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**Post-metaphysical God-talk and its implications for Christian theology:
Sin and salvation in view of Richard Kearney's *God Who May Be***

by

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Drie vers sestien

*Sy begin besef,
slang of geen slang,
dood of geen dood,
god of geen god,
die kennis sou sy haarself
die een of ander tyd wel toe-eien.
En wat oorbyl is die hunkering.*

22 Januarie 2008

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DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENT WORK

Student full name: Yolande Steenkamp

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Subject of dissertation: Post-metaphysical God-talk and its implications for Christian theology: Sin and salvation in view of Richard Kearney's *God Who May Be*

Declaration:

- (i) I understand the concept plagiarism and am aware of the University's policy in this regard.
- (ii) I declare that this dissertation is my own, original work. Where the work of others was used (whether from a printed source, the Internet or any other), such sources were duly recognised and referenced in accordance with departmental requirements.
- (iii) No work previously created by any other student or person was used under the pretence that it is my own.
- (iv) I have not, nor will I allow anybody to copy my work with the purpose of presenting it as zir own work.

Ms Y Steenkamp

Date

GENDER SENSITIVITY AND SCRIPTURE CITATIONS

1 Gender sensitivity

As a reflection of the author's personal stance, this study has made use of gender inclusive and/or gender neutral language as consistently as possible. While everything written by the author reflects this approach, sections that deal with the position of other authors may at times revert to androcentric language, but only when the use of inclusive or neutral language would threaten to misrepresent the argument of the original author. Naturally, all quotations preserve the gender approach of the original source.

	Subject	Object	Possessive adjective	Possessive pronoun	Reflexive
Female	she	her	her	hers	herself
Male	he	him	his	his	himself
Gender neutral	ze	zir	zir	zirs	zirself
Pronunciation					
	ze	zir		zirs	zirself
	zee	here		heres	hereself

2 Citations from Scripture

Unless otherwise indicated, all citations from Scripture are from the following sources:

English: New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Hebrew: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS).

Greek: *Nestlé-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28 (NA 28).

SUMMARY

A recent proposal for a post-metaphysical re-imagination of God has come from Irish philosopher Richard Kearney in his widely acclaimed monograph, *The God who may be: A hermeneutics of religion* (2001). Writing as a philosopher, and approaching his subject matter mainly by means of phenomenology and hermeneutic returns to biblical texts, Kearney invites theologians to contribute to the discussion from a specifically theological point of view. It is the intention of this thesis to accept Kearney's invitation and address both the challenges and opportunities posed to Christian theology by such a post-metaphysical re-reading of God.

Specifically, the thesis investigates the implications of post-metaphysical reimaginings of God for the theological categories of hamartiology and soteriology. When metaphysical assumptions no longer convince, how may we begin to reimagine the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, as well as salvation offered to a "fallen" humanity? The thesis proposes that a hermeneutical re-reading of certain counter-traditions in Scripture may assist the Church explore new ways forward. Specifically, such traditions may enable believers to traverse the polar opposites of atheism (the necessary death of the metaphysical God) on the one hand, and philosophically ignorant repetitions of theological formulations that no longer hold water, on the other, since both of these polarised options are undesirable on their extremities.

The methodology that the thesis applies is based on hermeneutical re-readings of biblical narratives and traditions. It re-engages those voices in the history of interpretation of biblical texts that offered alternative possibilities to the metaphysical way in which God (or sin and salvation) has traditionally been imagined. As such, we attempt an archaeology of the *yetser*, an Old Testament concept of imagination, and pay special attention to its Talmudic reinterpretation. The Gospel narratives of the Annunciation and Transfiguration, as well as the window that *Song of Songs* opens on the metaphor of the desire of God also receives special mention.

What results from this approach is, first, yet another deconstruction of the Augustinian formulation of original sin, as well as an eschatological reinterpretation

of the Christ event in terms of the messianic Kingdom of God. Christ, who submits his *yetser* to the will of the Father in an act of worshipful surrender, becomes the perfect embodiment of the Word of God to a humanity whose *yetser* is perpetually put in service of itself in an act of idolatry. The enabling of the Kingdom of God in Jesus, who embodies the human *telos*, captures the human imagination and transfigures humanity through the existential experience of transcendence which breaks into its concrete reality through the Christ-event and its retelling. In this way, realising eschatology is possibilised through the imagination. Christ as prototype of the divinely intended *telos* of humanity becomes an existential possibility via the transfiguration, enacted by the imagination. This enables humanity to become co-creators with God of his new creation, or Kingdom of God.

Such an interpretation proposes an eschatological approach to God (a God of *posse*) as an alternative to the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnicausal God of metaphysics (the God of *esse*). Whereas the God of *esse* faces the discrediting of philosophy, is ever haunted by the conundrum of theodicy, and is a God torn between his love for and his judgment of a humankind caught in a perpetually sinful state, the God of *posse* captures the free *yetser* of humankind and ever calls creation forward to its fulfilment in God's Messianic Kingdom of love and justice.

Keywords: post-metaphysical theology; postmodern theology; Richard Kearney; God Who May Be; eschatology; soteriology; Christology; original sin; hamartiology; anatheism.

GRACE IS ALL

If I could ask that you overlook these words,
And notice, instead, the whiteness holding them
If I could ask you to do that
Even at the beginning of an academic study
Even as it illustrates
My lack of eloquence
My own imaginative void
If I could do that
Then maybe it would be better said
That my whole being
Truly all of it
Even the silence that holds this moment
Is grateful for the wholeness of this story.
I exclude nothing.
No Eden. No Eden lost.
No thing. No absence of a thing.
I am
Simply
Grateful for all of it.
Grateful to each of you.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

... since the fall of Adam all men begotten in the natural way are born with sin, that is, without the fear of God, without trust in God, and with concupiscence; and that this disease, or vice of origin, is truly sin, even now condemning and bringing eternal death upon those not born again through Baptism and the Holy Ghost ("Augsburg Confession" n.d.:24).

With this formulation, the early Reformers indicated a return to the radical view of original sin as originally worked out by Augustine, a doctrine that had become somewhat softened around the edges in Scholastic theology,¹ thereby paving the way for an emphasis on the fallen state of humanity that still characterises the Reformed tradition to this day. The emphasis on sin is also apparent from the structure of some of the most important confessions of Reformed faith. The Heidelberg Catechism, for instance, after Lord's Day 1 establishes in its very first part ("Of the misery of the human person"), that human nature has become corrupted to the extent that the human person is prone to hate both God and nature, and is fully conceived and born in sin (cf. question and answer 5 and 7). The Canons of Dort, for its part, establishes the "curse" on all humanity for having sinned in Adam in its very first article.

Is the question of sin a necessary one to return to, however? Should we not simply, along with liberal theology, replace the grim view of the human person described above with a naïvely optimistic view of the basic goodness of humanity,

¹ In the *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*, Phillip Melanchthon responded to the refutation of Charles V and the Vatican representatives in a way that further expounds the radical interpretation of original sin by the Reformers as a corrective to Scholastic theology. Cf. the entire Article II, and, e.g., "For some contend that original sin is not a depravity or corruption in the nature of man, but only servitude, or a condition of mortality [not an innate evil nature, but only a blemish or imposed load, or burden], which those propagated from Adam bear because of the guilt of another [namely, Adam's sin], and without any depravity of their own. Besides, they add that no one is condemned to eternal death on account of original sin, just as those who are born of a bond-woman are slaves, and bear this condition without any natural blemish, but because of the calamity of their mother [while, of themselves, they are born without fault, like other men: thus original sin is not an innate evil, but a defect and burden which we bear since Adam, but we are not on that account personally in sin and inherited disgrace]. To show that this impious opinion is displeasing to us, we made mention of 'concupiscence,' and, with the best intention, have termed and explained it as 'diseases,' that '*the nature of men is born corrupt and full of faults*' [*not a part of man, but the entire person with its entire nature is born in sin as with a hereditary disease*]. Nor, indeed, have we only made use of the term concupiscence, but we have also said that '*the fear of God and faith are wanting*.' ... We, therefore, have been right in expressing, in our description of original sin, both namely, these defects: the not being able to believe God, the not being able to fear and love God; and, likewise: the having concupiscence, which seeks carnal things contrary to God's Word, i.e., seeks not only the pleasure of the body, but also carnal wisdom and righteousness, and, contemning God, trusts in these as good things" (Melanchthon n.d.:52, 54).

and similarly dismiss notions of judgment and punishment altogether? This question seems naïve at best, inhabiting as we are a world haunted by the large scale displacement of people, the threat of terrorism, exploding statistics in modern slavery and disconcerting trajectories in terms of social, economic and ecological injustice. It seems we are sure to escape the sentimental theologising that modernism could afford as humanity felt itself break free from religious authority. One must either be schizophrenic or affirm the reality and radicality of evil in our world. Along with this affirmation, as theologians we must re-engage with such biblical symbols as forgiveness and the judgment of God. To contend, as this thesis does, that sin is better understood apart from an emphasis on ontology as a human “state of being” is not to claim that sin is not real. Human sin is serious, and carries consequences. The effects of sin are not only a matter of perception, but are often real and tangible, often taking on a corporate nature and even effecting culture at large (cf. Anderson 2009:54).

1.1 Preliminary remarks

The dialogically related subjects of sin and grace have occupied centre stage in Christian Theology ever since the initial Christological and Trinitarian questions had crystallised into the Ecumenical confessions of the early Christian era. The dialogical nature of the subjects of guilt and redemption precludes a post-metaphysical approach to the one, without considering the implications that such a reading will hold for the other. The doctrine of sin is, indeed, no isolated subdivision of Christian Theology, but relates to the other doctrines in such an integral way, that the implications of misreadings or unfortunate and detrimental theological constructions often only show their effects in other doctrines (Durand 1978:7).

Of no other doctrine is this truer that the doctrine of salvation, and it is here especially that we observe that, while salvation in Christ no doubt forms the centre of the biblical revelation, the doctrine of sin could never be relegated to a secondary position, since the two relate to each other as two sides of a coin, with the one presupposing the other (Durand 1978:7-8). This is reflected, as pointed out by Karl Barth in his 1937-1938 Gifford Lectures, by the structure decided upon by the Scottish Confession of 1560. Instead of formulating an independent doctrine of humanity’s sin (as was customary in most dogmatics, both ancient and modern, as

well as in other Reformed Confessions of the 16th century), the Scots Confession in articles 2 and 3 addresses humanity's dire fallen state in the context of God's magnificent acts of salvation in Christ (Barth 1960:44-45):

What it has to say about Adam's fall it says in Article 2 in connection with the doctrine of the destiny appointed for man by "our God." And what it has to say about what is called original sin appears in Article 3 as an introductory clause to the doctrine of saving faith in Jesus Christ, brought about by the Holy Spirit, a doctrine which is here directly expressed for the first time. The Scottish Confession indicates in the strongest of terms the horror of the fact that man became and is a sinner, by setting it clearly in a connection in which it is both preceded and followed by the grace of God, the Creator and Reconciler of men. But it is in this connection that it occurs. The authors of our confession manifestly wished to avoid considering even for a moment this fact of sin separately and as such. That man is against God is true and important and has to be taken seriously. But what is even truer, more important and to be taken more seriously is the other fact that God in Jesus Christ is for man. And it is only from the standpoint of the latter fact that it can be seen how true and important the former is, and how seriously it must be taken.

1.2 Research problem

But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation (Rom 5:11).

The joyful conviction of the earliest believers, expressed above in the words of the apostle Paul, that humanity has found redemption in Christ, is arguably the single most unifying aspect of the New Testament (NT). What the NT tradition is less clear about, however, is exactly *how* this redemption takes place (Anderson 2009:193). If the doctrine of the atonement, as Williams puts it, "is the claim that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ effects a reconciliation between God and human beings," then the history of doctrine reveals the development of several theories of atonement that attempt to make sense of exactly what such a statement should be understood to mean (Williams 2004:n.p.; cf. Anderson 2009:193-194). If humanity is reconciled through Jesus Christ, *how* does such a reconciliation work? What is the nature of the sin that necessitates such a reconciliation in the first place? Our return to these questions in this study is made with a specific aim in mind, namely to explore post-metaphysical ways of speaking of nature and grace, sin and redemption, estrangement and reconciliation.

The understanding of sin and salvation in classical Church doctrine has been determined in significant ways by metaphysical assumptions uncritically adopted from Hellenistic philosophy. Concerning itself with the implications for the theological categories of hamartiology and soteriology, this study wishes to investigate how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, as well as the salvation offered to a “fallen” humanity, may be understood once metaphysical assumptions have been deconstructed. Are there traditions and counter-traditions in Scripture, a re-reading of which can assist the church in traversing the extremes of atheism (the necessary death of a metaphysical God) on the one hand, and an uncritical, philosophically ignorant and increasingly fundamentalist repetition of the metaphysical assumptions that adorned the landscape of the theology of yonder years, on the other (the stubborn clinging to the idol of anthromorphic certitude)?

Whether evil should be understood as possessing ontological existence, is a question that has occupied theologians for centuries. From Augustine’s *provatio boni* to Barth’s reference to the great nothing, theologians have attempted to steer clear of an understanding of evil that would locate it in the very nature of creation. Ironically, the same sensitivity has not always been extended to sin, so that “transgression,” “debt,” and especially “original sin” have often been described in ways that assume ontological existence. Original sin, specifically, locates “real sin” in the very nature or state of human existence.

It is precisely this ontological and metaphysical tendency in describing the “fall” and “salvation” of humanity that this thesis takes issue with. In this, the current study proceeds from two previous dissertations, the first of which explored Richard Kearney’s post-metaphysical “God of small things” (Steenkamp 2011), and the second of which evaluated Kearney’s more fully developed, post-metaphysical God *Who May Be* from a theological point of view (Steenkamp 2012, published by Scholarium in 2014). Because the 2012 study recognised that Kearney’s God *Who May Be* opened fertile grounds for interdisciplinary exploration between philosophy, theology proper and philosophy of religion, it suggested that Kearney’s proposal deserves thorough theological engagement. The current study proceeds from this conviction and the general theological evaluation of the previous study to investigate a particular, dialogically related category of systematic theology, namely that of

hamartiology-soteriology. The thesis provides a multi-layered contextual overview of these doctrines, and then attempts a reinterpretation in dialogue with Kearney's post-metaphysical system of thought. In this way, it wishes to determine whether Kearney's eschatological God of *posse*, as well his hermeneutical-phenomenological approach to the imagination, provides new and creative avenues along which theology may reimagine sin and salvation.

1.3 Hypothesis

1.3.1 The interpretation of sin in the history of the doctrine of the Church, and correspondingly the understanding of salvation in Christ, has been profoundly influenced by the Greek metaphysical tradition and its emphasis on ontology.

1.3.2 Scripture provides us with narratives that potentially deconstruct the metaphysical assumptions that have determined the interpretation of these biblical directives in classic Church Doctrine. Narratives that will receive special attention in this thesis are the Eden narrative, the Annunciation, the transfiguration on the mount, and finally the desire encountered in Song of Songs.

1.3.3 The contribution of philosopher Richard Kearney on the imagination and on the post-metaphysical interpretation of God as *posse* rather than as *esse*, provides a framework through which the Scriptural narratives surrounding sin and salvation may be fruitfully reinterpreted.

1.4 Research method

No methodology lends us direct, unmediated access to the semantic content of the abstract constructs of "sin" and "salvation." So Ricoeur already pointed out in his seminal *The symbolism of evil* (1967). Our only guideposts on a journey of reinterpretation are the metaphors inherited from our traditions. It is these metaphors that together have constructed interconnected narrative complexes, and in deconstructing the ecclesial narratives of sin and salvation, we must return *ad fontes*, to apply the Reformational dictum anew, to an appreciative exploration of the origin of our stories and our stories of origin (Anderson 2009:5; cf. 2009:38).

It is for this reason that, methodologically speaking, the thesis proceeds throughout from the basis of hermeneutical re-readings of biblical narratives and traditions. We would be at fault to assume that the meaning of either “transgression” or “forgiveness” is identical in such diverse literary traditions as Leviticus and Job, Romans and James, and therefore Chapter 2 studies the development of the semantic content of sin and salvation in great detail. This thesis takes seriously the tradition of the Church, and gives a special ear to those voices in the history of interpretation that offered alternative possibilities to the metaphysical way in which God has been traditionally imagined.

The Old Testament (OT) concept of the human *yetser*, or imagination, along with its Talmudic interpretation, receives special attention, as do the Gospel narratives of the transfiguration and resurrection. What results is, first, yet another deconstruction of the Augustinian expression of “original sin,” and a corresponding eschatological reinterpretation of the Christ event in terms of the messianic Kingdom of God. Christ, with his own *yetser* entirely fixed on the Father in an act of worship, becomes the perfect embodiment of the Word of God to a humanity whose *yetser* is perpetually put in service of zirself in an act of idolatry, as illustrated most clearly by the Eden narrative. The embodiment of the Kingdom of God in Jesus, the Messiah, captures humanity’s imagination and transfigures humanity through the existential experience of Transcendence breaking into zir concrete reality through the Christ-event and its retelling.

Such an interpretation proposes an eschatological approach to God (a God of *posse*) as an alternative to the omnipotent, omniscient, and omnicausal God of metaphysics (the God of *esse*). Whereas the God of *esse* faces the discrediting of philosophy, is ever haunted by the conundrum of theodicy, and is a God torn between his love for and his judgment of a humankind caught in a perpetually sinful state, the God of *posse* captures humanity’s free *yetser* and ever calls creation forward to its telos in God’s Messianic Kingdom of love and justice.

The focus of this study will fall primarily on the understanding of sin as found in Scripture, as well as the doctrine of original sin, coupled with a corresponding focus on the salvation offered in Christ. While questions such of the origin of evil, coupled with the justification of a loving God, might receive passing mention,

theodicy is not the guiding interest here. This choice does not reflect a preference or a value judgment implying that one issue is of greater consequence than the other. Rather, it is a choice made due to constraints of time and space, as well as a desire to offer the matters under discussion the thorough treatment that they deserve.

1.5 Expected results

We expect that Kearney's contributions in the fields of imagination (phenomenological) and post-metaphysical philosophy of religion (again phenomenological but also through his hermeneutic reinterpretation of biblical narratives), will prove fruitful in rethinking the doctrines of hamartiology and soteriology post-metaphysically.

As stated above, we have no other option but to appeal to the metaphorical when we attempt to speak of such concepts as "sin" and "salvation." For this reason, this study takes the metaphorical and idiomatic descriptions of our biblical and theological heritage seriously. We will see how the biblical tradition spoke of sin in terms of a heavy load to be carried and a stain upon the hands, and how the biblical metaphor of sin as debt became the dominant metaphor in the early Christian world to speak not only of sin, but also of forgiveness in terms of a bond being cancelled. This metaphor would find its ultimate expression in the form of Anselm's atonement theory of satisfaction.

We will see, however, that just as the Semitic and early Christian world used such common terminology from their shared vocabulary to create a symbolic universe in which both sin and salvation became concepts that could be grasped, the Jewish and Christian writers of our day make use of their own shared vocabulary in describing sin and salvation by using metaphors of alienation-reconciliation and inauthenticity-authenticity, deriving from existentialist philosophy, so drawing on a "common philosophical lexicon" of their own (Anderson 2009:113).

It is our expectation that Kearney's appeal to *yetser*, which in itself stems from ancient Israelite attempts to make sense of sin, will marry an ancient idiom to eschatological ideas of the imagination. We hope that this joining of the old with the new will open for us creative and novel pathways to re-imagine not only sin and salvation, but even the larger post-metaphysical ideas of God into which these fit.

CHAPTER TWO: OF EDEN: RECLAIMING A STORY GONE WRONG

Our study of hamartiology must begin with the one narrative that has held centre stage in this theological drama. We turn, then, to the Eden narrative.

2.1 Reading again

A garden, two trees, a devil, a seductress and her victim – or so traditional readings of the narrative in Genesis 2-3 would have it. The Garden of Eden narrative has fascinated its readers – both inside and outside religion – for centuries, and yet it is a story that needs to be salvaged from a long and heavy shadow cast over it by its history of interpretation. Christian readings of the story over the centuries have been largely conditioned by the hamartiological reductionism that characterises the fall-redemption paradigm as the dominant metanarrative of mainstream Christianity. The narrative's interpretation in Christianity has for most part been based on NT and patristic perspectives, and as such has become a narrative of condemnation and a tool for control, especially of women (cf. Steward 2012:46).

There have, however, been counter-traditions that have either not subscribed to the idea that the narrative supports the doctrine of original sin, or that have viewed what is usually considered “the fall” as symbolic of a great triumph for humanity.² In this section, we will attempt to do the narrative the honour of reading it on its own terms. For this reason, we will avoid terms such as original sin when referring to the man and woman’s disobedience, as well as characterisations of Eve as an erotic temptress, or projections such as identifying the serpent with the much later figure of the devil (cf. Hendel 2013: 5).

2.1.1 Reading in context

Genesis is a book of beginnings. Genesis 1-11, in particular (what is known as the Primeval Cycle), illustrates this aspect of the Book most clearly.³ The stories in this

² Cf., e.g., Tikva Frymer-Kensky’s note on Eve as Prometheus, “the bringer of culture (fire) for humanity, who was punished by the gods” (1990:275-276). Cf. also Reicke (1956:198-199) and his emphasis on human procreation as a principle of civilisation. A further example would be the Gnostic traditions, which understood the serpent as God’s divine messenger, and considered the serpent as good and Eve as heroine for grasping the insight provided by the eating of the fruit. Cf. Philip Alexander’s study on the Eden narrative in Gnostic literature for a thorough discussion (1992:91-104).

³ Erich Zenger, while discussing Rendtorff’s view of the Pentateuch as foundational myth of Israel, remarks as follows about the primeval cycle (which he considers to stretch from Gen 1-9), “Der

rather loose cycle are more appropriately termed “myths” that reflect on the world and its order, and how it came to be such. These myths attempt to “explore the transition from creation to the present world and to construct the categories and relationships that sustain a coherent world” (Hendel 1992:935). Various severe transgressions⁴ follow upon each other and impel, as catalysts, the movement toward the emergence of this world:

They provide the necessary crises for the definition of the proper relationships in the Israelite ethical system. In response to these transgressions Yahweh introduces the qualities and limitations of the present world: from an initial human state of nakedness and innocence come the familiar traits of clothing, mortality, work, the division of labor, a limited lifespan, the multiplicity of societies and languages, etc. The proper ethical relationships are established in this process: between man and woman, brother and brother, father and son, nation and nation, and running through all of these, human and God (Hendel 1992:935-936).

2.1.2 *The Eden narrative at a glance: A few notes on structure*

Various approaches have been taken in interpreting the narrative contained in Genesis 2-3, most focussing either on a literary or a historical-critical approach. I will refer here to some literary aspects of the narrative, and the text as text will be taken as basis for my arguments throughout.⁵ However, as will be clear, I regard the historical milieu of the narrative as key to its understanding. Moreover, I believe that the narrative and its motifs may contribute to our understanding of the context to which the narrative was intended to speak.

Pentateuch stellt diesen Weg Israels in einen *Großen Rahmen*: Die Urgeschichte Gen 1-9, mit der der Pentateuch beginnt, entwirft nicht nur den welt- und menschheitsgeschichtlichen Horizont für die ab Gen 10 erzählte Geschichte Gottes mit seinem Volk Israel. Gen 1-9 steckt zugleich den theologisch-hermeneutischen Rahmen ab, der dann mit der in Gen – Dtn erzählten Ursprungsgeschichte Israels ausgefüllt wird. Es ist zum einen die in der Welt als Schöpfung Gottes gegen das Chaos konstituierte Lebensordnung der unterschiedlichen Lebensräume und Lebenszeiten für die unterschiedlichen Lebewesen. Und es ist zum anderen die in der Urgeschichte, insbesondere in den Erzählungen über die Sintflut, narrativ vermittelte Theologie vom barmherzigen Gott, der einerseits die Sünde nicht bagatellisiert und der andererseits die Sünder »nach der Flut« künftig am Leben lässt, weil er das Leben liebt. Das ist die Botschaft von Gen 1-9: Die Schöpfung und alles Leben in der Schöpfung lebt nur aus der Barmherzigkeit Gottes, der sein Ja zum Leben durchhält – gerade angesichts der Sünde aller Lebendigen (Zenger 2008:70).

⁴ Adam and Eve's disobedience (Gen 3); fratricide (Cain and Abel, Gen 4); the defiance of Lamech, the father of Jabal and Jubal, the first cattle breeders and metal workers (Gen 4:23-24); illicit sexual relations (Sons of God and Daughters of Men, Gen 6:1-4); evil in general (the flood, Gen 6:5-8); familial taboos (curse of Canaan Gen 9:20-27); and excessive ambition (Tower of Babel, Gen 11:1-9). Cf. Hendel (1992:935-936) and Scullion (1992:942).

⁵ As with all structural analyses, the one I have outlined in *Fig. 1* is merely one of several possible ways of reading the text. I have utilised this approach as one tool amongst many to come to terms with a complicated and in many ways mysterious text.

Sections		Content	Section notes	Verses
1		Heading: section 1 – creation account	Theme: Yahweh Elohim and the beginning Creation account (heaven/earth, vegetation, man, animal life, woman) Yahweh Elohim is main acting character Scene is set for the unfolding of the narrative	2:4a
	.1	Problem statement (no vegetation) & reason (no rain, no one to cultivate the soil); <i>Yahweh Elohim is acting character</i>		2:4b5
	.1	Solution to drought (mist) and lack of labour (creation of the man); <i>Yahweh Elohim is acting character</i>		2:6-7
	.2	.1 Plants garden and places the man in it, grows all trees (incl. Tree of Knowledge & Tree of Life); <i>Yahweh Elohim is acting character</i>		2:8-9
	.2	The four main rivers (Pishon, Gihon, Tigris, Euphrates) water the garden		2:10-14
	.3	The man is placed in garden & instructed regarding the trees; <i>Yahweh Elohim is acting character</i>		2:15-16
	.2	.1 Problem statement (the man is by himself – apart from plant life, completely!); <i>Yahweh Elohim is acting character</i>		2:18
	.2	1st attempt at a solution (creation of all animals) – fails; <i>Yahweh Elohim is main acting character</i>		2:19-20
	.3	2nd attempt at a solution (creation of the woman & having man name her) – succeeds; <i>Yahweh Elohim is main acting character</i>		2:21-23
	.4	Aetiological statement – unity of husband and wife		2:24
	2	.1 Ignorantly and shamelessly naked	Theme: Challenging boundaries – serpent-woman/deceiver-sage Serpent and woman main acting characters	2:25
	.2	.1 Conversation: serpent and woman – man and woman will become like God if they eat; <i>Serpent is main acting character</i> (Note: Elohim, not Yahweh Elohim)		3:1-5
	.2	The woman considers the tree's benefits and eats, shares with the man; <i>Woman is main acting character</i>		3:6
	.3	Consciously naked		3:7a
3	.1	Clothes made from fig leaves – <i>man & woman are acting characters</i>	Theme: Challenging boundaries – bearing the brunt [Aetiological statement – serpents sail; women painful childbirth and submission to husbands; men physical labour] [Submission of women introduced] Yahweh Elohim is main acting character	3:7b
	.2	.1 Hiding from Yahweh Elohim – <i>man (& woman) are main acting characters</i>		3:8
	.2	.1 The man searched for and interrogated; the man diverts attention to the woman		3:9-12
	.2	The woman interrogated; the woman diverts attention to the Serpent		3:13
	.3	.1 The Serpent eternally punished – humiliation		3:14-15
	.3	.2 The woman punished – domestic relations		3:16
	.3	.3 The man punished – physical labour		3:17-19
	.4	The man gives the woman the name “Eve” – <i>the man is main acting character</i>		3:20
	.4	Clothes made from animal hides – <i>Yahweh Elohim is acting character</i>		3:21
	4	.1 The danger of the man eating from the Tree of Life	Theme: Enforcing boundaries - safeguarding divinity Yahweh Elohim is acting character	3:22
	.1	1st solution (The man is chased out from the garden)		3:23-24a
	.2	2nd solution (Tree of life under guard)		3:24b

Fig. 1. A structural and thematic summary of Genesis 2-3

One of the most significant literary approaches to the Eden narrative is that of Walsh (1977:161-177),⁶ and the structure I have outlined in *Figure 1*, despite some differences, generally corresponds to his. The analysis in *Figure 1* divides the narrative into four sections (“scenes”), with concentric patterns occurring especially within the sections, serving often to tie the scenes together as a whole.⁷ What happens in the centre of the garden (also the centre of the narrative), leads to dramatic spatial development on its edges. At the start (2:4-24), the scene is set for the rest of the narrative: the garden is created and the man and woman are formed and placed there to tend it. At the closing of the narrative (3:7b-24), the punishments and curses of Yahweh culminates in the ultimate separation: expulsion from the Garden of God.

