele gelowige met die Bybel en die geloofslewe kan ontwikkel, geskets. Om hierdie situasie te probeer verduidelik moet daar gekyk word na Bybelse interpretasie, die kerk en pastorale sorg.

Die inhoud van die studie bestaan uit vier hoofstukke wat die vier pilare ondersteunend tot 'n hermeneutiek vir aangeleerde hulpeloosheid beskryf. Die eerste hoofstuk lig sekere probleme uit wat ontstaan wanner die outoriteit van die Bybel misbruik word. Die tweede hoofstuk kyk na die beroep van die pastor en hoe 'n gebrek aan verantwoordbaarheid en beperkte selfkennis tot onvoldoende en skadelike skrifinterpretasie kan lei. Die derde hoofstuk fokus op die negatiewe gevolge wat die verwaarlosing van emosie op die individu se geloof en haar omgang met die Bybelse teks kan hê – veral met verwysing na vroue. Ter afsluiting wys die vierde hoofstuk die geneigdheid uit om moraliteit hoofsaaklik as gedragsuitinge te ag en om die Bybel as 'n reël-boek te gebruik. Die kombinasie van hierdie vier faktore skep 'n omgewing waarin 'n hermeneutiek vir aangeleerde hulpeloosheid kan floreer.

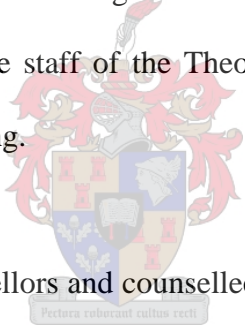
Die studie is 'n poging om my gewaarwordinge gedurende my werk as pastorale versorger en berader te formuleer. Die hoop word uitgespreek dat 'n duideliker verstaan van die probleem die eerste stap sal wees tot die vind van moontlike oplossings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest gratitude,

To Raymond, my husband, for loving and supporting me through an extended time of study, and to Jordan, my son, for accepting me and my work unconditionally.

To all those who supported me academically: to Dr J Punt, for patience with my journey ‘the long way around’; to Dr K Anthonissen, for being a mentor and constant encouragement; to Dr C le Bruyns, for being an endless source of practical guidance and interest in my thoughts; and to the staff of the Theological Library who always asked about my and my family’s wellbeing.



To all those friends, family, counsellors and counselees, who knowingly or unknowingly raised questions about faith, the church and the Bible, that refused to be simply answered.

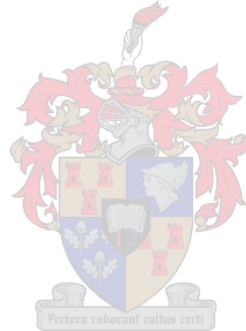
To God, for the freedom to love and to work.

Finally, to my parents, who instilled in me a love of learning from before I can remember.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1	9
THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE	9
1.1 THE BIBLE USED AUTHORITATIVELY	10
1.1.1 Ideological criticism.....	10
1.1.2 Feminist criticism.....	12
1.2 THE BIBLE PRESENTED AS THE ONLY AUTHORITY	14
1.2.1 The Bible as a storehouse of facts.....	15
1.2.2 The inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible	15
1.2.3 Grammatical-historical exegesis.....	16
1.3 REMOVAL OF ANY AUTHORITY FROM THE READER.....	17
CHAPTER 2	21
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PROBLEMATICS IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP	21
2.1 LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY	23
2.2 LIMITED SELF-AWARENESS	24
2.3 INAPPROPRIATE USE OF THE BIBLE IN PASTORAL CARE.....	28
2.3.1 Abstraction and generalization	28
2.3.2 Biblicism	29
2.3.3 Preaching at problems.....	29
2.3.4 Dogmatization.....	30
CHAPTER 3	31
THE NEGLECT AND ABUSE OF EMOTION	31
3.1 THEOLOGY AND EMOTION – POINTS OF CONTACT.....	34
3.2 PROBLEMATICS IN EMOTION AND ECCLESIOLOGY.....	38
3.2.1 Genderedness of emotion.....	38
3.2.2 The manipulation of Self-Conscious Emotions	41
3.2.2.1 Guilt as motivator and manipulator	43
3.2.2.2 An ecclesial responsibility	46

CHAPTER 4	51
HOW MORALITY IS DEFINED	51
4.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	52
4.2 CHRISTIAN EMPHASES	54
4.3 MORAL FORMATION AND THE CHURCH COMMUNITY	57
4.3.1 The means of moral formation.....	59
4.3.1.1 Practices or habits	59
4.3.1.2 Structures or roles	60
4.3.1.3 Specific instruction	60
4.3.1.4 Role models	61
4.4 MORAL FORMATION AND THE BIBLE	62
CONCLUSION.....	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	69



INTRODUCTION

'Most of us hear the word 'scripture' without stumbling over it. Using it, we give the impression, even to ourselves, that there is understanding of what the term means; that we all know what scripture is. On reflection, it turns out that this is hardly the case' (Smith 1993:1).

The debate around the Bible's role in the counselling process is not a new issue. For centuries, pastors and priests have considered, some with more success than others, how Scripture¹ might assist, guide or comfort a believer in need. Historically, these musings were possible in the exclusive confines of the church, functioning in a society where the Biblical text fundamentally influenced the prevailing worldview. Following the Enlightenment and the subsequent rise of scientific theory, the Bible, as well as conclusions about it, came under attack. The increasing knowledge of humanity collected in the work of Psychology enabled more careful consideration to be given to all the aspects of the counselling context, namely the counsellee, the counsellor and the process of counselling being engaged in. Pastoral care was thus challenged with an increasingly complex understanding of the counsellee and the counselling context while simultaneously having its primary resource, the Bible, questioned.

For many today, it seems that pastoral care has sold out its biblical and theological tradition to gain psychological credibility. Peterson (1980:4), arguing for a return to the deep Christian tradition of reliance on Scripture, poses the question, 'I can demonstrate acceptable competence in the skills I have been taught, but am I a *pastor*?' With this

¹ Fowl & Jones (1997:112) highlight a distinction between interpreting 'Scripture' and 'the Bible'. While the nuances of understanding between the two terms are noted, I use them interchangeably in the context of this paper.

question he notes the concern that the pastoral role, in attempting to adapt to the times, has lost the biblical base regarded by so many pastoral caregivers as necessary for unique impact in an individual's life.

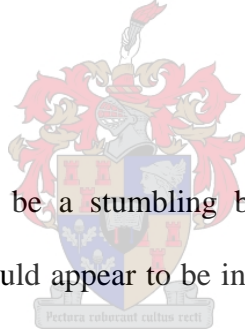
Capps (1988:41) echoes the concern of a lopsided approach. Providing a historical overview of the Bible in pastoral care, he highlights the shifting emphases of pastoral care as it has attempted to come to grips with the influence of psychology and changes in culture and thought paradigms. He reaffirms, however, the impact of the Bible as an agent of change, and notes that due to this very powerful influence, it is critical that pastoral care continue to dynamically engage with the issue of Scripture and counselling.

While both Peterson and Capps argue for a renewed emphasis on the role of the Bible within pastoral care, many individual believers², past and present, remain ambivalent about this sacred text. Sincerely wanting to make Scripture part of their daily lives, they find, however, that it is a book that at times raises more questions than it answers. In fact, certain questions do not seem to have an answer at all. It is a book caught up in history, with strange stories and strange characters and unpronounceable names, and while it speaks of God and speaks of humanity, we are still unsure of what either one is really like. In short, it is a treasure trove and a Trojan horse all rolled into one.

This dissertation is an attempt to constructively add to the dialogue around Scripture and the counselling process. My starting point is pastoral care (in its narrowest sense, a

² I borrow part of Okure's (1995:52) definition to define what I mean by the term, 'an individual believer', being, 'anybody who reads/hears the text with a view to deriving from it a meaning for life'.

specific encounter between an individual and a pastor; in its broadest sense, the caring role of church leadership directed toward the Body of Christ). Observations of my own experience both as counsellor and counsellee have raised the question of the Bible's role in the process again and again. Too often, an encounter that included Scripture in some way seemed not to provide the impetus toward positive personal change, but, in fact, appeared to encourage the opposite. This form of encounter did not require the physical reading of a biblical text as such, but nevertheless the problematics seemed embedded in explicit and implicit ways in how this Book was being interpreted and appropriated. How was it possible, I asked myself, that the Bible could function as a stumbling block to spiritual and mental wellbeing, and ultimately paralyse efforts to move toward responsible and life giving action?



To suggest that the Bible could be a stumbling block must be *anathema* to many believers. Such an occurrence would appear to be in direct contrast to the claims of the church, the pastor and the text itself. Rollins (1999:175) notes, however, 'It is no longer a secret in scholarly and even ecclesiastical literature that the Bible and its interpretation can have pathogenic effects on individuals and cultures'. Where then, or is it, with whom, does the problem lie? Or is it not so much a specific element as the interaction between the various elements that is preventing a constructive counselling experience?

My attempts to clarify an answer to these questions have lead me increasingly to focus not so much on the content of Scripture, but on how the Bible is used. In many ways this investigation has worked backwards, starting from the problem situation, and then

seeking some explanation for it. It seems that it is at the point where human hands and human minds make contact with this Book that the environment is engineered for a positive or negative interaction with the text. This point of contact can take on a multitude of forms. What I wish to highlight in this dissertation are those forms of contact that ignore, neglect or manipulate the complex subtleties of biblical interpretation and application. This is a vast task, in many ways too extensive for its current vehicle. With this in mind, I have attempted to strike a balance between highlighting broad themes and simultaneously providing necessary detail.

As previously stated, I begin the process working backwards from the pastoral care context. It is within this context that I have encountered what I term, a *hermeneutic of learned helplessness*. Broadly speaking, it describes the way in which a counsellee approaches living a life of faith and any interaction with the Bible. It is a harmful hermeneutic, continually thwarting responsible and life giving behaviour, by keeping a believer locked in certain paradigms. It encourages and maintains certain pictures of what constitutes faithful Christian living, who God is, and what our part in the drama of life really is. Integral to initiating and maintaining much of this understanding, on the face of it, is the Bible. As a text, however, it does not stand alone, and increasingly the role of *interpretation* of the text moves to the fore.

The term 'learned helplessness', more specifically, is a term born in psychological theory. It was coined by Martin Seligman following experiments on animals to which electric shocks were administered in circumstances from which there was no escape. The

inability to flee the difficult and painful situation resulted in a type of pathological helplessness that affected functioning, even when an avenue of escape was finally introduced (Reber & Reber 2001:317). Helplessness in the general literature is most often associated with feeling emotionally overwhelmed. In subsequent theory, however, a strong link has been made between the experience of helplessness and behavioural inaction, particularly as experienced in depression. In an often reciprocal relationship, then, feeling helpless and 'acting' helpless are interwoven.

Furthermore, apart from the emphasis on 'learning' within the learned helplessness theory of depression, the concept of attribution is significant (Barlow & Durand 1995:273). By attribution is meant, how and to whom one assigns meaning or control over the circumstances in one's life. What fosters learned helplessness are attributions that locate the control over events in one's life in external persons or powers. Although this is a concept centred in psychology, it has clear application to Christian experience and practice. Living a life of faith has repeated emphasis on relinquishing control and acknowledging the absolute power of another, whether it be God or pastoral leadership. As such, faithful living is a personal 'transformation' that initiates external attributions of control and on certain levels, encourages learned helplessness. Williams (1983:220) notes that the emphasis on external control was Freud's primary critique of religion. With reference to Freud, Williams notes that religion, '...attempts to deal with the powerlessness of the human subject; but rather than being itself a means of empowerment, it projects unrestricted power on to an alien reality and fixes the self in a

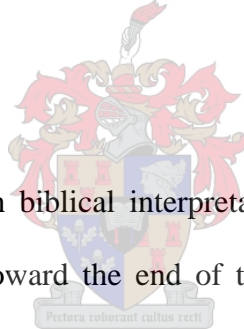
permanent state of impotence and alienation. Power (divine power) is accessible only through self-abasement and self-devaluing.’

