

Editorial

Does one have to be a believer in order to engage in academic theology? It may well be that one does not need to belong to a community of religious people, and/or adhere to a particular system of religious teachings, in order to objectively study religion in general or specific religious phenomena. However, I doubt whether one can study Christian theology in a truly meaningful way, if one has not, at least to some extent, experienced the impact of this theology in one's own life. Karl Barth was of the opinion that the theological method is best described as the *lex orandi et lex credendi* (the law of prayer and of believing). In other words: Spirituality and theology cannot be separated.

Spirituality is a more encompassing sphere than theology. In a fascinating article about the relationship between theology and spirituality, Sandra M. Schneiders, associate professor of New Testament and Christian Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology/Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley, CA), defines the spiritual life as "the whole of human experience within the horizon of ultimate concern." Theology is the most important, but not the only, discipline that is "important to the understanding and to the living of Christian religious experience."¹

This issue of *Spes Christiana* is dedicated to the topic of Christian Spirituality. The authors proceed with the presupposition that Christian doctrine must always be accompanied by Christian praxis and that, therefore, theology and spirituality are inseparably intertwined. Without being anchored in Christian truth, spirituality loses its bearings and remains stuck in feelings and emotions (at best), or in unhealthy fantasy and illusion (at worst). And, without a lived experience (i. e. spirituality), theology remains a dead letter that may endanger our inner balance rather than produce a sense of human purpose and wholeness.

The fundamental conviction that theology and spirituality belong together is reflected in the content of this issue. It contains four substantial articles that deal with topics related to our general theme of spirituality. However, the first and the final article (before the section with book reviews) are of a different nature. Even though it is clear from these two articles that they have been

¹ Schneiders, Sandra M. "Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners." *Horizons* 13.2, 1986, 253–274: quotes on p. 271.

written by competent scholars, they are of a thoroughly personal nature. Dr. Mike Pearson, a professor emeritus of Newbold College, has spent his entire working life teaching ethics and related subjects. In the opening article of this issue of *Spes Christiana* he describes his spiritual journey as an individual, but also how he has benefited spiritually from being part of a church community. He ends his remarkable spiritual travel log by emphasizing that he did not want his church to “wall” him “into an institutional understanding of God. What I believe and am,” Pearson states, “must stand the test of the public space and of my own integrity.”

The last article, by Dr. Andreas Bochmann, a professor of counselling at Friedensau Adventist University, is also of a very personal nature. It is the text of a lecture Bochmann delivered in January 2020 during a professional meeting at his institution. It focused on the question whether the use of spiritual categories in the context of musical therapy and, especially, in the setting of pastoral counselling, is permitted or must be considered as a form of malpractice. Bochmann zooms in on his own experience as a pastor and as a professional counsellor, and describes how he has tried to give spirituality a legitimate place in his counselling praxis.

Philip Nern, who currently is a M. A. student of theology at Friedensau Adventist University, wrote an important contribution about spirituality. Using the so-called *Relational Models Theory*, he analyses the relationship between man and God. This model was first developed by Alan Page Fiske, an anthropologist, who suggested that human activities are structured in accordance with four distinct models which guide human thought and behaviour in all domains of life. Nern’s article shows how these four models may also apply to the sphere of spirituality.

Dr. Peter Roennfeldt is an author and scholar, as well as a life-long practitioner, in the field of church growth. His home is now in Australia, but he has worked in various parts of the world, including many years in Europe. In this article he draws on his wide experience and his academic background, particularly on the dissertation for his Doctor of Ministry Degree (2013). “Emerging church” is a somewhat pejorative term in many Adventist circles. Roennfeldt analyses the “emergence” and development of the Emerging Church model and the Adventist response to this phenomenon.

As the editor of this journal, I have also contributed an article. My piece about Adventism, Postmodernity and Spirituality, echoes the interest I have

had, for the last three decades, in the influence of postmodern thinking on the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an institution, and on large numbers of Adventists individually, especially in the Western world. I describe some of the tensions that have arisen because of the postmodern rejection of many features of institutional religion, and the institutional suspicion toward postmodern expressions of spirituality.

Dr. Laurence Turner, a gifted emeritus Old Testament scholar, taught at Newbold College before retiring a few years ago. In his article he takes the reader to the rather controversial biblical narratives of Abigail, and the medium of Endor (1 Samuel 25 and 28). The two sections share, Turner believes, “many common thematic and linguistic details, which invite an intratextual comparison of the two narratives.” Turner points to the different scholarly approaches to the narrative concerning the role and actions of the medium.

I hope that the reader of this issue of our journal will enjoy its spiritual-theological mix. The fact that two of the articles are in German rather than in English may present a challenge for some, but I trust that those who are not fully conversant with the German language will find the technological tools to provide them with a translation. Alternatively, we can provide an English translation on request.

As has now become our tradition, we have included a number of book reviews which touch on topics that many of our readers will find relevant. Suggestions for future book reviews may be sent to Dr. Kerstin Maiwald, who is responsible for this part of *Spes Christiana*.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that our journal is a team product. In this context, special thanks to Jonquil Hole (English copy editing: articles), Dr. Laurence Turner (English copy editing: book reviews), Eudritch Jean (French translation of abstracts), Dr. Tom de Bruin (DOI assignments and upload), Prof. Stefan Höschele (consultation and managing of the print issue), our peer-reviewers, the editorial board members, and our authors.

I look forward to receiving manuscripts for our future issues. For the guidelines for the writing of articles as well as book reviews, see the website of the EASTRS (European Adventist Society of Theology and Religious Studies): <https://www.eastrs.org/spes-christiana>.

Reinder Bruinsma, General Editor

Second Journey

Michael Pearson

Abstract

This article describes in an essay-style the spiritual journey of the author since mid-life. It includes changes in ideas, practices, questions, and also answers. This whole journey is guided by the desire to encounter God on a personal level and to be authentic at every step. A relentlessly honest essay about the love of God and a love for God's family.

Warning Bells about 'Spirituality'

When I agreed to write a piece on 'Christian Spirituality,' several warning bells sounded in my mind. I recalled some words of Kenneth Leech, an Anglican priest who spent his entire ministry in the poor areas of London's East End. According to him, 'spirituality' can be "a dangerous diversion from the living God, from the demands of justice, from the engagement with reality. It can be a form of illusion" (Leech 1992 p 3). He meant that if our spirituality is entirely private, theoretical, comfortable and self-absorbed then it has missed the mark. 'Spirituality' can easily become a form of self-indulgence and a commodity to be consumed.

A Faltering Start

Even when I began writing this article on Christian spirituality, I tried four or five times and gave up in frustration. It simply would not take shape. I found it impossible to impose a structure on whatever it is I have come to know of God over these many years. I had to admit to myself that the subject does not lend itself to any neat categorization. It cannot be contained in the sort of scholarly, coherent and carefully researched piece that readers of *Spes Christiana* might expect. I should have recognized that before I started. I felt the way I did when I visited the Grand Canyon in Arizona. I took many photographs.

I tried to get an angle on it. I tried to fit it all in my view-finder but I just could not frame it. It was simply too vast. All I have now is a collection of faded pictures which evoke nothing of the awe I felt when standing on the rim of that vast chasm.

I might have produced here an objective-sounding account focusing on spiritual disciplines like fasting, prayer, meditation and Bible reading. Indeed in the first half of my teaching life I did exactly that. Such a cerebral approach is characteristic of the first journey. But now it seemed to me that I would somehow be evading the heart of the matter, the opening up of ourselves to the Living God. Any theoretical categories I was attempting to use were pitifully inadequate. I was rather like those disciples returning to Emmaus. I have long walked on the road with Jesus but found myself yet again in danger of not recognizing Him when He appears. And Jesus is the very heart of the matter. I had again to acknowledge that God repeatedly breaches the boundaries of my narrow framework and blinkered experience. What follows then is the result of much trial, error, approximation and not a little foolishness on my part. It would be dishonest to pretend otherwise. And this exploration continues even now when I am at an age when I thought I would be settled in my understandings.

There are yawning gaps in my account here. There is messiness and probably contradiction. You must be prepared to make some leaps where I have failed to build bridges. I am, as it were, stalking God, watching out for a footprint only to find in the end that it is God who is tracking me.

Prescriptive or Personal?

Another danger in this assignment was that I might lapse into a prescriptive account. The church has always encouraged me to have a '*personal* relationship' with God. I am grateful for that. I confess that I have often settled for an impersonal relationship, an easier more distant one. But I cannot have another person's experience of God nor you mine though perhaps the church sometimes encourages us to think otherwise.

And so inevitably this article is in large part autobiographical. It would be so anyway whether I acknowledged it or not. It emerges from my own particular back-story as a WASP male. I must acknowledge all of this – not least to myself. It would concern me if any reader thought that this article offered a model to be imitated. Not at all. This is nothing more than a series of hints and

clues. It is important to emphasize that at the outset. I am wary of any who offer a package tour of the Almighty.

I must tell my story 'slant', as the American poet Emily Dickinson has said. I see no alternative. So I have made a random choice of a starting point to what has been for me 'a second journey'.

What Is the Second Journey?

The second journey starts where the first one ends. The first journey is characterized by being cerebral, systematic, doctrinaire, impersonal. It no longer satisfied me. It is not surprising therefore that I was struck by these celebrated words from Dante which were on the flyleaf of a book whose title kept occurring in things I was reading thirty years ago:

In the middle of our life's road
I found myself in a dark wood –
The straight way ahead lost.

The book was *Second Journey: Spiritual Awareness and the Mid-life Crisis* by Gerald O'Collins (O'Collins 1995). He is a writer whose churchmanship is very different from my own. He is a Catholic who came to feel that his Catholicism could no longer adequately sustain his life with God. He said something which startled me in its clarity: "We cannot live the afternoon of life according to the programme of life's morning: for what in the morning was true will at evening have become a lie" (O'Collins 1995, 4). Not only was this true of me but it was also true of many of those friends and people I knew who were giving up on the Adventist church for precisely that reason. The haemorrhaging distressed me and still does. What the church was saying evidently lacked resonance. These friends and I needed to hear words which could sustain the weight of our lives. I was now in middle age and life was complicated by teenage children, ageing relatives and questions of vocation. If only those who spoke for the church could more often engage with people's everyday lives with greater honesty and imagination. If only I could hear my own experience 'named' from the pulpit.

The second journey beckoned.

The Beginning of my Second Journey

I was in mid-life, mid-career and wondering what to do next. I had just declined what on the face of it seemed a good career move. I have never doubted that I did the right thing but was aware that options were narrowing down. I was tired and needed to find new spiritual and professional resources.

6 July 1991 proved to be an important day. It was a Saturday.

We had sung a hymn in church the previous week which had startled and moved me because it summed up my feelings so precisely. I tried but failed to memorize it. So on this summer day I jotted down in an old notebook the verse which had taken me unawares – together with the date for some unknown reason. I did not know it then but that was the birth of my spiritual journal. I have continued with the practice of using a journal ever since. It is not a daily practice. There are long gaps but it is where I record those rustlings of God which I sometimes detect.

The words of that hymn by Charles Wesley were a beacon in a dark place:

Jesus, confirm my heart's desire
To work, and speak, and think for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up thy gift in me.

Nothing had shifted 'my heart's desire' but I needed some sense of vocation. I did recognize then, if only dimly, that making myself available for a personal relationship with God might well mean that I would diverge somewhat from conventional understandings of the form which that experience should take. It might mean that God would take me where I did not wish to go. It might involve some painful separation, some unlearning. It was a risk which I slowly felt willing to take ... largely out of desperation.

I was slowly learning that my spiritual life is not distinguishable from the rest of my life. But I did need to create some open space where I might stumble upon God. The space so easily becomes cluttered with all kinds of rubbish, even very worthy rubbish.

I began to recognize that my own attempts to wrestle with God have value only insofar as they enable me to become more fully human in the mould of Jesus. To sense and respond to the human need which surrounds me every day. To recognize God at work in my everyday routines. To gradually confront the nonsense inside me so that other people are less burdened with it.

Tensions

About this time a friend of ours recommended the writing of Harry Williams, an Anglican priest from a tradition very different from my own. He spoke about life with God with great honesty, clarity and humour.

In his book *Tensions* Williams seemed to put his finger on my pulse time and time again. "Tension [...] is the price of life. [...] It is when we refuse to recognize and welcome tensions which are life-giving that we fall a prey to tensions which are death-dealing". He adds that Jesus made it clear that "there is no such thing as an easy, comfortable, placid relationship with God. If we think that there is and that we have attained to it, that merely shows that we are asleep or dead, perhaps more accurately, simply as yet unborn". He continues: "If our beliefs are cut and dried, it means that we have anaesthetized ourselves against nine-tenths of reality. [...] Triumphalism [...] is the cowardice which runs away from conflict under the guise of a bogus assurance. [...] People are zealous for a cause when they are not quite positive that it is true" (Williams 1976, 13–15). It all sounded familiar. I learned that I must learn to live with paradox, that I must somehow learn how to sustain these tensions within myself.

This was strong medicine but I recognized enough of what he was saying in myself and in my faith community to want to continue. Williams gave me courage to explore those questions which had always lingered but which I had by no means pressed far enough.

The second journey could not be avoided.

The Wilderness

I nevertheless felt that I was in a dark place, a kind of wilderness. Lost.

Williams argued in the second book in his trilogy, *True Wilderness*, that in the Bible very important things happen in the wilderness. The book called me to believe that something of significance might happen in my own current, small wilderness if I was able to recognize it. "Our wilderness, then, is a sense of inner isolation. [...] It's a sense of being alone – boringly alone, or saddeningly alone, or terrifyingly alone" (Williams 1965, 29–30). When you feel that isolated, that lost, you begin to plan escape routes which usually turn out to be dead ends.

A guiding scripture in Williams' book is Exodus 20:20–21: "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die. [...] Then

the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was". I had too often let the church do the talking and the thinking. I saw that all too often my conversation, my focus was much more about the church than it was about God. That was in fact a principal way of hiding, of remaining at a distance. I was seeking to validate, justify, understand, explain, motivate myself by reference to the church, not by being a child loved by God. It is a common enough and insidious spiritual evasion. I saw that I was still too dependent on familiar ways of tracking God.

I felt that Williams had identified me when saw the "man who is afraid he isn't there [...] and points at things external to himself, shouting, 'That, that is me'" (Williams 1965, 22). He talks about "this urge to evade the responsibility of being the mysterious, dissatisfied, potentially dangerous, and potentially magnificent people they are" (Williams 1965, 24). He quotes Mk 8:36 (NEB): "What does a man gain by winning the whole world at the cost of his true self?" I experienced this as a call to 'come to myself', rather like the prodigal son, and to stop hiding, stop remaining at a distance – poverty stricken. I admired Williams' determination: "I resolved that I would not preach about any aspect of Christian belief unless it had become part of my own life-blood" (Williams 1965, 8).

But Nicodemus' question lingered: "How can a man be born again when he is old?" Or at least forty-four.

God's 'Absence'

Isaiah 45:15 contains this startling assertion: "Truly, you are a God who hides himself." And hiddenness looks a lot like absence sometimes. Absence or temporary absence or apparent absence. For a purpose known only to God. But from our side it may look like abandonment, both baffling and frightening. Mary's resurrection morning experience seemed to ring true for me. "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him" (John 20:13). Mary wonders whether it has all been for nothing. So too the experience of the two disciples on the Emmaus road. The story in Luke 24 runs through many of seasons of the spiritual life: "We had hoped [...] how foolish you are [...] stay with us [...] they recognized him [...] he vanished [...] our hearts were burning within us". What a tangle of aspiration and emotion! For me, the resurrected Lord is difficult to track sometimes. But there was the promise of resurrection, resurrection now from my own dead past.

I had not yet learned 'I am that I am'. I shall be there as I shall be there. Wendy Robinson says: "God's presence is assured, the form it will take is not" (Robinson 1974, 14). I had made the mistake of deciding in advance what form God's presence should take. "Stay with us." "I am with you always." An elusive presence. This 'absent' God who paradoxically does not know how to be absent.

Fellow Travellers

I was not as alone as I felt. I could not possibly have made the journey without my soulmate. Helen was at least as hungry – more hungry – for her own second journey as I was. From the very beginning of our relationship, we had read and shared our responses to many of the same books. True spiritual companionship within the family or beyond it is indispensable on such a journey. I discovered that apart from Helen there were many people to welcome us on the journey, this second journey. But sadly we could find little evidence that any Adventist writers were addressing the issue.

I had slowly grasped that if you wish to come to the truth, you must read or listen to those who have a different view of the world from your own. That is my natural instinct but it is also part of my training in philosophy. If you listen only to people who agree with you, you may be confirmed in your belief but you may all simply be wrong – together. You may exist in an echo chamber. If however you listen to those who disagree with you, or who do not share all your presuppositions, you have the opportunity to test and modify your belief, or, if those writers can come up with nothing to make you change your mind, to confirm it.

This process of testing involves allowing the Scriptures to probe our hopes and fears, uncomfortable as that may be. I have found that Anglicans, Catholics, Lutherans, those of no faith, novelists, biographers and more, all supply me with the questions with which I can navigate the difficult parts of the journey. So too in a different way the people who live around me. My next-door neighbours have their own different senses of what matters in life. Their questions may sometimes be rough-hewn but they are genuine. I must submit my own ideas to the test of everyday living.

These are all good companions on the second journey. The movement of the Spirit is not confined to those in my own spiritual community or people

just like me. To believe otherwise is pure arrogance. "The wind blows where it chooses" (John 3:8).

False Self

There are those who would like to regiment our experience of God. And it is easy to want simply to fit in. By the time you arrive in your mid-forties you have accumulated various obligations, human and financial. They are such that you cannot simply follow your own whims or dreams. There are other people and factors to consider. One of the effects of this is that you can be squeezed out of shape. You are required to play certain roles even when they are not comfortable, and are obliged to act in a way which is sometimes not authentic. The spiritual danger is that you lose track of yourself. You too easily become a false self. You become your own almost-convincing double. The great danger for the church is that it may be led by some people – mostly men – in mid-life who have become precisely that, false selves, though few would recognize that description. I have witnessed too much of this to deny it.

And, of course, there is great pressure in the church to become David in Saul's armour. For the sake of unity. Or maybe just appearances. For the sake of tidiness. Status, popularity, qualifications, achievements – they are all part of the mould which we squeeze ourselves into. Relentless activity on behalf of the church is dignified by the label 'dedication' or 'commitment', and so we may develop a certain sense of self-worth. There are not many ways of developing it in ministry and so we go for simple indicators: baptisms, doctorates, large pastorates, invitations to speak here and there or to write books. "Unable to be ourselves, we become good party members instead." (Williams 1983, 77)

O'Collins is forensic in his analysis: "We act the play. We learn our lines. We know what people want us to say. We lie. In the end it is not even deliberate" (O'Collins 1995, 10).

I can only plead guilty.

Loved?

If I am not to get my sense of worth from my 'status' where else can it come from? "God so loved the world that [...]." No verse in the Bible is more familiar to a Christian than that. It is at the basis of all our teaching. I knew it well enough. So familiar is it that it is quite possible somehow to know it but not receive its force. Loved the world? Yes, God loves all the masses of people.

But me? That is harder to hear because I have direct acquaintance with all the interior rubbish that clutters my spirit. To know myself loved by God – it is what I have so often missed as I involved myself in the busy-ness of church life. Known and yet still loved. I feared that anyone who really knew me would find much that was fraudulent and unlovable. I confess I have found it difficult to know myself loved by God in deep places.

Stillness

The knowledge of being loved by God comes partly, I think, from the experience of being loved unconditionally by another human being and partly through stillness. I have wondered about calling it ‘silence’. But silence tends to frighten some Christians. Partly because they may associate it with monastic or meditative practice but partly also because most of us cannot manage it without all the churchy noise which usually distracts us.

The wider Christian church has always been nervous of this stillness because you cannot know what people are doing with their silence – it may be subversive. So times of silence in our own faith community are sadly rare. It has become important to me to remember Elijah who came into the presence of his God not through the drama of fire or earthquake but through “a sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12).

The idea of silence must be approached with a little caution. The practice of silence suits me well but I am probably temperamentally more suited to it than some others. Furthermore, it is possible to be silent without being still because the restlessness is within. So also it is possible to know inner stillness without being silent.

For me, silence can be so articulate.

“Uncrowd my heart, O God, / until silence speaks / in your still, small voice; / turn me from the hearing of words, / and the making of words / and the confusion of much speaking, / to listening, / waiting, / stillness, / silence” (De Waal 2003, 42).

Sabbath

The practice of real Sabbath-keeping offers an unparalleled opportunity for stillness. However, my experience had often been that it was a time of busy-ness with church routines. On the second journey I felt the need to reconsider my patterns of observance.

This is no place for an extended consideration of the Sabbath. Many exist elsewhere. But if I am to flourish spiritually, I need to find a favourable environment to do that, and the Sabbath offers me a particular, even unique, opportunity. I need time to slow down and take stock of the direction of my priorities. There is a real sense in which what is truly important is not that I keep the Sabbath but that the Sabbath keeps me. I gain no religious merit in Sabbath observance but I do gain benefit. It is a time for developing ‘antibodies’ not only against external threats but against all manner of personal weaknesses – let me be clear, sins – which may have a negative impact on others who are important to me. I need time to find out what is life-giving, what makes me fully alive.

At the same time I must acknowledge that Sabbath time is not to be confused with inactivity or inertia. The Jews teach us that the dance of life continues, that the Sabbath is sometimes a time for exuberance, outward-going not inward-retreating. I am amazed at how many Christians beyond the Adventist church are re-discovering the possibilities of Sabbath. Brueggemann says: “Sabbath is [...] a critique of the false desires that focus on idolatry and greed that have immense power for us. When we do not pause for Sabbath, these false desires take power over us. But Sabbath is the chance for self-embrace of our true identity” (Brueggemann 2014, 88). The title of his book *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, and other titles tell their own story: Nicola Slee, *Sabbath: The Hidden Heartbeat of Our Lives*, and Lynne Baab: *Sabbath-keeping: Finding Freedom in the Rhythms of Rest*.

Church Community

I am not a gregarious person by nature and will seek out smaller groups rather than larger ones but one of the lessons of the Covid-19 lockdown for me has been that, despite this, I do very much need contact with the members of my community. I have missed them. My community does contain some people whom I have known for a long time and who have been through many seasons of life with me, life-giving and death-dealing. The genius of the church is that it is that rare social organization not formed for the benefit of its members. It brings me into contact with people whom I would not choose to be with. There I meet the ‘other’. Rubbing up against them shows me my own weaknesses and areas of inner desert if I will allow it. No spiritual life can be lived apart from a community to which one feels some obligation. It serves as

a corrective to my self-absorption and provides some protection against worshipping a God made in my own image. It teaches me that my life needs to be about something bigger than myself.

Despite every one of its shortcomings, and they are many, the church is deeply precious to me and I feel protective of it against all those forces, inside and outside, which threaten its health. I do not know of a brief way to examine this further. The best I can do here is to invite you to do a simple exercise which I have used myself and with others. Fill in the blank with the name of a social institution: 'The church is like a...'. The obvious candidates arise often: a hospital (for the sick), a military barracks (to train Christian soldiers), a supermarket (for getting regular supplies), a bank (for building up credit) and so on. The best response I ever heard came from a pastor in the Baltic church in the immediately post-Soviet era: "The church is like a circus". Somehow that helped me to understand what a church is really like. There are ringmasters, clowns, high-flying trapeze artists, wild animals amid all the warmth, interest and aspiration. I leave you explore this simile but I have been happier since I acknowledged both the magnetism and the absurdity of the church. With all that, I choose to remain because it offers access to resources vital to my living well.

'The World'

When seeking to deepen our openness to God there is the danger that we may generate a closedness to 'the world', which is biblical code for the polar opposite to God. The word 'secular' derives from the Latin name for those medieval monks who left the monastery to carry the Word to the marketplace while others simply remained within cloister walls to observe the daily offices and work to sustain the life of the monastic community. It was inevitable that the seculars would return to the monastery with mud on their sandals, and with it some worldly ways and attitudes. These 'seculars' provide me with a fitting image of the tension between the aspiration to holiness and the obligation to live my faith in a context uncongenial to it.

I had resolved that tension already. I could not remain behind the conceptual walls of an institution. Everything about my past shouted that I must be in the world if not of it. The secular world must be allowed to provide its tests to my faith. And yet I wanted to belong. More tensions! Harry Williams concluded that "in order to love God I often had to hate religion and I began to

catch glimpses of God's glory where, on any ecclesiastical estimate, that glory had no right to be" (Williams 1982, ix).

"The wind blows where it chooses".

Generosity

The church only uses the word 'liberal' positively in one sense. When a plea for funds is made, we are often asked to give 'liberally', meaning generously. In that sense I aspire to be liberal. I would like to be more liberal, more generous than I am in my attitudes to other people. More welcoming of their individual strengths and weaknesses, their anxieties, their sadnesses and their joy. I would like to extend to them the sort of graciousness that God extends to me. To use the title of Brian Maclaren's book, I seek a 'generous orthodoxy'. I want myself and my people to avoid all forms of meanness, especially in attitudes.

Social justice

It is a clear teaching of Scripture that true worship of God is inextricably linked with a concern for social justice. The OT prophets along with Jesus and Paul have a strong bias to the poor, the widows, the orphans, and other marginal people with no-one to care for their well-being. I wish I had really grasped this earlier. I have been too content to be a pietist, too concerned with personal redemption, mine and others'. It has affected my understanding of what bearing witness to the way of Jesus really means. Does it mean political engagement? Selective activism because you cannot be involved in all the needs that the world presents? I can only confess that I have not found any satisfactory answer for myself and remain disappointed about that. How can I bring together the way of Jesus and the affairs of the wider community?

Prayer

So much advice about prayer has been offered that I am nervous about adding to it. People's dispositions and circumstances vary so much that it is dangerous to generalize about it. But a great many people who make no profession of faith will admit nevertheless to praying sometimes. I believe that prayer is deeply intimate. As Mark Oakley rightly says: "The older I get, the more difficult I find it to describe what I mean by the word 'prayer'. At the same time, increasingly I realize how important it is" (Oakley 2019, 23).

I will confine myself to a couple of ideas. The first is that I have understood that I and my fellow-believers are prone to want to use God for our own purposes. To enlist God on our side and to get God to guarantee some benefit for ourselves, for those we care about or for a cause we value. But maybe we miss the point. Our being 'with God' cannot be a transaction. I am not to *use* God but to *enjoy* God for who God is. I must be in search of that true wonder for God and God's ways ... which are not our ways. In an age where 'awesome' has become a descriptor so casually used, I need to maintain my sense of awe, of wonder for what Rudolf Otto called the "mysterium tremendum et fascinans".

I have found that while praying by myself I can easily slip into a mind-set where I cater for an imagined audience almost as if I were praying in public. I search for an angle, an idea which would work in a lecture or sermon ... to be addressed to others! I create a structure as if there were some virtue in that. I engage in a kind of holy diplomacy. I almost feel that my prayers should be correctly punctuated! It is only more recently that I have given up trying to be diplomatic, polite, balanced or articulate in prayer. Instead I have found some liberation in opening up my muddled mind, the thoughts not arranged in any coherent order. If my prayer tumbles out in a crass or chaotic way, I have come to believe that God can receive that. I believe that God would swap a kilo of prayerful politeness for a gram of transparency and passion. I regret that I have come to this rather late in life.

I pray that God will be Emmanuel, *with* me and *with* the people who are on my radar, in a manner and at a time of God's choosing. The detail is not mine to fix. I know many people do have prayer lists and that is well and good. I pray not according to a list but according to who may be on my mind or who has crossed my path. I have found freedom in praying in that way. I no longer feel the need to be 'comprehensive' in my coverage.

It may be that this too in time will dry up. Then I will need to reflect further. In times of dryness I often go to prayers, poetry or verses of hymns written by those who have trodden the way before. They give me words when I lack them. My mind invariably loses focus when I am praying. Sometimes I use a very short fragment from Scripture, no more than four or five words and simply repeat them. That is all my tired mind will do sometimes. Sometimes I must just pray that God will receive the stutterings of my fragmented mind. I am encouraged by what Paul says in Romans 8 about "groaning [...] sighs too deep for words". Sometimes that is all I can do.

I believe it is important to clear an open space in my spirit where God can be present. I am reminded of the occasion when Jesus cleared all the clutter from the temple in a plea that true worship might take place. I wonder whether my heavy emphasis on petitionary prayer has sometimes been an evasion of some of the true work of prayer. I 'introduce' God to other needy people rather than laying bare not simply my own neediness but my own self. Perhaps our deepest desires are our true prayers – all the rest is public relations. That means that nothing at all is off-limits in prayer.

All I have to do is turn up.

Spirituality and Sexuality

There can be little doubt that there is a strong identity between our spiritual and our sexual selves. I believe that this is true for both men and women. Here we confront our deepest intimacies, our deepest selves. Jesus hinted at it: "I in you and you in me" (John 15:4). I believe my sexual self gives me clues about my spiritual life if I have the necessary courage and understanding. But I find it difficult to examine this area of life for myself. I have found few who will help me. Embarrassment, inability to access the movements of my own soul, inability to find the right words to capture these deepest feelings, my fears about the sacred and the profane – these all play their part in keeping me from exploring these "treasures of darkness" (Isaiah 45:3).

I believe it is not at all appropriate to have open season on these experiences – that way lie real dangers. So I have few models of how to do it. The best I can do is privately trust to God all my desire, aggression, fantasies, regrets, disappointments, guilts, hurts, blame, tendency to treat others as objects not subjects, etc. The whole of human life is there. But I am understandably afraid to visit this place. I might learn distressing things about myself which would need real maturity to handle. This is difficult inner terrain. There is much to say about such matters and this is not the time. I would simply point in a direction which is suggested by the title of the book *Befriending Our Desires* by Philip Sheldrake (Sheldrake 1994).

Confession

It is strange that a church such as ours which is so interested in sin is so little interested in confession. Of course, we go through the motions and there are generic prayers of confession. But there is little in our corporate worship to

guide me in my own confession. Why is this? First, confession has a whiff of Catholicism about it and so we may throw the baby out with the bathwater. Then there is the embarrassment or discomfort of others' sins or our own being given public expression. And we must take that seriously.

But in private prayer there is no danger that my sins will be paraded for all to see. Part of the problem is that I tend to think that what I must confess lies in my actions or words. But confession looks different when I acknowledge that I must confess who I am rather than what I may have done or said. These are merely the by-product of who I am. That takes me into some serious interior work which may be uncomfortable, and I may not be very good at it. But if I confess that I display tendencies to be envious, materialistic, competitive, proud, lustful, disdainful, controlling – the list goes on – then there arises the possibility and obligation to work on habits which may have developed over a long time and may be difficult to shift. This is tough soul work. But if I can say to God: 'This is who I am and who I have been. I am not proud of it. I have been ignorant of much of it. I have hurt people by being who I am. Forgive. Help me to know forgiveness, receive it when it is given. Help me not to linger in guilt. Help me in the long haul back to a better place', then the way is open for change to occur.

I read once that our greatest sins are either things that we are proud of or things of which we are simply unaware. If that is so then I have difficult work ahead because in both cases I remain totally oblivious to my sins, my going in the wrong direction. I am being asked to hear a narrative about myself which is different from the one I habitually prefer to tell. In the Church of England, the liturgical prayer of confession asks *first* for forgiveness for things we have not done and ought to have done before it speaks of things we have done and ought not to have done. My sins of omission may be more numerous than I care to consider. I can only trust that God will break the news to me gently for this has the potential to be devastating.

Joy

My experience in the church has taught me well about duty; it has done less well when it comes to joy. It has taken me a long time to recognize that. My church has reinforced my own natural suspicion of spiritual exuberance, my narrow seriousness. To be sure there is a great deal of evangelical noise around in the church but cool rationality is no less a threat. It is encouraged

by an emphasis on doctrine rationally constructed and doctrinally disciplined behaviour. I have learned much about joy from those church members of a different culture from my own.

It is difficult to say exactly what joy is. It is a different creature from all the fun and happiness on offer in the marketplace. Joy simply comes – you cannot plan it. No amount of planning will do it as I discovered once when I went to King's College Chapel, Cambridge for evensong and the anticipated exultation just did not come to me. As C.S. Lewis says we are "surprised by joy".

But maybe too often I miss the moment of joy. It is possible to experience joy in the most unpromising of circumstances. I recognize it when I see it. I see it in airport arrival halls when little children rush towards a parent or grandparent. I see it sometimes in a concert hall at the end of a performance. Sometimes in hospitals too. I may experience it across a gentle landscape lit by evening sun. Walking a cliff path by a vast sea. A quiet moment in a cathedral or sacred space. A line in a play. In a hymn a phrase of which catches me by surprise. The faithfulness of a friend. The deepest loyalty of a spouse. "It is the turning / aside like Moses to the miracle of the lit bush" (*'The Bright Field'*, Thomas 2003, 114).

Joy may be subversive in nature if it comes when others are not expecting it. It suggests a value system which may be different from theirs. There is something gloriously unpredictable about joy. As Buechner says: "Once they have seen him in a stable, they can never be sure where he will appear" (Buechner 1985, 13).

Witness

I have grown up with conventional ideas about witness. It involved men (of a certain personality type) standing above an audience, telling people how things stand and urging them to action. It involved the preparatory work of advertising and crowd events. Much of it felt rather unnatural to me. All these may have their place. Indeed, my own father became an Adventist Christian after attending some public meetings. I have been pleased to see the church more recently moving towards more natural community involvement which is Jesus-shaped. Jesus helps me to become a more human human-being. He extends my capacity for compassion mixed with a little risk taking. I think the most effective witness to Jesus often occurs when I am unconscious that witness is even taking place. Being not telling.

Laughter

Laughter does not attract much attention in the Bible and little that is positive. So it may seem strange to include it here. Fraser says that “laughter is a necessary accomplice of truth-telling” (Fraser 2007, 152), and I remember once hearing someone say: “Laughter is inimical to fascism”. I think the same applies to fundamentalism. The temptation which faces authoritarian leaders is the same as faces evangelical preachers. And me. It is to take myself too seriously. It is a way of making myself the centre of the world, perhaps the most original of sins.

Churches can make the same error on the grand scale. “In man’s ability to perceive and laugh at the comic in himself and his world, the Divine is at work creating order. For there can be no true order without a sense of proportion, and what destroys our sense of proportion is pride. Laughter is the enemy of pride as pride is the handmaiden of illusion”. Berger has said that humour provides “signals of transcendence”. Williams says: “to laugh is to be redeemed” (Williams 2006, 64–65). The healing function of laughter in the spiritual life is to puncture my pretentiousness. It is difficult sometimes to know how seriously to take myself – both child of God and clown. Laughter has the potential to reduce the distance between my assumed persona and who I really am.

Laughing is not far from worshipping. People ‘make us laugh’. And, of course, cry. It comes unbidden, unplanned. So too with worship. It is in the same family of responses both unbidden and profound.

Jesus

None of the foregoing makes much sense unless at the centre of all this thirsting and seeking is Jesus. This means that wherever you go in the Bible Jesus is the One who gives the whole thing resonance. Without Him it can be no more than fascinating religious history. But what does this mean? It means becoming so familiar with the Jesus of the Gospels that He becomes part of the fabric of my being. It means that He rouses something important deep within. It means that I take seriously what he says about a life well-lived. It means creating some open space where we may approach each other. It means being ready to be surprised by the Gospels and not certain that I already know what the accounts are saying. It means not treating as mere metaphor or hy-

perbole some of the uncomfortable things Jesus says and does. It means admitting to myself that I often do not grasp what it means. It means that sometimes I don't want to grasp what it means because of the cost. It means thirsting for more.

The third book in Williams' trilogy is *True Resurrection*. Here he emphasizes his conviction that resurrection cannot be consigned to the past or the future. It is a present lived reality: "Everyone who drinks of this water that I will give will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14).

I can only reply with the Samaritan woman: "Sir, give me this water" (John 4:15).

Resurrection is now.

Conclusion

I have walked once around the subject of spirituality here. Now there comes a time to be silent. I have walked around it many times myself and frequently pursued false trails even when I was sure I had the scent in my nostrils. But I am confident that as I keep walking, I will detect the divine scent if I provide God with that open space. I look for the cracks in doctrine and practice for "that's where the light gets in", as Leonard Cohen sings.

Three things bother me as I conclude. The first is that it is somehow false to speak of 'the spiritual life'. There is only everyday life imbued with the Spirit of Jesus to a greater or lesser extent. Second is that it is easy to fall into a kind of arrogance in centring my comments on my own experience. Again I say that this article does not provide a model but just some hints. Third it may bother you that I have cited no Adventist authors. I am familiar enough with the thinking of Ellen White to know that much of what I have said here can be anchored in what she has said before, simply in a different idiom.

Further it is entirely possible that what has so caught my attention and excited me over the years has left you cold. That is the danger of being autobiographical. All that I have said is personal but not, I hope, merely individual. I hope that in this article you will have caught a glimpse or two of something which might help you to grow in spirit. Some slant-wise insight. Such glimpses have had a deep effect on how I journey, on how to recognize dead-ends and how to follow promising paths.

The church has beaten a path for me to follow towards God which I would not have found by myself. I remain profoundly grateful for that. At the same time, I have not wanted the church to wall me into an institutional understanding of God. What I believe and am must stand the test of the public space and of my own integrity. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons in the fifth century, once famously said: "The glory of God is man fully alive". I would like to be fully alive.

I have said enough – maybe too much.

I am beginning to find that much of what I believed during the first journey I still affirm and value but for very different reasons, with different motivations and, yes, with greater strength. And some things have been burnt off by the noontide sun.

T.S. Eliot said it so well in his poem "Little Gidding":

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

I believe that if I can say with the psalmist: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God" (Psalm 42:2) I shall not be disappointed.

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Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel beschreibt im Stil eines Essays die spirituelle Reise ab der Lebensmitte des Autors. Darin enthalten sind Veränderungen in Bezug auf Ideen, Praktiken, Fragen und auch Antworten. Die gesamte Reise ist geleitet vom Wunsch, Gott persönlich zu begegnen und auf jedem Schritt authentisch zu sein. Ein schonungslos ehrliches Essay über die Liebe Gottes und die Liebe zu Gottes Familie.

Résumé

Cet article décrit sous la forme d'un essai le cheminement spirituel de l'auteur à partir de la quarantaine. Il prend en compte les changements dans les idées, les pratiques, les questions et aussi les réponses. Tout ce cheminement est guidé par le désir de rencontrer Dieu à un niveau personnel et d'être authentique à tout moment. Un essai implacablement honnête sur l'amour de Dieu et l'amour pour la famille de Dieu.

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Spiritualität als Beziehung

Das Gott-Mensch-Verhältnis unter der Perspektive der Relational Models Theory

Philip Nern

Abstract

Eine bedeutsame Perspektive auf Spiritualität ist die der Beziehungsgestaltung zwischen Gott und Mensch. Die *Relational Models Theory* ermöglicht, die Sprache über diese Beziehung vier grundlegenden menschlichen Beziehungsverhältnissen zuzuordnen. Im Neuen Testament sowie in modernen Spiritualitätswürfen wird die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung demnach primär sowohl durch eine Sprache der Nähe als auch der Autorität bzw. Größe umschrieben. Diese Spannweite wird durch die Transzendenz Gottes sowie die Inkarnation Jesu plausibel. Andere Beziehungsmuster, die auf der Gleichwertigkeit oder aber eine Kosten-Nutzen-Kalkulation zwischen beiden Parteien aufbauen, können nur sekundär identifiziert werden. Insgesamt zeigt sich, dass Relationale Spiritualität nach biblischer Tradition einen dynamischen und vielgestaltigen Charakter aufweist, dabei aber nicht beliebig wird. Kritik an bestimmten Praktiken und Ansätzen tritt meist dann auf, wenn die Spannweite ungesund hin zu einer Seite aufgelöst wird.

1. Zur Vielfalt der Spiritualität

Christliche Spiritualität – was ist das überhaupt? Über die Jahrhunderte haben Christen auf verschiedensten Wegen danach gesucht, das Leben im *spiritus*, dem Geist Gottes, zu führen, wie es Paulus in Galater 5,25 fordert. Diese Wege trieben die Eremiten in die Einsamkeit, die Franziskaner in die Armut, die Mystiker zu sich selbst und Dietrich Bonhoeffer in den Alltag; sie brachten Menschen zu ihrem Nächsten, in die Liturgie und in die Gemeinschaft. Die

Liste ließe sich fortführen.¹ So unterschiedlich diese Wege auch verliefen – in eine eher ethische, kontemplative oder ästhetische Richtung, ihnen war und ist die Frage danach gemeinsam, was eine angemessene „Entfaltung des christlichen Glaubens“ kennzeichnet (vgl. Wiggermann, 709). Spiritualität zu definieren erweist sich daher als herausfordernde Aufgabe, und Abhandlungen zu dieser Frage zeigen eine erhebliche Perspektivenvielfalt auf.² Die Einschätzung, dass sich Spiritualität als „einordnungsresistent“ erwiesen hat, scheint also zuzutreffen (Wiggermann, 709).

Eine der vielen Perspektiven auf Spiritualität ist die der Gestaltung einer Beziehung zwischen Mensch und Gott. „Beziehung“ ist ein Begriff menschlicher Erfahrung und kann unterschiedlich gefüllt werden; dementsprechend sind vielseitige und vielleicht sogar gegensätzliche spirituelle Konzeptionen denkbar. Was diese jedoch eint, ist, dass sie alle von einem Beziehungsgeschehen ausgehen. Wie kann und wie sollte diese Beziehung zwischen dem Menschen und dem in der Bibel porträtierten Gott also konkretisiert werden? Das

¹ Eine Ausführung der historischen Ausprägungen christlicher Spiritualität stellt Dahlgrün 2009, Kapitel 1 dar. Angesichts dieser Historie fragt Peng-Keller, ob christliche Spiritualität im Singular oder Plural zu verwenden sei. Mit dem Hinweis darauf, dass sich all diese Traditionen auf das Wirken des *einen* Geistes beziehen, wählt sie den Singular und betont die Unteilbarkeit dieser Traditionen (Peng-Keller 2010, 14). Ob man sich dieser optimistischen Sicht anschließen muss, ist nicht Frage dieser Arbeit, aber es ist zu beachten, was Powell zu Dogmatik und Glaubenspraxis schreibt: „Die Tatsache, dass die regulierende Funktion der Lehre sowohl auf Überzeugung als auch auf Praxis zutrifft, bringt sie in eine enge Verbindung zu christlicher Spiritualität. Ihr Hauptanliegen ist, den christlichen Charakter von Spiritualität zu erhalten.“ (Powell 2005, 7, eigene Übersetzung) Eine Theologie der Spiritualität muss daher nicht ausschließlich deskriptiv sein, sondern kann auch normativen Anspruch haben, der das christliche Proprium spiritueller Praxis bestimmt.