2.1.3 Prominent themes in the Eden narrative

It will soon become clear that many of the literary themes in the Eden narrative have their background in ancient Near Eastern (ANE) mythology.⁸ The Primeval Cycle (Gen 1-11) consists of mythical texts with themes and motifs that occur in many of the ancient Mediterranean cultural and religious heritages.

⁶ Gordon Wenham has, for example, used it as the basis for his discussion in his Genesis commentary in the Word Biblical Commentary series (Wenham 1987:50).

⁷ Since concentric movement appears to be a structural feature in the narrative, I have structured sections 2 and 3 according to this pattern. This differs from other structural proposals that I have come across. First, scholars have usually tended to see 2:25 as belonging with 2:24, forming the end of a section that is followed by the scene with the serpent and the woman. (Interestingly, even Walsch, with his second scene stretching from 2:18-25, notes with regard to v. 25 that it is “relatively independent” of vv. 18-24, and brings the entire scene to a close with a prolepsis pointing forward to 3:7 [1977:164]). Second, a break of 3:7 into two parts belonging to different sections does not follow the usual trend. I have decided on this structure because of the concentric patterns that I have identified in the structure, and the importance that concentric development seems to have in the narrative at large. In section 2 (2:25-3:7a), the woman’s conversation with the Serpent and her and the man’s eating of the fruit is framed by the development regarding their nudity. That they were unashamed at first, but now self-conscious, emphasises the actions in 3:1-6 as the events that bring about the radical change in the fortune of mankind. Following in section 3 (3:7b-3:21) is a next (and much more clearly structured) concentric pattern that is outlined by the making of clothes – first the desperate attempt of the man and woman, and then that of Yahweh. Sandwiched between these are the interrogation and punishment of the three transgressors. As Hamilton notes, the “order of the narration of the sin and the sinner is the reverse of the order in which each comes under God’s judgment. The sin of the man (vv. 9-11), the sin of the woman (v. 12), and the sin of the serpent (v. 13) are in a chiastic arrangement with the judgment of the serpent (vv. 14-15), the judgment of the woman (v. 16), and the judgment of the man (vv. 17-19)” (Hamilton 1990:196).

⁸ An analysis of the possible polemical nature of the text as a means of safeguarding the cult of Yahweh from Canaanite influences, especially that of the goddess Asherah, fall far outside the scope of this study. It would not be unrelated to the subject matter, however, if it would reveal the ideological (monotheistic) intentions of the cultic powers that be, and how ideas of disobedience were used to keep the religious masses at bay and shun the feminine out of the national cult. Space prohibits us from indulging those curiosities anywhere outside of a mere mention. Cf., however, Steenkamp & Prinsloo, forthcoming, in this regard.

The garden

The Eden narrative shares many motifs with other ANE descriptions of divine dwellings. These include the direct presence of the deity, the heavenly council, the issuing of divine decrees, the water source that supplies the whole earth,⁹ abundant fertility, sexual undertones, and the presence of trees with magical qualities (Wallace 1985:83; cf. Reicke 1956:198).¹⁰ A motif associated with the “garden of god” in ANE literature, but that is absent from the Genesis narrative, is that of the mountain dwelling.¹¹ I agree with Wallace’s assessment that “the mountain dwelling and the garden features were motifs belonging to the larger theme we have called the ‘garden of God’” (1985:86). The mountain, the rivers, trees and precious stones are all specific historical references to a prevailing idea of the garden of God, and in this the temple of later Israel is now also implicated.¹² The cherubim who are to guard the Tree of Life add to this imagery.¹³ Furthermore, when Yahweh “walks” through the Garden (Gen 3:8), the same verbal form (*hitpa’el* participle of **הלך**, *halach*) is used as that of God’s presence in the Israelite tent sanctuary (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14; 2 Sam 7:6-7) (Wenham 1987:76). The fact that other beings seem to accompany Yahweh in the garden also reminds us of Canaanite religion as it relates to the Garden of Eden.

⁹ In the OT, the image of life-giving waters flowing out from the temple to rejuvenate the whole land is applied to Zion in several biblical texts (e.g. Ezek 47:1-12; Zech 14:1-21; Joel 4:16-18; Ps 36). In Ezek 47:12 there exists a close relation of the life-giving waters with rejuvenating trees. The trees that grow on the bank of the rivers flowing from the temple will bear fruit for “food” and leaves for “healing.”

¹⁰ Think, e.g., of the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh Epic: In his quest for immortality, Gilgamesh travels through a land of darkness, arriving in a place of light where a garden is described with vines that are “good to look at” and fruit that are “pleasing to see.” Another Mesopotamian example is the garden of the gods in the land of Dilmun, described in the Sumerian myth “Enki and Ninhursag,” where the land is watered by life-giving “waters of abundance.” Cf. also the striking association between life-giving waters and the “trees of Eden,” where Assyria and Pharaoh are described as trees (Ezek 31:2-18). The garden of god is sometimes the site of sexual activity between deities, such as in “Enki and Ninhursag,” (where Dilmun is the site of the marriage of two gods), and the dwelling of El (which might be the site of the sexual union of El and his consort Asherah). According to Wallace, however, the “motif of the sacred marriage and its connection with the garden of God is not employed in the present form of Gen 2-3. ... (W)e will find that at some earlier stage in the narrative this motif could have been used as part of the theme” (Wallace 1985:88).

¹¹ In Ugaritic mythology, El’s abode is situated at such a mountain at the “source of the two rivers.” In biblical material, the mountain dwelling (Zion) has a place in the garden of God only in late texts (Wallace 1985:85; cf. Ezek 28:13; 47:1-12; Zech 14:1-21; Isa 33:20-24; 51:3).

¹² “We have seen that the garden of Eden narrative is full of symbols suggesting the presence of God and his life-giving power – trees, gold, rivers, and jewels used to adorn the holy of holies. In Israelite worship, true life was experienced when one went to the sanctuary. There God was present. There he gave life” (Wenham 1987:74).

¹³ Cherubim in the OT are Yahweh’s means of locomotion (cf. 2 Sam 22:11; Ps 18:10), and He sits enthroned upon them (cf. 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs 19:15; Isa 37:16; Ps 80:1; 99:1). In the temple, two cherubim face each other on the two ends of the covering above the ark (Hamilton 1990:210).

Yahweh addresses them after the couple has eaten from the tree, saying, “they have become like one of *us*.” For Wallace, this plural reference incorporates all divine beings. The dwelling of El is similarly associated with the meeting of the divine council of gods under his rule. In the Eden narrative, the garden is the place where Yahweh makes known his decree, as El does at the council of deities (Wallace 1985:80).

The tree of knowledge and the tree of life

Mesopotamian myths make reference to plants, food and water bestowing immortality or eternal youth on those who find them, although no references are made to a “*tree of life*” specifically (Wallace 1985:103).¹⁴ In the Eden narrative, the “gaining of divine qualities of life (or almost divine ones) is associated with the meeting of the divine council, another motif of the garden of God theme, and with eating (or drinking) some substance which possesses the magical powers to grant the gift” (Wallace 1985:105). Such a council meets in the Eden narrative in 3:22 in response to the man and woman’s gaining the knowledge of good and evil, and in prevention of their gaining immortality.

Apart from the Eden narrative, the OT mentions the Tree of Life in only four other texts.¹⁵ The curious case of (the) A/asherah should be noted in this context too, however. This divine female figure seems always to have been associated with

¹⁴ Ancient Near Eastern parallels of importance include Gilgamesh (gaining life beyond that normally allotted through the eating or drinking of a special substance); Adapa (showing immortality to be only one divine attribute, the wisdom of Adapa being another); and Ishtar (who is sprinkled with “water of life” before descending to the netherworld, with a Sumerian version mentioning also a “plant of life” (Wallace 1985:105). Sacred trees, although not specifically mentioned in these literary parallels, can, however, be found in other contexts. A bilingual incantation for an unspecified illness, with the Sumerian referring to a tree is a famous example. The tree (only the gods Enki, Shamash and Tammuz have accessed it) has some magical healing powers and is found between the river of two mouths, rooted in the fresh water spring (*apsû*), with the appearance of lapis lazuli (Wallace 1985:106). As seen above, natural and stylised trees appear in various iconographic forms, found among other on cylinder seals, reliefs, stelae, and monuments.

¹⁵ Proverbs 3:18, 11:30, 13:12, and 15:4, with one more appearance in the LXX in Isa 65:22. Proverbs associates the tree of life with wisdom and life, while some psalms, together with Proverbs, draw connections between wisdom, obedience to the commandments, righteousness, and life (cf. also Deut 4:1; 5:16, 33; 8:1; 30:16, 19; and Lev 18:5). Trees that remain green throughout the summer drought are often seen in Scripture as symbolic of the life of God (e.g. Ps 1:3; Jer 17:8) (Wenham 1987:62). Parallel to this connection between wisdom and life on the human level, is the mythological level, as seen in the myth of Adapa, where wisdom and eternal life stand parallel to one another (Wallace 1985:109). The so-called “cosmic tree” in some biblical passages should also be mentioned, especially Ezekiel 31.¹⁵ This text describes the Pharaoh of Egypt as a majestic tree, growing in a place adorned with the same motifs of the garden of God.

trees¹⁶ and, as is to be expected from a mother goddess, sexuality.¹⁷ Since the Bible records the destruction of a large number of trees sacred to her, it becomes clear that the term “(the) A/asherah” could refer to either the goddess or a tree or tree-like object that represented her (Long 1991:39; cf. Stuckey 2004; Wyatt 1995:188; cf. Deut 16:21). A second association with Asherah in the OT are the references to the *bāmōt*, or hilltop sanctuaries, which typically have A/asherahs and probably living trees among their features (Dever 2005:224).¹⁸ Based on the multitude of textual and material evidence available to us,¹⁹ some association between Asherah and the sacred tree(s) in the Garden (both of life and of knowledge) in the Eden narrative seems evident.²⁰ It is quite possible that the goddess may have occupied a more prominent role in earlier versions of the Eden myth. However, as her cult became more and more suppressed (from the 8th century B.C.E. onward and especially in post-exilic Israel), it is likely that she was written out of the myth. Symbolism reminiscent of her still remained, however, and was employed with the polemic intent to warn Israel not to partake of her cult (eat from the trees of knowledge and life in

¹⁶ E.g., she is found under trees (1 Kgs 14:23; 2 Kgs 17:10), is made of wood (1 Kgs 14:15; 2 Kgs 16:3-4) and is erected by humans (2 Kgs 17:1) (Long 1996). Deuteronomy 16:21 forbids the people to plant any living tree as an asherah beside the altar of Yahweh. Judges 6:25-26 demands that the asherah which the Hebrews have built beside the altar of Baal be both cut down and used as wood for a burnt offering of the bull used to pull down the shrine. This association with trees and wood is confirmed by the translation of “asherah” into “grove(s),” “trees,” (LXX) and “grove/wood” (Vulgate). Furthermore, the Mishnah understands an asherah to be any tree that is worshipped (Long 1996). Binger also discusses the word נָלַע in the OT, which would be a predictable feminine of נָא, “god,” but which is translated as “oak” or “terebinth” (1997:135-138).

¹⁷ The OT suggests a strong sexual element to her and her cult. “On every high hill and under every green tree, the people of Israel “lay down as a prostitute,” “bowed down playing the harlot,” and “burned with lust among the oaks” (Jer 2:20; 3:6; Isa 57:5).

¹⁸ The phrase “on every green hill and under every green tree,” coupled with allusion to sexual activity occurs time and again where idolatrous practices are denounced (e.g. 1 Kgs 17:10; Isa 57:5; Jer 2:20; 3:6, 13; 17:2; Ezek 6:13; Hos 4:12-13).

¹⁹ Archaeological evidence strongly suggests both the presence of a vibrant cult of Asherah (among many of the other Canaanite deities) in Palestine, as well as a possible association between Yahweh and Asherah. Apart from the literally thousands of unearthed fertility figurines (cf. Dever 2005:194-195), some important pieces of evidence include, but are not limited to: The Lachish ewer and goblet (cf. Hestrin 1987:212-223); the cult stand from Ta'anach (cf. Dever 2005:219-221; 2001:178); the “Yahweh and his A/asherah” phrases from Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el Qom (cf. Dever 2005:132-133; 2001:186; Binger 1997:107; Wyatt 1995:192; McCarter 1987:147, 149; Coogan 1987:119; Keel & Uehlinger 1998; Stuckey 2004); and the menorah as a cultic stand possibly bearing witness to the presence of Asherah in early Yahwism. The menorah indeed has the form of a stylised tree, often resembling or even identical to ancient depictions of sacred trees (e.g. on the Lachish ewer, discussed by Hestrin 1987:212-223; Meyers 1992:142). Given the centuries-long presence of sacred poles – asherahs – in Yahwism, or the worship of sacred trees associated with Asherah, also practised by Israelites for centuries, it seems highly probable that the menorah as a stylised tree bears witness to the presence of Asherah in early, pre-monotheistic Yahwism. I agree with Long that the menorah preserves the memory of the sacred feminine in Judaism (cf. also Dever 2001:197).

²⁰ This perspective is in itself not new. Cf. Long (1996); Wallace (1985).

the garden), since this would lead to the calamity of exile. In this regard, cf. Steenkamp & Prinsloo (forthcoming).

Turning now to the significance of the *tree of knowledge* in the Eden narrative, we note first the absence of any other biblical or extra-biblical references to such a tree. Wallace discusses different interpretations of the type of knowledge associated with the tree under three categories (1985:116-130; cf. also 1992:657-658):

- (i) *The acquisition of human faculties.* A spectrum ranging from discerning moral values, to attaining human maturity, to the ability to make choices determining the course of one's life.
- (ii) *Knowledge of sexual relations* (cf. Reicke 1956:196-197). This is suggested by elements such as the nakedness and shame of the couple, the woman designated as "mother of all living," punishment concerning childbearing, the woman's desire for her husband, and the association of serpents with certain ANE fertility cults.
- (iii) *Universal knowledge.* Although he does not suggest that any one meaning excludes all others, he opts for the last option on the basis that the phrase "good and evil" is used in several OT passages as a merism indicating "everything" in "the general colorless sense in which the word can be used in our own language, although the context in which it is used can give a more specific meaning to the phrase" (Wallace 1985:128). Thus, for Wallace the humans seem to become as the gods in the sense that they gain divine knowledge of "everything."

A final word regarding the trees of life and knowledge concerns the fact that two trees appear in the present form of the narrative, although only one is essential for its development. It is possible that previous, separate traditions of the final narrative may have contained only one tree, with the presence of two trees in the present form resulting from "the combination of variants of the one motif. ... The small contradictions and inconsistencies are the result of this process" (Wallace 1985:103; cf. also Jaroš 1980:205; Wenham 1987:62). Given the strong association between wisdom and life in Proverbs and Psalms, it might be that "the association of the tree of life and the tree of knowledge which gives wisdom is a traditional feature

of the story" (Wallace 1985:130). Add to this the association between the goddess Asherah and sacred trees, the later female hypostatisation of Wisdom as a Tree of Life, as well as the female Shekinah,²¹ associated among others with the Menorah as a stylised tree, and I find it difficult to believe that the presence of all these motifs bearing witness to the historical development of the religion of Israel are coincidental.²²

The serpent

The Hebrew noun נחש, "snake," relates in the OT to meanings such as "divination" and "fortune." Along with other Hebrew words for "snake," it can also refer to mythical dragon-like figures. Notions that are often associated with serpents include protection, danger, healing, regeneration, and (less frequently, sexuality; Hendel 1995:1405), as well as immortality, fertility, wisdom (Wallace 1985:144) and goddesses.²³ In the OT, specifically, there are several associations of the snake with Yahweh or with magic.²⁴

²¹ Long explains (1995), "The Shekinah, in the everyday tradition of Judaism, denotes the presence of God... Although her name is feminine, most mainstream rabbis did not stress this but often identified the community of Israel with her. ... However, in the strong mystical – and for a very long time, secret – tradition within Judaism, named the Kabbalah, the Shekinah assumes her divine female form. She is the central presence in the Tree of Life, she is partner to God, and is the channel of His glory; Patai (1990) believes that she is in direct line with ancient Hebrew goddesses. She was understood to be a personified female, she accompanied the dispossessed Jews and mourned with them in their troubles and persecutions, and she is believed to be an intermediary between God and the world. There are many similarities between her and the descriptions of Wisdom." Shani Smith lists some of the names and images of the Shekinah, "a bride, king's daughter, matron, mother; a point; an only one; she is the source of all new life and source of all the souls. She becomes the collective life of the community of Israel" (Smith 1991:6).

²² In light, then, of the biblical references that indicate the presence of Asherah in the cult of Yahweh, archaeological evidence such as the figurines and the Ta'anach cult stand, and the inscriptions from these two sites (even if it refers to a cultic object), a positive identification of Asherah as a Hebrew goddess that was perceived, at least in some circles in ancient Israel, to be the consort of Yahweh, is not farfetched. Asherah is beyond doubt a goddess, who by symbol, and/or as deity and (probably) spouse, remained significant in Yahwism. Brueggemann aptly remarks, "... insofar as Asherah is a goddess, attention to her (i.e. in the Hebrew Bible) (even by condemnation) likely indicates the incorporation of the character and functions of feminine divinity into the faith of Israel and perhaps into the character of YHWH. The classical tradition of monotheism has no doubt excluded, as much as possible, hints of the feminine in the character of God. The presence of Asherah in the Old Testament (or repressed hints of that presence) may indicate an awareness that a feminine dimension of the divine is absorbed into the character of YHWH. In any case, Asherah's appearance precludes any simplistic, one-dimensional characterization of YHWH, who must be understood, according to the text, as emerging in a complex and contested religious environment" (Brueggemann 2002:11).

²³ The serpent's association with *wisdom* is extensive. According to Philo, who associated serpents with the development of the first letters of the alphabet, the magus Zoroaster held that the serpent was immortal and strongly associated with beauty, good, wisdom, order, justice, and perfection

The Gilgamesh epic illustrates a further dimension of the serpent in myth, when it snatches away the plant that would have ensured immortality for Gilgamesh. Although this scene no doubt serves the aetiological function of explaining why snakes shed their skin, thus rejuvenating themselves, it also illustrates that Gilgamesh's quest for eternal life is ultimately futile: immortality is the realm of the gods alone. The parallels with the Eden narrative are obvious.

The serpent in Genesis 2-3 is a complex and interesting character, with all the above mythical characteristics adding to the ambiguity of the text. The ancient audiences were no doubt captivated by the question of who or what this serpent is, and how its actions should be judged. Similar to other trickster figures, the serpent in the Eden narrative is an ambiguous figure who blurs accepted categories of existence. It is at the same time described as an "animal" and as "cunning," possessing the power of speech and sacred knowledge that belong to the territory of the gods. As such it crosses the boundaries between the categories of animal, human, and divine (Hendel 1995:1410).²⁵ Ambiguity also characterises the result of

(Wallace 1985:160). In apogryphic texts such as 4 Macc 18:8 and *Pss. Sol.* 4:9, and Matt 10:16 in the NT, the serpent was known especially for its cunning nature (Wallace 1985:160). Reicke also notes that the serpent probably owes its wisdom to being an agent of the underworld (1956:195). The evidence for the serpent's association with *fertility* is primarily artistic: The serpent is often depicted with naked goddesses (sometimes the mother goddess), and often placed in a position near the genital area of the goddess (Wallace 1985:160-161). Thousands of cult symbols found in Palestine in the form of figurines of a naked woman with a serpent twined around her neck confirm that the serpent was a symbol important to the fertility cults (Scullion 1992:945; cf. Reicke 1956:197). For associations with *healing*, consider the bronze snake in the wilderness (Num 21:4-9), the association of the serpent with the healer-god of Beth Shean, and the association of the snake with the Greek healing-god Aesclepius. There is also the possible connection with the naked goddess, which could be Asherah. Whether the snake is associated with the goddess at all, and whether such an association would denote rejuvenation, rebirth, protection, and sexuality is not clear, although the Qudšu iconography and a goddess-epithet from the Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions, "the one [feminine] of the snake," have for some suggested such an association (Hendel 1995:1407). In 2 Kgs 18:4, the asherah is mentioned next to *Nehuštan*: the copper snake made by Moses in the desert. However, as Binger points out, each of the four objects (asherah, copper-snake, idols, and high places) in this text are treated in their own sentence with their own verb: we are not given reason to believe that Asherah was closely associated with the snake cult (Binger 1997:124).

²⁴ Apart from the Eden narrative see, e.g., the Egyptian plagues (Exod 4, 7) and the bronze serpent (Num 21; 2 Kgs 18). Hendel also mentions Isaiah's initiatory vision (Isa 6) as a possibility (1995:1408). The bronze serpent, destroyed as an idol in 2 Kgs 18:4, is interesting in light of the Eden narrative, since the bronze serpent narrative in Num suggests that the snake was a traditional sign of Yahweh's healing power that later became unacceptable in monotheistic Yahwism. The link between healing and rejuvenation or eternal life is apparent.

²⁵ Cf. Kruger, "... the question may be asked, in the light of the mythical serpent ... sometimes presented as being *divine*, whether the *וְנַח* (cf Gn 3:1, 2, 4, 13, 14, 15), reveals divine features. Regarding secret knowledge, the answer is positive, as indicated above. ... The reality that in the mind of the ancients a serpent was viewed as divine thus bears upon this creature in Genesis 3" (2001a:59).

the serpent's actions. While the text condemns the disobedience, the human couple still become "god-like," as the serpent promised, insofar as they obtain knowledge that belongs to the realm of the sacred. "Like tricksters of other traditions (cf. Prometheus and Epimetheus of Greek tradition), the boon of the trickster is both a benefit and a loss, for which humans pay the price" (Hendel 1995:1410-1411). The beautiful wordplay between עֲרָם (*arum*, "cunning") and עֲרֹם (*erom*, "naked") brings the point home: there is a direct relationship between the nature of the serpent and the result of the "disobedience," and a link is thus established between creation and the Eden narrative.²⁶ There is further wordplay: As Adam and Eve seek to be "cunning" or "clever," (עֲרָם, *arum*), they instead discover that they are naked (עֲרֹם, *erom*) (Wenham 1987:72), and then first the serpent and then the ground "cursed" (אָרוּרָה/אָרוּר; *arur/arurah*; Gen 3:14/3:17) as a result of their striving to be "like God." The wordplay between עֲרָם ("cunning") and עֲרֹם ("naked"), connects the motif of the nakedness of the couple with the serpent, possibly suggesting that the serpent functions in the narrative as a symbol of fertility and wisdom (Wallace 1985:144).

The choice of the serpent as the character playing the role of the trickster should be seen against familiar ANE associations with the snake, namely that of danger, death, magic, privileged knowledge, rejuvenation, immortality, and sexuality. In the Eden narrative, fertility, wisdom and immortality – all functions of snakes – come together. That this creature is then condemned to dust conveys a powerful message to those who practice Canaanite religion in general, namely that what seems favourable to the eye may carry in itself the seed of death and judgment.

The woman

The man names the woman חַוָּה (*hawwâ*), because she became the mother of all that lives. This name, which became "Eve" in English, has been widely studied.²⁷ In short,

²⁶ "The word (*arum*) occurs quite regularly in the Wisdom literature. It refers to something that is respected and advocated in some contexts, where it is translated as 'prudent,' but feared and condemned in others. ... This is the Wisdom that leads to life; 'Come to me,' says Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and 9, 'and I will give you life.' This is the Wisdom that holds in her right hand 'Life, and in her left hand riches and honour' (Prov. 3:16). This is also the wisdom that is condemned by the prophets: for example, 'Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!' (Sawyer 1992:68).

²⁷ Cf. Wallace 1985:147-161. Relationships have been suggested between Eve (חַוָּה), life (חַיָּה), know (Aramaic חַוָּה) and serpent (Aramaic חַוָּה) (Alexander 1992:98). The Hebrew text links the name of Eve (חַוָּה) with "life" (חַיָּה), following popular etymology (contra Hamilton 1990:105).

this name of the woman in Hebrew could be related to words for either “serpent” or “life” in Semitic languages, and so yet another connection between the serpent and the woman is established. Moreover, many have pointed to a connection between Eve and a goddess. The epithet “mother of all living” reminds of the mother or fertility goddesses, themselves sometimes associated with serpents, as seen above.

It is clear that there are many associations with Eve: she could be serpent goddess, the mother goddess, or another goddess altogether (Wallace 1985:148-159). She could be a symbol for Wisdom, which, as we have seen, was personified as a woman. In the final version of the narrative, Eve is better seen as a symbol of Dame Folly, the counterpart of Lady Wisdom.²⁸ In light of the rich ambiguity of the myth, it is unlikely that the figure of Eve is symbol for any one of these possibilities exclusively. We would be wise to allow her character the literary ambiguity for which it aims.

Boundaries

Important things happen in the centre of the garden (also the centre of the narrative, cf. *Fig. 1*), and lead to dramatic spatial development on its edges. The reversal of living conditions naturally places emphasis on the events in the centre of the narrative (section 2, 2:25-3:7a). The reversal of norms regarding nakedness centres

²⁸ Cf. the discussions on Lady Wisdom and/or Dame Folly in Radford Ruether (2005:90-97), Long (1991; 1995); Murphy (1990:145-155). The picture of the two rival women, Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly, is painted in Prov 9. It is interesting to note that Folly is described as “a deceptive ‘look-alike.’ ... If the call of Wisdom and that of Folly look and sound so much alike, how can the ‘simple’ tell them apart? The surest way is to stay close to home and not to stray into the houses of ‘aliens’” (Radford-Ruether 2005:94). In relation to the repressed presence of the female deity in the OT, we should observe that wisdom literature (Proverbs, Job, Ben Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon) portrays Wisdom as a personified (it seems sometimes God-hypostatised) female figure. Opinions vary, with some scholars seeing Lady Wisdom as a literary device (e.g. Murphy 1990:133, for whom Wisdom is a biblical expression of the communication of God), and others arguing that she seems at times to have gained ontological status alongside Yahweh (e.g. Long 1995; Radford Ruether 2005:90). While the origins of this figure has been widely debated (cf. Radford Ruether’s short summary, 2005:90), there has also been the suggestion that Asherah has found a reappearance in Lady Wisdom as consort of Yahweh. The sacred tree associated with her, the tree pole long present in Yahwism, became the Wisdom that is a “tree of life for all who find her” (Prov 3:18; cf. Dever 2001:197). Coogan indeed holds that the depiction of Wisdom as a divine being present at creation (Prov 8) draws on actual Israelite belief in the consort of the deity. Coogan sees further evidence for this conclusion in later wisdom material, especially Wis 8-9 and Sir 24. He concludes with a reference to Philo who remarks that God is the husband of wisdom (Coogan 1987:120). Cf. also Camp, who sees adumbrations of ANE goddesses in the Wisdom figure (not necessarily a consort figure), but nevertheless stresses the need to consider the allusions to human women in the applicable texts (1990:191). Murphy is an example of a scholar who does not find the ancient goddess hypothesis satisfying as an explanation of why Wisdom is personified as a female (1990:146).

around the conversation with the serpent and the eating of the fruit. Instead of the expected elevation, insight, and life, what follows is separation, pain, and shame. The interaction with the serpent, a symbol for wisdom or fertility, leads to death. Any interpretation of the Eden narrative needs to look closely at these central events.