To me, the term ‘learned helplessness’ captures some of the apathy, inaction, feelings of personal helplessness, frustration and guilt that often appear to accompany attempts at appropriating Scripture for one’s life in the world. Furthermore, it describes what shows itself as an extreme aversion to move into confident decision-making and action, with an individual functioning instead from a base of anxiety and fear of stepping out of God’s will. These often unconscious paradigms are typically interwoven with certain understandings of Scripture and, concomitantly, understandings of God. This is a paradigm and process that, I contend, is learnt. Most lay believers, unskilled in ‘how to read Scripture’, are dependent on leaders and Christian literature to help them interpret the biblical text. Thus they learn how to read and appropriate Scripture through what they are taught. The quality and bias of the teaching they receive has a direct impact on the personal model of biblical interpretation that they develop, and this in turn has implications for how they think, feel and act toward society and themselves. If a model of biblical interpretation is learned, it suggests that it can be unlearned as well. While that brings hope that some of the damage done can later be undone, I will not focus on that aspect in this discussion.

The remainder of this dissertation will focus on four factors that appear to form the cornerstones supporting a hermeneutic of learned helplessness. These factors originate from an incredibly diverse range of topics, but have theological and psychological

emphases running as threads throughout. Each factor is, however, caught up in some way in the role that the Bible plays within the pastoral context. Additionally, each one is highlighted for the potential it has to frustrate and hamper real personal and faith development and maturity.

Attempting to cover such a broad range of topics, many of them unique academic fields in their own right, requires some selection. With this in mind, each factor is briefly introduced, and then followed by two or three specific areas of emphases that have particular bearing on the learned helplessness concept. Each factor is discussed firstly as an independent unit, with the conclusion of the paper providing an opportunity for reflection and integration.



Olbricht (1998:553), reflecting on biblical interpretation in the past century, in North America in particular, writes, ‘Toward the end of the 1970’s more and more biblical critics perceived their work to be in the service of international biblical scholarship rather than of the church’. In a small way, this paper is an attempt to reverse that trend. Biblical scholarship, and especially the work of biblical interpretation, has as a point of culmination the hearts and minds of lay Christian believers within the local church. Unless the gains in study are translated into life forming and transforming words for all believers, an integral purpose of the critical interaction with the Bible is lost. This dissertation does not make claims to fully achieving this task, but is nonetheless an effort to build a bridge between the halls of academia and the vestibules of the local church. My hope is that, above all, the discussion around Scripture and pastoral care will be

earnestly engaged in by scholars, pastoral leaders and lay believers, to ensure that our lives and our witness as Christian believers truly reflect the abundant life and hope that we proclaim to all as good news.

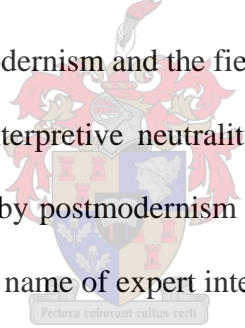


CHAPTER 1

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

*‘When new mystifications replace the old,
there is no end to oppression’
- Michael Walzer*

The dynamics of authority is a topic that has enjoyed increasing attention in recent years within the field of biblical studies. The rise of new forms of biblical criticism, following an emphasis shift over many years, from sender to message to receiver (Mouton 2002:27), has again raised questions around where ultimate interpretive authority lies and who has the right to possess it. Modernism and the field of historical criticism, have been challenged on their pretence at interpretive neutrality and claims of correctness. The climate of questioning introduced by postmodernism has highlighted much of the abuse and misuse that has occurred in the name of expert interpretation.



It must be acknowledged that the complexity of Scripture and the complexity of humankind provide the arena for diverse and numerous interpretations of a text. Looking back over church history and the Christian tradition provides the evidence of this actually happening, and the plethora of Christian denominations that exist today attests to the continued difficulty that Christians experience in understanding the Bible and its application to life. Difficulty in understanding does not, however, sanction misunderstanding, or worse, abuse. This is, however, what has often occurred where certain interpretations of Scripture were at stake. Furthermore, the manipulative use of

the Bible still occurs today – both on the level of how the book is used, as well as on the level of who interprets it. This manipulation can have many contexts and different guises. It is most often, however, at the level of the local congregation, where the individual believer encounters the subject of Scripture’s authority. The fruitfulness of this encounter will either guide a believer into an enthusiastic relationship of reverence to God or foster a constant criticism of self, as subjected to an all-powerful deity.

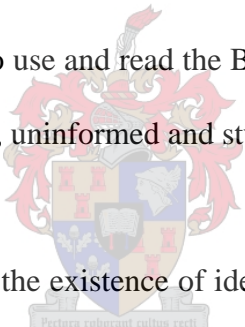
1.1 THE BIBLE USED AUTHORITATIVELY

Most Christians are in agreement on the centrality of Scripture for doctrine and the practice of faith. Questions around the Bible, Migliore (1991:40) notes, are thus not related to *whether* Scripture is a primary authority for the Christian faith, but *what sort of* authority it is. Two forms of biblical criticism, ideological criticism and, more specifically, feminist criticism have gone to great lengths to enunciate some of the ways that Scripture, and the authority surrounding it, are (mis)used to serve human ends.

1.1.1 Ideological criticism

Vanhoozer shatters any pretence at innocent interpretation when he notes, ‘To interpret – to produce meaning - is to serve someone’s interest.’ (1998:166). Thus he establishes a tie between personal power and reading from the outset. How this personal power is used forms the crux of Christian ministry. In a typical faith community, the leadership works to construct a reality for the people that makes the world and living in it tolerable and intelligible. The complex system of values and ideas that constitute an ideology thus

motivates people to behave in certain ways and to regard their position within the community as natural and necessary (Yee 1999:535). Leaders are crucial in defining the 'how' and 'why' of a system, and often enjoy special privilege when viewed, furthermore, as in the service of God. Defining a system is not necessarily in itself a negative action, but holds potential for abuse when the process proceeds in an unconsidered manner. When this occurs, Smit (1997:6) notes, 'Then people are not consciously aware that they follow rules and prescriptions. They think that is simply the proper way to read! They are not aware that they have been told and taught to read like that in their particular social location, community, tradition, etcetera. Instead they believe their way of reading the Bible comes naturally. They take it for granted. And they think that all other people who use and read the Bible in different ways, and come to different interpretations, are wrong, uninformed and stubborn.'



The recognition and acceptance of the existence of ideological bias is something that has been sorely lacking in the past. Traditional structures of society and the church meant that the privilege of reading and interpreting Scripture was most often left in the hands of a leading minority. Scientific methods and historical criticism sought to bring greater freedom from 'the tyranny of interpretive traditions and the violence of partisan exegesis' (Vanhoozer 1998:162). A historical approach hoped to provide neutral, critical tools that would open interpretation to anyone who knew them. This claim to impartiality and, ultimately, 'truth' has, however, come under fire with the rise of postmodernism. Postmodern biblical critics have pointed out that in many ways historical criticism simply perpetuated the hierarchy of former times, in an altered form. The power play simply

shifted from church and state to conquerors and conquered territories, and reinforced the age-old disparities between the sexes (Vanhoozer 1998:162).

Our current age of criticism has forced recognition of the embeddedness of ourselves and our motives in all that we do – including how we read the Bible. This knowledge is not, however, owned by all, and so the abuse of positions of leadership continues. This ‘interpretive violence’ (Vanhoozer 1998:161), unacknowledged for what it is, then perpetuates a dysfunctional hermeneutic to any believer exposed to it.

1.1.2 Feminist criticism

One of the groups within the church that has been most severely affected by the manipulation of interpretive authority is women. Thiselton (1992:430) notes, ‘Certain biblical texts, as mediated through many Christian traditions, are perceived in most strands of feminism to have been transposed into instruments of power, domination and social control.’ Thus the authority of men has been entrenched and legitimated by the use of Scripture in specific ways. Typically, certain texts such as 1 Tim 2:8-15 and 1 Peter 3:3-5, which affirm the patriarchal society of biblical times, have been interpreted literally and stamped with the authority of tradition and God. In a predominantly male-directed society, it then becomes impossible to counter this interpretation, not to speak of the perceived challenge to God that it is seen to represent.

Feminist critics have wasted no time in pointing out the convenience of using a sacred text to justify relationships that are in fact dominated by issues of power rather than

spirituality (Daly 1968; Reuther 1983; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983). They argue that women have lost their voice in numerous spheres of life, and this is particularly true within the church and with regard to understanding the Bible. They highlight Jesus' use of his authority to invert the female and male stereotypes of that day (Anderson 1983:21), in contrast to the legalistic application of the Scriptures by the temple leadership. When this happens, the Bible ultimately plays second fiddle to the interpreter's agenda and its role becomes one of a tool, used to legitimate biases and behaviour. Thus the existing status quo is kept intact.

More seriously, at times the Bible is used to legitimise the physical and emotional abuse of women and children. Thus persons who claim to be devout Christians are responsible for sexist and violent behaviour, all the while maintaining their piety. Heggen (1996:15) emphasises the intermingling of religiosity and behaviour in the defence of certain actions from Scripture. She notes sources that indicate a higher rate of parental assault on children whose parents subscribe to the premise that God intends men to dominate and women to submit (Heggen 1996:17). The religious beliefs propagated by certain traditions have been so internalised that religious women are loathe to label abuse against them as wrong. This reinforces a dangerous psychological and physical passivity, and what often appears to others as an irrational tolerance of violent situations.

The difficulty with criticising an ideological framework is that it is often viewed as rebellion, or arises within the quarters of the minority. As ideology is so enmeshed with power, there is often reliance on a greater power or the existing power to initiate change.

This means that unless church leaders themselves are open and eager for change, the interpretation of the Bible remains an activity that can be engaged in for selfish reasons.

1.2 THE BIBLE PRESENTED AS THE ONLY AUTHORITY

It is not only the use of the Bible, but the authority ascribed to the text itself, that can foster a hermeneutic of learned helplessness. Apart from the Bible's role as a 'source' document for the origins of the Christian faith, its status as canon elevates it in influence and authority within the Christian community (Punt 1998:267). Certain communities have taken this thinking to the extreme, proclaiming the Bible to be the ultimate authority on all matters. The Bible is thus seen as the final (and for some, the only) word on any issue a believer may face. In this way an individual is conscience bound to find the answer to a problem in the pages of the Bible, or risk a subconscious excommunication within the congregation. This rejection is expressed through statements of doubt around a believer's faith and ability to live trusting God alone. The implication is that lack of faith is expressed by one's being unable to say, 'God said', or 'God says'. As the physical evidence of God's word is found most clearly in the Bible, that must then constitute one's source. In this way, Migliore (1991:44) notes, the authority of Scripture is turned into 'a deadening authoritarianism.'

Boone (1989) explores Protestant fundamentalism in her book *The Bible tells them so: The discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*. She notes the seemingly innate human need to make sense of life and order circumstances and events. This need is linked to the search for a single text that will provide such a framework or explanation.

Fundamentalism takes this commonsense yearning of humanity and translates it into a purely spiritual issue, putting the Bible forward as the sacred text designed especially for that need. The fact that the Bible can provide direction on certain issues becomes the foundational platform for it to provide direction on all issues. When this is coupled with the contention that Scripture is straight from the mouth of God, a believer's full reliance on the Bible becomes a necessary act of faith.

Certain understandings about Scripture and the legitimation for them create a tight circle of meaning that is impossible to break from within the sphere itself. Vorster (1988:162) helpfully describes some of the features of a fundamentalist understanding and use of Scripture, three of which are noted below:



1.2.1 The Bible as a storehouse of facts

One of the most basic conclusions of fundamentalism is that the Bible consists of innumerable reliable, objective facts. As the core text is factual, single facts can be extrapolated from their contexts, with application in numerous situations. It is therefore possible for the Bible to 'speak into' any and every situation (Vorster 1988:162).

1.2.2 The inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible

Fundamentalism works from the premise that if the Bible is factual, it follows that it is inerrant. Scripture thus contains no error, whether of a historical, geographical, cultural,

grammatical or most importantly, religious nature. It therefore cannot be questioned, but is able to fully answer all the reader's questions (Vorster 1988:163).