² Einige Beispiele: Powell nennt für seine „vielschichtige“ Theologie der Spiritualität vier bedeutende Aspekte: Verkörperlichung, Gemeinschaft, Teilhabe an der gefallenen Welt, Teilhabe am dreieinigen Gott (Powell 2005, 11 und 207). Rubach versteht als wesentliche Aspekte evangelischer Spiritualität Bibelfrömmigkeit, Nachfolge, Gemeinschaft, Zeugnis und Dienst für die Welt (Rubach 1987, 126 ff). Peng-Keller sieht Spiritualität bestimmt durch die Herkunft in Christus/Geist, den Gemeinschaftsbezug, den Vollzug im Leben durch Nachfolge und eine Grundhaltung des Vertrauens und der Zuversicht (Peng-Keller 2010, 15 und 29). Alle drei Autoren kommen aus dem protestantischen Spektrum und neben einigen gemeinsamen Aspekten (z. B. Gemeinschaftsbezug, Alltagsbezug) lassen sich auch klare Schwerpunkte ausmachen (Schriftbezug, Traditionsbezug, Geistbezug, Trinitätsbezug).

ist die Frage, die den Anstoß für die folgende Arbeit gegeben hat. Es soll gezeigt werden, dass die Mehrdimensionalität der Gott-Mensch-Beziehung mithilfe der *Relational Models Theory*, die alle menschlichen Beziehungen in vier Grundmuster unterteilt, plausibel erfasst werden und auf jeweilige Schwerpunkte hingewiesen werden kann. Dabei kann die Anwendung dieser Theorie im Rahmen dieses Artikels nur überblicksartig geschehen und nicht erschöpfend erörtert werden, weshalb an manchen Stellen auf mögliche weitere Forschung hingewiesen wird. Im Folgenden soll zunächst das Konzept von Spiritualität als Beziehungsgeschehen näher betrachtet werden (Kapitel 2), anschließend wird die *Relational Models Theory* als menschlicher Beziehungen diskutiert (Kapitel 3), das die Kategorien liefert, um die neutestamentliche Sprache über die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung zu sortieren und zu analysieren (Kapitel 4). Die Ergebnisse werden abschließend in Beziehung zu einigen Beispielen spiritueller Theologie und Praxis heutiger Christen gesetzt (Kapitel 5). Die Hoffnung dabei ist, ein tieferes Verständnis für die spirituelle Tradition zu erlangen, die die biblischen Autoren durch ihre Schriften geschaffen und geprägt haben, und Perspektiven aufzuzeigen, wie diese Tradition in einer angemessenen Weise fortgeführt werden kann.

2. Spiritualität als Beziehungsgestaltung

Das Wort „Beziehung“ ist Ausdruck dafür, dass zwei Dinge in irgendeiner Form zueinander in Verbindung stehen. Es gibt, wie noch gezeigt werden wird, sehr unterschiedliche Arten, wie solche Beziehungen zwischen Menschen gestaltet werden können. Für die folgenden Gedanken ist es hilfreich, zwischen *Beziehungsgestaltung* und *Beziehungsverhältnis* zu unterscheiden. Letzteres beschreibt eine Grundlage, den Rahmen, in dem zwei Dinge zueinander in Bezug stehen, während ersteres diesen Rahmen füllt und der Beziehung zwischen Personen in unterschiedlichen Formen Ausdruck verleihen kann.

Was ist nun „christliche“ Spiritualität im Sinne der Beziehung? Beziehungsgestaltung kann als ein wesentliches Merkmal christlicher (bzw. theistischer) Spiritualität verstanden werden, denn andere Formen (etwa säkularer oder ostasiatischer) Spiritualität kennen diesen Bezug zu einem konkreten

Gegenüber kaum.³ Das Christliche an dieser Beziehung zeigt sich weiter durch den Bezug auf ebenjenen Gott, der in der biblischen Geschichte vorgestellt wird, die die Vorbilder und den Rahmen für die Gestaltung dieser Beziehung bietet. Dieser Gott wird in der christlichen Tradition als dreieiniger erkannt und ist so bereits durch innertrinitarische Beziehungen und Gemeinschaft gekennzeichnet, die aber nicht für sich bleiben, sondern ihren Blick auf die Schöpfung und den Menschen werfen.⁴ Wenn im Folgenden von „Relationaler Spiritualität“ gesprochen wird, dann ist die Gestaltung der Beziehung zu diesem persönlichen Gott der biblischen Tradition gemeint.⁵

Dieser Gedanke, dass Spiritualität einen relationalen Charakter hat, ist nicht neu: Er findet sich in nahezu jeder Abhandlung über Spiritualität entweder explizit formuliert – dann aber nicht immer als zentrales Element oder eigenständige Konzeption – oder er wird implizit durch die Formulierungen, Bilder und Beschreibungen spiritueller Theologie und Praxis ausgedrückt.⁶

³ Man kann hier zwischen einem pneumatologischen (von Gott her gedachten) und einem anthropologischen (vom Menschen her gedachten) Spiritualitätsbegriff unterscheiden. Sautter schreibt dazu, dass Spiritualität im letzteren Fall „eine innere Geisteshaltung bzw. Geistesgestimmtheit des Menschen“ bezeichne (Sautter 2008, 47). Waaijman argumentiert dagegen mit der Offenheit von Begriffen wie „theistisch“ oder „persönlich“ und will in sein Beziehungsverständnis von Spiritualität auch säkulare und nicht-theistische Formen integriert sehen (Waaijman 2005, 129 ff). Bei seinen Ausführungen stellt sich jedoch die Frage, ob hier nicht von der Offenheit dieser Begriffe zu schnell auf deren Beliebigkeit geschlossen wird und sie am Ende zu einem inhaltsleeren Container werden.

⁴ Diese innere Beziehung Gottes und die daraus folgende grundsätzliche Orientierung Gottes auf eine äußere Beziehung zum Menschen hin, wird näher bei Swarat 2017, 500 ff beschrieben.

⁵ Relationale Spiritualität kann auch andere Perspektiven bezeichnen, z. B. gelebte Spiritualität in einer Gemeinschaft oder die Abhängigkeit von Spiritualität von den Beziehungen einer Person. Tomlinson et al. beschreiben fünf verschiedene Definitionen dieses Begriffes; diese Arbeit richtet sich nach der ersten Definition: „Relationale Spiritualität wird verstanden in Bezug darauf, wie man die Beziehung zu dem Heiligen erfährt.“ (Tomlinson et al. 2016, 57, eigene Übersetzung)

⁶ Das Ziel christlicher Spiritualität sei eine „Beziehung der Anteilnahme“ (Powell 2005, 48, eigene Übersetzung) oder „eine Beziehung zu Jesus zu entwickeln“ (Linn 1997, 10, eigene Übersetzung), sie sei eine „von Gott auf dieser Welt hervorgerufene liebende Beziehung des Menschen zu Gott und Welt“ (Dahlgrün 2009, 153; siehe auch Sauser 1988, 145) und ein Glaube, der „sich äußert“, nehme notwendigerweise eine Beziehung auf (Seitz 1983, 674). Wenn Spiritualität als „Anwesenheit Gottes“ im Leben des Christen (Ruhbach 1987, 137), als „Antwort auf den Geist im gesamten

Der Fokus auf den Aspekt der Beziehung ist unter anderem deshalb attraktiv, weil ihr ein außerordentlich dynamisches Element innewohnt, das für das Verständnis von Spiritualität hilfreich sein kann. So entfaltet beispielsweise Kees Waaijman sein Spiritualitätsverständnis von der gott-menschlichen Beziehung her. Durch das „aufeinander Einwirken der göttlichen und menschlichen Wirklichkeit“ geschehe Wachstum, Transformation und Umformung, „ein Suchprozess, in dem der Mensch sich herausbildet“ (Waaijman 2005, 128). Spiritualität als Beziehungsgestaltung ist für ihn also ein Geschehen.

Auf zwei Einschränkungen zu dem Begriff der relationalen Spiritualität muss allerdings hingewiesen werden. Einmal legt er eine Tendenz zur Verinnerlichung nahe, was im Gegensatz zu der praktischen christlichen Nachfolge im Alltag steht, die viele Autoren und auch der biblische Befund als wichtigen Ausdruck und menschlichen Anteil der Beziehungsgestaltung Mensch – Gott verstehen. Wohl auch aus diesem Grund erweitert Corinna Dahlgrün in ihrem Standardwerk ihre Definition von Spiritualität auf „die von Gott auf dieser Welt hervorgerufene liebende Beziehung des Menschen zu Gott *und Welt* [Hervorhebung hinzugefügt], in der der Mensch immer von neuem sein Leben gestaltet und die er nachdenkend verantwortet“ (Dahlgrün 2009, 153). Zweitens könnte der Begriff der Beziehung die Spiritualität auf eine individuelle Ebene beschränken und den Bezug zu der Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen übersehen, der jedoch in der theologischen Reflexion (siehe Fußnote 2) sowie der biblischen Tradition ebenfalls eine nicht unerhebliche Rolle spielt.

3. Die Relational Models Theory

Wie kann nun die Vielfalt menschlicher Beziehungen sinnvoll und systematisch erfasst werden? Ein plausibler Ansatz hierzu wird von Fiske und seiner *Relational Models Theory* vertreten. Dort verbindet er verschiedene soziologische und psychologische Modellbildungen, um zu einer möglichst universellen Theorie der sozialen Beziehungen zu kommen. Sein Grundgedanke ist einfach: Alle Beziehungen, die von Menschen gestaltet werden, lassen sich in vier Grundmuster unterteilen (vgl. Fiske 1992, 689f), die sukzessive in der Kindheit als Handlungsmodelle erlernt werden. Jedem dieser Grundmuster

christliche Leben“ (Downey 1997, 46, eigene Übersetzung) oder als Miteinander von anthropologischer und pneumatologischer Perspektive beschrieben wird (vgl. Peng-Keller 2010, 14), dann setzen diese Darstellungen ebenfalls eine Beziehung voraus.

ist eine bestimmte Art eigen, Entscheidungen zu treffen, Ressourcen zu verteilen, Handlungen zu bewerten usw. Auch wenn in verschiedenen Kulturen die Ausprägung der Grundmuster variiert und unterschiedliche Gestalt annehmen kann, funktionieren sie im Kern nach denselben Prinzipien (vgl. Fiske 1992, 693). Die Theorie Fiskes hat sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten in verschiedenen Kontexten bewährt und als hilfreicher heuristischer Ansatz erwiesen, um die verschiedenen Arten menschlicher Beziehungen zu klassifizieren, was sie auch für eine theologische Anwendung als geeignet erscheinen lässt.⁷ Hier soll seine Theorie daher kurz vorgestellt und auf ihre theologische Anschlussfähigkeit hin betrachtet werden.

3.1 Vier Grundmuster der sozialen Interaktion

In dem ersten der vier Beziehungsmuster, dem *Communal Sharing* (CS), ist die Gemeinsamkeit das bestimmende Prinzip. Eine CS-Beziehung wird durch geteilte Leiblichkeit und Eigenschaften der greifbaren Nähe definiert (Verwandtschaft, gemeinsames Essen, Ideologie, die familienartige Bande begründet) und mögliche Unterschiede zwischen den einzelnen Mitgliedern der Gruppe spielen keine Rolle: Ressourcen stehen jedem zur Verfügung; es besteht der Wunsch nach gegenseitiger Fürsorge; es gibt kein Streben nach Macht; Entscheidungen werden möglichst im Konsens getroffen (vgl. Fiske 1992, 694–696; Biber, Hupfeld und Meier 2008, 622). Beispiele für diese Art der Beziehung können Mutter-Kind-Beziehungen, Sportteams, Selbsthilfegruppen, manche Stammesgesellschaften oder auch Liebespaare sein (vgl. Fiske 2004, 4). Charakteristisch ist zudem, dass klar zwischen In-Group und Out-Group unterschieden wird und so eine eindeutige Identität und Abgrenzung gegenüber anderen Menschen geschieht. Nicht selten werden CS-Beziehungen durch Gesten körperlicher Nähe ausgedrückt wie einem Kuss,

⁷ „Reichliche und verschiedene Beweise unterstützen die Relational Models Theory, etwa ethnographische Beobachtungen, ethnologische Vergleiche zwischen Kulturen, Forschung zu natürlicher sozialer Kognition im Alltag und experimentelle Studien, die Bewertungsskalen und künstliche Stimuli verwenden.“ (Fiske 2007, 744, eigene Übersetzung) Die Theorie erfuhr in Bezug auf verschiedene Bereiche bereits eine breite Anwendung, beispielsweise auf persönliche Werteorientierung, Erziehung in Schulen oder kybernetische Prozesse (vgl. Biber, Hupfeld und Meier 2008, 609–628; Bagley 2010, 83–106; Giessner und van Quaquebeke 2010, 43–55).

einem sexuellen Akt oder synchrone Bewegungen wie einem Tanz (vgl. Fiske, Thomson und Thein 2009, 1295).

Das zweite Grundmuster menschlicher Beziehungen ist das *Authority Ranking* (AR), in dem das Prinzip der Rangordnung bestimmend ist. Wer in dieser Rangordnung höher steht, hat zum einen das Recht, Entscheidungen zu fällen, Moral zu definieren, Gehorsam einzufordern, die Gruppe zu repräsentieren und über Ressourcen zu verfügen (auch nicht-materielle wie Informationen oder Ehre). Gleichzeitig trägt diese Person die Verantwortung für Wohlergehen, Sicherheit und Stabilität der Gruppe und muss daher Ressourcen wieder verteilen und auf schwache Mitglieder achten (vgl. Fiske 1992, 700–702). Beziehungen, die nach dem AR-Muster konstituiert sind, vermitteln Sicherheit und einen klaren Ort für den einzelnen; dementsprechend schätzen untergeordnete Personen den Wert der Tradition besonders hoch (vgl. Biber, Hupfeld und Meier 2008, 622). Äußere Merkmale von Rangordnungen können sich z.B. auf Alter, Geschlecht, Fähigkeiten oder Ämter beziehen (vgl. Fiske 2004, 5). Einige politische Führungspersönlichkeiten, Gottesbilder in vielen Religionen oder militärische Hierarchien sind Beispiele für Systeme, in denen Rangordnung eine große Rolle spielt. Eine AR-Beziehung kann durch Vergrößerung, räumliche Erhöhung oder zeitlichen Vorzug dargestellt werden (Fiske 2010, 40–82).

Als *Equality Matching* (EM) bezeichnet Fiske das dritte Muster menschlicher Beziehungen, das von dem Prinzip der Gleichheit bestimmt wird. Alle Teilnehmer der Beziehung stehen auf einer Stufe und nehmen die gleichen Rechte, Pflichten und Möglichkeiten wahr, wobei das Ziel der Beziehung ist, Ungleichheiten aufzulösen. Dies ist beispielsweise der Fall, wenn zwei Menschen einen Gefallen austauschen oder das *ius talionis* anwenden. Auch wenn in einem Rennen die Teilnehmer auf der gleichen Position starten, in einem Spiel von allen dieselben Regeln befolgt werden oder in einer Demokratie jeder Bürger genau eine Stimme abgeben darf, orientiert man sich an EM-Prinzipien (vgl. Fiske 1992, 694–696; 2007, 743). Anders als in AR-Kontexten werden Unterschiede zwischen Individuen als problematisch angesehen und es wird als nötig erachtet, diese auszugleichen. Anders als in CS-Kontexten geschieht dies aber unabhängig von Bedarf oder Nützlichkeit; Gleichheit ist aus sich heraus erstrebenswert (vgl. Fiske 1992, 702–706). EM-Beziehungen können durch Gleichheit in Größe, Höhe, Zeit usw. erkennbar gemacht werden (vgl. Fiske, Thomson und Thein 2009, 1295).

Das vierte und letzte Grundmuster wird als *Market Pricing* (MP) bezeichnet und richtet sich nach dem Prinzip der Proportionalität. Ziel der Beziehung ist, den eigenen Gewinn zu erhöhen. Kosten und Nutzen werden zueinander in Beziehung gesetzt und nach der Frage beurteilt: „Ist das, was ich aus dieser Beziehung bekomme, proportional zu dem, was ich hineinstecke?“ (Fiske 2004, 6) Die offensichtlichsten Beispiele für MP-Beziehungen werden durch Geld repräsentiert (Preise, Mieten, Steuern etc.); aber auch mit abstrakteren Konzepten wie Zeit und Aufwand können Kosten und Nutzen kalkuliert werden. MP-Beziehungen beruhen auf Freiwilligkeit; es muss also kein Austausch geschehen. Während in CS-, AR- und EM-Beziehungen von dem Gegenüber erwartet wird, seinen Teil beizusteuern, muss in einer MP-Beziehung zuerst ein gutes Angebot gestellt werden, das auf eine Nachfrage trifft (vgl. Fiske 1992, 706–708). Beispiele für solche Beziehungen sind Arbeitsplätze, Handelsgeschäfte oder Kreditvergaben, in denen die Kriterien klar sind, um bestimmte Ergebnisse zu erzielen. Moralisch ähneln MP-Prinzipien dem Utilitarismus, der nach dem Gesamtnutzen für eine Person oder Gruppe fragt und dann auf dieser Grundlage zu einer Entscheidung findet (vgl. Fiske 2004, 6; 2007, 744).

3.2 *Psychologie als theologischer Anknüpfungspunkt*

Inwiefern ist es nun berechtigt, eine solche psychologische Theorie als theologisches Werkzeug zu verwenden? Wie soll ein Denkansatz, der Jahrtausende nach der Niederschrift der biblischen Texte entwickelt wurde und dies noch dazu in einer diesen Texten völlig fremden Kultur, dazu beitragen, das biblisch-christliche Denken über Gott zu bereichern? Zum einen ist Offenbarung geschichtlich; Gott macht sich in der Geschichte fassbar, um zum Menschen zu kommen. Die Inkarnation Gottes impliziert, dass er in menschlichen Kategorien verständlich sein *will*. Man kann sagen, dass Gott sich zum „Gegenstand des Menschen gemacht hat“, sodass wir auch „gegenständlich von ihm reden können“ (Pöhlmann 2002, 60). Wenn also in der Bibel eine reichhaltige Bildsprache verwendet wird, um von, über und mit Gott zu reden, dann kann man sagen, dass diese Art des Redens der Absicht Gottes entspricht. Dieser Bezug auf unsere menschliche Existenz bedeutet sekundär, dass (z. B. psychologische) Modelle, die wir verwenden, um ebendiese menschliche Existenz zu

erfassen, dazu geeignet sind, das Sprechen über Gott zu bereichern, denn letzteres lässt sich von ersterem nicht trennen.⁸

Zum anderen: Sprache ist gebunden; jeder Sprechakt ist geknüpft an konkrete Erfahrungen des Menschen. Biblische Autoren können nur innerhalb ihres eigenen Horizontes Gotteserfahrungen beschreiben und ausdrücken, daher greifen sie auf die Bilder zurück, die ihnen bekannt sind. Indem sie dies tun, eröffnen sie dem heutigen Leser das Angebot, Gott mit den Augen dieser Welt zu sehen. Die *Relational Models Theory* beansprucht Universalität und Transkulturalität, und deshalb kann man sich von ihrem Beitrag in dem Gespräch mit den Texten der Vergangenheit durchaus einen Mehrwert erhoffen. Die *Relational Models Theory* erscheint also als vielversprechende Perspektive auf die biblischen Schriften. Da sie vor allem deskriptiv und heuristisch vorgeht, ist auch ihr spekulatives Element minimiert, was nicht alle psychologischen Ansätze der Exegese von sich behaupten können.⁹

3.3 Theologische Anwendung

Nicht nur in Bezug auf die biblischen Schriften, auch in anderen Forschungsfeldern hat sich gezeigt, dass eine Theorie der sozialen Beziehungen in einem bereichernden Dialog mit der Theologie stehen kann, denn immerhin spielen Beziehungen im Vollzug des christlichen Glaubens grundsätzlich eine essentielle Rolle. So konnte die *Relational Models Theory* bereits in den Bereichen der Ökumenik (Höschele 2016) und Ethik (Höschele 2021) Anwendung finden und damit ihr theologisches Potential darstellen. Der Mehrwert dieser relationalen Perspektive auf Theologie ist, dass sie die Dynamik und die Interaktion unterstreicht, die zu vielen Themen wie den obigen gehört, und das Geschehen zwischen den verschiedenen Akteuren bedenkt. Zu der Frage

⁸ Nichts Anderes vollzieht die Exegese, indem sie den historischen Charakter der Bibel anerkennt und durch die Analyse von soziokulturellem Umfeld, verarbeiteten Traditionen usw. versucht, den Text und seine göttliche Botschaft tiefer zu verstehen und gleichzeitig Fehlinterpretationen möglichst zu identifizieren und zu vermeiden (vgl. Maier 2013, 212).

⁹ Hier ist an die tiefenpsychologische Exegese zu denken, die u. a. von Drewermann vertreten wurde und die sich stark an den Ideen Freuds und Jungs orientiert (vgl. Vette 2007, Abschnitt 6.1). Im Unterschied dazu soll die Anwendung der *Relational Models Theory* keine neue Kategorie der Deutung eröffnen, die eine spekulative Bedeutungsebene hinter dem Text aufschlüsselt, sondern eine Kategorie der Sortierung, die mit den Erkenntnissen arbeitet, die bereits durch andere exegetische Schritte erarbeitet wurden.

nach dem Was wird die Frage nach dem Wie gestellt. Ganz ähnlich verhält es sich mit der Frage nach einer relationalen Spiritualität.

4. Die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung im Neuen Testament

Spiritualität kann als Beziehungsgestaltung verstanden werden, die aus einem bestimmten Beziehungsverhältnis zu Gott heraus erwächst. Menschliche Beziehungen können, wie gezeigt wurde, umfassend in vier Muster bzw. Verhältnisse eingeteilt werden, und die Frage danach, welche dieser Beziehungsmuster die Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch angemessen erfassen können, liegt nahe. Aus christlicher Perspektive teilt sich Gott in den neutestamentlichen Schriften dem Menschen auf eine einzigartige Weise mit, weil die Erfahrung des menschengewordenen Christus einen essentiellen Unterschied ausmacht (Heb. 1,1–2). Im Rahmen dieser Arbeit sollen nun die Schriften des Neuen Testaments auf diese vier Beziehungsmuster hin untersucht werden, indem Bilder und Formulierungen geordnet werden, mit denen die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung beschrieben wird. Es wird also die Frage nach dem neutestamentlich markierten Beziehungsverhältnis gestellt; die untersuchten Texte behandeln nicht notwendigerweise Spiritualität im eigentlichen Sinne. Dieses Verhältnis zwischen Gott und Mensch stellt aber die Grundlage für eine konkrete Gestaltung der Beziehung – und mithin von Spiritualität – dar.

Dabei können keine belastbaren quantitativen Aussagen gemacht werden. Die Einordnung in die vier Beziehungsmuster unterliegt einem gewissen Interpretationsspielraum, und manche Bilder implizieren Konnotationen, die uns heute unzugänglich sind. Aussagen zum Beziehungsverhältnis sind zudem manchmal explizit, sehr viel häufiger geschehen sie jedoch implizit, z. B. durch die Beschreibung Gottes als Akteur. In dem Rahmen dieses Artikels können vor allem Textbeispiele expliziter Art eingebracht werden. Ein Durchgang durch das Neue Testament sollte aber dennoch ermöglichen, Schwerpunkte der verschiedenen Beziehungsmuster zu erkennen (siehe Tabelle im Anhang).

4.1 Communal Sharing: Gott ist nah

In Jesus Christus wurde Gott Mensch und nahm am Leben dieser Welt teil. Durch ihn hat Gott die Trennung zur Menschheit überwunden. Johannes schreibt: „Und das Wort wurde Fleisch und wohnte unter uns.“ (Joh. 1,14) Er beschreibt eine *tatsächliche* Nähe zwischen Gott und Mensch, die hergestellt

wurde. Das vielseitige Beziehungsverhältnis, das die Autoren des Neuen Testaments zu Gott bezeugen, pflegen und vermitteln, wurzelt maßgeblich in dieser Erfahrung. Jesus berührte die Menschen, unterhielt sich mit ihnen und war einer von ihnen. Wenn CS-Beziehungen durch geteilte Leiblichkeit definiert werden (siehe 3.1), dann schafft Gott, indem er sich nicht nur mit Menschen identifiziert, sondern selbst zu einem wird, die ideale Ausgangssituation für eine solche Beziehung.¹⁰ Einige erkennen in dieser Jesusoffenbarung eine Verschiebung im Beziehungsverhältnis zwischen alttestamentlichen und neutestamentlichen Schriften. Pöhlmann formuliert, dass Gott „hier [im AT] in erster Linie der *Herr* (Adonai), dort [im NT] in erster Linie der *Vater* (Abba)“ sei, wobei dies natürlich nicht absolut gelte, sondern nur Schwerpunkte bezeichne (Pöhlmann 2002, 117).

Diese greifbare Nähe Gottes durch Jesus wird auch im Hebräerbrief beschrieben:

Wir haben nicht einen Hohepriester, der nicht Mitleid haben könnte mit unseren Schwachheiten, sondern der in allem in gleicher Weise wie wir versucht worden, doch ohne Sünde. Lasst uns nun mit Freimütigkeit hinzutreten zum Thron der Gnade, damit wir Barmherzigkeit empfangen und Gnade finden zur rechtzeitigen Hilfe! (Heb. 4,15–16)

Weil Jesus uns Menschen nahekam und uneingeschränkt Teil dieser Welt war, können Christen ebenfalls „hinzutreten“, also nahekommen. Die *tatsächliche* Nähe wird zum Nährboden einer *metaphorischen* Nähe, die der Christ in seiner geistlichen Identität verwirklicht sehen kann. Paulus schreibt entsprechend, dass Heidenchristen Gott „nahe geworden“ sind (Eph. 2,13; vgl. Schnackenburg 2003, 111), und Christus bzw. sein Geist eine „Wohnung“ in dem Gläubigen haben (z. B. Röm. 8,9). Die zahlreichen „in Christus“ bzw. „in mir/uns“-Worte drücken ebenfalls bildhaft diese Nähe aus und lassen den Eindruck von Einheit und Gemeinsamkeit lebendig werden (z. B. Kol. 1,27; 2,6–7).¹¹

¹⁰ Wie noch in den folgenden Abschnitten deutlich werden wird, kommen in der Person Jesu sehr vielfältige Beziehungsmuster zum Ausdruck. In einer weiteren Arbeit kann diese Vielfalt auf ihre christologische Bedeutung hin näher untersucht werden.

¹¹ Insgesamt wird im Neuen Testament 64-mal die Wendung „in Jesus Christus“ und 37-mal „im Herrn“ verwendet, wie Schnelle aufzeigt. Weiter beschreibt er: „Durch die Taufe gelangt der Glaubende in den Raum des pneumatischen Christus und konstituiert sich die neue Existenz in

Auch auf der Ebene der zwischenmenschlichen CS-Beziehungen wird diese Nähe vielfach ausgedrückt. Grundlegend sind die Tischgemeinschaften Jesu, die „Vertrauen, [...] Bruderschaft; [...] Lebensgemeinschaft“ ausdrücken; auch das urchristliche Abendmahl, das leiblicher Ausdruck der Gemeinde für ihre Gemeinschaft mit Jesus Christus war, baut auf dieser Tradition auf (Jeremias 1960, 196f). Gott und Christ teilen umfassende „Gemeinschaft“ miteinander (Phil. 2,1; 1 Joh. 1,3); konkret nennt Jesus seine Zuhörer „Bruder und Schwester und Mutter“ (Mk. 3,35); Paulus spricht von der Gemeinde als der „Geliebten“ Gottes (Röm. 9,25–26) oder der „Verlobten“ Jesu (2 Kor. 11,2). Sogar die Vereinigung zweier Menschen im Sexualakt kann als Analogie für die Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch benutzt werden (1 Kor. 6,17). Und schließlich dürfen Christen ihren Gott mit dem vertrauten „Abba“ ansprechen, weil sie zu ihm in einer Vater-Sohn-Beziehung stehen (Röm. 8,9–14; Gal. 4,6).¹²

Aus diesem CS-Verhältnis ergeben sich Eckpunkte der Beziehungsgestaltung. Ziel ist es, aus der Nähe zu Gott heraus zu handeln. „Wenn wir durch den Geist leben, so lasst uns durch den Geist wandeln!“ (Gal. 5,25) Bemerkenswert ist hier, dass die Motivation zum ethischen Handeln nicht darin besteht, einen Gewinn zu erhalten (MP) oder Gott etwas zukommen zu lassen (AR), sondern sie geht und denkt von der Nähe zu Gott aus: Identität bestimmt Verhalten. CS-Spiritualität schafft ein Bewusstsein für die CS-Beziehung zu Gott. Gebet (Röm. 8,16), Ethik (1 Kor. 6,17), Hoffnung auf die Wiederkunft (Offb. 21,3–4) und Gemeindeleben (Eph. 2,19) können deshalb in einer Haltung praktiziert werden, dass sie Ausdruck, Konsequenz und Vergegenwärtigung dieser Nähe zu Gott sind.

der Verleihung des Geistes als Angeld auf die in der Gegenwart real beginnende und in der Zukunft sich vollendende Erlösung. Der Mensch wird aus seiner Selbstlokalisierung herausgerissen und findet sein Selbst in der Christus-Beziehung.“ (Schnelle 2007, 253) Kümmel 1987, 196 ist zuzustimmen, der darauf hinweist, dass Paulus aber nicht so weit geht, an eine mystische Vereinigung mit Christus zu denken.

¹² Die Bezeichnung als „Vater“ drückt keine reine CS-Bezeichnung aus, wie auch noch im folgenden Kapitel deutlich werden wird. Dennoch schwingt hier eine neue Nähe mit, wie z. B. Schlier 1978, 254 ausdrückt: „Es ist nicht ein ängstliches Herbeirufen des abwesenden Gottes, sondern der vertrauensvolle Anruf des anwesenden Gottes.“

4.2 Authority Ranking: Gott ist höher

Auch AR, das zweite Grundmuster, spielt für die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung, wie sie im Neuen Testament dargestellt wird, eine wesentliche Rolle. Fiske sieht „den Glauben an ein höchstes Wesen, das der Schöpfer sei, dessen Wort Wahrheit sei und dessen Wille gut sei“ als klassisches Beispiel für AR-Beziehungen (Fiske 1992, 701). Die Beziehung zu Gott als höchstem Wesen orientiert sich natürlicherweise an dem Prinzip der Rangordnung.

Als „Herr“ wird zur neutestamentlichen Zeit im profanen Gebrauch ein Mensch bezeichnet, der in wirtschaftlichen oder sozialen Aspekten Kontrolle und Entscheidungsgewalt besitzt (*Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 1992, 813). In Gleichnissen wird daher immer wieder von Gott oder Jesus als „Herrn“ gesprochen und die Figur, die Gott repräsentiert, ist ganz im AR-Stil meist diejenige, die die Macht hat oder über Ressourcen verfügt.¹³ Gläubige nehmen dagegen die Position der „Diener“ oder „Knechte“ ein, die Gott gegenüber Rechenschaft schuldig sind (Mt. 20,8; 25,14–31; Mk. 13,35; Lk. 10,2; 12,36–37). Außerhalb dieser Geschichten realisiert sich daher die Herr-Diener-Beziehung dadurch, dass die *realen* Ressourcen der Gläubigen wie Zeit und Arbeitskraft (1 Kor. 4,1 ff), Ehrerbietung (Phil. 4,19–20) oder der eigene Körper (1 Kor. 6,19–20) Gott zur Verfügung stehen und nach seinen Idealen eingesetzt werden. Gesteigert wird das Bild des „Herrn“ dann, wenn nicht nur einzelne Lebensbereiche Gott zugeordnet werden, sondern die menschliche Existenz des Gläubigen an sich als Gottes Besitz bezeichnet wird: „Alles ist euer, ihr aber seid Christi, Christus aber ist Gottes.“ (1 Kor. 3,22–23) Meist wird Gottes Besitzanspruch auf die gesamte Gemeinde bezogen (Eph. 1,13–14; 1 Petr. 2,9–10; Offb. 14,1).

Eine weitere menschliche Beziehungserfahrung, die nach dem AR-Muster strukturiert ist, ist die zwischen Lehrer und Schüler. Die Autorität des Lehrers gründet in seinem umfangreicheren Wissen, seiner Weisheit und zuweilen auch nur in seiner Position. Jesus wird als Lehrer respektiert (Mt. 11,28–30) und in Joh. 13,3 sogar als „Lehrer und Herr“ bezeichnet, was seine Unterweisung mit Autorität verknüpft. Weitere analoge Beispiele (Gott als Richter, König oder Hirte) sind im Anhang aufgeführt; auf ihre Ausführung wird hier

¹³ „Herr“ wird auch in einem abstrakteren Sinn als Titel verwendet, wie in Joh. 20,28; 2 Kor. 11,7; Offb. 4,8, vgl. *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* 1992, 814 ff.

verzichtet, da Gottes AR-Position in den neutestamentlichen Schriften evident ist.¹⁴

Die Gestaltung einer AR-Beziehung zu Gott beruht auf dem Verständnis, dass die höhergestellte Person ein Anrecht auf Ressourcen hat. AR-Spiritualität zeichnet sich daher zum einen durch Gehorsam aus. Sie verleiht der Beziehung zu Gott Form, indem der Mensch in seinem Leben den Willen und die Werte Gottes akzeptiert und umsetzt: „Nicht jeder, der zu mir sagt: Herr, Herr! wird in das Reich der Himmel hineinkommen, sondern wer den Willen meines Vaters tut, der in den Himmeln ist.“ (Mt. 7,21) Dieses Beziehungsverhältnis kann sich auf so unterschiedliche Bereiche beziehen wie Ethik (Mt. 6,24; Kol. 4,1), Lektüre der heiligen Schriften (2 Tim. 3,16–17) und Gebet (1 Thess. 5,17–18), die auch teilweise bereits im CS-Kontext genannt wurden und offenbar verschieden aufgeladen werden können. Auf der anderen Seite fließen aber auch Ressourcen von der höhergestellten Person zurück, in Bezug auf Gott vor allem wohlwollendes Eingreifen. Der Gläubige versteht Gott als Retter (Heb. 13,5–6) und denjenigen, der Gebete hört und auf sie reagiert (Lk. 11,9–13; 18,1).

Darüber hinaus fällt auf, dass die AR-Beziehungsebene in einer Wechselbeziehung zur CS-Beziehungsebene steht: Immer wieder werden beide Aspekte miteinander vermengt. In Röm. 9,25 wird der Gläubige zwar mit dem Bild der „Geliebten“ bezeichnet (CS), zuvor wird er aber als „Ton“ beschrieben und Gott als „Töpfer“ (AR). Auch die Beschreibung des Gläubigen als „Sohn“ kann CS-Charakter haben, aber AR-Aspekte sind ebenso präsent, denn ein guter Vater „züchtigt“ seinen Sohn (Heb. 12,7) und verteilt Ressourcen (Lk. 11,11–13); die Liste ließe sich fortsetzen. Damit weist die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung des Neuen Testaments eine relationale Spannweite auf: Umfassende Nähe kommt zusammen mit umfassender Autorität. Auch in menschlichen Beziehungen ist es nicht ungewöhnlich, dass sich verschiedene Muster überlagern (vgl. Fiske 2004, 8), man muss diese Spannweite also nicht als Widerspruch missverstehen, da beide Perspektiven im Neuen Testament offenbar nebeneinander stehen können.

¹⁴ Aufgrund seiner Bedeutsamkeit für die biblische Tradition (vor allem des Alten Testaments) sei noch der Bund erwähnt, ebenfalls ein Beispiel für eine AR-Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch. „Der Gott Jahwe geht kein wechselseitiges Bündnis ein, sondern gewährt seinen B., verpflichtet sich selbst und nimmt in die Pflicht, wem er den B. auferlegt.“ (Gertz 1998, 1863)

4.3 Equality Matching: Gott ist partnerschaftlich

Weniger klar als in den ersten beiden Fällen zeigt sich die Situation in Bezug auf das EM-Beziehungsmuster. Gott kann eindeutig als nah und als höher erkannt werden, aber wird von ihm als einem „Partner“ gesprochen, der gleichberechtigt neben dem Menschen steht und auf dem dieselben Erwartungen liegen?

Tatsächlich scheint an manchen Stellen im Neuen Testament eine solche Beziehung die Sprache über Gott zu motivieren.

Jeder nun, der sich vor den Menschen zu mir bekennen wird, zu dem werde auch ich mich bekennen vor meinem Vater, der in den Himmeln ist. Wer aber mich vor den Menschen verleugnen wird, den werde auch ich verleugnen vor meinem Vater, der in den Himmeln ist. (Mt. 10,32–33)

Der Gedanke, den Jesus hier äußert, folgt dem EM-Prinzip, dass Ungleichheiten ausgeglichen werden müssen: Wenn von der einen Seite ein Bekenntnis gegeben wird, dann wird dies auch von der anderen Seite erwartet. Die AR-Beziehung zu Gott erkennt zwar auch Ungleichheit an, diese soll aber nicht ausgeglichen werden, sondern sie wird akzeptiert und entsprechend gehandelt. Eine CS-Beziehung auf der anderen Seite fragt nicht danach, wer wie viel eingebracht hat, sie ist sich über die Sicherheit dieser Beziehung im Klaren und auch darüber, dass jeder das einbringt, was in seinen Möglichkeiten liegt. Das obige Beispiel unterscheidet sich von beiden Beziehungsmustern, weil eine Balance erreicht werden soll. Diese Balance bildet die Grundlage für den EM-Gedanken in einigen Bibeltexten, in denen Jesus die Rolle eines Vorbildes zukommt.¹⁵ Gläubige seien die „Nachahmer“ Jesu (Eph. 5,1–2), und weil Jesus sein Leben für die Menschen hingegeben hat, haben auch die Gläubigen eine „Schuldigkeit“, ihr Leben für andere hinzugeben (1 Joh. 3,16; 4,11). Was der Eine tut, das tut auch der Andere – es wird ein Ausgleich erwartet.

¹⁵ Es kann eingewandt werden, dass einem Vorbild bereits eine höhere Stellung zukommt und dies daher als AR eingeordnet werden müsste. Tatsächlich stehen die genannten Texte meist in einem AR-Kontext, in dem die Autorität Gottes in keiner Weise in Frage gestellt wird. Gerade vor diesem Hintergrund ist es aber interessant zu beobachten, dass nicht Gehorsam, sondern Ausgleich erwartet wird; die Frage, ob eine Ungleichheit beglichen werden kann, steht nicht zur Debatte. In die Beziehung werden so EM-Aspekte eingeflochten. Die Vermengung von EM- mit AR- und CS-Beziehungen wird unten diskutiert.

Nun fällt auf, dass ausschließlich die göttliche Seite in Vorleistung geht, nie der Mensch. Von ihm wird dagegen erwartet, dass er auf die Ungleichheit reagiert, die durch das Handeln Gottes geschaffen wurde, und dass er nach dem EM-Prinzip des Ausgleiches handelt. Die Beispiele, die oben genannt wurden, stehen auch nicht für sich selbst, sondern sind in einen Kontext eingebettet, in dem bereits andere Beziehungsmuster dargestellt wurden. Bevor Jesus in Mt. 10,32 den Bekenntnisaustausch fordert, beschreibt er Gott als Richter, „der sowohl Seele als auch Leib zu verderben vermag“, und in 1 Joh. 3–4 wird stark mit einer Inkarnationstheologie argumentiert, also der CS-Identität in Christus (vgl. Schnelle 2013, 547). Die Gleichheit, die zwischen dem Gläubigen und Jesus an manchen Stellen ausgedrückt wird, scheint daher nur sekundär und von der Autorität oder Nähe Gottes abgeleitet zu sein.¹⁶ Die Zuordnung solcher Texte zu dem Modell EM muss also zurückhaltend geschehen.

EM-Beziehungen sind nicht unbedingt durch eine starke Vertrauensbasis charakterisiert; der Austausch ist dann beendet, wenn jede Seite ihren Beitrag geleistet hat (vgl. Fiske 1992, 702). Eine reine EM-Spiritualität würde zwar Ausgewogenheit erreichen wollen, aber darüber hinaus keine tiefere Beziehungsqualität anstreben. Wenn sie aber als abhängig verstanden wird, dann scheint sie eine besondere Wirkung zu entfalten, weil etwa eine Autorität sich nur durch einen Akt der Selbstlosigkeit auf dieses Beziehungsverhältnis einlassen kann, denn welchen Grund gibt es, dass sie in Vorleistung gehen sollte? Eine AR-EM-Spiritualität kann deshalb von besonderer Faszination und Hingabe geleitet werden, wie es zum Beispiel der berühmte Philipperhymnus (Phil. 2,5–11), die Geschichte des Herrn, der seinem Knecht dient (Lk. 12,35–37), oder das unerwartete Handeln Jesu bei der Fußwaschung (Joh. 13,1–17) ausdrücken.

¹⁶ EM-Beziehungen, in denen die Ressourcen stark unterschiedlich verteilt sind, können sich zu praktischen AR-Beziehungen entwickeln, weil der eine Partner in eine immer stärkere Schuldigkeit gegenüber dem Anderen gerät (Fiske 1992, 705). Die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung geschieht aber schon allein aufgrund des Textbefundes umgekehrt: Von der AR-Beziehung her können auch EM-Beziehungsaspekte gedacht werden. Im ersten Fall geschieht eine Machtkonzentration, im zweiten Fall dagegen eine Machtverteilung.

4.4 Market Pricing: Gott macht ein Angebot

Auch die Identifikation des MP-Beziehungsmusters in neutestamentlichen Texten ist nur eingeschränkt möglich. Zwischen Gott und Mensch geschieht nach dem Denken der Apostel kein Austausch von Gütern oder Leistungen, die proportional zueinander in Beziehung gesetzt werden könnten und deren Unterschiede berechenbar wären, so wie es bei Geldgeschäften der Fall wäre. Messbarkeit ist daher keine zu erwartende Eigenschaft einer MP-Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch. Biblische Autoren scheinen die Gott-Mensch-Beziehung dennoch an manchen Stellen mit Verweis auf Kosten und Nutzen zu beschreiben, und das Kriterium der Proportionalität scheint dann in einem allgemeinen Sinne anwendbar zu sein:

Aber was auch immer mir Gewinn war, das habe ich um Christi willen für Verlust gehalten; ja wirklich, ich halte auch alles für Verlust um der unübertrefflichen Größe der Erkenntnis Christi Jesu, meines Herrn, willen, um dessentwillen ich alles eingebüßt habe und es für Dreck halte, damit ich Christus gewinne. (Phil. 3,7–8)

Die überschwängliche Sprache des Paulus geht mit einer einfachen Kalkulation einher: Er investiert „alles“, um „Christus [zu] gewinnen“. Sein Einsatz wird in ein Verhältnis zu dem von Gott¹⁷ versprochenen Resultat gestellt und er erkennt, dass der Nutzen, nämlich die „Erkenntnis Christi Jesu“ und die „Auferstehung aus den Toten“, wie er in Vers 11 schreibt, die Kosten übersteigt (ähnlich 2 Tim. 4,8). Am Ende ist der Inhalt dieses Preises aber, Christus näher zu sein: „Er verlangt danach, Christus mehr zu kennen, denn er will die persönliche Beziehung zu seinem Herrn vertiefen.“ (O'Brien 2009, 391, eigene Übersetzung) CS- und MP-Beziehung vermengen sich; der Gewinn ist Nähe.