As Hendel so aptly puts it, “Genesis envisions a single, God-created universe in which human life is limited by the boundaries of knowledge and death” (2013:9). The penetration of the divine realm by the couple is the main concern of the narrative, and it is for this reason that they are expelled from Eden: “the limitations and hardships of life are intimately associated with Yahweh’s prevention of human attainment of divine attributes” (Wallace 1985:130).²⁹ This theme recurs twice more in the Primeval Cycle (Gen 1-11). In Genesis 6:1-4 and 11:1-9, Yahweh again acts as antagonist of humankind, imposing on them the limitations of their existence in reaction to their aspiring to move beyond the limitations of human, earthly existence (Wallace 1985:130). This should be understood in view of the utterly authoritarian culture of the ancient Mediterranean World, where boundaries were considered as natural and sacred, and were hardly ever questioned or challenged. Order is crucial in such a world, as Osiek illustrates,

Order as a value encompasses the entire range of cosmic and human relationships whereby one is embedded in family, society, culture, and universe. As a perceived mode of relating, it is right relationship, the opposite of chaos, which is disordered or carries no relationship (Osiek 1998:143-145).

While knowledge, and even moreso knowledge of God, is usually esteemed by Scripture as something to be desired, and something that God insists must be disseminated, the Eden narrative speaks of “a sort of knowledge which God withholds from man” (Reicke 1956:194; cf. Wenham 1987:63). For the author(s)/redactor(s) of the Eden narrative, possessing knowledge of good and evil (i.e. of everything) is the privilege of Yahweh alone, and humankind should not aspire to attain this (cf. Job 15:7-9, 40; Prov 30:1-4). That knowledge is a dangerous matter in the Eden narrative (Reicke 1956:201), seems to be in line with an OT tradition that certain things are forever to remain a mystery to humankind. Respect

²⁹ “In its present form the main point of the narrative concerns the interaction of the human and divine realms. An aetiological function is served as the narrative describes the origins of the human condition, but it also portrays human limitations as a means of Yahweh preventing any further encroachment of humankind on the divine realm” (Wallace 1985:183).

for these boundaries is associated with the “fear of the LORD” and “wisdom” (cf., e.g., Eccl 3:11, 14). In line with this tradition, the wisdom poem in Job 28 indicates the futility of human probing into what is divine and therefore mysterious (Murphy 1990:135; Radford-Ruether 2005:95). When the couple hear Yahweh walking in the garden, they hide, and Adam explains that it was because he was afraid, having realised that he was naked. It is this position, fear of God and recognition of human frailty, that is regarded as the appropriate attitude for humankind before God.

Wisdom

There seems to be a close association in the Eden narrative with Israel’s wisdom tradition. The phrase “to know good and evil” is a *leitmotif* in the Eden narrative, occurring four times (Gen 2:9, 17; 3:5, 22). The phrase “your eyes will be opened” describes the means by which Adam and Eve come to know good and evil, and the phrase “you will be like God” describes the state of knowing good and evil (Toews 2013:5-6). The couple’s newly attained knowledge seems to consist of varying degrees of moral knowledge, sexual awareness, and individual self-consciousness. It permanently elevates the status of humans, even as it results in exile from paradise. The resulting picture of reality is therefore ambiguous – humans gain a measure of wisdom, but lose paradise (Hendel 2013:41).

It is an axiom of wisdom literature that past conduct determines present circumstances, and we find a corresponding link between the couple’s former conduct in Eden and their future existence in which they will bear the consequences of their disobedience. The view expressed by the narrative is, however, very much in line with the book of Ecclesiastes, bringing across the disquieting notion that wisdom disappoints (Carmichael 1992:53). Adam and Eve will bear the consequences of their aspiring to attain self-sufficiency by accessing knowledge that belong to the realm of God. The prohibition not to eat of the tree of knowledge echoes the pessimistic wisdom tradition: “In much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow” (Eccl 1:18). Although wisdom was highly regarded in Israel, the reservation not to rely excessively on it was always present. The same wisdom praised as a “tree of life” (Prov 3:18), was renounced by the prophets when people relied on wisdom more than on God (e.g. Jer 9:23). Wisdom is a gift from God. However, it may result in either well-being or difficulty, depending on the way

one relates to it. The man and woman follow the advice of the serpent, reach for wisdom, and indeed become like the gods (Gen 3:22). The narrative portrays the results of such over-reliance on wisdom in the reversal of all that the couple hoped to gain from the tree of knowledge (Kruger 2001b:229). The semi-divine serpent, representing wisdom, is given opportunity to display his wisdom. Because the advice is followed by disaster, however, the wisdom as represented by the serpent, and thereby the optimistic wisdom tradition associated with Solomon, is ridiculed (Kruger 2001b:230).

2.1.4 Concluding our literary approach

As a multi-layered text, the Eden narrative draws on many images and symbols that open multiple possibilities of meaning. The hermeneutical challenge consists in the fact that the same character or entity may be interpreted in different ways (Kruger 2001a:55). It is no mistake that “the” single and particular meaning supposedly intended by the author(s)/editor(s) “still eludes the reader and cannot readily be identified” (Kruger 2001a: 56). If the author(s)/editor(s) had intended an unambiguous meaning that would be obvious to the reader, they would have used less ambiguous images. We must therefore assume that the multiplicity in the images are intentional, and avoid reducing these rich symbols to one specific meaning in the interest of one supposedly intended purpose of the narrative (both of which scholars have been notoriously unable to agree on). This is a narrative that resists one dimensionality in every way. As Goldingay very aptly concludes,

Genesis 2-3 is a story full of irony and strange twists, of complications. It resembles a farce, or an episode of a sitcom in which a number of themes interweave in apparently random ways and come to an unexpected finish that brings a sort of resolution without necessarily tying up every end. ... And yet the story ends with a world that we know, and it explains some of its puzzling features. Snakes crawl. Motherhood brings pain. Marriage is fraught. Growing food requires hard toil. Human beings cover themselves, even in warm climates. Life ends in death and we cannot find our own way to the secret of eternal life (Goldingay 2003:148).

2.2 The Eden narrative: A story of sin?

In his recent *The story of original sin*, John E. Toews (2013) provides an outline of how sin evolved to acquire an ontological status in the western church. Similar to the

present author, Toews embarks on this study very much for personal reasons, having been plagued throughout his life by questions about sin emerging from the evangelical context in which he was raised and theologically trained (2013:1). He explains that the penal substitution theory with which he was presented in seminary, claiming that the state of original sin into which he had been born necessitated forgiveness that was made possible by the death of Christ, rested heavily on a particular reading of the Eden narrative:

... I was required to read Eric Sauer's *The Dawn of World Redemption* and Augustus H. Strong's *Systematic Theology*. From Sauer I learned that Satan had been a prince or viceroy of God who had rebelled against God and been expelled from the heavenly court, although Sauer admitted that there was no biblical evidence for this understanding. This Satan was responsible for the temptation of Eve and "the fall" of Adam and Eve. Because Adam was the organic representative of "mankind," "the fall" was universal and "death established itself upon all his descendants." Every individual was "in Adam." Strong articulated the same theology but with different language. The context for the discussion of original sin was the law. Adam's sin in the Garden was the violation of the law. Adam's sin was "imputed to all his posterity so that "in Adam all die." Strong explicitly embraced a theology of sin articulated by a church father named Augustine in the mid-390s and early 400s: "God imputes the sin of Adam immediately to all his posterity, in virtue of that organic unity of mankind by which the whole race at the time of Adam's transgression existed, not individually, but seminally, in him as its head. The total life of humanity was then in Adam; the race as yet had its beginning only in him. In Adam's free act, the will of the race revolted from God and the nature of the race corrupted itself." Traducianism is the theory of sin transmission that Strong embraced; that is, in the sexual act, the male transmits sin through the sperm that fertilizes the female egg. The result is that all of Adam's posterity is born into the same state into which Adam fell, that is, total depravity. All humans are born with the complete corruption of their moral nature and a bias toward evil (2013:1-2).³⁰

This view of sin finds its soteriological counterpart in the necessity of the virgin birth of Jesus, so that the male could be removed from the reproductive cycle, with the result that the transmission of sin could be halted (Toews 2013:2). Toew's remark that his theological education trained him to understand sin as an ontological reality (i.e. "... that I was sinful by nature apart from any choice or action of my choosing," 2013:3) is highly significant, in that such a view will of necessity find its soteriological counterpart in a view of salvation as a corresponding ontological event made possible by the cross of Christ.

³⁰ Toews references Sauer (1951:32-34, 56-57) and Strong (1907:533f., 593, 619, 637f.).

In *Chapter one, The story of sin in Genesis 3*, Toews reads what is traditionally interpreted as a narrative of the “fall” as a crime and punishment narrative that had its origin somewhere between the 10th century B.C.E. and Israel’s exile in the 6th century B.C.E. Adam and Eve’s “sin” (a word that he rightly points out is nowhere to be found in the narrative), consists of their mistrust and disobedience of God (2013:4). As a result of this, although they do not die, a great change follows in that they are now consciously naked and afraid to meet God. Their expulsion from the garden – both as punishment and as preventative measure to prohibit them from gaining access to eternal life – indicates that their previous state of intimate friendship with God has been lost, along with the possibility of immortality (2013:12).

The mistrust and disobedience of Adam and Eve results in estrangement from God and exile from the Garden; exile means that “at homeness” is lost, fragmentation replaces unity and wholeness (*shalom*), death replaces the prospect of immortality (2013:12).

Toews’ emphasis on what is *not* present in the text is significant in light of the excessive theological content that has been piled and projected onto this text and its interpretation in its rather complex *Wirkungsgeschichte*. This includes a complete lack of any association of the serpent with Satan or the demonic;³¹ the absence of sexual connotations;³² and the absence of words such as “sin,” “transgression,” “rebellion,” or “guilt.” Nowhere is it implied that Adam’s moral condition suffers or is altered as a result of the disobedience, or that the sin of Cain in Genesis 4 should be understood in view of “a morally defective nature that he inherited from Adam” (2013:13). The narrative does not mention a “fall,” i.e. that “later Christian understanding which has been read back into the text” (2013:13):

³¹ The Wisdom of Solomon (likely written in Alexandria in the 1st century B.C.E. [Harrington S.J. 1999:55] or the 1st century C.E. [Vanderkam 2001:125]) begins the association of the serpent with Satan in Gen 2:24. The same association is implied in the story of Jesus’ temptation (Freltheim 1994:149), which also had its origin in the 1st century B.C.E. and may point to the development of this association during this time. While this observation by Toews that Gen 3 itself makes no such association is a crucial one (indeed, the OT does not know a personified Satan [Cole 2006:32]), it is doubtful that “the serpent is introduced in the story because of what it says, not because of who or what it is” (2013:5). The figure of the serpent is not coincidental, but is a loaded symbolic figure purposefully chosen for everything it symbolised in the ANE. This almost certainly did not include the devil, however.

³² Augustine’s association of desire in the narrative with passion that leads to sex, coupled with his judgment that both this desire and the ensuing passion and sex are all sinful, have no basis in the text, according to which the “desire is for wisdom, for the possibility to transcend one’s limitations by gaining new knowledge and insight” (Toews 2013:6).

(T)he story of salvation history, which is a fairly normative interpretive framework for a Christian reading the whole Bible does not begin with “the fall.” Rather, it begins with broken relationships and exile, which is a very Jewish way of reading the text. And lest we forget, it was Jewish people who wrote this text originally for Jewish people, probably for Jewish people living in exile trying to understand the profound tragedy of the destruction of their country, the Temple, many of their fellow-countrymen (women/children), and their exile in Babylon. The re-definition of the story of Genesis 3 as a “fall” represented a much later Hellenistic-Gentile re-interpretation of the text...” (Toews 2013:13-14).

To say that any “fall” language presents us with a case of eisegesis is not to claim that the couple’s disobedience carries no consequences. While they do not die, they feel shame as they become aware of their nakedness.³³ From a gender perspective, “they see each other naked and do not notice their gender, but in 3:7 they suddenly realize that they are gendered, that they are sexually different. Something profound has changed by the eating of the fruit” (Toews 2013:7).

Their expulsion from the garden, which is a preventative measure to ensure that they do not gain immortality by eating from the tree of life, points to the disruption of their relationship with God. Apart from estrangement from God, their mistrust and disobedience of God also lead to estrangement between themselves on the one hand and between them and nature on the other, as is evident from the “blaming game” that follows God’s interrogation, as well the “naming game” – a “chilling sign of domination” introduced only at this point in the story. Although Adam names the woman as Eve, giver of all life, the act of naming her makes clear that “(t)he woman guarantees the future now in subordination to man” (Toews 2013:11).

Humanity’s relation to the earth suffers severely. The earth is cursed, subjecting humanity to a life of toil under the sun for their basic survival needs – a theme that is echoed in the remainder of Genesis.³⁴ Matthews has shown that

³³ We should not, however, read into the narrative notions of guilt surrounding sexuality, as has often been done. “Adam and the woman are ashamed. There is no language or even suggestion of sin and guilt, consciousness of sin or consciousness of guilt in the text. The common Western interpretation of the narrative as ‘the Fall’ with its accompanying theology of sin has been read back into the text. They have walked naked with God in the Garden before. They have had sex before and their nakedness was unitive (‘one flesh,’ 2:24). Only one thing has changed because they have eaten from the forbidden fruit – they suddenly ‘see,’ a seeing that reveals something profoundly new about themselves, namely, that they are naked. They do not want to meet God naked. The text says nothing more, and we should not let Augustine, or Luther, or Freud, or anyone else tell us that there is more than the text says” (Toews 2013:8).

³⁴ This does not mean, as some versions of “fall” hamartiologies suggest, that nature once existed in an idyllic state where the lamb and lion lived in peace and where no natural disasters occurred. There

“curse” is a repeated motif, present not only in the Eden narrative. This provides the link with the rest of the book Genesis, as the Primeval Cycle must look beyond itself for a catalyst through whom blessing can be effected, i.e., Abraham (cf. the notion of election and the language of “curse” in the patriarchal promises in Genesis 12:3; Matthews 1996:56). It is important to see, however, that the ground that was cursed in Genesis 3 is the same earth that God created as “good” in Genesis 1. God’s relation with creation is good and pleasing, begins in blessing, and is characterised by blessing even as he calls Israel’s first patriarch as catalyst of this blessing to the nations.³⁵

The question of death deserves special mention. The structure of 3:19 suggests that death is not a punishment, since 19b, “until you return to the ground from which you were taken,” is syntactically subordinate to 19a, “You will eat by the sweat of your face.”

בזעת אפיק תאכל לך	You will eat by the sweat of your face,	Independent statement
עד שובך אל-האדמה	until you return to the ground	Dependent temporal clause
כי ממנה לךחית	from which you were taken.	Dependent relative clause

There is some disagreement between scholars on this matter, though. The majority do not understand death as punishment for the disobedience in the Garden, but understand vv. 17-19 as an aetiological response to humanity’s experience of a life filled with never ending toil. According to these thinkers, death puts an end to a long life of hard labour, for “indeed you are dust, and to dust you will return.” Toews, for example, sees the phrase regarding death as a “fitting conclusion to the sentence of punishment in vv. 14-19. In their origin and destiny human beings belong to dust” (2013:11).³⁶ There are those exegetes, however, who view death as a punishment

is also nothing in Rom 8 that suggests that creation’s “groaning” began only after some imagined “fall” (Goldingay 2003:147). “When describing the world as subject to futility, Paul does not say when or how this came about, and it fits Genesis and Romans to see the world as by its nature subject to decay and death from the beginning” (Goldingay 2003:147-148).

³⁵ Goldingay has also drawn attention to the interplay of blessing and curse in Genesis. God’s creation begins in blessing, until the serpent and land are cursed. From now on, he states, “blessing and curse will struggle for dominance in the story” (Goldingay 2003:139). While blessing and curse are correlative in Genesis, they are however not expressed as exact antonyms, since while God actively blesses, “God does not actively curse, but declares that snake and ground are cursed. ... To describe God as blessing but not directly cursing suggests that blessing is YHWH’s natural activity, while cursing is less so. ... In YHWH’s nature blessing has priority over cursing, love over anger, mercy over retribution” (Goldingay 2003:139).

³⁶ Notice the wordplay between “humankind” (מ־דָם) and “soil” (אַדְמָה) in this regard.

for disobedience, or as both punishment and a natural consequence of humankind's origin from the earth (Toews 2013:11; cf. also Chapter 4).

2.3 Conclusion

Any discussion about "sin" based on the Eden narrative needs to take place along the lines of mistrust and disobedience of God, resulting in fractured relationships and estrangement on all levels – from God, from each other, from some animals, and from nature (Toews 2013:14; cf. Goldingay 2003:144). Such a relational view of sin and its effects is far removed indeed from the ontological understanding of sin that developed under the influence of the Western Church Fathers (Toews 2013:14). Neither the Eden narrative, nor any other biblical text, speaks of Adam and Eve bringing about the "fall" of the human race. Instead, the mytho-narratological prologue to Genesis tells "not just one but a sequence of stories" that in combination attempt to provide some explanation for "how wrongdoing came to dominate the human story in ways that affect people's relationship with God (Gen 3), with their family and society (Gen 4) and with supernatural powers (Gen 6)" (Goldingay 2003:144).

Kruger is right in saying that Genesis 3 contains motifs of an "overconfidence in human 'evolution,' in the sense of hoping for an apotheosis, also an overconfidence in wisdom, and unacceptable royal rule" (2001^a:47). I would also argue that at (what one might call) the "surface meaning," the condemnation of humankind's attempt to cross divine boundaries, forms the core content of the narrative.

The Garden of Eden story depicts a reality that is profoundly earthly and – from the human point of view – decidedly imperfect. Humans become "like gods" by gaining the knowledge of good and evil, but the contents of this knowledge are ambiguous and double-edged. Humans now are more than they were before, but their increased knowledge entails a loss of innocence and an exile from paradise. In one sense it is a story of growing up – from a state of childhood innocence and dependence to the sorrows and independence of adulthood. In this view of reality, humans are condemned to be free – but are subject to strict limits. We take pride in

our God-like knowledge, and even in our capacity to disobey God's command, but it is a harsh world that we inhabit and bequeath to our children (Hendel 2013: 43).

The Eden narrative functions on the level of myth in the sense that it describes events that never happened in history, and yet has been happening since the beginning of time and continues to happen every day.

Readers may well find the dynamics of their own lives reflected in Adam and Eve's story. We too decline to fulfil the vocation God sets before us and decline to accept the limits God sets for us. We too prefer the knowledge tree to the life tree. We too yield to strange blandishments and lead one another astray. We too pay a price in our relationships with God and with our work, with our spouses and with our children. No doubt the storytellers' experience of these realities shaped their telling of their story (Goldingay 2003:145).

One may understand the larger context of the Eden narrative, the mytho-narratological prehistory of Genesis 1-11, as a snapshot of everything that went wrong in humanity's relationships (Goldingay 2006:131). To this extent, the literary corpus serves an aetiological function, since it explains the origin of the most fundamental challenges of life that humans are faced with. To find out whether the calamity introduced by human disobedience will have the final say, or whether the divine benevolent intention will prevail, we must follow the story of sin and salvation in the remainder of Scripture. Before we do so, however, there is a final thought regarding the Eden narrative that is well worth keeping in mind. In contrast to the defining role that the Eden narrative has played in Christian theology, we should notice that the story of Adam and Eve is never retold or reinterpreted in the OT. This is significant indeed in view of the way in which the OT continually reinterprets itself and its traditions. Has the Christian tradition made too much of this story?

We turn, now, to consider different ways in which sin and salvation were understood in the remainder of the OT, before we will pick up the history of interpretation of the Eden narrative during Second Temple Judaism, and finally trace the story of sin and salvation in the NT.

CHAPTER THREE: THE STORY OF SIN AND SALVATION IN BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

In this chapter, we trace this story of sin and its dialogical counterpart, the story of salvation, as it has been expressed in the OT, Second Temple Judaism, the Jesus Movement, and the remainder of the NT. Given the incredible weight that the Eden narrative has carried in hamartiology, the reader may be surprised at just how small the impact of the narrative has been in biblical thought itself.³⁷

3.1 Sin and salvation in the Old Testament

Quite distinct from the traditional view of the Western Church, with its emphasis on the fallen state of humankind, the OT presents us with an underlying assumption of well-being (Räisänen 2010:134). Death is generally not understood to have resulted from sin,³⁸ and it is accepted with some equanimity that life comes to an end (even though the premature end of life may call forth protest) (Goldingay 2006:631). The OT is characterised by a general enthusiasm about life, in which grey hair is seen as a crown and the faithful may expect that their flame will not burn out before its time (Goldingay 2006:631).

The OT knows sin not as a state of being but as a “human deviation from the expressed will and desire of God” (Cover 1992:31). Such transgressions could disturb the fundamental state of well-being, but the OT proclaims a merciful God (*הָנָן וֶרְחֹם*), and provided means through which the sinner could return to a state of communion with God through expiatory measures (Räisänen 2010:134). We may

³⁷ Walter Benjamin’s distinction between the “life” and “afterlife” of a text applies here, a distinction which he uses to describe the change that the “original” text undergoes in the process of its interpretation (1996:256). In looking at the story of sin, particularly the Eden narrative and its *Wirkungsgeschichte*, we will include both its life and its afterlife. That is, we will attempt to understand the narrative in its original context, as far as this is possible, along with the effect that it has had on later generations, just as these generations had its own effect on the text.

³⁸ The OT seems ignorant of any link between sin and mortality: “By its nature this life is the context in which proper human existence is worked out. ... The First Testament does not see death as something that comes from outside ourselves, an alien force attacking us from without, like the god Death of other Middle Eastern religions or Paul’s ‘last enemy’ (1 Cor 15:26), or as something unnatural that is to be fought and defeated with the resources of medical science, a little like a virus. Death is not a threat. ... Nothing alarming or frightening can assail us in the realm of death, because there are no metaphysical powers outside YHWH’s control. Nor do we fear meeting YHWH after death, as if death means being confronting with our misdeeds and judged us [sic]” (Goldingay 2006:633).

contemplate, in this regard, the touching expression of hope based on the character of Yahweh, in the face of overwhelming despair following Jerusalem's destruction:

- ²¹ But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
²² The steadfast love (*חֶסֶד*) of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies (*רַחֲמֵי*) never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness (*אִמּוֹנָה*).
²⁴ "The Lord is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."
²⁵ The Lord is good (*טוֹב*) to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.
²⁷ It is good for one to bear
the yoke in youth,
²⁸ to sit alone in silence
when the Lord has imposed it,
²⁹ to put one's mouth to the dust
(there may yet be hope),
³⁰ to give one's cheek to the smiter,
and be filled with insults.
³¹ For the Lord will not
Reject (*זָנַח*) forever
³² Although he causes grief, he will have compassion (*רַחֲם*)
according to the abundance of his steadfast love (*חֶסֶד*);
³³ for he does not **willingly** afflict (*כִּי לَا עֲנֵה מְלָבֵד*)
or grieve anyone (Lam 3:21-33).

The phrase "does not willingly afflict" (literally "does not afflict from the heart"), expresses this basic trust in the grace and goodness of God. Goldingay describes this by referring to mercy as belonging to the "dominant" (central or governing) aspect of God's person, while justice belongs to the "marginal" aspects (Goldingay 2006:166). It would certainly be misleading to claim that wrath is not an attribute of God and that only love and faithfulness constitute the Godhead. However,

... (i)t is the case that wrath has a secondary status within God, compared with love and faithfulness. Thus the exercise of anger issues from God's circumstantial will, which always stands in the service of God's absolute will for life and blessing (Goldingay 2006:166-167).

This means that Israelite faith found security in the trust that, even if God may judge them, this judgment is ultimately intended for their salvation. This is not to create the impression that the OT is unconcerned with the reality of sin. On the

contrary, we may deduce from the frequent occurrence of the multiple Hebrew words³⁹ used to denote human failure in a variety of contexts (including cultic, ethical, and moral), that sin is one of the central themes that OT theology wrestles with (Cover 1992:31). Transgressions and evil were realities of life that had to be dealt with, but ancient Israelites did not understand the world as a whole to be in bondage to sin, or humans to exist in some sinful state (Räisänen 2010:135).

The OT does not know anything resembling original sin as formulated by Augustine. Sin does not automatically or necessarily form part of human nature,⁴⁰ or even of reality itself, for that matter. The OT does not know evil as a self-existent entity, and the sequence of the first explicit references to evil (**עַר**) illustrates not only that evil is only comprehensible when set over against the good (**טוֹב**), but also that good pre-exists evil (Goldingay 2006:254). The foundational narratives of Genesis therefore support the idea that we can have no understanding of sin except in the context of grace. That is not to say that the OT is insensitive to the universality of sin. All humans sin, and the permeating nature of sin is reflected in OT texts (Cover 1992:32-33; cf. Räisänen 2010:135; Goldingay 2006:262-265).⁴¹ Interestingly, the OT is unconcerned with the question of the origin of sin and evil, and it was only in Second Temple Judaism that this theme would receive greater theological attention (cf. 3.2). While early Christian thought usually returned to the Eden narrative to answer questions pertaining to sin, the OT does not refer to this narrative in any of its

³⁹ Some of the most significant terms include the variety of lexical forms of the roots *ht'* (אָתָה), *pš'* (עַשֵּׂה), and '*wn*' (עָוָן). *Ht'* (אָתָה) occurs most frequently (595 times), and the semantic history of the term reveals a development from denoting to be mistaken, be at fault, be lacking, or miss a target, until it came to have moral and theological overtones (Cover 1992:32; cf. Goldingay 2006:257). Whereas *ht'* (אָתָה) could refer to an inadvertent, unintended mistake, the term *pš'* (עַשֵּׂה), occurring around 135 times, describes a "willful, knowledgeable violation of a norm or standard," with the result that it often describes and is translated as rebellion (Cover 1992:32). '*Wn*' (עָוָן) signifies error and iniquity, and occurs around 299 times in its various lexical forms. This word is almost always used in a religious context, and "(m)etonymic usages of the term illustrate clearly the relationship in Hebrew thought between 'sin' and resultant 'guilt' and 'punishment,' since 'awôñ may denote any of these three senses (or all three meanings) in a single passage (Cover 1992:32). 'Awôñ usually implies that the sinner deliberately chose the wrong way (Goldingay 2006:259).

⁴⁰ Räisänen explains by pointing out that the evil deeds and the disasters that are seen as their consequence, are *actual evils* that are in no way seen as connected to some evil inheritance or evil inclination inherent to human nature (Räisänen 2010:135, citing Barr 1992:9). Goldingay clarifies that the OT's perspective on universal sinfulness urges communities to "look at their *actual* lives and face up to their implications" (Goldingay 2006:265, emphasis YS).

⁴¹ By the "universality of sin" is meant the fact that all humans, everywhere, and in all times, sin. On this the entire OT agrees, even though different literary corpora may have their own perspective on the nature of such sin.

classical writings, and instead locates human sinfulness in “creatureliness” (Cover 1992:33; cf. Räisänen 2010:135).