1.2.3 Grammatical-historical exegesis

The claim that the text is all - sufficient means that to read or understand it correctly requires, above all, finding the correct meaning of a word (Vorster 1988:169). This form of interaction with the Bible, 'generates a host of strained interpretations, many of which seem quite unnecessary to the preservation of the Christian faith' (Boone 1989:64).

Fundamentalism places the Bible on the defensive. It works from an implicit understanding that the text is under attack, and therefore needs those who regard it as sacred to put barriers in place to prevent its being overrun. Christian believers are then encouraged to view the world as their enemy and to regard their text and faith as under constant attack. What often emerges as a viable coping strategy in response to this perception is the development of a fortress mentality. This mentality then facilitates learned helplessness, as believers often internalise this pattern of victim-like thinking.

The fortress mentality creates constant conflict, however, as believers live and function within broader society. Schwartz (1999:260), speaking on young confirmands' attempts to negotiate clarity on life and faith, notes that as they progress in confirmation classes, they begin to 'smile over the distance from reality, or at least the "strangeness", of the moral orientations derived from the biblical message'. There is thus an

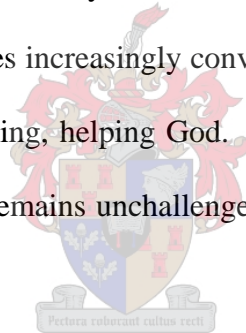
acknowledgement that the Bible exists in a world that is different to what it describes, and a world that often does not care for what the Bible describes. Fundamentalism interprets this difference as a threat, and ultimately taps into fear to force compliance. This bias contributes to believers' emotional, psychological and spiritual instability as they attempt to mature in faith and personality.

1.3 REMOVAL OF ANY AUTHORITY FROM THE READER

When the Bible is manipulated by those in authority, or is held up to be the only spiritual authority, it can help to foster an attitude of learned helplessness in a Christian believer. By placing sole authority in the Biblical text or the church leader interpreting it, it removes any authority an individual reader may have in approaching Scripture³. Essentially, this creates a power imbalance. One party, the text, holds all the power, and the other party, the reader, has none. Such a reader becomes and remains dependant on the text, or those who claim to have the key to understanding the text, for generating direction and meaning from the Bible. S/he may sincerely claim to be listening for the 'word of God', while in fact listening only for a voice of authority. Such readers surrender all their rights to the text, believing that this is the way of obedience and faithfulness to God.

³ Boone (1989:2) notes this fact in describing how fundamentalism functions, 'Because the authority of a text is partially constituted by those who interpret that text and because fundamentalism so masterfully effaces the role of interpretation, fundamentalism has been very successful in winning and sustaining its converts. Preachers contend that they do nothing more than expound the plain sense of the word of God, and so thoroughly do they lard their pronouncements with bible verses that it is indeed difficult for the ordinary layperson to dispute a preachers authority, derived as it appears to be from the Word of God itself.'

In essence, such an individual is never afforded the opportunity or given the responsibility of becoming an individual. S/he has no choice, no freedom and hence no perceived capacity to generate own meaning. Thus a believer is continually in limbo, ‘waiting on the Lord’ for prompting and direction. Such a believer can often be hard pressed, however, to find specifically tailored instructions for his or her choices, and so, often resorts to literal or allegorical interpretations of texts, with no regard for context, historical placement or the ethics of exegesis. Ultimately, a believer who functions in such a spiritual paradigm translates this ‘interpretive captivity’ into limiting behaviour, interpreting risk as unfaithfulness and individual choice as selfishness. As long as this paradigm remains in place, it effectively short-circuits future growth and maturity in faith, and conversely, often requires increasingly convoluted reasoning, or even denial, to sustain faith in the image of a loving, helping God. Typically, by adopting the label of piety, this ‘learned helplessness’ remains unchallenged and instead, comes to be seen by some, as the ideal model of faith⁴.



If we consider the act of reading (and interpretation and application) to be an ethical choice or responsibility (Mouton 2002:11), then it is understandable that by denying the scope for freedom in that act, the means toward ethical interpretive maturity is compromised. This may not appear so on the surface, but by creating a doctrine of how to interact with the Bible the options of those who approach the text are limited from the start. Fundamentalism, in a convoluted way, while attempting to guarantee responsible

⁴ With the rise in the availability of Christian literature, the proliferation of ‘authority’ on biblical interpretation now extends beyond local church leaders. This reinforces interpretive dependence, and at times creates a culture of simply moving on from one interpretive bestseller to another.

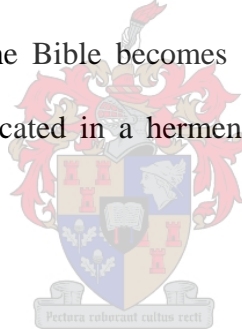
interaction with Scripture, instead fosters rigid interaction with the Bible that is translated into similar behaviour in life and Christian witness. This ultimately compromises a believers' education in the 'lifelong process of learning to become a wise reader of Scripture, who is capable of embodying that reading in life' (Fowl & Jones 1997:112).

A form of literary and later, biblical criticism that has presented a challenge to the sole authority of the text is reader-response criticism. In response to the past decades' emphasis on the importance of the text, reader-response criticism has taken the role of the reader in creating meaning in the reading process seriously. The question has been raised: Is it possible to consider meaning, not as a property of the text itself, but instead as a function of the experience of the reader engaged in the act of reading the text? Put another way, is it conceivable that the person reading the text has more, or at least equal, power in the reader-text relationship? (Fowler 1992:51). Such questions shake the foundations upon which learned helplessness thrives. Reader-response criticism forces a re-evaluation of the reader in the process of reading, by highlighting the capacity a reader has to make choices, and reiterating the privilege to question texts, ourselves and other readers. This affirmation of the individual reader provides a necessary balance to the all-powerful text or all-knowing interpreter.

Too often, questions addressed to God or the Biblical texts are made out to be evidence of immature faith and an affront to divine authority. Submission, quiet and humility are raised as the prized attitudes of a truly faith-filled heart. Ironically, this is in stark contrast to many narratives that appear within the Bible itself. Prickett (1981:109) notes, the

characteristic mode of encountering God within Scripture is not the traditional line of submission that one might suspect but instead, of argument. He writes, ‘Wrestling Jacob, or Abraham pleading for the cities of the plain...sets the tone for book after book of the Old Testament – culminating, perhaps, in the great debates of Job. Moreover, it is a tradition of which God seems to approve. Abraham, Jacob, Elijah and Job are all men whose passion for arguing with God finds favour and reward.’

A biblicist or fundamental approach to Scripture removes the freedom to make choices. While the intention is no doubt to protect against poor choices, removing the right to practise choosing at all stands directly in the way of character development and personal spiritual maturity. As a result the Bible becomes a book that blocks life, instead of bringing it, and a believer is educated in a hermeneutic of faith and Scripture that is detrimental to growth.



CHAPTER 2

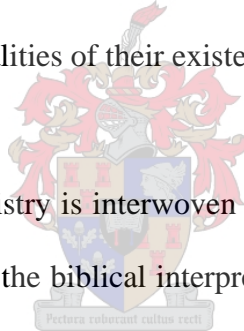
PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL PROBLEMATICS IN CHURCH LEADERSHIP

*'Everyone thinks of changing the world,
but no one thinks of changing himself'
- Leo Tolstoy*

The vocation of ministry is intimately wrapped up with the identity of the pastor. While others may speak of a career or a job, the pastor often speaks of a vocation (Moynagh 1995:882). Vocation suggests an earthly agenda with links to heaven – a meeting of God and humanity in the realm of work. Freud (cited in McDargh 1983:89) proposed that 'lieben und arbeiten', to love and to work, are the two components necessary for fulfilled existence. Reflecting on this, it would appear that the role of pastor provides the ideal place to give expression to both of these elements in fulfilling and meaningful ways. Facilitating this daily process requires, however, that clergy be open to continued personal and professional growth. This can at times be challenging and is often neither pleasant nor safe (Weiser 1994:155).

Writing on pastoral identity, Marshall (cited in Ramsay 1998:84) emphasises that it is a 'highly dynamic, evolving, and intrinsically relational process'. Sadly, however, the necessary emphasis on selfhood and personal development too often falls by the way when pastors enter formal ministerial roles. The responsibility of ministry is translated into different tasks that require upkeep, and less pressing or visible needs are relegated to

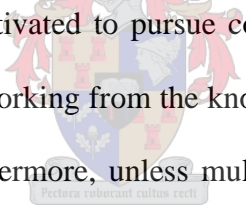
the end of the 'To Do' list. The typical functions of preaching, teaching and counselling dominate, with the Bible taking a central role in all of these functions. What is often lost is the importance of simply living the Scriptures, apart from preaching or teaching about them. What is insufficiently acknowledged is that selfhood, an actual living of what is preached and communicated from Scripture, is essential for an authentic fulfilling of the role of pastor. This interrelationship of living and reading is so important because it is the most basic model of 'the Bible applied to life' for many believers and constitutes what they would consider faithful Christian living. Peterson (1992:172) emphasises this in writing about the vocation of a pastor, 'What pastors do, or at least are called to do, is really quite simple. We say the word *God* accurately, so that congregations of Christians can stay in touch with the basic realities of their existence...'



The life and work of pastoral ministry is interwoven with the biblical text. Countryman (2003:1) states that: 'The work of the biblical interpreter has never been more confusing and complex than it is now.' While he is here commenting on the present experience within academia, the same could be said for those involved in church leadership. With the lengthening of recorded history and the accelerated pace of the acquisition of knowledge, interaction with any given topic in today's world demands a considered juggling of multiple contributors. This means that increasingly special time and care must be taken with communicating the meaning of a text as rich and complex as the Bible. For many involved in ministry, however, the task of considered and reliable interpretation of Scripture is viewed as one task among many, rather than the foundation of the ministry that follows.

2.1 LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

It cannot be denied that pastoring provides a unique vocation. This uniqueness is often, however, interpreted as exclusivity – a sense that the aspects that frame other careers are not applicable in what is regarded as ‘a calling’. That means that where other work situations have accountability features such as performance measurement build in, or annual requirements of further education to maintain professional registration, the ministry of a local congregation seldom has such formal arrangements. This means that there is a lack of accountability, both on a personal and professional level, in many ministry positions and this has direct implications for how clergy engage with the Bible, and the quality of pastoral care given.



Unless an individual leader is motivated to pursue continued study with regards to the Bible, church leadership is often working from the knowledge base originally obtained in Bible College or seminary. Furthermore, unless multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary skills and paradigms were introduced and accepted at that early stage, it is not uncommon for biases to be established that are able to remain unchallenged in the local church setting. Reflecting on the general tendency of ‘mainline’ denominations to simultaneously acknowledge and ignore biblical scholarship, Countryman notes that, once a student is in a position of pastoral leadership, s/he often begins to lean more toward an exclusively sentimental use of the biblical text (2003:14). These one dimensional and inadequate ways of approaching the text and its interpretation are then transferred to others through preaching and teaching. With the pastoral role being one of spiritual and administrative authority within the church body, these exegetical methods

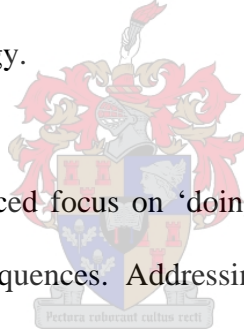
are often accepted uncritically by lay believers, and become incorporated into or form the framework for how they then approach the Bible.