Ein anderes Bild, das Anklänge an MP-Beziehungen enthält, ist das des „Lohnes“. Immer wieder wird Gott in der Rolle des Arbeitgebers dargestellt, der Menschen anwirbt, ihnen eine Aufgabe gibt und am Ende Lohn auszahlt (Mt. 20,1–16; 2 Tim. 2,4; Heb. 11,6.26). Dies überschneidet sich natürlich mit Gottes Rolle als „Herr“ in einer AR-Beziehung, aber die Erwähnung des Geldes und der Kontext, der oft von bestimmter Arbeit oder Verzicht für Gott spricht, machen es plausibel, diese Beziehungen auch unter MP-Aspekten zu

¹⁷ Siehe dazu V. 14: Die Berufung wird von Gott ausgesprochen (vgl. O'Brien 2009, 433).

deuten. Weitere Beispiele sind die Versprechen des „hundertfachen“ Gewinns (Mt. 19,29) oder des „Schatzes“ im Himmel (Mk. 10,21–22), die der Gläubige für seinen Verzicht erhält. Dieses Kalkulieren nach Kosten und Nutzen kommt wohl am stärksten bei Paulus zum Ausdruck, wenn er schreibt, dass Christen die „elendsten aller Menschen“ seien, wenn sie die Aussicht auf die Auferstehung als Belohnung nicht hätten (1 Kor. 15,19). In diesem Fall würde sich ihr Einsatz nicht lohnen und – so in letzter Konsequenz – sollte die Beziehung zum Gott Jesu Christi auch nicht eingegangen werden.

Dieses Prinzip der Freiwilligkeit und der bewussten Entscheidung für die Beziehung ist wichtig für den MP-Kontext. Viele der obigen Texte stehen in einem Zusammenhang der Ermutigung und Werbung, in denen Gott und sein Reich in Konkurrenz zu anderen Weltanschauungen oder Lebensstilen stehen. Wie bei den Beispielen der EM-Beziehung zu Jesus steht auch hier außer Frage, dass das Angebot Gottes bei Weitem alle Alternativen übersteigt; auch die Aussage des Paulus in 1 Kor. 15,19 ist keine ernsthaft zu bedenkende Möglichkeit.

Insgesamt sind MP-Beziehungen nicht primär auf den Anderen ausgerichtet und fragen nach dem eigenen vertraglich festgelegten Nutzen. In der christlichen Gott-Mensch-Beziehung im MP-Stil ist die Ausrichtung auf den Anderen jedoch wesentlich, da sie eng mit CS- und AR-Beziehungen verwoben ist. Der Bezug zu Gott wird dadurch gestärkt, dass entweder der Inhalt des Gewinns auf ihn bezogen ist – er schenkt (eschatologische) Nähe zu sich selbst – oder dadurch, dass die AR-Rolle Gottes eine andere, mehr werbende Betonung erfährt.¹⁸ Wie bei der EM-Beziehung zu Gott ist diese Perspektive aber abhängig ist von anderen, grundlegenderen Beziehungsverhältnissen. Eine MP-Spiritualität nach dem Prinzip *do ut des* ist aus sich selbst heraus berechnend und entspricht gerade nicht der Logik der Evangelien. Erst durch

¹⁸ Ein interessantes Beispiel für die Verknüpfung von AR und MP Beziehungsmuster ist in Mt. 18,1–8 zu finden. Zwischen dem Richter und dem Hilfesuchenden besteht normalerweise ein AR-Verhältnis; in dieser Geschichte zeigt sich der Richter aber an seinem eigenen Vorteil interessiert und reagiert erst auf die Forderung der Witwe, nachdem er fürchten muss, durch ihr Handeln Schaden zu erleiden (vgl. Bovon 2001, 192f). Diese Abwägung verleiht der Beziehung die Züge eines MP-Verhältnisses. Da das Abwägen des Richters in einen Gegensatz zu Gottes gesicherter Fürsorge gestellt wird („Gott aber...“, V. 7), scheint hier aber kein Beispiel für eine MP-Beziehung zu Gott vorzuliegen.

die Ableitung aus den Modellen CS und AR scheint die Begeisterung, die bei Paulus in seinem obigen Zitat zutage tritt, verständlich zu werden.

4.5 Ertrag

Im Neuen Testament wird in einer sehr vielseitigen und reichen Sprache versucht, die Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch in Worte zu fassen. Beim Sortieren dieser Vielfalt in verschiedene Beziehungsmuster hilft eine relationale Perspektive, die primären Stoßrichtungen des Beziehungsgeschehens zwischen Gott und Mensch zu erkennen. Zusammenfassend ergeben sich folgende Beobachtungen:

1. Das Geschehen zwischen Gott und Mensch wird im Wesentlichen als CS- und AR-Beziehung beschrieben. Beide setzen ein solides Vertrauen zu Gott voraus und können plausibel aus den Gottes- und Christuserfahrungen der Gläubigen abgeleitet werden. Sie sind daher als primäre Verhältnisse der Gott-Mensch-Beziehung zu bezeichnen.

2. Die umfassende Nähe (CS) und Autorität (AR) Gottes wurden nicht als Widerspruch, sondern als Spannweite erkannt und können nebeneinander bestehen. Die Frage, ob einzelne Autoren verschiedene Schwerpunkte setzen, ist berechtigt, übersteigt aber den Rahmen dieses Artikels.

3. EM- und MP-Beziehungsmuster können selten beobachtet werden. Sie sind oft abhängig von den beiden anderen primären Beziehungsverhältnissen und wären ohne diese nicht tragfähig. Sie können daher als sekundäre Verhältnisse der Mensch-Gott-Beziehung bezeichnet werden und können einen ergänzenden Beitrag zum relationalen Verständnis von Spiritualität leisten.

4. Alle vier Beziehungsverhältnisse führen zu jeweils eigenen Fragen, Erwartungen und Motivationen in der Beziehungsgestaltung zu Gott. CS-Spiritualität möchte Gott nahe sein; AR-Spiritualität will Gott gehorchen; EM-Spiritualität trachtet danach, dem Vorbild Jesu zu entsprechen; und MP-Spiritualität beabsichtigt, Gottes Angebot zu erwerben. Daraus abgeleitet können ähnliche Handlungen wie Gebet, moralisches Verhalten usw. mit unterschiedlicher Haltung und Motivation durchgeführt werden, je nach dahinterliegendem Beziehungsverhältnis.

5. Verknüpfung der Perspektiven

Dieses mehrschichtige Beziehungsverhältnis kann nicht nur im Neuen Testament beobachtet werden, sondern auch in modernen Spiritualitätswürfen

und den Diskussionen um konkrete spirituelle Ausprägungen. Es ist nicht überraschend, dass in bestehenden Spiritualitätsmodellen eine ähnliche Verteilung der Beziehungsverhältnisse zu entdecken ist, wie sie auch im Neuen Testament anzutreffen ist, denn immerhin dient dieses im Christentum als Quelle spiritueller Praxis und Orientierung. Zunächst wird also auf die primären Beziehungsverhältnisse eingegangen (5.1 bis 5.3) und anschließend auf die sekundären (5.4).

Erstaunlich oft lassen sich heutige Überlegungen zu Spiritualität in die Spannweite zwischen CS- und AR-Beziehung einordnen. Reine CS- oder AR-Spiritualitäten sind kaum zu erwarten; die folgenden Beispiele legen in verschiedener Intensität einen Schwerpunkt auf eine der beiden Seiten, und es wird (wie sich zeigen wird) zu beiden Seiten hin auf die Gefahr der Vereinseitigung aufmerksam gemacht.

5.1 CS-Spiritualität

Autoren, die in ihren Werken eher eine CS-Spiritualität beschreiben, leiten diese oft pneumatologisch ab. Spiritualität wird als „Leben aus dem Geist“ beschrieben und als Zeugnis und Vergegenwärtigung der neu geschaffenen Nähe zwischen Gott und Mensch begriffen. Der Geist stiftet „unverbrüchliche Gemeinschaft mit dem auferstandenen Christus, den die Evangelien als *den* Geistträger des neuen Äons bezeugen“ (Peng-Keller 2010, 32–33). Vor allem diese Identität als geisterfüllter Mensch motiviert zu spirituellen Praktiken, nicht der Gehorsam gegenüber oder das Hören auf Gott, was eher eine AR-Spiritualität kennzeichnen würde. Für Powell ist Teilhabe an Gott („participating in God“) einer von fünf Kernaspekten seiner Überlegungen zu christlicher Spiritualität; er argumentiert diesbezüglich: „Wir können die Welt praktisch nur dadurch überwinden, dass wir in Christus sind, der die Welt überwunden hat, und weil wir den Geist empfangen haben. Wenn wir die Welt übersteigen, ist dies die Verwirklichung unserer Beziehung zu Gott, einer Beziehung der Anteilnahme.“ (Powell 2005, 48, eigene Übersetzung)

Diese besondere Betonung des Heiligen Geistes ist auch ein Merkmal charismatischer Spiritualität. Zimmerling erkennt in diesem Typus christlichen Lebens eine tiefe Sehnsucht nach der Erfahrung der Anwesenheit Gottes, der durch emotionale Höhepunkte begegnet werde. Dieser Wunsch nach der Nähe Gottes reagiere auf das Defizit der „einseitigen Intellektualisierung des

Glaubensaktes im Protestantismus“ (Zimmerling 2005, 22).¹⁹ Dieser Schwerpunkt der CS-Spiritualität drohe dort aber auf der anderen Seite von einer „Sehnsucht“ zur „Sucht nach immer neuen außerordentlichen Phänomenen umzuschlagen“ (Zimmerling 2005, 20): Die CS-AR-Spannweite steht offenbar in der Gefahr, aufgelöst zu werden, wenn die Nähe Gottes verabsolutiert wird.

Ein weiteres Beispiel für CS-Spiritualität sind mystische Traditionen, für die ebenfalls die Erfahrung des Göttlichen zentral ist.²⁰ Dort geht es um ein „intimes Geschehen zwischen der Person des Mystikers und dem Erfahrungskern“, einer Art „endgültigen Wirklichkeit“ oder „unvergleichlichen Gegenwärtigkeit“ (Steggink 2002, 37–38). Mystische Elemente lassen sich in vielen religiösen Traditionen entdecken; im christlichen Kontext ist der besagt Erfahrungskern mit Gott gleichzusetzen und das Ziel ist die Vereinigung mit ebendiesem Gott. Auch bei mystischen Wegen sehen einige Beobachter die Gefahr der Einseitigkeit und Verabsolutierung eines einzigen Beziehungsaspektes.²¹

5.2 AR-Spiritualität

Diesen Formen gegenüber stehen solche Werke, die eher den Gedanken einer AR-Spiritualität betonen. Sie sprechen seltener von einem „Leben aus dem

¹⁹ Auch Pannenberg schreibt über die Krise protestantischer Frömmigkeit, die er im Kern als Bußfrömmigkeit versteht. Er sieht ihr Problem darin, dass sie auf der Voraussetzung aufbaue, dass der Mensch sich als Sünder vor Gott verstehe, um das Geschenk der Gnade anzunehmen. Das könne heute nicht mehr so gesehen werden, weshalb er vorschlägt, Sünde nicht mehr als Übertretung des Gesetzes zu verstehen, sondern als „Nichtidentität“. Die „Freiheit eines Christenmenschen“ sei dann durch die „Teilhabe an Jesus Christus“ möglich (Pannenberg 1986, 24). Er formuliert CS-Aspekte nicht klar, aber sie scheinen durch, weshalb er mit der Beobachtung Zimmerlings, dass es ein Defizit an CS-Spiritualität gibt, stellenweise übereinstimmt.

²⁰ Wie oben bereits erwähnt werden hier nicht nur „Reinformen“ der verschiedenen Spiritualitäten dargestellt. In der Mystik beispielsweise kann ein besonderes Bewusstsein für die Größe Gottes herrschen: Gott als der absolut Große, der die Erfahrung der Einheit schenkt. Siehe dazu auch Dahlgrün 2009, 48–49.

²¹ Schröer beschreibt dies wie folgt: „Mystik ist präsentische Eschatologie, Gleichzeitigkeit im Augenblick der Unterbrechung der Tendenzen zur Selbsterstörung. Glauben ist aber nicht nur Anteilhabe, sondern auch Unterwegs-Sein. Damit sind Erfahrungen des Suchens und Findens verbunden. Mystik enthält die Gefahr der Weltverneinung.“ (Schröer 2002, 70)

Geist“, häufiger dagegen von „Nachfolge“. Vielleicht verstehen sie sich selbst nicht als spiritueller Entwurf oder werden nicht als solcher eingeordnet, weil sie den Gedanken der Nähe und Geistanwesenheit kaum betonen; wenn jedoch Spiritualität als Beziehungsgestaltung zwischen Gott und Mensch verstanden wird, dann lohnt es sich, auch die Suche nach Wegen der Spiritualität breiter zu fassen. Bonhoeffers *Nachfolge* ist ein Beispiel, in dem aus einem AR-Beziehungsverhältnis zu Gott eine konkrete Gestaltung erwächst und in dem erkennbar wird, welcher Wert in dieser Perspektive liegen kann:

Das Gebot Jesu ist hart, unmenschlich hart, für den, der sich dagegen wehrt. Jesu Gebot ist sanft und nicht schwer für den, der sich willig darein ergibt ... Das Gebot Jesu hat nichts zu tun mit seelischen Gewaltkuren. Jesus fordert nichts von uns, ohne uns die Kraft zu geben, es auch zu tun. Jesu Gebot will niemals Leben zerstören, sondern Leben erhalten, stärken, heilen. (Bonhoeffer 2016, 37–38)

Jesus Christus als derjenige, dem der Christ folgt, dessen Gebot er hält, der etwas fordert – Bonhoeffer scheint die AR-Beziehung zu Gott als eine positive und ermutigende zu verstehen. Auch Klaus Bockmühl spricht in seinem Buch *Leben mit dem Gott, der redet* von Gottes „Rat“, seiner „Führung“, von einem „hörenden Herzen“ und kommt zu dem Schluss, dass „das Reich Gottes immer der Rahmen und das Ziel dessen ist, was Gott uns durch den Heiligen Geist lehren will“ (Bockmühl 2002, 173). Auf Gott zu hören versteht er demnach als gehorchendes Handeln.

Wie in Bezug auf die Mystik weist Henning Schröer auch auf die Gefahren hin, die der einseitigen Fokussierung auf Nachfolge – oder allgemeiner formuliert: Spiritualitäten, die AR-Charakter haben – eigen sind, nämlich die der „Moralisierung und der ewigen Nomadenschaft“ (Schröer 2002, 70). Auch Bonhoeffer sieht sich dazu veranlasst, in dem obigen Zitat zwischen dem Gesetz Jesu und „seelischen Gewaltkuren“ zu unterscheiden.²² Beide Beispiele zeigen, dass die Autorität Gottes sich auf verschiedene Arten manifestieren

²² Bonhoeffer gegenüber wurde immer wieder der Vorwurf erhoben, einer gewissen Werkgerechtigkeit nahe zu stehen. Jahre nach der Abfassung seines Buches schreibt er selbst dazu: „Ich dachte, ich könnte glauben lernen, indem ich selbst so etwas wie ein heiliges Leben zu führen versuchte. ... Heute sehe ich die Gefahren dieses Buches, zu dem ich allerdings nach wie vor stehe, deutlich.“ (Bonhoeffer 2016, 29).

kann und dass Menschen, die sie betonen, in der Gefahr stehen, sie zu einer ungesunden Form ihrer selbst zu formen.

5.3 Spannweite statt Widerspruch

Auf kirchengeschichtlichem Hintergrund wird eine AR-Beziehung zwischen Mensch und Gott von protestantischer Seite manchmal mit Misstrauen beäugt.²³ Michael Meyer-Blanck erklärt in seiner Monographie *Gebet*:

Luthers Zorn auf das mittelalterliche Messwesen war primär darin begründet, dass dort falsch gebetet wurde, weil aus den Gebeten eine falsche Gotteslehre sprach. Der *Canon Romanus* mit seinen immer weiterwachsenden Interzessionen nährte die falsche Vorstellung, Gott sei ein nehmender Gott, dem der Mensch etwas zu tun schuldig sei. (Meyer-Blanck 2019, 247)

Hier wird ein AR-Beziehungsverhältnis beschrieben, das äußerst einseitig fordernd gestaltet war und die spirituelle Praxis wesentlich beeinflusste (und wohl auch beeinträchtigte). Bestimmendes Prinzip des Gebets muss nun für Meyer-Blanck die Nähe und Güte Gottes sein. Damit will Meyer-Blanck aber das AR-Beziehungsverhältnis zu Gott nicht völlig verworfen wissen, im Gegenteil. Denn er schlägt für die evangelische Praxis vor:

Es kann demnach ... erst recht aber nicht gesetzlich gebetet werden. Gott sollte im evangelischen Gebet zwar als die „schlechthin überlegene Instanz“ zur Sprache kommen. Dabei ist er aber gerade nicht als fordernde Instanz, sondern im Vertrauen auf die Überlegenheit seiner Güte anzubeten. (Meyer-Blanck 2019, 247)

Eine AR-Spiritualität versteht Gott als den Größeren, und als dieser kann er vor allem als „Fordernder“ oder aber als „Gebender“ erscheinen. Im Gebet will Meyer-Blanck Gott vor allem als den „Gebenden“ wiederfinden. Diese Schwerpunktverschiebung, die er beschreibt, zeigt zum einen anschaulich, dass aus ähnlichen Beziehungsverhältnissen je nach Betonung unterschiedliche Formen der Beziehungsgestaltung resultieren können. Zum anderen zeigt er, wie die Balance und Spannweite zwischen AR- und CS-Beziehungsverhältnis erst die gesunde Betonung der AR-Beziehung zu Gott

²³ Siehe z. B. die Beschreibung mittelalterlicher Frömmigkeit in Pannenberg 1986, 10.

zu garantieren vermag und eine Verbindung beider Aspekte zu einer gegenseitigen Bereicherung führt.²⁴ Dass Gott *nicht* nur der „nehmende Gott“ ist, wird daran erkennbar, dass er nahe gekommen ist. In einem ganz ähnlichen Gedankengang bezeichnet auch Johann Gerhardt die AR-Beziehung zu Gott als „ultimative Bedrohung“ für den Menschen aufgrund seiner Größe und Heiligkeit. Erst durch die Nähe Gottes, das Kreuz, und Gottes Angebot einer CS-Beziehung kann der Mensch die Beziehung zu Gott als „Wunder der bedingungslosen Akzeptanz“ erkennen (Gerhardt 2004, 39.80).

Diese Beispiele lassen die Spannweite zwischen CS- und AR-Spiritualität greifbar werden. In beiden Beziehungsverhältnissen wird vor der Gefahr der Einseitigkeit gewarnt, wenn die Spannweite als Widerspruch missverstanden wird und die Nähe Gottes zugunsten seiner Größe und Autorität oder umgekehrt aufgegeben wird. Aus dem neutestamentlichen Befund heraus ist es essentiell, beidem Beachtung zu schenken und einen angemessenen Platz einzuräumen. Schröer will deshalb beide Aspekte von Spiritualität, die er als Mystik und Nachfolge bezeichnet, zusammenbringen, wenn er schreibt: „Die Mystik ist das ästhetische und die Nachfolge das ethische Kriterium der Spiritualität.“ (Schröer 2002, 70) In der konkreten Beziehungsgestaltung ist es selbstverständlich möglich, dieser Spannweite sehr unterschiedliche Formen zu geben.²⁵

²⁴ Ganz ähnlich zu Meyer-Blanck formuliert auch der katholische Theologe Josef Sudbrack diese Spannweite zwischen Nähe und Autorität Gottes (Sudbrack 1999, 84): „Dieses Vertrauensgebet: ‚Abba, Vater!‘ ist der Angelpunkt des geistlichen Lebens, der Spiritualität. So ruft nach Paulus Gottes Geist selbst in uns und nicht nur wir in der Kraft des Geistes. Das führt auf einen Erfahrungs- und Reflexions-Gipfel, der die denkerische Logik übersteigt, zu dem Gott, der – nach Augustinus – uns ‚innerlicher als unser Innerstes‘ ist und zugleich ‚höher als unser Höchstes‘. Ihn aber spricht Augustinus in diesem zwei-gerichteten Gebet drittens mit ‚Du Gott‘ an. ... Das ist die Drei-Dimensionalität, die trinitarische Kraft der Spiritualität, in der alles andere wurzelt, die Spannung, die Gott für unser Leben ausmacht: Gott, den wir im betenden Dialog ansprechen dürfen und der zugleich alles Wissen und alle Erfahrungen überragt.“

²⁵ Siehe dazu Kapitel 1 in Dahlgrün 2009. Sie beschreibt verschiedene Spiritualitäten und zeigt dabei immer wieder, wie sich AR- und CS-Spiritualitäten, also Gestaltung, die aus einem Bewusstsein für die Größe Gottes oder dessen Nähe entspringt, miteinander vermischen.

5.4 Spuren von EM- und MP-Spiritualität

Beispiele für AR und CS-Spiritualitäten können zahlreich gesammelt werden. In Bezug auf EM- und MP-Spiritualität ließen sich dagegen bereits im neutestamentlichen Textbefund nur wenige anknüpfungsfähige Beispiele finden. Ein ähnliches Bild ergibt sich, wenn man den Blick auf heutige Ausprägungen christlicher Spiritualität richtet. Im Folgenden sollen einige Spuren beschrieben werden, in denen sich EM- und MP-Spiritualität konkretisieren.

EM-Spiritualität im Neuen Testament manifestierte sich vor allem in der Beziehung zu Jesus Christus selbst, indem der Gläubige ihn als Vorbild und Partner auf dem Weg des Glaubens erkennt. Wenn auch nicht prominent, ist dieser Gedanke doch im alltäglichen Gespräch mit Christen immer wieder zu hören: Jesus als menschliches Vorbild, dessen Gesinnung es zu erreichen gilt. Missversteht man diese Variante von EM-Spiritualität als soteriologisch entscheidenden Faktor, so kann eine Nähe zur Werkgerechtigkeit entstehen, wenn ich als Mensch meine, eine bestimmte Stufe erreichen zu müssen. Der Hinweis auf die Sicherheit der CS-Beziehung, die ethisches Verhalten als natürliche Folge des Beziehungsverhältnisses und weniger als Schuldigkeit versteht, mag hier hilfreich sein.

Einige Spuren einer MP-Spiritualität können durch einen kurzen Blick in das Alte Testament entdeckt werden. Dort fallen solche Begebenheiten auf, in denen Menschen mit Gott in Verhandlungen treten, wie bei Abraham in Gen. 18 oder Mose in Ex. 33. Den Bibelleser können solche Situationen überraschen, denn Gott begibt sich offenbar auf die Augenhöhe des Menschen und ermöglicht ihnen in solch einem Gespräch die Position eines Verhandlungspartners, in der sogar die Argumentation mit Gott und der Versuch, ihn zu überzeugen, angebracht zu sein scheinen. Der Mensch, der mit Gott auf einer Stufe ringt, selbst wenn Gott sich nicht auf darauf einlassen müsste – dieser Gedanke mag ebenfalls in der Alltagsspiritualität einiger Menschen eine recht hohe Plausibilität besitzen. Die Fragen nach Glaubenszweifeln, Leid usw. sind präsent und werden durchaus nicht nur mit Gott als dem Großen (AR) oder dem Nahen (CS) besprochen, sondern als dem, mit dem diskutiert werden kann und der zur Rechenschaft gezogen wird (MP), selbst wenn sich diese Perspektive nicht sehr umfassend in der Literatur niederschlägt.

Weiterhin wird MP-Spiritualität immer wieder in negativer Abgrenzung gefunden. Einige Autoren bemerken im modernen Christentum eine ausgeprägte Konsummentalität, die sich von dem allgemeinen Zeitgeist auch auf

den Bereich der Spiritualität auswirkt. Michael Downey stellt dieser Ausprägung christlicher Spiritualität ein ernüchterndes Zeugnis aus:²⁶

Die spirituelle Reise kann zu nicht mehr als einem narzisstischen Ego-Trip werden, eingehüllt in heiliger Rhetorik. ... Viele vollziehen spirituelle Disziplinen und Praktiken, weil es ihren Tag besser macht. Wenn das eine nicht funktioniert, dann wird es fallengelassen und etwas anderes ausprobiert. Diese pragmatische Realität ist tief verwurzelt. ... Ganz im Gegenteil kann der einzige Grund, um den Weg der Spiritualität zu beschreiten, nur das Heilige an sich sein. In eher religiöser Sprache: Der Grund dafür, ein spirituelles Leben zu leben, liegt nicht darin, aus mir eine andere oder gesündere oder bessere Person zu machen, sondern einfach weil Gott Gott ist. (Downey 1997, 20–21, eigene Übersetzung)

Das gewinnorientierte Denkmuster, das nach dem Nutzen fragt, ist in dieser Beschreibung sehr greifbar. Die beschriebene Art der MP-Spiritualität unterscheidet sich grundsätzlich von den besprochenen neutestamentlichen Beispielen, denn der Gewinn wird *diesseitig*, präsentisch bemessen und nicht eschatologisch.

5.5 Ertrag

Es konnten hier nur einige wenige Beispiele betrachtet werden; diese Analyse könnte also in einer eingehenden Studie noch sehr viel umfassender ausfallen. Dennoch können einige Beobachtungen festgehalten werden:

1. Gängige Spiritualitätswürfe zeigen wie die neutestamentlichen Texte Schwerpunkte im CS- und AR-Beziehungsverhältnis.
2. Aspekte von EM- und MP-Spiritualitäten scheinen seltener aufzutreten; hier mag es sich lohnen, eine vertiefte Suche anzusetzen.
3. Kritik an Spiritualitätskonzeptionen richtet sich meist gegen eine Vereinfachung, die sich in dem größeren Bild des neutestamentlichen Textbefundes nicht widerspiegelt.

²⁶ Vor allem in Bezug auf nordamerikanische Spiritualität wird dieser Vorwurf besonders betont, siehe als weitere Beispiele Guy 1999, Kapitel 8; Powell 2005, Kapitel 1.

6. Ausblick

Spiritualität ist komplex. Das bedeutet nicht, dass sie nicht verstanden werden oder man sich ihr nicht gedanklich nähern kann. Aber es bedeutet, dass sie nicht zu schnell einem bestimmten Konzept zugeordnet (und damit möglicherweise untergeordnet) werden darf. Die Perspektive der Relationalen Spiritualität vor dem Hintergrund der *Relational Models Theory* hat dies unterstrichen. Auch wenn manche Aspekte dieser Arbeit in weiteren Analysen vertieft werden können, hat sich grundsätzlich gezeigt, dass die Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch konnte nicht auf eine Dimension heruntergebrochen und reduziert werden kann; vielmehr bietet sie Raum für sehr unterschiedliche Manifestationen. Nicht ein einzelnes Beziehungsverhältnis, sondern das In- und Miteinander verschiedener Perspektiven auf Gott, die unterschiedliche Gestalt annehmen können, helfen, die Vielfalt an Gestaltungsformen der Gott-Mensch-Beziehung zu erfassen, zu verstehen und wertzuschätzen. Offensichtlich impliziert diese Spannweite eine logische Notwendigkeit, weil Gott bereits in sich selbst vielschichtiger ist, als Menschen es erfassen könnten. Oder, um es in prägnanten Kurzthesen zusammenzufassen:

1. CS-Spiritualität wird sich der Nähe Gottes bewusst.
2. AR-Spiritualität wird sich der Größe Gottes bewusst.
3. EM-Spiritualität, die sich auf CS und AR bezieht, wird sich der Partnerschaftlichkeit Gottes bewusst.
4. MP-Spiritualität, die sich auf CS und AR bezieht, wird sich des guten Angebotes durch Gott bewusst.

Das Ergebnis dieser Arbeit scheint also in gewissem Sinne selbstevident zu sein, nämlich, dass in Fragen der Spiritualität Vielseitigkeit herrschen darf und soll, dabei aber keine Beliebigkeit. Der Gott, der durch die biblische Tradition den Menschen vorgestellt wird, ist hoch und erhaben, aber nicht fern; er ist nah, aber löst sich nicht in mir auf und bleibt so Gegenüber. In vielen Bereichen des christlichen Lebens kann diese Spannweite entdeckt werden; hier könnte sich eine weitere Studie lohnen, wie die Spannweite im Beziehungsverhältnis, die in dieser Arbeit nur jeweils kurz angesprochen wurde, sich z.B. in Bereichen des Liedguts, des Gebets, der Bibellektüre, der Ethik, des Lebensstils äußern kann.

Mit Jens M. Sautter ist abschließen festzustellen, dass Spiritualität Haltung und Handlung zugleich ist (Sautter 2008, 51–52). Deshalb können Beziehungsverhältnis und Beziehungsgestaltung nicht voneinander getrennt werden, wobei es dennoch lohnend ist, sie voneinander zu unterscheiden, denn Haltung schafft Handlung und Handlung schafft Haltung. In beidem können sich Christen noch heute in die Tradition der biblischen Autoren stellen und lernen, sich zu dem Gott dieser Tradition in Beziehung zu setzen.

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Anhang: Tabelle zur Gott-Mensch-Beziehung im NT

Gott	Christ	Ausgewählte Beispieltex-te	RMT
(Anführer)	Soldat	2 Tim. 2,3	AR
Annehmender	Opfer	Röm. 12,1–2	AR
Besitzer	Besitz	1 Kor. 3,23; Eph. 1,13–14; 1 Petr. 2,9–10; Offb. 14,1	AR
Erwählender	Erwählter	Eph. 1,3–4	AR
Gebende	Bittende	Lk. 11,9–13; 18,1	AR
Geehrter	Ehrender	Phil. 4,19–20	AR
Haupt	Körper	1 Kor. 12,27; Eph. 1,22–23	AR
Herr	Diener	Mt. 6,24; 18,21–35; 20,8; 25,13–31; Mk. 10,45; 13,35; Lk. 10,2; Kol. 3,24; 4,1; 1 Petr. 4,11	AR
Hirte	Schaf	1 Petr. 2,25; Offb. 7,17	AR
König	Gefolgschaft	Offb. 19,15–16	AR
Lehrer	Schüler	Mt. 7,28–29; 11,28–30; 23,8– 11; Joh. 13,3; (2 Tim. 3,16)	AR
Richter	Gerichteter	Röm. 14,10; 16,5,7	AR
Rufender	Antwortender	1 Thess. 2,12; 2 Petr. 1,3	AR
Töpfer	Ton	Röm. 9,25	AR
Hohepriester	Nahende	Heb. 4,14–16	CS/AR
Vater	Sohn	Lk. 11,11–13; Röm. 8,9,14– 16; 2 Kor. 1,2; Gal. 4,6; Heb. 12,7; Offb. 21,7	CS/AR
Bewohner	Wohnung	Röm. 8,9; 2 Kor. 12,9; Eph. 3,17 ff; 2 Tim. 1,14, siehe auch die „in mir/Christus“- Worte	CS/(AR)
Beschenkender	Beschenkter	2 Petr. 1,3	CS
Bruder	Bruder/Schwester/ Mutter	Mk. 3,35; Heb. 2,11	CS
Gewand	Bekleideter	Gal. 3,27–29	CS
Liebender	Geliebter	Röm. 9,25–26	CS
Mitbewohner	Mitbewohner	Eph. 2,19, (Joh. 1,14)	CS
Rüstung	Ausgerüsteter	Eph. 6,11	CS

Gott	Christ	Ausgewählte Beispieltex-te	RMT
Tröster	Getröstete	Offb. 21,3–4	CS/(AR)
Verlobter	Verlobte	2 Kor. 11,2	CS
Weg	Gehende	Heb. 10,19	CS
<i>Einheit</i>		1 Kor. 6,17	CS
<i>Gemeinschaft</i>		1 Kor. 6,17; Phil. 2,1; 1 Joh. 1,3	CS
<i>Gleichheit</i>		2 Kor. 3,18; Kol. 3,10–11; 1 Joh. 3,2; Heb. 2,17–18	CS
<i>Nähe</i>		Eph. 2,13	CS
<i>Teilhaber</i>		Mk. 8,34.38; Röm. 6,5–6; Phil. 1,23; 4,9; 2 Tim. 2,12–13; 2 Petr. 1,4; Offb. 20,4	CS
<i>Versöhnung</i>		Kol. 1,22	CS
Mitarbeiter	Mitarbeiter	1 Kor. 3,9; (Lk. 12,35–37)	EM
Vorbild	Nachahmer	Joh. 13,1–17; Eph. 5,1–2; Phil. 2,5; 1 Petr. 1,14–19; 2,21–24; 1 Joh. 3,15; 4,11	EM
Bekennender	Bekennender	Mt. 10,32–33	EM
Belohnender	Belohnter	Mt. 19,29; 2 Kor. 9,6–11; Phil. 3,8–9.12–24; 2 Tim. 4,8; 1 Petr. 5,4; (Heb. 10,29)	MP
Lohngeber	Entlohnter	Mt. 6,4.6.18; 10,14–42; 20,1–16; Röm. 2,6–8; 2 Tim. 2,4.6.14; 1 Kor. 3,8.14–15; Heb. 10,35–39; 11,6.26	MP
Schatz(-geber)	Schatzsammler	Mt. 6,19–20; 19,17.21; Mk. 10,21 ff	MP

Abstract

A significant perspective on spirituality is that of the relational formation between God and human beings. The *Relational Models Theory* makes it possible to assign the language about this relationship to four basic human relationships. In the New Testament as well as in modern concepts of spirituality, the relationship between God and humans is thus primarily described by a language of closeness and of authority or greatness. This range is made plausible by the transcendence of God and the incarnation of Jesus. Other relationship patterns, which are based on equivalence or a cost-benefit calculation between the two parties, can only be identified secondarily. In summary, it can be seen that relational spirituality according to biblical tradition has a dynamic and multifaceted character, but does not become arbitrary. Criticism of certain practices and approaches usually occurs when the span is unhealthily resolved to one side or the other.

Résumé

Une perspective significative sur la spiritualité est celle de la formation de la relation entre Dieu et les êtres humains. La Théorie des Modèles Relationnels (*Relational Models Theory*) permet d'attribuer le langage de cette relation à quatre relations humaines fondamentales. Dans le Nouveau Testament comme dans les conceptions modernes de la spiritualité, la relation entre Dieu et l'humain est donc principalement décrite dans un langage de proximité et d'autorité ou de grandeur. Ce champ est rendu plausible par la transcendance de Dieu et l'incarnation de Jésus. D'autres modèles de relation, qui sont basés sur l'équivalence ou sur un calcul coût-bénéfice entre les deux parties, ne peuvent être identifiés que secondairement. En résumé, selon la tradition biblique, on peut voir que la spiritualité relationnelle a un caractère dynamique et multiforme, mais ne devient pas arbitraire. La critique de certaines pratiques et approches se produit généralement lorsque l'étendue est malsainement décidée d'un côté ou de l'autre.

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Emerging Church and Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality

Peter Roennfeldt

Abstract

Postmodernism challenges the church. The complexity of late 20th and early 21st century American evangelicalism was the environment for fresh Emerging Church conversations. Interest in Americanized Church Growth was waning, and church attendance was continuing to decline in spite of charismatic renewal. There was increasing frustration with the evangelistic ineffectiveness of the megachurch seeker models in reaching postmoderns, together with the growing realization that there were alternatives to inherited Constantinian models of church. It is a complex conversation. Some, who are faithful to biblical authority, doctrine and the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ, have sought to keep the focus on being both a missional and missionary movement. This article does not simply list what is right or wrong with Emerging Church, nor confine discussion to certain practices. It examines how Adventists have assessed this movement, and, in reflecting the author's academic, professional and personal journey of ministry, it represents an Adventist response.

Even today, long after its heyday, it seems unreasonably bold to use the descriptor Emerging Church (EC) or labels associated with it, such as *emergent* and *emergent theology*. Responses to it were generally aggressive, dismissive or judgmental. In some circles, if opponents wished to destroy a pastor or ostracize a church planting team, they were branded as emerging and that was sufficient to bring about their demise.

EC has been a complex evolving phenomenon within very late 20th and early 21st century evangelicalism. The first part of this article reviews many of the plots and sub-plots associated with its emergence. This then provides, for the second part, a somewhat messy frame for reflecting on Adventism's

responses – including its ambivalent relationship with the concept of missional church as well as some of its own challenges as an eschatological movement within postmodernism.

My interest in this subject is not academic alone. During my 50 years of ministry (1971–2021), Church Growth was introduced to the Global North and I, with five or six other Christian leaders, launched the *Australian Fellowship for Church Growth* – to foster Church Growth awareness and principles across the country.

Then, when EC first surfaced, I was serving in the Trans-European Division, and while uneasy with the directions some EC proponents took, I hoped it might be a catalyst to cultivate a positive intentional Adventist response to the mission challenges and opportunities posed by postmodernism.

Then, my academic research involved a phenomenological study of the impact of these two – Church Growth and EC – on reshaping Australian evangelical ecclesiology (Roennfeldt 2013). This raised the disturbing question: In what ways might Adventist ecclesiology also need reshaping? This paper is therefore, in itself, an Adventist response to EC.

1. The Emergence of Emerging Church

John Jovan Markovic, who wrote two articles for *Ministry Magazine* – “The Emerging Church: A Call to Action and Authenticity” (March 2010; Markovic 2010a) and “The Emergent Theology: Voices of Confusion” (May 2010; Markovic 2010b), observed that “as early as the 1960s, some Christian leaders recognized that Christianity at all levels ... was undergoing fundamental changes and new approaches were necessary to recapture the attention of the masses” (Markovic 2010b, 11).

Post-World War II *baby boomers* were coming of age and society was changing. Migration was beginning to rewrite the demographics of the Global North, with Christianity in retreat and other major world religions growing (see Jenkins 2002). And while church officials struggled to admit it, by the mid-1970s church affiliation and attendance was showing ominous signs of decline. Adventism’s evangelistic methods – developed within the church-attending, Bible-reading, family-worshipping villages of nineteenth century New England (Noll 1994, 12–13.62–63 and 118)¹ – were no longer attracting the crowds.

¹ Noll specifically relates to the context of early Adventism.

Evangelistic ineffectiveness was not unique to Adventism. Others were perhaps more alert to the signs of societal shifts, the cultural and campus tensions of the 1960s and the worship wars of the 1970s. Interestingly, two books entitled *The Emerging Church* were published in the 1970s (Larson and Osborne 1970; Wilkins 1975), both reflecting the reality that David Bosch would later articulate – that each new paradigm or era offers both distinctive understandings of mission as well as the opportunity for new forms of church (Bosch 1991, 182).

It would be some decades before *Emerging Church* would emerge as a brand, during which time another movement that would provide a seed-bed for EC caught the attention of pastors and Christians concerned about mission. Reports of Christian movements in the Global South, and the language of Church Growth offered fresh hope.

An understanding of the enthusiasm for Church Growth and its Americanization is significant for us to appreciate the environment in which EC emerged.

1.1 American Church Growth

In the American context McGavran's message of Church Growth – for him, synonymous with evangelism and church planting – was revised and co-opted. Modernist pastors related positively to his growth techniques and evaluation processes, which sounded very corporate, while sidelining his undergirding motivation and passion for evangelism and church planting.

Their concern was growing declining established churches, not planting new churches. And it was assumed that Church Growth (which was reportedly working) must be different to evangelism (which was no longer working). "In a strange twist, CG (Church Growth) was reinterpreted to affirm a revised American-form 'mission station approach' – large campuses with employees offering full services (shops, malls, cafes, schools, media and counselling services) – the very method that, McGavran observed, stymied the spread of the gospel in the Global South" (Roennfeldt 2013, 49).

For McGavran mission was leading people to Jesus Christ. He rejected the notion that any and every good work could be called evangelism. However, in the American context Church Growth became synonymous with good procedures, facilities, programs and works that attract. McGavran envisaged mission happening through extensive disciple-making and multiple church-

planting in all *people movements*, but in the Global North it was anticipated this would happen through the *renewal* of established churches.

When his class notes were revised and published as *Understanding Church Growth* in 1980, McGavran urged Canadian, American and European readers to “translate these insights from the world of mission into thought forms which fit the Western scene” (McGavran 1980, 165). However, the American brand of Church Growth – popularised by mega-churches such as Willow Creek and Saddleback, and their conferences – took a trajectory inconsistent with its McGavran roots.

1.2 *Renewal – A New Direction for Church Growth*

American forms of Church Growth gained time for attractional forms of church, but the goal-posts were shifting and these forms were increasingly unattractive. At the very time American Church Growth – with its complex attractional seeker models, formulated for modernist contexts – was gaining popularity among evangelicals (including Adventists), society was shifting exponentially.

While some Church Growth loyalists were sceptical of the notion of post-modernism and blind to any transition of world-view – digging in to make church as they knew it work – the pragmatists acknowledged the crisis and a renewal emphasis offered hope.

Under the leadership of Peter Wagner, Professor of Church Growth at Fuller’s SWM from 1971–2001, and John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard Churches in the mid-1970s, a new direction was fostered. They launched a controversial course called “Signs, Wonders, & Church Growth,” which was taught at the SWM from 1985–1987.² While charismatic churches had not previously engaged closely with the Church Growth movement, Wimber was given freedom to design most of this course with its emphasis on renewal – singing love songs to God, experiencing the powerful presence of the Spirit with miraculous healing and in-class prayers for the sick.

² COLLECTION 0182: MC510 Signs and Wonders Collection Fuller Seminary Archives and Special Collections, 2019, <https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1157&context=findingaid> (accessed June 23, 2021).

McGavran was concerned and uncomfortable with the “lack of conversion growth” in the American forms of Church Growth, even with its American-Wagner-Wimber renewal emphasis.³ However, with postmodernism and post-Christendom – and even a developing neo-postmodernism – the new reality and environment for mission, there was an urgent sense that “some new directions beyond church renewal and church growth” were needed (Guder 1998, 73).

1.3 Rediscovering the Shape of the Early Church

While the Americanisation of Church Growth was evolving under the influence of Wagner and Wimber, there were other developments that are significant for our discussion of EC. The first was the sense that a biblical frame was needed for Church Growth theory. McGavran had provided this, but it was largely overlooked by American Church Growth. This led some to explore the book of Acts, and return to Jesus’ story and methods in the Gospels. The second was a growing body of research into the life and experience of early believers – in church and mission. This meant that simple and experiential alternatives to the complex modernist models – emphasizing small, relational, reproducible and multiplying mission approaches – were considered.

In introducing John Mallison’s *Growing Christians in Small Groups* (Mallison 1989), Eddie Gibbs affirmed the aspect of multiplying groups “in communities which are culturally distanced from the church” (ibid., xii: introduction by Eddie Gibbs). Mallison, an Australian Baptist, had gone further, writing, “In its infancy, the church was a small group in which believers gathered to support each other in growing in Christ and in witnessing to their Lord” (ibid., 4).