Humans were made of dusty chthonic substance (hence, frail and ephemeral), born of impure women in a tainting birth process (hence morally tainted) and made to inhabit a polluted, lower-than-celestial realm called earth (hence, having even more natural proclivity to sin than celestial creatures, who themselves all too frequently fall into error) (Cover 1992:33).

Israelite cultic purity traditions cast human birth in a suspect light, and while Augustine would later cite Ps 51:7 (NRSV 51:5)⁴² in support of his doctrine of original sin, the Psalmist’s confession of being “brought forth in iniquity” and conceived “in sin,” is more accurately understood in a cultic light as pertaining to Israelite purity customs (Cover 1992:33).⁴³ Despite this connection between sin and creatureliness, the OT consistently stops short of ascribing this universally prevalent human sinfulness to the Creator and never implies that God endowed human beings with sinful tendencies. Indeed, the OT unfailingly holds human persons responsible for their own sin (Cover 1992:34).

It is necessary to elaborate somewhat on the cultic and unintentional sin briefly mentioned above. The “Israelite conception of sin as cultic trespass, ritual impurity, sacrilege, and inadvertent sin” meets with significant resistance from especially Western readers, and the frequent difficulty in distinguishing between “sin as ethical-moral and sin as cultic-ritual” in Israelite literature only adds to the problem (Cover 1992:34). That both cultic and moral sins were considered equally severe offences against the deity (even when committed unintentionally), could result in the same dire consequences (which may even include death), and that similar expiatory sacrifices atoned for both categories of sin, demonstrates the extent of the cultural-hermeneutical challenge involved (Cover 1992:34). To add to the confusion, Israelite literature even used the same lexical range to refer to cultic and moral sin (Cover 1992:35).⁴⁴ It quickly becomes clear that “sin” in ancient Israelite religion was both a

⁴² “Indeed, I was born **guilty**, a **sinner** when my mother conceived me” (NRSV, 51:5); “הַנְּשָׁעֹן חִלְלָתִי” “בְּחֶטְאָ יִחְמַתֵּנִי אֱמִי” (BHS, 51:7). Cf. also Job 15:14; 25:4; 14:1, 4.

⁴³ This is because “(I)eitical law and perhaps even earlier ritual customs stipulated mandatory expiatory sacrifices for the defilement of the woman incurred during parturition (Lev 12); every newborn, to that extent, had come into contact with impurity at birth, and hence had a sinful beginning” (Cover 1992:33).

⁴⁴ The same terms (*hattāt*, *'asām*, *'awōn*) are used to denote cultic sins, guilt, and sometimes even punishment for sin or guilt, so that “the irrelevance of disobedient intent is thus evident even in the

serious and complex matter, and moreover could arise from more than intentional disobedience, rebellion or ill intention – it could even be as unavoidable as a normal bodily function (such as a pelvic discharge, for both sexes; Cover 1992:34; cf. Goldingay 2006:278-280). To approach an understanding of these ancient social-religious boundary markers,

(w)e must remember that Hebrew culture, like other ANE cultures, was dominated by belief in the supernatural and by a clear separation of “sacred” and “profane.” Hebrew conceptions of sin must be understood within a universe of thought that transcends the static, materialistic viewpoint of modern science (Cover 1992:34).

Within such a symbolic universe, regulated by (almost) mechanical and (most definitely) supernatural dynamics, violations against the sacred carried a potency that could pollute and endanger the entire land and community (Cover 1992:34). Keeping this in mind, it becomes apparent how Israel’s elaborate cultic and sacrificial system was intended to counteract the evil that could result from the violation of sacred boundaries (Cover 1992:35). Within this context, it becomes understandable why unintentional sin (often called “the sins of one’s youth”) carries equal theological significance in Israelite religion, since it too might hold disastrous consequences for the entire community (Cover 1992:35).⁴⁵ Also to be understood in this light is the idea that children could inherit the penalties due for sins committed by their parents. This implies that punishment could be delayed – a notion that runs parallel with similar notions of corporate personhood in the OT⁴⁶ – and yet the OT often engages critically with this idea (Cover 1992:36).⁴⁷

The priestly focus on cultic and unintentional sin finds its counterpart in the prophetic and historiographic collections, which typically emphasise sin in terms of intentional disobedience, rebellion, and apostasy (Cover 1992:36). This moral-ethical approach to sin understands the human person “as a creature of choice in a contest of wills and allegiances: the autonomous will of the creature versus the authority and

nomenclature. Similarly, the root *tm'* ‘be(come) impure/unclean/desecrated/polluted’ often had moral and cultic components which cannot be separated” (Cover 1992:35).

⁴⁵ “From a cultic-ritual viewpoint, unconscious sin would have been dangerous: the menace of its contagion would continue to grow as long as the offense were undetected and unatoned” (Cover 1992:35).

⁴⁶ Cover here refers to Exod 20:5-6; 34:6-7; Num 14:18; Deut 5:9-10; Jer 32:18.

⁴⁷ An example is the theodicean struggle after the destruction of Jerusalem, where the suffering individuals laments that, while *their parents* were the ones who sinned, the parents have now passed away, and *they* are left bearing their parents’ punishment (Cover 1992:36, cf. Jer 31:29; Ezek 18:2).

will of the Creator" (Cover 1992:36). The prophetic image for Israel of stubborn children rebelling (*עַשְׂف*, *pāša'*) against their parents fall within this context (cf. Ezek 2:5, 7; 5:6; 12:2; Isa 30:9; Goldingay 2006:259). *Pāša'* and *mārad* may also describe rebellion against a king or similar political ruler, and so Israel is depicted as the wayward people who refuse to submit to the authority of their heavenly ruler (Goldingay 2006:260). Similarly, Israel is described as wilfully blind and stubbornly deaf, ignoring the words of the prophets.

That human rebellion never lessened, regardless of the persistence of divine grace, demonstrated to humanity through election, promise, covenant, forgiveness, and even mitigated punishment, is a theme that runs through the entire OT (Cover 1992:36). The Deuteronomistic History stresses sin as covenant disloyalty, a notion also found in prophetic literature. Sin in the prophetic and historiographic corpora fundamentally describes estrangement from the Divine due to the voluntary rejection of Yahweh, inevitably resulting in disturbance of the divine order (Cover 1992:36).

The OT routinely makes theological generalisations about "the wicked" or "sinners," on the one hand, and the "righteous," on the other (Ps 1 being a famous example; Goldingay 2006:266). This generalisation created internal theological tension in the OT, as seen for example in the critique of the pessimistic wisdom tradition against what it perceived as the naïve optimism, displayed in the belief that the "wicked" would meet calamity, while the "righteous" would enjoy divine blessing (Cover 1992:36-37).

It is striking to note that these ancient theologians considered it entirely possible for people to be considered "righteous," even while affirming the universality of sin. A conscientious servant of Yahweh would be considered "righteous," even while committing sin in certain respects (Cover 1992:37; cf. Räisänen 2010:136; Goldingay 2006:266-267). As Räisänen puts it,

It is one thing to belong to the frail human race; it is quite another to willfully and persistently transgress God's will. In other words, there is a difference between individual transgression, which no one can avoid in the long run, and the way of life of "sinners" who choose to disregard God (Räisänen 2010:135).

Also,

Since blamelessness did not mean perfection, it was not regarded as impossible to fulfill God's commandments. It was worth the effort to stress their importance from generation to generation. True, humans are weak, and an evil inclination fights within them against a good inclination,⁴⁸ for God provided humans with the impulse to do evil as well as with the impulse to do good. (Räisänen 2010:136).

The term "wicked," on the other hand, describes that collective group that incorrigibly remained in stubborn rebellion against Yahweh (Cover 1992:37; cf. Räisänen 2010:138). This moral judgment sometimes blurred into a decidedly sociological category, where "sinners" and "the righteous" would serve to establish divinely sanctioned social boundaries between "us" and "them" more than it would describe certain moral orientations to life (Räisänen 2010:138; cf. Cover 1992:27). Stereotyping is, after all, a central strategy of the ancient Mediterranean world (Malina 1993:17; Neyrey 1993a:51). When Israel came under political threat from the 8th century onward, the sociological need for such stereotyping became more pronounced. During this time, the "wicked" as a class were made the scapegoats in an attempt to explain the people's suffering as the chastisement of Yahweh evoked by the guilt of this group for resisting Yahweh's rule (Cover 1992:37).

Sin as institutionalised social injustice through the abuse of authority, power and wealth, receives special attention in the prophetic corpus (Cover 1992:37). While the OT always understands sin as alienation from God, it maintains that violations of the dignity or possessions of another person also constitute sin. In such cases, the sin would bear the double alienation between the sinner and zir community as well as with God, requiring repentance and restitution (Cover 1992:37).

The consequences of the ruptured relationships caused by sin are consistently grave in the OT. The primeval history sees God reacting to sin with remorse for having created humans, while in covenantal theology God responds with wrath and punitive action. The OT reveals some preliminary engagement with the question of how any injury or harm could be done – by sin or otherwise – to a truly transcendent God. In the Book of Job, both Job and his friends take a critical stance to the idea that human sin may disturb the divine plan in any significant way (Cover 1992:38). The assumption in relation to this question, which the OT applies to

⁴⁸ This is the *yetser harah* (evil imagination) and *yetser hatob* (good imagination). Cf. 3.2 and 5.2.

Yahweh, is in agreement with the surrounding cultures of the ANE, namely that the Gods

are duty-bound to uphold the moral order of the universe by rewarding righteousness and punishing sin. Societal stability depended upon the maintenance of its moral fabric, and this the gods had to insure (Cover 1992:28).

The OT displays diversity regarding the nature of divine punishment meted out for sin, which probably reflects the complexity of the question (Cover 1992:38):

If indeed there was a consistent Israelite dogma of talionic retributive justice, why are there so many apparent exceptions – including the major voices of dissent heard in the books of Job and Qoheleth which were also endorsed as canonical by official Judaism? Did God intervene by fiat to personally administer punishment, or did he employ agents, or did he merely maintain the balance of natural events which automatically bring the sinner his just due (so Koch 1955:1-42)? Evidence for each of these modes of punishment may be found in the OT, and the narrative in 1 Kings 22 shows how convoluted schemes of divine punishment might become. However, the lack of scholarly consensus on these questions testifies to the fact that the diversity of viewpoint and the complexity of the problem even among ancient writers have not been fully appreciated (Cover 1992:38).

Israel's election as God's covenant people adds a new dimension to the punishment of sin, since this places Israel under oath to conform to the covenant stipulations (Exod 24), just as Yahweh was expected to mete out punishment if Israel should stray from her covenant fidelity (Cover 1992:38-39; cf. Deut 27-28). According to this doctrine of retribution, the fall of Judah to Babylonia in 586 B.C.E. and the ensuing exile were explained by the prophets as divine punishment for sin. The OT conforms to what Patrick D. Miller has called a "poetic justice" in its treatment of divine judgment and punishment. This means that a poetic form of the talion is often employed, according to which transgression of a certain kind invites repayment in kind, so that the king who "does evil" suffers "calamity" (Cover 1992:39, citing Miller 1982).

Finally, a priestly contribution to the punishment of sin surrounds the metaphor of weight, where the sinner is seen to carry the guilt of a committed sin as weight until it is duly removed through cultic rites and divine forgiveness (Cover

1992:39; cf. Anderson 2009:15-26).⁴⁹ While the sinner carries this weight, ze may experience all sorts of suffering as a result, determined to some extent by the nature of the sin, for there is a causal connection between sin and calamity (Räisänen 2010:136). The Book of Job illustrates that suffering was at times so strongly linked to sin that it became hard for Israelites to imagine that suffering could occur outside of the presence of sin (Cover 1992:39; cf. Goldingay 2006:265).

To say that a person or a people is “guilty” generally does not describe a subjective state or “feeling of blameworthiness,” but instead points to the “objective position of someone who has committed an offense” (Goldingay 2006:573). Whether this offensive act was committed intentionally or not is irrelevant, and the wrongdoer would “carry” the result of their actions, so that “(w)rongdoing, guilt and punishment interrelate” at this level (Goldingay 2006:573).

Any discussion of sin in the OT must likewise focus on the great emphasis that Israelite theologians placed on grace and the forgiveness of sin (Cover 1992:39; cf. Goldingay 2006:314-315). Any awareness of personal wickedness in the OT is always equally matched with an awareness of the overflowing mercy of God. The repentance to which Israel is called is of the heart, as source of thought and action, and is to be matched on the exterior by outward action such as fasting and lamenting (Goldingay 2006:328). Repentance is also corporate. Apart from the need for individuals to “turn” from their path of wrongdoing, there are times that the nation as a whole has gone astray, with Yahweh wanting to see the people as a whole rending their hearts, not their clothes (Goldingay 2006:328).

The ultimate foundation of hope for forgiveness is the loving commitment and faithfulness of Yahweh. The *hesed* (חֶסֶד) of Yahweh “suggests a commitment that goes beyond anything that the other party has a right to expect,” even when the

⁴⁹ Gary Anderson has illustrated very effectively how the metaphor of sin as weight functions in the OT. The prevalence of this metaphor is often severely underestimated, since more dynamic translations express related metaphors or idioms as “being guilty” or “to forgive” (Anderson 2009:25-26). Anderson’s interpretation of these metaphors are impeded, however, by his lack of insight into the dyadic personality as described in recent research by biblical anthropologists. He therefore makes too much of the subjective load of personal guilt, apparently unaware of research that describes the dyadic personality of collectivistic cultures as decidedly non-introspective (Malina 1993:12, 14-15). Furthermore, Anderson does not pay adequate attention to the cultic sphere of life in ancient Israel, including purity standards and the anthropological dynamics that lay behind these (Neyrey 1993b:122-125).

covenant partner has forfeited any right to expect such commitment (Goldingay 2006:330). It is for this reason that even God's wrath may be said to be so designed that it may invite people to turn back to God. God's judgment is therefore better understood as correction, aimed at motivating Israel to change her direction (Goldingay 2006:338). Divine judgment is therefore simultaneously an act of refinement and, ultimately, restoration of torn relationships, so that Israel may turn and recognise Yahweh as one who may "heal after hitting" (Hos 6:1-3; Goldingay 2006:341-342). Being human, in the mind of the OT, means being-in-relation to the Creator and being-in-relation to one's fellow creatures, both with creation and fellow humans.⁵⁰ Humanity finds zirself in this covenantal relationship by virtue of being created by God, who addresses humanity as Thou (Goldingay 2006:521). Thus, to be truly human means to exist in relationship with one's Creator.

3.2 Sin and salvation in Second Temple Judaism (200 B.C.E. – 200 C.E.)

Literary activity and theological reflection flowered during the Second Temple period. While formative Judaism "inherited from the biblical tradition a relatively optimistic view of the human condition in God's world" (Räisänen 2010:135), the collective difficulties experienced during the Greek and Roman periods resulted in an increased interest in the origin of sin and evil. It is during this time period that the idea of some opposing supernatural power, such as a "primordial act of rebellion in a superhuman realm" (Räisänen 2010:137), gains popularity in this regard. Whereas, in the OT, even evil things are thought to originate from Yahweh, Satan now becomes a major adversary of God, with Belial as "the master of the spirits of error; the present age is under his control" (Räisänen 2010:137; cf. *T. 12 Patr.*).

Others, however, turned to the primeval narrative of the first humans to find an explanation to the problem of evil. In view of the fact that the Eden narrative receives no reinterpretation – or even retellings – in the OT, the significant amount of interpretive attention that it receives in Second Temple Judaism is striking, and shows that Paul's interpretation of the sin of Adam forms part of a larger trend at the time. The treatment of the Eden narrative during the 400 years of the Second

⁵⁰ The OT does not imply that the individual is unimportant, yet it never values the individual over the community. As one would expect from religious thought emerging from the collective cultures of the ANE, The OT finds the locus of human identity more in our being members of a community than in our being individuals (Goldingay 2006:528).

Temple period displays both development and diversity in the interpretative tradition. The earlier literature from this period (Sir, Wis, *Jub.*, Dead Sea Scrolls) portray Adam as a hero and wise man. He is a model of holiness, the first patriarch of the Jewish people, and in *Jubilees* even performs priestly duties before leaving (not being driven from) the Garden. These early sources see Adam neither as the father of sin nor as the origin of death (Toews 2013:36-37).⁵¹ Instead, sin is understood to have originated with Cain (Sir, Wis), or with the lamented “marriage” between the “sons of God” and the “daughters of men” (Gen 6; cf. 1 *En.*, *Jub.*, T. 12 *Patr.*, Dead Sea Scrolls). In a bold claim by the *Community Rule* (Dead Sea Scrolls), it is even suggested that this responsibility may lay with Godself, due to God’s creation of an evil spirit that led to sin entering the world through Adam (Toews 2013:36). Thus, prior to the destruction of the temple during the Roman revolt,

(t)he two wisdom writings that re-tell the Adam story in Second Temple Judaism picture him as a heroic Israelite figure. Adam is the patriarch of the Jewish people, a man of great wisdom who is the image of the humanity God intended in creation. This form of Adam theology advanced a claim about the place of Israel in the purposes of God. Israel is God’s true humanity who fulfill[s] [sic] God’s destiny by obeying the Torah. This Adam theology was transposed into nationalist ideology during the Maccabean period, 165-63 BCE, and the anti-Roman reaction that resulted in the Jewish-Roman War of 66-70 CE and the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE (Toews 2013:21).

The traumatic events of 70 C.E., when Jerusalem and the Temple suffered a second destruction, found literary expression through, among others, a different interpretation of the introduction of sin into the world. The Apocalyptic writers of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* hold Adam responsible for this (only *2 Bar.* 19:8 and 48:42

⁵¹ In Sir 17:1-7, the responsibility for both human mortality and the knowledge of good and evil is laid at God’s feet and is not seen as punishment for sin (cf. Toews 2013:17; cf. Sir 41:4). A tradition reflected in Sir 25:24 (“From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her we all die” NRSV), and which was traditionally understood as referring to Eve (cf. Levison 1985:617, n. 1 and Ellis 2011:723, n. 2), has recently been argued by Jack Levison to refer to the “evil wife” that is the beginning of sin, and the cause of husbands’ death (Levison 1985:617-623, esp. 619). Levison illustrates how an interpretation of the “woman” as Eve is exegetically unsound, since (i) attributing death to Eve conflicts with Ben Sira’s view of the origin of death; (ii) it conflicts with Ben Sira’s interpretation of Gen 1-3; (iii) it conflicts with the immediate literary context (Levison 1985:618); and (iv) the sapiential poem from Qumran Cave 4 provides a similar description of the wicked women without having Eve in mind (Levison 1985: 622). Collins has also pointed out that the context of v. 24 is a series of negative sayings concerning the troubles women cause men (25:13-36), and that the text expresses Sirach’s mistrust and suspicion of women rather than reflecting his view of the Eden narrative (Collins 2004:298). Teresa Ellis also concludes that the text cannot refer to Eve, and argues that it alludes indirectly to Hesiod’s Pandora as a prototype for Sirach’s “evil wife” (placed opposite the “wife of valour”) as a means of undermining Hellenistic claims to cultural superiority (Ellis 2011:723-42). Cf. Toews (2013:18).

mention Eve in this regard; Toews 2013:37). It is to 2 Esdras 7:118 (NRSV; scholarly title is *4 Ezra*) that we owe the word “fall” to describe the result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience. Ezra’s comment that, while only Adam sinned, we are all affected by his “fall” from possible immortality, makes it clear that Ezra considered Adam and Eve (along with their posterity) to have missed out on the possibility of immortality because of their sin. It does not refer to the act itself or any other general consequence (Goldingay 2003:145). Paul parallels Ezra’s thinking in Romans 5, though he does not employ “fall” terminology. Nevertheless, “fall” language found its way into church tradition through the inclusion of 2 Esdras in the Apocrypha, which the church eventually came to regard as Scripture.

While universal death, physical pain, and the general state of chaos in the world, follow as a consequence of sin, the act of sinning flows from a free choice and is therefore a matter of individual responsibility (Toews 2013:37).⁵² The fact that the Apocalyptic writings at the end of the 1st or beginning of the 2nd century C.E. unilaterally reject the notion of hereditary sinfulness, may point to the existence of minority groups during this time that did propagate the hereditary transmission of sin from Adam (Toews 2013:37).

While one tradition holds Eve more responsible than Adam for the disobedience in the Garden (*Jub.*, *Josephus’ Ant.*, *L.A.E.*), it is only the *Life of Adam and Eve* that associates illicit sexual desire with Eve’s transgression. It is also in the *Life of Adam and Eve*, which strangely is the same document that holds Eve most responsible for the transgression in the Garden, that we find a subversive portrayal of Eve as a virtuous model of morality (Toews 2013:36).

Second Temple Judaism continues the OT tendency to describe the consequence of sin in relational terms. As an act of free will, sin disrupts relationships, even with nature. One tradition describes how, following the transgression in the Garden, animals lost the ability to speak (*Jub.*, *Philo*, *Josephus*;

⁵² Sirach, e.g., maintained a high theology of human free will, as well as the human capacity for keeping the Torah (cf. Sir 15:11-15; also 16-20). There is for Sirach “no such thing as ‘original sin,’ biological or social, which predisposes people to disobey God and choose sin” (Toews 2013:20). For *2 Bar.*, as well, disobedience is a matter of choice, so that “Adam and Eve are not responsible for the sin of their posterity” (Toews 2013:31; cf. *2 Bar.* 48:47). Also, “(t)he key concept for *2 Baruch* is imitation. Adam did not cause his descendants to sin. Rather they chose to sin by imitating his disobedience” (Toews 2013:32).

Toews 2013:36-37). The guilt of the Garden was also understood to have had cosmic historic consequences, in that it effected a change in the apocalyptic ages by introducing the present evil age – an idea that we will re-encounter in Paul (Toews 2013:37). In general, however, and aside from the hypothetical minority group referred to above, which may have understood Adam and Eve's sin to have effected an ontological change that was transmitted from generation to generation, the material available to us suggests that Second Temple Judaism

... believed in a relational understanding of sin – it is disobedient action which people freely chose to do – rather than the result of an ontological condition of human nature inherited from previous generations. In other words, the sin of Adam and Eve was interpreted in Second Temple Judaism in Jewish categories of thought – relational or covenantal rather than ontological (Toews 2013:37).

The “yetser” (יצר)

²⁰ Yet you did not take away their evil heart from them, so that your law might produce fruit in them.²¹ For the first Adam, burdened with an evil heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him. ²² Thus the disease became permanent; the law was in the hearts of the people along with the evil root; but what was good departed, and the evil remained (2 Esd 3:20-22).

In this Apocryphal book, we come across an early development of the Hebrew word *yetser*, which occurs in the OT and received some attention in Rabbinic thought. Except for a small counter tradition that maintained that *yetser* was neither good nor evil, but a neutral creative impulse created by God that could be used for either good or evil (cf. 5.2), the majority of texts seem to regard the *yetser* as wicked, based on texts such as Genesis 6:5. This is the *yetser harah*, or “evil inclination” which was understood to explain the human tendency for unrighteousness.

In the quotation above, the author refers to this “evil inclination” or “heart” to come to terms with the apostasy that resulted in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (cf. 2 Esd 4:22-25). The author (under the pseudonym *Ezra*), appeals to deuteronomistic theology, claiming that the city fell because the elect are full of sin and that “all of us also are full of ungodliness” (2 Esd 4:38). The reason for this ungodliness, according to Ezra, is the evil inclination that has led all humans astray, from Adam onward. Interestingly, the author corrects Ezra through the mouth of an angel, who holds that there are indeed some righteous people left, including Ezra

himself (2 Esd 6:32; Räisänen 2010:136). The implication is that the *yetser* does not predetermine the human person to sin, and that everyone remains responsible for zir own iniquity. Indeed, for

... though they had understanding, they committed iniquity; and though they received the commandments, they did not keep them; and though they obtained the law, they dealt unfaithfully with what they received (2 Esd 7:72).

Not everybody is to be counted as transgressors, claims the angel, since there are those who “have striven with great effort to overcome the evil thought that was formed with them, so that it might not lead them astray from life into death” (2 Esd 7:92). It thus becomes clear that there existed a degree of diversity in Jewish thought regarding the *yetser*. Importantly, even where the *yetser* was thought to be evil, as in the text above, Jewish thought never removed responsibility for sin from human subjects. It is indeed possible to resist the evil inclination and be righteous. Due to our thorough discussion of the *yetser* in Chapter 5, we conclude with these few introductory remarks.

3.3 Sin and salvation in the New Testament

The NT tradition stands in continuity with both the OT and the Second Temple period, seeing sin as an act or stance that is opposed to God, and including in such offenses acts of injustice committed against fellow humans (Sanders 1992:40). Sanders distinguishes three partially overlapping views of sin and sinners, namely, (i) individual, wrong acts; (ii) persons who sin routinely, having no regard for the will of God; and (iii) a “power” or “force” opposed to God that may capture humans and lead them into sin (Sanders 1992:40). We will provide a brief overview of the first two aspects, followed by the third under its own heading (2.4.1).

The early Jesus Movement continued the relatively optimistic view regarding the moral nature of human beings that is found in the OT, and that continued into formative Judaism (Räisänen 2010:139).

All people sin, no doubt – the common notion of universal sinfulness remains unshaken – but that can be handled; it is not a tragedy. All humans are “evil” when they are compared to God, ..., but then again there is a vast difference between the “good person” who “out of the good treasure of the heart produces good” and the “evil person” who “out of evil treasures evil” (Q 6:43-45; Räisänen 2010:139).

The notion of the universality of sin is found throughout the NT (Sanders 1992:41), and the nature of such sin is generally understood as individual wrong thoughts or actions. While the exact nature of the wrongful acts is often not specified, there seem to have been general agreement about which acts would be counted as sinful (Sanders 1992:41). The early Jesus Movement considered it quite possible for humans to fulfil God's commandments, even if radicalised by the Sermon on the Mount in (Matt) 5. Even Paul, despite the pessimism of his arguments in Romans, claims that he does not know of any personal sin (1 Cor 4:4), and exhorts his congregations to remain blameless (Räisänen 2010:140).

The NT consistently holds that such individually committed sinful acts may be atoned for. The means of atonement in Judaism is continued in certain parts of the NT, namely confessing such sins to a priest, offering a sacrifice, and making restitution to any person who may have been wronged (Sanders 1992:41). By and large, however, the NT is of the opinion that the sacrificial system has been superseded, so that the sinner may now approach God directly for the purpose of confessing sin and gaining forgiveness. It is clear, however, that confession to fellow believers still had a place (Sanders 1992:41).

The NT continues the OT view that any sin that remains unatoned for will be punished, either by suffering of some kind while still alive, or after death. It is for this reason that we find a similarly strong connection between suffering (e.g. disease) and sin than we saw in the OT (Sanders 1992:42). Along with this view came the understanding that any chastening, in the form of suffering in this life, prevents the ultimate destruction of the believer, since sins may only be punished once (Sanders 1992:42; cf. 1 Cor 11:27-32; 2 Bar. 13:10). The NT also sees a link between sin and death (Rom 1:32; 5:12; 6:16, 23). It is this link that forms the basis for both the idea that Jesus' death atoned for sinners (he died in our place) and the view that the believer escapes death by dying with Christ and rising to new life (Sanders 1992:42).

The NT does not develop a standard system of atonement for sins committed after conversion, and in light of the OT provision for (and emphasis on) restitution through repentance and sacrifice for generally righteous Israelites who occasionally sin, the apparent silence of the NT in this regard begs an explanation (Sanders 1992:42).

We have already seen that the emphasis was on perfection, and probably this idealism prevented the early authors from spending much time and energy on coping with transgressions by Christians. Secondly, many of them expected the Lord soon to return, and thus they were not motivated to work out a system of pastoral care for straying members of the Church. The stark position of Hebrews – no forgiveness for intentional postconversion sin – is explained by this view: Jesus offered the sacrifice for sins “once for all at the end of the age” (9:26) (Sanders 1992:42).