In many ways, this would appear to be a product of a process that begins within the institution of learning. Practical considerations, such as funding and time constraints, often force an essentialist approach that attempts to cover as much of a curriculum as possible. This means that students are shown the means to acquire knowledge but not necessarily wisdom. Highlighting this discrepancy, Fowl and Jones (1997:112) argue for wisdom in interpreting Scripture, and not simply knowledge of methods or linguistics. This wisdom is not a product of sound education alone, but requires developing, ‘specific patterns of acting, feeling, and thinking well’ (Fowl and Jones 1997:112). Thus the interpretation of Scripture becomes an embodiment of what is read, the ‘living word’ in action. While this is the ideal, too often pastors are left to their own devices in the task of reflecting God’s character. Some denominations do attempt to provide mentorship or accountability structures to address the needs of the pastoral staff, but the all too regular failings of clergy, at times reflected in the popular media, suggest that still more needs to be done. Ultimately, when pastors fail as people, immediate doubt is cast on their message and its source, the Bible.

2.2 LIMITED SELF-AWARENESS

The lack of accountability concerns not only the responsibilities that form part of the pastoral role, but often the personhood of the pastor as well. McNish (2004:185) notes, ‘There is far too much projection by members of the clergy...of disease and pathology on

those whom we serve, and far too little introspection and examination of our own motives, disease and, pathology.’ Countryman (2003:3) notes that the work of the scriptural interpreter calls for a certain ‘ethos’ or ‘character’ in the one who pursues it. As noted earlier, this aspect of learning is underemphasised in theological education. Too often, course content takes precedence over character content. Character formation finds some expression in the concept of spiritual formation, but as Willard (2003:4) notes, this is a catch-all category that generally conveys little specific information. Traditionally, spiritual formation as an attempt at the more intimate and in-depth processes of spiritual direction has found a greater welcome in Roman Catholic circles than in Protestant religiosity. The practice of the spiritual disciplines, in particular, has, therefore, been all but buried in Protestant ecclesiology.



The consequences of the unbalanced focus on ‘doing’ at the expense of ‘being’ in the pastoral role has had serious consequences. Addressing this in his introduction to writing on the spiritual disciplines, Foster (1989:1) writes, ‘Superficiality is the curse of our age. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.’ The failure to take seriously the need for personal and character development has delivered church leadership adept at fulfilling a certain role, but not necessarily able to translate a faith effectively into the challenges of this century. This superficiality translates into how the Bible is taught, and ultimately into the life of every congregant in the pew. The reluctance to grapple with issues of self breeds a reluctance to grapple with other areas of difficulty, and deep interaction with the Bible is maintained only on the sparsest of levels. The Bible’s power to penetrate to the will,

heart and spirit is thus diffused, resulting in what Willard (2003:7) describes as, the ‘now common failure of committed Christians to rise much above a certain level of decency.’

The pastoral role is one of the few practical spaces where the habits of character and moral formation can be visible and accessible to lay believers. These habits are intimately interwoven with the constant considered interpretation and reinterpretation of the biblical text (Fowl and Jones 1997:114). Unless church leadership takes up the challenge of lifelong learning in relationship to the Bible, interpretation is often reduced to mere methods of convenience, and stagnant ones at that. This has direct implications for the congregations under such leadership. A study by Robert Wuthnow (cited in Jones 2003:144) on ‘Bible study’ groups within the American context found that, although such groups functioned under the auspices of Bible study, they were more focused on providing personal support to each other than on study of the Bible per se. When it came to interaction with the text, Wuthnow found, such groups often produced ‘wooden interpretations’ (e.g. “The Bible helped me get a job, therefore it must be true.”), revealing little actual knowledge of or skill in biblical interpretation. This small group context echoes a similar situation in numerous local congregations, a situation for which church leadership must take a large measure of responsibility. Ultimately church leadership’s carelessness about their own and others’ personal character development and the challenges of interpreting the Bible has a direct impact on how the Bible is understood or appropriated for life, and whether these efforts truly bear fruit in practical terms.

Certain church leaders' lack of relationship with themselves, reflects in a lack of relationship with the biblical text. Fowl and Jones (1997:124) propose one means to address this relational void: 'Christians...need to learn to read the Scriptures "over-against ourselves" rather than simply "for ourselves".' This requires entering into dialogue with the text and giving it permission to speak. Thus Scripture is able to interrogate the reader, opening possibilities of dramatic and deep transformation. This process must be initiated, lived and taught by church leadership. Furthermore, an active willingness to struggle with obscure and difficult texts in a critical and authentic manner must be cultivated. Engagement in this process puts paid to the superficiality previously noted by Foster, as the place of both the text and the reader are affirmed in the process of making meaning. This brings the practice of pastoring, by active engagement in faith and life, into the midst of the community of believers, and makes visible the life that is proclaimed by a Living Word. Church leadership has at times, however, typically struggled to maintain a balance between being accepting of inadequacy and striving for the new creation that salvation initiates. In large measure it has dealt with this by holding up a veneer of perfection and actively hiding the difficulty of simultaneously being both a believer and a human being. As long as each week reveals some form of biblical product, little attention is paid to the process of how this product is achieved or the actual impact it exerts. Such haphazard interaction with the biblical text plays out its consequences in the pastoral care context, in how both the pastor and the text are able to function.

2.3 INAPPROPRIATE USE OF THE BIBLE IN PASTORAL CARE

The consequences of lack of accountability and limited self-awareness have repercussions for biblical interpretation particularly within the realm of pastoral care. Anderson (2001:214) states quite boldly, ‘There is a wrong use of the Bible in attempts to discern God’s will in critical pastoral situations, as well as a right use.’ Inattention to the person of the pastor and the critical nature of biblical interpretation typically results in stilted use of Scripture, and impoverishes the pastoral context as a whole. Discussing possible dysfunctional uses of Scripture in pastoral care, Louw (1998:380) highlights seven ways in which the text is used inappropriately. Four of these are highlighted below:

2.3.1 Abstraction and generalization

Instruction from the Bible is given in general terms, focussing on well-known verses or common clichés. This keeps dialogue on a superficial level, and entrenches the perception that Scripture is only communicable or able to be understood in vague, philosophical terms. An individual believer thus fails to connect faith to the minute details of daily life and concludes that the Bible is either not applicable to current life situations or must be forced to find a fit. Furthermore, personal interaction on such an abstract level hinders the human relational development that so often serves as fertile soil for a deeper encounter of God in Scripture. Louw (1998:380) notes, ‘Pastors may also seize on texts to hide their own uncertainty. Scripture then has to compensate for poor counselling skills and the pastors’ personal and identity problems. In this way, Scripture

becomes a buffer between the pastors' unfinished business and the parishioners' problems.'

2.3.2 Biblicism

Biblicism (Louw 1998: 381) is closely linked to fundamentalism, and the approach to Scripture that regards the Bible as a text that contains everything necessary for any situation. It often involves the random use of a text that seems to reflect some truth on a specific situation, by virtue of a significant keyword, or by virtue of the authority inherent in the fact that Jesus said the words contained therein. This approach ignores the context of the text, cultural considerations and the changing nuances in meaning over time. Typically, it models a literal approach to applying the Bible to daily life thus restricting interaction with the text to what appears to have a direct link in vocabulary. Pastoral care then becomes nothing more than a word search. What becomes particularly problematic is when a word 'match' cannot be found. This then results in convoluted semantics in an attempt to have the text 'speak' into current life, while the awareness of possible inauthentic rendering is ignored.

2.3.3 Preaching at problems

In misusing Scripture in pastoral care, one of the common errors is a homiletic approach (Louw 1998:381). This involves preaching a spontaneous mini-sermon to a believer as a way of addressing the issue at hand. As with abstraction and generalisation, it allows the pastor to hide behind the Biblical text, appearing to be competent and caring, but with an inadequate and potentially harmful hermeneutics at play. In essence, the regard of the

counsellor for Scripture and the authority ascribed to the pastoral role are used as a cover for ignorance and limited skill.

2.3.4 Dogmatization

Such an approach does not refer to specific biblical verses during a pastoral meeting, but rather to particular doctrinal issues (Louw 1998:381). In this way, very complex explanations are reduced to simplistic rules supposedly derived directly from Scripture. Unless presented with creativity and sensitivity (Campbell 1985:90), such guidance often comes across as directive and demanding, suggesting that the Bible is a book seemingly opposed to full living.

The abovementioned points highlight some of the consequences for clergy, counsellors and the Bible that occur when the pastoral role loses the urgency and necessity of careful interaction with the biblical text. Sadly, church leadership often fails to see that Scripture can be an ally in the experience of insecurity and pain without having to be used only as a prop. This requires a vulnerability of self and vocation, however, that is all too often lacking in today's pastoral environment.

CHAPTER 3

THE NEGLECT AND ABUSE OF EMOTION

'The will to nothingness, sanctified'
– Nietzsche

Emotions⁵ are often the primary motivators in bringing believers to the point of reading the Bible. It is not uncharacteristic to find a bedridden individual searching the Bible's pages for comfort or solace, or a concerned congregant searching for direction with a major decision. Church leaders are familiar with the boundless enthusiasm that initial conversion brings and the resultant decision of the new believer that a Bible must be on hand at all times in case of an opportunity to share the good news. Even the pages of Scripture itself, especially the Psalms, are filled with emotive language and descriptions of emotional states (Clements 1993:7).

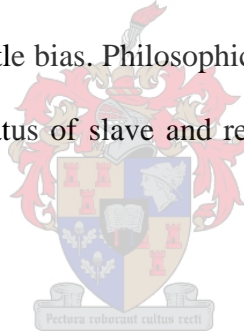
A cursory search through various pastoral care journals and general reference works on the Christian faith, however, reveal limited discussion on emotion as a topic in its own right. It seems that although there is an implicit acceptance that emotion is part of our

⁵ As a term, 'emotion' is difficult to define. Reber & Reber (2001), note, 'The term itself derives from the Latin *emovere*, which translates as *to move*, *to excite*, *to stir up* or *to agitate*. Contemporary usage is of two general kinds: 1) An umbrella term for any of a number of subjectively experienced, affect-laden states, the ontological status of each being established by a label the meaning of which is arrived at by simple consensus. This is the primary use of the term in both the technical and the common language. It is what we mean when we say that love, fear, hate, terror, etc. are emotions. 2) A label for a field of scientific investigation that explores the various environmental, physiological and cognitive factors that underlie these subjective experiences.' My use of the term lies in the primary definition, and I use it interchangeably with the word, 'feelings', although in strict psychological theory there would be more specific distinction.

human makeup, there is little, if any, direct discussion on the topic as it applies to our Christian experience. Cho (2003:2) stresses this in speaking about traditional Sunday school, noting that, ‘Church education has predominantly depended on the cognitive aspect, considering the affective element as trivial.’ This absence around emotional dialogue is reflected in the field of biblical interpretation as well. Perhaps, because so much of biblical interpretation has viewed the Bible as a book or a tool, the reality that it is in fact a text with which we are engaging in a lifelong relationship, has been lost. The lack of attention to this aspect of relating has had as a consequence, the neglect of the part that emotion plays in how we read Scripture.

Other reasons for this dearth on the topic of emotion and the Bible in theological literature are less clear. Two significant influences however, bear mentioning. Firstly, the mode of dualistic thinking that has filtered down through the centuries since the Enlightenment has had a profound effect on how we as human beings categorise our reality, and furthermore, our very selves. Theological reflection has not escaped this ‘overall intellectual metaphor’ (Prokhovnik 1999:4), and anthropologically, human beings have thus been attributed a divided mind and body. Prokhovnik (1999:24) notes furthermore that one of the consequences of dualism has been, that the necessary ability to distinguish between two different things has been extended and perverted into opposition. This opposition typically evolves into a sense of competition and means that eventually there must be a winner and a loser. A result of this, is that reason (traditionally located in the mind) and emotion (traditionally located in the body) are seen as opposite entities and ultimately emotion has been regarded as the inferior party.

The debate around reason and emotion goes back to the ancient Greek philosophers. Although the philosophical conversation was seldom focused on the concept of emotion as such, emotional experience often entered the fray via debate around morality. The topic of emotion was thus inextricably linked with a moral agenda of evaluating good or bad behaviour. Somehow, it seemed, emotion had a part to play in motivating decisions to act. Significantly, however, when weighing up emotion against reason, the influence of emotions was questionable and too often, undesirable. Aristotle's attempts at defining emotions by describing them as, 'that which leads one's condition to become so transformed that his judgment is affected, and which is accompanied by pleasure or pain.' (Solomon 2000:4) reveals this subtle bias. Philosophically and theologically, emotion has therefore been relegated to the status of slave and reason has been awarded the task of master⁶.