At the same time, Robert Logan’s call to “move beyond church growth to active involvement in church planting” (Logan 1989, 17), together with a renewed interest in the Book of Acts as their manual, alerted church planters to the nature of first century missional household gatherings as the form of pre-Constantinian churches. Robert Banks, a Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for the History of Christian Thought and Experience at Macquarie University

³ McIntosh 2005, 87; <https://www.churchgrowthnetwork.com/freebies2/2015/3/13/the-life-and-ministry-of-donald-a-mcgavran> (accessed June 23, 2021).

who also served as Professor of the Ministry of the Laity at Fuller, had published in 1979 *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Cultural Setting* (second edition: Banks 1994), and the next year first released his narrative of Publius attending the home church of Aquila and Prisca in Rome, *Going to Church in the First Century* (second edition: Banks 1990).

A series of essays published between 1960 and 1992 by Edwin A Judge, Professor of History at Macquarie University in Australia (1969–1993), provided sociological insights into the experiences of pre-Christendom faith communities. Now released under the title *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century: Pivotal Essays by E. A. Judge* (Scholer 2008), these included “The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century” (ibid., 1–56; first published by Judge in 1960) with a section entitled “The Household Community: Oikonomia” (ibid., 20–27).

This context within American evangelicalism – with interest in Americanized Church Growth waning, national church participation numbers continuing to decline in spite of charismatic renewal, increasing frustration among young adult leaders with mega-church seeker models and their ineffectiveness in reaching postmodernists, together with the growing realization that there were alternatives to inherited Constantinian models of church – provided the environment for fresh conversations.

1.4 The Beginnings of Emerging Church

Kwabena Donkor, Associate Director of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Biblical Research Institute, outlines the beginnings of EC in his booklet, *The Emerging Church and Adventist Ecclesiology* (2011). He writes:

Mark Driscoll traces the beginnings of the Emerging Church to a conference hosted by the Leadership Network in the mid-1990s. The conference's initial focus on ministry to Generation X shifted to issues “related to being the Church in an emerging postmodern culture.” Continuing the discussion on postmodernism, a small team was formed to study what missions would look like in the USA and the implications for theology and the Church. The team eventually came to include Brian McLaren, Doug Pagitt, Chris Seay, Tony Jones, Dan Kimball and Andrews Jones, with McLaren rising to become team leader. In America, Brian McLaren is generally recognized as the most

representative of the Emerging church. It was this team that became what is now known as the Emergent. (Donkor 2011, 1)⁴

While, as already mentioned, two Church Growth books had been published in the 1970s using this title, the term EC for this movement came from Karen Ward's EmergingChurch.com website, launched in 2000 as a forum to work through her frustrations and questions about church (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 320–321). Having worked in a denominational environment, she considered denominations to be like machines, but the idea of seeker-sensitive church seemed weird. To her and other postmodernists it was “vampire church” – sending out the message, “Come and get grabbed!” (ibid., 320). For Ward, “The emerging church ... (was) new, unformed, still happening” (ibid., 321). The term was descriptive, suggesting continuity – “new ways of being church” while at the same time emphasizing a connection to the “continuing church.” It suggested a continuous dynamic process – something experimental (Moynagh 2004, 14).

Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger interviewed over 80 key practitioners – all of whom had been raised within, but were moving on from, American seeker, mega-type renewal churches – and identified nine practices of EC, with three core (ibid., 44):

- (1) Identity with the life of Jesus, as “the way of Jesus.”
- (2) The transformation of secular space, to deconstruct the secular/spirit divide.
- (3) Living in community – and even communal living.

Together with these, Gibbs and Bolger found EC seeks to: (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities (ibid., 45).

Shaping these practices was a sense of disaffection with two major philosophical positions – “*traditional fundamentalism* and *modernity*” – with their undergirding “epistemological certainty” (Donkor 2011, 5; see Bolt 2006, 207). Donkor makes the point: “Emergents are convinced that the church’s key weakness is its capitulation to modernity as evidenced in the church-growth and megachurch phenomenon” (Donkor 2011, 6). They argue that *foundationalism* – “the idea that for knowledge to be certain, it must have an unassailable

⁴ For a more nuanced description of its beginnings, see Driscoll 2006.

basis on which all other knowledge ought to be built” – “has not been able to deliver its promised certainty and therefore should be rejected” (ibid., 6; see Barbour and Toews 2010, 35).

Emergents “replace foundationalism with a post-foundational epistemology that is interested primarily in an inclusive, open-ended *conversation*, aimed at fostering community and theological insight.” (ibid.). However, before condemning EC as uniformly opposed to universal objective truth, we should note the assessment of Ed Stetzer – American missiologist, church planter, Dean of the School of Mission, Ministry, and Leadership at Wheaton College, and Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center – who observed three “types” of emerging leaders and churches, those he termed the relevant, reconstructionists, and revisionists (Stetzer 2006).

For Stetzer, the Emergent Relevant were conservative Christians with sound doctrine, “proclaiming a faithful biblically-centered Gospel,” but committed to reaching their postmodern communities in contextually relevant ways; Reconstructionists hold orthodox views of the gospel and Scripture, but consider the current forms and structures of church to be irrelevant and unhelpful; while Revisionists question and revise the gospel and the church from the perspective of postmodernism (ibid.).

Donkor writes of Brian McLaren, listed by *Time* magazine (February 7, 2005) as one of the 25 most influential evangelicals – the “paradigm shifter” and “elder statesman” of EC (Barton 2005; White 2005) – as “the most representative of the Emerging church.” (Donkor 2011, 3). However, informed by Stetzer’s types, it would be more helpful to say McLaren was the most representative Emergent Revisionist.

1.5 Brian McLaren’s Influence

McLaren trained as a teacher, not a pastor – but sick of “sneering about churches” he and his wife Grace started a “fellowship group” that became a “house church,” which then grew to be a community church. In 1986 he left his teaching to become the pastor for 20 years (McLaren 1999, 215).

He relished the transition to postmodernism, and at first affirmed Church Growth practitioners trying to navigate the transition and discontinuity of postmodernism. His first book, *Reinventing Your Church* (1998), revised as *The Church on the Other Side: Doing Ministry in the Postmodern Matrix* (2000), “echoed the language of a 1980s church growth book” – but it was intended as a

“portal” to postmodern ministry, exploring “how modern church might emerge to participate in ‘the postmodern matrix’” (McLaren 2000, 7–8).

He became the leading voice in deconstructing modernist church, as a platform to rethinking church from the postmodernist vantage point. In his 2009 debate with Bryan Hollon, professor of theology at Malone University, entitled “Emerging or Diverging: In What Direction is the Emerging Church Movement Headed?,” McLaren outlined six stages in its development together with his contribution (outlined in Table 1; cf. Robinson 2009, reproduced from Roennfeldt 2013, 74).

Table 1: McLaren’s six stages of the EC conversation

Stage	Topics of this conversation	Books contributing to this conversation
1	How to do church for 18–30 year olds - <i>A church for the postmodern</i>	<i>Reinventing Your Church</i> (1998), revised as <i>The Church on the Other Side</i> (2000)
2	How to evangelize and disciple people - <i>An apologetic for the postmodern</i>	<i>Finding Faith</i> (1999) – republished as <i>A Search for What Makes Sense</i> (2007) <i>A Search for What is Real</i> (2007) <i>More Ready Than You Realize</i> (2002)
3	Philosophy: Christian faith today - <i>Thinking and knowing as a postmodern</i> - <i>A redeeming story for a postmodern</i>	<i>A New Kind of Christian</i> (2001) <i>The Story We Find Ourselves In</i> (2003) <i>The Last Word and the Word After That</i> (2005)
4	Understanding church history or tradition - <i>Theological reforms for the postmodern</i>	<i>Adventures in Missing the Point</i> (2003) <i>A Generous Orthodoxy</i> (2004)
5	Kingdom of God: justice and civil issues - <i>Kingdom for the postmodern</i>	<i>The Secret Message of Jesus</i> (2006) <i>Everything Must Change</i> (2007)
6	Cultivating spirituality - <i>Spirituality for the postmodern</i>	<i>Finding Our Way Again</i> (2008) <i>A New Kind of Christianity</i> (2010) <i>Naked Spirituality</i> (2011)

This Table illustrates the journey that McLaren and EC Revisionists have taken. It reveals McLaren’s struggles – first with American Church Growth modernist models of church, then how to evangelize postmodern people, and how to tell the gospel story.

“The church struggles because it is so deeply rooted in modernity,” agrees Ed Stetzer. “It needs to reach people in emerging postmodern culture.” However, he argues, “the church cannot become postmodern” (Stetzer 2006b, 126). On the other hand, McLaren, believed the way forward was an apologetic of faith and church from the vantage of postmodernism, knowing full well that “a postmodern version of Christianity will be different from the modern version” (McLaren 2002, 64).

This transition is evident from Stage 3 on, in Table 1. McLaren’s trilogy – *A New Kind of Christian* (2001), *The Story We Find Ourselves In* (2003), and *The Last Word and the Word After That* (2005) – marked the turning point (McLaren 2003, vx). He started writing “more directly about the Christian gospel itself, from a vantage point within the emerging culture” (ibid.). He suggested “a wide variety of stories” of redemption (Roennfeldt 2013, 79) – centred in Jesus, but described by Stetzer as moving from the meta-narrative to a mini-narrative of what God has done for you (Stetzer 2006b, 131), with no one version being the same or complete (see Sweet 2003, 199; Roennfeldt 2013, 79). This meant valuing “the church in all its forms” – hierarchical, historic, congregational, mega, mini, micro, liquid, quantum, virtual, and “everything in between” (McLaren 2005, 195).

For McLaren, to view “Christian faith from the vantage point of postmodernism suggests, even necessitates, theological reform” (Roennfeldt 2013, 81) – evident in his titles, *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004), *The Secret Message of Jesus* (2006), and *Everything Must Change* (2007). In *Finding Our Way Again* (2008) he drew resources from ancient traditions and practices to enrich spirituality, and by 2010 “believed there was consensus that ‘a defining moment’ had come for ‘a new kind of Christianity’ to be born” – believing “dogmas have today been displaced by spirituality” (Roennfeldt 2013, 84, quoting McLaren 2010, 14 and 23).

1.6 *The Emerging Missional Connection*

While it adds complexity to any description of EC, we cannot afford to overlook another piece of the puzzle. Just as understanding that American Church Growth and its evolution to the American-Wagner-Wimber renewal model were not McGavran’s Church Growth – and not EC; so, it is important to understand that while some hoped to see the principles of Missional Church

(MC) shape EC, they are not the same and should not be conflated or critiqued as one (Bracket 2016).

The MC conversation began in the 1970s, with a group of theologians discussing Lesslie Newbigin's work and forming "The Gospel and Our Culture Network." Newbigin – a contemporary with McGavran, and also a long-term missionary in India – described the postmodern, post-Christendom and post-Christian world-view as a "very tough form of paganism." (Newbigin 1985, 249). While "pre-Christian paganism" exists where Christian faith is not known, post-Christian paganism is "born out of the rejection of Christianity," and Newbigin considered it "the most challenging missionary frontier" (Newbigin 1987, 2–7).

A MC was defined as "a reproducing community of authentic disciples, being equipped as missionaries sent by God, to live and proclaim His Kingdom in their world" (Bracket 2016). It is about the mission of God, and therefore emphasizes conversions, church attendance and spiritual growth, as well as being *the body of Christ* in the community – bringing transformation and justice.

While EC Revisionists intentionally seek to adapt Christianity to postmodernism, MC intentionally proclaims the Word of God and gospel to postmodernists, to make disciples, and call them to worship the true living God.⁵ A comparison of the hallmarks of a MC (Frost and Hirsch 2003, 11–12; Roennfeldt 2013, 36: Table 15) with the "Nine Key Practices of Emerging Church" (Roennfeldt 2013, 33: Table 14) – identified by Gibbs and Bolger – reveals stark differences.

Both foster identity with Jesus and his kingdom, community, welcoming hospitality, generous service, and participation. However, while both affirm the Christian's life as a witness to the gospel, MC:

- prioritizes proclamation,
- emphasizes discipleship,
- accepts the Bible as normative in its life,

⁵ Hill 2008, 254 puts it this way: "Their ecclesiology is shaped by the *Missio Dei*, a view of western culture as mission field, a missionary proclamation of the gospel, and a missional reading of scripture. . . . They engage specific cultures as a contrast society, called-out by God to give witness to his reign and the values of his kingdom, and demonstrate missionary faithfulness from a position of cultural marginality."

- “seeks to discern God’s specific missional vocation” for the community and its members,
- considers community worship to be “the central act,”
- and it “has a vital public witness.” (Roennfeldt 2013, 36: Table 15)

In contrast, the Emergent Reconstructionist conversations of the mid-1990s about forms and structures of church and worship, moved to Revisionist conversations proposing new postmodern perspectives on biblical authority, the Trinity, the atonement, salvation, kingdom and ecclesiology. In light of this, some sought to move EC toward MC.

In *The Shaping of Things to Come* (2003), Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch intentionally offered “hints of the way forward” in “the important work of rediscovering a New Testament mandate for the church in the twenty-first century” (Frost and Hirsch 2003, xi). While their commitment was to MC they saw potential in EC, and proposed *emerging missional church* as a way forward.

In *A Generous Orthodoxy* (2004) McLaren included a chapter entitled “Why I am Missional” and another, “Why I am Emergent.” He observed that missional “changes everything” – eliminating the dichotomies of evangelism versus social action, ministry (inside church) and mission (outside church), in-groupings and out-groupings (McLaren 2004, 118–119). And, in *The Forgotten Ways* (2006), Hirsch suggested “emerging missional” could provide the best descriptor for what was needed – the church faithful to the mission of the New Testament apostles in relating to the challenges of postmodernism (Hirsch 2006, 66–72).

However, while the term *emerging missional* cultivated important debate, linking the two led to confusing them as one and the same. And, while by 2013 Frost believed missional was dominating the *emerging missional* conversations,⁶ Hirsch feared EC had married “the spirit of the age” and he was arguing for “a missional response that takes the postmodern context seriously while (being) motivated and shaped by *missio Dei*.”⁷

The missional conversation had been muddied by its association with EC, for few made the distinctions that Stetzer had observed between the three types of Emergents. And, while Frost and Hirsch had popularized the term *emerging missional*, they stepped back with Frost stating his preference for MC

⁶ Michael Frost interview (June 26, 2013), see Roennfeldt 2013, 91.

⁷ Alan Hirsch interview (January 4, 2013), see Roennfeldt 2013, 34.

(Frost 2006, 1), and Hirsch for what he termed the “Apostolic Genius” (Hirsch 2006, 67) – tracing their connection with MC through “The Gospel and Our Culture Network.”

They were looking for “audacious new versions of Christian communities within unchurched subcultures” (Frost and Hirsch 2003, x) – church that is: (1) “*incarnational*, not attractional, in its ecclesiology,” (2) “*messianic*, not dualistic, in its spirituality,” and (3) “*apostolic*, rather than a hierarchical mode of leadership” (ibid., 12) – but, this fundamentally different view of church and mission is to rise from *missio Dei*, not postmodernism.

2. Responding to EC with Adventist Certainty

Born in the modernist era and defined by dogmatic certainty, self-confidence and self-identity as the last day *remnant church* of Bible prophecy, Adventists have found it difficult to acknowledge the reality of postmodernism.⁸ Armed with 28 *Fundamental Beliefs*,⁹ little attention has been given to how doctrinal beliefs, ecclesiology, spirituality or mission might be changed by the “dislocating” transition from a modern to postmodern worldview (Dockery 1995, 14), or from Christendom to post-Christendom and post-Christian societies.

It is not surprising, therefore, that popular Adventist responses to EC was generally reactionary. In his 2010 *Adventist Review Online* article, “The Emerging Church,” Fernando Canale wasted few words before making his point: “This new worship and spirituality, then, ‘emerge’ from ancient Roman Catholic liturgy, Eastern spirituality, contemporary charismatic worship, and post-modern culture.” He continued, drawing the contrast: “As the remnant church, our mission, identity, and nature (as Seventh-day Adventists) stand on the consistent understanding and intelligent application of all biblical teachings” (Canale 2010).

For his general Adventist readership, Canale could hardly have chosen more loaded terms to shut down the conversation. He left no doubt regarding his intentions – pitting any Adventists who might suggest some value in EC

⁸ In this, Adventists were not alone. The 22 contributors to Dockery 1995 – including Thomas C. Oden, Carl F.H. Henry, and Stanley J. Grenz – seemed unaware of any potential ecclesiological implications from postmodernism.

⁹ See <https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/fundamental-beliefs/>.

against those Adventists who are God's "remnant church" and faithful to Scripture – concluding:

To fulfill (sic) their mission, Adventists should stop playing follow the leader after the postmodern reformation of Evangelicalism and become the leaders of a biblical reformation by following Scripture alone and generating an alternate ecumenical movement. In personal and theological faithfulness to Scripture, Adventists should be creative in finding ways to penetrate all cultures with the complete biblical history of love and salvation. After all, God called His remnant church to play the leading role in the final chapter of the great controversy between good and evil. (Ibid.)

Canale offered no suggestions as to how Adventist might "be creative in finding ways to penetrate all cultures" – and to be fair, that was not the scope of his article – but there is little doubt that any creativity must be confined to his take on "love and salvation" and "the great controversy between good and evil."

2.1 A More Considered Response Was Needed

The cursory overview of EC as an intentional response to the evangelistic challenges of postmodernism in this paper, illustrates the complexity of this phenomenon. And Fernando Canale devotes the first of his two articles in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* to untangling the complex historical background to American Evangelicalism – where EC gained "momentum, attention, and influence" (Canale 2011 a, 84).

He traces the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation and State Churches, the impact of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648), the emergence of secular culture and "tolerant rationalism" with modernity (ibid., 87), the impact of the Great Awakenings and philosophical trends, the rise of Fundamentalism and Pentecostalism at the beginning of the twentieth century, and Neo-evangelicalism and Charismatic renewal by the mid-to-late twentieth century.

In summary, Canale writes, "Protestantism emerged from Scripture as a reform of the Roman Catholic Church and a serious challenge to culture." However, concerned that "the focus of the Protestant Reformation is switching progressively from Scripture to culture," he concludes with the question, "Is the Protestant Reformation emerging from Scripture coming to an end?" (ibid., 100–101).

But might it be that if the Protestant Reformation is anchored in reforming the Roman Catholic Church and Christendom culture, as Canale says, that it loses its identity and reason for being in the post-Christendom and post-Christian environment of postmodernism and neo-postmodernism? Could attention to Stetzer's Emergent types and the essence of MC provide a clear biblical and gospel centred identity for a continuing Protestant Reformation?

2.2 Informed by Relevants, Reconstructionists and Missional Church

Canale is correct in observing that "the Emerging Church movement is not just about worship innovations," however, not all Emergent types are committed to "a major overhaul of Evangelical belief (theology), ecclesiological identity (renewing the center of the Evangelical movement), and practice of ministry (worshiping)" (Canale 2011b, 70).

EC is not synonymous with American Church Growth, the American-Wagner-Wimber renewal emphasis, or MC – and is not a homogeneous phenomenon. It is, as Canale says, "a complex and variegated movement" and "churches that embrace this label are not monolithic" (ibid., 67), but it is often easier to treat it as uniform. While Stetzer's three types, as well as the biblical foundation of MC, provide a frame for a more considered response to EC – and Donkor begins with these (Donkor 2011, 3–5) – by focusing upon McLaren's views in his treatment of "Key Theological Themes of Emerging Church," he also labels the EC movement as uniformly Revisionist (ibid., 8–14).

In his treatment of worship and ministry as "the most visible aspects" of EC, Canale does the same, concluding that "Emerging worship and spirituality ... 'emerge' from ancient Roman Catholic liturgy, eastern spirituality, contemporary charismatic worship, and postmodern culture" (Canale 2011b, 72). He treats American Church Growth and charismatic renewal churches, along with pagan spiritualities, as of the same genre. It is true that Emergent Revisionists "embrace postmodern epistemology," but if Stetzer's types are accepted, it is not valid to conclude that "unlike the Protestant Reformation, the emerging Church Reformation emerges not from Scripture but from Christian tradition" (ibid., 86).

2.3 Culture, Scripture and Ecclesiology

While McLaren, the leading Emergent Revisionist, intentionally pursued theological reform from a vantage point within postmodernism – with a wide variety of mini-narrative redemption stories, a spirituality framed by ancient traditions rather than biblical teaching or authority, and church in all and any form – his “new kind of Christianity” (McLaren 2010, 14 and 23) did not persuade the Relevantists, Reconstructions or MC advocates, nor deviate them from mission to postmodernist.

Unfortunately, by critiquing EC as if it is defined totally by the Revisionists – and by labelling a broad sweep of American Evangelicalism as EC – we fail to be challenged by the questions being asked by those seriously committed to sharing the authentic biblical gospel in this postmodern era. We simply condemn all endeavours to be relevant or relate as EC – and liberal, Revisionist.

In 2010 the official Seventh-day Adventist clergy magazine *Ministry*, presented the – here already briefly mentioned – two-part analysis of EC by John Jovan Markovic, associate professor of modern European and church history at Andrews University – Part 1, “The Emerging Church: A Call to Action and Authenticity” (March 2010; Markovic 2010a), and Part 2, “The Emergent Theology: Voices of Confusion” (May 2010; Markovic 2010b).

In his first article, Markovic acknowledged “a thirst for spirituality” among his students, and their “experimenting with spirituality outside their respective denominations.” He observed that EC “is not a new denomination, but a network of like-minded pastors who, back in the late 1990s, felt *homeless* and *unchurched*.” They were mostly young, “with a clear objective to transcend denominational discord and eliminate doctrinal and ecclesiological barriers that separate people” (Markovic 2010a, 18–19).

Of course, Adventism in the 1990s was no stranger to “denominational discord,” with bitter “doctrinal and ecclesiological” controversy. Many (not just young pastors) struggled to find identity within their denomination that had during the 1980s torn itself apart over the investigative judgment doctrine and, in 1990 and 1995, failed to reach consensus on a gospel-framed ecclesiology that would affirm the *priesthood of all believers* – including women.

Markovic realized that EC was “a serious challenge” for a church that had become “complacent, lethargic, and insensitive to social ills,” with “thousands of alienated young and old ... completely disappointed with Christianity and

Christians" (ibid., 20). He observed that EC engaged with those that "traditional Christians" did not – the many who would never "step into the church or listen to traditional evangelistic presentations" (ibid.).

Modernism's rationalism and single metanarrative made little sense in postmodernism's experiential environment, but EC's variety of worship styles affirmed the maxim, "spirituality must be experienced." However, while agreeing that some innovation in worship is "biblically acceptable," Markovic expressed "particular concern" with "the presence of icons, mystic notions of silence and meditation, contemplation and medieval centering prayers, the eucharist with its transubstantiation notions, prayer labyrinths, and so forth." These he saw as "designed to lead the worshiper toward self-centeredness, self-reliant methods of salvation, self-worship, nature worship, and pantheistic, gnostic, or monistic states of mind," and away from Jesus Christ. (Ibid., 19–20)

In this Markovic reflected both Donkor and Canale's concern even with the Relevantants, although he did not use the distinctions of Stetzer's three type. For Stetzer, the Emergent Relevantants were conservative Christians with sound doctrine and a faithful biblical Gospel, but committed to reaching their postmodern communities in ways that were contextually relevant (Stetzer 2006a). Even in this regard, Donkor warns of practices that he suggests may involve syncretism – "issues pertaining to particular points of worship styles (music types, dancing, praying loudly, shouting, etc.)" (Donkor 2011, 4). And while Stetzer's Reconstructionists also hold orthodox views of the gospel and Scripture, they consider "the current form of church is frequently irrelevant and the structure is unhelpful" (Stetzer 2006a) – which Donkor sees of greater concern for it takes "contextualization more theologically" (Donkor 2011, 4).

While acknowledging that EC provided a "forum" for "a postmodern generation" that embraces a "matrix of reality" that is "'both/and' rather than the traditional Western 'either/or'" – to explore serious questions – Markovic could not resist adding: "and to most of those questions, they have no answers." He then offered, "We Christians who take the gospel mission seriously and claim the Scriptures to be the sole repository of spiritual authority should welcome this opportunity to step in and make a contribution" (Markovic 2010a, 20) – perhaps not cognizant of the contribution that Relevantants, Reconstructionists and MC could make.

Markovic considered EC as “a serious challenge,” and “a threat to Christianity today” – for it represents the shift in wider society and is embedded – “not an organized counterforce but rather a way of thinking within the faith” (ibid.).

His second article – “The Emergent Theology: Voices of Confusion” – enlarges on his point that at the heart of EC is the issue of spirituality – not just forms of worship, but changes to theology. He states, “the Emergents *are* about changing Christian theology” – expressing concern that emergent theology was becoming less Christ-centred and more Spirit-centred, being “shaped and formulated more by personal and cultural experience, and less by the revealed Word of God,” and increasingly incorporating “Eastern notions of reality and spirituality” (Markovic 2010b, 10).

His is a broad brush approach, treating all EC advocates as Revisionists and not recognizing different types of Emergents. He surmises that the emphasis on “spirituality, rather than religiosity” is to “attract newcomers, estrange (them) from the mother base, and then convert them into the new Emergent Christianity” (ibid.). His concern is that an overemphasis upon a Spirit-focus might lead to an “embodied theology” – in which the Spirit’s work in each person’s story and their understanding of the biblical text, as “embodied in the community, equals, or in some cases, supersedes the written Word of God” (ibid.).

Markovic took issue with the EC emphasis on church and individuals cultivating the kingdom of God “here and now” – without due emphasis on the necessity of a final eradication of sin from the universe; and accused EC proponents of a revisionist approach to history, giving undue weight to the Patristic fathers, rather than to the apostles or Jesus. This he believes intentionally fostered the evolution of a utopian rather than biblical “emergent attitude toward human predicament (that) resonates with New Ageism, the Baha’i teachings, Eastern monistic notions, and so forth” (ibid., 11).

This illustrates my concern that a failure to consider significant differences between various Emergents results in sidelining the very significant insights and commitment of many committed to biblical and faithful gospel mission within this postmodern, post-Christendom and post-Christian era.

3. An Adventist Missional Response to Postmodernism

We live in the postmodern era. Postmodern is who many of us are – living with tension: postmodernists in life, but in faith and church anchored in modernism’s rationalism. Adventists have critiqued EC, but has Adventism acknowledged the evangelistic ineffectiveness of its 19th and 20th century modes, and repositioned itself as an intentional 21st century evangelistic response to this new paradigm? Given the magnitude and complexity of mission today, a courageous and visionary biblical response is needed – one shaped by Jesus’ approach to disciple-making, church-planting and movement-building.

In the first chapter of *The Body of Christ: A Biblical Understanding of the Church* (2009) – considered “the most comprehensive treatment” of ecclesiology “in the history of the denomination” (Knight and Whidden II 2009, 9) – Reinder Bruinsma outlines challenges facing the church and its various responses, including “emerging church” (Bruinsma 2009, 11–21). Bruinsma provides a comprehensive view of church – biblical and theological, historical, practical, and Adventist. He agrees, “a lot of change may be needed in the church,” but urges caution lest we end up with something that “is no longer a ‘church’ in the biblical sense and in the way Christ intended” (ibid., 19).

This is an urgent question: What is a biblical church, reflecting what Jesus intended? Donkor defends “an orthodox understanding,” fearing the main elements of evangelism, edification, worship and social concern are “being re-envisioned” by EC (Donkor 2011, 15–16). He fails to give credit to the Emergent types he has previously affirmed, even claiming that in EC evangelism is “replaced with the missional idea” (ibid., 16) – unfortunately implying that missional is not evangelistic. While referencing the many models of church governance within Protestantism, he highlights EC’s “aversion to structure” (ibid., 23–24) – but again fails to make any distinction between Emergent Revisionist and those seeking to be faithful to Jesus’ idea of church, God’s mission (the *missio Dei*), and the apostles’ vision.

While featuring Angel Manuel Rodriguez’ “remnant ecclesiology” – with its missionary outlook, soteriology and eschatology (ibid., 26–30; see Rodriguez 2009, 21) – Donkor considers that “on the nature of the Christian church, its role, rituals, and governance Adventists share quite a bit with the wider Protestant evangelical churches” (Donkor 2011, 24–25).

This may highlight an issue that is critical: Does Adventist ecclesiology – together with the church’s “role, rituals, and governance” – reflect inherited Constantinian and post-Constantine influences that have not been addressed and that hinder effective biblical evangelism in this postmodern era? This is the question many EC Relevantists and Reconstructionists, together with MC advocates, are also asking – and that is overlooked in most critiques of EC. How revolutionary would it be if Adventism rediscovered Jesus’ idea of church from the New Testament instead of relying upon notions of church inherited from later post-apostolic times?

Just months before His crucifixion and resurrection Jesus used the word that Matthew translated as *church*, for His *gathering* of disciples – a word without architectural, political or religious connotations at that time (Matt. 16:13–21). His church is our church. He is the foundation. Its basic unit is the “two or three” who gather in His name (Matt. 18:20). And He gave them “the keys” – the gospel of salvation (see Matt. 16:19,21) – to unlock heaven for families, friends and colleagues.

An emphasis of the remnant concept is that of a falling-away, followed by the restoration of biblical truth. Increasing numbers within Adventism are now aware that our church is a poor reflection of what Jesus and the apostles had in mind for His church. The call to be a missional and missionary church is urgent. It suggests a continuing reformation, even a revolution, in practising the *priesthood of all believers* with justice and without discrimination on racial, status, or gender grounds (1 Peter 2:9–10).

Postmodernism has challenged church, but within weeks COVID-19 catapulted the church into change. Scattered to “households of faith” (Roennfeldt 2020; Roennfeldt 2021) COVID-19 exposed the underlying weakness of church being largely reduced to building-centric-worship. Early believers understood the idea of churches in households, where churches gathered to pray and to reflect on the good news of Jesus’ resurrection and presence (worship), to meet each other’s needs (service), to share the gospel with unbelieving family and neighbours (evangelism and disciple-making), to enjoy the presence of the Spirit in the Lord’s supper and baptisms (fellowship), and to grow spiritually (obedient discipleship) (Acts 2:42–47).

In this article I have not provided a simple list of what is right or wrong with EC, nor confined our discussion to EC practices. It is a complex move-

ment represented by many – Relevants, Deconstructionists, and some Revisionists. Some, faithful to biblical authority, doctrine and the eternal gospel of Jesus Christ, have sought to keep the focus upon being both a missional and missionary movement.

It is through this Christ-centred frame that Adventists must seriously endeavour to: (1) interpret the changed culture, (2) discover the good in this culture, (3) identify where the Holy Spirit of God might be at work, (4) confront destructive cultural norms – both within modernism and postmodernism – in ways constructive for the gospel, (5) sharpen its message to relate to the end-time scenarios of postmodernism, and (6) find ways of growing Christian faith and God’s kingdom in these eschatological times.

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Zusammenfassung

Die Postmoderne fordert die Kirche heraus. Die Komplexität des amerikanischen Evangelikalismus im späten 20. und frühen 21. Jahrhundert war die Umgebung für neue Emerging-Church-Gespräche. Das Interesse an amerikanischem Gemeindegewachstum ließ nach, und die Zahl der Kirchenbesucher ging trotz charismatischer Erneuerung weiter zurück. Es gab eine wachsende Frustration über die evangelistische Ineffektivität der „Suchermodelle“ der Megakirchen, wenn es darum ging, postmoderne Menschen zu erreichen, zusammen mit der wachsenden Erkenntnis, dass es Alternativen zu den überkommenen konstantinischen Gemeindemodellen gab. Es ist ein komplexes Gespräch. Einige, die der biblischen Autorität, der Lehre und dem ewigen Evangelium von Jesus Christus treu sind, haben versucht, sich weiter darauf zu fokussieren, sowohl eine missionale als auch eine missionarische Bewegung zu sein. Dieser Artikel listet nicht einfach auf, was an Emerging Church richtig oder falsch ist, noch beschränkt sich die Diskussion auf bestimmte Praktiken. Er untersucht, wie Adventisten diese Bewegung bewertet haben; und indem er den akademischen, beruflichen und persönlichen Weg des Autors in seinem Dienst widerspiegelt, gibt er eine adventistische Antwort.

Résumé

Le postmodernisme défie l'église. La complexité de l'évangélisme américain de la fin du 20^e et du début du 21^e siècle a créé l'environnement pour de nouveaux débats de l'église émergente. L'intérêt pour la croissance d'église aux Etats-Unis déclinait et la fréquentation de l'église continuait de baisser en dépit du renouveau charismatique. Il y avait une frustration croissante face à l'inefficacité évangélique des modèles de méga-églises pour atteindre les postmodernes, y compris la prise de conscience croissante qu'il existait des alternatives aux modèles d'église hérités de l'époque Constantine. C'est un débat complexe. Certains, fidèles à l'autorité biblique, à la doctrine et l'évangile éternel de Jésus-Christ, ont cherché à rester concentrés sur le fait d'être un mouvement missionnaire. Cet article n'énumère pas simplement ce qui est bon ou mauvais dans l'église émergente, ni ne limite la discussion à certaines pratiques. Il examine comment les Adventistes ont évalué ce mouvement et, en reflétant le parcours académique, professionnel et personnel du ministère de l'auteur, présente une réponse adventiste.

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Adventism, Postmodernity and Spirituality

Reinder Bruinsma

Abstract

This article explores to what extent postmodern thinking has impacted the way in which spirituality is defined and experienced within the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Before proceeding with the argument that we can indeed see a definite and substantial impact, the three essential terms (Adventism, postmodernity and spirituality) are defined and a short overview is given of the impact of postmodernity on life in the era in which we now live. Then attention is given to developments (under the influence of postmodernity) in the domain of spirituality, and, in particular, to the increase of spirituality outside the church. Some wider trends in the ecclesial world are reflected in Adventism.

Of special importance is the fact that most expressions of Adventist spirituality have traditionally been channeled into institutionalized forms and, in general, the church's leadership has become extremely concerned about new approaches they cannot control and that emphasize religious experience at the expense of doctrine. This concern, the author contends, has manifested itself very clearly in reactions toward *Spiritual Formation* and *The One Project*. The author believes this is one of many clear indications of a deep divide between modern and postmodern Adventism. Further study would be needed to either prove or disprove whether his thesis is correct and/or to what extent other factors, besides postmodernism, help to explain recent and contemporary developments in the domain of spirituality.

1. Terminology

This article seeks to probe the impact of postmodernism on Seventh-day Adventism, specifically with respect to developments in spirituality. This is far from simple and I can only hope to succeed, at least in some preliminary way,

if we will proceed on the basis of some clear definitions. I also hope that further study about developments in Adventist spirituality will benefit from this initial exploration. All three terms—Adventism, postmodernity and spirituality—have broad and imprecise connotations, and the way in which I will try to define them in the context of this study may betray my bias, or may be too narrow for the taste of some readers. But some definitions are required if we are to approach this topic in a meaningful way.

“Adventism” may be the easiest of the three concepts to define. Even though the label can be used with reference to other groups and historic phenomena, I will use it as it is most commonly used, namely in reference to the world-wide Seventh-day Adventist denomination. However, while doing so, I must immediately add that the Adventist experience is not “one size fits all.” As the Adventist Church has grown into a faith community of over 22 million baptized members, it has become more and more diverse, and one could justifiably say that there are different kinds of Adventism, which vary from extremely conservative to quite liberal (Bruinsma, 2006, 84)¹, and everything in between, such as proponents of “historic Adventism” and believers in Last Generation Theology. In the context of this article another important divide appears to be especially relevant, namely the chasm between “modern” and “postmodern” Adventists. I have argued elsewhere that this might well be the most fundamental divide in contemporary western Adventism (Bruinsma 2005), and I proceed in this article with that in mind.

Postmodernism and postmodernity² may have become household terms, but to put a clear boundary around their exact meaning continues to be problematic. Scottish theologian Alister C. McGrath calls postmodernity “a complex, perhaps ultimately undefinable notion” (McGrath 2004, 224). Most

¹ See also: Holmes, Lee Roy. “What Do You Mean: Seventh-day Adventist?” *Adventist Review* (<https://www.adventistreview.org/141520-16>; this article was adapted from the chapter “Whatever Happened to the Seventh-day Adventists?” Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, ed.: *Here We Stand*. Hagerstown: Review and Herald Graphics, 2005, 741–747); Taylor, Ervin. “What Kind of Adventist Are You?” *Adventist Today* (<https://atoday.org/what-kind-of-seventh-day-adventist-are-you-2/>).

² The words “postmodernity” and “postmodernism” have slightly different meanings. Postmodernism is the philosophy or theory that is at the basis of postmodernity. The terms are often used interchangeably.

descriptions of postmodernity point to the differences with modernity, but do not provide a clear-cut definition. It has been described as “an elastic critical category, with a wide range of applications and potential understanding” and as “a kind of ‘portable’ term which enables us to enter a great many ideas about specific characteristics of the world today” (Ward 2003, 15). Prominent Baptist theologian Stanley J. Grenz, in his book *A Primer on Postmodernism*, states what underlies most descriptions of postmodernism: “Postmodernism refers to the intellectual mood and cultural expressions that are becoming increasingly dominant in contemporary society. We are apparently moving into a new cultural epoch,” and he then continues to pinpoint in some detail what this postmodern phenomenon entails (Grenz 1996, 13–15). Michael Welker, a German Protestant theologian, emphasizes that the most significant difference between modernity and postmodernity is between the highest value and the interpretation of this value in both epochs. For modernity, the value of *unity* is of the highest importance. For post-modernity, the value of *difference* is most crucial (Welker 2002, 438).

The discussion is ongoing about whether the age of postmodernity should perhaps more aptly be called the epoch of “late modernity.” Others maintain that postmodernism has already ended and given place to something that is often referred to as post-postmodernism or by a range of other terms, such as altermodernism, cosmodernism, and metamodernism. Nonetheless, there seems to be a rather broad consensus that there have been major philosophical and cultural developments in most domains of life since the 1960s and 1970s, and that these developments justify speaking of a shift from modernity to postmodernity, and of postmodernity as “the main cultural framework leaving its mark on European and other Western societies today” (Lienemann-Perrin 2007, 446). There is, I believe, sufficient basis to employ the term post-modernism for the *Zeigeist* that still governs much of contemporary thinking and cultural expressions.

The third term that needs some preliminary clarification is “spirituality.” In the past, spirituality was firmly linked to religion, but in our postmodern era this is no longer self-evident. In fact, Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead suggest in the title of their widely acclaimed book that we see a “spiritual revolution” in which religion is giving way to spirituality (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 1–11).

There is an abundance of definitions of “spirituality.”³ The British theologian C.P.M. Jones offers this description: Spirituality is “a search for meaning and significance by contemplation and reflection on the totality of human experience in relation to the whole world that is experienced, and also to the life which is lived and may mature as that search proceeds” (Jones 1986, xxv–xxvi). Below we will specifically focus on Christian spirituality. I found the description of Dr Alex Tang, the founder and director of Kairos Spiritual Formation Ministries, very apt:

Christian Spirituality is the process of spiritual formation of a disciple of Jesus Christ for an authentic and fulfilled Christian life in the present world; involving bringing together the fundamental tenets of the Christian truths and the experience of living in God’s presence, grace and love in our daily life. It is Trinitarian, incarnational and grace-filled living. It is *theology in action*.⁴

This accords with the definition given by Alister McGrath:

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 and within the scope of the Christian faith. (McGrath 1999, 2)

2. The Impact of Postmodernism

All aspects of contemporary life have, to a greater or lesser extent, been impacted by postmodernism. And most people in the western world⁵ – whether they realize it or not – have to a greater or lesser degree been influenced by postmodern ideas. The main characteristics of the postmodern consciousness may be listed as follows, recognizing that this summary is far from complete. It does, however, include the elements that are most relevant in our present discussion.

³ Harri Kuhalampi provides an overview of some of the most prominent definitions of Christian spirituality in his dissertation *Holistic Spirituality in the Thinking of Ellen White*: Kuhalampi 2010, 18–26.

⁴ https://www.kairos2.com/christian_spirituality.htm.

⁵ The question as to what extent people in the non-western world have been influenced by postmodernism is not easily answered. It differs from country to country and also depends on age groups and levels of education. A key difference between the West and other parts of the world is the strong individualism in the West.

(1) The abandonment of the Enlightenment belief in evitable progress, which has translated into a gnawing pessimism.

(2) The conviction that life on earth is utterly fragile.

(3) The rejection of all “grand narratives” that professed to offer an overarching framework for all aspects of life.

(4) The conviction that we are more than our brains. Postmodernism subscribes to a holistic philosophy; it de-emphasizes science and rationality in favor of intuition and emotions.

(5) The fundamental principle that there is no Absolute Truth, but we all have our own truth. This leads to a major degree of relativism and pluralism.

(6) A mixing of elements from different traditions (and, in the arts, a mixing of incompatible styles and materials).

(7) Interpretation is a key concept. We all read a text through our own lenses, and each person is allowed to have his/her own interpretation.

(8) The key concept of deconstruction, which means that we must not only discover what a text *does say*, but also what it *does not say* and how it may be a vehicle of violence and oppression.

(9) Postmodern people want to pick and choose; they embrace what they like and reject what they do not agree with.⁶

(10) A shying away from long-term commitments (Bruinsma 2014, loc. 410–loc. 754; Bruinsma 2006, 26–28; Grenz 1996, 13–15).

It is clear that these general characteristics have a major impact on faith, religion and church, including the Seventh-day Adventists Church and Adventist believers. For one thing, many church members no longer want to accept a complete doctrinal package but feel free to “pick and choose” from the doctrinal smörgåsbord. In today’s postmodern climate the Adventist Church, in particular in the Western world, manifests an ever-increasing pluralism and many members seek their inspiration also in sources outside their denominational boundaries.

Perhaps the most dramatic change in recent decades has been the massive exodus from the church. (It is beyond the limitations of this study to analyze the many factors that play a role in this dramatic development, but the impact

⁶ This was confirmed in the Adventist Church by the *Valuegenesis Project*. See Gillespie and Donahue 2004, 156–159.

of postmodernism is clearly one of them). Virtually all Christian denominations have seen their membership decline, and worship attendance has dramatically dropped, in particular in Western Europe. This has been true for both Protestants and Catholics, but Americans are also leaving their churches in large numbers. Currently 43 percent of American adults identify with Protestantism, down from 52% just ten years ago. One in five Americans (20%) are Catholic, down from 23% in 2009.⁷ In a number of European countries the situation would be worse, were it not for the significant number of Christian immigrants from former colonies and other countries in the South. An estimated 26 million Christian immigrants currently live in the member states of the European Union.⁸

The Adventist Church is not exempt from the phenomenon of church leaving. In fact, the retention rate of members is extremely worrisome. According to a 2020 report by David Trim, the head of the denominational office for statistics, in just over half a century the church saw some forty million accessions, but lost over sixteen million members. Over half of those “lost” were simply registered as “missing.”⁹ There are no solid data to establish which reasons dominated in this process. But there is enough evidence to conclude that a sense that the church has lost its relevancy, rather than doctrinal disagreement, is the most prominent cause. It would probably be safe to say that, as many members became more postmodern, their attitude towards the church *as an institution* had tended to shift. This would agree with the general picture in the Christian West, which shows that one of the characteristics of postmodernism is a dislike for institutional religion. This is in particular true for the younger generations. Dan Kimball, an evangelical pastor and author in California, wrote a book entitled *They Like Jesus but not the Church* (Kimball 2007). This title encapsulates in a few words how the “emerging generations” relate to the Christian religion. They cannot tolerate most Christians they have met, and many feel they can relate to God “without all the unnatural structure the organized church would impose upon them (ibid., 74). In fact, they experience

⁷ <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

⁸ <https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2012/03/europe-fact-sheet.pdf>. Christian immigrants outnumber slightly the number of Muslim immigrants.