The century-long delay of the parousia challenged this denial of continued forgiveness and resulted in the rite of penance to provide for post-baptismal transgression. This came to be an expected reality, leading eventually to Luther’s dictum that every believer is *simul iustus et peccator* (Sanders 1992:42).

The NT reveals a general consensus regarding the belief that “Jesus came to save people from their sins, and consequently that faith in him was required for the remission of sin” (Sanders 1992:42). This was not the view of the historical Jesus, however, who understood sin and its remission in a typically Israelite way, whereby righteousness was characterised by adherence to the law. The historical Jesus proclaims the nearness of the Kingdom of God, urges people to prepare for it, but never limits “the righteous” to his followers, nor equates “sin” with those who refuse to do so.

The so-called “sinners” that the historical Jesus was associated with is best understood as a social-religious class of marginal figures that were ousted by both the political and the religious powers that be, and who would have been considered by these authority figures as habitual sinners (Van Aarde 2001:144; cf. Sanders 1992:42). It is here that we approach the NT view of sin as social classification that denotes persons who sin routinely, having no regard for the will of God (Sanders 1992:40, 43; cf. Räisänen 2010:140-142). It is this collective group that became most associated with Jesus in the Gospels, and coincidentally also with John the Baptist, who was said to be accepted by “tax collectors and prostitutes” (Matt 21:32). The religious institutions of the day considered the lives of this collective group to be antithetical to the will of God, and it is likely that the historical Jesus himself is to be placed among this social group (Van Aarde 2001:41). That Jesus’ association with sinners is consistently criticised in the gospels is due probably to the fact that he was understood to claim that “even heinous sinners who followed him were acceptable to

God, and that he did not require of them the standard acts of atonement which are provided for them in the law" (Sanders 1985:204-208; cf. Sanders 1992:43). This would naturally have been perceived as a threat by the cultic-religious institutions of the day.

The early Jesus Movement tended to consider all non-believers as sinners, insisting that all humans needed to convert to faith in Jesus. Their view of universal sin therefore became more radical than that of the historical Jesus. This was continued in the remainder of the NT, as illustrated by Paul's statement in Rom 5:8, "But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us."

The views of sin discussed so far have all understood sin as something that may be avoided. Whether a wrongful act committed by an individual (in which case it is possible not to sin), or a social-religious stereotyping of a collective (in which case it is possible for an individual to repent from being a "sinner"), both atonement and change was possible and was understood to rest upon God's grace (Sanders 1992:44; cf. Räisänen 2010:143). Christianity continued the consistent Israelite belief that God loves and wishes to save sinners (Sanders 1992:44). Based on God's grace it was at least possible, though admittedly hard, to avoid sin. In the remaining category, however, sin is seen as an enslaving power against which humans are quite helpless, save for the gracious victory of Christ.

3.3.1 *The story of sin in the Jesus Movement: Paul the follower of Jesus*

With the Pauline view of sin, we return to the question of the Eden narrative, since all of the merely three references to the Eden story in the NT is found in the Pauline (or Deutero-Pauline) corpus (Toews 2013:38). Toews interprets Paul's theology of sin within the same apocalyptic framework than he did *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* (cf. 3.2). Paul wrote his letters a decade and a half before the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple – the event for which the Jewish apocalyptic writings of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* attempts to construct a theodicy (Toews 2013:39). *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* wishes to offer the Jewish people hope through their apocalyptic outlook of God entering or invading history and changing its course: the "present evil age" would be overcome by the "age to come" (Toews 2013:40-41). For Paul, however, these two ages are epitomised by the paradigmatic figures of Adam and Jesus:

Messiah Jesus' life, death and resurrection was God's apocalyptic answer to the apocalyptic power of *Sin*⁵³ introduced by Adam into the world. History is really about two apocalyptic paradigmatic figures, Adam and Jesus. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus was the apocalyptic event for Paul that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was for *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* with one critical difference. The writers of *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* were trying to formulate a theodicy so that they and their people could hope again. Paul believed that the apocalyptic events of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection meant history now existed at the "mingling of the ages" (1 Cor 10:11 especially, and 2 Cor 5:16), that is, the overlap of the present evil age and the age to come (Toews 2013:41).

1 Corinthians 15:22 and Romans 5:12-19

For as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ (1 Cor 15:22).⁵⁴

Paul points out this parallelism between Adam and Christ while providing clarity regarding the resurrection from the dead, and without stipulating exactly what he means by "in Adam all die." His point seems to be that the consequences of Adam's disobedience are reversed in Christ (Toews 2013:38-39). Writing to believers in Rome a few years later, though still around a decade and a half before the destruction of Jerusalem (70 C.E.), Paul associates Adam with death in the same apocalyptic fashion than *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* would do some forty-five years later:

¹²Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, **and so death spread to all because all have sinned**⁵⁵ – ¹³sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law.

¹⁴Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. ¹⁸Therefore just as one man's trespass led to

⁵³ When referring to "sin" as apocalyptic power rather than as referring to individual acts of sin, Toews capitalises the word and puts it in italics to make the distinction clear. The same practice is followed here for clarity.

⁵⁴ “Ωσπερ γάρ ἐν τῷ Ἄδαμ πάντες ἀποθνήσκουσιν, οὕτως καὶ ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ πάντες ζωποιηθήσονται.”

⁵⁵ Romans 5:12, “Διὰ τοῦτο ὥσπερ δι’ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου ἡ ἁμαρτία εἰς τὸν κόσμον εἰσῆλθεν καὶ διὰ τῆς ἁμαρτίας ὁ θάνατος, καὶ οὕτως εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους ὁ θάνατος διῆλθεν, ἐφ’ ὃ πάντες ἤμαρτον.” The phrase ἐφ’ ὃ πάντες ἤμαρτον have become notorious due to Augustine developing his doctrine of original sin partially based on a Latin mistranslation of the Greek. “There is now general agreement that it means *because all have sinned* rather than ‘in whom all have sinned,’ as Augustine would have it (Toews 2004:156).

condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.¹⁹ For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous (Rom 5:12-19).

Paul's letters display a similar apocalyptic interpretation of the Eden narrative as *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch*. He, however, does not attempt to construct a theodicy for this tragedy in the way that *4 Ezra* and *2 Baruch* does. Instead, Paul reframes his apocalyptic theology in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah (Toews 2013:40). Paul's reframing of apocalyptic theology transforms Adam's transgression into an apocalyptic event, that introduced the power of *Sin* into the cosmos and enslaved all humans and the entire cosmos to the power of universal, cosmic sinfulness (Toews 2013:46).⁵⁶ The serpent, which we should note, Paul does not call "Satan," is thus an apocalyptic agent that introduces *Sin* as apocalyptic power (not as individual acts, i.e., "sins") (Toews 2013:40). The consequence of this *Sin* is the mortality in which all humans share, and yet all human persons remain responsible for their own sinful behaviour, or "sins" (Toews 2013:46). Regardless of the cosmic power of *Sin*, passages such as Romans 2 holds that it is still possible to act rightly in God's eyes (Räisänen 2010:146). Paul does not concern himself with questions about the transmission of sin. Universal sinfulness was due to the cosmic power or rule of *Sin*, and did not result from the biological transmission of sin from one generation to the next (Toews 2013:46).

Sin in Paul is defined as a relational problem, or quite literally a political problem, the rulership of *Sin*, from which human beings and creation need liberation. Sin is not defined in ontological categories. Paul outlines a political theology of sin, not a metaphysical doctrine of sin (Toews 2013:46).

In the same vein as Adam's transgression, Paul interprets Christ's death as yet another apocalyptic event, but this time as one that has God as agent. Apart from merely expressing the love of God, the cross is a "unique and determinative apocalyptic event in the struggle between God and the anti-god powers of the

⁵⁶ This *Sin* that Adam introduced to the world is "an apocalyptic power, a cosmic anti-god figure, a ruler figure" (Toews 2013:41). Toews continues, "Paul personifies *Sin* in the Romans texts on *Sin* (set in *italics* to make this clear). *Sin* is singular. It is *Sin* as power, as reign, as magnetic field. *Sin* is a personal power; it has desires and passions (6:12; 7:5); it is opportunistic (7:8, 11); it revives from sleep (7:9); it deceives (7:11); it dwells within 7:17, 20, 23). As a personal power, it enters the world (5:12); it rules (5:21; 6:12, 13, 14); it enslaves (6:6, 16, 17, 20; 7:14; 8:2); it works (7:17, 20; it has its own law (7:12-8:2). Paul interprets *Sin* as a cosmic power" (Toews 2013:41-42; cf. 2004:155; Sanders 1992:44; Räisänen 2010:144).

cosmos" (Toews 2013:40; cf. Gaventa 2007:125-145; Räisänen 2010:144, 146; Sanders 1992:44). This interpretation of Paul, reflected in Romans 8:32, finds its parallel in Romans 3:21-26, where Paul interprets the genitive in διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (*dia pisteos Iesou Xristou*) as a subjective genitive, meaning "the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus," rather than "faith in Jesus," an objective genitive (Toews 2013:40; cf. 6.4.2).⁵⁷ "God is revealing end-time, saving righteousness through the faithfulness of Jesus, not through human faith in Jesus" (Toews 2004:103). Indeed, it is possible that the little emphasis Paul places on who should bear the responsibility for the death of Jesus, over against his elaborate exposition of atonement, should be understood against the view that, for Paul, this responsibility lies with God (Gaventa 2007:127).

Similar to Jesus' death, his resurrection is also, for Paul, an apocalyptic event signalling the inauguration of the age to come (and of the general resurrection), and proclaiming Jesus as God's eschatological Messiah (Toews 2013:40-41). The apocalyptic event that is Christ, meant for Paul that current history was playing out in the "overlap" of the present evil age and the age to come (Toews 2013:41). This age would commence with the second coming, when Christ would hand the kingship over to the Father, so that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

Investigating whether the remainder of the Pauline corpus supports this apocalyptic interpretation of Jesus' death and resurrection, Gaventa turns to the pivotal statement in Romans 3:24-25:

²¹But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through **the redemption** that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵whom God put forward as a **sacrifice of atonement** by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:21-26).⁵⁸

⁵⁷ See Toew's detailed exegetical treatment in his commentary on Romans (2004:108-111).

⁵⁸ Romans 3:24-25, "δικαιούμενοι δωρεάν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ· δν προέθετο ὁ θεός Διαστήριον διὰ [τῆς] πίστεως ἐν τῷ αὐτοῦ αἵματι εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιούμηνς αὐτοῦ διὰ τὴν πάρεσιν τῶν προγεγονότων ἀμαρτημάτων."

Gaventa follows Douglas Campbell in arguing that the word “redemption” ($\alphaπολυτρώσις$) is a key word in the passage (God’s righteousness being revealed in this act), and that the word carries the nuance not of “ransom,” or paying a price, but of liberation, such as liberation from slavery (Gaventa 2007:137; Campbell 1992:116-130).

Whatever else Rom. 3:21-26 does, then, it depicts the death of Jesus Christ as bringing about release from captivity, the very captivity to which God hands humanity in Romans 1. ... Romans 6 can be read as an explication of this same point. As Paul reflects on the analogy between Jesus’ death and that of the believer in baptism, he claims that the believer has died to slavery to Sin (Gaventa 2007:137).

Paul’s apocalyptic reframing of Sin

Personified in Romans, *Sin* is a cosmic power that was present in the cosmos before Adam, but which entered human history through Adam, bringing *Death* in its sway (Toews 2013:42; cf. 2004:155). Paul regards $\sigmaάρξ$ (flesh) as the entry point for *Sin*, a word which “denotes the bodily character of humans on one hand,” carrying “overtones of weakness, selfishness, and even hostility to God,” and which may even be a “radicalization of the Jewish notion of the evil inclination, or evil heart, as the source of sin” (Räisänen 2010:144). Paul’s categories of interpretation are those of Jewish apocalyptic theology, namely that the present world is ruled by the evil power of *Sin*. Paul never speculates, however, about the origin of *Sin* as apocalyptic power, or about the nature of the relation between *Sin* and *Death*: “He, like his fellow Jewish apocalyptic theologians, just assume that death is the consequence of *Sin*” (Toews 2013:42; cf. 2004:155).

The rulership of *Sin* does not excuse a sinner from zir personal responsibility, however. All of humanity suffers death because all have sinned.

First, all human beings are under the rule of *Sin* (Rom 3:9) – there is universal sin because of the cosmic power of *Sin*. Second, all humans are responsible for the spread of death “because all sin” (Rom 5:12) – there is individual human responsibility for sinful behavior; that is, all humans, except one (Jesus), choose to submit to *Sin*’s rule by behaving sinfully. The exception of the one person’s obedience is critical; it underlines free choice and human responsibility. Jesus entered the world ruled by *Sin* but chose not to submit; instead his obedience both demonstrated and effected the saving power to overcome *Death* with *Life* (Toews 2013:42).

In this regard Paul is yet again in agreement with Jewish apocalyptic theology, which held to both “corporate destiny” and “personal responsibility.” The former entails the idea of *Sin* due to one apocalyptic figure, while the latter is maintained by the fact that all sin. While Adam is a “representative personality, a paradigm,” it remains true that each individual “chooses to live within that paradigm” (Toews 2004:156-157; cf. Räisänen 2010:143). The same also goes for the magnitude of Christ’s victory over *Sin* and *Death*, namely that it has both a universal and an individual application. Adam’s disobedience unfolds in universal *Sin* and *Death*, while Christ’s victory unfolds universal salvation.

Paul’s view of sin: A critical evaluation

Now that we have gained an understanding of Paul’s manner of thought regarding *Sin* as universal enslaving power, we may pause briefly to consider some logical inconsistencies in Paul’s thinking that Sanders has pointed out (1992:44). Paul does not offer an anthropological, theological, or cosmological explanation of his conception of *Sin*. His conclusion in Romans 3:9 that all are governed by the enslaving power of *Sin*, furthermore, does not rest on empirical observation, since the charges of immorality that form his argument are exaggerated and does not take into account those who do not make themselves guilty of such overstated acts (Sanders 1992:44-45):

(t)he conclusion in 3:9 does not correspond to what leads up to it in any respect: the charges in chaps. 1-2 overstate the case and the conclusion is contradicted by 2:13-14. What this means is that Paul’s conclusion, that all are under Sin, was not derived from the line of observation and reasoning he had presented in the previous two chapters (Sanders 1992:45).

Furthermore, with regard to the universality of sin claimed in Rom 5:12, Sanders points out Paul’s logical inconsistency:

(i)n order to make the grip of sin universal, Paul wished to make Adam instrumental. Yet he had two problems: transgressions of the Law which preceded it should not count; not everyone sinned, as did Adam, by rebelling against God’s commandment. Despite these problems, he asserted the consequence: ‘by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners’ (5:19). His anthropology did not include the conception of inherited sin, and thus he had no logical way of proving universal condemnation by appeal to Adam. He simply asserted it, while himself citing points which count against it (Sanders 1992:45; cf. Räisänen 2010:147).

In both cases, then, Paul's conclusion is independent of the preceding arguments. In the way that Paul attempts to argue his case, Adam's sin does not, in fact, prove the universality of sin. The exaggerated sins of some do not logically imply that all humans are under *Sin*.

The first option that Sanders puts forward as a possible explanation for these inconsistencies is that Paul did not start out with a conviction of the dire, sinful state of humanity, but that he "deduced the plight from the solution" (Sanders 1992:45; cf. Räisänen 2010:147):

Once he accepted it as revelation that God intended to save the entire world by faith in his Son, he naturally had to think that the entire world needed saving, and thus that it was wholly bound over to Sin. His soteriology is more consistent and straightforward than his conceptions of the human plight, and thus may show that in describing sin he had to go in search of arguments which led up to a preformed conclusion (Sanders 1992:45; cf. Sanders 1977:442-447, 474-475; Räisänen 2010:147).

A second possibility is that Paul was influenced by aspects of a dualistic worldview, which viewed the created order as bound to the control of the god of darkness.⁵⁹ The fact that Paul understood the entire created order to be in need of redemption, though he failed to illustrate how the entire created order could be guilty of sin, creates the impression that he was influenced by such a dualistic worldview (Sanders 1992:45; cf. Räisänen 2010:148). This view corresponds to a large degree to the apocalyptic interpretation of Toews. Paul was not a full blown dualist, however, as is seen from his belief that it was God himself (and not some second power or god) that "had subjected the creation to 'futility,' and that he had done so 'in hope,' planning its redemption" (Sanders 1992:45). Nevertheless, considering the references to evil spiritual beings in Paul's depiction of Sin as a power, Sanders concludes that Paul must have been influenced by some sort of dualism, although he remained a thorough monotheist and stopped short of creating a truly dualistic theology with a fully personified opposing power (Sanders 1992:45).

While Sanders affirms the presence of dualistic thinking in Paul, the first possibility also has him convinced, namely that Paul's discussions of sin have been determined by his soteriology (Sanders 1992:46). Indeed,

⁵⁹ Zoroastrian dualism had, for instance, penetrated the Mediterranean, and its influence is seen in the Dead Sea Scrolls (Sanders 1992:45).

(i) it is hard to avoid the impression that Paul is forced to create a bleak picture of the world in bondage to Sin for the reason that otherwise God's radical act in delivering Christ to death would seem futile. ... Paul's statements on Sin are a reflection of his conviction that God has prepared salvation for all humans in Jesus Christ, and in him alone (Räisänen 2010:148).

The inconsistency in Paul's argument becomes clearly visible when we observe that, when he does not contemplate the human predicament from his soteriological perspective, he quite naturally assumes, in continuity with the rest of Scripture, that believers are able to fulfil the law (Räisänen 2010:149).

Such "anthropological slips" (above all Rom. 2) reveal that Paul's commonsense view of humankind differs from his theological interpretation of the human condition. ... This commonsense view yields, however, to Paul's forced theological analysis, which requires that everyone outside Christ *must* be a corrupt sinner, imprisoned by evil power (Räisänen 2010:149).

Paul's qualified affirmation of a hostile power enslaving the universe runs counter to the foundational Israelite doctrine that God is in control of what happens. It implies that God intended human disobedience. Paul affirms this, stating that God "intended universal sin so that he could subsequently save everyone by grace," and that God gave the law for this very reason. As with many ancient forms of pre-Judaism, Paul upheld both predestination and free will, on the one hand explaining that those who did not accept Jesus were hardened by God, and on the other hand holding them responsible for not heeding God's call to salvation (Sanders 1992:46). Applied to sin, Paul's upholding of both predestination and free will means at the same time that God intended it and that human beings are guilty of it.

Paul appeals to (a modified) dualism in order to avoid "laying the intention to condemn at God's door" (Sanders 1992:46). This move enables him to shift the blame to an external power that had been able both to manipulate the Law and the flesh "in defiance of the goodness of creation" (Sanders 1992:46). He concludes,

The presence of dualistic influence in Romans 6-7 cannot be denied, and it is confirmed by the passages about inimical non-gods. Yet in the discussion of sin there is a more powerful theology at work, one which is seen throughout his thought: God created the world and controls history; he will save the world through Christ; everything else, even sin itself, follows from his will but is subjected to it and used for his purpose (Sanders 1992:46).

In order, then, to present Christ as universal Saviour, Paul presents a universe in the grips of the enslaving power of *Sin*. This is a dark line of thought that especially played out in his anthropology, and the radicality of his interpretation would lay dormant until Augustine used it to draw his own conclusions. Until Augustine, the only interpreters who would come close to Paul's pessimistic view would be the gnostic Christian tradition, under whose influence Augustine himself came in the form of Manichaeism. Perhaps this is as good a reason as any for why Paul's pseudo-dualism appealed to him in the way that it did.

Eve

Paul's apocalyptic reframing of *Sin* and salvation is centred on the figures of Adam and Christ. When Paul does mention Eve (only twice), he does so in contexts other than those expounding *Sin*. In 2 Corinthians 11:1-4, Paul voices his fear that the believers may be led astray by "other" preachers preaching a "different" gospel, in the same way that Eve was deceived (*ἐξηπάτησεν*, v. 3)⁶⁰ by the cunning serpent. The second reference, which casts Eve in a decidedly negative light, is found in the pseudo-Pauline letter of 1 Timothy (2:14):

¹¹Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. ¹²I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. ¹³For Adam was formed first, then Eve; ¹⁴and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. ¹⁵Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty (1 Tim 2:11-15).

The author uses his distinction between Adam and Eve (Eve was "really deceived,"⁶¹ Adam was not; Eve has become a transgressor, while Adam has not) as a rationale justifying his view of the place of women in the Christian community. In both cases, the issue is neither *Sin*, nor Eve's obedience and the consequences thereof. Instead, the author seems familiar with a Jewish tradition that seems to view women as more susceptible to deception than men (Toews 2013:45; cf. 2.3 above), and it is the implications of this for the order in the community of believers that is of

⁶⁰ Paul seems to be familiar with a tradition that intensified the meaning of "deceived" in Gen 3:13, evident in his use of the compound form of the verb found in the Lxx of Gen 3:13, "and the woman said, 'the serpent deceived (*ἐπατήθη*) me'" (Toews 2013:44).

⁶¹ While the simple form of the word "deceived" (*ἐπατήθη*) is used for Adam (and for Eve in the Lxx of Gen 3:13), the pseudo-Pauline author uses the intensified form (*ἐξαπατηθεῖσα*) for Eve, following the pattern in 2 Cor 11:3 (cf. footnote 60).

real concern here. Eve does not play the same apocalyptic part in world history as Adam is seen to have done in the Pauline understanding of *Sin* and salvation.

3.4 Sin as debt and virtue as merit

In his study of the transition of metaphors for sin from that of a weight that an individual must carry (a dominant metaphor in the OT), to that of a debt that had to be repaid or remitted (a metaphor growing in dominance during the Second Temple Period),⁶² Gary Anderson makes the interesting observation that, as the metaphor of sin changed to a debt, human virtue came more and more to assume the role of a merit or credit (Anderson 2009:ix). Ranging from individual (the idea of a treasury in heaven created through almsgiving) to collective merit (i.e. the Jewish concept of the merits of the fathers), such credit could be called upon in times of crisis, either as basis for divine intervention, or even to pay the debt of one's sin (Anderson 2009:ix). The metaphor of sin as debt already appears in the latest stratum of the OT (e.g. Isa 40:2). It steadily replaced the metaphor of sin as burden, and eventually worked its way into early Christian thought,⁶³ where it impacted upon atonement theory (Anderson 2009:x).⁶⁴ First entering Christian thought through the Semitic world of

⁶² The dialogical relationship between sin and salvation is again apparent: "And just as the metaphor of sin as a burden led to the construction of a ritual for the riddance of sin through a scapegoat, so the metaphor of sin as a debt permitted early biblical interpreters to see a level of meaning in the biblical laws about debt release that would have been lost on the original biblical authors. ... If the Jubilee year was that point when all debt related to the land was released, then no enormous hermeneutical leap was required to go one step further and declare that God would also announce the forgiveness of sin on that day. For those sins, like other monetary debts, had been slowly but inexorably accumulating over time" (Anderson 2009:38).

⁶³ Cf., e.g., Matt 6:12; Luke 7:36-50.

⁶⁴ Colossians 2:13-14 is one of the NT texts that has had the greatest impact on theories of the atonement: "And when you were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with him, when he **forgave** us all our trespasses, **erasing the record that stood against us with its legal demands**. He **set this aside**, nailing it to the cross" (καὶ ὑμᾶς νεκροὺς ὅντας [ἐν] τοῖς παραπτώμασιν καὶ τῇ ἀκροβυστίᾳ τῆς σαρκὸς ὑμῶν, συνεζωποίησεν ὑμᾶς σὺν αὐτῷ, χαρισάμενος ἡμῖν πάντα τὰ παραπτώματα. ἔξαλειψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν δὲ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸν ἤρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου προσηλώσας αὐτὸν τῷ σταυρῷ). While the basic idea of this text is clear, there remains some unclarity: "Who actually signed the bond and who possessed it when God erased it? Because the text is unclear on these matters, these questions were subject to a variety of hypothetical solutions (Anderson 2009:118). Drawing from other Pauline letters, we may deduce that Paul imagined our sinful state as similar to that of a debt-slave (Anderson 2009:118). Also, along Pauline lines of thought, we may understand Adam as having signed the bond that thus enslaved humanity, an interpretation followed among others by Irenaeus of Lyons (Anderson 2009:118-119). If we understand, then, where and when the bond originated, we are left with the question of who holds the bond. The answer of 5th century Syriac theologian Jacob of Serug was that, "(e)ven though it was God who issued the command that Adam violated, somehow Satan ends up holding the bond" (Anderson 2009:119). Many early Christian thinkers would follow Jacob of Serug in thinking along these lines, which later became known as the Christus Victor model: "Because the life of Christ is a tale of God's defeat of the power of death, it makes sense that this very power (a.k.a. Satan) should

Syriac speaking Christianity, the metaphor for sin as debt steadily penetrated into every aspect of Greek and Latin theology (Anderson 2009:131). Simultaneously, in the early post-biblical period, almsgiving emerged as a spiritual practice among both Jews and Christians (Anderson 2009:x).⁶⁵

The metaphor of sin as debt, and forgiveness as “satisfaction,” would tread deeply into the Jewish-Christian heritage. Anderson’s study is valuable for illustrating the subtle dialogical relationship between sin as debt and almsgiving as merit, on the one hand, and also for elucidating the impact that this metaphor has had on atonement theory (especially that of Anselm, cf. 4.3.1).⁶⁶ Anderson has indeed illustrated that, as soon as the metaphor of sin as debt emerges in the OT, so too does the doctrine of satisfaction (2009:44).

There is, however, one of Anderson’s central arguments that requires critical assessment. He claims, namely, that the biblical tradition presents sin, through its metaphors, as possessing a certain “thingness.” In tracing the history of metaphors for sin in Scripture, he argues that, since sin is described as a burden born on the shoulders of the sinner (earlier strata), a stain upon the hands (earlier and later

hold some advantage over humanity from which Christ can save them” (Anderson 2009:119). But how exactly does Christ deliver humanity from this bond of indebtedness? Anderson discusses at length the answers of Narsai and Jacob of Serug, respectively, both of whom are early Syriac theologians who think along the lines of the Semitic debt metaphor. To summarise: “For Narsai, the voiding of the bond requires that Satan overreaches the legal terms that he had been given. Since it would be unjust of God simply to take them away by force, he must trick Satan into thinking that Christ falls under the terms of the bond he holds. When Satan determines that Christ is truly a man and then decides to have him executed, his legal rights over humankind evaporate. Christ reveals himself as the Son of God and rips up the bond in front of all the assembled host of heaven. In this view, Christ must suffer, but solely as a means of showing himself as an innocent victim whom Satan has wrongly accused. His suffering does not provide any ‘currency’ with which to repay the bond. Jacob, on the other hand, believes there is a real price to be paid and that the bond can be abrogated only by Christ’s fulfilling its terms. Everything turns, in his view, on the exchange of Christ for Bar Abba. The latter is a stand-in for the first Adam. ... It is the death of the innocent one that generates the necessary currency, a currency that was beyond the reach of any other son of Adam. ... The unique ability of the Second Adam to generate such an infinite store of merit ... is not fully worked out in this homily of Jacob (for this we must await the work of St. Anselm)” (Anderson 2009:129-130).

⁶⁵ In the book of Daniel, King Nebuchadnezzar is compared to a debt-slave and advised to give alms to redeem himself. The book of Tobit holds that the giving of alms directly funds a treasury in heaven, which may be called upon in times of trouble (Anderson 2009:146). Familiar NT examples include Matt 6:19-20; 19:16-30; Luke 12:13-21. Cf. also Sir 29:9-13 (Anderson 2009:146-147).