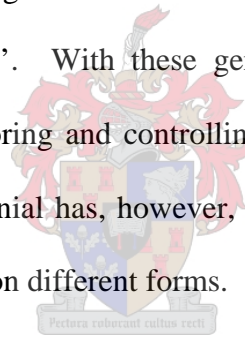
In the second place, a direct result of theology's entanglement within a dualistic paradigm has been the connection between emotion and sin. The assumption that emotion and emotionalism are the same, has resulted in a stigmatization with regard to feelings and their expression and given rise to the culture of restraint, or more specifically repression, evident in so many theological circles⁷. Faith has come to be contrasted with feelings, reinforcing a spiritual reason for denying much of emotional experience. Much of the

⁶ This general perception around emotion has been, for the most part, uncritically assimilated into popular Christian literature. As an example, influential Christian leader, Dr James Dobson, writing in, *Emotions: can you trust them?* makes the comment that, 'when forced to stand alone, feelings usually reveal themselves to be unreliable and ephemeral and even a bit foolish' (1980:6).

⁷ The use of the word, 'repression' has psychological connotations. With regard to emotion, it means to 'put down, suppress, control, censor, exclude' and ultimately has a negative impact on an individual's wellbeing (Reber & Reber 2001:625)

generalization around emotion has resulted in both society and the church forming stereotypes, with the church stopping only to add a moral dimension. Evidence of this is clear in the traditional listing of the seven deadly sins (pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony and lust), almost all of which involve terms that today are commonly associated with emotional states (Capps 1987).

‘Sinful’ behaviour has also been co-opted as proof of the danger of emotion, with classic and popular literature filled with the vivid descriptions of passions resulting in regrettable consequences. Frijda (1996:1), investigating cruel and violent behaviour, typically said to be motivated by political, religious or economical strivings, states, ‘much of this behaviour is driven by emotions’. With these general observations, any attempt at civilization has deemed the censoring and controlling of emotion as a prerequisite. In many cases condemnation and denial has, however, only delayed emotional outburst or encouraged its expression to take on different forms.



3.1 THEOLOGY AND EMOTION – POINTS OF CONTACT

The first considered theological attempt at addressing the tide of negativity surrounding emotion was originated by Schleiermacher (Webster 1988:620). In an attempt to counter the Enlightenment’s demands for a rational explanation for God, Schleiermacher argued that the feeling of what he called ‘absolute dependence’ was the origin of religious experience. Although not speaking singularly of emotion per se, the emphasis on a metaphysical focus of existence, allowed for debate on aspects of selfhood that were intangible (Webster 1988:620). He acknowledged that religion also involved thought and

action, but maintained that feeling was the best measure of the extent of an individual's faith.

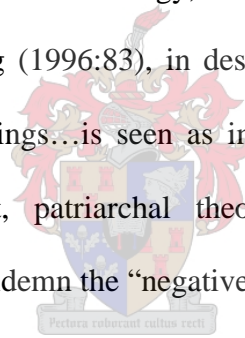
William James, a pioneer of the science of psychology, presented a similar position in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. He too, maintained that feeling was central to religion, enabling one to account for the immediacy and subjectivity of the experience (Watts 1997:247). James was probably responsible in large part for locating the future discussion on emotion and religion within the broader parameters of psychology and situated today, under the auspices of the psychology of religion. As the scientific method was refined, however, emotion was relegated a backseat as more measurable elements such as behaviour, took the foreground.

The recent revival in the interest and study of emotion⁸, has had some positive spin offs for research within religion. Watts (1997:250), for example, notes numerous areas where emotion and religion overlap. Among others, he highlights the experience of feelings, the association with a network of beliefs, physiological components, ritualistic practices and cognitive construction and reflection. Averill (1996:90), writing on the importance of social constructs in the debate on emotion, notes, 'New converts know that they have "arrived", not when they accept intellectually the creed of their new religion, but when they experience the emotions considered appropriate to that religion'. New research is thus drawing explicit links between faith and emotional experience. These areas of

⁸ Strongman (1996) covers at least 150 theories of emotion that have arisen in the past two decades, in the fourth edition of *The Psychology of Emotion – Theories of Emotion in Perspective*.

discussion have as yet, however, not filtered through to the discipline of theology as such and even less to directly impacting pastoral care.

An area where emotion has been recognized theologically for its significance is within feminist and womanist criticism. Although not fully expanded upon even within this field, emotion has been reclaimed as an essential part of humanity's lived existence, and in particular within the experience of women. The necessity of a greater awareness and acceptance of emotions and their expression has been emphasized, especially in view of the fact that emotions are part of our embodiment as living creatures. Feminist critique itself still encounters resistance within theology, however, making the conversation on emotion an implicit victim. Jung (1996:83), in describing the current state of affairs, notes, 'The full spectrum of feelings...is seen as integral to human wholeness within feminist theologies. In contrast, patriarchal theologies are highly suspicious of "emotionalism" in general and condemn the "negative" emotions in particular.'



Possibly the most commonly known convergence of emotion and faith is within the topic of spirituality, an area that has enjoyed growing attention within the past few years (Willard 2003:3). Although the term itself is not easily defined, McGrath (1999:2) attempts a basic definition, reading as follows, 'Christian spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic Christian existence, involving the bringing together of the fundamental ideas of Christianity and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of the Christian faith.' Thus it constitutes an attempt to integrate values, beliefs and will into the practicalities of daily existence and faith made visible.

Furthermore, Stringfellow (1984:22) states, ‘...spiritual fulfilment necessarily involves the *whole* person – body, mind and soul, place, relationships...’ Spirituality then opens the door to encounter with God on a level beyond, though not excluding, the purely rational. It is an area of faith practice that has firm links to the Catholic tradition, but has also historically reflected itself in the Protestant conception of piety. Generally speaking, however, Protestantism has had difficulty integrating emotion and faith, both corporately and individually (Rice 2005). Of necessity, this block has had serious repercussions for the interpretation and interaction with the Bible. Christians who claim to be ‘people of the Book’ will clearly approach the Scriptures with a bias against emotional expression if they also believe themselves to be people of restraint.

Resources on the topic of emotional expression and individual faith are scarce and even more so in the area of emotional experience and the Bible⁹. Past inadequacies in approaching Scripture and prejudice against certain aspects of being human, allow Smith (1993:2) to conclude that, ‘It will become evident that we need an enhanced and more subtle notion of scripture, and a more sensitive awareness of what it means to be human’. The remainder of this chapter will constitute an effort to highlight some of the areas where emotion and the biblical text intersect, emphasising the viability of this interaction and calling for increased focus on these areas of Christian praxis.

⁹ A recent attempt at looking at the gospel of Mark from the aspect of Greek oral performance by Whitney Shiner (2003), includes a chapter on emotion. Shiner notes the importance of emotion in rhetoric, in presenting and shaping opinion, and touches briefly on how Jesus is presented emotionally.

3.2 PROBLEMATICS IN EMOTION AND ECCLESIOLOGY

The following section presents two areas where the traditional neglect of emotion in the interpretation of Scripture has perhaps had a particularly detrimental effect.

3.2.1 Genderedness of emotion

The neglect of the emotive self within ecclesiological tradition has been especially damaging for women. The uncritical absorption of dichotomous hierarchies into the church and theological tradition has in fact dealt a double blow to women. In the first place, a woman's intrinsic value as a self has been undermined by questions of worth around her identity as female. Lloyd (cited in Prokhovnik 1999:6) maintains, 'our trust in a Reason that knows no sex has...been largely self-deceiving'. Arguing further, she writes convincingly that, 'the very definition of reason entailed not only the omission of women, but the expulsion, banishment and exile of women, to the realm identified with nature, *emotions* (my emphasis), passions, body, disorder, formlessness, subordination, passivity, otherness and danger' (Lloyd cited in Prokhovnik 1999:7). This is the result in large part of specific interpretations of Scripture and culturally determined roles around sex and gender.

It has, however, not merely been a matter of denigrating female identity, but of questioning the means of expression thereof as well. In this way, supposed normative ways of being and modes of expression have left women excluded and without the resources to institute change. Shields (2002:11) highlights just how embedded understandings of emotion are in culture and gender and how these affect individual

behaviour in society in general. Providing an example of the contradictory messages sent around emotion in gender, she notes that while emotion is regarded as feminine, anger is more generally seen as masculine. Furthermore, in Christian communities what is often proclaimed as normative is also held up as spiritual and thus, the specific emotional culture within the church has a direct impact on the women believers in that community and how they understand, practice and assimilate their faith.

Psychological research has also highlighted the gender divide in the area of emotion. Current emotions research acknowledges that men and women differ in terms of intensity and expression of emotions. In general, findings indicate that women are more intensely expressive of both positive and negative emotions, and are better able to recognize and decode affective expressions in others (with some exception of anger). While men generally report more pride and loneliness than women, women score higher on experiencing fear and vulnerability. Women are also more likely to experience intropunitive affects such as embarrassment, anxiety and shame (Brody & Hall 2000:344). In attempting explanations of these findings, researchers have highlighted various aspects such as physiology, cognitive processes and social and cultural paradigms as playing a part in emotion processes.

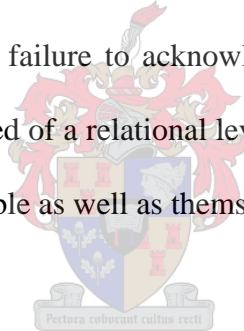
A crucial point made in psychological research is that women tend to generalize their emotional expressiveness across facial, physiological and verbal modalities (Brody & Hall 2000:341). This reveals an encompassing of the whole self in communicating what is being felt. When such expressions are censored, however, reprimand is in turn

communicated back to all the areas of self. In this way body, thoughts and feelings are judged unacceptable – and the very act of ‘emotioning’ (Drodge 2000:188) – or ‘being’ for a woman, is condemned¹⁰.

Unfortunately, pastoral care has been an accomplice in the emotional neglect and manipulation of women. In contradiction of its aims to care for, understand and empathise with all believers, pastoral care has often merely created a context perpetuating the stereotypical attitudes evident in society. Thus women have been regarded as inferior creatures, locked into assumptions around their biology and spirituality. Riet Bons-Storm (1996) highlights this situation in her book, *The Incredible Woman - Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. She emphasizes that although a sophisticated literature has for some decades existed in feminist philosophy, psychology and theology, very little of it actually influences the field of pastoral care. Thus pastors understand their focus too often to be on illness and death, when instead, so many women (and men) struggle to live authentically. Women's efforts to express these ‘life’ concerns fall on deaf ears, however, as their means of expression, are regarded as overwrought, overly sensitive or out of control. In attempting to clarify the problem areas in pastoral care, Bons-Storm narrates the stories of various women who have encountered discrimination. One such woman, Sophie, when asked, whether she would talk to a pastor about her problems replied, “I would certainly not do so. Of course I've talked to a pastor every now and then in the past, but when things have come up that were really important to me, I got the impression that the pastor thought what he understood as ‘obvious’ was far more important than my particular questions” (Bons-Storm 1996:16).

¹⁰ Drodge uses the term ‘emotioning’ as a verb to emphasize its inseparability from thinking and behaving.

This pastoral understanding of the ‘obvious’ appears directly related to how the Bible is interpreted. In many cases it is firstly linked to the ‘condition’ (Braidotti cited in Bons-Storm 1996:20) of being a woman. This assumption of ‘defect’ has strong ties to traditional Christian interpretations of women and the roles that they are allowed in society, many of which are tied up in literal interpretations of biblical passages. The second is the need that so many church leaders experience to defend the Bible. This implies that those who bring challenging questions or ‘irrational’ experiences to the text, are seen to be attacking it, and must be warded off. What is often discredited is that, ‘our deepest longings can be understood as the starting point of a hermeneutical circle’ (Bons-Storm 1996:128). The continued failure to acknowledge these deeper longings means that women in particular, are robbed of a relational level of interaction with Scripture and a deepening appreciation of the Bible as well as themselves.