⁹ David Trim, “Mission Challenges,” presentation at Autumn Council 2020, <https://www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/files/2020%20Annual%20Council%20statistical%20report%20full%20copy.pdf>.

the church and its culture as “very unlike Jesus” (ibid., 80), and often as judgmental and negative (ibid., 96). Moreover, in many cases they see the church as misogynistic and homophobic (ibid., 27 and 91–119). And fundamentalist ideas, combined with sexism and patriarchal attitudes, can be especially off-putting (Winell 2007, 87–96).

3. The Turn towards Spirituality

The turning away from institutional religion and the resulting hemorrhage of church membership in most denominations is not the only significant trend in the Christian world in the West. Another important trend has to do with spirituality. It is widely recognized that spirituality is not dead, but is possibly more alive than in modern times.¹⁰ Philip Sheldrake, a senior research fellow at the Cambridge Theological Federation, concluded there is presently in the Western world “a more broadly based quest for spiritual wisdom and practices” than we have seen for a long time. He states that at this point in time the experience of spirituality is “more varied, eclectic, global, ecumenical, and radically plural” than at almost any moment in the Christian past (Sheldrake 2013, 200). Having said this, it must be added, that there is a growing dichotomy between religion and spirituality. This has led to a shift in religious experience among many who have decided to remain in the institutional church, as well as among a large group of “seekers” who are looking for a spiritual home where their spiritual hunger can be satisfied, and among a, probably even larger, group of men and women who have embraced a form of spirituality without being connected to any religious community.

What binds these different categories together is what Heelas and Woodhead refer to as the “spiritual revolution,” which has its basis in the “massive subjective turn of modern culture” (Heelas and Woodland 2005, 2). In the religious domain this means a turn away from a focus on a Reality outside us to “subjective life”, which is “life lived in deep connection with the unique experiences of my self-in-relation” (ibid., 3). These two authors make a distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion is being connected with “a ‘higher’ authority of transcendent meaning, goodness and truth”, while spirituality is invoking “the sacred in the cultivation of unique subjective life”

¹⁰ How to measure spirituality remains a much-debated issue. For a discussion of two widely used instruments, see: Slater, Hall and Edwards 2001.

(*ibid.*, 5). Kenneth I. Pargament, an American emeritus professor in psychology, agrees. He states: "A polarization has developed in which spirituality tends to be viewed as individually oriented and good, and religion tends to be viewed as institutional and bad" (quoted by McMinn and Hall 2000, 205).

Anke Bisschops, a pastoral psychologist at the Tilburg School of Theology in the Netherlands, points to the fact that the division in these different categories may need further precision. She describes how in her country an increasing number of Christian spiritual centers "attract the growing number of unbound spiritual seekers who reject any limitations on their personal freedom and who value autonomy, authenticity and personal growth", but that many of them simultaneously have retained a high level of commitment to their local church (Bisschops 2005, 24, 37).

Much of what is referred to as non-church spirituality goes under the umbrella of New Age. To define New Age is probably as challenging as it is to provide a consensus-definition of postmodernism. We must be aware of the significant differences between the thinking of the postmodern philosophers and most New Age practitioners. To state one crucial difference: postmodernity tends to be very pessimistic, while the New Age believers look forward to the abundant happiness of the age of Aquarius! But the two phenomena have much in common in the area of spirituality. We note the absorption of the culture of individualism, the rejection of objective truth and a tendency towards a thoroughgoing syncretism, which borrows elements from ancient Christian sources, but also from other world religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism, and from paganism (Veith 1994, 199). All of this is embedded in what many have called the "re-enchantment" of the world. After the "sacred canopy"¹¹ had been removed and the modern, secular world of rationalism became "dis-encharnted", postmodernism brought a new openness toward non-rational, miraculous and supernatural phenomena.

And to the extent that "spiritual" people still consider themselves as religious, we often find that their religion is no longer characterized by "a set of beliefs about what is real and what is not," but rather by a set of preferences

¹¹ This term is used by sociologist Peter L. Berger as the title of his book on the sociology of religion (Berger 1987).

as to what they choose to believe (Veith 1994, 193; Sheldrake 2013, 175). “Bricolage spirituality” seems to be a fitting epithet for the eclectic post-Christian varieties of spirituality (McKnight 2010, 206).

4. Adventist Institutionalized Spirituality

There is good ground for defining traditional Adventist spirituality as largely “institutionalized spirituality”, i.e. a spirituality that was organized along institutionally arranged patterns.¹² This has a few clear reasons, but there is also a good reason why in the western world, with the rise of postmodernism, this no longer operates as successfully as it used to. Its emphasis on propositional Truth and a strongly apologetic approach in its communication methods, together with its undeniable tendencies towards fundamentalism (Bruinsma 2000, 8–14), gave Adventism a distinct “modern” (rational) flavor. This “modern” deference to reason, Malcolm Bull and Keith Lockhart explain, was not only a legacy of the Enlightenment, but also of the Common-Sense philosophy that had become popular in the nineteenth century New England states, where Adventism originated (Bull and Lockhart 1989, 23). The emphasis on the mind and the mistrust of emotion and the experiential aspect of religion has remained a feature of Adventism until today.

Another major factor has been (and continues to be) the persistent perspective on unity as uniformity. The entire “world church” (which became a favorite term for referring to the denomination) was constantly encouraged to engage in the *same* projects, seek inspiration from the *same* themes, employ the *same* promotional slogans, and use the *same* publications and other resources, in particular the writing of Ellen G. White.

The third important factor was fear – concern that the church members would be led astray by the false doctrines of “Babylon” and through such external threats as spiritualism and mysticism. In its earliest period the Adventist Church was plagued by fanaticism and extremism (Toews 2013, 818–819), and the general mistrust towards clerical authority in several of the new religious movements was reflected in the fledgling Adventist community, and

¹² This pattern is analysed in great detail in Zoltán Szalos-Farkas’ doctoral dissertation *The Rise and Development of Seventh-day Adventist Spirituality* (Szalos-Farkas 2005). Szalos-Farkas sees Adventist spirituality as a concomitant of the church’s doctrinal framework and institutional development.

tended to make every lay member into a potential theologian (Hatch 1989). This could at times lead to bizarre teachings and undesirable practices and, as time went by, measures were deemed necessary to prevent such problems and encourage uniformity. Interestingly, this stimulated a process whereby a community that initially was totally averse to organization and creed-like statements would become an well-oiled denominational machinery with a detailed corpus of *Fundamental Beliefs* (Knight 2001).

Several spiritual institutions were adapted in early Adventism from existing traditions in contemporary Protestantism. The Seventh Day Baptists organized their first Sabbath School in 1739 (Schwarz and Greenleaf 2000, 154) and the Sunday School appeared on the American scene in 1790, inspired by British examples (Boylan 1988, 6). They first targeted children, but soon also had classes for adults. By 1830 the Sunday school was a “permanent fixture in American life” (Boylan 1988, 20), ready to be adopted and adapted by Seventh-day Adventists. James White wrote the first Sabbath School lesson in 1852 and soon the first Sabbath Schools were organized. These initiatives eventually grew into an intricate global Sabbath School network, with study resources for all age groups and a strong emphasis on mission promotion (Kuntaraf 2020). The Sabbath School became, without much doubt, the most important channel of spiritual nurture in the Adventist Church. But it was/is very “modern” in its organizational pattern, in its rational approach and its focus on global uniformity.

In countries in the South the number of Sabbath school members has tended to be higher than the number of church members, but it would appear that in the Western world the enthusiasm for this “modern” medium has somewhat waned. David Trim, the director of the denomination’s office for statistics, concluded from a global study of the spiritual impact of the Sabbath School that there are very significant differences in the appreciation for the *Adult Bible Study Guide*, with the “western” divisions of the church scoring much lower than the divisions in the South. He added: “The skepticism in North America is evident, too, in the fact that, in a 2013 survey of recent graduates of Adventist colleges in the United States, only 21% engaged “often” or “very often” with the SS quarterly, in contrast to 57% who answered “never” or “hardly ever” .¹³

¹³ <http://www.adventistresearch.org/sites/default/files/SS%20Summative%20Report%202017.pdf>.

Another traditional feature of Adventist church life that may also be designated as “modern” is the camp meeting. Camp meetings bring members together for a week or longer, usually in a rural setting, with a program dominated by much preaching, often by prominent speakers from elsewhere in the world. Adventists inherited the camp meeting phenomenon from their Millerite forebears, but other denominations also held camp meetings. In 1956 the *Ministry* journal published an article about the importance of the camp meetings and observed that “the camp meeting of a half century ago was the spiritual bulwark to many denominations.” Regrettably, the author said, “little by little the spirit of modernism has overtaken the rank and file of present denominations, so that today the camp meeting may be looked upon as something only for the Ozarks” (Ritz 1956, 11–13). In the United States and in Australia camp meetings still enjoy a degree of popularity (though mostly only on the weekends), but in some conferences camp meetings have been discontinued. In Europe, the camp meeting tradition never caught on, except in the United Kingdom where the introduction of the camp meeting proved to be one of the side effects of the influx of immigrants from the Caribbean.

Other “modern” channels for spiritual nurture, providing a uniform spiritual diet for the entire world church, are the weekly prayer meeting and the annual week of prayer, recently augmented with other prayer initiatives which are also orchestrated from “on high.” The (usually Wednesday night) prayer meetings were a common feature in Methodism and in other churches, and that Adventist should have adopted and adapted these comes as no surprise. It is no secret, however, that in most Adventist congregations in the western world the prayer meeting, if it is still held, draws only a few participants.

The first Week of Prayer that was organized by the denominational leadership was held from December 25, 1885 to January 2, 1886 (Butler 1885, 9–10). This initiative evolved into a global event that later shifted to the month of November. “Readings” continue to be produced and translated into many languages. Church leaders see it as an opportunity to provide the global membership with material they deem vital for their spiritual growth. Although precise statistical data about the current participation of church members in the Western world in this “modern” aspect of Adventist church life are not available, there is ample evidence that the “readings” now often remain unread, and attendance during the weekday meetings is minimal.

Another initiative aimed at increasing the spirituality of the church members was launched at the beginning of the first term of Pastor Ted N. C. Wilson's presidency of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, namely the Revival and Reformation project, which in many ways resembled a similar undertaking during the presidency of Robert Pierson (Bruinsma 2016, 48–50). Once again, we note the “modern” approach, as this was something that was imposed on the Church, as if revival and reformation can be organized and facilitated by a system of committee decisions, publications and websites.¹⁴ To my knowledge, no research has been done to determine the impact of the revival and reformation materials and to discover what percentage of the members feel they have benefited spiritually from these. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, at least in the western world, the project did not enthruse many members.

Other global efforts aimed at providing spiritual nurture, which have a decidedly modern and institutional flavor, are the publication (since 2005) of the *Adventist World* journal in 25-plus languages,¹⁵ the publication of annual “devotional” books with daily spiritual messages for different age groups, the constant worldwide promotion of the writings of Ellen G. White, and the annual “missionary book” in scores of languages. The authors of these books are usually selected from a small group of orthodox leaders who can be trusted to produce a traditional message. The 2021 title is *Hope for Troubled Times* and its author is Pastor Mark Finley, a personal assistant to the General Conference president.¹⁶

5. Adventist Alternative Spirituality

It does not require supernatural insight to conclude that the growing number of Adventists who are partly or fully postmodern are less and less attracted to institutionally created and imposed spiritual resources, which no longer resonate with their longing for a kind of spirituality that is “guided by biblical example, but is also holistic, culturally relevant and applicable in the various

¹⁴ For a survey of this initiative, see <https://www.revivalandreformation.org/about>.

¹⁵ For details, see <https://www.adventistworld.org>.

¹⁶ <https://adventist.news/en/news/seventh-day-adventist-church-announces-new-2021-missionary-book-of-the-year>.

life situations and circumstances” of postmodern twenty-first century people (Kuhalampi 2012, 56).

As noted above, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced a large exodus of members in the past few decades. This may, at least in part, be explained by the impact of postmodernism and by how the thinking and attitude of many towards institutional religion developed. However, among those who have retained their membership many have also to a greater or lesser degree become postmodern. They share in the general postmodern rejection of the “grand narratives” or “metanarratives” that serve as an overarching framework for all aspects of life. This includes an increasing skepticism (or even outright dismissal) of the Adventist metanarrative. They no longer see the history and the present role and ambition of Adventism in the same, often exclusive and triumphalistic, mode as “modern” Adventists tended to do. They share in the postmodern dislike of (over-)institutionalized religion and ecclesial hierarchies, and prefer to focus on the “small stories,” and on what happens locally. Like other postmoderns, they have absorbed an individualized approach to life in general, and to spirituality in particular. They refuse to be told by any authority (ecclesial or otherwise) what they must believe, but “pick and choose” what they feel they can accept, and then claim the freedom to adopt their own interpretation and to also be inspired by what happens beyond their own denominational walls. They manifest a greater openness to emotion and intuition, at the expense of purely rational religious arguments, and share in the postmodern emphasis on the value of diversity and the need for tolerance when opinions vary (Bruinsma 2014, loc. 1544–1577; Bruinsma 2005).

Although many aspects need further study, it seems safe to suggest that postmodern tendencies among a significant segment of Seventh-day Adventists in the Western world lead towards a disinterest in institutional channels of spirituality and to an openness, or even enthusiasm, for other avenues of spirituality. At the same time, this would also help us to understand the uneasiness of many leaders about initiatives in the domain of spirituality that move outside the institutionalized Adventist traditions. Thus, I believe, we see a clear chasm between modern and postmodern approaches to spirituality. On the modern, institutional side, this leads to constant warnings and condemnations, often based on mere terminology and rumors, rather than on serious attempts to understand the phenomena that are being condemned.

Much of the fear that is expressed by church leaders, some popular preachers and independent ministries, centers on the real or alleged influences of Eastern religions and philosophy, New Age teachings and pantheistic philosophies, and strong warnings are sounded against meditation, centered prayer, mindfulness and other spiritual practices. A clear indication of how important all this was deemed, was the fact that the president of the world church, in his “inaugural sermon” in 2010, expressed his deep concerns. Wilson stated:

We must be vigilant to test all things according to the supreme authority of God’s Word and the counsel with which we have been blessed in the writings of Ellen G. White. Don’t reach out to movements or megachurch centers outside the Seventh-day Adventist Church which promise you spiritual success based on faulty theology. Stay away from non-biblical spiritual disciplines or methods of spiritual formation that are rooted in mysticism such as contemplative prayer, centering prayer, and the emerging church movement in which they are promoted.

Wilson added that believers should “look within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to humble pastors, evangelists, Biblical scholars, leaders, and departmental directors who can provide evangelistic methods and programs that are based on solid Biblical principles and *The Great Controversy* theme.”¹⁷

Within the confines of this article many aspects must remain untouched. I have selected two examples that I believe illustrate the widespread fear for persons and groups which are seen as promoting a type of postmodern spirituality that conflicts with the modern, institutionalized practices that characterize traditional Adventism. I have chosen “spiritual formation,” and the “One-Project” and the controversy that has surrounded (and still surround) these issues.

5.1 *Spiritual Formation*

Why did the faculty of the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University find it necessary in 2012 to publish “A Statement on Biblical Spirituality”?¹⁸ It was because the concept of “spiritual formation” had become a very

¹⁷ For the full text of the sermon, see: <https://www.adventistreview.org/2010-1526-2>.

¹⁸ https://www.andrews.edu/sem/sdats_bibspir.pdf.

controversial topic in the Adventist Church and the SDA Theological Seminary, especially, had been aggressively accused of promoting “spiritual formation”.

At first the use of the term “spiritual formation” and of some of its derivatives was non-controversial in Adventist circles. But, eventually, “spiritual formation” came to be seen as “a codeword for the surreptitious infiltration of mysticism and even Satanism” (Thomas 2012, 44). At the origin of the fundamentalist crusade against Spiritual Formation were two (non-SDA) men: Ray Yungen and Roger Oakland, who through their Lighthouse Trail Publishing ministry started a war against the Spiritual Formation movement, which they saw as the greatest apostasy of our times. In December 2007, they happened upon an article published by the Adventist News Network, which reported in positive terms about Spiritual Formation. This made them sound the alarm. In all probability, an Oregon Adventist pastor, John Witcombe, soon joined by others, began to voice his concerns.¹⁹ An avalanche of publications (mostly in the media at the fringes of the church) resulted. A privately published book – the *Omega Rebellion* by Rick Howard – was distributed by the Review and Herald publishing house (Thomas 2012, 47).

Commenting on the Statement by the Seminary Faculty, Denis Fortin, then the dean of the Seminary, admitted that “recently, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary and Andrews University have been under scrutiny for offering courses in spiritual formation to their students.”²⁰

The statement of the Seminary faculty defined biblical spirituality as “the process of divine restoration and healing of the broken relation between the Triune God and humanity” and was very clear with regard to the kind of spirituality it rejected. It stated:

As in all matters of faith, Christians of the twenty-first century need to safeguard their beliefs and practices about spirituality to ensure that they do not depart from biblical principles. In today’s postmodern, pluralistic world, with its multiple influences from Eastern non-Christian religions, animism, New Age and other sources, the meanings of

¹⁹ <https://amazingdiscoveries.org/ad-newsletter-archive-summer-2009-Hunger>.

²⁰ <http://www.adventistonline.com/m/discussion?id=1451550%3ATopic%3A1847054>.

“spirituality” and “spiritual formation” have become ambiguous and conflicted. (Ibid.)²¹

The statement was adamant that the Theological Seminary rejects all “methods to seeking to ‘experience’ God by an emptying of the mind or an altered state of consciousness” and “all varieties of so-called ‘spiritual’ practices that are inconsistent with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs” (ibid.).

Harri Kuhalampi, a Finnish scholar, commented that the statement is rather defensive. It “seems to be motivated by a need to protect the church against wrong spiritual practices rather than an interest in attempting a comprehensive description of Christian spirituality” (Kuhalampi 2012, 55). He finds the document “regrettably one-sided and narrow” (Kuhalampi 2012, 56), and opines that it does not do justice to the richness of the concept of holistic spirituality, as found in the writings of Ellen G. White, especially in her classic *Steps to Christ* (Kuhalampi 2012, 57). That the statement was defensive can be understood in the context of the controversy that had developed.

The person at the center of this controversy was Jon L. Dybdahl (b. 1942), an esteemed Adventist scholar and administrator, who during more than a decade taught at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University (1990–2002), and subsequently served as the President of Walla Walla University (2002–2006). While at Andrews, Dybdahl taught for a number of years his highly popular course in “spiritual formation.” The very title of the class proved to be fuel for the fire on which the heretical concept of “spiritual formation” was to be burned. Dybdahl’s book *Hunger: Satisfying the Longing of your Soul* (2008) likewise became the object of blistering criticism. A review on the website of the independent ministry *Amazing Discoveries* is exemplary for many negative, similarly un-nuanced, comments that the book received in conservative Adventist circles. It states:

This approach reflects ‘emerging spirituality,’ and is a merger of Eastern and Western forms of meditation. These practices include prayer stations, Taizé, silence, sacred space, ancient prayer practices, spiritual direction, centering prayer, inner light, beyond words, spiritual disci-

²¹ A print version of the statement may be found in *Spectrum* 40.1 (Winter 2012), 50–54.

plines, prayer labyrinths, and prayer rooms. They also include contemplative prayer, centering down, 'Jesus prayer,' *lectio divina*, and breath prayer.²²

As the result of the heavy criticism the Review and Herald Publishing Association decided to withdraw the book from circulation.

In a two-part article in *Ministry*, Dybdahl, looks back on the controversy his work ignited. He stresses that he is "opposed to all forms of spirituality that are contrary to the principles of the Bible and the writings of Ellen White" and that he regrets he did not better clarify certain terms that he used in his book (Dybdahl 2015, 19). However, I believe such clarifications and even some alterations would not have solved it. Whatever other aspects may have played a role, Dybdahl's *postmodern* openness to what he considers valuable elements in other religions and in other approaches to spirituality is totally opposed to the *modern* exclusivity of traditional ideas. The chasm simply cannot be bridged.

5.2 *The One Project*

The other example of an expression of spirituality that also clearly exhibits the modern-postmodern tension, that I want to zoom in on, is The One Project. This initiative started in late 2010 in a hotel room in the American city of Denver, when a small group of pastors, who were friends (Alex Bryan, Japhet De Oliveira, Tim Gillespie, Dany Hernandez, Eddie Hyppolite, Sam Leonor and Terry Swenson) had an intense discussion. The One Project website gives a record of how it started:

We were pretty exhausted and seeking something resembling a personal and meaningful answer to the question: Why does Christianity matter? We left as brothers – renewed, directed and inspired by the true answer to the question why. That answer, for us, is summed up in the phrase *Jesus. All.* It turned out that lots of other people felt the

²² See note 19. For other, somewhat later, examples of this type of un-nuanced criticism, see Schultz 2016, 310 and 314–315 and Barnes 2012. The Master's thesis of Elvis-Silviu (Andrews University, 2018), "A Methodological and Theological Evaluation of Jon L. Dybdahl's Theology of Spirituality," provides a more academic, but also highly critical evaluation of Dybdahl's book *Hunger: Satisfying the Hunger of Your Soul*.

same ... That was evident at the first One Project gathering we held here in Atlanta in 2011 with 172 people.²³

The focus on Jesus Christ characterized all meetings that were held during the following eight years, not only in the United States, but also in Europe and Australia. "We vowed that we were committed to the idea that a Jesus-driven, Jesus-bathed, Jesus-backed, Jesus-led, Jesus-filled, Jesus-powered, all-about-Jesus Adventist Church is the uncompromising directive from our past, the joy of our present and for our future." (Ibid.) During the meetings, short presentations were accompanied, not only by music but, in particular, by long discussions. Said Japhet de Oliveira, one of the leaders of the project: "[We were] short on programming but long on discussions."²⁴

When the first phase of The One Project ended with two final meetings in February 2018 in San Diego (USA) and Sydney (Australia), thousands of people in North America, Europa and the South Pacific had attended a total of thirty-two meetings. Nathan Brown, one of the promoters of the project in Australia, stated that The One Project has been "one of the best and most important conversations happening in the Adventist Church" (Brown 2018). Two years later The One Project was resurrected and entered a new phase. February 2020 saw the start of "a new chapter in the story of The One Project. ... The focus of the first gathering was The Great Disruption: Jesus' unprecedented confrontation with politics, theology and belonging."²⁵

Besides being profusely praised and receiving deep appreciation from many, The One Project "also attracted more than its fair share of criticism, suspicion and straight-up nastiness." Some voices warned "vociferously that The One Project was the last great apostasy" that the church was facing (Brown 2018).

It was to be expected that there would be heavy opposition against a grass-root initiative that sought to engender a kind of spiritual awakening which was different from the traditional institutionalized Adventist expressions of

²³ <https://www.the1project.org/the-journey>.

²⁴ <https://www.adventistreview.org/archive-5193>.

²⁵ <https://www.the1project.org>.

spirituality.²⁶ Here was a stark contrast between “the modern” with its emphasis on ingrained practices and a focus on doctrine and “the postmodern”, with its primary interest in experience and individual interpretation. Extremely critical comments were soon found on the websites of conservative independent groups. A few examples must suffice. They invariably express fear that there is neglect of established Adventist doctrines. One pastor who attended a The One Project meeting in 2014 commented: “To me, the entire tenor of the meeting had an air of making fun of Adventist doctrines. It’s subtle, but it’s there, but almost like a disdain for the pillars of our faith.”²⁷ Another visitor was equally critical and wrote about it on an ultra-conservative website. Her comments clearly betray a suspicion of all postmodern tendencies:

I continued listening for an Adventist version of “Present Truth,” but instead heard a revised truth – a nebulous truth that focused on “conversation” and “dialogue,” with consensus determining direction. I heard people disillusioned with the established church structure, some seeking to deconstruct traditional worship. ... I heard an urgency that we dip into “other streams” and “streams that flow both ways” for truth. ... I heard an emergent truth.²⁸

Cindy Tutsch, a retired Associate Director of the Ellen White Estate, was very concerned that, among several other things, she missed in The One Project a positive reference to the messages of the three angels in Revelation 14, any mention of the pre-Advent judgment and of a literal six-day creation.²⁹

On the other hand, there were many very positive evaluations of the content of The One Project. William Johnsson, a former general editor of the Adventist flagship journal, *Adventist Review* expressed how he felt “over certain developments” in the church. “My dilemma,” he said, when referring to his experiences in The One Project, “is this: I cannot reconcile some church actions with what the Holy Spirit seems to me to be clearly telling us” (Johnsson 2018).

²⁶ For an overview of what was actually preached at The One Project meetings, see Brown, Bryan, and De Oliveira 2014. For a (positive) review of the book by Stephen Chavez, coordinating editor of *Adventist Review*, see: <https://www.adventistreview.org/141515-29>.

²⁷ <http://intelligentadventist.com/2017/04/what-others-have-said-about-the-one-project-2/>.

²⁸ <http://advindicate.com/articles/2014/3/4/one-project-present-or-emergent-truth>.

²⁹ <https://spectrummagazine.org/article/2016/09/27/response-william-johnsson%25E2%2580%2599s-one-project-concerns-and-some-concerns-my-own>.

In the same article he states: "I cannot support, far less defend, the stance adopted by the General Conference toward The One Project. I think it is irresponsible. And ironic, these same leaders had encouraged the worldwide church to pray for revival" (Johnsson 2018). Two years earlier, Johnsson had expressed himself even more clearly. "The One Project is from the Lord. It is something to encourage, not to vilify" (Johnsson 2016).

What was "the stance adopted by the General Conference" leadership that so annoyed Johnsson (and many others)? Following the 2018 Spring Council of the Executive Committee of the world church, the church's top leadership released a statement through the Adventist News Network (ANN), which stated that "church leaders are often asked for advice on how to relate with some initiatives and organizations," and then it referred specifically to The One Project as well as "a number of entities both inside and outside the church organization." The statement mentioned that "the Church will be eager to work with all who share its prophetic message expressed in the 28 Fundamental Beliefs," but warned the church leaders around the world with these words: "We commend those who, prior to joining any initiative or movement, study for themselves to assess whether such movements are in accordance with the revealed will of God." And: "The name of Jesus must be uplifted in ways consistent with His propositional revelation in Scripture" and, therefore, "we invite our church leaders and any concerned individuals to assess the biblical foundations of any ministry or evangelistic initiative."

Although the statement does not say this in so many words, any initiative that wants to have the church's approval must teach the doctrines that are deemed to be foundational. Seven points are specifically mentioned in a wording that only thinly disguises the mistrust for the allegedly postmodern direction The One Project has taken. First, the question is asked: "What does it mean to accept Jesus Christ? When we say we accept Christ is this a mystical Christ of experience only, or, does it mean an acceptance of the doctrinal truths He taught, or, both?" Another concern is expressed in the question whether there is a clear understanding of the uniqueness of the Seventh-day Adventist movement: "Are they clear in how Adventist faith differs from other evangelical denominations that exalt Jesus?" In addition, questions are asked about their commitment to the traditional views regarding 1844 and Christ's ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, a literal six-day creation, the beast

powers of Revelation 13, and finally: “How do they understand gender identity and the question of LGBTQ+ relationships to church membership in the light of Scripture? Do they have a clear, unambiguous and biblical understanding of this subject?”³⁰

I do not argue that The One Project is a totally postmodern project, but there is little doubt that the initiators have a much more postmodern outlook on how to translate their Adventist convictions into a spiritual pathway than the authors of the above statement are comfortable with. The church leadership defends a modern, institutionalized approach to spirituality and those two approaches illustrate the deep “divide” between modern and postmodern Adventists.

6. Conclusion

The arguments I have presented in this article and the conclusions I have arrived at can only be tentative. Trends and transitions between different ways of thinking within a particular population can only be clearly seen in retrospect and while things are still in a flux and have not been fully crystalized, one remains to a large extent in the realm of expectations and projections. I had no academic studies at my disposal when assessing what has been happening with respect to the phenomena of Spiritual Formation and The One Project. (To a large extent I had to look for my information at the Internet.) Nonetheless, I believe it is important to begin the process of looking at more general trends that underlie current controversies in the Adventist Church. Is my conviction that the chasm between modern and postmodern Adventism is actually more fundamental than the distance between conservative and liberal Adventism. If so, where does this manifest itself? If it is true that a major segment of the Adventist Church in the Western words is increasingly postmodern, will this further intensify the ongoing exodus from the church? And will we have to deal with more, rather than less, polarization in the future? I believe that a better understanding of what is actually happening in the modern-postmodern arena can foster greater tolerance for other viewpoints and may bring a greater preparedness to learn from each other.

³⁰ For the complete text of the statement, see: <https://adventist.news/en/news/an-invitation-to-uplift-jesus>.

Further study is essential to either prove or disprove, or qualify, the thesis that recent and current developments in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are heavily impacted by a divide between modernism and postmodernism. Such study might also help to find answers to some of the above questions, and to shed more light on recent and contemporary developments in the domain of spirituality. Perhaps this article can play a constructive role in this process.

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Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel geht der Frage nach, inwieweit sich das postmoderne Denken auf die Art und Weise ausgewirkt hat, wie Spiritualität innerhalb der Freikirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten definiert und erlebt wird. Bevor die These aufgestellt wird, dass tatsächlich ein deutlicher und erheblicher Einfluss zu erkennen ist, werden die drei wesentlichen Begriffe (Adventismus, Postmoderne und Spiritualität) definiert und ein kurzer Überblick über die Auswirkungen der Postmoderne auf das Leben in der heutigen Zeit gegeben. Dann wird die Aufmerksamkeit auf die Entwicklungen (unter dem Einfluss der Postmoderne) im Bereich der Spiritualität gelenkt, und insbesondere auf die Zunahme an Spiritualität außerhalb der Kirche. Einige breitere Trends in der kirchlichen Welt werden im Adventismus reflektiert.

Von besonderer Bedeutung ist die Tatsache, dass die meisten Ausdrucksformen adventistischer Spiritualität traditionell in institutionalisierten Formen gelebt wurden und dass die Kirchenleitung im Allgemeinen äußerst besorgt über neue Ansätze ist, die sie nicht kontrollieren kann und die die religiöse Erfahrung auf Kosten der Lehre hervorheben. Diese Besorgnis, so argumentiert der Autor, hat sich sehr deutlich in den Reaktionen auf *Spiritual Formation* und *The One Project* manifestiert. Der Autor ist überzeugt, dass dies einer von vielen klaren Hinweisen auf eine tiefe Kluft zwischen dem modernen und dem postmodernen Adventismus ist. Weitere Studien wären nötig, um entweder zu beweisen oder zu widerlegen, ob seine These richtig ist und/oder inwieweit andere Faktoren neben der Postmoderne dazu beitragen, die rezenten und gegenwärtigen Entwicklungen im Bereich der Spiritualität zu erklären.

Résumé

Cet article explore dans quelle mesure la pensée postmoderne a influencé la manière dont la spiritualité est définie et vécue au sein de l'Église Adventiste du Septième Jour. Avant de poursuivre l'argumentaire selon lequel nous pouvons effectivement voir un impact certain et substantiel, les trois termes essentiels (adventisme, postmodernité et spiritualité) sont définis et un bref aperçu est donné de l'impact de la postmodernité sur la vie à l'époque où nous sommes actuellement. Ensuite l'attention est accordée aux développements (sous l'influence de la postmodernité) dans le domaine spirituel et, en particulier, à l'augmentation de la spiritualité en dehors de l'église. Certaines tendances plus larges du monde ecclésial sont reflétées dans l'Adventisme.

D'une importance particulière est le fait que la plupart des expressions de la spiritualité adventiste ont été traditionnellement canalisées dans des formes institutionnalisées et, en général, les dirigeants de l'église sont devenus extrêmement préoccupés par les nouvelles approches qu'ils ne peuvent pas contrôler et qui mettent l'accent sur l'expérience religieuse au détriment de la doctrine. Cette préoccupation, affirme l'auteur, s'est manifestée très clairement dans les réactions envers « Spiritual Formation » et « The One Project ». L'auteur croit que c'est l'une des nombreuses indications claires d'un profond fossé entre l'Adventisme moderne et postmoderne. Une étude approfondie serait nécessaire pour attester ou non si sa thèse est correcte et/ou dans quelle mesure d'autres facteurs, outre le postmodernisme, contribuent à expliquer les développements récents et contemporains dans le domaine de la spiritualité.

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What Do You Do When Your Prophet Dies? Abigail, the Medium of Endor and the Raising of Samuel¹

Laurence A. Turner

Abstract

1 Sam. 28:3–25 has long been a controversial biblical narrative. This narrative-critical analysis suggests that readers may gain insight into its meaning by reading it within the context of the books of Samuel. I argue that 1 Sam. 25 and 28:3–25 share many common thematic and linguistic details which invite an intratextual comparison of the two narratives. In particular, the characters of Abigail and the medium of Endor, when read in light of each other and considering the characteristics of other adjacent chapters, as well as biblical representations of the practice of necromancy, predispose readers to be sceptical about the claims of the medium.

Few biblical passages have caused more problems than 1 Sam. 28:3–25. The raising of Samuel from the grave by the medium of Endor at Saul's request has no biblical parallel. Consequently, commentators across the Judaeo-Christian spectrum have struggled to assess it, and over the centuries it "has brought theologians to despair, because it appeared to undermine the credibility of Scripture" (Beuken 1978, 3). Three basic points of view have predominated (for details see Smelik 1979, especially 161–165). Some read the account as affirming that the medium, by her own inherent power, genuinely raised Samuel from the realm of the dead. But others have had theological and dogmatic objections, for such a stance seems to conflict with the clear condemnation of necromancy elsewhere in Scripture (e.g., Lev. 19:31; 20:6; Isa. 8:19).

¹ I would like to thank Grenville Kent for his comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Thus, they claim, it was not the medium who resuscitated Samuel but rather God himself in a unique act. However, historically the predominant approach has been that the raising of Samuel was a satanic delusion. Variations of these perspectives persist to the present time. (Representatives of the three approaches are respectively, Hamori 2015, 124–25 and 129; Tsumura 2007, 45 and 617; Olariu 2015, 94).

1. Method

1 Sam. 28 illustrates the preference of biblical Hebrew narrative for “showing” (i.e. what characters say or do), rather than “telling” (i.e. explicitly explaining the significance of those words and actions). But it is an extreme example of this tendency, resulting in numerous questions to intrigue the interpreter.² What is more, exploration of some of these details indirectly helps to clarify the central event of the narrative – Samuel’s post-mortem appearance. To that end, this article adopts a narrative-critical approach and will argue that a reading of the narrative is enhanced by investigating its literary inter-connections within the book. Specifically, that we may read it profitably in dialogue with 1 Sam. 25, and that the characters of Abigail and the medium of Endor should be read comparatively and contrastively. In doing so, I utilise the same method as studies which highlight the detailed interrelation between not only individual narratives but also significant characters in the books of Samuel. For example, there are persuasive cases for reading 1 Sam. 28 and 30 in tandem (Garsiel 1996, 192–93), as well as comparing Abigail with the wise woman of Tekoa (e.g. Newkirk 2015, 129–30; Youngblood 2017, 835), or Bathsheba (McKay 2000). The medium has also been compared profitably with Hannah (Michael 2018). “There is a growing recognition ... that a complex web of relationships exists in the telling and composition of the biblical narrative, particularly seen in the obsessive quest of the narrator of 1 Samuel to connect his characters with other characters within and outside the book of 1 Samuel” (Michael 2018, 477). In line with these readings, I suggest we assess

² For example, what is the purpose of repeating Samuel’s death notice (v. 3a), virtually verbatim, from 1 Sam. 25:1? What was Saul’s motivation for expelling “the mediums and the wizards from the land” (v. 3b)? In the séance, why does the medium’s seeing Samuel suddenly reveal the true identity of Saul (v. 12)? (Those who catalogue many more similar details include Olariu 2015, 75; Fischer 2001, 26.)

the medium and Abigail as narratively juxtaposed characters. Such an investigation, I will argue, has implications for reading the raising of Samuel.³

1 Sam. 25 and 28:3–25 are not the only passages in the book that invite detailed intratextual analysis. For example, 1 Sam. 24 and 26 are obvious candidates. In both chapters Saul sets out with three thousand men to pursue David (26:2; cf. 24:2); David is told that the LORD has delivered his enemy into his hand (26:8; cf. 24:4); David spares Saul's life because the king is the LORD's anointed (26:9.11.16.23; cf. 24:7); Saul addresses David with the words: "Is this your voice, my son David?"⁴ (וְהִקְוִיךָ יְהוָה בְּנִי דָוִד, 26:17; cf. 24:16); in his response David uses the metaphor of a flea (פְּרָעִשׁ, 26:20; cf. 24:14); and Saul acknowledges his guilt and David's innocence (26:21 cf. 24:17). In the past, most argued that these detailed correspondences indicate the two narratives are simply variant forms of the same tradition (e.g. Smith 1902, 143; Hertzberg 1964, 207). More recently, with a growing interest in the way Hebrew narrative frequently exhibits repetition with variation, the trend has been to assess their literary interrelationships and unique contributions when read within the context of the book as a whole (e.g. Tsumura 2007, 594–96; Bodner 2008, 274). Additionally, chs. 24 and 26, when read against the background of the intervening ch. 25, illustrate how characters in separate narratives may be compared and contrasted subtly, in this case Saul and Nabal. While Saul is present in chs. 24 and 26 but absent from ch. 25, he is implicitly present in the latter chapter through the character of Nabal. For example, Nabal lives in Maon and Carmel (25:2), places visited by Saul (15:5; 23:25). Like Saul, Nabal also uses the insulting term "son of Jesse" for David (25:10; cf. e.g. 20:30; 22:7). Nabal and Saul both repay David "evil for good" (25:21; cf. 24:17). Nabal's own servant denounces him to Abigail (25:17), while Saul grumbles that all his servants "have conspired against me" (22:8). As Saul's daughter fools him (19:11–17), so Abigail outmanoeuvres her husband Nabal (25:19.36–37). (For a more detailed discussion see e.g., Gordon 1986.) The fact that Nabal has three thousand sheep (25:2), while Saul has three thousand chosen men (24:2; 26:2), could also be more than coincidental (Youngblood 2017, 817).

³ Detailed discussions of methodology and the criteria to apply may be found in Miller 2011; Leonard 2008; Biddle 2002; Meek 2014.

⁴ Citations are taken from the NRSV unless indicated otherwise. Occasionally I provide my own translation (AT = author's translation).

2. General Parallels between 1 Sam. 25 and 28

Comparable types of interrelationship to those outlined above, that is in narrative progression and characterization, also appear when reading ch. 28 intratextually with ch. 25. I will begin by outlining general parallels before turning to a more detailed analysis. The progression of both narratives is remarkably similar. Each begins with a virtually identical death notice for Samuel.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
<p>“Now Samuel died (וַיָּמָת שְׁמוּאֵל); and all Israel assembled and mourned for him (וַיִּקְבְּצוּ כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּסְפְּדוּ־לוֹ). They buried him at his home in Ramah (וַיִּקְבְּרוּהוּ בְּבֵיתוֹ בְּרָמָה)” (v. 1).</p>	<p>“Now Samuel died (וַיָּשָׂמוּ אֶל מָת), and all Israel mourned for him (וַיִּסְפְּדוּ־לוֹ כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל) and buried him in Ramah, his own city (וַיִּקְבְּרוּהוּ בְּרָמָה וּבְעִירוֹ)” (v. 3 AT).</p>

Note also how all Israel (25:1) and the Philistines (28:4) both “assembled” (וַיִּקְבְּצוּ), which adds to the repetition. In Hebrew narrative art, repetition is rarely redundant. It normally underlines elements of importance for the narrative.⁵ Here, like David, Saul faces the major issue of what he will do after his prophet dies, especially since “the LORD did not answer him, not by dreams, or by Urim, or by prophets” (28:6). The general progression of his narrative shares several common features with David’s in ch. 25.

1 Sam. 25: David	1 Sam. 28: Saul
David fears Saul (cf. 23:14–15, 24–25). ⁶	Saul fears the Philistines (v. 5).
David with his men travel to the wilderness of Paran (v. 1b).	Saul with two of his men travel to Endor (vv. 7b–8a).
David meets a significant woman, Abigail (v. 23).	Saul meets a significant woman, the medium (v. 8b).
David receives a message about his present and future (vv. 26–31).	Saul receives a message about his present and future (vv. 16–19).

⁵ For explanations of the general principles, see e.g. Fokkelman 2000, 112–22; Walsh 2009, 81–95 and for a detailed application to 1 Sam. 28, see Kent 2012, 148–52.

⁶ David’s motive for moving to the wilderness is unstated in ch. 25, but fear of Saul is a reasonable assumption, for this is the reason he went previously to the Wilderness of Ziph (23:14–15) and the Wilderness of Maon (23:24–25).

What is more, Saul faces a similar dilemma to that of David.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
David's plan for revenge against Nabal and his household would bring bloodguilt upon him (v. 26).	Saul's consultation of a medium to raise Samuel from the dead (vv. 7–11) makes him guilty of contravening the Torah (e.g., Lev. 19:31; 20:6,27; cf. 1 Chr. 10:13).

As well as these correspondences, there is also a significant contrast between the two men's experiences.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
David listens to Abigail and thus avoids bloodguilt (vv. 26 and 33), while receiving a prediction of his lasting dynasty (v. 28).	Saul listens to the medium ⁷ and thus is guilty of necromancy, while receiving a prediction that his dynasty is doomed, (vv. 17–19).

That is, David is innocent and his house will endure, while Saul is guilty and his house will end (cf. Michael 2014, 483).

3. Detailed Parallels between 1 Sam. 25 and 28

Beyond these broad similarities of narrative progression and the general experiences of David and Saul, there are also detailed points of contact between the two narratives. We have already noted the two virtually identical death notices for Samuel at the head of both narratives, but there are many more linguistic links between them. Their cumulative effect is greater than the sum of the individual points of contact.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
"The woman (הַיָּשָׁרָה) was clever and beautiful..." (v. 3).	"Seek out for me a woman (הַיָּשָׁרָה) who is a medium" (v. 7).