⁶⁶ “Between the early biblical eras and the Middle Ages, however, is the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth. The narrative of his life and, in particular, his death provides a key link in the metamorphosis I am describing. His Crucifixion became, in some traditions, the ultimate act of atonement; through his suffering, Christ was paying off the enormous debts incurred through human sinfulness. For those who saw punishment as a means of raising currency to pay down a debt, it was important to magnify the sufferings of Christ. Late medieval portraits of Jesus as a tortured figure on the cross, such as the Isenheim altarpiece, are a good witness to this. *On the earliest Byzantine crosses we possess, however, Christ is not portrayed as suffering*” (Anderson 2009:9, italics YS).

strata), or as a debit recorded in the heavenly account books (later strata, Second Temple Period, NT), it follows that Scripture portrays sin as possessing a certain ontological character (Anderson 2009:x).

This manner of engaging a metaphor to procure an ontological grip on reality needs to be questioned, however. Metaphors are employed precisely to provide a way for speaking about the unspeakable. Such “semantic innovation,” to borrow from Kearney and Ricoeur, is achieved precisely because a metaphor points *at once* to what something “is” and “is not.” To opt for the one at the cost of the other is to collapse the metaphor. Metaphors unlock semantic possibilities for describing reality – they do not procure for us an ontological grasp on this same reality. In attempting to draw a conclusion about the ontological nature of sin based on the nature of the biblical metaphors, Anderson transgresses the boundaries of his own argument, namely that we have to start from the metaphors for sin and salvation, and from there move toward an understanding of the larger narrative complexes (Anderson 2009:5). Failing to uphold the dialogical tension of the metaphor in saying simultaneously what sin *is* and *is not*, and thereby collapsing one pole of this tension into the other, is to misunderstand a metaphor.

3.5 Conclusion

The biblical story of sin and salvation, judgment and mercy, is set on the stage of the abiding grace of God. Even if God may at times reveal God’s capacity for judgment and punishment, the believer may rest in the knowledge that such judgment will always be in service of the mercy that characterises God’s dominant nature (Goldingay 2006:166). Even if some vessels may be destined for mercy and others for judgment (Rom 9), we are reminded that “these are not two coequal destinies because both serve God’s purpose of mercy, and both may profit from it” (Goldingay 2006:167). The relational dimension of the human experience dominates in the biblical understanding of sin and salvation. Sin consists in the breaking of relationships: with the divine, with nature and with fellow humans, and salvation consists in the mending of these relationships.

The heart, referring to the inner centre of the human person, adds an important dimension to our exploration of sin and salvation in biblical thought. From

the OT's "keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life" (Prov 4:23), to the NT's "what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles" (Matt 15:18), the "deeds make known the person" (Goldingay 2006:556). For people who have gone astray, it is the inner aspect of the person that stands in need of renewal. This is not to say that the "inner" and "outer" person are two separated entities, for the Semitic worldview holds a holistic understanding of personhood. Indeed, both inwardly and outwardly, a person is to seek God (cf. Ps 84:2 [MT 3]; Goldingay 2006:558).

Having traced the "Story of sin" through both the Bible and the Second Temple Period, we must take note that we have yet to find a tradition that supports the ontological theology of sin found in later Christian thought (cf. Toews 2013:47). Furthermore, the texts in which Paul reinterpreted the Eden narrative (1 Cor 15 and Rom 5) do not justify the disproportionate emphasis on sin that interpretation has traditionally placed on it, as a perusal of commentaries clearly illustrate (Toews 2004:165). The preoccupation with sin in this text is due, no doubt, to the prominent influence of the doctrine of original sin and its interpretation of these texts.⁶⁷ This approach projects notions onto these texts such as that Adam's nature, corrupted by his disobedience, is passed from generation to generation through biological reproduction. The cosmic notion of *Sin* as Paul understood it is also traded in for a personal, individualised view of sin (Toews 2004:165) that accomplishes little against the structural forces of sin that prolong global injustice and suffering in our midst.⁶⁸ Before proceeding, then, we should take note of the fact that these passages mention neither the corruption of human nature, nor even hint at sinful tendencies. The text does not imply any sort of hereditary "passing on" of Adam's sin to the world. These are all profound cases of eisegesis (Toews 2004:165).

⁶⁷ Toews briefly outlines, "Luther and Calvin, following Augustine, have set the agenda. Luther asserts that v. 12 concerns 'original and not actual sin.' Calvin claims that Adam 'corrupted, vitiated, depraved, and ruined our nature . . . he could not have generated seed but what was like himself . . . we are all imbued with natural corruption'" (2004:165).

⁶⁸ Apart from the fact that the doctrine of original sin is not supported by Scripture, Toews makes the important point that its great detriment lies in the fact that "it minimizes and individualizes the nature of **Sin**. Adam let loose a cosmic power that overwhelms everything and rules history and nature... **Sin** is a cosmic and powerful magnetic force that seeks to pull everything into its field" (2004:165-166). Even when one does not wish to follow Paul in ascribing cosmic power to *Sin* – something like a field of influence – his view of *Sin* as power and force goes a long way toward enabling us to come to terms with structuralised injustice and suffering on the planet – the sort of manifestations of evil that make the individual feel powerless to bring change and justice to a system that has taken on a life of its own.

CHAPTER FOUR: METAPHYSICAL STORIES? THE STORY OF SIN AND SALVATION IN THE THEOLOGICAL TRADITION

Building on Chapter 2, we may now turn to the theological development of hamartiology and soteriology, its dialogical counterpart. Beginning with the Greek and Latin Church Fathers, we pause to consider the controversy between Pelagius and Augustine, and then trace the story of sin and salvation further throughout the scholastic period, the Reformation, and the modern period. The traditional distinction between the person of Christ (Christology), the objective work of Christ (Atonement Theory), and the subjective application of the merits of Christ by believers (Soteriology), will generally not be upheld. While such a distinction may be helpful for heuristic reasons, it remains an artificial division. With its interdisciplinary approach, this study interpenetrates all these fields.

4.1 Sin and salvation in formative Christianity

4.1.1 *The story of original sin in the Greek Church Fathers (ca. 150-400 C.E.)*

Considering the importance of the Eden narrative in the discourse on sin, it is sobering to note that, following Paul's letter to the Romans (mid 1st century C.E.), it would be another one hundred years before we would again find any references in early Christianity to the transgression in the Garden (in Justin Martyr from Rome; Toews 2013:49). Generations of Apostolic Fathers – including such heavyweights as Clement of Rome, Ignatius, Papias, Polycarp, Barnabas, and the anonymous writers of the Didache and the Shepherd of Hermas – seem to have found it unnecessary to refer to Eden as they attempted to interpret salvation in Christ (Toews 2013:49).

While some describe a notion of “original sin” in reference to the Greek Fathers, this is far removed from the doctrine that would eventually emerge from the pen of Augustine. Berkhof explains that the eastern Fathers’ view of sin ...

... was, particularly at first, largely influenced by their opposition to Gnosticism with its emphasis on the physical necessity of evil and its denial of the freedom of the will. They stressed the fact that Adam’s creation in the image of God did not involve his ethical perfection, but only the moral perfectability [sic] of his nature. Adam could sin and did sin, and thus came under the power of Satan, death, and sinful corruption. This physical corruption was propagated in the human race, but is not itself sin and did not involve mankind in guilt. There is no

original sin in the strict sense of the word. They do not deny the solidarity of the human race, but admit its physical connection with Adam. This connection, however, relates only to the corporeal and sensuous nature, which is propagated from father to son, and not to the higher and rational side of human nature, which is in every case a direct creation of God. It exerts no immediate effect on the will, but affects this only mediately through the intellect. Sin always originates in the free choice of man, and is the result of weakness and ignorance. Consequently, infants cannot be regarded as guilty, for they have inherited only a physical corruption (Berkhof 1969:128).

In their interpretation of Genesis 3, the Greek Fathers reveal remarkable similarity. While they are all in agreement that sin entered the human race through Adam's transgression, they view the implications thereof quite differently than the Latin Church (Toews 2013:60). Most importantly, the Greek Fathers do not know inherited guilt. While humankind inherits Adam's punishment (i.e. death and corruption), they do not inherit his sin, for such guilt could only follow from a freely committed personal act (Toews 2013:60).

Clement of Alexandria (150-215 C.E.) introduces the tendency to assign a sexual nature to the first sin. For Clement, it is not sexual intercourse between Adam and Eve that was in itself sinful, but rather the fact that it was premature (*Strom.*, iii, xii, xv, xvii). In later patristic times, however, the sexual act itself becomes increasingly suspicious (Toews 2013:54). Another development is Methodius' use of the term "fall" to describe the disobedience in the Garden (bishop of Olympus, 260-311 C.E.). This implies some exalted position in Adam before his disobedience – a notion not found in the biblical and early patristic word *parabasis*, or "transgression" (Toews 2013:58). Methodius also introduces the word "corruption" (*thphora*) to describe the consequences of the fall on creation (Toews 2013:58).

The Greek Fathers reveal a tendency to allegorise Genesis 3 (Toews 2013:61).⁶⁹ Adam and Eve's transgression is often seen as the understandable error of imperfect, innocent children, and which thwarts their natural development into the

⁶⁹ Constructing his transcendental "fall" doctrine in *De principiis*, Origen (185/86-251/254 C.E.) reads the Eden narrative as an allegory of the collective fall of humanity before history. This explains the presence of evil and injustice in the world as the consequence of transgressions committed in a "previous, other worldly," life (Toews 2013:56; cf. Berkhof 1969:128). While Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa disagree with Origen's idea of the pre-existence of souls and a fall between history, the two brothers also read the Eden narrative allegorically, understanding Adam not as a historical being, but rather as equivalent to humanity (Toews 2013:59). Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 C.E.) from the Antiochene school likewise treat Adam as a type, rather than an ancestor, of humanity (Toews 2013:60).

mature creatures that God had planned for them to become (Toews 2013:61). The consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience is seen more in terms of moral weakness and the loss of the Holy Spirit's assistance, i.e. as *deprivatio* rather than *depravatio*: "a fundamental corruption or deformity of human nature" (Toews 2013:61).

Irenaeus (130-202 C.E.), for example, finds the cause for humanity's fall in its creaturely nature. Unlike Augustine, who insisted that humankind was created perfectly, Irenaeus seems to suggest that humanity was created imperfectly. He means by this that the human person is an immature creature who must, through moral growth and development, be brought to the perfection and completion that God intends (Durand 1978:20). For this reason, Irenaeus does not consider humanity's fall into sin to be a catastrophic event that destroys its perfection, because humanity never had this perfection to begin with. Irenaeus and Augustine agree that Adam forfeited his friendship with God through his sin, and that all people die as a result of this sin. But while, for Augustine, God's plans have been frustrated by original sin, for Irenaeus human disobedience is almost a necessity for the "education" that formed part of God's plans from the beginning, as did Christ's incarnation (Zimmerman 1998:n.p.).⁷⁰ Even if humanity must then suffer the consequences of sin to gain wisdom and reach maturity, God's purpose for humankind will eventually be reached. Indeed, Christ the Pantokrator, who recapitulates⁷¹ all of humanity in his incarnation, is the "central figure for whom God measures the layout of the universe." Adam is a secondary figure, "created to

⁷⁰ Zimmerman explains, "He would create man free, He foresaw the sin, He then made provisions accordingly. He would help man to use that freedom properly, with original sin as a stepping stone to facilitate the learning process. Christ would come fully prepared to cope with the situation of the fallen race. He would recapitulate the fallen race and lead it to the Father. Augustine, however, would project Christ as an afterthought – as a second plan after the first had failed. Christ is sent into the world as a Repairman, to patch up the disaster caused by Adam. Even so, Augustine has us living in a world not completely repaired by Christ. It is a world, he maintains, in which God still punishes us for Adam's misdeed. It is as though we live in the suburbs of Chernoble [sic] after the nuclear meltdown" (Zimmerman 1998:n.p.).

⁷¹ Berkhof states this recapitulation of Christ beautifully: "By His incarnation and human life he thus reverses the course on which Adam by his sin started humanity and thus becomes a new leaven in the life of mankind. He communicates immortality to those who are united to him by faith and effects an ethical transformation in their lives, and by his obedience compensates for the disobedience of Adam (Berkhof 1969:165).

provide Christ with a worthy cause to activate his great love" (Zimmerman 1998: n.p.; cf. Berkhof 1969:165).⁷²

The Greek Fathers do not know an ontological understanding of sin (Toews 2013:61). They hold a more positive view of human nature than the Latin Church, and understand sin to consist of freely committed acts that fracture relationships. Transmission of sin takes place by means of social heredity rather than biological heredity, meaning that children brought up outside of paradise were left to the distorted examples of their parents (Toews 2013:61). Eastern thought consistently emphasises free will and personal responsibility, even in the face of a tendency to explain the entrance of evil into the world as resulting from the malevolent assaults of Satan and demonic forces (rather than through abstract ideas of original sin) (Toews 2013:61). Finally, the Greek Fathers generally translate the disputed ἐφ' ὃ phrase in Romans 5:12 as "because of" rather than as "in whom," in agreement with the bulk of critical scholarship today (Toews 2013:61; cf. footnote 55).⁷³

The Eastern conception of sin produced a soteriology that emphasised the free will of humanity rather than the operation of divine grace (Berkhof 1969:128-129). A person's free will, rather than the grace of God, takes the initiative in the work of regeneration, and yet cannot complete this work unaided. The resulting co-operation means that God enables a person to turn from evil and do good (Berkhof 1969:129). Greek soteriology also imagined salvation as a "direct result of the incarnation, a new divine revelation given to man, or as (along with Christ's death and resurrection) communicating new life to mankind" (Berkhof 1969:167). Salvation was also seen, however, in terms of objective conditions that had been divinely met. In this last case we come across metaphors such as the death of Christ as a

⁷² See Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* III, 22, 3, "Hence also was Adam himself termed by Paul 'the figure of Him that was to come,' because the Word, the Maker of all things, had formed beforehand for Himself the future dispensation of the human race, connected with the Son of God; God having predestined that the first man should be of an animal nature, with this view, that he might be saved by the spiritual One. For inasmuch as He had a pre-existence as a saving Being, it was necessary that what might be saved should also be called into existence, in order that the Being who saves should not exist in vain" (Irenaeus 2007:455).

⁷³ Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428 C.E.), who wrote at almost the same time as Ambrosiaster, mistranslated the phrase, and was subsequently followed by Augustine (Toews 2013:60).

sacrifice to God, a satisfaction to divine justice, and a ransom paid (usually to Satan; Berkhof 1969:167).⁷⁴ To this should be added the Greek idea of divinisation.⁷⁵

The Eastern Fathers' understanding of sin and salvation shows some affinity with the later teachings of Pelagius, and may to an extent have paved the way for Pelagianism (Berkhof 1969:128). Their views on the appropriation of salvation usually involve collaboration between freedom and grace.⁷⁶ This study illustrates that such features are in line with Scripture, however, such as an emphasis on free will (positively stated), and an absence of teachings such as the depravity of human nature (negatively stated) (cf. 3.1, 3.3).

4.1.2 *The story of original sin in the Latin Church Fathers prior to Augustine (ca. 200-400 C.E.)*

The difference between the Eastern and Western theologians of the early centuries is quite profound. As opposed to the diverse cultural, intellectual, and theological centres from which the Eastern Fathers emerged (including Palestine, Syria, Asia

⁷⁴ The ransom theory dominated atonement thinking for most of the first millennium of Christian thought (Williams 2004:n.p.; cf. Siekawitch 2007-2008:3). Clement of Alexandria so understands the death of Christ, although in his main work, the idea of Christ as Teacher who "saves men by endowing them with true knowledge and inspiring them to a life of love and true righteousness," seems to occupy him more (Berkhof 1969:166). Origen introduces a new twist to this metaphor by claiming that Satan was deceived in the transaction and thus divinely outwitted – an idea picked up Gregory of Nyssa (Berkhof 1969:166, 167; cf. Siekawitch 2007-2008:4). Gregory of Nazianzus deviated from the idea of Christ's death as a ransom, denying both that a ransom was paid to Satan and that God the Father would require a ransom (Berkhof 1969:167).

⁷⁵ The idea that the incarnation allows Christ to save humanity by deifying human nature is prevalent with Irenaeus and Origen, and given particular prominence in Athanasius' *De Incarnatione* (Berkhof 1969:166).

⁷⁶ When it came to the appropriation of salvation, the early Fathers stressed the NT requirements of repentance, on the one hand, and faith in Christ on the other. Their understanding of these actions – faith and repentance – had not been thoroughly worked out yet, however: "Faith was generally regarded as the outstanding instrument for the reception of the merits of Christ, and was often called the sole means of salvation. It was understood to consist in true knowledge of God, confidence in Him, and self-committal to Him, and to have as its special object Jesus Christ and His atoning blood. This faith, rather than the works of the law, was regarded as the means of justification. ... It cannot be said, however, that a clear conception of faith emerged in the thinking of the first three centuries. In their emphasis on faith the Fathers largely repeated what they found in the Bible" (Berkhof 1969:203-204). As for repentance, it is not clear "whether they conceived of it merely as an act or condition of the mind, or regarded it as including amendment of life. ... (I)t is quite evident that, when they speak of it in the former sense, they attach great importance to its external manifestations in penitential deeds. ... There is a tendency to stress the necessity of good works, especially works of self-denial, such as liberal almsgiving, abstinence from marriage, and so on, to attach special merit to these, and to co-ordinate them with faith as a means of securing the divine favour" (Berkhof 1969:204-205). The tendency to associate baptism with the forgiveness of previous sins, and penance with the forgiveness of sins committed after baptism, also had its origin among the early Fathers (Berkhof 1969:205).

Minor, Greece, Egypt, and Gaul), the Western Fathers who played a role in the development of the doctrine of original sin came primarily from North Africa (Carthage and Hippo) and Italy (Milan and Rome) (Toews 2013: 62). Another very influential difference was the fact that the Eastern Fathers all made use of the LXX and the Greek NT, while some of those western fathers who had the most influence on the “story of sin,” read the critical biblical texts in the Latin translation only (Toews 2013:62).

Tertullian (ca. 155-220 C.E.)

Among patristic theologians, Tertullian is second only to Augustine in the role he played in the development of the doctrine of original sin. Via traducianism, he introduced a new anthropology to Christianity that provided Augustine with the framework he needed to complete the doctrine (Toews 2013:63; cf. Berkhof 1969:129). Tertullian laid out this teaching in *De anima*, arguing that

each soul is derived along with the body with which it is united from the parent; the whole man, soul as well as body, is produced by one and the same generative act, and the paternal germ is not merely a portion of the father's body, but is charged with a definite quantity of his soul-stuff. There is a real sense, therefore, in which all souls, actual or potential, were contained in Adam, since they must all be ultimately detached portions of the original soul breathed into him by God. Every soul, as Tertullian expresses it, is, as it were, a twig cut from the parent-stem of Adam and planted out as an independent tree (Kelly 1968:175).

With traducianism replacing the creationism of Greek theology, the way is opened for a doctrine of innate sin, as distinguished from innate evil (Berkhof 1969:129). From this materialist view of the soul, Augustine argues that “God created the soul of the offspring by working on a spiritual substrate drawn from the soul of the generating male parent” (Toews 2013:63). Later Western Fathers, such as Ambrose, argue on this basis that the miraculous conception of Jesus was required to keep Jesus’ human nature free of sin by eliminating a male from taking part in his conception (Toews 2013:63).

Tertullian introduces the phrase *vitium originis*, “original moral fault,” which imply that Adam somehow contained in himself the entire human race (i.e. “seminal identity”). Yet it seems as though Tertullian, a strong defender of human free will,

stops short of concluding that all human souls, being detached portions of the original soul guilty of sin, therefore must bear the moral responsibility for the primordial sin (Toews 2013:64; cf. Berkhof 1969:129).

Tertullian displays the beginnings of a distinctly Latin soteriology, and may be said to have laid the foundations for a doctrine of penance in the Roman Catholic Church (Berkhof 1969:168). Tertullian considers Christ's death on the cross as being of central significance and the culminating point of Christ's mission (Berkhof 1969:168). Finally, it is to Tertullian that we owe such legal terms as "guilt," "satisfaction," and "merit," although "he did not yet apply these terms to the sacrificial work of Christ, but to the repentance and good works that should follow sins committed after baptism" (Berkhof 1969:168).

Cyprian (b. 200-210; d. 258 C.E.)

Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, was greatly influenced by Tertullian. In a letter to Fidus, an African bishop, he links "original guilt" with the salvific effect of infant baptism, urging that baptism be administered as soon as possible after birth. Although the infant is not guilty of any sin of its own, it has contracted the contamination of the "first death," being a descendant of Adam (Toews 2013:65; cf. "Letter 64"). Cyprian therefore teaches both that all descendants of Adam share in this hereditary contagion, and that such hereditary sin can be remitted by baptism (Toews 2013:66).

Ambrose (339-97 C.E.)

In this bishop of Milan, who would eventually baptise Augustine, we meet the most pessimistic view of humanity encountered so far. Ambrose is important not only for the profound influence he had on Augustine, but also for how he developed and deepened the sceptical anthropology of his fellow Western theologians, preparing the way for Augustine to finally bring everything together in a formulated doctrine of original sin.

Ambrose formally introduces the doctrine of "original righteousness" in Adam, creating an even starker contrast between the state of a fallen humanity and the

alleged perfect state of Adam before the fall.⁷⁷ With this doctrine also came a new way to speak of Adam's disobedience, using "fall" (*lapsus*) rather than the traditional "transgression" (*praevaricatio*, almost a direct translation of the Greek *parabasis*; Toews 2013:67). Ambrose was also the first to argue that Adam's real sin had been pride, as he had craved equality with his Creator (Kelly 1968:353, referring to *Exp. Ps. 118 7, 8; ep. 73, 5* and *In Rom. 5, 14*;⁷⁸ cf. Toews 2013:67). This internalisation of sin marked a significant shift from the Eastern Fathers, for whom the cause of Adam's transgression was mostly seen as external in the form of evil forces.

For Ambrose, "hereditary sins" (*peccata hereditaria*) can be washed away by baptism and foot washing, but he also makes reference to "original sin" as an "inherited bias towards evil," which is often tied for him to sexuality, and which he deems sinful.⁷⁹ With regard to hereditary sins, Ambrose also goes further than Tertullian, claiming that not only the sin, but also the guilt of Adam was inherited by his descendants (Toews 2013:68). Ambrose also explicitly formulates "seminal identity," meaning that, since all of humanity was "in" Adam, it means that when he fell, all humanity fell with and sinned in him (Toews 2013:68). Given the extent to which Ambrose went in his interpretation of original sin, it is perhaps surprising that he still managed to hold on to the idea of free will and human responsibility (Toews 2013:68). Augustine, however, would not be able to maintain this tension.

Ambrose's soteriology shares some features with that of Irenaeus and Origen, especially regarding the ransom paid to Satan, along with God's deceit of the devil (cf. footnote 74). He emphasised Christ's death as a sacrifice to God that served as

⁷⁷ Kelly paints a picture of this contrast in Ambrose's mind: "In the first place, the general Western view was that man's primitive state had been one of supernatural blessedness. ... It was Ambrose, however, perhaps inspired by his acquaintance with the Cappadocians, who painted the picture in the most glowing colours. Adam had been a 'heavenly being', breathing ethereal air and immune from life's cares and boredoms.¹ Accustomed to conversing with God face to face,² he held his carnal appetites in sovereign control.³ Along with Eve he radiated perfect innocence and virtue,⁴ and was even exempt from the need of food.⁵ From this happy state, however, he fell, being condemned to concupiscence and death" (Kelly 1968:353, making reference to ¹*Exp. Ps. 118 15, 36; 4, 5;* ²*Enarrat. Ps. 43, 75;* ³*Exp. Luc. 7, 142;* ⁴*Parad. 24; 63; ep. 58, 12;* ⁵*Parad. 42).*

⁷⁸ Note that this commentary on Romans, previously incorrectly attributed to Ambrose or St. Hilarius, was in actual fact written by Ambrosiaster, a contemporary of Ambrose. Ambrosiaster is treated in the section below (Toews 2013:69).

⁷⁹ Ambrose was an ascetic who believed that sexuality was a scar upon the human body (Toews 2013:66). He advocated for virginity and considered human beings to be born in the sin of their parents, referring to the sexual act of procreation. It is no surprise, then, that Ambrose also held that the virgin birth of Jesus was necessary to avoid in the person of Christ any physical contamination that he considered inherent to normal birth (Toews 2013:67).

“a satisfaction of the divine sentence of death pronounced on sinful humanity,” without specifically stating why this sacrifice was necessary (Berkhof 1969:168-169).

Ambrosiaster

Ambrosiaster’s commentary on Romans, often erroneously attributed to Ambrose, had an enormous influence on Augustine and his formulation of the doctrine of original sin. The commentary provided Augustine with the exegetical foundation on which to build the doctrine, even though the crucial proof text, Romans 5:12d, was infamously mistranslated from the Greek (Toews 2013:69). Ambrosiaster relies on a Latin version of Romans that translated the *ἐφ’ ὃ* (*eph ho*) phrase as *in quo*, “in whom,” rather than the correct “on account of” or “because of” (cf. footnote 55). Thus, it remains an unfortunate historical fact that

... Ambrosiaster bequeathed to Western Christianity the supposed biblical foundation for its characteristic and “orthodox” theology of “original sin” and “original guilt” on the basis of a faulty reading of what Paul actually wrote (Toews 2013:70).

Approached from a different angle, the remarkable influence that Ambrosiaster’s exegesis had on Augustine seems strangely ironic, given that research has found Ambrosiaster’s theology to be closer to Pelagius than to Augustine himself (Souter 1927:80; cf. Toews 2013:70). Souter even claims that Ambrosiaster failed to fully comprehend the doctrine of justification by faith, understanding “faith” as the content of beliefs rather than the belief itself, and even understanding “belief” as consisting of adherence to the law (1927:80). Not having “grasped the idea that before God man must always be the receiver and the favoured, never the giver or benefactor,” Ambrosiaster holds that “we can acquire merit with God” (Souter 1927:80). Furthermore, because he saw the inheritance of sin as limited to the flesh, Ambrosiaster denied the notion of inherited sin insofar as it applied to the soul. He also states that the Holy Spirit enables believers to resist the temptations of the flesh (Souter 1927:82; cf. Toews 2013:70-71). Finally, it seems that Ambrosiaster was undecided whether humans had the ability to refrain from sin, something that Augustine strongly denied (Toews 2013:71).

We see, then, that at the dawn of the Pelagian controversy, parts of the Latin Church began to think of sin in ontological terms, as something that is inherited. Up

to this point, the Western Fathers still managed, albeit somewhat forcibly, to maintain the human free will and responsibility that was so emphasised in the Eastern Church. Augustine would soon realise, however, that the determinism of ontological sin and human responsibility were a match too uneasy to keep alive, and so his theology of original sin had no room for free will (Toews 2013:72).

While all the nuts and bolts of the doctrine of original sin were already on the table at this point, waiting for Augustine to be assembled (Toews 2013:72; cf. Rees 1991:9-10), we should note that, up to now, none of the writers hereto examined considered “original sin,” in whichever way they described it, to belong to the essence of the gospel. It was not reflected, as Toews reminds us, anywhere in the rules of faith. Neither was it mentioned in any local baptismal creeds of the period, nor in any of the great ecumenical councils. It would only be after Augustine, at the Council of Orange (529), that the doctrine of original sin would be included in a creed of the church (Toews 2013:72).