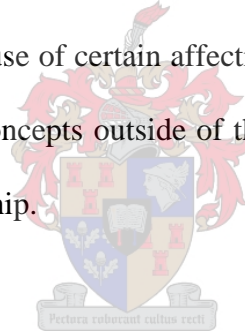


3.2.2 The manipulation of Self-Conscious Emotions

Research in self-conscious emotions has enjoyed increasing attention in recent years, both from a psychological and theological angle. As the term suggests, these are emotions experienced in the complex interface between cognition and affect and involve an individual’s evaluation of themselves, whether positive or negative. Self-conscious emotions include embarrassment, pride, guilt, shame, empathy and envy, among others (Lewis 2000:624). The increased attention in this field reflects a deepening interest in the more complex aspects of human makeup, and greater focus on the personal effects of our social embeddedness in life. As new understandings emerge, however, light is being

shed on the manipulation, whether conscious or not, of emotional experience in the past. The church is thus being forced to reconsider a traditional propensity to label or abuse emotion in pursuing a soteriological agenda.

Practically all Christian believers are familiar with terms such as, ‘guilt’, ‘pride’ and ‘selfishness’. They are words often heard from the pulpit and form fundamental understandings of theological doctrine. The problem is that the theological significance of these terms has not been sufficiently explained apart from their emotional ties. Often, on hearing these words an implicit understanding of the terminology is assumed, when in fact these concepts are in desperate need of a fuller engagement. Furthermore, the biblical text, although rich in the use of certain affective language such as ‘love’, is quite restricted in embellishing these concepts outside of the biblical culture and ethos, or the limits of the God-human relationship.



Readers of the biblical text are also often exposed to dialogue between biblical characters without necessarily having insight into what emotions the characters are experiencing as they speak. This means that interpretations of biblical texts are highly reliant on the emotional intelligence of whoever is teaching on the passage. Such a situation has paved the way for generalizations, a dominantly male point of view and the stilted use of emotional expression and experience within the Christian tradition. In general, biblical interpretation and preaching has been used to elicit certain self-conscious emotions exclusively in the service of getting souls saved and sinners sanctified. One of the primary emotions enlisted in this agenda has been guilt.

3.2.2.1 Guilt as motivator and manipulator

Guilt is a concept that all Christians have some familiarity with. Whether correctly defined or not, it is a word that possesses immense spiritual loading and emotive content. Due in large part to its vastness and vagueness, it has been the topic of numerous sermons and expositions of Scripture. In many instances, however, its power to motivate individuals' behaviour has been purposefully warped through exegesis, to encourage a certain way of being. Many such interpretations may lead to the assumption that guilt is the problem. This is often incorrect. The nagging feeling of guilt is rather, the symptom of a traditional Christian teaching that in part, originates with the writings of Augustine (Cooper 2003:76). In discussing vices and virtues, Augustine argued that pride was the primary flaw of all humanity. The teaching, that pride is to be avoided at all costs and if encountered, to be reversed in self-sacrificial love, has formed a tap root of Christian tradition. With this in mind, the church's warning is continuous and insistent that Christians must be aware of and counter pride. While there is validity to this warning, problems arise, however, when there is a failure to define what pride is and what constitutes feelings of pride. The failure to enunciate this clearly has led to pride becoming the label of choice for attempting to address many forms of unwanted behaviour. Furthermore, pride has become equated with any talk of self which is affirmative or laudatory (Evans 1988:77). The essence of pride and selfishness has intermingled with confidence and a sense of self-worth, to the extent that, for many believers, they have become interchangeable. Grogan (1995:477) reflects this often unconscious bias when writing, 'God's goal for his church and so for every Christian is

maturity in Christ...This should affect our whole perspective on the Christian life, the main goal of which should not be happiness or self-realization but holiness...'. This means that regularly, Christian believers attempting to define or build a self, are hounded by feelings of guilt that they are acting selfishly and therefore contradicting their faith. Thus a cycle of self abnegation occurs, typically fuelled by sermons on selected portions of Scripture.

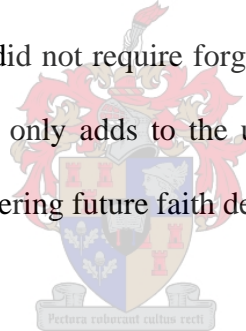
Providing an alternative angle to Christianity's manipulation of guilt, Capps (1993:71) asserts that when many people use the theological language of guilt, they are instead articulating feelings of shame. He explains this, showing how the definition of shame contrasts with guilt in the following way. Guilt, he defines as primarily concerned with a failure to live up to the expectations of others (Capps 1993:72). This aligns well with traditional theology that places our sin as a barrier between us and God, and presses believers to acknowledge their culpability in wrongdoing before God. They are thus both 'guilty of' wrongful action, and feel 'guilty for' what they have done. Shame, is instead, a response to our failure to live up to an ideal that we have held for ourselves; a recognition of our self-deficiency, and is therefore more intimately woven within the self than what guilt is. Shame, writes Capps (1993:71), 'contribute(s) to a sense of self-depletion, of self-diminishment. Even as we experience such feelings, we feel low, depressed, vulnerable, empty, or insignificant'. Thus, while guilt has the 'other' as a victim, in the case of shame, the victim is in fact, the self.

The failure to distinguish guilt and shame has led to countless shame experiences being handled with the tools used to manage guilt. This only serves to increase the trauma to the self, and exacerbate the alienation that believers can experience in the church. Capps (1993:82) highlights two such examples. Firstly, the assumption that self-disclosure makes a person feel better, while often applicable to guilt, does not always apply to shame. Recounting a shaming experience, instead, forces one to relive the shame and often adds to the emotional burden, by increasing the feeling of being ashamed, as one recounts the self's inadequacies all over again. Christian tradition has, however, emphasised the necessity of confessing 'sin' before God and humankind, creating the possibility of forcing confessions of guilt that were in fact, misdirected. Helen Lewis' groundbreaking study on shame and guilt (cited in Capps 1993:153), points out that guilt is more prevalent among men, while women more often feel shame. This has meant that patriarchal ecclesial structures have been 'requiring Christian women to interpret their experiences of shame within the conceptual framework provided by the theology of guilt, and therefore to do violence to their own experience' (Capps 1993:86). Thus, the confusion of shame and guilt has had particularly negative effects for women believers.

Secondly, because shame experiences are unpredictable, unlike guilt, they cannot be 'learnt from' as such (Capps 1993:83). Where guilt can be confessed, reassurance of forgiveness given and future steps taken to prevent repeating the offence, shame only results in self-constriction and diminished interaction in new situations. Too often, however, believers are encouraged to 'take a lesson from God' out of a negative emotional experience. A failure to do this is construed as disobedience to the will of

God. There is seldom an acknowledgement that not all life lessons are positive, and that referring to God's will, is at times, simply used as a cover for failure to engage with particularly difficult questions.

As has been noted, the experience of shame is deeply bruising, and leaves the self with few resources to heal. Many individuals have approached the church hoping for repair, only to encounter a misnaming of experience, and an additional burden placed on them. Due to the emphasis on guilt, they have been seen as guilty of sin and required to repent, when often the original experience left them ashamed and not guilty. Thus they have been called to 'confess' something that could not be confessed, and have been told they are 'forgiven' for something that did not require forgiveness. The emotional dissonance that results from such encounters only adds to the uncertainty around interaction with God and the Bible, ultimately hindering future faith development.



3.2.2.2 An ecclesial responsibility

How then, do self-conscious emotions arise and how would the church be implicated in their manipulation? Lewis (2000:623) notes the difficulty in investigating these complex emotions, firstly, because they seldom reveal themselves in body or facial expression, and secondly, because they have no clear, set elicitors to aid predicting under what circumstances they will occur. What Lewis does highlight is the necessity of cognitive processes in eliciting these emotions, and how deeply the notion of self is caught up in these processes. In attempting a more structured approach to the discussion, he presents a structural model of how these emotions can be elicited (Lewis 2000: 624). The relevance

of these processes to the pastoral context will become clear as the model is presented. What emerges, is the ideal environment that the church and pastoral care provides for eliciting certain self-conscious emotions, and how this has enabled emotional manipulation in the past and helps to perpetuate it in the present.

Lewis names his model, *A Cognitive-Attributional Theory of Self-Conscious Emotion*, and I provide a cursory description of it here. The first feature of the model emphasizes the role of standards, rules and goals (SRG's) that govern human behaviour. The information that helps establish SRG's is gathered through socialization in a specific culture, or a specially established group such as a church congregation. Maintaining full membership within the group requires that one adhere to these SRG's and incorporate their prescriptions into identity formation and personal development (Lewis 2000:626). These standards, rules and goals will therefore significantly influence how one thinks, feels and acts. The formation of SRG's is a process that occurs automatically within each ecclesiastical tradition. One of the problems with SRG's in the religious context, is the possibility of vague or biased biblical interpretations forming the base of subsequent behaviour guides, and the limited structures to address any resultant inconsistency. The spiritual dimension of this process also requires that morality feature prominently in the process, often creating room for uncritical notions of good and bad behaviour.

The second part of the model entails the self evaluation that one engages in around one's thoughts, feelings and actions. This requires self-reflection followed by a cognitive conclusion of whether what one has done, thought or felt was a success or failure. The

intricacies within this process have received a great deal of attention within attributional theory. Attributions involve the reasons that people give for why they have failed or succeeded, and how they ultimately define the two concepts. Basically speaking, attributions are generally internal or external (i.e. internal – success or failure is attributed to the self; external – success or failure is attributed to circumstances or others), and are influenced by situational factors, upbringing and past experiences of reward and punishment, among others. The form of attribution that one ascribes to has direct relevance for the emotion that will be experienced (Lewis 2000:627).

The process of internal evaluation is one that is insisted upon within the Christian framework of acknowledging sin and seeking forgiveness. The Christian faith also provides a specific paradigm within which self, others and the world is understood. It is thus an active agent in shaping the resources that believers draw on in making their attributions of self-worth and how ‘faithfully’ they live out their convictions and beliefs. Those in church leadership enjoy a great deal of power in presenting the ‘SRG’s according to Scripture’. These interpretations are foundational in what believers internalize as right or wrong and consequently act upon. Furthermore, if one is to follow a linear approach, the end result of these initial interpretations is certain emotions, and within Christianity, as previously highlighted, particularly the emotions of guilt and shame.

Typically, most of pastoral care begins with emotional content, in the sense that they are seen as symptoms signifying spiritual problems. Lewis’ model suggests that, in fact,

certain emotions have a much earlier origin, and are deeper within the self than cursory counselling will reach. Lewis (2000:634) states, ‘...given the place of self-evaluation in adult life, it seems clear that the self-conscious evaluative emotions are likely to stand in the center of our emotional life’. If this is true, it becomes all the more crucial that pastoral care reevaluate the definition of what are generally considered negative emotions, and investigate their origins more fully. A failure to do this will simply allow what is often akin to emotional abuse, to continue and further alienate struggling believers from the Body of Christ.

In conclusion, it is not only individual believers’ struggle with self that results from the neglect of emotion within the church. One of the most significant, yet often unnoticed, casualties of emotional neglect and abuse has been the image that believers are able to form of God. The ambiguous, and at times even harsh reception, that human emotion has experienced within Christianity, has sadly, spilled over into how the person of God is understood. While the image of God has not necessarily been rendered emotionless, God has typically been attributed only certain emotions, and these emotions themselves, almost always appear under the cloak of a tempered love. Although a relationship with God is cloaked in emotive language, for too many believers this is an abstract knowledge that does not reach the heart. Thus, although the sense of relationship is spoken about it is not really felt or experienced.

Louw (1998:332) contends that ‘an appropriate God image promotes more constructive and purposeful actions’. Just as a positive, realistic image of God brings life and purpose

to a believer's life, a harsh or negative image can distort expectations of faith, and resultantly hamper fulfilled Christian living. A crucial component of forging both a constructive image of God and of the individual self, is an awareness and cultivation of emotional experience. It has therefore become increasingly important that the proclaimed message of love in the Christian faith, not only be heard, but truly felt and experienced as well.