Abigail is introduced unsurprisingly as "the woman". For unstated reasons, Saul requests specifically "a woman" to act as a medium to call up Samuel. Necromancers were not exclusively female (Johnston 2002, 154–55; Hamori 2015, 118), but his request creates a literary connection with ch. 25, for just as Abigail dominated that episode, so will the medium here. What is more, Saul (a male authority figure) approaches the medium (an anonymous female figure), about Samuel (a male authority figure), and thus acts as a foil

⁷ I provide details below for arguing that it is the medium who speaks throughout to Saul.

to Abigail (an obscure female figure) who approaches David (a male authority figure) about Nabal (a male authority figure).⁸

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
Abigail says to David, “Upon me alone, my lord, be the guilt (יָצוּן)” (v. 24).	Saul tells the medium, “As the LORD lives, no punishment (יָצוּן) shall come upon you for this thing” (v. 10).

Abigail is willing to bear יָצוּן while Saul assures the medium she will not, establishing a linguistic link, regardless of any questions about idiomatic nuance.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
“When the LORD has done to my lord according to all the good that he has spoken concerning you...” (v. 30).	“The LORD has done to you just as he spoke by me” (v. 17).

When Abigail refers to “all the good” spoken concerning David, she is, of course, referring to Samuel’s prophetic word, the same prophetic word Saul hears was spoken to him “by me” (i.e., Samuel).

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
Abigail says to David “listen to (שָׁמַע) the words of your servant (אֲפָקָה)” (v. 24 AT), to which he replies, “I have listened to (שָׁמַע) your voice (קוֹל)” (v. 35 AT).	The medium tells Saul, “you also listen to (שָׁמַע) the voice (קוֹל) of your servant (אֲפָקָה)” (v. 22 AT), and when her later pleas are supported by his servants, Saul “listened to (שָׁמַע) their voice (קוֹל)” (v. 23 AT).

In both passages the female character tells the male character to listen to her words, which he then does, their interaction using similar language.

Finally, events happen quickly in the two episodes.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
“Abigail hurried (Piel of מָהַר) ... When Abigail saw David, she hurried (Piel of מָהַר) ... Abigail got up hurriedly (Piel of מָהַר) ...” (vv. 18, 23, 42).	“Quickly (Piel of מָהַר) Saul fell full length on the ground ...” (v. 20 AT), and in her farewell, the medium who had a fatted calf “quickly (Piel of מָהַר) slaughtered it ... and they ate” (vv. 24–25).

⁸ Kim sees the dynamic of Saul’s employment of the medium partly in these terms but compares it instead to Hannah’s approach to Eli (K. Kim 2018, 250).

These two episodes account for five of the six uses of מָהַר in 1 Samuel (the other occurrence being 17:48, when David engaged Goliath, an incident Abigail alludes to metaphorically in 25:29).

There are further points of contact between chs. 25 and 28 which do not depend on linguistic similarities.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
Begins with Samuel's death (v. 1) and ends with Nabal's (v. 38).	Begins with Samuel's death (v. 3) and ends by anticipating Saul's the next day (v. 19).
David makes a request of Nabal, but Nabal refuses (vv. 9–11), an action that constitutes the complication for the ensuing plot.	Saul inquires of the LORD but the LORD refuses to reply (v. 6), an action that constitutes the complication for the ensuing plot.
Abigail offers food to David and his men (vv. 18, 27, 35).	The medium offers food to Saul and his men (vv. 22, 25).

In addition to the general points of contact between David and Saul in the two narratives, already canvassed above, there are also more detailed thematic correspondences between the two men.

1 Sam. 25: David	1 Sam. 28: Saul
David prepares for battle against Nabal, in anger (v. 13).	Saul prepares for battle against the Philistines but is fearful (v. 4–5).
Abigail says to David positively, "let your enemies (אֹיְבֵי) and those who seek to do evil to my lord be like Nabal" (v. 26).	Saul is asked negatively, "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has turned from you and become your enemy (אֹיֵב)?" (v. 16).
David plans to kill Nabal and all the males in his household (v. 22).	Saul hears that he and the heirs of his royal household will all be killed (v. 19).

As one might expect, there are also telling contrasts between these two characters, for these two narratives are clearly not simply repetitive but contrastively juxtaposed.

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
David is <i>commended</i> for listening to the LORD <i>by sparing</i> Nabal and his household (vv. 26b and 31b).	Saul is <i>condemned</i> for disobeying the LORD <i>by sparing</i> King Agag of Amalek (v. 17).

1 Sam. 25	1 Sam. 28
David responds positively to the words of commendation and blesses Abigail (vv. 32–33).	Saul responds negatively to the words of condemnation and is “filled with fear” (v. 20). ⁹

4. The Role of Abigail

Such comparisons and contrasts encourage further reading of the two narratives in tandem, this time paying attention to the relationships between Abigail and the medium of Endor.

As a preliminary step we will consider the role of Abigail in ch. 25. Unlike her husband Nabal, Abigail is no fool. She is an intelligent and insightful woman (25:3), and displays that intelligence and insight not only by swiftly deciding on a courageous course of action to save lives (25:18–20), but also in her diplomatic skill in dealing with an enraged David (25:23–31). But her significance for the narrative transcends her intelligence, insight and diplomacy. The core of Abigail’s speech to David is both retrospective and prospective. Retrospectively, she repeats the essence of Samuel’s previous words:

Abigail tells David	Samuel had told Saul
“When the LORD has...appointed you prince over Israel” (25:30).	“the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart; and the LORD has appointed him to be ruler over his people” (13:14). “The LORD...has given [your kingdom] to a neighbour of yours” (15:28).

Samuel’s previous statements had not mentioned David by name, but the larger context indicates this unequivocally. This might have been common knowledge, for Jonathan tells David “you shall be king over Israel ... my father Saul also knows that this is so.” (23:17). The Amalekite who comes to David after the imminent battle assumes the same (2 Sam. 1:10).

⁹ A further contrast might be construed between David’s blessing of the LORD because of Abigail, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today (הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה)!” (25:32), and the judgement on Saul, “Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD...the LORD has done this thing to you today (הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה)” (28:18). While “today” occurs many times in deuteronomic texts (e.g. 12x in Deuteronomy; 30x in the books of Samuel), its ubiquity points to theological significance.

While Abigail’s identification of David might not in itself demonstrate her prophetic gift, she then moves from retrospective to prospective mode, and here her prophetic role is clearer. She tells David for the first time that he will be “a prince” (נָשִׂיךְ) over Israel (v. 30). His status as נָשִׂיךְ becomes a reality in 2 Sam 5:2, when the tribes of Israel say to him, “The LORD said to you: It is ... you who shall be ruler (נָשִׂיךְ) over Israel”. Then, the now enthroned David tells Michal that the LORD “chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince (נָשִׂיךְ) over Israel” (2 Sam. 6:21). Thus, Abigail’s words are fulfilled by subsequent events (van Wolde 2002, 370–71). The prophet Nathan also confirms that Abigail’s prophetic words to David are genuine by the divine word he later delivers to David.

1 Sam. 25: Abigail	2 Sam. 7: Nathan
“the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure (Niphal participle of נָשִׂיךְ) house (תְּבֵינָה)” (v. 28).	“your house (תְּבֵינָה)...shall be made sure (Niphal perfect of נָשִׂיךְ) forever” (v. 16; cf. v. 11b).
“the lives of your enemies (בָּרִיחַ) [the LORD] shall sling out, as from the hollow of a sling” (v. 29).	“[the LORD] will give you rest from all your enemies (בָּרִיחַ)” (v. 11a).

Samuel had never declared either of these assurances to David.¹⁰ In summary, therefore, while not formally identified as a prophet, Abigail delivers a true prophetic word by reiterating prophecy already announced in the past by Samuel and also delivering a new prophecy for the future, confirmed as true by later events and also by a true prophet. Abigail thus stands in the prophetic tradition within the books of Samuel. Samuel is dead, and his prophetic ministry silenced, but Abigail reiterates and expands his prophetic word. Rather than Abigail “looking more like Jonathan all the time” (Bodner 2008, 267; cf. Green 2003, 400), she is more like Samuel, almost as if he had been raised from the dead. Jewish tradition saw something like this possibility when it counted Abigail as one of the Hebrew Bible’s seven female prophets (“Tractate Megillah 14a” n.d.). As van Wolde states, “The great prophet Samuel is gone, as was reported before these events in I Sam. 25,1. For lack of an Israelite prophet, she acts as a prophetess” (van Wolde 2002, 367; cf. Chapman 2016, 205; Vannoy 2009, 226; Dekker 2016, 321; Carman 2015, 47).

¹⁰ This is abundantly clear from previous narratives, though not all concede the point (e.g. Esler 2020, 181).

5. Abigail and the Medium of Endor

Having clarified the role of Abigail, we turn now to the points of contact between her and the medium, their similarities yet significant contrasts, and what these might contribute to an understanding of 1 Sam. 28:3–25 in general and to the raising of Samuel in particular.

Initially, we will consider the general function of the medium. In ch. 25 Abigail speaks, while in ch. 28 it is the raised Samuel who does so, not the medium – or so it would seem. For example, Garsiel’s comment is typical, “the description indicates that [the medium] is simply the means by which a link is established between Saul and Samuel. Afterwards she disappears; she is not present when, without her mediation, Samuel and Saul talk together” (Garsiel 1996, 181; cf. Olariu 2015, 86 and 88). Similarly, Brueggemann states, “The woman has been marginal during the main meeting with Samuel” (Brueggemann 1990, 196). Some, like Bodner, argue that the medium is not absent, but witnesses the encounter between king and prophet, “and thus she is acquainted with Saul’s dreadful expectations” (Bodner 2008, 301). However, I would argue that rather than the medium being absent, marginal, or merely a witness, she is in fact central and active.

Immediately after Saul tells the medium “Bring up Samuel for me” (28:11b), without any detail about necromantic procedure or ceremony, “the woman saw Samuel” (28:12a). Saul then asks her “what do you see?” She answers cryptically, “I see a divine being¹¹ coming up out of the ground” (28:13b). Saul presses her for a description, “What is his appearance?” She said, “An old man is coming up; he is wrapped in a robe (לְבָשֵׁי)” (28:14a). Clearly, Saul sees nothing. He depends entirely on the medium for visual information. In fact, her description is so generic it reveals little, for not only Samuel as a child (1 Sam. 2:19) and adult (15:27), but also Jonathan and David (18:4), Saul himself (24:4.11), and more widely priests (e.g., Exod. 28:4; Lev. 8:7), wore a לְבָשֵׁי. Also, the dead, male and female, were sometimes buried enrobed in cloth or matting (Bloch-Smith 1991, 218). Thus, despite Saul’s pressing questions, the medium’s description of what she sees – an old man in a robe – provides little basis for Saul’s conclusion “that it was Samuel”

¹¹ The Hebrew אֱלֹהִים is plural, used with a plural participle, literally “I see gods arising”, though frequently translated in the singular as e.g. “a spirit” (NKJV); “a god” (ESV); “a ghost” (NJB).

(28:14b). It could be almost anybody. Or nobody. Saul's identification is a symptom of how desperate he is for it to be Samuel.¹²

Not only does Saul "see" only through the eyes of the medium, but it is also highly likely that he "hears" not Samuel, but the medium. Far from exiting the scene once she has visually described Samuel, she remains and speaks. This interpretation is supported by the way the OT elsewhere describes the practice of necromancy. The OT contains little detailed description of necromancy, but what it does say is instructive. For example, Isa. 8:19 asks: "And when they say to you, 'Inquire of the mediums (הַאֲבוֹת) and the necromancers (הַיִּדְעָנִים) who chirp and mutter,' should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living?" (ESV). Isaiah uses the same technical terms for mediums and necromancers as those 1 Sam. 28:3 states were expelled by Saul (הַאֲבוֹת and הַיִּדְעָנִים), just before he tells his servants to find him "a woman who is a medium" (אִשָּׁת בַּעֲלַת-אֹזֶב v. 7), whom he then employs to raise Samuel. Commentators debate whether Isaiah's terms refer to ghosts and spirits etc., or to the mediums and necromancers who engage with them, but for our present purposes this distinction is not important. Whatever they are, they "chirp (Pilpel of צַפֵּף) and mutter (Hiphil of הִגִּה)". The first term occurs only in Isaiah (Isa. 8:19; 10:14; 29:4; 38:14), only in Pilpel, where its primary meaning appears to connote, through onomatopoeia,¹³ the chirping of birds, creatures mentioned explicitly in 10:14 and 38:14, and probably metaphorically in 8:19 and 29:4. If van der Toorn is correct, the notoriously difficult text of Isa. 28:10.13, translated by NRSV as "precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little",¹⁴ is actually a repetitious "pastiche of birdcalls", which mimics the alleged sounds communicated to the necromancer by the dead (van der Toorn

¹² Space precludes consideration of the narrator's comment that "Saul knew that it was Samuel" (v. 14). Does this indicate the genuineness of the medium's necromantic skill? Kent argues persuasively that this is an example of focalization, "the technique in which the narrator temporarily adopts the point of view of a character" (Kent 2014, 157. See pp. 157–159 for more detail.).

¹³ The pronunciations of the four Pilpel forms used are *metsaphtsim*; *metsaphtseph*; *tetsaphtseph*; *'atsaphtseph*.

¹⁴ Cf. "mutter upon mutter, Murmur upon murmur, Now here, now there!" (JPS); "they will hear meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling, a syllable here, a syllable there" (NET). NJB does not translate but transliterates the Hebrew to convey the gurgling meaningless murmurings of babies just taken from the breast, "Sav lasav, sav lasav, kav lakav, kav lakav, zeer sham, zeer sham!"

1988, 215). The second term, “mutter”, is the only Hiphil form of נהג in the OT, its unique form preventing dogmatism about its precise connotation. In Qal its meanings include the growling of a lion (Isa. 31:4), groaning of a mourner (Isa. 16:7), and (the sound produced when) meditating on the law (Ps. 63:7). In the context of Isa. 8:19 it is reasonable to assume, as do most versions, that the two verbal forms together convey the sense of inarticulate sound that requires interpretation by a medium or necromancer. Their client might hear only chirpings and mutterings, allegedly from the dead, but the professional interpreters of this language of the dead translate it into recognisable speech (e.g. van der Toorn 1988, 209–11). That mediums allegedly performed as ventriloquists for the dead seems to have been a well-established view. Blenkinsopp states that “the client would hear a voice ‘like a whisper from the dust’ (Isa. 29:4), the sense of which would be given an interpretation appropriate for the occasion by the medium. The most important skill required of the medium was that of throwing the voice” (Blenkinsopp 2002, 56; cf. Evans 2018, 733:7; for a contrary view see Schmidt 1995a, 153.156). Such a role of medium as ventriloquist was the understanding of the LXX translators, who in 28:3 rendered נִבֵּא (medium) by ἐγγαστρίμυθος, a word which “is a semantically transparent compound meaning ‘the one who has words in his belly’, the ventriloquist” (Torallas-Tovar and Maravela-Solbakk 2001, 419).¹⁵ Such a perspective casts an ironic shadow over the medium’s statement to Saul, that “your servant has listened to your voice” (28:21 AT), while all the time it is Saul who has been listening to her voice.

The background outlined above suggests the strong possibility that in 1 Sam. 28 the medium of Endor conveys Samuel’s speech to Saul. She acts as Samuel’s ventriloquist. Without her, Saul would not understand the chirps and mutterings just as without her he would know nothing of Samuel’s appearance (28:13–14a). Therefore, I would contest Green’s point that “as several have observed, the woman seems only to see and Saul only to hear” the raised Samuel (Green 2003, 429). Rather, it seems more likely that given the reader’s knowledge “that the ghost of Samuel appeared to the witch of Endor in a vision which was not seen by the consultant Saul [then the] words spoken

¹⁵ See Torallas-Tovar and Maravela-Solbakk 2001 for a detailed discussion on the evolution of the Greek word, and for the historical development of the association between ventriloquism and necromancy.

by the ghost in v. 15 ff. must logically be considered as the witch's interpretation for Saul of what she heard in her vision" (Lust 1974, 141–142: fn. 7).¹⁶ Several other scholars concur (e.g. Fischer 2001, 37; Kiboko 2017, 210; Young blood 2017, para. 923; D. Kim 2018, 29: fn. 39; cf. Chapman 2016, 203).

I suggest therefore, that whatever Samuel says in ch. 28 is spoken by the medium. Bearing in mind this central role and function of the medium of Endor in her narrative we are now able to compare and contrast her more effectively with Abigail, and how these interconnections enrich an understanding of ch. 28.

Abigail's interaction with David is comparable with the medium's interaction with Saul.

Abigail	The medium
Acts as a third party between David and Nabal (25:23–27).	Acts as a third party between Saul and Samuel (28:11).

While it is Abigail who takes the initiative in ch. 25, and Saul in ch. 28, nevertheless, the mediating role of both Abigail and the medium is obvious in both chapters. What is more,

Abigail	The medium
Repeats the prophetic word of Samuel about David (25:30).	Repeats the prophetic word of Samuel about Saul (28:17–18).

The medium's speech, just like Abigail's, first repeats the essence of Samuel's previous revelations, this time not about the LORD's choice of David, but his rejection of Saul: "The LORD has done to you just as he spoke by me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand, and given it to your neighbour, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD, and did not carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the LORD has done this thing to you today."

Abigail	The medium
Pronounces new prophecies about David's future as king and the establishment of his royal house (25:28–29).	Pronounces new prophecies about Saul's future as king and the end of his royal house (28:19).

¹⁶ However, I would demur over the use of the terms "ghost", "witch" and "vision."

The medium, as did Abigail, announces new prophetic predictions about the future,¹⁷ this time not about David’s, but Saul’s destiny and that of his dynasty: “Moreover the LORD will give Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines; and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me; the LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines”. In the context of the first part of the medium’s speech, this means that not only will Saul himself die, ending his kingship, but also, more pointedly, all the heirs to the throne – his sons – so a Saulide dynasty will never be established (Schmidt 1995b, 118; D. Kim 2018, 23). In contrast to Abigail’s successful attempt to persuade David not to bring divine judgement upon his head, the medium not only repeats the past divine judgement on Saul, but also announces, for the first time, that the end of the king and his dynasty will occur the next day.

Abigail	The medium
Speaks as a prophet like the deceased Samuel (25:28–30).	Speaks the words of the deceased prophet Samuel (28:15 a, 16–19).

The correspondences between Abigail and the medium present the two as acting prophetically. Polzin refers to the medium as “a prophetic medium – or a mediumistic prophet” (Polzin 1989, 200), while Kim, drawing on other details in the narrative, notes that “the woman’s role as necromancer parallels Samuel’s role as prophet” (D. Kim 2018, 28). While Abigail speaks *like* the deceased Samuel, the medium speaks *for* him.

6. Problems with the Medium’s Predictions

Later events and the prophet Nathan confirm Abigail’s prophecies, but the medium’s prognostications are more problematical. Should we accept them as equivalent to Abigail’s – genuine prophetic words – or not? For example, the narrator informed us earlier that “Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death” (15:35), that is, he never saw him again. Yet here, allegedly, the two converse through the auspices of the medium. Does the narrator’s

¹⁷ While some claim that the raised Samuel adds no new information (e.g. Jobling 1998, 89 and 254), Kent makes a convincing counter argument (Kent 2014, 150). He also cites Goldingay’s perceptive comment “Defeat did not have to mean death. It had not done so in previous engagements between Israel and Philistia, whichever side won. Even if it did, his death did not have to mean his sons’ deaths” (Goldingay 2001, 178).

previous statement allow for, or preclude, a post-mortem mediated conversation? As the medium predicted, Saul suffers defeat the next day (28:19; cf. 31:1) but the details raise some doubts about the accuracy and intent of her words (see Kent 2012, 201–4; 2014, 153).¹⁸ She predicted “the LORD will give Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines” (28:19). Does this idiom mean that the Philistines will kill Saul (cf. 1 Sam. 24:7.10), or just that they will defeat him (cf. 1 Sam. 23:4), possibly capturing him? While the Philistines do defeat Saul’s army, they neither capture nor kill him, for he kills himself to prevent those very circumstances (31:4). Also, while some of the army were killed (31:1), some “men of Israel ... fled”, neither captured nor killed (31:7). The medium also predicted that “tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me” (28:19). This comes hard on the heels of the announcement that “the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand” (28:17), therefore contextually, the strong implication is that the house of Saul – the king and his heirs – will be exterminated the following day. Yet the reality is that the house of Saul survives the battle of Gilboa. The early chapters of 2 Samuel take up the story of Saul’s son Ishbosheth who, with Saul’s general Abner, sets up a continuation of the Saulide dynasty in Mahanaim (2 Sam. 2:8).

Therefore, while there are several significant similarities in the roles of Abigail and the medium in their respective narratives, there are also some uncertainties about whether the medium is a bona fide mediator of an authentic message as is Abigail. Indeed, Chapman suggests that the medium’s offering food to Saul to strengthen him physically, rather than addressing his true spiritual need, is “precisely the opposite of what he truly needs”, and therefore “one can think of the medium as a kind of anti-Abigail, a woman who mis-feeds and thereby engenders further strife” (Chapman 2016, 205). So, what of the medium? Are the above uncertainties merely minor incongruities with no narrative significance? Or are they subtle indirect indications to the reader, in true Hebrew narrative style, to reflect on what is said and done and to draw conclusions not explicitly stated?

The larger context of ch. 28 within the books of Samuel might help in answering these questions. Just as 1 Sam. 25 and 28 involve Saul and David, and

¹⁸ Contra Tsumura’s dogmatic claim that the uttered words must be from the genuine Samuel because “only he would have been able to give that message” (Tsumura 2007, 627). Cf. Chapman, who believes in “the truthfulness of the ghost’s prediction” (Chapman 2016, 202).

contain repetition with variation, so too do 1 Sam. 31 and 2 Sam. 1. Their proximity to 1 Sam. 25 and 28 makes their characteristics even more significant. They give two accounts of the death of Saul, conveyed by the narrator to the reader in 1 Sam. 31 and by an Amalekite to David in 2 Sam. 1. At the outset, their accounts are virtually identical.

1 Sam. 31: The narrator	2 Sam. 1: The Amalekite
Saul's army fled (v. 1).	Saul's army fled (v. 4).
Many soldiers were killed (v. 1).	Many soldiers were killed (v. 4).
Three of Saul's sons were killed (v. 2).	Saul's son Jonathan was killed (v. 4).
Saul was badly wounded (v. 3).	Saul was badly wounded (vv. 6a, 9b).

The Amalekite's only deviation from the narrator's version is that he mentions the death of Jonathan only, not that of his two brothers as well. However, since he is speaking to Jonathan's staunch friend David this deviation is understandable. Further points, however, deviate more dramatically.

1 Sam. 31: The narrator	2 Sam. 1: The Amalekite
Saul asked his armourbearer to kill him (v. 4a).	Saul asked the Amalekite to kill him (v. 9a).
The armourbearer refused, so Saul killed himself (v. 4b).	The Amalekite killed Saul (v. 10a).

This example of repetition with deviation is particularly instructive for our present purposes. Just as 1 Sam. 25 and 28:3–25 contain two death notices for Samuel, 1 Sam. 31 and 2 Sam. 1 give two accounts of the death of Saul. They agree closely on events leading up to the moment of Saul's death. But the conclusions of the two accounts present mutually exclusive presentations of how Saul died. Did he take his own life, or did the Amalekite kill him? Given the omniscient role of the narrator in biblical narratives, we take the narrator's account as genuine and the Amalekite's claim as a deception, aimed at ingratiating himself with David, even though there is no explicit statement to this effect. The irony, of course, is that David thinks the Amalekite is telling the truth, and consequently executes him (2 Sam. 1:14–16).¹⁹

¹⁹ Another example of how subtle yet significant deviation between versions of the same event by narrator and character produce interpretative insight occurs in Judg. 13:2–7. On recounting her experience to her husband, the woman omits the pivotal role for their son promised by the angel of the LORD – that he would begin to defeat the Philistines. Thus, indirectly the narrative

Without pressing too hard for similarities between these two accounts on the one hand and those of Abigail and the medium on the other, they do share a similar dynamic. We know the narrator's account of Saul's death (1 Sam. 31) is the whole truth, therefore the Amalekite's cannot be. Likewise, we know Abigail tells the truth, for she repeats Samuel's previous prophecies, and later events plus the prophet Nathan confirm her predictions. The medium also repeats what Samuel has previously said but, to some degree at least, we are suspicious of her predictions. If she did not truthfully convey a genuine message from Samuel, then what were her motives? In line with Hebrew narrative conventions, we are not told. However, it is plausible that she plays a similar role to that of the Amalekite in 2 Sam. 1. That is, just as the second account of Saul's death, given by the Amalekite, is a mixture of truth and error, then the medium's words following Samuel's second death notice may also be a mixture of truth and error. Just as the Amalekite's account contains no explicit judgement by the narrator as to its genuineness, so too with the medium's speech. The fact that we judge the Amalekite to be a liar is based on the juxtaposition of what he says with the narrator's previous account. Similarly, we may question the medium's role by juxtaposing it with Abigail's in ch. 25. This would be in line with the nature of characterization in Hebrew narrative which habitually builds up layers of complexity by comparing and contrasting one character's speech and action with another's, unadorned by explicit interpretative insight. The incongruities between the prophecies of the medium and Abigail; the lack of complete accord between what the medium predicts and subsequent events; and the potential concord between her narrative role and that of the Amalekite, that is, as purveyors of error in the critical details of Saul's future on the one hand and of his death on the other, make readers justifiably wary in taking her raising of Samuel and mediation of his prophecy at face value.

The notion that readers should approach the medium's raising of Samuel with some mistrust, receives further support from the larger context of the

portrays the woman as being more concerned with the end of her curse of childlessness than with the salvation of the nation.

books of Samuel. Here, we find numerous examples of characters lying or engaging in deceit of various forms,²⁰ which have inspired book-length treatments (e.g. Newkirk 2015). Some examples of deceit are transparent and straightforward. For example, Michal rescues David from Saul's murderous schemes by craftily clothing an idol and laying it in a bed, to fool Saul's servants into thinking it is actually the ailing David, whom she has just encouraged to escape before the men arrive (19:11–16). After discovering the ruse, Saul asks her explicitly, "Why have you deceived me like this?" (19:17). Other examples are slightly more opaque. For example, on arriving at Nob, David tells the priest Ahimelech that he has come because "the king has charged me with a matter" and he is sworn to secrecy (21:2). This appears to be an untruth, for not only do we have no evidence that Saul has thus commanded David, but given the context, would have been extremely unlikely to do so. However, some resist such a reading, suggesting that by "king" David means the LORD (e.g. Bergen 1996, 221). This might just be possible, but even if one grants it, there is no textual evidence that the LORD instructed David to act this way either. At the very least, even if David is referring to the LORD, he is being duplicitous, choosing his language carefully to convey the wrong impression. A more ambiguous example of deception is 2 Sam. 16:3. Ziba tells David, who is fleeing from Absalom, that Mephibosheth, who has remained in Jerusalem, has "said, 'Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.'" Can this accusation be true? Mephibosheth must be delusional if he believes Absalom will surrender the throne to him. So, Ziba seems to be lying; but readers cannot be certain. But more importantly, David believes Ziba, just as he had previously believed the deceitful Amalekite (2 Sam. 1:15–16). Here, has Ziba fooled David in like manner to David's fooling of Absalom by planting his deceptive undercover agent Hushai in Absalom's court (2 Sam. 15:32–37; 17:5–16)? That David might have misjudged Mephibosheth is raised in the subsequent narrative, but David's indecision in giving a definitive judgement in favour of either Ziba or Mephibosheth (19:24–30), suggests David's inability to discern who is telling the truth. Thus, if the medium's raising of Samuel is not all that a surface reading of the account would seem to be, the larger context shows it is not a narrative anomaly. The immediate context also provides clear examples of deceit. In chs. 27 and 29, immediately before and after

²⁰ Examples include 1 Sam. 16:2–3; 20:5–8; 21:12–15; 27:10–12; 2 Sam. 3:27; 13:24–27; 17:20; 20:9–10.

the medium's activity, David lies repeatedly, consistently fooling King Achish (27:8–12; 29:3.6.8–9.10b). In addition, ch. 28 begins with Saul's explicit attempt to deceive the medium by divesting himself of all royal apparel, which she unmasks, "Why have you deceived me?" (v. 12). If he himself is subsequently deceived by the medium it would be a wonderfully ironic reversal.²¹ It would also place the medium in the same class as the wise woman of Tekoa who successfully deceived David (2 Sam. 14:2.19).

Once one accepts the case for reading with disciplined suspicion the medium's words, which allegedly convey the message of the raised Samuel, one more detail looms large. It is telling that Samuel, when alive, had roundly condemned necromancy and divination, as does the rest of the OT. When denouncing Saul, he had said, "For rebellion is no less a sin than divination, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry." (15:23). Yet, when claiming to communicate the words of Samuel, after allegedly raising him from the dead, the medium is silent on the "rebellion" of divination (cf. Kent 2014, 152–53). One does not have to guess what Samuel's attitude to necromancy was; readers already know. In life, Samuel had relentlessly catalogued Saul's many failings, but in death, apparently, he foregoes the possibility of condemning divination as he had done in life. Readers need to assess what the possible reasons are for this striking omission, but that it should raise further suspicions about the medium's claims is a strong possibility.

7. Conclusion

This narrative-critical and intratextual reading of 1 Sam. 25 and 28:3–25 has argued that the two narratives share many characteristics which encourage reading them together as narrative juxtapositions, a feature found elsewhere in the books of Samuel (e.g., 1 Sam. 24 and 26; 1 Sam. 31 and 2 Sam. 1). Linguistic and thematic similarities heighten their interrelationship. Both begin

²¹ Olariu also notes this general juxtaposition (Olariu 2015, 84). Newkirk considers only Saul's deception of the medium, not the possibility of the opposite (Newkirk 2015, 153–55). Kiboko's view that the medium "was entirely faithful ... revealed the true words of Samuel ... had only good intentions" and that "Samuel, Saul, Saul's servants, and the narrator all accept what she has done" (Kiboko 2017, 216), overstates her case and does not give due weight to Samuel's previous condemnation of necromancy (15:23), nor due consideration of intertextual links that point in the opposite direction. (Cf. Michael 2018, 486: fn. 72.)

with virtually identical death notices for Samuel and then detail how first David (ch. 25) and then Saul (ch. 28) act after his demise. Comparisons and contrasts between their respective experiences with Abigail and the medium of Endor enhance their characterization. However, just as significant are the interrelationships between Abigail and the medium. In the central part of each narrative these women take the initiative, Abigail explicitly so, while the medium's similar role becomes clear against the background of the OT's depiction of necromantic practice. Thus, Abigail speaks throughout to David as the medium does to Saul. Both retrospectively repeat the prophetic word of Samuel to, and prospectively predict the future for, either David or Saul. Their repetitions of Samuel's previous prophetic pronouncements are non-problematic. Abigail's predictions are confirmed by subsequent events and by the word of the LORD that came to Nathan. However, the medium's predictions raise questions either because of their lack of precision or apparent failure of fulfilment in their details. Thus, of the two narratives, readers can be confident of the truthfulness of the first but harbour suspicions about the second. A similar situation arises shortly after in a comparison of 1 Sam. 31 and 2 Sam. 1. Just as chs. 25 and 28 began with two death notices for Samuel, here both chapters contain accounts of Saul's death, conveyed respectively by the narrator and then an Amalekite to David. The Amalekite's version repeats the basic details of the narrator's but deviates significantly on the matter of how Saul died, claiming that he killed Saul, which contradicts the narrator's version that Saul killed himself. Readers must make a judgement as to which account is correct for both cannot be, yet the narrative contains no explicit guidance. Readers will prefer the version of the omniscient and reliable narrator. In which case, the Amalekite is a liar and his account deceptive, providing yet one more example of deception that permeates the books of Samuel. Just as the second account of Saul's death is fraudulent, so the second narrative that explores a response to Samuel's death (1 Sam. 28:3–25) also raises, at the very least, suspicions. The narrative of Saul and the medium makes no explicit judgement because that assessment is left with the reader. This is not because the narrative is neutral on the matter but rather because biblical narratives have a teaching function. Reading narratives in which the narrator does not pronounce the final judgement, but hands responsibility to the reader, enables the reader to participate in the drama, to observe the clues left by the creative narrator, and to grow in wisdom.

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Zusammenfassung

1 Sam. 28,3–25 ist seit langem eine kontroverse biblische Erzählung. Diese narrativ-kritische Analyse schlägt vor, dass sich dem Leser deren Bedeutung durch die Lektüre des gesamten Samuel-Buches erschließen mag. Es wird argumentiert, dass 1 Sam. 25 und 28,3–25 viele gemeinsame thematische und linguistische Details aufweisen, die zu einem intratextuellen Vergleich beider Narrative anregen. Besonders die Charaktere von Abigail und dem Medium von Endor, wenn sie miteinander betrachtet werden und außerdem die Charakteristika der weiteren Kapitel berücksichtigt werden, können – wie die biblische Praxis der Nekromantie selbst – den Leser zu einer Skepsis dem Medium gegenüber veranlassen.

Résumé

1 Samuel 28:3–25 a été longtemps un récit biblique controversé. Cette analyse narrative-critique suggère que les lecteurs peuvent mieux cerner la signification du récit en le lisant dans le contexte des livres de Samuel. Je soutiens que 1 Samuel 25 et 28:3–25 partagent de nombreux détails thématiques et linguistiques communs qui invitent à une comparaison intratextuelle des deux récits. En particulier, les caractères d'Abigail et du médium d'Endor, lorsqu'ils sont lus l'un à la lumière de l'autre et considérant les caractéristiques des autres chapitres adjacents, ainsi que les représentations bibliques de la nécromancie, prédisposent les lecteurs à être sceptiques quant aux affirmations du médium.

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Kunstfehler Spiritualität

Andreas Bochmann

Zusammenfassung

In seinem dialektischen Vortrag vertritt der Autor als Theologe die These, dass die Einbeziehung von Spiritualität in die Beratung ein Kunstfehler sei. In der Gegenthese argumentiert er als Sozialwissenschaftler empirisch, dass die Exklusion von Spiritualität in der Beratung ein Kunstfehler sei. In seiner Synthese empfiehlt er einen kritisch reflektierten Umgang auf der Metaebene, der ritualisiert und selektiv begrenzt ist.

Die Fachtagung „Das Timbre von Charisma und Spiritualität in der Musiktherapie – Göttliche Gnadengabe und/oder Heilige Fermaten?“ führte Musiktherapeuten mit unterschiedlichsten professionellen und weltanschaulichen Hintergründen aus ganz Deutschland im Januar 2020 in den kleinen idyllischen Hochschulort Friedensau zusammen. Der hier abgedruckte Vortrag vertrat eine beratungswissenschaftliche Perspektive. Witz und Ironie der mündlichen Präsentation gehen leider in der Schriftform eher verloren, sollten aber mitgedacht werden. Die Veranstaltung wurde im Rahmen des von der Hochschulrektorenkonferenz geförderten Projektes „Kleine Fächer-Wochen an deutschen Hochschulen“ ausgerichtet.

Einleitung

Eine Fachtagung zum Thema Spiritualität im Kontext von Musiktherapie und ähnlichen therapeutischen oder beraterischen Angeboten ist höchst verdächtig. Darüber kann auch nicht der wunderschöne Titel dieser Veranstaltung hinwegtäuschen.

Musiktherapie steht ohnehin in einigen Kreisen schon allzu schnell im Verdacht, irgendeine pseudowissenschaftliche, esoterisch angehauchte Aktivität Handtrommeln schwingender Utopisten zu sein, die sich aus Rhythmus und

Timbre, plus ein bisschen Atemtechnik – nichts anderes sind ja Fermaten – Heilung, wenn nicht gar Heil erwarten. Nun auch noch der schillernde Begriff Spiritualität hineingeworfen – und schon sind alle Vorurteile bestätigt.

Diese Fachtagung ist verdächtig. Zurecht, wie ich überzeugt bin und gleich noch begründen werde, denn das Thema meines Vortrags lautet: „Kunstfehler Spiritualität“.

Gerade als Theologe, der sich als Pastor über die Krankenhausesorge in das Feld der Beratung vorgewagt hat und heute an der Theologischen Hochschule Friedensau als Professor für Beratung und Seelsorge lehrt (gerade diese Kombination klingt ja schon wieder nach Spiritualität), bin ich – zur Überraschung mancher Kolleginnen und Kollegen – äußerst skeptisch, wenn Beratungs- oder Therapieangebote mit spirituellen Anliegen vermischt werden, quasi ein synkretistisches Konglomerat bilden, das weder theologisch reflektiert, noch wissenschaftlich haltbar ist. Und das meine ich nicht einmal augenzwinkernd, sondern durchaus ganz ernst.

Geschichtliche Entwicklungen

Meine eigene Rezeption von Fachliteratur reicht ja zurück in eine Zeit, als die Pastoralpsychologie versuchte, sich als grandiose humanistische Disziplin zu etablieren, die ohne den missionarischen Eifer aus früheren Zeiten, berauscht von den Erkenntnissen der Psychologie, experimentierbereit und einer weltanschaulichen Neutralität verpflichtet, ohne einen Transzendenzbegriff, geschweige denn Spiritualität auszukommen suchte.

Damals, in den glorreichen 70er und 80er Jahren, angetrieben durch die Fortschritte der 68er Bewegung, verbannte man mit einigem Stolz alles Reaktionäre aus der Seelsorge – wie Bibel oder Gebet, die doch nur dazu dienten, Menschen einzuengen, zu manipulieren, zu beherrschen. Spiritualität gehörte nicht mehr in die Seelsorge, sondern „aktives Zuhören“, analytische Selbstreflexion und aufgeklärte Nüchternheit waren Marken, die von der praktischen Theologie gesetzt wurden. Stollberg (1972) – einer der theologischen Helden der damaligen Zeit – brachte es mit seinem berühmten Bonmot auf den Punkt: „Seelsorge ist Psychotherapie im kirchlichen Kontext.“

Beratende Seelsorge – so der Titel eines Lehrbuches aus der Zeit von Hans-Joachim Thilo (Thilo 1971), war eine wahre Offenbarung, Scharfenberg (Scharfenberg 1972) *Seelsorge als Gespräch* war erfrischend und befreiend, Hans-Christoph Piper (Piper 1973) *Gesprächsanalysen* erklärte, wie genaues

Hinhören und Einfühlen die bessere Herangehensweise im Umgang mit Menschen war, als Methoden der Frömmigkeit oder dem so undefinierbaren und damit leicht für alles herhaltende Transzendenzbegriff.

Nein, die Poimenik ist bei solchen innerweltlichen Engführungen nicht stehen geblieben. Im Gegenteil, die praktische Theologie ist in den letzten 20 Jahren sehr deutlich zu ihrem theologischen und spirituellen Proprium zurückgekehrt.¹

Dennoch bin ich als Mensch – auch als Lehrender – von jener Zeit tief geprägt, von dem Misstrauen gegenüber frömmelnder Vereinnahmung von Menschen durch Seelsorger „alter Schule“, die mit Bibeltexten, Liedern und Gebeten glaubten, psychische Störungen beheben zu können, die sie meist nicht einmal als solche erkannten, geschweige denn anerkannten.

Als Beispiel für die durch die damalige Pastoralpsychologie überwundene Formen der Seelsorge mag die nouthetische Seelsorge nach Jay E. Adams (Adams 1976) gelten. Historisch war Adams freilich eigentlich eine Abwehrreaktion auf die gerade beschriebene moderne Seelsorgebewegung. Aber ich möchte jetzt nicht mit Wortspielen rund um Reaktion und reaktionär beginnen... Die genaue historische Einordnung ist nicht mein Anliegen.

Jay Edward Adams, Jahrgang 1929, ist ein evangelisch-reformierter Theologe, der mit dem Anspruch, Seelsorge „biblisch“ zu gestalten, insbesondere in den 70er Jahren des letzten Jahrhunderts den evangelikalen Büchermarkt zum Thema prägte. Als Jugendlicher war ich fasziniert von seinen Büchern. *Competent to Counsel* und *The Christian Counselor's Manual* gehört zu seinen Hauptwerken, aber Titel wie *Handbook of Church Discipline* lassen die Stoßrichtung des in Speech promovierten Homiletikers und Seelsorgelehrers ahnen.

Das von ihm entwickelte „Modell“ einer nouthetischen Seelsorge, ist bestenfalls eine simplistische Form der Verhaltenstherapie (die freilich als psychotherapeutisches Verfahren abgelehnt wurde), schlimmstenfalls eine – wie es einer meiner theologischen Ausbilder einmal nannte – menschenverachtende Form der Manipulation und Machtausübung – heute würde die Literatur wohl von „geistlichem Missbrauch“ reden. Tatsächlich war Adams der Überzeugung, es bedürfe keiner Psychotherapie, die er per Definition für

¹ Zu nennen sind hier z. B. Eschmann 2002; Morgenthaler 2005; Ziemer 2008; Herbst 2013. Selbst Michael Klessmann (Klessmann 2015), der selbst durch die pastoralpsychologischen Entwicklungen der 70er Jahre geprägt wurde, legt großen Wert auf Spiritualität in der Seelsorge.

gottlos und humanistisch hielt (ein Schimpfwort in weiten Teilen des amerikanischen Evangelikalismus). Stattdessen seien zumindest die meisten menschlichen Probleme auf persönliche *Sünde* im Leben zurückzuführen. (Adams selbst versucht in seiner späteren Apologetik zu seinem Werk den Eindruck allzu grober Vereinfachung zu relativieren, mit wenig Wirkung). Sünde müsse vom Seelsorger konfrontiert werden, die Beseelsorgten diese bekennen und zugleich Anstrengungen unternehmen, sich am klaren biblischen Ideal auszurichten.

Ich nehme Adams als Beispiel, weil hier eben nicht nur die *Form* – also z. B. ein Gebet, ein Bibeltext oder irgendein Ritual – den Ansatz ausmacht, sondern tatsächlich eine *inhaltliche* Sichtweise.

Unschwer zu ahnen, dass die Zunft der Psychotherapeuten nicht sonderlich angetan war. Selbst in dem relativ neutralen Wikipedia-Eintrag über Adams ist zu lesen: "Psychologists have argued that nouthetic counseling can do considerable harm to patients." Und Bakers *Encyclopedia of Psychology and Counseling* bescheinigt ihm Unwissenheit bezüglich der Theorien, die er kritisiert.²

Aber auch die Rezeption bei Theologen fällt zumeist kritisch aus. Errol Royden Wagner (Wagner 1995) widmet seiner Kritik an Adams eine ganze Dissertation – in Theologie wohlbemerkt – und greift gerade die Pneumatologie von Adams an – die Lehre vom Heiligen Geist. Ich dachte, dieses kleine Detail passt dann doch zu den heiligen Fermaten – den Atempausen – denn der Hauch, der Atem, der Geist – Pneuma eben – wirkt vielleicht gerade in den ganz kleinen Pausen zwischen den Tönen oder für Berater ohne Musik – zwischen den Zeilen. Aber ich eile meinem dialektischen Konstrukt voraus.