4.2 Nature vs. grace, Pelagius vs. Augustine, and the *cul-de-sac* of binary oppositions

4.2.1 *Pelagius on grace and the freedom of the will*

History, written as it is by victors and conquerors, has for the most part looked unfavourably upon the ethically-minded monk and ascetic from the British Isles. While some have looked to his reputedly “blameless character” and “even temper” to explain why he was “a stranger to the conflicts of the soul, those struggles with sin, and those deep experiences of an all-renewing grace” (Berkhof 1969:132) that moulded Augustine’s thought, others have looked to the influence of native Celtic spirituality (e.g., Newell 1997). Still, Pelagius remains a watermark on the pages of history – a figure known to us mostly through the eyes of his opponents.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ In the aftermath of the Pelagian controversy, both “Jerome and Augustine left behind them a great corpus of their works, among them the latter’s fifteen anti-Pelagian treatises, all intact and only one unfinished; we have also at our disposal writings by Prosper of Aquitaine, Paul Orosius and Marius Mercator, all contemporaries of Pelagius who were opposed to his teachings and exerted a considerable influence on the later historians of the Church. *Of his own works [Pelagius’] only a handful have survived, along with a number of quotations embedded in Augustine’s treatises, sermons and letters and selected by him solely in order to refute them*” (Rees 1991:21, italics YS). In studying Pelagianism, then, “(w)e have … no account … from the pen of a disinterested historian of the time when the events took place, and very little comment from friendly sources or even neutral

An ascetic and moralist, Pelagius reached Rome following extensive travels in the eastern regions of the Roman Empire. These travels brought him into contact with the eastern views on human personhood, which were decidedly more optimistic than those generally circulating in the west at the time (Toews 2013:76; cf. Rees 1991:9). While in Rome, and upon encountering Ambrosiaster's *Commentary on Romans*, Pelagius responded by writing his own *Expositions of the thirteen epistles of St. Paul* between 405/6 and 410 (Toews 2013:76). Coming to the crucial Romans 5:12, Pelagius denies both the hereditary transmission of sin and the idea of an inherent fault in human nature. He interprets the text in terms of social inheritance, stating that "humans sin by voluntary imitation of Adam's sin" (Toews 2013:76-77). In expositing Romans 5:15, he also argues that the power of righteousness to make alive was far greater than that of sin to put to death, and even that the righteousness of Christ benefits unbelievers along with believers (Toews 2013:77).

Pelagius considers the postulation that the human person cannot help but sin to be an insult to the Creator, and insists that it is indeed possible for a person to observe God's commandments without sinning, if ze so wills (Augustine, *Gest. Pelag.* 16). God would not have extended the various commands in Scripture to be "holy" or "perfect" if these are in fact impossible to keep (*Qualiter* 2 and 4; cf. Rees 1991:94). Besides, Scripture offers examples of a number of innocent lives (Augustine, *Nat. grat.* 42-4; Kelly 1968:360; cf. Berkhof 1969:133).

Pelagius' doctrine of *impeccantia* does not imagine, however, that any one person will live a blameless life from the cradle to the grave, but rather envisages a state of perfection "attained by strenuous efforts of the will and which only steadily increasing application will be able to maintain" (Kelly 1968:360, referring to *Ad Demet.* 27; cf. Rees 1991:93). Sin is, after all and as Pelagius admits, universal, though he understands this as being due to "wrong education, to bad example, and to a long-established habit of sinning" (Berkhof 1969:133). Pelagius' view on the human ability to keep God's will is in continuity with the Scriptural view that, regardless of the universality of sin, it is still possible for a person to be considered "righteous." This does not imply the complete absence of any sin from a person's life,

ones. ... It is not difficult to see why Pelagius and the Pelagians have had such a poor press over the intervening years" (Rees 1991:1).

but rather that one's life is characterised by devotion to God and right action (cf. 3.1, 3.3).

Pelagius' central teaching of unconditional free will relates to this. Pelagius holds that, unlike other creatures, humanity is endowed upon its creation with the ability to accomplish the divine will by its own free will, so that each person is able to freely choose between right and wrong action (Kelly 1968:357-358).⁸¹

Pelagius denies Augustine's claim (following Ambrose) that Adam was endowed with an extraordinary sense of piety, or that his will was biased toward the good. In his mind Adam's condition was neutral and his will free and undetermined, so he possessed a capacity for both good and evil (Berkhof 1969:132). Pelagius also opposes the idea that, post-Eden, humanity would embody an intrinsic bias toward evil.⁸² Since he believes each soul is immediately created by God, it is impossible for it to be stained by transmitted sin (Kelly 1968:358; cf. Toews 2013:76).

Pelagius concedes that the disobedience in the Garden had dire consequences for humanity, introducing both physical and spiritual death, and initiating a "habit of disobedience" that transpires by custom and example, but not by physical descent. He therefore denies any congenital fault in a newborn (Kelly 1968:358-359; cf. Berkhof 1969:133; Toews 2013:76). While baptism of adults was medicinal and regenerative, the baptism of infants was "purely benedictory," culminating in the spiritual illumination of children who were already eligible for

⁸¹ Pelagius argues that there are "three features in action – the power (*posse*), the will (*velle*) and the realization (*esse*). The first of these comes exclusively from God, but the other two belong to us; hence, according as we act, we merit praise or blame" (Kelly 1968:358, referring to Augustine, *Grat. Chr.* I, 5). *Posse* here denotes the human capacity for righteousness, i.e. the ability not to sin. For Pelagius, this ability is a God-given part of human nature. *Velle*, in turn, refers to the human person's capacity to make his or her own free choice of right action. Finally, *esse* denotes the capacity to move from this choice into right action, in other words to live in accordance with the *posse* – the nature given by God – namely without sin (Rees 1991:35). "The first cannot be taken away from him, and he never loses the ability to do good; but if he is to exercise it properly, he must employ the second and third, which are both under his control. But what has actually happened is that the first capacity, though reinforced by the law as embodied in the scriptures, has atrophied because of man's failure to make the right use of the second, and in order to bring it into play again, he has been offered the opportunity of redemption by the saving death of Jesus, who forgives his sins, restores his will and sustains it by his own teaching and example" (Rees 1991:36).

⁸² Pelagius held that Adam's "fall into sin injured no one but himself, and left human nature unimpaired for good. There is no hereditary transmission of a sinful nature or of guilt, and consequently no such thing as original sin. Man is still born in the same condition in which Adam was before the fall. Not only is he free from guilt but also from pollution. There are no evil tendencies and desires in his nature which inevitably result in sin" (Berkhof 1969:132-133).

eternal life (following Ambrose and Ambrosiaster) (Kelly 1968:359; cf. Berkhof 1969:133; Haight 1974:30; Toews 2013:76).

Pelagius denies that there could be any “special pressure” on the human person’s will to choose the good (Kelly 1968:359). He does not deny the necessity of grace in the fulfilment of divine will, but resists the idea of some sort of special, internal action of God upon the soul, and especially any sort of predestination to holiness (Kelly 1968:359). God’s predestination operates strictly in terms of his foreknowledge, so that humans advance in holiness by merit alone (Kelly 1968:360).

This autonomy has often been thought to mean that humanity has been removed from God’s sovereignty. However, Pelagius’ view on the freedom of the will should be seen within the interpretive framework of the gracious will of God. Humanity’s free will is enjoyed, namely, by the benevolence of its Creator, and should be employed to the ends for which that Creator has prescribed (Kelly 1968:358). Furthermore, Pelagius’ theology certainly did not neglect grace, but really framed the freedom of the will within “a grace of creation, a grace of revelation and a grace of redemption” (Rees 1991:36).⁸³ Pelagius saw a rationality and liberty in the human person that he considered to have been given at zir creation (*bonum naturae*), and for Pelagius these are not achievements but divine gifts that, if properly utilised, could bring human persons into conformity with God’s will (McWilliam 1999:889).

Augustine’s spirited arguments against the Pelagian claim that justification before God occurs on the basis of human merit, rather than as a freely received gift of the grace of God, highlights an aspect of Pelagius’ theology that is often misunderstood. Pelagius indeed states repeatedly in his commentary on the Pauline Epistles that “baptism is the sacrament of justification *by faith alone*,” and yet it seems that Pelagius understands this faith to “proceed naturally from the right use of free will” (Rees 1991:92). Pelagius failed to describe such faith as something inspired by God. Yet one should remember that Pelagius’ theology of free will is

⁸³ Haight compares Pelagius and Augustine on this point: “The Pelagians did not deny grace; they affirmed it. But grace was first of all man’s own freedom, his God-given ability to decide between good and evil. For Augustine, while free choice remained, the desire and affections of man were locked in a web of sin. The custom and habit of personal sin imprisoned free choice within the narrow confines of sensible self-seeking” (Haight 1974:30).

indeed embedded within a theology of grace (see above), for he considers the faculty of free will to be God-given, and within this frame of thinking, it is not much of a stretch to consider that putting this gift of God (free will) to good use, might earn the believer the “merit” of further grace of God. Appealing to R. F. Evans’ study of Pelagius’ theology of baptism (Evans 1968:117ff.), Rees offers a useful explanation of how Pelagius can insist that baptism is “the sacrament of justification *by faith alone*, while still maintaining that faith ‘merits’ the grace of God”:

... it is a matter not so much of inconsistency as of the misleading use of language and particularly, of the words “faith” and “merit.” By faith Pelagius means the trust in Jesus with which the convert approaches God when he seeks “justification” through baptism and by which alone he can be said to “merit” grace to absolve his past sins and so “justify” him, that is, make him righteous. ... Man’s faith is thus securely based on the act of Jesus in intervening to redeem man through baptism by his death and to strengthen him thereafter by his teaching and example. Yet man is a sinner who has no merit by virtue of which he may claim this grace of atonement and revelation: “faith merits grace only in the sense that it is the indispensable and freely chosen condition of the effectual working of grace.”^a Thus Pelagius could argue that his “merit by faith” is not to be equated with merit by works, since it is not merit by forgiveness of sins through baptism: faith alone “absolves him as to the past, justifies him as to the present and prepares him for future works of faith.”^b It is vital to observe the precise sequence of events – faith first, then righteousness of faith, then righteousness of works, bringing the whole process to its proper fulfilment (Rees 1991:92-93, citing ^aEvans 1968:118; ^bPelagius, *On Romans 4,6*).

Pelagius’ teachings have often been unfairly classified as a version of naturalism. While it is true, at least to some extent, that his teachings fall short in terms of truly engaging the broken reality of the human condition, his proposals are offered in a profoundly religious spirit: “it radiates an intense awareness of God’s majesty, of the wonderful privileges and high destiny He has vouchsafed to men, and of the claims of the moral law and of Christ’s example” (Kelly 1968:360-361). This spirit in which Pelagius offered his teachings was for the most part absent in his disciples, often serving only to intensify a conflict that may have otherwise led to creative theological dialogue.

Aside from these unfortunately imbalanced representations of Pelagius’ thought, Pelagianism also invited criticism for its optimistic view of human nature on the one hand, and for its perceived inadequate acknowledgment of the human person’s dependence on the grace of God (Kelly 1968:361). The teaching was

condemned at various meetings and councils, among them at Carthage (in the person of Celestius, 412), Carthage and Milevum (416), the great African council at Carthage (418), and the council of Ephesus, where the doctrine was finally anathematised (431) (Kelly 1968:361). Rees explains this victory of Augustinianism over Pelagianism in light of Augustine's standing in the church on the one hand, and his persistence in opposing Pelagius to the last:

For them it was a fight to the finish, and at the end of the day it was Augustine's high standing as an acknowledged leader of the Church and his proven skill as a controversialist that won the battle. After the Synod of Diospolis had announced its verdict in favour of Pelagius, Augustine's determination to destroy his opponent and all that he stood for hardened into an obsession. It was he who revived the subject of Pelagius' orthodoxy as soon as the records of Diospolis were made available for examination; it was he who masterminded the all-out campaign of the African Church to enlist the support of the Emperor and the Pope of Rome and to overcome the latter's reluctance to endorse an unambiguous condemnation of Pelagius and Celestius; it was he who, indefatigable as ever, picked off Pelagius' main supporters one by one and reduced them to silence; and it was he who continued the witch-hunt into the far corners of the Empire by ensuring that there would be no area of the Church in which Pelagius and his friends might be able to find asylum (Rees 1991:130).

4.2.2 Augustine's theology of original sin (354-430 c.E.)

Ever since his Manichaean days, Augustine was plagued by questions about evil and its presence in the world. His theodicy rests upon the twofold foundation that, firstly, God created all things good,⁸⁴ and secondly, that humanity has fallen from this state of grace by an incomprehensible abuse of its God-given freedom. From this, humanity's fall, stems all other evil, which comes upon humanity as punishment (Durand 1978:23). Explaining how he "strained to perceive what I now heard, that free-will was the cause of our doing ill, and Thy just judgment [the cause] of our

⁸⁴ See Augustine, *Confessiones* VII, "But Thee, O Lord, I imagined on every part environing and penetrating it, though every way infinite: as if there were a sea, every where, and on every side, through unmeasured space, one only boundless sea, and it contained within it some sponge, huge, but bounded; that sponge must needs, in all its parts, be filled from that unmeasurable sea: so conceived I Thy creation, itself finite, full of Thee, the Infinite; and I said, Behold God, and behold what God hath created; and God is good, yea, most mightily and incomparably better than all these: but yet He, the Good, created them good; and see how He environeth and fulfils them. Where is evil then, and whence, and how crept it in hither? What is its root, and what its seed? Or hath it no being? Why then fear we and avoid what is not? Or if we fear it idly, then is that very fear evil, whereby the soul is thus idly goaded and racked? Yea, and so much a greater evil, as we have nothing to fear, and yet do fear. Therefore either is that evil which we fear, or else evil is, that we fear. Whence is it then? seeing God, the Good, hath created all these things good. He indeed, the greater and chiefest Good, hath created these lesser goods; still both Creator and created, all are good. Whence is evil?"

suffering ill" (*Conf.* VII), Augustine illustrates that all forms of evil known to us can be explained within the framework of sin and punishment of that sin (Durand 1978:23-24). Indeed, Augustine perceives God's punishment of sin as the way in which God sustains the harmony of creation by maintaining a moral balance, since a world in which sin exists but is kept in balance by God's punishment of that sin, is not more corrupted than a world that knows no sin and, consequently, also knows no punishment (Durand 1978:24). Augustine is careful not to suggest that God might have been caught off guard by sin, and instead describes God as fully in control, even able to bring forth good from evil and making use of sinners to achieve his good purpose (Durand 1978:24).

It is Augustine that we have to thank for introducing the decisive phrase "original sin" (*originale peccatum*) in 397, along with "original guilt" (*originalis reatus*). He describes humanity as a "lump of sin" (*massa peccati*), since all have died in Adam (1 Cor 15:22; Toews 2013:74). Augustine's argument for original sin rests, in part, on the (biblically unsupported) notion of an Adam that, pre-fall, was righteous and perfect, possessing mental powers greater than the most brilliant philosophers and scientists (Toews 2013:78; cf. Kelly 1968:361-362). This imaginary Adam was also morally perfect, possessing the capacity not to sin (*posse non peccare*),⁸⁵ and his appetites and feelings – including his sexual appetite – were under complete control of his (free) will, which was subject to God as it had been endowed with both an inclination to virtue and a gift of perseverance to persist in the right exercise of the will (Toews 2013:79; Kelly 1968:362).

The responsibility for Adam's fall is to be laid squarely at his own door, since God had given him every advantage. In the end, however, he erred on account of his creatureliness, "which meant he was changeable by nature and so liable to turn away from the transcendent good" (Kelly 1968:362). Adam's fall consisted of the sin of wilful transgression of God's command, and included in itself any and all possible

⁸⁵ Augustine regarded the inability to sin (*non posse peccare*) as the apex of liberty, our end in heaven. Adam did not possess this freedom, but it would have been his end if he had persevered in accordance with his ability not to sin (*posse non peccare*) (Kelly 1968:362, referring to Augustine, *Corrept.* 33). In Berkhof's words, "Man was created immortal, which does not mean that he was impervious to death, but that he had the capacity of bodily immortality. Had he proved obedient, he would have been confirmed in holiness. From the state of the *posse non peccare et mori* (the ability not to sin and die) he would have passed to the state of the *non posse peccare et mori* (the inability to sin and die). But he sinned, and consequently entered the state of the *non posse non peccare et mori* (the inability not to sin and die)" (Berkhof 1969:134).

forms of sin (Toews 2013:79). Following Ambrose, Augustine described Adam's sin as blasphemous for being motivated by Adam's pride and desire to be like God (Toews 2013:79; cf. Kelly 1968:362; Berkhof 1969:134).

Due to Adam's wrongful choice, human nature was essentially changed and humanity universally condemned, "because Adam's sin 'passed unto all men'; it is original sin [*peccatum originale*] or transmitted sin [*peccatum ex traduce*]" (Toews 2013:79). Because Augustine understood the unity of the human race realistically, he judged the entire human race to have been germinally present in Adam, therefore also sinning with him (Berkhof 1969:134).⁸⁶ It is because of this contamination of the soul that infants must be baptised (Toews 2013:80). Augustine's doctrine of original sin is infamous for building from a mistranslated Latin rendering of ἐφ' ὃ in Romans 5:12 as "in whom" all sinned, instead of "because of" (cf. footnote 55).

Augustine distinguishes between "inheriting an 'evil condition' from Adam, and inheriting 'real sins' with real 'guilt'" (O'Connell 1990:127). He judges humanity to not only participate in, but to also be co-responsible for Adam's transgression in the garden. This constitutes the very essence of original sin: because we were one with him when he made his wrongful choice, we therefore "willed in and with him" (Kelly 1968:364). This is why Augustine sees no conflict in us carrying both the ill effects of the original sin on our nature (*vitus*), and the guilt (*reatus*; Kelly 1968:364). While baptism removes the guilt from infants, the defilement of human nature is so grave that baptism cannot correct it. Hence, the offspring of baptised parents would still suffer the blemish of Adam's transgression (Toews 2013:82).

Concupiscence, which plays an important part in Augustine's doctrine, generally refers to the human tendency to substitute the "lesser goods" of creation for the ultimate and supreme good.⁸⁷ Augustine considered it the first sin that contained in it all others (Rees 1991:62):

⁸⁶ This concept sounds strange to contemporary ears, and therefore Berkhof explains, "The race is not constituted individually, that is, of a large number of relatively independent individuals, but organically, that is, of a large number of individualizations which are organic parts of that generic human nature that was present in Adam. And therefore the sin of the human nature was the sin of all its individualizations" (Berkhof 1969:134-135).

⁸⁷ "Augustine lists the sins of concupiscence as pride, sacrilege, homicide, spiritual fornication, avarice and theft but, in this connection, its chief manifestation is sexual desire, fed and watered by

Adam's first sin was a sin of pride, attributable to concupiscence in its broadest sense of self-love or self-centredness; but it was to the concupiscence which resulted, *concupiscentia carnis* or sexual concupiscence, that his descendants were to be in thrall ever after (Rees 1991:62).

The two metaphors *vitium* and *reatus* play a critical role in Augustine's doctrine of original sin. As a legal metaphor, *Reatus* affirms humanity's inherited legal liability and subjection to judicial punishment for Adam's sin. This "transfer of original guilt" was occasioned via seminal identity, according to which Adam included the whole of humanity in a physiological sense, since humanity as a whole would proceed from his genitals (Toews 2013:83). Because Augustine considers our individual souls as metaphysically identical to that of Adam, he can claim it is really *us* who committed the original sin (O'Connell 1990:127).

Vitium, on the other hand, is a medical metaphor that describes the hereditary moral disability that, since acquired by Adam, is transmitted from one generation to the next. While Augustine does not argue for the total depravity or the complete elimination of the image of God in us, the damage is extensive enough to ensure humanity's enslavement to ignorance, concupiscence and death.

Augustine does not mean to imply that humanity has been deprived of free will (*liberum arbitrium*) itself. We have lost our liberty, post-fall, in terms of the capacity that we possessed to avoid sin and do good, so that, henceforth, we need God's grace to avoid sin and an even more special kind of grace to do good (Kelly 1968:365). Our free will has remained intact, and yet, in our corrupted state, the sole use to which we put the will is to do evil (Kelly 1968:365; cf. Berkhof 1969:134). This is why Augustine speaks of the evil inclination of the human heart, since even though our choice remains free, "we spontaneously, as a matter of psychological fact, opt for perverse courses" (Kelly 1968:365-366).

Augustine's utterly pessimistic anthropology finds its logical counterpart in his insistence on the necessity of grace. The purely external aids in which Pelagius understood grace to function (see 4.2.1) did not satisfy Augustine, for whom the power of grace needed to rejuvenate fallen man was essentially the presence of the Holy Spirit, or "Gift" (*donum*), as Augustine preferred (Kelly 1968:366; cf. Berkhof

man's instinct to reproduce his species" (Rees 1991:62). While sexual reproduction is in itself necessary, Augustine still considered this the lowest of all forms of concupiscence (Rees 1991:62).

1969:135). This grace can, for Augustine, assume a number of forms. First, *preventive grace* initiates in our souls any good that we may aspire to or even contemplate. Second, *cooperating grace* denotes the way in which, once our will has been quickened, God assists and cooperates with our will to do good. Third, *sufficient grace* is what enabled Adam in Paradise (if he would choose to use his free will to this end) to accomplish the good. Finally, *efficient grace* is bestowed on the elect, enabling them to both will and do heaven's bidding (Kelly 1968:367). All grace is always a free gift from God (*gratia dei gratuita*), and since any deed committed by humanity is always already the result of grace, human merit can never earn divine favour (Kelly 1968:367; cf. Berkhof 1969:135-136, 206-207).⁸⁸

It is here, in Augustine's view of divine grace, that we should look for the source of his particular view on both free will and predestination. If divine grace begins the work in the will that will direct it toward the good, and if this grace, as expression of God's almighty will, must accomplish what it sets out to do, then the question arises as to which extent the will can still be said to be free (Kelly 1968:367). Kelly outlines Augustine's view in a number of stages:

First, in the strict sense of free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), he holds that man is always free, that is, he can choose freely the course he will pursue; but since his will acts on motives and certain motives may press irresistibly on it, the range of choices which are "live options" for him is limited by the sort of man he is. Fallen man, for example, breathing the atmosphere of concupiscence, though theoretically free, as a matter of fact only opts for sinful objects. From this point of view grace heals and restores his free will, not so much enlarging his area of choice as substituting a system of good choices for evil ones.^a Secondly, Augustine acknowledges that God's omnipotent will, operating on our wills by grace, is irresistible. But he points out^b that He works through our wills, the effect being that they freely and spontaneously will what is good. To be more explicit,^c God knows in advance under the influence of what motives this or that particular will will freely consent to what He proposes for it, and arranges things accordingly. Thus grace accommodates itself to each individual's situation and character, and Augustine can claim^d that, for all the power of grace, it rests with the recipient's will to accept or reject it. Thirdly, however, we should recall his distinction between free will (*liberum arbitrium*) and freedom (*libertas*). Freedom

⁸⁸ While Augustine understands humanity to be totally depraved and unable to do any spiritual good, he admits that the will has a certain natural freedom, by which it can still perform acts that are "civilly good, and from a lower standpoint even praiseworthy. At the same time he maintains that man, separated from God, burdened with guilt, and under the dominion of evil, cannot will that which is good in the sight of God. As he sees it, that only is good in the sight of God which springs from the motive of love to God" (Berkhof 1969:135).

is free will put to a good use, and that man is free in the full sense who is emancipated from sin and temptation; he is free to live the life God desires him to live.^e Its first stage, which Adam enjoyed, is the ability not to sin; its culminating stage, to be enjoyed in heaven, is the inability to sin.^f In this sense not only could there be no opposition between grace and freedom, but it is grace which confers freedom. Man's free will is most completely itself when it is in most complete subjection to God, for true liberty consists in Christ's service^g (Kelly 1968:367-368, referring to ^a*Grat.* 31; *Spir. et litt.* 52; *Ep.* 157,10; 177,4; *Enchir.* 105; ^b*Corrept.* 45; ^c*Ad Simplic.* 1, 2, 13; ^d*Spir. et litt.* 60; ^e*Enchir.* 32; *C. Jul. op. imp.* 6,11; ^f*Corrept.* 33; ^g*Mor. eccl.* 1,21; *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 41,8; *Grat.* 31).

When Augustine calls God's grace "irresistible," then, he does not suggest that divine grace forces the will, so that a person is no longer a free agent. Rather, he sees the power of divine grace in the fact that it effects such change upon the human will that it causes the human person to voluntarily choose what is good. For Augustine, this means that the will of the human person has been restored to its intended and true freedom, and this is also how Augustine sees the grace of God as the source of all good in the human person (Berkhof 1969:135, 207).

The problem of predestination flows from this, for if grace offers humanity the only hope for regeneration, and grace is a free gift from God, then the salvation of human persons ultimately depends on a decision by God about who shall be recipients of God's gift. On Scriptural grounds, Augustine holds that God has made this decision from all eternity, and on rational grounds he held that this decision in no way reflects his foreknowledge of future good deeds, since any good deed done would itself be the fruit of the grace offered to the individual as determined by God's primeval decision (Kelly 1968:369). According to Augustine, God decides who he wants to show mercy to, granting them the gift of grace that will lead to their regeneration, while hardening the hearts of those he does not want to save.

Thus Augustine not only speaks of the predestination of the righteous, but also of some as being predestined to eternal death and judgment (Kelly 1968:109). It is divine grace that produces the right response from the elect – a response that is congruent with their condition, so that "their response is held by Augustine to be in perfect harmony with their call, which is made in such a way and at such a time that they, as God alone foreknows, will be unable to reject it" (Rees 1991:41). This is how Augustine conceives that faith can be at once an act of the human person and yet be

called forth by God. This view of Augustine on predestination was wholly unpalatable to Pelagius, to whom it sounded like logical determinism (Rees 1991:41-42).

Augustine made no significant contribution to soteriology (Berkhof 1969:169). On the one hand, he echoed many of the Fathers that preceded him, for instance regarding deification of human nature by the incarnation (though only ethically speaking) and regarding Christ's death dissolving a claim that Satan had on humanity (Berkhof 1969:169). On the other hand, and for the most part, Augustine's soteriology is far removed from Greek thought, and indeed establishes the trajectory that Latin theology was bound to take on the matter. His soteriology is woven around the threads of original sin, justification by grace, and reconciliation by the sacrifice of Christ (Berkhof 1969:169).

An evaluation of Augustine's doctrine of original sin

A first matter regarding Augustine's doctrine of original sin that begs critical reflection, is the question of whether his doctrine of original sin was influenced by Manichaeism.⁸⁹ For this we follow the work of Augustine specialist Johannes van Oort (1987; 1989; both these articles revised and republished, 2017a; 2017b). In his 1989 essay, Van Oort addresses the closely related questions of whether, firstly, Augustine really understood sexual concupiscence as a punishment for primordial sin, and considered this punishment to be transmitted as original sin through the act of sexual procreation; and secondly, whether Manichaeism exercised any influence on this view of Augustine, namely sexual concupiscence and the propagation of original sin (Van Oort 1989:382).