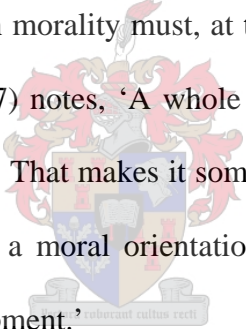


CHAPTER 4

HOW MORALITY IS DEFINED

*'The hell to be endured hereafter,
of which theology tells,
is no worse than the hell we make for ourselves in this world
by habitually fashioning our characters
in the wrong way'
- William James*

The final factor to be addressed in describing what contributes to a hermeneutic of learned helplessness, requires some exploration of what is understood as Christian morality. Any attempt to speak on morality must, at the start, acknowledge the vastness of the subject. Schwartz (1995:257) notes, 'A whole cluster of processes is covered by this concept of "moral formation". That makes it somewhat ambiguous, but quite rightly leaves the process of building up a moral orientation open to many individual partial processes of formation and development.'



Despite an acknowledgement in research literature of the complexity of the debate on what constitutes morality and moral formation, however, for many believers an all too simplistic approach to moral issues seems to remain the norm in many congregations. In writing on ethics and ecclesia, Mudge (1999:245) states, '(moral) formation can go wrong. It can present partial insights or distorted vision. It can be "mal-formation".' Driven largely by claims of a biblical basis, directives on moral behaviour are today, often simplified to such an extent that a believer is ill equipped to negotiate the different nuances demanded by considered moral engagement. It is this over simplification firstly,

of what exactly constitutes ‘good’ and ‘evil’, and secondly, of locating morality’s expression primarily within behaviour, that fosters the hermeneutic described in this dissertation. As noted in previous chapters, much of this bias originates with how Scripture is interpreted.

As introduction to the complexity of the debate, I will briefly highlight some of the more influential work on moral formation done in psychological and theological circles to date. This serves to emphasise how difficult a discussion on moral matters is, and to highlight the varying points of emphasis on the Bible and the church, even within the broader Christian tradition. Against the backdrop of this brief historical overview, I will move on to highlight the crucial role that the church plays as arena for moral formation in individual believers, and how the misdirection of this influence can result in moral apathy and learned helplessness.



4.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Historically, psychoanalytic theory attempted the first psychological model of moral development. For Freud, moral development was rooted in the emergence of a component of the personality known as the superego. To him the basic instinctual drives of aggression and sex were already apparent in childhood. He insisted that parents frustrate these drives in their attempts to socialise their children into the broader community. As children are unable to retaliate effectively against their parents, they internalise the prohibitions of their parents, thus conforming to societal norms. Anxiety, guilt and fear of punishment, function as primary motivators in continuing the formative

process of moral behaviour into adulthood. Thus the superego represents an internal parent, ensuring self-control (Vander Zanden 1998:272).

The stage approach to human development was introduced into psychological circles following Erikson's influential eight-stage model of psycho-social lifespan development. Jean Piaget also adopted a stage approach in investigating the cognitive development of young children, after becoming intrigued by how children use reason. His work then formed the foundation for a stage theory, introduced by Lawrence Kohlberg, focussing specifically on moral development. In brief, Kohlberg proposed six stages, on three levels, ranging from Preconventional morality to Conventional morality to Postconventional morality (Weiten 1989:398).

Behavioural and learning theory attempted to provide another angle to moral development than the purely psychoanalytical or cognitive. Researchers such as Bandura and Mischel, emphasised the role that social interaction, and particularly imitation played, in helping children to identify the difference between right and wrong. Moreover, they emphasised that social behaviour is variable and changes in varying situational contexts. Consequently, moral behaviour is not simply an innate response, but is constantly influenced by life's circumstances (Vander Zanden 1998:273).

Present day scientific research within the field of moral formation remains divided into three broad areas: behaviour, affect and cognition. Attempts to integrate or employ a more holistic approach have met with limited success (Rest 1984:24). This is perhaps a

clear consequence of Kurtines & Gewirtz's (1984:6) assessment that, 'contemporary moral thinking tends no longer to be so much concerned with the justification of a particular set of universal or objective moral standards as with the question of whether such standards can be justified at all, and, for the first time in history, relativistic moral thinking has become part of the mainstream of Western thought'.

4.2 CHRISTIAN EMPHASES

Interestingly, while psychology speaks of morality in terms of development, Christian literature more often uses the term 'formation'. As such, Christianity betrays its very real goal of actively directing what constitutes morality, in a specific direction. Christian debate on moral formation has located itself within the broader discussion on ethics. Biggar (1993:164) provides a compact, but enlightening, history of ethical development in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought*. He divides historical developments in the field under the headings of Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant ethics. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will highlight basic developments in the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches only.

Biggar begins the review on Roman Catholic ethics in the wake of the Reformation. Among various criticisms of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, the Roman Catholic Church was concerned that this doctrine would result in moral laxity. The Council of Trent (1545-63) thus focussed on moral discipline, through defining various sins and the appropriate penance to be made. This resulted in a moral theology that was 'characterised by its abstraction both from consideration of the spiritual grounds

and end of moral life and from the more positive task of the cultivation of the virtues’, directing its focus instead on the ‘transgression of specific moral laws’ (Biggar 1993:164). Furthermore, natural law, with its origins in the work of Thomas Aquinas, increasingly took centre stage, as did the reliance on human reason.

Throughout ensuing debates on moral issues, a defining characteristic of Catholicism was the authority of the church, as represented by the upper clerical structures of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This structure of authority culminated after the First Vatican Council stipulated the infallibility of the pope’s moral teaching. The rigidity of this system did not go unchallenged, but it was Häring who introduced the new lines of direction for Catholic moral theology. Stepping out of the mould, he addressed both clergy and laity, picturing the moral life as an imitation of Christ, in response to the grace shown by God. While the definition of moral principles remained the task of the magisterium, making concrete moral judgements was essentially a responsibility given to all of God’s people. Greater receptivity was also accorded to knowledge in the social sciences and other Christian traditions (Biggar 1993:166).

Current Catholic moral thinking still relies heavily on papal statements to reflect and direct thinking on political, economic and social concerns. As such, it has linked individual moral formation to a walk of faith and an active existence within a religious community, directed and guided by the church leadership.

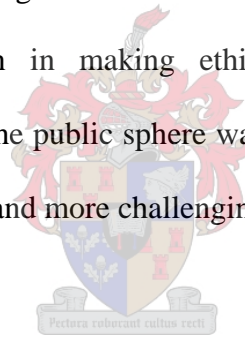
The Protestant debate on ethics has been influenced especially around questions of its theological or philosophical genesis. Philip Melancthon especially set a precedent for separating ethics from Christian dogmatics, spawning a casuistic approach to ethical questions (Biggar 1993:172). However, this approach was largely abandoned as the debate moved to the broader scope of the nature and foundations of morality.

The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason was brought to bear on issues of morality as well. Increasingly, moral principles were drawn from nature by reason rather than specifically Christian sources or revelation, as in Kant's *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793). Before long there was reaction against the overly rational emphasis, led by theologians such as Schleiermacher and Hegel who sought to remind ethicists of soteriology and the influence an individual's freedom had on ethics. Kierkegaard emphasised morality as part of a response to a divine calling, so that common morality was subsumed under the demands of Christian discipleship (Biggar 1993:174).

Emil Brunner and Dietrich Bonhoeffer also followed the approach of ethics being a response to a divine command, while still allowing for elements such as the family, the church and the state to be influential as well. The interplay between love and justice was brought into sharp focus by the writings of Richard Niebuhr. How love is defined in the face of rules and circumstances, was argued by Fletcher in his influential, *Situation Ethics* published in 1966. Fletcher argued that 'love is the only Christian norm; that, although moral rules are useful guides to the kinds of action that usually express love, in the end

love must discern in each situation what is the most loving thing to do; and that there will be some occasions when love will require the suspension of pre-fabricated rules' (Biggar 1993:176).

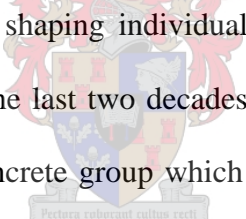
At present, with increased emphasis on community and ecumenical problems, certain authors have stressed 'middle axioms'. A phrase introduced by J.H. Oldham and now expanded on by Preston, middle axioms are described as 'directions' for social practice that are midway between universal principles of social ethics and particular policies, embodying both moral principles and informed empirical judgements (Biggar 1993:176). Stressing the importance of middle ground has been an effort to broaden the scope of the factors taken into consideration in making ethical judgements. Furthermore, as Christianity's direct influence in the public sphere wanes, the debate on how we live out Christian morality becomes more and more challenging (De Gruchy 2004:56).



4.3 MORAL FORMATION AND THE CHURCH COMMUNITY

Of first importance is to note that the discussion on morality contextualizes itself within two broad areas: the community and the individual. These two spaces are constantly interrelating and informing each other. On the one hand, it is noted that we are unable to speak about being moral outside of a group, as concepts such as kindness, equality and human rights require a social setting to actually become concepts (Rasmussen 1995:182). Vander Zanden (1998:272) explains, 'Morality involves how we go about distributing the benefits and burdens of a cooperative group existence'.

Simultaneously, society or a community is non-existent without the various individuals who make it up. In this way, Rasmussen notes that we possess a consciousness of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ just by virtue of our humanness (1995:181). Thus, the ultimate decision-making exercise on whether to follow a certain course of action or not, can be influenced by, but is not fully at the mercy of, society. Moral agency confirms that an individual, as a single entity, is ultimately able to make moral judgements and act on them (Helm 1995:604). Broadly speaking then, these two ‘actors’, community and the individual, create, experience and recreate, the kind of moral environment in which they function. Their combined interaction is crucial in shaping the picture that a group and individual hold up as the ideal moral environment to strive for.

A faint watermark of a university crest is centered on the page. It features a shield with various symbols, topped with a crown and a figure holding a staff. Below the shield is a banner with the Latin motto "Pectora robustant cultus recti".

The importance of community in shaping individual identity and moral outcomes has been increasingly emphasised in the last two decades. Schwartz (1999:258) notes, ‘All morality is always related to a concrete group which shares common value-orientations and a common worldview. It is part of a way of life and thus socially anchored...Morality is accordingly the morality of persons who belong to communities.’ The importance of social factors and community influence in moral formation is particularly noteworthy in the context of the church. The church typically positions itself as a specific community, with a spiritually mandated role to provide direction on how to distinguish between good and evil, and as such, it taps directly into this power that community exerts. Thus, in many believers’ eyes, and at times, even the broader social setting, it is accorded a special authority to deliver direction on moral issues. Christian theology’s emphasis on relationship, both with God and with others, ensures furthermore

that the church will maintain a crucial voice on morality even into the future. Christianity as a faith is paradoxically located in our being created in the image of God, as well as being human. Christian communities will by their very nature therefore, continually constitute an ‘ethical event’ (Barth cited in Anderson 2001:205).

4.3.1 The means of moral formation

How does the church engage in the task of moral formation? Rasmussen (1995:183) highlights four means by which congregations actively influence and direct individual morality namely, practices or habits, structures or roles, specific instruction and role models.



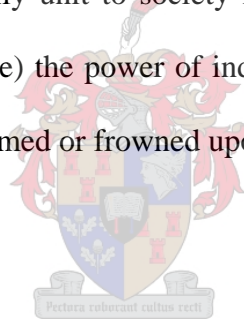
4.3.1.1 Practices or habits

This point emphasises that repeated communal activities are a means toward moral education. Rasmussen quotes Meeks (cited in Rasmussen 1993:109) in stating that ‘practice makes morals’. Habitual thinking and behaving thus form a cornerstone of building character. This is true on an individual as well as communal level. Often spoken of as rituals, these repeated activities force a continual return to a focal point, acting as reminders of what binds, orders and sustains daily life. Furthermore, they include and challenge the entire person – emotionally, spiritually, cognitively and behaviourally (Rasmussen 1995:184). As both thought and action are involved, there is always room for ever deepening understanding of what makes us moral, and how we can

actively live this out. Such repetition is a cornerstone of Christian ecclesiological tradition and doctrine.