These: Spiritualität als Kunstfehler

Spiritualität in Beratung und Musiktherapie, so meine These, ist ein Kunstfehler. Sie gehört dort nicht hin. Hier sind ein paar Argumente für die Position.

² https://de.wiki2.wiki/wiki/Jay_E._Adams (abgerufen am 20. Juni 2021).

Argument 1: Meine Spiritualität ist ganz sicher nicht die Spiritualität meines Gegenübers

Spiritualität, quasi als eine Form der angewandten Theologie, ist eine höchst individuelle und höchst subjektive Erfahrung, nicht ein überprüfbares Objekt. Allein schon deshalb verbietet sich Spiritualität in einem streng wissenschaftlichen Kontext, dem sich ja die musiktherapeutische und beraterische Landschaft verpflichtet fühlt – jedenfalls die hier vertretene. So lautete zumindest das Credo vieler Psychotherapeuten: Religion und Spiritualität ist Privatangelegenheit eines jeden Einzelnen, jenseits der Psychologie als klarer, faktenbasierter Naturwissenschaft. Das war ja quasi schon ein Fortschritt gegenüber Sigmund Freud, der ja Spiritualität – gut, er sprach mehr von Religion – in Bausch und Bogen pathologisiert hat („Eine Neurose ist individuelle Religiosität, und Religion ist eine universelle Zwangsneurose.“).

Argument 2: Spiritualität ist sehr intimes Erleben

Wenn ich sogar Theologiestudierenden empfehle, in der Seelsorge nicht mit Menschen zu beten, insbesondere Menschen des anderen Geschlechts, begegnet mir mehr als nur erstauntes Kopfschütteln. Für Beratung und Therapie mag das ja noch einleuchten – aber in der Seelsorge? Diese radikal provozierende Aussage ist natürlich erklärungs- und ergänzungsbedürftig. So spricht m.E. überhaupt nichts dagegen, *für* Menschen zu beten – aber das kann ja gerne außerhalb der Seelsorge-, Beratungs- oder Therapiestunde geschehen. Auch meine ich hier nicht klar strukturierte, vorgegebene Gebete wie das Vaterunser oder einen Psalm, sondern die ganz persönlichen Gebete, die in tiefer Spiritualität mit Gott ringen, wie einst Jakob am Jabbok. Hinter der Warnung steht die Erfahrung, dass jeder Ausdruck von Spiritualität – insbesondere das intensive, persönliche Gebet – ein hohes Maß an Intimität schafft und die professionelle Distanz, die für Therapie, Beratung *und* Seelsorge nötig ist, verwischt und auflöst. Oder um es noch deutlicher zu sagen: Spiritualität und Sexualität sind die intimsten Ausdrucksformen des Lebens. Deshalb ist das Einbringen von Spiritualität – wie Sexualität – in Therapie, Beratung und Seelsorge tabu.

Argument 3: Spiritualität missbraucht das Machtgefälle

Selbst bei dem größten Bemühen um Augenhöhe – wie sie gerade in feministischen Ansätzen von Therapie und Beratung gefordert (und gefördert) wird

(siehe z.B. Clinebell 1983), impliziert Therapie und Beratung immer ein Machtgefälle. Deshalb begeben sich Menschen in Therapie und Beratung. Sie erwarten Hilfe, Unterstützung, weil sie in dem Augenblick nicht in der Lage sind, das Anliegen selbst zu lösen. Zumindest aus der Wahrnehmung des Klienten besteht bei der Therapeutin oder dem Berater ein Erfahrungs- und/oder Wissensvorsprung. Wir sprechen hier auch von Autorität. Wenn sich jetzt noch die Transzendenz – also eine ultimative Autorität – zur Autorität gesellt, entsteht eine Machtfülle, die dem Machtmissbrauch nicht nur Tür und Tor öffnet, sondern jegliche heilige Fermate durch einen lauten und unheilvollen Paukenschlag ersetzt.

Dieses dritte Argument mag vielleicht nicht für die Seelsorge gelten, in der Geistliche ja eben auch als geistliche Autoritäten gesehen werden – oft auch aus eigenem Selbstverständnis gesehen werden wollen; wobei mir eben auch als Theologe „Gurus“ – und die gibt es letztlich nicht nur in den fernöstlichen Traditionen – höchst suspekt sind. Aber da mag es unterschiedliche theologische Ansätze geben.

Potentielle Gefahr von Spiritualität in Therapie und Beratung

Ich halte – so meine These – Spiritualität in Therapie und Beratung deshalb für fehlplatziert, ja, potenziell schädlich:

1. Die Unterschiedlichkeit im Erleben von Spiritualität wird fast zwangsläufig zu Missverständnissen und Fehlinterpretationen in Beratung und Therapie führen. Wir geraten auf falsche Gleise und damit auch zu fatalen Lösungsansätzen. Jedenfalls rutschen wir in eine ideologische statt einer wissenschaftlichen Haltung.
2. Die hohe Intimität von Spiritualität ist potenziell schädlich, weil sie im Bereich von Beratung und Therapie zu symbiotischen Verführungen, jedenfalls mit Sicherheit zu Grenzüberschreitungen führen kann. Schutz und Sicherheit unserer Klienten sind aber eine ganz wesentliche Grundlage unseres Arbeitens, die nicht ohne Schaden riskiert werden kann und darf.
3. Wenn das Ziel der Beratung oder der Therapie die Freiheit und Autonomie des Menschen ist (übrigens für mich auch theologisch begründet!), dann ist jede Guru-Mentalität, d.h. die Verknüpfung von Spiritualität mit Autorität, schädlich. Wenn ich in Beratung und The-

rapie der wissende, zwischen Transzendenz und Immanenz vermittelnde „Meister“ werde – und sei es nur implizit, aufgrund der mir vom Klienten zugeschriebenen Autorität – führe ich Menschen in eine Abhängigkeit zu mir, mit zahlreichen aktiv genutzten oder passiv geduldeten Ausbeutungsmechanismen. Außer vielleicht für mein Bankkonto – wenn ich privat liquidiere – ist das hochgradig schädlich (übrigens auch für mich selbst).

Ich persönlich halte das Schadensrisiko für so hoch, dass es angemessen ist, von einem Kunstfehler zu sprechen, Spiritualität in Beratungs- und Therapieprozesse mit einzubringen.

Das Einbringen von Spiritualität in Beratung und Therapie ist ein Kunstfehler.

Soweit zu meiner These. Auch wenn ich selbst gar nicht so sehr aus der Disziplin der Philosophie komme, wird es Sie kaum überraschen, dass ich dieser These mit allergrößtem Vergnügen eine Antithese entgegensetze. Schließlich befinden wir uns auf dem Campus einer *theologischen* Hochschule und wäre es politisch nicht korrekt, auf einer Fachtagung zum Thema *Spiritualität* eben diese dermaßen abzuwerten, wie ich es gerade getan habe. Zwar ist politische Korrektheit nicht mein Leitmotiv, aber so ein bisschen hat das dann doch mit meiner Identität als Theologe und Pastor zu tun, der ich eben auch bin – aus Leidenschaft und Überzeugung. Es wird sie also nicht überraschen, wenn meine Gegenthese lautet:

Gegenthese: Das Nicht-Einbringen von Spiritualität in Beratung und Therapie ist ein Kunstfehler

Was aber vielleicht überrascht, ist meine Begründung für die Gegenthese. Hier argumentiere ich gerade nicht als Theologe. Wenn ich sage, Spiritualität gehört in Beratungs- und Therapieprozesse, tue ich dies als Sozialwissenschaftler, schlimmer noch – als Empiriker. Es kommt noch schlimmer: Ich argumentiere von der quantitativen Sozialforschung her, also von der Statistik.

Und ich weiß, damit mute ich sowohl den Musiktherapeutinnen und Musiktherapeuten als auch den Theologinnen und Theologen sehr viel zu – denn beide sind aufgrund ihrer Zunft eher nicht statistikaffin. Selbst die deutsche Sozialwissenschaft scheint mir sehr viel stärker der qualitativen Forschung verhaftet als der quantitativen. Hier möchte ich, ähnlich wie bei der These –

bei der ich meine zeitgeschichtliche Prägung offengelegt habe –, meine regionale Prägung benennen. Ich habe Pastoralpsychologie in den USA studiert. Und zumindest in den 90er Jahren waren die amerikanischen Sozialwissenschaften ganz klar von quantitativen Forschungsmethoden geprägt, was mir im Promotionsstudium vier Semester Statistik einbrachte.

Nun sind Beratungswissenschaften von Hause aus interdisziplinär angelegt, weshalb ich hier gar nicht apologetisch sein möchte, sondern im Gegenteil die konstruktive Irritation kalkuliert der interdisziplinären Horizont-erweiterung dienen lasse. So meine Hoffnung.

Quantitative Forschung

Tatsächlich zeigt nämlich die quantitative Forschung den positiven Zusammenhang zwischen Spiritualität einerseits und Wohlbefinden, Gesundheit, Stabilität und Zufriedenheit andererseits. Ich komme selbst speziell vom Feld der Paarberatung. Mit diesem Gebiet bin ich nicht nur besonders vertraut, es eignet sich auch besonders, diese Zusammenhänge aufzuzeigen. Es gibt eine hochsignifikante Korrelation zwischen Spiritualität und allen Bereichen der Paarbeziehung – z.B. Kommunikation, Konfliktbearbeitung, Finanzen, Sexualität – um die vier gewichtigsten Faktoren für eine gelingende Beziehung zu benennen. Aber selbst bei Themen wie Freizeitgestaltung, Kinder und Elternschaft, Verwandten und Freunden ... überall gibt es positive Korrelationen. Wer Beispielzahlen sehen will, den verweise ich auf Astrid Giebel, Ulrich Lillie, Michael Utsch, Dieter Wentzek, Theo Wessel, die den schönen Sammelband *Geistesgegenwärtig beraten* herausgegeben haben. Dort habe ich mitten in einer geisteswissenschaftlichen Auseinandersetzung mal ganz plump und dreist Zahlen vorgelegt. Hier möchte ich aber nicht mit Zahlen ermüden. Mir reicht das Konzept der Korrelation.

Was heißt das? Für Musiktherapeuten und Theologen und andere Nichts-tatistiker lässt sich der Satz in etwa so übersetzen: Steigt der eine Wert, so steigt auch der andere. Es gibt beispielsweise eine positive Korrelation zwischen Körpergewicht und Körpergröße. Je größer ein Mensch, desto höher auch sein Gewicht. Natürlich gibt es kleine Dicke und große Dünne. Es gibt also keine perfekte Korrelation in der Sozialwissenschaft, aber es gibt so etwas wie eine Richtung – mit mehr oder weniger Streuung rund um die Diagonale. Fügen wir das Adjektiv „signifikant“ hinzu, dann meinen Statistiker, dass sie nicht mehr annehmen, dass dieser Zusammenhang zufällig sei. Bei einer

hochsignifikanten Korrelation ist die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass es sich um einen Zufall handelt, kleiner als 1:1.000.

Allerdings muss auch vermerkt werden, dass Korrelationen kein Nachweis für Ursache und Wirkung sind. Mein Statistikprofessor konnte während einer Vorlesung nebenher fünf Dosen Pepsi wegtrinken. Er erzählte uns, dass er als Student einmal ein Jahr lang seinen täglichen Pepsi-Konsum aufgeschrieben habe und gleichzeitig die Geschwindigkeit, mit der er sein Auto gestartet bekam. Es gab tatsächlich einen negativen Zusammenhang. Je mehr Pepsi er trank, desto weniger Zeit brauchte er, sein Auto zu starten. Das ist eine negative Korrelation. Nun fragte er uns: Ursache – Wirkung ... woran das liegen könne. Natürlich tippten wir auf den hohen Koffeingehalt. Bei so viel chemisch induzierter Psychostimulanz wird dies auch Auswirkungen auf die Psychomotorik haben – also der Zündschlüssel schneller gedreht. Das ist natürlich völliger Blödsinn, wie jeder Automechaniker bestätigen kann. Tatsächlich war es ein altes Auto (er war zu der Zeit noch Student). Im Sommer – wo dieser Professor besonders viel Pepsi zu sich nahm –, startete sein Auto schneller, als im Winter, wenn sein Bedarf an Kaltgetränken sank, aber das Auto auch größere Startprobleme hatte. Sozialwissenschaftlich sauber kann eine Korrelation auf eine Wirkung von (a) nach (b) weisen oder aber von (b) nach (a), oder aber: ein Faktor (c) beeinflusst sowohl (a) als auch (b), obwohl (a) und (b) nichts miteinander zu tun haben. So jedenfalls im Beispiel des Professors, in der (c) die Sonne war, die sowohl den Pepsi Konsum ansteigen ließ als auch die Startprobleme des Autos verringert.

In der Sozialwissenschaft wird inzwischen nicht nur die Kausalität, sondern auch die Bedeutung der Signifikanz höchst kontrovers diskutiert. Ist meine Stichprobe groß genug, bekomme ich fast immer irgendwelche signifikanten Ergebnisse, die aber tatsächlich völlig bedeutungslos sind. Mit anderen Worten – Statistik ist sicherlich kein Allheilmittel. Das muss ich mir schon eingestehen. Gleichwohl ... wenn Studie um Studie nicht nur signifikante, sondern bedeutsame Ergebnisse aufzeigt, dann möchte ich diese nicht einfach ignorieren, wie es z. B. die Tabaklobby in den 60er Jahren des letzten Jahrhunderts tat, als Studie um Studie hohe Korrelationen zwischen Tabakkonsum und Lungenkrebs ergaben. Es ist eben – pragmatisch gesprochen - doch was dran, allen theoretisch korrekten Anmerkungen zum Trotz.

Wechselwirkung von Spiritualität und Paarbeziehung

Nach diesem Exkurs in die quantitative Forschung zurück zur Praxis in Beratung und Musiktherapie und damit auch zur Antithese, zum Kunstfehler Spiritualität durch Tabuisierung.

Meine Antithese basiert auf der Annahme, dass es sich bei der Korrelation zwischen Spiritualität und Paarbeziehung um eine echte wechselseitige Wirkung handelt: Die Spiritualität (a) beeinflusst positiv die verschiedenen Lebensbereiche (b). Aber auch umgekehrt nehmen die verschiedenen Bereiche des Lebens (b) Einfluss auf die Spiritualität (a). Ob darüber hinaus ein Wirkfaktor (c) zum Einsatz kommt, beispielsweise göttliche Gnadengabe, vermag ich dann eher wieder als Theologe zu behaupten, aber nicht sozialwissenschaftlich zu belegen.

In der Paarberatung gehen wir davon aus, dass die Spiritualität neben Kommunikation, Konfliktbewältigung, Sexualität und Finanzen zu den wichtigsten Faktoren einer gelingenden Beziehung gehören. Anders formuliert: Spiritualität ist existenziell für gelingende Beziehungen, aber auch für das Leben insgesamt, und zwar, das ist mir wichtig, aus sozialwissenschaftlicher Perspektive.

Wenn das aber so ist, dann darf ich das Thema aus Beratung und Therapie nicht ausblenden oder gar aussperren. Ich *muss* es einbringen – und zwar völlig unabhängig, ob es Teil meiner eigenen Weltanschauung ist oder nicht. Stellen Sie sich eine Paarberatung vor, in der Sie *nicht* die Kommunikation thematisieren würden – oder eine Paarberatung, in der Sie dem Paar sagen: Konflikte in Ihrer Beziehung sind eine reine Privatangelegenheit, da möchte ich mich nicht einmischen ... Genau das passiert aber sehr häufig in Bezug auf Spiritualität. Als ressourcenorientierter Berater eine so gewichtige Ressource *nicht* anzubieten, ist fahrlässig, ist ein Kunstfehler – sowohl auf der Theorieebene als auch in der Praxis. Propagandisten einer Enthaltensamkeit – oft noch mit dem klug formulierten Selbstanspruch „weltanschaulicher Neutralität“ – sind sogar oft sehr viel stärker ideologisch unterwegs als jene, die *mit* dem Thema Spiritualität arbeiten. Weltanschauliche Neutralität ist ohnehin eine grandiose Illusion. Die gibt es nicht.

Synthese beider Thesen

Der Charme der dialektischen Erörterung liegt nun gerade darin, diametral entgegengesetzte Positionen zu begründen – hoffentlich nachvollziehbar und durchaus ernst gemeint, um sich dann an eine Synthese heranzutasten, die sich natürlich bei diametralen Positionen als besonders spannend erweist. Die Paradoxie, die es aufzulösen gilt, heißt ja, den Kunstfehler Spiritualität möglichst zu vermeiden – also Spiritualität zu integrieren bzw. nicht zu integrieren. Das geht doch gar nicht!?

Doch.

Ein solcher Brustton der Überzeugung ist eigentlich nicht meine Art. Ich bin persönlichkeitsbedingt, aber auch als Wissenschaftler eher vorsichtig und zurückhaltend. Insofern sind zwar nicht These und Antithese augenzwinkernd gemeint, wohl aber mein nachdrückliches „Doch“. Es bleibt wohl eine Spannung. Dennoch wage ich einen Versuch.

Synthese: Selbstreflexion über die eigene Spiritualität

Der erste Vorschlag zu einer Synthese ist die Selbstreflexion. Das gilt eigentlich für alle Aspekte von Musiktherapie und Beratung – aber eben auch hier. Ich muss mir meiner eigenen Spiritualität bewusst sein. So haben wir an unserer Hochschule³ eine Lehrveranstaltung „Spiritualität in Musiktherapie und Beratung“, in der die ganz persönliche Auseinandersetzung mit der eigenen Spiritualität angeregt wird, damit sie eben nicht unkontrolliert und unreflektiert in meine Prozesse mit Klienten dazwischen schießt und Schaden anrichtet. Wir bieten hier keine „christliche Beratung“ oder „christliche Musiktherapie“ an, weil wir auch säkularen Menschen einen Studienplatz anbieten möchten. Aber gerade säkulare Querdenker an so geheiligtem Boden, wie Friedensau oft zelebriert wird, haben hier viel zu bieten – manchmal auch für sich selbst zu erkennen: Was glaube ich? In wieweit ist Spiritualität eine Ressource für mich? Was ist Spiritualität überhaupt für mich? Spätestens jetzt werden Sie bemerken, dass ich entgegen wissenschaftlicher Gepflogenheiten nicht einmal den Versuch unternommen habe, den hoch komplexen, schillernden Begriff „Spiritualität“ zu definieren! Genau hier beginnt nämlich auch die Eigenreflexion, zu der natürlich auch dieser Vortrag anregen will.

³ Theologische Hochschule Friedensau in Friedensau-Möckern.

Synthese: Diskurs auf Metaebene

Der zweite Vorschlag zu einer Synthese ist die Rettung auf die Metaebene. Stellen Sie sich vor, ein Paar kommt zu Ihnen in die Paarberatung mit gegensätzlichen Aufträgen: Ein Partner will, dass Sie die Paarbeziehung retten (was ohnehin schon einen überhöhten Heilsanspruch beinhaltet), der andere erwartet, dass Sie dem Dummkopf von Partner bitte beibiegen mögen, dass die Beziehung zu Ende sei. Das ist ein unlösbarer Auftrag, der gar nicht so selten ist. Was tun Sie? Natürlich den Prozess sehr schnell beenden? Dafür sind wir nicht da! Nein, das Paar ist nun einmal gekommen und Sie wollen etwas anbieten: Die Metaebene. Bei der Paarberatung lautet der zugegebenermaßen vereinfachende Auftrag: Wir können gemeinsam miteinander erkunden, ob es sich lohnt, weiter in die Beziehung zu investieren oder eben nicht, d.h. es findet ein kritischer Diskurs statt, nicht aber eine handlungsorientierte Auftragerfüllung in die eine oder andere Richtung.

In ähnlicher Weise habe ich hier zwei gegensätzliche Positionen dargelegt, die sich gegenseitig ausschließen. Metaebene heißt: Ich spreche quasi diskursiv *über* Spiritualität, ohne diese – jedenfalls ungefragt – in den eigentlichen Prozess hinein zu nehmen, ganz sicher nicht als therapeutische oder beraterische Direktive, als Handlungsanweisung oder Intervention. Für den Diskurs bietet sich sowohl die sozialwissenschaftliche Erkenntniswelt an – dass Spiritualität eine wichtige Ressource ist - als auch mein persönliches – aber bitte gut reflektiertes Erleben. Transparenz kann im Rahmen des Diskurses also sehr wohl auch beinhalten, dass ich das tue, was fromm formuliert heißt „ich lege Zeugnis von meinem Glauben ab.“ Das wird eher selten passieren und hängt vielleicht auch von meiner Arbeitsweise ab. Der gemeinsame Nenner der Intimität illustriert dies vielleicht noch einmal: wir werden wohl auch eher selten Auskunft zu unserem eigenen Sexualleben geben. Im Sinne der Transparenz oder auch des Lernens am Modell ist es aber grundsätzlich möglich, sofern es beschreibend und nicht vorschreibend ist.

Synthese: Intervention

Ein dritter Einfall in Richtung Synthese ist die vereinbarte, klar begrenzte Intervention. Wenn ich, der ich Klienten nicht selten auch als Pastor bekannt bin, in der Beratung Klienten gegenüber bin, gibt es häufiger ausgesprochene oder unausgesprochene Erwartungen, die ganz unmittelbar mit Spiritualität zu tun haben. Der Klassiker insbesondere im freikirchlichen Kontext: der

Wunsch nach Gebet am Ende einer Sitzung. Hier bin ich – das ist hoffentlich im ersten Teil deutlich geworden – eher bei den Skeptikern. Weder bietet ein abschließendes Gebet ein magisches Lösungsangebot, insbesondere zur Vermeidung notwendiger therapeutischer oder beratender Arbeit, noch ist ein Gebet als Zeitstrukturierungselement zu empfehlen. Und doch – wenn das Bedürfnis vom Klienten kommt und gemeinsam reflektiert wurde, um auszusprechen, dass das Gebet nicht funktionalisiert und mit Erwartungen überfrachtet wird, die es nicht erfüllen will, fühle ich mich frei – gerade auch aufgrund meiner Doppelrolle, die ja in meiner Identität verankert ist, als Pastor und Berater, auch einem solchen Wunsch nachzukommen. Um das Nähe-Distanzverhältnis in Balance zu halten, wird es in aller Regel eher allgemeinen und segnenden Charakter haben.

Umgekehrt, wenn ich ahne, dass hier eine unangemessene Heilserwartung mit einem Ritual verknüpft sein könnte, darf solch ein Wunsch auch frustriert werden – oder muss es sogar. Wohl aber nicht als Vermeidung, sondern gekoppelt mit einem offenen, transparenten Diskurs. Das gilt auch bei klarer Ablehnung von allem, was irgendwie „spirituell“ wirkt durch Klienten. Ein Paar kam weit gereist zu mir in die Beratungspraxis. Sie waren aufgrund ihrer beruflichen Situation so weit gereist und waren aufgrund internationaler Vernetzung ausgerechnet auf mich kommen. Als sie in das Gesprächszimmer kamen, blieben sie erschrocken stehen. „Muss man bei Ihnen fromm sein, um hier beraten zu werden?“ war ihre bange Frage, als sie Zeichen meiner Spiritualität in dem Raum entdeckten. „Nein, müssen Sie nicht,“ war meine Antwort. „Gleichwohl möchte ich Ihnen nicht verheimlichen, dass ich aus einer christlichen Motivation arbeite und mir Spiritualität viel bedeutet.“ „Uns eben gar nicht – und wir möchten das auch nicht.“ Klare Ansage, klare Vereinbarung, an die ich mich auch gehalten habe. Gleichwohl war dieses säkulare, um nicht zu sagen atheistische Paar hoch motiviert bei der Sache. Es entwickelte sich eine Intensität im Prozess, wie ich sie selten erlebt habe. Göttliche Gnadengabe! So merkte ich an einer Stelle rein deskriptiv an: „Wissen Sie, ich habe den Eindruck, hier passiert gerade etwas zutiefst Spirituelles.“ Beide nickten verstehend, erkennend. Mehr war nicht möglich, mehr war nicht nötig.

Und mit diesem Bild bin ich dann wieder bei dem schönen Titel dieser Fachtagung angekommen. Dieser Moment des Erkennens war für mich eine

heilige Fermate, ein ganz kurzes Innehalten, Luftholen, Halten, Den-Atem-Gottes-Inhalieren.

Ausblick

Erlauben Sie mir zum Abschluss eine ganz persönliche Coda, nicht so lang wie bei Jean Sibelius üblich – keine Sorge.

Als Wissenschaftler und als Mensch habe ich das Bedürfnis, ein wasser-dichtes Argument zu liefern. Für die Beratung erscheint mir mein kleiner Impulsvortrag einigermaßen konsistent oder stimmig. Nur bin ich eben Berater, nicht Musiktherapeut. Musik aber ... ist in meiner privaten Wahrnehmung ein hochgradig transzendentes Erleben. Nirgendwo bin ich in meiner Spiritualität tiefer berührt als im Erleben von Musik. Dabei ist es für mich unerheblich, ob ich Bach, eine Jazzmesse, Taizé Gesänge oder moderne Anbetungsmusik höre ... oder einfach nur meditativen Klängen lausche.

Und so dämmert es mir: Das Handwerkszeug der Musiktherapie *ist* – gewissermaßen Spiritualität. Das schmeißt nun am Ende des Vortrages vielleicht nicht ganz alles um, was ich gesagt habe ... aber bringt so hoffe ich ... noch ganz neue Klänge und einen neuen Rhythmus in das Vorgetragene, neues Erkennen für mich. Jedenfalls bin ich weiter sehr gespannt auf die Entfaltung dieses Tages und bedanke mich herzlich, dass Sie sich mit mir ganz interdisziplinär als Musiktherapeutinnen und Musiktherapeuten auf ein Nachbarfeld gewagt haben. Danke.

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Abstract

In his dialectical lecture, the author argues as a theologian that the inclusion of spirituality in counselling is to be viewed as malpractice. In the counter-thesis, he argues empirically as a social scientist that the exclusion of spirituality in counselling is malpractice. In his synthesis, he recommends a critically reflected approach on the meta-level that is ritualised and selectively limited.

Résumé

Dans sa conférence dialectique, l'auteur argumente en tant que théologien que l'inclusion de la spiritualité dans l'assistance psychologique doit être considérée comme une faute professionnelle. Dans la contre-thèse, il soutient empiriquement en tant que chercheur en sciences sociales que l'exclusion de la spiritualité dans l'assistance psychologique est une faute professionnelle. Dans sa synthèse, il recommande une approche critique ritualisée et sélectivement limitée au niveau méta.

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Book Review

Anthony G. Reddie. *Is God Colour-Blind? Insights from Black Theology for Christian Faith and Ministry.* Second edition. London: SPCK, 2020. 152 pp. 15,80€/£12.99.

“I’m a Black liberation theologian, so don’t be surprised if I say things that will upset you.” (p. 97) This may seem an odd sentence to start a book review with, but it is exactly what Anthony Reddie, Director of the Oxford Centre for Religion and Culture (Regent’s Park College, University of Oxford), and Extraordinary Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of South Africa, achieves in his book. Why that is a good thing will, I hope, have become evident by the end of this review.

This is the second edition of his book, which has been revised and updated, and includes a new afterword on Black Lives Matter. The book is divided into six chapters of roughly equal length. There are a few explanatory footnotes scattered throughout the chapters, and a lot more, quite well-furnished end-notes. There is also a short index, but a bibliography, which would have been useful, is missing.

While not overly complicated, Reddie’s style of writing is, nonetheless, quite scholarly and can, at times, be demanding. That being said, Reddie intends the book to be “a resource for ministers, local preachers, lay readers and many others who are engaged in some form of leadership role in the Church” (p. xi), and I think he has succeeded in this. Reddie writes from a British Methodist background, but that does not mean the book has nothing to say to Seventh-day Adventists, regardless of which side of the Atlantic we may find ourselves. On the contrary, given our own history of White Eurocentredness that has an effect to this day, the issues raised and tackled in this book are very relevant indeed.

One may be tempted to skim the introduction or skip it altogether. However, I found it essential reading, because I, along with probably many readers of this review, am a White European, and it was important to first read Red-

die's description of Black theology as well as his definitions of practical theology and what he calls *participative Black theology*. The idea of "reinterpreting the meaning of God ... in light of the very real experiences, largely of struggle, oppression, and sheer hardship, of Black people" (p. xi) is not something that a lot of White people, let alone White Adventists, are familiar with. Establishing this perspective is an important function of the introduction. Reddie then outlines his "activity-based approach" (p. xiv) – often through group exercises – to educating people, and to "practice Black theology in partnership with ordinary people, both Black and White" (p. xv).

The corpus of the book is divided into two parts: (1) Insights from Black theology for group exercises and Bible study, spanning chapters 1–4, and (2) insights from Black theology for sermons, comprising chapters 5–6.

Chapter 1 deals with the affirmation of difference, and starts with a seemingly innocuous group exercise about a choice of meals at an imaginary club. It became clear to me quite quickly how blindsided we often are by our Whiteness – regardless of our country of origin – because it is regarded as neutral and normative, including within Adventism; and it is this realizing and confronting that makes the book so valuable, because it bursts that bubble and presents us with a new point of view.

Chapter 2 covers proverbial wisdom. The group exercise centres round Jamaican proverbs, or wise sayings, which serve as examples of how wisdom is contained in often-unexpected places. Furthermore, it recasts the parables of Jesus as similar containers of complex proverbial wisdom, and invites us to a "radical Christology" through which "we learn to live together as ... one humanity" (p. 34).

Chapter 3 focuses on self-identity and what it means to be human. In the group exercise, one is asked to define different elements of one's identity, ordered by importance. One then reflects on those words and their respective ranking. Equally remarkable is what is often left out, because it is taken for granted, or considered "normal" (e.g., many disabled individuals will write down their disability, whereas most able-bodied individuals do not identify their 'able-bodiedness'; the same is true for women and LGBTQ+ individuals vis-a-vis hetero cis-males). White individuals are, thus, far less likely to identify as White, than Black individuals do as Black. The chapter ends with an important critique of Whiteness, and a call to a life of interdependence.

Chapter 4 is entitled “Reading the Bible with Black Theology.” This Black hermeneutic, that seeks to link the original context of a passage with “contemporary concerns of marginalized and oppressed people” (p. 53) has a high view of Scripture, and rejects the historical-critical method and its putting a “primacy on human reason” (p. 54). It contains seven examples of “Black-theology inspired biblical reflections” (p. 60), with first an outline of the process, followed by the reflections themselves.

The second part, containing chapters 5 and 6, focuses on preaching. Each chapter centres around a particular sermon: one on the parable of the talents, based on Matt 25:14–30, and the other on Original Sin, based on one of John Wesley’s 44 Sermons. Both sermons are reproduced verbatim, and represent a “Black theology reinterpretation” (p. 94) of the subject matter. Not everyone will agree with every conclusion in these two chapters, particularly with the views of African-American Womanist theologian Delores Williams on the crucifixion of Jesus, in the opening paragraphs of chapter 6. However, I find such views that shake and challenge my own, often long-held, convictions more refreshing rather than threatening.

The newly added afterword on Black Lives Matter starts by reflecting on why they all too often do *not* matter to so many people. Reddie recounts his upbringing in a Jamaican immigrant household in Bradford, in the north of England, in the 1970s and 80s. This includes recollections of the largely White Methodist church that the family attended. While describing them as “kind and gracious people ... they had nothing to say to the persistent reality of racism that affected the lives of all non-White people in the city of Bradford” (p. 107). The recent toppling of the statue of Edward Colston (a 17th century philanthropist who was also involved in the Transatlantic slave trade) in Bristol in the summer of 2020, which was then pushed into the harbour, serves as a more recent example of how the feelings of Black people over the statue of someone who profited from trading in their forebears were seen as less important than the statue and its treatment. But the gospel implores us to solidarity with Black people, and that is the challenge for White Christianity. The book ends with a call for reparations and “restorative justice within the world economy” (p. 113), as a consequence of love for God and showing God’s justice, using the two examples of the rich young ruler, and Zacchaeus.

The idea of social justice has only slowly progressed within Adventism. Moreover, our understanding of faith and righteousness is located mostly on

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an individual rather than a corporate, let alone global economy, level. By presenting God as one who sees and identifies with the oppressed, disadvantaged, poor, and weak, not just on an individual level, but as groups and whole demographics – and, hence, describing God to be Black – this book helps to widen and enrich our view of God and humanity, and hopefully sensitizes us to issues that are close to the heart of God, but may not have been quite so close to ours.

As for the question posed in the title of the book, it is answered in the dedication at the beginning of the book on p. v: “To all those who have helped me realize God is not colour-blind – God affirms Blackness.” I agree, and hope this book helps many more reach the same conclusion.

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Book Review

Denis Kaiser. *Trust and Doubt: Perceptions of Divine Inspiration in Seventh-day Adventist History.* Schriften der Forschung. Historische Theologie 3. St. Peter am Hart: Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen, 2019. 453 pp. Hard cover: 29,90€. PDF: 26,90€.

This published version of Denis Kaiser's Ph.D.-dissertation is a comprehensive treatment of what the subtitle promises: A thorough analysis of the understanding of divine inspiration in early Seventh-day Adventist history, mainly during the 50 years from 1880 to 1930. The author compiled material from many years of research, collecting even numerous hitherto unexamined primary sources from archives outside of the SDA library network. Among these, for instance, articles of the United Methodist Church on Ellen G. White, authored by Dudley M. Canright, or early Adventist periodicals like the *Hope of Israel* from the General Conference of the Church of God (Seventh Day), a SDA faction of the 1860s, containing articles denigrating Ellen White's prophetic ministry. Besides these unpublished sources Kaiser went through more than 50 published primary serials and 210 primary books and pamphlets of the time under investigation, including 54 works of Ellen G. White. This vast amount of primary material is complemented by about 95 secondary works and 21 secondary journals. Needless to say, in consequence, the book is built on a broad and stable foundation of footnotes backing up the historical and theological analysis given throughout the book.

The author was adjunct professor from 2012 to 2016 at the Department of Church History in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Since 2017 he has been assistant professor of church history in the same department. From 2011 to 2015 he was assistant annotator and since 2016 annotation project editor of *The Ellen G. White Letters and Manuscripts with Annotations*, vol. 2, 1860–1863. Also, he is coeditor of the *Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism* and subeditor of the "History of Theology and Ethics" section of the *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*.

The treatise is divided into four main chapters, introduction and summary excluded. The first one provides the historical, theological, and socio-cultural background for different perceptions of inspiration in 19th century USA, leading the reader to the early Adventist understanding from the time of the Millerite movement's disintegration after the great disappointment in 1844, down to 1880.

The second part discusses the perceptions of inspiration in the period from 1880 to 1895, a particularly interesting time because of the increasing acceptance of higher biblical criticism in Protestant denominations. The development within Adventism is investigated by reference to four main representatives expressing the clearest statements on inspiration: Uriah Smith, George I. Butler, Dudley M. Canright, and Ellen G. White.

Chapter three leads to twenty years (1895–1915) with three other “protagonists:” Alonzo T. Jones, William W. Prescott, and Stephen N. Haskell – again completed by clarifying and correcting statements of Ellen G. White. This time is of special importance since Ellen G. White's masterpiece “The Great Controversy,” originally published in 1888, was revised in 1911 and thus raised a number of questions and critiques regarding her claims to be an inspired author – who apparently needed “corrections.” Furthermore, this was the last time span of the Adventist church with a living prophetess guiding through theological disputes like the one about inspiration.

The fourth and final part deals with the last 15 years under investigation (1915–1930), again exemplifying the discussions within the American Seventh-day Adventist church by examining statements of Arthur G. Daniells, Judson S. Washburn, Francis M. Wilcox, and the prophetess's son, William C. White, profiting from his unique life experience as secretary and assistant to his mother's prophetic ministry.

The huge and complex topic of inspiration is not easily put into clear, unambiguous terms. As Kaiser demonstrates, it is always important to keep in mind the theological (hermeneutical) background of the different authors, since this largely determines the words used to describe what we call “inspiration.” In his final, concluding chapter Kaiser further honestly explains the methodological challenge to generalize what the selected, renowned Adventist leaders said in particular situations. Lost sources, misconstrued contexts, or the overestimation of certain statements may lead to a distorted view of history. This study deals with the perceptions of great leaders of Seventh-day

Adventist history and thus gives fresh insights into an under-investigated subject of the denomination's past. Yet, it neither scrutinizes all the material available in the church's archives nor does it claim to catch all the views given in the church's broader spectra. Of course, the prominent names chosen for this study most likely represent the church's mainstream(s), but they still leave room for further investigation of smaller niches of the denomination. Also, the years beyond 1930, especially until 1970, would be of interest as a prelude to the inspiration debates in the 1970s and 1980s prompted by the rediscovery of the 1919 Bible Conference reports.

In summary, Kaiser's book yields a much deeper insight into the perceptions of the investigated persons and many interesting aspects that were not dealt with as comprehensively before. Particularly impressive is the vast number of primary sources used to break new ground in this field of Adventist historical research. This is the convincing basis for his conclusions, as e.g., the finding that Adventists never encouraged any disbelief whatsoever regarding the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, while candidly discussing the (un-)reliability concerning minor details of no theological consequence, like historical data. The main issue under discussion was Ellen G. White's ministry and prophetic claim, far more than the inspiration of the Bible. This, in turn, led to conclusions that might be drawn from Ellen G. White's inspiration experiences in comparison to biblical prophets, and vice versa. The lessons learned through the living prophet were, in many respects, illuminating the inspiration process even of biblical writers. It can be postulated that none of the traditional views (verbal-plenary inspiration, personal inspiration, thought inspiration, degrees of inspiration) any longer fitted the experiences the SDA church was privileged to undergo through Ellen G. White's prophetic ministry.

Among the resulting tensions, Kaiser mentions some individuals holding that Ellen G. White was inspired on any topic, even with non-theological content; or that some clung to the conviction that all writings are verbally inspired, something she strictly rejected; others thought that her writings must be the "last word" on any interpretation of biblical passages, or that all of the historical data she took from lexica and other Bible reference works must be correct to the uttermost. These misconstrued views later became a matter of intense dispute, not only at the 1919 Bible Conference.

Book Review

The numerous blurbs on the back cover and the book's first pages from the Universities of Harvard and Notre Dame to different Adventist Universities, the Ellen G. White Estate, and the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, all commend Kaiser for his outstanding research covering not only Adventist history, but even some areas of the wider American (Protestant) religious history. Some even acknowledge it as the standard reference on the topic of inspiration in 19th and early 20th century Adventism.

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Book Review

Steve Daily. *Ellen G. White: A Psychobiography*. Conneaut Lake: Page Publishing, 2020. (Kindle version)

Steve Daily, Ph.D., is a former Adventist pastor and chaplain who taught psychology at Loma Linda and La Sierra Universities for over twenty years. This is the fourth book by Daily about Seventh-day Adventism and its founder (cf. *Adventism for a New Generation* [Better Living Publications, 1993]; *Prophetic Rift*, 2 vols. [Better Living Publications, 2007]). The book's release coincides with the 50th anniversary of the 1970 issue of *Spectrum Magazine* that launched a new era in Adventist studies, turning the denomination and its prophetess into subjects of serious academic inquiry.

Daily's journey out of Adventism began in 1985 when he began attending the Vineyard Church where he saw "a much healthier expression of Christianity than what I had found in Adventism" (loc. 103). After leaving Adventism around a decade ago, Daily founded the GraceWay Community Church (Riverside, CA) and serves as its senior pastor.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters and a conclusion; each chapter ends with a set of four questions for discussion. Daily's overarching premise is that Ellen White was perhaps "the most successful con artist in history" (an assertion repeated four times) who used so-called "visions" and divine "testimonies" as a "prophetic trump card" to maintain her dominance over the church and enrich herself. What emerges in the book is an unrelenting *ad feminam* attack on White. The word "plagiarism" appears 126 times and dominates the entire presuppositional spectrum, followed by "fraud" and "fraudulent" (65), "deception" (54), "pathological" (49), "sociopathic" (43), "lies" and "lying" (42), "manipulate" (29), "cover up" (25), "immoral" (18), "con artist" (17), "hypocrisy" (16), as well as "abuse," "dishonest," "prophetic/religious schizophrenia," "artificial," "vicious," "pathological double binds," "scandalous," "self-interest," "unethical," "illegal," "embezzled," and similar terms.

For a psychobiography written by a trained psychologist and historian, I expected Daily to offer a discussion of his own methodological approach, and

a consistent, unbiased application of psychological theory on a broad cross-section of the evidence. Instead, Daily cherry-picks on the negative, painting White with a broad brush, blurring important nuances of her story, and reducing her experience to a monochromatic shade of pathology. Such constricted categorization leads him to dismiss White as a relic of 19th century visionary charlatanism, an unscrupulous “con artist,” and a high-functioning narcissistic-sociopath. At times, the book reads less as a biography of an important religious figure than as a script for the TV series *American Greed*.

If denominational hagiographies of White are biased in her favour, Daily’s work is severely biased against her. That White was far from infallible, and that her books present thorny issues – not only for the extensive, uncredited literary “borrowing,” but also in terms of substance – has been largely explored in the last five decades. But Daily would have readers believe that White had no virtue or redeeming quality. Had Daily been more open to his subject he would have tackled balancing her story which could have weakened his *a priori* conclusions. As William Anderson and William L. Dunlop warn authors of psychobiographies, “the greatest danger is foisting theory onto the subject. Instead theory should open up, not close down; provide new questions, not easy answers; complicate, not simplify; produce possibilities, not reductions.”¹ While Daily sought to revisit previously known patterns of behaviour, as well as orientating/organizing metaphors and motifs in White’s life, the deductive approach of imposing a narrow category of “plagiarism” and “fraud” over her entire experience is misleading and ultimately fallacious, causing the author to ignore important deviations. Thus, as Daily himself seems to have admitted, using “psychobiography” as a single category for his book is a misnomer, not only because it also discusses history and theology, but because of Daily’s unremitting tendency to pathologize his subject. The book actually fits better the category of “psychopathography.”

Daily’s hermeneutic of pathology informed his choices as a historian, as seen in the high selectivity with which he culled negative events in White’s life on which to build his iconoclastic case. For a psychological sketch which is not empirically based – psychobiographies are rarely so, since authors do not

¹ Anderson, James W., and William L. Dunlop. “Executing Psychobiography.” Claude-Hélène Mayer and Zoltan Kovary, eds. *New Trends in Psychobiography*. Switzerland: Springer Nature, 2019, 11.

always have access to their subjects and their *Lebenswelt* – Daily should have erred on the side of caution. Instead, Daily's exuberant diagnosing of White, coupled with lack of sensitivity toward her, blinded him to humanizing events in her life and their important psychological implications. For example, one looks in vain for a discussion of the premature deaths of her two sons Henry Nichols (at 16) and John Herbert (at 3 months) and the impact this had on White. The period after the death of her husband James is also singly framed by Daily's overriding assumption that White viewed his death as an opportunity to realize her own ambitions of power and greed over the denomination. The *sequelae* of her head injury at the age of nine is, again, relegated solely to its potential pathological implications with no interest in how such an experience at a young age could have contributed to her growth as a person. Likewise, White's watershed trauma at the Great Disappointment of 1844, pregnant as it was with psychological implications deserved serious, unbiased consideration, rather than Daily's simplistic "cover up" explanation revolving around the doctrine of the "shut door" and later date-setting for the Second Coming.

A prime example of the dark lenses through which Daily sees White is his accusation that she had an "addiction to alcohol" which often led to "alcohol withdrawal delirium" (cf. loc. 1995–1999). From her own writings, it is clear that White sometimes did use "cordial" (from the Latin *cor*, "heart"), an alcoholic drink with high sugar content thought to "revive" the heart, as medication, although the amount and frequency of her use are not clear (cf. *Manuscript Releases* 17, 61). Conversely, White criticized the medical practice of her time of using the cordial as a go-to treatment for all maladies, especially for children (cf. *Selected Messages* 2, 468). Thus, a cursory review of the evidence falsifies Daily's hasty conclusion that White had an "addiction" to liquor, and that she was a hardened hypocrite for condemning its use by others while frequently imbibing in it herself (Daily should have included the materials found in his footnote #129 in this section to balance this point). Any unbiased reader could easily conclude that White's sporadic medicinal use of the cordials – like her consultation of the pseudoscience of phrenology – need not reflect poorly on her psyche or character, but merely highlights the constraints of her own scientific *milieu*. Attempting to capitalize on this in order to cast aspersion on White's reputation is a fallacious, anachronistic, and intellectually dishonest argument.

Notwithstanding the mordant tone, and the author's tendency to pathologize White, a few sections revisit important questions which deserve serious

probing by scholars within the broader spectrum of her life's story, such as Daily's case that White demonstrated antisocial behaviour towards several of her contemporaries. Emblematic of this trait is the way White often fired off insensitive "testimonies" to church members. White's apparent inability to apologize and her tendency to attack her critics were important recurring themes. Persons she once lauded as pillars of the movement were quickly "doomed, damned, and lost forever, without hope" (loc. 1680) and relegated to darkness as unconverted, demon-possessed souls once they voiced doubts about the "testimonies." "To disagree with the prophet was to become the target of a vision," concludes Daily (loc. 1372–1373). White's defensiveness towards her critics contrasted with the attitude of other pioneers such as Uriah Smith and John H. Kellogg, Daily argues, and fed an air of infallibility around her. But Daily's sympathetic view of Smith, Gage, Kellogg, and even competitor prophetess Anna Philips Rice begs the important question: How is Daily capable of seeing virtues in other Adventist pioneers, but not in Ellen White?

The way White engaged in psychobiographies of her opponents and shifted blame is seen in high relief in chapter 12 ("Bookmakers, Banishment, and Reorganization") which deals with White's literary borrowing as the source of continuous conflict with her "bookmakers," Marian Davis and Fannie Bolton. The issue was not White's literary borrowing *per se* – she appeared to have settled in her own mind that God had given her a blank authorization to borrow from other authors – but that Bolton spoke publicly about the goings-on of their editorial work. When faced with such criticism, White turned her fountain pen into a dagger and aimed it at Bolton; beginning with light "testimonies" (even critiquing the colour of her dress), White escalated the attacks declaring Bolton demon-possessed. These cases of "spiritual abuse," Daily concludes, reveal how White's testimonies misrepresented the character of God. This analysis is followed by chapter 13 which discusses the characteristics of high-functioning sociopaths, as well as narcissistic personality disorder as they may have intersected with White's profile – especially in her relationship with famous Adventist John H. Kellogg. Here again, no balancing aspects of White's psychological profile are explored, making the conclusions of this discussion highly questionable.

For what it is worth, Daily's book furthers the foregone conclusion in academia that Ellen G. White was not a saint. Due to the special place given to her in the denomination, her writings and ministry have added a deep layer

of complexity to the Adventist experience, and her larger-than-life presence over the denomination is often what causes people to stay, and a significant reason why they leave. Rather than clarifying theological subjects, White often takes ambiguous, if not contradictory positions, forcing the denomination to earmark considerable resources since the 1980s towards belaboured explanations in attempts to salvage her reputation and mollify the critics. This strategy ended up placing her on a pedestal of infallibility and inerrancy, allowing her critics to capitalize on the inconsistencies, and the degree to which her extensive pronouncements on a number of theological issues appear to reflect her own opinions – rooted in a 19th-century scientific-cultural-religious context – rather than special revelation. (See, for example, Daily's discussion of White's adoption of "vital force" physiology, phrenology, sexual health myths, and other debunked ideas [loc. 1225–1573]).

Moreover, White's uncredited literary "borrowing" looms large in the controversies surrounding her claims of inspiration, and the defence offered by the denomination has been largely dismissed as self-serving, and ultimately, unconvincing. Even though copyright jurisprudence was still in its infancy throughout White's career, the legal merit of the question is hardly the point; the problem of White's uncredited literary borrowing has always been one of transparency. The denomination may claim that it has killed plagiarism's "snake and shown the stick" by appealing to legal arguments, but White's questionable literary practices will continue to threaten the prophetess's heel.

Overall, Daily's book is well-written, and supported by over three hundred endnotes. At bottom, however, it offers little original insight into Ellen G. White's psychological profile, and, in my opinion, fails in its proposed task to be "honest and fair" and to let readers make up their own minds. Daily draws all the conclusions, taking his "con artist" mantra to its last implications, both to the detriment of Ellen G. White's legacy, as well as his own as historian. Let the reader beware of taking Daily's conclusions at face value. Daily's weak case against White will likely result in stronger defences of her.

Considering the inherent complexity of the subject and its ramifications, perhaps the ideal approach to Ellen G. White as the founder-prophetess of a major modern-day evangelical denomination lies midway between the heroic figure defended by the denomination, and the unsavoury character portrayed by Daily. Regardless of how one sees her self-attestation as the "messenger of the Lord," and despite the excesses of believers who take her every word as a

divine command, many have found meaningful spiritual guidance in her writings, “borrowed” or otherwise. In her time, White was an indefatigable evangelist and champion of temperance, social causes, and religious liberty. In terms of ecclesiology, White’s repudiation of “kingly power” in church governance in favour of a decentralized, bottom-up, representative model has helped the denomination navigate several crises throughout its history. Warts and all, White did execute her vision of a worldwide denomination (20 million plus members worldwide) with publishing, educational, and leading medical institutions. Lastly, White never saw her role in the denomination as that of an infallible prophetic voice that could one day replace Scripture. Through her *testimonies*, White saw herself as a pastoral voice providing spiritual guidance.

Sophisticated readers should view attempted *exposés* of White such as Daily’s as opportunities to seek equilibrium between polarizing approaches to her legacy based on the following tensions:

- (1) Infallibility/inerrancy *vs.* fallibility/errancy
- (2) Special revelation *vs.* human opinion (reflecting her own *Sitz im Leben*)
- (3) Supernatural visionary experiences *vs.* self-induced spiritual trances (i.e., “theological daydreaming”)
- (4) Originality of ideas and books *vs.* plagiarism
- (5) Truthfulness and consistency *vs.* deception and hypocrisy

For a responsible, impartial look at Ellen G. White’s life and work as an important figure in the history of American religions, *Ellen Harmon White: American Prophet* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2014), will remain the standard. White’s composite story will continue to attract biographers, and the most conscientious among them will demonstrate an open mind to her humanity, contributions and possibilities, rather than forcing her into a straitjacket.

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Book Review

James Eglinton. *Bavinck: A Critical Biography*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 450 pp.

John Bolt, an emeritus professor at Calvin College (Grand Rapids, MI) and an expert on Calvinism, endorsed James Eglinton's new biography of Herman Bavinck with these words: "This will be the definitive Bavinck biography for generations." Time will tell whether Bolt is correct in this assessment, but after reading this fascinating book I tend to agree. Eglinton, who teaches Reformed Theology at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland, is (so far) the last in a series of seven biographers of Bavinck (1854–1921). Therefore, much was already known about the life and work of this prominent Dutch theologian, but Eglinton was able to access some new sources. The newness of his book is, however, especially due to the fact that he fundamentally disagrees with the widely accepted view that there were "two Bavincks", who, respectively followed orthodox Reformed theology and allied himself with the modernism of his times (p. xviii). Eglinton wondered whether Bavinck was able to "hold orthodoxy and modernism in some kind of critical equipoise" (p. xix), and concluded that the answer is affirmative: A close examination of Herman Bavinck's theology and his approach to practical issues shows that he consistently tried to keep the two poles of orthodox Calvinism and the "modern" approach to Christianity together. For him "orthodoxy" was never a static concept. "Rather it put down roots in diverse historical locations" (p. 260). It would seem that this element justifies the term "critical" in the subtitle of the book.

Significance of Herman Bavinck

Herman Bavinck belongs to the group of famous theologians who lived and worked in the Netherlands, but also acquired international fame. To understand his importance, it is essential to know something about the complex history of Dutch Calvinism, and of the development of several Reformed denominations (see note 4). Eglinton does a good job of sketching Bavinck's

roots in the Old Reformed Church in Germany (where he was born) and, in particular, in describing how the Bavinck family joined the Dutch denomination that in 1834 “seceded” from the national Dutch Reformed church in the so-called “Afscheiding” (literally: secession). While his views would evolve significantly, Bavinck always remained “a son of the Secession” (p. 15).

Putting the epithet of “theologian” on Bavinck does not begin to do justice to his many-faceted contribution to Dutch society and beyond, in many different fields. The suggestion is certainly to the point, that on his simple gravestone these words might have been appropriate: “Here lies a dogmatician, and ethicist, an educational reformer, a pioneer in Christian psychology, a politician, a biographer, a journalist, a Bible translator, a campaigner for woman’s education ...” (p. 291).

Book Structure

Eglinton follows a clear structure in his book. It is divided into five parts, each with two or three chapters (1854–1872). *Part one* deals with Bavinck’s roots, with a separate chapter on his father Jan Bavinck, who became a theologian and author in his own right, and remained a sounding board and coach for his son. It describes the move of the family from the border town Bentheim in Germany to the Netherlands, where Jan eventually became a pastor in the Secessionist Church (*De Christelijk-Gereformeerde Kerk*). Another chapter describes Herman’s early years, and his early education. After attending a secessionist elementary school, Bavinck moved to the Gymnasium in Zwolle – a rather elitist kind of school – which was indicative of father Jan’s ambition for his son. In this context Eglinton makes this important observation: “Bavinck’s life ought to be perceived against the wider social trajectory of the *Afgescheidenen*” (“Secessionists”). This trajectory “moved from a pre-1848 existence (with limited opportunities for participation in society) to a place of toleration and freedom in late modern Dutch culture” (p. 55).

Part two follows Bavinck as a theology student at the University of Leiden (1873–1880). Opting for Leiden for his theological formation made him somewhat suspect in “Seceder” circles. However, he retained close ties with the theological school in Kampen, where he took the exams that would open the road to pastoral ministry in the “Seceder” churches. The first overtures from Abraham Kuyper, the founder of the Free University in Amsterdam, which soon became the centre of so-called neo-Calvinism, date from this period in

Bavinck's life. From then onwards the lives and careers of Kuyper and Bavinck are increasingly closely intertwined.¹

Part three brings us to Bavinck's short pastoral experience in the Frisian city of Franeker. He was soon appreciated and respected by his parishioners, although he began his work with considerable misgivings. He noted in his diary: "I have accepted the call to Franeker. It is quite a big, and for an inexperienced candidate, a fairly difficult congregation" (p. 114). From the beginning of his pastoral work, he had his eye on a future appointment as a professor in Kampen. "Bavinck's activities in Franeker maintained a dual focus: he was working hard at ministering to his congregation, while also making moves that kept up a public, scholarly profile" (p. 124).

Part four deals with the time of Bavinck's professorship in Kampen (1889–1902). While initially having a heavy teaching load, he nevertheless found time for other activities and his scholarly star was steadily rising. He began to focus more on writing books and, in particular, to gather materials for what would be his *magnum opus* – his four volume *Christian Dogmatics*, which, he believed, would constitute "a bold effort to meet the theological needs" of the times (p. 198). Bavinck would in this period actively promote a merger of his "Seceder" Christian Reformed Church with the new denomination that resulted from Kuyper's split from the Dutch Reformed Church (the *Doleantie* in 1886). This merger eventually came about in 1892 (pp. 182ff). Bavinck would, however, never see his fervent wish fulfilled that the two theological centres (in Kampen and Amsterdam, respectively), would become one single institution.

Part five chronicles the crowning period of Bavinck's theological career, when, from 1902 onwards, he taught at Kuyper's Free University. Through his academic teaching, but also through preaching and lecturing for a wider public, his influence grew further and extended also into the realm of the so-called "Social Question." Confronted with the challenges of the kind of atheism that was espoused by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), Bavinck became more convinced than ever that the world needed the light of Calvinism, "refracted through a neo-Calvinistic prism" (p. 225). He emphasized, however,

¹ For a recent biography of Abraham Kuyper, see: Koch, Jeroen. *Abraham Kuyper: Een Biografie*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Boom Uitgeverij, 2006. For a recent English language biography, see Bratt, James. *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.

more and more the defence of Christianity in general rather than just a particular denominational entity (p. 227). While connected with the Free University (until the end of his life), he authored numerous books, not only of a theological nature but also on topics of psychology, biography, and pedagogy, and on the role of women and other social issues. The first edition of his four-volume *Christian Dogmatics* was completed in 1901. A second, significantly enlarged, edition appeared in 1911 (p. 241). It would not be until 2008 that a full English edition came off the press.² In addition, Bavinck entered the political arena. He served one (rather unsuccessful) term as chairman of the Anti-Revolutionary Party, the political party founded by Kuyper, and, subsequently, he was elected to membership in the Dutch Senate.

This section ends with a short description of the deteriorating health, death and burial of Bavinck, followed by a *postscript*, mostly dedicated to the person and work of Johanna, Bavinck's wife since 1891. She was not only increasingly active as a powerful voice for women's rights, but also did what she could to further disseminate her husband's writings beyond the Netherlands.

Characterisation of Herman Bavinck

The picture of Herman Bavinck that emerges in this meticulously researched book is that of a multi-talented, but also very ambitious, scholar, with a grand capacity for work and broad interests – who also ventured into the realm of church politics and national politics. Although of modest descent, he always felt “a powerful drive toward the centre and upper echelons of society” (p. 165). It must have pleased him to be invited to join several highly prestigious Dutch academic and cultural societies. The picture that emerges is also that of someone who valued international contacts, who enjoyed travel, and of someone who appreciated family life and was loyal to his friends. After he failed to win the hand and the heart of his first love, Amelia (p. 91), he enjoyed a happy family life with his wife Johanna and their daughter Hannie. He also maintained some lifelong friendships, as e.g., with Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1859–1936), who spurned Bavinck's theological convictions and became an expert of some fame on Islam (p. 81).

² Published in 2008 by Baker Academic (Grand Rapids).

One of the themes that is constantly reappearing in this biography is how Bavinck sought to relate his Reformed (neo-Calvinistic) theology with contemporary developments in the ecclesial and academic world. He believed that theology was to serve other sciences “as a modern integrative discipline, without which they would be doomed to an unfulfilling future of arbitrary coexistence” (p. 170). Christian doctrine, as he understood it, continued to have an answer to modern challenges, even to Nietzsche’s atheism. At the same time, it also needed to be formulated in such a way that it would be accessible to a wider public than only those with theological expertise. This was why, in 1913, he published a “simple” summary of Christian fundamentals in his *Guidebook for Instruction in the Christian Religion* (p. 262).

When following developments in the life and work of Bavinck, Abraham Kuyper is never far away. Their relationship was often complicated. They, in many ways, complemented each other, but there were also controversies and disagreements. “The differences between Kuyper and Bavinck were increasingly evident: While one [Kuyper] remained an idealist, the other [Bavinck] was increasingly open as a realist” (p. 231).

Evaluation

While the book offers a wealth of detail, it left me somewhat disappointed with regard to discovering more fully Bavinck’s theological development over time. I would have liked to find more information about the content of his key publications. I am, for instance, intrigued by the fact that Bavinck wrote a book about origins (*Creation and Evolution*; 1901), but disappointed that there is not at least a short summary of his views on this topic (p. 211). This criticism would also apply to some other important books which are just mentioned without much further information. I would also have liked to learn more about the development of Bavinck’s views on the inspiration of Scripture. He wrote in 1883 to his friend Snouck Hungronje: “I am in no way finished with my view of Scripture” (p. 138). So, where did his thinking on this topic eventually lead him? What I miss perhaps more than anything else is a special chapter on his *Christian Dogmatics*. How did he deal with various traditional doctrines? Where did he break new ground? How did the revision of 1911 differ from the original work, other than in its length?

But, apart from these (what I feel are) shortcomings, Eglinton has produced a wonderful biography. It has very extensive endnotes (81 pages) and a rich

bibliography (35 pages). The list of short descriptions of key figures, churches³, educational institutions and newspapers is very helpful. If the reader feels his/her appetite for Dutch church history has been whetted, I recommend an excellent handbook written by a group of scholars and edited by professor H. J. Selderhuis.⁴

And finally: I hope the book may be an inspiration to those scholars who in 2021 seek to connect their theology with the contemporary world. This was the lifelong aspiration of Herman Bavinck and his dealings with this challenge are increasingly appreciated by theologians in the Reformed world and beyond. I agree wholeheartedly with this statement explaining why reading Bavinck is a very worthwhile experience: “[Bavinck’s] expansive, nuanced, and deeply trinitarian theological vision is both intellectually challenging and spiritually nourishing.”⁵ The recent publication of the English translation of his magnum opus on dogmatics, with the title *Reformed Dogmatics* (2003–2008), has made this work more accessible to the English speaking world and many recognize the ongoing relevance thereof, as Bavinck was not afraid to deal with major issues in confronting the Christian faith, and value the pastoral and open approach that is found throughout his work.

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³ A chart of the relationship between the various Reformed denominations in the Netherlands (with dates of establishment and of mergers etc.) would also have been useful.

⁴ Selderhuis, Herman J. *Handbook of Dutch Church History*. Göttingen: V & R, 2014. This is a translation of the original Dutch edition: *Handboek Nederlandse Kerkgeschiedenis*. Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2006.

⁵ Derek Rashmahy, Ph. D. candidate at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/why-you-should-read-bavinck/> (accessed March 3, 2021).

Book Review

John C. Peckham. *The Doctrine of God: Introducing the Big Questions*. London: T&T Clark, 2020. 262 pp.

The Doctrine of God is an introductory textbook aiming to provide a clear and concise introduction to the doctrine of God by addressing some big questions concerning divine attributes and the God-world relationship in mainly recent Christian theology. More precisely the book provides an issue-focused presentation on selected contemporary perspectives. The book in its coverage is however not limited only to recent Christian debates, but frequently features also philosophical and historical voices which complement the debates. The book is therefore not a book in historical theology, or philosophical theology, but rather a book in systematic theology proper covering the contemporary debates relating to major questions surrounding the doctrine of God. Since the book is framed as an introductory textbook its readership is assumed to be mostly students of theology. Given the level of the presented material, its dense and detailed nature will primarily be most beneficial to graduate level (postgraduate or master's level) students, yet certainly readers beyond the formal academic setting will also benefit from the book's concise syntheses.

John C. Peckham is a professor of theology and Christian philosophy at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. While still relatively young, Peckham is already an accomplished author of several books published by major publishing houses including Baker, Eerdmans or IVP Academic. Since Peckham's specialization is the theology of God, he is in prime position to provide an introductory text on contemporary approaches to this subject.

The Doctrine of God, in its nature, is an analytical book synthesising major dialogues into a digestible format. Because of this, the book does not offer Peckham's critical engagement with the presented positions. Throughout, the author tries to stay neutral and present the material from a dispassionate analytical perspective. Given this fact, the book review will proceed not by engaging critically with specific arguments the book raises (apart from two

issues raised at the end of the review), but rather it will aim to provide a distilled summary of the quite detailed synthesis the book offers.

Before we start providing such a distilled synthesis, it is worth pointing out that the book follows the same structure in all chapters. Each chapter contains a concise yet detailed discussion regarding a specific topic concerning a divine attribute, followed by an overview of Scriptural places pertinent to the subject, a section on further questions and a section on major sources relevant for the subject. Thus, the overall structuring of chapters demonstrates that this book aims to be a textbook.

Lastly, it has to be said that Peckham utilises the footnote section extremely well by providing the readers with a broad ranging overview of the major resources and key names. Yet the references are not overdone. They are just on the right level for a book of this nature.

Peckham begins by introducing first the nature of systematic theology. This helps the reader to understand the basic definitions and perspectives which delimit the book's framework. He will come back to some of the points – particularly about the Scripture's normative place for systematic theology – in the final epilogue to indicate where he sees space to advance discussions regarding the nature of systematic theology since most of classical and historical systematic theologies were and are done by borrowing philosophical categories – as he notes right at the beginning (pp. 3–4).

Once the book introduces the issue regarding theological method, from page 4, it introduces the broad theological landscape of the contemporary theology of God. Particularly students – who are the primary intended readership – will find this helpful because they are getting a high altitude overview of the shape of the “forest” before they are taken deeper into the forest itself – which as they will discover soon is quite a dense place.

In this high-altitude overview, classical theism is introduced as the main, broad yet not monolithic category. The main questions of classical theism are presented as those of God being the perfect being, necessarily existent, self-sufficient, simple, eternal, immutable, impassible, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (p. 5). These concepts in turn will become the primary topics of the book.

Peckham begins the debate by pointing out that to a large extent the doctrine of God in classical theism has been shaped by Platonic, Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian categories and hence major diversity exists in the contemporary

scene regarding how it is received and interpreted today. This leads to a necessary delineation of the terms. Peckham introduces traditional (strict), modified or moderate (qualified) and revised (open theism and process theology) classical theism. All these terms are further nuanced to show how they operate when it comes to specific questions relating to divine attributes. Peckham initially provides a set of examples to demonstrate their basic outlook.

Overall, the introduction provides a clear and concise, yet quite sharp overview of the terms, names, concerns and main sources involved in the big debate about God.

It is evident from the introductory chapter 1 that in terms of the argumentation, Peckham is not in pursuit of a critical or deconstructive approach (even though where he is leaning is discernible and he could have engaged with such positions more critically if he wanted to); nor is he following a reconstructive approach providing his own answers and solutions. Rather, as he says, his overall aim is not trying "to prescribe the way forward... but to map out the contemporary landscape in a way that provides an introductory entry point ..." (p. 23).

Chapter 2 takes the reader into the forest itself. The first major question – divine passibility or impassibility is discussed. The questions are: Does God have emotions? Does God change? Can God be affected by the actions of his creation? Within the contemporary horizon, Peckham recognises four main positions. (1) Utter immutability and strict impassibility (impassibility being the sub-category of immutability). This position affirms pure aseity, meaning God does not depend on anything. He is timeless and simple. Strict classical theism affirms external, sensational and internal impassibility. In this sense, as Peckham points out, God is not really related to the world, the world is related to God (p. 34). Among the key protagonists, Peckham lists, Katherin Rogers, James Dolezal, Steven Duby, Thomas Williams, Paul Helm, Brian Leftow, Thomas Weinandy and Gilles Emery from contemporary voices and Anselm, Aquinas and Augustine from historical ones.

At the other end of the spectrum is (2) the ethical immutability and strong essential passibility of process theism. Such a position, as Peckham summarises, holds God to be maximally and universally sympathetic. However, as the author suggests, this position is also a form of panentheism (the world is *in* God, but God is more than the world) especially in the version of Hartshorne. Peckham points out that while Jüngel and Moltmann also condone

strong passibility, they propose alternative forms of it, as does Thomas J. Oord with his essential kenosis theology or theocasmocentrism (God is essentially related to the world).

In the middle of the road is what Peckham terms (3) qualified immutability and qualified impassibility. This proposes that God is really related to the world. God is relationally mutable but not in his essential nature. He is mutable in his relation to the world only. This position, Peckham also defines as revised impassibility. Those holding this position criticise what they see as Stoic influence running from Origen to Maimonides to Kant – denying that God experiences joy or sorrow. Peckham shows how many contemporary scholars, including Torrance, McCormac, R. Lister, M. Horton, K. Vanhoozer, D. Bloesch, and B. Ware subscribe to this vision of God's immutability and impassibility.

Still, Peckham takes his readers further into the forest by indicating that there is yet a further qualification on the contemporary scene – (4) qualified immutability and qualified passibility. In this version, God is immutable in his essential nature, yet also voluntarily relational and hence changes relationally. Therefore, God is not immutable in the strict sense. Among others, Peckham names Steven Davis, Allan Padgett, Thomas Oden, Ronald Nash, Clark Pinnock, Wayne Grudem, Alvin Plantinga, and John Stott as subscribers to this position.

The discussion Peckham provides in chapter 2, already demonstrates that the issues relating to basic and major questions relative to God's attributes are complex and diverse. While the chapter provides an entry point to the debate on God's attributes, it is evident that Peckham is not trying to oversimplify the issues, but that he includes a necessary level of complexity in his analysis.

Chapter 3 focuses on another major question – divine timelessness or atemporality (being outside of time) and the related question of divine omnipresence. Here, Peckham offers a threefold categorization of perspectives on these questions: (1) Strict classical theism and its affirmation of divine timelessness. He also discusses five major criticisms of it that have emerged in the contemporary debate; (2) God is timeless and not timeless. God is somehow both atemporal and temporal. Being outside of time and yet entering into time. This is sometimes called "temporal omnipresence" (p. 83). In this regard, Peckham here, offers his own rephrasing of the position by suggesting that "God is neither temporal nor atemporal in the way creatures are" (p. 84). Finally, (3) divine temporality is the opposite position to strict timelessness. God

is eternal yet he also experiences temporal succession. Here process theists and open theists argue in favour of an utterly temporal view.

Regarding the related question of God's omnipresence, Peckham demonstrates that this is a question shrouded in considerable mystery and hence multiple perspectives exist regarding the topic. He discusses those multiple views on pp. 100–103.

Chapter 4, presents another complex issue: Does God know everything? Does God know the future? Peckham here presents the question of divine omniscience and various approaches to it. Additionally, the author also includes the related question of the free will of creatures since much of the debate about omniscience revolves around this question. Given the complexity and the depth of the questions, Peckham categorizes the answers into five categories. (1) Theistic determinism – confirms full knowledge of God and hence leads to causal determinism. (2) Open solution – God knows all there is to know. God does not have exhaustive knowledge due to the limits of liberty of creatures. Peckham places into this category open and process theists. (3) The Ockhamist solution – God's knowing of the future does not necessitate it. God has evident cognition of all future contingents (Ockham, p. 119). (4) The Boethian solution, also known as the atemporalist solution - God knows the future directly, but does not know beforehand – rather all times are present to God. Knowledge of all things is eternal and located before the free choice question. Finally, Peckham lists (5) the Molinist solution – God knows the future via middle knowledge. He knows what creatures might do freely (developed by Luis de Molina in the 16th century).

Throughout the analysis, Peckham maintains his distance from the issues and does not engage in critical dialogue with various positions or theories. Such engagement would simply make the book far bigger and unworkable as an entry point textbook to contemporary discussions. Peckham tries to keep everything within the framework of debate with different angles without adjudicating among views. His analysis while detailed and penetrating is not trying to swing the reader one way or the other.

In chapter 5, John Peckham invites the reader to consider the question of divine omnipotence – the extent and exercise of divine power. Can God do anything and everything? Does God cause everything? These are the core questions under consideration, according to Peckham. Additionally, the related issue which the chapter discusses is the implication divine omnipotence

has for the topic of divine providence and consequently for the topic of free will or creaturely freedom. In short, the question of determinism is also discussed in the chapter. Peckham recognises three main positions regarding the question of divine omnipotence and determinism and further two more sub-positions. (1) The theistic determinism of classical theism – argues that God causally determines everything. Everything in the world is the result of divine determinism. Such a position is not compatible with libertarian free will. Peckham importantly notes that “[m]ost Christian determinists, however, maintain that humans are morally responsible for their actions and possess a kind of ‘free will’ that is compatible with causal determinism” (p. 151). Such a position is then called compatibilist free will. The question of divine responsibility for evil naturally arises. Here some theistic determinists argue that while God causes all, including evil, it is not evil for God because divine causation is for good purposes (p. 154).

The second position (2) suggests that God acts only by persuasion, thus the extent of his power is limited by persuasion. This position, as Peckham notes is once again the polar extreme to theistic determinism. This view maintains that God is omnipotent in persuasive power – a position held by process theology. (3) That God is omnipotent but grants significant freedom is the middle position sitting between the first two answers. In this view, God is omnipotent and could determine everything, yet he does not causally determine it. This is sometimes called sovereign indeterminism. Peckham further notes, that there are two important variations within the third perspective. One is the view of open theism – God is omnipotent but uncertain about the future. Another variation of sovereign indeterminism is Molinism – God possesses exhaustive foreknowledge but does not always get what he wants. He knows the most preferable route to the future and hence the future is certain. While these positions present fine nuances, Peckham includes them in the discussion to demonstrate the complexity and variability of answers which are involved in answering some of the basic confessions of Christian theism. The analysis amply demonstrates that even these basic confessions regarding God’s attributes have been understood in manifold and often contradictory ways.

The chapter concludes with an introductory discussion about human free will since the topic will be picked up more fully in the next chapter. Peckham presents the determinist, indeterminist and compatibilist options available within the contemporary scene.

Is God entirely good, is the question of chapter 6. The question is related to the question of evil – why evil if God is entirely good? Ultimately, this leads the author to discuss the hotly contested topic of theodicy. Once again, the question of divine omnibenevolence is related to the question of free will, which the last section in chapter 5 already introduced. In chapter 6, Peckham takes the reader quite a bit deeper into the forest, yet he does it here under the umbrella of theodicy and omnibenevolence. There are eight specific propositions which Peckham discusses in the chapter. (1) The determinist approach – God is not the author of evil, even when God causes evil, he does not do so with evil intentions. (2) Sceptical theism – is sceptical about the human capacity to understand divine reasons relative to evil - for example Plantinga (p. 179). Peckham also mentions, as he usually does also with other positions, critics of this view such as Bart Ehrman. (3) Process theodicy and finitist approaches – defuse the problem by denying divine omnipotence, while finitists argue that God does not possess the power to prevent evil – therefore is not culpable for it. (4) The protest or anti-theodicy approach – suggest that theodicies legitimise evil. Some in this group claim God may not be entirely good (for example John K. Roth, p. 181). As Peckham notes, this is not a viable option for the vast majority of Christian theists, because it challenges divine goodness. (5) The free will defence approaches – propose evil is the result of the misuse of creaturely free will. Peckham suggest that importantly Alvin Plantinga has argued convincingly the case from a philosophical perspective. (6) In Open Theism – God is not culpable because he did not know with certainty what evils would occur. (7) *Felix culpa* and the greater good answers – maintain evil is necessary for the greater good, hence *felix culpa* – happy fault, referring to the fall in the sense it did more good than evil – a position which according to Peckham has a long history going back to Ambrose of Milan, Augustine, Aquinas or Schleiermacher. Today John Hicks (“soul-making theodicy”) and Richard Swinburne (“higher-order goods defence”) argue the case along the same lines. (8) Cosmic conflict approaches – provide a free will defence which places the question of evil into a celestial framework. While this is also Peckham’s own model of explanation of divine omnibenevolence and theodicy (*Theodicy of God’s Love: Cosmic Conflict and the Problems of Evil*, 2018) he also names C. S. Lewis and Kevin Vanhoozer as protagonists of this view.

With these questions out of the way, the book offers a concise introduction to the topic of the triune God in its last chapter 7. Methodologically or pedagogically Peckham argues that it is better to address the question of the Trinity after the questions relating to divine attributes are discussed. The question of how God can be one and three is taken by the chapter as the lead question and is discussed from the point of view of the Nicene Creed and the angle of divine simplicity. Furthermore, Peckham helpfully introduces the contemporary, mainly evangelical, scene with regards to the question of the eternal procession of Christ and the eternal subordination theories which surfaced in recent evangelical debates.

The debates about the conceptions of the Trinity are framed by three different perspectives. (1) Singularity and Latin theories – suggesting the persons of the Trinity are one unity, sharing one faculty of reason, will and consciousness. (2) Relational and Social theories – utilize social and relational language. (3) Relational identity theories – also called relational Trinitarianism – suggest the trinitarian persons are numerically the same but not identical. Divine persons are genuinely distinct, yet by virtue of their consubstantiality, one and the same God (p. 211).

What will interest readers is also the synthesis Peckham provides with regards to the contemporary evangelical debates about eternal generation of Christ (the issue implicated by the language of “begotten” in the early creeds). The debate mainly turns on whether Christ is eternally or temporarily subordinate to the Father. Grudem or Ware prefer the former, while Erickson or Bilezikian opt for the later. The debate has implications – though not discussed in the book – on ecclesiology and hierarchical or functional understandings of ministry. As with other chapters, also the last one provides a detailed presentation of biblical places which are utilised in the debates.

Finally, the chapter finishes with a discussion about divine simplicity, a key concept looming large in the debate about the Trinity. Peckham sums up the three main positions (1) Strict simplicity (there are no distinctions in God); (2) Formal simplicity (there are only formal distinctions in God); (3) Generic simplicity (there are genuine distinctions in God), after which he concludes his overview by referring to scholars like Nash, Plantinga, Thompson and Lundberg who suggest divine simplicity should be eliminated from the discussion and rather the focus should fall on divine unity (p. 234).

Formally the book ends with an epilogue and the important sections of glossary and index, both of which will be greatly valued by the student readers who could quickly find definitions of the many complex terms used in the book.

At the end, it is worth raising a couple of points which to the reviewer stand out from Peckham's overall analysis and synthesis. One is about the level of collusion between classical (strict) theism and Hellenistic philosophy. Peckham repeatedly brings out the problematic level of dependence of classical theism on the conceptual language of philosophy. The specific section on "Hellenization hypothesis" demonstrates this concern (pp.60–66). What becomes then implicitly shocking in this regard is the case of some conservative protestant and evangelical scholars who, as the analysis demonstrates, are willing to collude with non-biblical conceptions in order to protect the historic and traditional confessions of the church about God.

The second point that stands out somewhat from Peckham's analysis is that the doctrine of God occupies the central place in systematic theology's structure and yet it is an area that is deeply controversial, loaded with layers of unscriptural tradition and hence ultimately leads to questions over methodology and specifically the place of Scripture in systematic theology. It is no surprise then that Peckham in his epilogue announces his new book which was published recently: *Divine Attributes: Knowing the Covenantal God of Scripture* (Baker Academic, 2021). It constructively proposes an approach to the doctrine of God, called "covenantal theism". Importantly though, this new book appears to be a mission which will strive to place the Scriptures in their methodologically central place. It will be interesting to watch then how Peckham's new book will complement and advance the many issues which the book reviewed here, brings out.

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Book Review

Jacques B. Doukhan. *Genesis: Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 2016. 544 pp.

Jacques Doukhan is both the author of *Genesis* and the editor of the Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary. *Genesis* is the first release of this series and is intended as a model for all subsequent commentaries. Similar to other biblical commentaries, *Genesis* covers the entire book of Genesis. In this regard, the editors mention two important pieces of information in the preface: the project's intent is to reach beyond our confessional frontiers and also to serve as an update to the classic Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC). The main difference in the title is the addition of "international", which seems to indicate the diversity of the authors' backgrounds. Jacques Doukhan, for example, is originally from Algeria, grew up and received education in France and was Andrews University's professor for decades. Doukhan earned a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Hebrew Literature from the University of Strasbourg and a Th.D. from Andrews University (USA). His Th.D. dissertation was on Genesis ("The Literary Structure of the Genesis Creation Story," 1978), which means that he has a deep knowledge of the subject at hand. *Genesis* is over five hundred pages long (including bibliography) and follows the verse-by-verse commentary formula.

Doukhan's *Genesis* is filled with some fresh insights and although it may not be a groundbreaking commentary, it is a solid work and dialogues well with classical and modern critics, covering not just theological aspects, but also presenting archaeological and linguistic details. Among those, the brief commentary on Genesis 22:14, connecting Abraham's ram offering with the Day of Atonement, is particularly interesting. Doukhan's ability to connect Jewish tradition with his exegesis, so prominent in his other publications, is present in this commentary too. The most interesting moments in *Genesis* are precisely those; for instance, when he comments on Genesis 16:1 pointing to Genesis Rabbah (p. 229: footnote 502). All in all, *Genesis'* footnotes are enlightening.

In his brief “Introduction”, Doukhan writes about Genesis’ authorship and setting. Although the scholarly discussion on both topics is extensive and thorny, he tries, in just a few pages, to summarize the complexity of biblical criticism and, at the same time, to defend Mosaic authorship; an impossible task which he accomplishes with very questionable success. However, the weakest link in Doukhan’s first pages is his attempt to present a literary structure. After pointing towards two widely established macro-structures, he discloses a chiasmic structure that mixes the *’ēllē tōlēdōt* formula with the phrasal construction *lek-leka* from the Abraham cycle. His proposal is as follows (p. 31):

- A Eden: Adam (1–2)
- B From Eden to Babel (3–11)
- C From Babel to Promised Land (12–22:19)
- B’ From Promised Land to Egypt (12:20–48:20)
- A’ Prospect of Promised Land: Israel (48:21–50:26)

Among several questionable decisions in this proposal, let me point out two: First, many of the words, constructions and themes are recurrent and form a net that strongly links Genesis 2:4–4:26. Some of these links are: (a) a paronomasia between *’ārūmmîm* and *’ārūm* in Genesis 2:25 and 3:1; (b) the expressions *kōl-hayyat haśśādeh* (Gen. 2:19; 3:1) and *’ēšeb haśśādê* (Gen. 2:5; 3:18); (c) the verbs *’ākal* and *’ābad* are strongly connected in Genesis 2 and 3; (d) the noun *’ādāmāh* links Genesis 2, 3 and 4. Thematically, Genesis 2–4 presents the original relationship between God-humans-earth and the reversion of this relationship. There is plenty of literary evidence that does not render acceptable the breaking of this narrative section into two different sections.

Second, a considerable number of scholars understand the formula *’ēllē tōlēdōt* to be an obvious heading. For example, Matthew Thomas concludes: “A good heading provides continuity with the preceding material while presenting new material that will be the subject of the following section. As seen above, the *toledot* formula fulfills these functions. Another feature of a heading is that it causes the reader to pause and notice that a new section is at hand.”¹

¹ Thomas, Matthew A. *These Are the Generations: Identity, Covenant, and the Toledot Formula*. New York and London: T & T Clark, 2011, 37.

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In fact, Doukhan’s literary structure proposal ignores important literary features; one receives the impression that he does so to place the Abraham cycle as the centre of the book of Genesis. Unfortunately, this impression persists, mainly because Doukhan’s penchant for chiasmic structures appears everywhere, even at the price of ignoring literary features that are clearly present in the narratives.

Since chiasmus is a literary feature, it is important to acknowledge that it does need a literary form. This means that it is necessary to establish literary standards of control to recognize and legitimize chiasmic structures that should not solely be based on the will of the scholar. Many have succumbed to identifying chiasmic structures in large portions of the biblical text based on thematic correspondence alone. Others use the intense repetition of some words and phrases in biblical narratives and poetry as easy avenues to carve out chiasmic structures. However, more times than scholars tend to admit, there is a tendency to highlight some terms whilst ignoring others, based more on the scholar’s perception rather than on the text’s nuances. This seems to be the case in Doukhan’s *Genesis*, and not just in the “Introduction”.

It would be preferable to follow a more conservative literary approach, using the *toledot* formulas as headings and then dividing the book of Genesis into twelve sections:

Gen. 1:1–2:3	In the beginning
Gen 2:4–4:26	Heavens and earth
Gen 5:1–6:8	Adam
Gen 6:9–9:29	Noah
Gen 10:1–11:9	Sons of Noah
Gen 11:10–11:26	Shem
Gen 11:27–25:11	Terah
Gen 25:12–25:18	Ishmael
Gen 25:19–35:29	Isaac
Gen 36:1–36:8	Esau
Gen 36:9–37:1	Esau and sons
Gen 37:2–50:26	Jacob

Genesis, being a Seventh-day Adventist commentary, suffers from its utter absence of dialogue with Laurence Turner's old, but still groundbreaking *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*.² Some points there deserved consideration; for example, Turner's explanation of Isaac's blessings to his sons in Genesis 27 and at the beginning of Genesis 28. Turner's volume is one of the more interesting literary works on Genesis and, unfortunately, continues to be largely ignored in SDA academic circles.

Furthermore, apart from John Walton's 2001 NIVAC commentary, Doukhan never mentions any of this scholar's other publications which are some of the most relevant works on Genesis in recent Christian literature.³ Jacques Doukhan already responded to some of Walton's claims in an article⁴ and it would be a shame to not have that included in *Genesis* throughout the commentary. To utterly ignore Walton's controversialist works may prove to be a mistake in the long run.

Still concerning the Bibliography, a comment on the section "Selected Annotated Bibliography" concerning Robert Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative* really does seem to miss the point of Alter's extensive corpus of work (p. 528). Alter does not deny historicity, he just elaborates that it is not the main focus of any narrative. Maybe this quote may help elucidate his argument: "Every narrative that purports to be historical presents its details first of all because they "really" happened."⁵ The quotation marks on "really" is a reminder that the reality is not the ultimate reality, but the narrator's view of reality. Thus, Alter in no way denies the historicity of Genesis' narratives; he just argues that the narrator is working on a literary level too, contributing artistry and

² Turner, Laurence A. *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*. JSOTS 96. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990. (Re-published 2008: Wipf and Stock, Eugene.)

³ Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009; Walton, John H. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2015.

⁴ Doukhan, Jacques B. "A Response to John H. Walton's Lost World of Genesis One." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49.1, 2011.

⁵ Alter, Robert. *The World of Biblical Literature*. New York: Basic Books, 1992, 90.

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intertextuality to the story telling. As a matter of fact, as Laurence Turner already pointed out,⁶ Seventh-day Adventist scholars have a difficulty dealing with literary criticism, and Doukhan's *Genesis*, unfortunately, seems to be one more example of precisely that.

Jacques Doukhan's *Genesis* is a solid Seventh-day Adventist commentary on the book of Genesis. It is a clear step up in comparison to the old SDABC. It covers well some important issues and creates some interesting dialogues with Christian and Jewish sources and scholars. However, it lacks progress in many areas, like the discussion of what "rest" in Genesis 2:2–3 truly means. The brilliance encountered in Doukhan's other works related to Genesis and Daniel, for instance, flashes here and there, but does not give rise to a brilliant overall Genesis commentary.

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⁶ Turner, Laurence A. "The Costly Lack of Literary Imagination in Seventh-day Adventist Biblical Interpretation." Børge Schantz, ed. *Exploring the Frontiers of Faith: Festschrift in Honour of Dr Jan Paulsen*. Lüneburg: Advent-Verlag, 2009, 261–276.