4.3.1.2 Structures or roles

A further crucial element in moral formation is answering the question, ‘Where does authority lie?’ Writing on order and roles, Rasmussen (1995:184) states, ‘Structures channel behaviour and, by doing so, form character and conduct. Morality is learned by taking on specified roles and carrying out the responsibilities tied to them’. Thus the ordering of people, from the family unit to society in general, is a morally potent act. How we as humans use (and abuse) the power of individuals or groups is instructive of the values and virtues that are affirmed or frowned upon.



4.3.1.3 Specific instruction

Specific education remains the most readily acknowledged and recognised means of communicating moral direction. This is a function most generally attributed to the church. Teaching takes place in diverse ways, from singing, to biblical exegesis to the ethics presented behind a Sunday school story. While it is often seen to be a formal, institutionalised process, this is not necessarily so. Colby & Damon (1995:353) contend that moral educating occurs as soon as a person is placed in a social context.

4.3.1.4 Role models

Every group or society has representative characters or organisations that are held up as moral examples. These people, stereotypes or organisations embody attitudes and actions that then form a blueprint for what others strive toward. Children, adolescents and adults are reliant on significant others to model ‘how to’ live morally (Rasmussen 1995:184). These significant individuals both help shape and reflect what is culturally, and in the case of faith, spiritually, admired. The pastor and other church leaders are often of specific significance in this role.

The above factors highlight how moral formation constitutes part of the church’s ontological makeup and critical functions. How well the church fulfils the task of moral formation is seldom, however, critically engaged in by lay believers. As noted in previous chapters, the combination of unchecked human and spiritually directed authority, too often provides the ground for neglect, abuse or misdirection of lay believers. As has been noted earlier, the fact that morality can be formed, means that it can be malformed as well. This is often a point of criticism from those outside the church, who note that for all the talk on holiness, too often the church has failed to deliver on the ground. Sadly, the church has not always been, as Mudge (1999:244) writes, ‘...a generator and maintainer of “space” for reconciliation of the issues dividing mankind.’¹¹

¹¹ The current South African context bears witness to this dilemma. South Africa currently faces a particular challenge around addressing the moral fibre of this country. The increased media coverage of specific cases of violence, neglect and abuse against the most vulnerable in society – women and especially, children, has added weight to a growing realization that the character and integrity of our nation and very humanity are under threat. South Africans have been left reeling in recent years, following reports of the rape of infant baby girls, the abduction and murder of young children and the sexual abuse of children by the clergy. Not surprisingly, the visible clash of innocence and human depravity has raised

4.4 MORAL FORMATION AND THE BIBLE

Enmeshed in this debate, is the role of Scripture. In the church, the Bible is inextricably interlinked in the understandings of and directives around moral living. Anderson (2001:213) highlights this, writing, ‘As theological ethics attempts to address questions of human morality and the commandment of God, the role of Scripture is of central concern.’ How precisely the Bible plays out this role is a vast topic that has been debated for centuries. Helpfully, Anderson distinguishes three broad streams of the current use of Scripture in moral formation, namely prescriptive, instructive, and illustrative (2001:213). In the first, the Bible is held up as a book of law, providing binding, very specific rules for living. This interpretation accords with a fundamentalist approach to Scripture that views the Bible as complete and applicable beyond time and space. Secondly, the instructive approach introduces a measure of interpretive leniency, seeing the Bible as providing moral criteria rather than set rules. Here Scripture gives an overarching set of values, ideals and principles that take different contexts into consideration. Finally, an illustrative approach to the Bible’s role in morality, maintains that the Bible is a source of moral wisdom. As such, it provides various examples of moral thought and behaviour, grounded in life and faithful living, and aided by the example of Christ.

awareness among the populace in general that work is needed to restore a respected culture of human rights and dignity.

The Christian church has remained strangely silent on this point, so much so that the government has been the first to attempt to address the issue. Perhaps the church is afraid of critical self-reflection or overwhelmed by the weight of the problem, or simply believes that it is already sufficiently busy in the work of morality. Regardless, noting that numerous social problems are merely symptoms of deeper, underlying problems, the political leadership has placed the issue of morality and ethical behaviour under the spotlight. More specifically, all efforts in regard to the debate on morality have been brought under the broad umbrella of a programme known as The Moral Regeneration Movement, initiated in 2002. This movement aims to develop a caring society, actualising the ideals enshrined in the country’s Constitution, and reigniting the spirit of ubuntu. While these efforts are laudible, it is disconcerting that government has taken the initiative on openly addressing moral matters, in a country that claims a Christian majority. This only serves to highlight the church’s seeming inability to take the lead in providing practical and theological guidance in building and maintaining society.

I wish to focus for a moment more closely on the first use of Scripture in moral formation noted by Anderson, for it is this prescriptive means of biblical and ecclesial application to moral living that fosters learned helplessness. Gula (2004:316) contends, 'In moral theology, the sun has set on our obsession with the act-analysis of problem-oriented ethics. The new light is dawning on the centrality of the person in the universal call to discipleship and on making a total evaluation of moral issues.' While this shift in emphasis is apparent within academic literature, within church and pastoral care settings, however, there is still an overwhelming equation of morality with behaviour. Church leaders have then taken on themselves the task of directing this behaviour, while they themselves are ultimately guided by their interpretation of the Bible.

The persistence of this act-based approach lies in large part with church leadership's sincere attempts to provide guidance in decision-making. It is simplistically assumed that as long as there are external guidelines to direct action, a straight forward decision of whether to obey them or not, is sufficient to regulate moral behaviour. The Bible is then presented as the manual containing these guidelines (Everding & Wilbanks 1975:24). Perhaps in large part, because behaviour constitutes the visible aspect of morality, the church places emphasis on what can be seen, to the detriment of deeper currents of influence. Schwartz (1999:257) emphasises this bent, noting, 'The Christian faith, it is believed, should manifest visible consequences precisely in the realm of moral actions, and only to the extent it does so is it seriously Christian faith'. So much time and energy

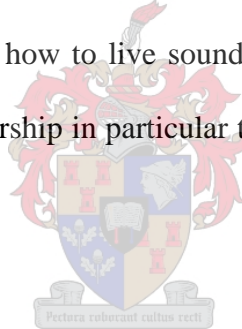
are put into keeping up this appearance, however, that the foundations of faith and character formation are at times neglected.

A simplistic equation of behaviour and morality encourages a hermeneutic of learned helplessness. Evaluating morality along the lines of acts alone often creates rigid thinking and judgmental attitudes. Exclusive focus on such a superficial level, makes for neat appearances, but lacks the substance necessary to handle the increasing complexities of contemporary moral needs. Dallas Willard (2003:3), notes, ‘...we have multitudes of professing Christians who well, may be ready to die, but obviously are not ready to live, and can hardly get along with themselves, much less with others’. Legalist approaches to life and Scriptural interpretation eventually alienate Christians from the very environment they seek to impact, and effectively render them impotent and ineffective.

What such an approach has failed to consider is that morality has as much to do with ‘being’ as it has to do with ‘doing’ (Rasmussen 1995:182). Atkinson (1995:606) notes this imbalance when writing, ‘morality is more than responding to moral dilemmas...it is also about character’. The renewed interest in academic circles around this topic attests to the growing awareness that attention to character formation has long been neglected. Jones (2002:19) argues that it is due to a lost sense of the Bible as the central text for Christian identity and character formation. This is true on certain levels; however, for many lay believers there is no loss of awe or desire for the Bible to form the axis of their living. Their struggle is with making sense of the different biblical books’ application and significance to life in the world today. When they are taught, or see modelled, means

of biblical interpretation that leave significant questions unanswered, or even ignored, their walk of faith becomes a trap. This ‘inescapable dilemma’ can then lead to a coping strategy of learned helplessness, where a believer will speak of being a Christian in name, but miss the fullness of experience that faith seemed to promise. The Christian faith then becomes a matter of obeying rules, avoiding guilt and trusting a particularly demanding God.

The difficulties around living a moral life are not new. While this problem persists, however, it is crucial that the church and pastoral care change where necessary to meet the growing challenge. The need for fresh and enlightened approaches to the Bible that practically and faithfully teach us how to live sound moral lives, is more pressing than ever. It is the task of church leadership in particular to actively set the example for those that follow.



CONCLUSION

The focus of this dissertation has been an introductory attempt at conceptualising and describing a hermeneutic of learned helplessness. This is a hermeneutic that is applicable both to how an individual believer interacts with the biblical text, as well as how s/he feels, thinks and acts, as a result. This hermeneutic is essentially a framework that directs personal psychological and spiritual activity, except that in this instance, it works to stymie responsible action and hamper personal maturity. In this way, it sets up a circle of conflict, which on the surface seems to provide sound direction for living, but in fact, creates an emotional and spiritual quandary, that typically leads to inaction. This sets up a cycle of passivity, a continually reinforced helplessness, that when blanketed in spiritual terminology, becomes very difficult to describe or break out of.

The Bible and its interpretation are intimately interwoven into the entire process. In most instances, the Bible is seen as the genesis – of authority, direction, structure and consequent behaviour. This attribution of origin appears to most lay believers to be a mark of respect and awe for a book that contains what are perceived to be, the very words of God. In tandem with philosophical paradigms and modern worldviews, this understanding necessitates obedience and unquestioning acceptance of the biblical contents. Despite the sincerity of this approach to Scripture, it fails, however, to perceive how it places the Bible in the role of victim. Paradoxically, attributing all authority to the biblical text locks its voice and ability to create meaning within the confines of a limited vocabulary. Any possibility of dialogue is blocked, as it is demanded of the text to speak, but without an audience who is actually hearing. In this way, the text becomes the

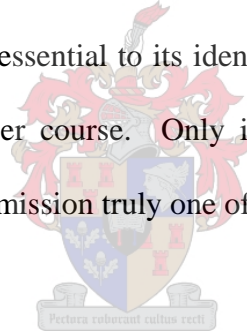
prisoner of its interpreter. When this form of 'captive interpretation' is taught to others, it has the potential to generate problems instead of possibilities for faithful living. It is these problem scenarios that have presented themselves in the pastoral counselling room, and have fuelled my pursuit of a clearer understanding and defining of the problematics involved.

This dissertation has not attempted an alternative way or proposed a unified solution to the problems that have been highlighted. What is clear is that solutions will require a close co-operation between the fields of theology and psychology. With the biblical text located precisely between the persons of God and humankind, it will be necessary to tap into our knowledge of God as well as our knowledge of humanity to begin an adequate response to the difficulties this positioning generates. In many ways, pastoral care and biblical studies have already made inroads into this shared space. This dissertation indicates, however, that there are still numerous areas that require careful study and further research.

One area of research that holds promise in addressing the dynamics of a hermeneutic of learned helplessness, is the increasing literature about imagination. In brief, imagination allows for the integration of body, mind and emotion (Dykstra 1981:76), an integration that still remains absent in large areas of Christian experience, as noted in Chapter 3. Simultaneously, it opens the creative space to provide, 'the anthropological point of contact for divine revelation' (Green 1989:40). This is a function that in many Christian circles is still largely attributed exclusively to the Bible and the church leadership who

interpret it. Some of the failings of this authoritarian and restricted interpretive approach have been the topic of this dissertation. The concept of imagination thus provides a fresh and enlivening avenue of scriptural interaction, while nevertheless maintaining the integrity of personhood, the image of God and the biblical text.

‘Theology dare not hide behind our ancestors; it must relate to the situation of the present world and the contemporary search for God.’ (Gerstenberger 1996:81). As individual believers struggle to live faithfully in contemporary society, it is essential that the church and its leaders authentically engage in assisting lay believers in this task, and especially with regard to the role that Scripture plays in this goal. When it becomes clear that the church is failing in this task, it is essential to its identity and witness, that it make every endeavour to plot a new and truer course. Only in this way will it ensure that its message remains credible and its mission truly one of hope and life.



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