As for the first question, Van Oort finds that Augustine's opinion on the matter seems clear even from the early stages of the Pelagian crisis. Augustine connects

⁸⁹ Augustine was a Manichee from age 19 to 28, from approximately 373 to 382 C.E. Instead of the African Christianity, it was the gnostic Christianity of the Manichaeans that appealed to Augustine, so that the young intellectual joined them as an *auditor* (Van Oort 1987:137). The young Augustine became acquainted with Manichaean teaching and read several of their writings, so that the picture that emerges of Augustine during this time is that he is "a convinced Manichee, feels deeply attracted to their Christological piety and sings Manichean psalms and hymns" (Van Oort 1987:138). Furthermore, Augustine read Manichaean works during his period as a Christian bishop and displays his thorough knowledge of their writings in, e.g., *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* and *Contra epistolam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti* (Van Oort 1987:139). That Augustine's thought was influenced by Manichaeism is further illustrated by Augustine's own admitting to the fact in *De pulchro et apto* (Van Oort 1987:139-140; cf. *Conf.* IV,15,24-27).

the disobedient excitation of the sexual organs with the evil of sin and states that unbaptised infants are guilty through *concupiscentia sexualis*, since the sinful flesh of the parents transfers a *nōxa* to their children (Van Oort 1989:382-383).⁹⁰ Book XIV of *De civitate Dei* considers libido as the punishment for Adam and Eve's sin.⁹¹ The most characteristic aspect of this *concupiscentia sexualis* consists in the "disobedient random motion as retribution imposed on man for his prior disobedience" (Van Oort 1989:383; 1987:147-148).⁹² In *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* (c. 420), dated to the same time, Augustine states that the human person contracts sin from the evil of carnal concupiscence, that "natural generation contracts the guilt of concupiscence," that anyone born through carnal concupiscence is bound by original sin, that original sin is transferred through and results from carnal lust (*traductum et adtractum de carnali concupiscentia*), and that original sin passes on to all humanity through natural procreation (Van Oort 1989:384).⁹³ This trend continues in *Contra Julianum* and the *Opus imperfectum*, and thus it is clear that Augustine not only considered sexual concupiscence as a punishment for primordial sin, but also understood this primordial sin to be "transmitted as original sin by means of the sexual desire in copulation" (Van Oort 1989:384).

Importantly, it is the uncontrollability and irresistibility of sexual concupiscence, or its random motion, that Augustine describes as its essential feature: "a *motus* that is entirely disobedient to the will" (Van Oort 1989:384).⁹⁴ This random motion is a *malum*, and it is through this *malum* of the sexual concupiscence that original sin is transmitted (Van Oort 1989:385).^{95, 96} Van Oort summarises Augustine's view of sexual concupiscence as follows:

⁹⁰ Van Oort refers to Augustine's 411 C.E. *De pecc. mer.* I,57; II,4; III,2.

⁹¹ Before their sin of disobedience, Augustine considered Adam and Even to have lived happily and peacefully, undisturbed as they were by *perturbationes animorum* (Van Oort 1987:147, citing *De civ. XIV*,10).

⁹² Van Oort refers to *De civ. Dei* XIV,10, 17, 20, 21.

⁹³ Van Oort refers to *De nupt.*: I,1; I,21; I,27; I,37; II,45.

⁹⁴ Augustine habitually describes *concupiscentia* or *libido* as *motus inmoderatus* or *motus inordinatus*. As an example, Van Oort refers to *De civ. Dei* XIV,23.24.26, etc.

⁹⁵ Van Oort refers to *Op. imp.* IV,29 and, apart from the quotations referred to above, also to *De nupt.* II,59 and *C. Iul.* II,33.

⁹⁶ While Augustine at first held that the "marriage" of Adam and Eve in paradise consisted only of a spiritual marriage and excluded any and all sexuality, he later adjusted this view (no doubt due to the attacks by Julian of Eclanum) and conceded that, in order to carry out the command in Gen 1:28, "there must have been sexual union in paradise and even a certain *libido*. This *libido* was, however, always under the strict control of the will, not sinful because not rebellious. In its randomness appears its sinfulness and through this sinfulness original sin is transmitted" (Van Oort 1989:385).

- a. *Concupiscentia sexualis*, which is beyond the control of human will, is referred to in a highly negative way;
- b. random *concupiscentia sexualis* is regarded as a punishment for primordial sin and this sin is transmitted as original sin by means of the copulation;
- c. the sinfulness of *concupiscentia sexualis* is pre-eminently manifest in its randomness as *motus inordinatus* or *inmoderatus* (Van Oort 1987:149).

It is precisely here, in Augustine's emphasis on "the sinfulness of sexual concupiscence as a *motus inordinatus* through which sin is transferred," that Van Oort comes to the second part of his investigation and detects the influence of Manichaeism (Van Oort 1989:385):⁹⁷

In Manicheism matter is the evil principle. Its characteristic nature is lust and desire, ἡδονή and ἐπιθυμία in the Greek and Coptic, Āz in the Persian and Parthian texts. This lust and desire also burn in the human body which is matter. Random motion, therefore, is its typical feature. In this random motion the wickedness of matter is apparent (Van Oort 1989:385).

⁹⁷ Mani and his followers propagated a profoundly negative view of *concupiscentia sexualis*, as is already clear from their thoroughly dualistic cosmological myth, which understood evil as an eternal cosmic force that opposes the Father of Greatness. The world is a mixture of light and darkness, good and evil. "World history has as its purpose the separation of light and darkness so that the primordial state of things can be restored. This will be the case when all the redeemed particles of light have returned to the kingdom of light and those damned have been locked up on the 'clod,' together with the prince of darkness, his henchmen, matter and concupiscence (Pers. Āz, Gr. ἐπιθυμία, Lat. Concupiscentia)" (Van Oort 1987:140). Manichaean doctrine therefore held that the "νοῦς (the revelation from the other world) saves the ψυχή (the divine spark in man) from the ὕλη (evil matter) (Van Oort 1987:140). Furthermore, since the macrocosm is believed to mirror the microcosm, this myth was really understood as a "self"-experience. Just as the light and darkness struggle for dominance in the world, then, the "lust in man" "darkens the intellect. In the unconscious, sexual passion is churning and strives for gratification. The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit, the light-νοῦς, is held captive in sinful flesh (matter)" (Van Oort 1987:140-141). In this worldview, where ὕλη is a power that strives to vanquish the kingdom of light, matter is understood as random motion, "depicted as a continuous struggle of countless demons that inhabit the kingdom of darkness" (Van Oort 1987:141). The following point that Van Oort makes is important: "What is here described pertaining to the macrocosm is a mythical projection of a psychological experience. The human body is ὕλη and the ὕλη is ἐπιθυμία, *concupiscentia*, evil desire and lust (ἡδονή). This manifests itself in particular in the sexual impulse, the *libido*. This stirs about in man, operates destructively like a devouring demon and strives for gratification. Having its origin in the darkness of the unconscious or semi-conscious, its aim is the conquest of the pure light of the good and clear consciousness (Van Oort 1987:141). Furthermore, the Manichaean myth considers Adam and Eve (or Gēhmurd and Murdiyānay in the Middle Persian sources) to be the product of cannibalism and sexual union of two demons, so that humanity still bears the mark of this (Van Oort 1987:141). All this contributes to the profoundly negative view of the human body and especially concupiscence (Van Oort 1987:141). Cf. Van Oort (1987:141-145) for an exposition of various texts that mention ἡδονή and ἐπιθυμία in a negative and an explicitly sexual sense, and illustrate the profound sense of sin in Manichaeism as a result. At the end of this literary overview, Van Oort summarises that, in Manichaeism, first, "sexuality is referred to in a highly negative way"; second, "sexual desire is the primordial sin and the punishment for sin, which procreates itself by means of the copulation"; and finally, "*concupiscentia sexualis* is pre-eminently characteristic of the kingdom of darkness, the realm of evil, the ὕλη, and is described as random motion" (Van Oort 1987:145).

Mani's understanding of the evilness of matter differs significantly from the Greek philosophical understanding of Plato (matter as that which becomes all things when it assumes certain qualities and shapes) and Aristotle (matter as the element in relation to which form and privation occur). For Mani, matter is the random motion within each individual being.⁹⁸ This definition of matter as ἄτακτος κίνησις is wholly Manichaean, and it is precisely in this ἄτακτος κίνησις that the wickedness of ὑλη manifests itself. Further, it is through this ἄτακτος κίνησις that evil procreates itself. "As Manichean texts speak of ἄτακτος κίνησις, so Augustine laid stress on the *motus inmoderatus*: it is sin and through it sin is transmitted" (Van Oort 1989:386).⁹⁹

It would seem then, that the repeated accusations by the Pelagians, and in particular Julian of Eclanum, that Augustine's doctrine of original sin, transmitted by the sexual act and in this way contaminating posterity, was a relapse into Manichaeism, had some foundation in reality (Van Oort 1987:148). In his defence, Augustine appealed to predecessors in the Christian tradition, but

only succeeded in respect to his notion of (original) sin, the necessity of baptism and the sinfulness that remains in man even after baptism, not however for his opinion that original sin is propagated through random sexual desire (Van Oort 1987:148).

The parallelism between Augustine's views and that of Manichaeism is indeed substantial, and Julian is correct in pointing out these agreements in thought. Parallelism does not, however, prove causality. While the fact that Augustine spent much of his philosophically formative years as a Manichaeans certainly makes an argument for causality plausible in the author's view, Van Oort also points out that the correspondence between Augustine and Manichaeism may simply have been due to the fact that both Manichaeism and early Christian thought shared the same religious-intellectual context (Van Oort 1987:150-152).¹⁰⁰ It is therefore possible that

⁹⁸ This distinction is made by the Platonist Alexander of Lycopolis, who describes the Manichaeans view as "ἢ ἐν ἔκάστῳ τῶν ὄντων ἄτακτον κίνησις" (Van Oort 1989:386).

⁹⁹ Van Oort clarifies that his main point in the essay is that only Augustine and the Manichees lay such stress on *concupiscentia sexualis* as ἄτακτος κίνησις. He states, "I do not argue that only Augustine and the Manichees maintained that (original) sin is transmitted by sexual generation; cf. in the preceding Christian tradition for instance St. Ambrose. I do not even say that only Augustine and the Manichees referred to the function of the *motus concupiscentiae*; for a *pollutio peccati* transferred *ex concupiscentiae motu*, see Origen, *Comm. Rom.* VI,12" (Van Oort 1989:386).

¹⁰⁰ The *Cologne Mani Codex* has "established irrefutably that the young Mani grew up in a Jewish-Christian baptist milieu. Thus, from the very first, Mani was subjected to Jewish-Christian influence and this can explain many characteristic features of his world religion... But concerning this Jewish-

Augustine may have drawn from an earlier, shared tradition for his ideas on *concupiscentia sexualis*, original sin and baptism. Van Oort states, however, that this possibility should be considered as an “Arbeitssatz,” since further research on the matter is needed before a final conclusion may be made (Van Oort 1987:151).

Another aspect of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin that invites critical reflection is the lack of a biblical foundation. Both the idea of a perfect and righteous Adam and the theory of seminal identity are foreign to Scripture. For the first, Augustine follows Ambrose, who constructed this mythology without any biblical basis whatsoever, and for the latter he builds on debates within Graeco-Roman philosophy (Toews 2013:85-86). Finally, as a result, the biblical basis for original sin itself fails completely:

Augustine grounds his theology in five biblical texts: Job 24:4-5 [faulty Latin translation from the LXX] [25:4-5 NRSV]; Psalm 51:5; John 3:5; Ephesians 2:5; Romans 5:12. Two of the proof-texts are based on mistranslations (Job and Romans), the use of the Ephesians texts is “specious,” according to Rondet, and neither the Psalms nor the John texts support Augustine’s idea of “original sin” (Toews 2013:85).

Neither the Eden narrative, nor any other part of Scripture, offers a basis for a doctrine of original sin. Scripture bears no witness to the idea of “a universal human nature which was forever biologically corrupted by Adam’s wilful act and for which all subsequent generations are now accountable” (Toews 2013:88). The Platonic and Stoic ideas that enabled Augustine to think along these lines, via the notion of seminal identity, have long since been abandoned. Also, while Augustine claims that his doctrine of original sin was aligned with church tradition, his views differ greatly from that of the Eastern Church, and while Augustine’s thought certainly had more parallels within the Western Church, it is really only Ambrose and Ambrosiaster who offers clear support for original sin as outlined by Augustine (Toews 2013:84).

Despite the lack of biblical support and the discontinuity with the larger theological tradition on sin, as we’ve seen so far, Augustine’s doctrine of original sin

Christian group we are also informed that it was absolutely averse to marriage and sexuality. ... Furthermore, there is evidence that these Jewish-Christian baptists among whom Mani grew up – practically certain they were Elchasaites – were not alone in their views. Elsewhere in Jewish and (Jewish-)Christian circles there was also disapprobation at sexuality” (Van Oort 1987:151). For a detailed discussion of examples that illustrate the connection between sexual lust, the evil inclination (*yetser hara*), and baptism, cf. Van Oort (1987:151).

became official church dogma when the Council of Orange accepted it in 529. Given the emphasis that the church placed on the apostolic tradition as a guide in distinguishing truth from heresy, this is really quite a marvel.¹⁰¹ It was precisely because Vincent of Lérins was concerned about such “doctrinal innovations” as Augustine’s views on predestination, that he outlined what is today known as the “Vincentian Canon” for determining the continuity of a teaching with Church tradition (universality, antiquity, consensus; McGrath 2007:136-137). All this notwithstanding, Augustine’s doctrine of original sin has been echoed in official creeds and confessions across a range of traditions ever since (e.g., Augsburg [Lutheran, 1530], Council of Trent [Roman Catholic, 1563-1564], Second Helvetic Confession [Reformed, 1566], Westminster Confession [Reformed, 1646], Thirty-Nine Articles [Anglican, 1563], Articles of Religion [Methodist, 1784]) (Toews 2013:86).

4.2.3 Attempting integration, achieving compromise: Semi-Pelagianism

It should come as no surprise that the history of dogma reveals several attempts at dialogue, or even compromise, between the widely divergent approaches of Augustine and Pelagius. While the council of Carthage outlawed Pelagianism in 418, some aspects of Augustine’s teaching were also problematic to some in the church (e.g. the East, where it would have no perceptible impact). A number of theologians in the south of Gaul took particular issue, for instance, with Augustine’s suggestion that, though the will remains free, it is in its fallen state incapable of choosing the good. They also resisted aspects of his view on predestination that for them came dangerously close to fatalism (Kelly 1968:370; cf. Rees 1991:103).

Interestingly, and highlighting the by now familiar differences between East and West on such matters as original sin, free will, and grace, Rees points out that the monks of southern Gaul were closer in “nature and training” to the theology of the Eastern Church than that of the West. This was due to their belonging to a monastic tradition that had developed in Egypt (3rd century) and later spread to the west (4th century; Rees 1991:104). Upon coming into contact with some of the

¹⁰¹ To understand why Augustine’s teachings, which violated these major criteria for truth in the ancient church, were not declared heretical alongside that of Pelagius (or even declared a heresy while Pelagius was vindicated), we should look to politics rather than to what conforms to Scripture or tradition. Explains Toews, “Augustine, in addition to being a brilliant polemicist, was a strategic politician who knew how to use the power structures of the Roman church as well as the imperial government and its military to serve his theological and ecclesiological purposes...” (Toews 2013:89).

extreme points of Augustine's teachings, these monks "could see their simplicity of belief and life being undermined by these new-fangled and outlandish ideas" (Rees 1991:10).

The most prominent among these thinkers (called "semi-Pelagians" from the 17th century onward) was a monk of Marseilles, John Cassian,¹⁰² who strongly opposed Pelagianism, yet held that Scripture often portrays the initial beginnings of a good will to originate in the human person (e.g. Zacchaeus), and subsequently strengthened by divine grace (Kelly 1968:371). He argued that Adam retained the knowledge of the good, so that humanity's will is better understood to be sick rather than dead (Kelly 1968:371). Divine grace cooperates with the human person, bringing restoration and assistance where needed, and indeed the human person cannot fulfil a good deed without the aid of God. Finally, because God wills all humanity to be saved, any person who perishes must do so against God's will. For this reason, God's predestination must rest on the basis of his foreknowledge of the quality of human behaviour (Kelly 1968:371, referring to Cassian, *Coll.* 13,8,4; 13,11,1f.; 13,12,2; 3,12,3-5; 13,13,1; 13,9,5; 13;7).

Owing mainly to an unjustified association with Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism did not have much of an impact against the growing influence of Augustine in the Western Church (Kelly 1968:371; cf. Berkhof 1969:138). Despite this failure to impact *Dogmengeschichte* in any lasting manner, it may be helpful to view Semi-Pelagianism as an attempt to mediate between the polar opposites of the positions which Pelagius and Augustine both argued to the extreme. The semi-Pelagians maintained, as Pelagius had done, that Augustine's take on predestination had distorted the doctrine of grace to something that stood in discontinuity with the teaching of the Church (Rees 1991:128). Augustine had wanted to defend the importance of the divine initiative in the salvation of humanity at all cost, but for the monks of Marseilles (as for Pelagius) this resulted in an

extreme position which threatened to undermine the whole foundation of the Christian life as an active and loving co-operation between God and man. All that

¹⁰² A former disciple of John Chrysostom, Cassian "had fled to the west in 405, a victim no doubt, like his master, of the Origenist witch-hunt in the east. It was he who had founded the two monasteries, one for men and the other for women, at Marseilles around 415, and his reputation stood high in the western Church. ... He was certainly no Pelagian; on the contrary, he would connect Pelagianism with Nestorianism ..." (Rees 1991:105).

he had succeeded in doing, albeit unwittingly ..., was to replace the Christian God with the Nature of the Stoics, endowed with the superhuman faculties of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence but robbed of the infinite power of love. Whether by nature or God, man was programmed from the beginning of the world to find his freedom only by sacrificing it to the laws of the one or to the will of the other. Pelagius argued that Augustine had deprived man of his freedom to respond to God, Augustine that it was only by surrendering his apparent freedom that man could be truly free" (Rees 1991:128).

For his own part, Pelagius placed an equally extreme emphasis on the freedom of the will, causing leaders in the Western Church to at once cringe at the prominent place he gave to humanity's role in the pursuit of righteousness, and accuse him of underplaying the divine role in salvation (Rees 1991:128-129).

(B)y his over-emphasis on the freedom of the human will and on its ability to cope with the problems presented by human weakness when faced by day-to-day pressures, he gave the appearance of having lapsed into a kind of naturalism. He believed in divine grace, however inadequately he may have defined it; he believed in it as a means of redemption and as a means of salvation available to all men and women alike; but either he had no doctrine of infused grace or he was unable to make it explicit (Rees 1991:129).

With the benefit of hindsight, we may lament the fact that the early 5th century did not provide fertile ground for the sort of dialogue between Augustine and Pelagius that would have facilitated an integration of their respective positions which could only have been to Europe's benefit (cf. Rees 1991:129).¹⁰³ Neither were the time and circumstances ready for the compromise offered by Semi-Pelagianism. John Cassian seemed to understand something about the necessity of "third ways" that lead us beyond the stalemate of polar opposites, put so eloquently by Roger Haight, S.J. Looking at the Pelagian controversy as the interplay of symbols that represent two opposing views of humankind (Haight 1974:35),¹⁰⁴ he reminds us that

(o)ne must suppose again that since each of the two symbols are evidently based on solid values; despite their excesses, aspects of each position must

¹⁰³ Pelagius, with his considerate tendency to soften the edges of the most extreme points of his theology, hinted at such a willingness for compromise "by the care which he took to qualify his own emphasis on the ability of men to choose good by adding the phrase 'with the assistance of God' both at Diospolis and in his confession of faith presented to the Pope" (Rees 1991:129). Augustine, however, was unwilling to make any compromise whatsoever "on a matter which he believed to be of vital importance for the survival of the Christian Church" (Rees 1991:129).

¹⁰⁴ For Haight, these symbols "stand respectively for human autonomy and total dependency on God, for human freedom and the constriction of that freedom so that it needs internal divine aid to accomplish the good, for a universal possibility of salvation and an optimistic view of human nature over against a pessimistic view of man under the shadow of predestination" (Haight 1974:35-36).

somewhat be integrated into a total Christian view of man and the Christian life. If either of the symbolic positions espoused in Pelagianism and Augustinianism are taken by themselves without the modifications that the other demands, if they are simply pitted against each other in an either/or fashion with no attempt at integration, one will inevitably be led to the untenable extremes that each position implies. This being the case, the symbols can be seen as poles of human life and Christian faith experience that must be integrated in Christian life and understanding. While the values of each must find a place in the Christian outlook, still, because they are opposing, they must be held in tension ... (Haight 1974:37; cf. Reese's interpretation of Haight in 1991:129-130).

The recognition of the value of and need for both approaches in dialogue has made searching for a "third way" (to use Kearney's term) beyond the opposing "symbols" of Augustinianism and Pelagianism one of the focal points of recent scholarship on the subject of grace and freedom (McWilliam 1999:889). We will return to this question in 6.1.

4.3 Sin and salvation in scholastic thought

4.3.1 Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109)

While Anselm is perhaps best known to philosophy for his ontological argument for the existence of God, theology values him for *Cur deus homo* (Why God became human). Anselm's hamartiology emphasises original sin, though for him it represents not human nature as such, but the condition into which it has come since the time of its creation, that being guilt and pollution being passed on from father to child. He considers children guilty, even for the sin which they inherited, since "(a)ll sin, original as well as actual, constitutes guilt" (Berkhof 1969:142-143). Anselm shares Augustine's view that Adam, as representative of the entire human race, caused an apostatisation of the "general" human nature. Since every child is an individualised part of this human nature, they each also sinned in Adam and therefore share in the resulting guilt and pollution (Berkhof 1969:143).

Anselm interprets true freedom of the will to mean that a person has become self-determined toward good to such a degree that sinning becomes, in effect, an impossibility. The power to choose between good and evil is therefore, for him, an inadequate definition for the freedom of the will (Berkhof 1969:143-144). The apostasy of both the angels and Adam was thus not an act of genuine freedom, since these transgressions were committed in spite of their freedom, and by virtue of

the possibility of sinning (*possibilitas peccandi*; Berkhof 1969:144). Anselm's distinction, then, between true freedom and the voluntary faculty in the Eden couple means that, while true freedom was lost due to the defilement of human nature, the voluntary faculty, i.e. the ability of the will to choose either good or evil, remained, but as a shadow of true freedom. This assumes that the will was originally not created with indifference, so that freedom of the will consisted in choice; instead the will was created to choose only one path, namely that of holiness. This can never happen due to any compulsion from without, however, for Anselm considered it necessary that any such acceptance of a will oriented only to good, must be as a result of self-determination.

Anselm was the first to attempt a harmonious, systematic and consistent theory of the Atonement, and opened a new era in soteriology (Berkhof 1969:171). Indeed, the influence of Anselm's atonement theology on "universal Christian consciousness" has been extensive (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). He regards the atonement as a non-negotiable, necessary component in the redemption of humanity, and therefore rejects theories that do not place the atonement in the centre of their soteriological theories. These included many of the theories that had their origin among the Eastern Fathers, such as the Recapitulation Theory and the Ransom-to-Satan theory,¹⁰⁵ which he both finds wanting, along with the idea that Christ's death merely manifests God's love for humanity (Berkhof 1969:172). Anselm argues that "the absolute necessity of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ must be grounded in an immanent and necessary attribute of the divine nature," and this ultimate ground he finds in the "honour of God" (Berkhof 1969:172).

Anselm's argument for his atonement theory runs as follows: Humanity, as creature of God, owed God complete submission to God's will, but instead rebelled against it, so simultaneously dishonouring God and contracting a debt as a result

¹⁰⁵ Siekawitch argues that Anselm did not, in fact, completely reject the ransom theory, but merely revised it: "He agreed that humankind had sold itself into the slavery of the devil. He believed that people are rescued from the enemy through Christ's death. He even embraced Christ's death as a ransom payment for people's sin. But he did not agree with the elaborate illustrations of the ransom theory such as that of Augustine who saw the atonement as a mousetrap set to catch the devil. God did not owe the devil anything, because both the devil and humans belong to God. ... The ransom is not paid to the devil; it is paid to God. The ransom did overcome the devil and by this defeat, brought honor to God" (Siekawitch 2007-2008:6).

(Anderson 2009:190; cf. Berkhof 1969:172).¹⁰⁶ The insult to God's honour begged restitution, since it would be both irregular and unjust for God's mercy to simply overlook sin (Berkhof 1969:172; cf. Siekawitch 2007-2008:7; Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Anselm imagines that God's honour could be vindicated either by punishment or by satisfaction, and both for reasons of God's own purpose and to spare humanity, God decided on satisfaction (Berkhof 1969:172). This implied two requirements: firstly, that "man should now render to God the willing obedience which he owed Him," and secondly, that "he should make amends for the insult to God's honour by paying something over and above the actual debt" (Berkhof 1969:172). Humankind, however, possess no "currency" to repay this debt, since everything they own has been given to them (Anderson 2009:190). Since both these requirements are therefore beyond what humanity is able to offer God, the only option is that Godself should provide the satisfaction (Berkhof 1969:172; cf. Siekawitch 2007-2008:7; Ratzinger 2004:n.p.):

A gift – and Anselm looks upon satisfaction as a gift rather than as a punishment – surpassing all that is not God can only be God. God only could make true reparation, and His mercy prompted Him to make it through the gift of His Son (Berkhof 1969:172).

If God were to remove the injustice by simple amnesty, however, what had gone wrong in the first place would not really be repaired "from the inside" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Furthermore, sufficient satisfaction could not be made by God alone, however, since the one making satisfaction needed to be part of the very human race that had dishonoured God and incurred the debt in the first place, yet without sin and guilt. Only "the God-man" could satisfy these requirements (Berkhof 1969:172-173; cf. Siekawitch 2007-2008:7).

The situation viewed from the side of humanity is hopeless; eternal condemnation appears unavoidable. But this very predicament stands in contradiction to God's goodness. Were God to accept the status quo, he would be forced to watch helplessly as his created world fell apart. And so God's dilemma: Only He has the means to pay what is owed, but the responsibility for the debt rests with humanity. The only possible solution, Anselm concluded –

¹⁰⁶ The metaphor of sin as debt, which arose in the late OT period and became widespread in early Syriac Christianity and later also in the West, receives its greatest emphasis in Anselm, so that Anderson claims that there "is no thinker in the Christian tradition for whom debt and atonement come together in such an integrated fashion" (Anderson 2009:189).

and hence the title of his work, *Why God became Man* – is for God to become incarnate (Anderson 2009:190).

While the God-man's obedience to God was necessary, it was insufficient as a full restoration of God's honour, since obedience to God was nothing but duty, and gained no merit (Berkhof 1969:173; cf. Anderson 2009:190). By suffering and dying, however – a completely voluntary act on the part of a sinless being – “the God-man” paid his Father infinite honour (Berkhof 1969:173; cf. Anderson 2009:190):

This was a work of supererogation, which could accrue to the benefit of mankind, and which more than counter-balanced the demerits of sin. Justice required that such a free gift should be rewarded. But there is nothing which the Father can give the Son, for He needs nothing. Therefore the reward accrues to the benefit of man and assumes the form of the forgiveness of sins and of future blessedness for all those who live according to the commandments of the Gospel (Berkhof 1969:173).

Christ's work of supererogation deserved some form of compensation from the Father “for the infinite value that has been surrendered” (Anderson 2009:190). Christ, being God and wanting for nothing, had no need for any reward from God, however, and so the infinite merit gained by Christ's voluntary passion is offered as free gift to all who approach God in the name of his Son (Anderson 2009:190). Anselm's explication of the satisfaction theory of the atonement brought the dominance of the ransom theory to an end, so that the satisfaction theory became the prevailing theory of the Middle Ages (Siekawitch 2007-2008:4).

Certain aspects of Anselm's approach call for clarification. A first problem concerns the application of his theory. Anselm believes that the atonement only fully satisfies past sins, and that, to maintain the forgiveness provided through the cross, a Christian must make due satisfaction through penance and correct conduct (Siekawitch 2007-2008:9). Aquinas would develop the idea of satisfaction through penance further, so that by the time of the Reformation it had become entrenched in scholastic theology, providing the necessary impetus for the penal substitutionary theory of the Reformers (Siekawitch 2007:2008:9-10). If the merit gained by Christ's voluntary passion is indeed infinite, however, it is unclear why Anselm imagines that sin committed post-conversion and baptism needs further merit established by human effort.

Second, there is the matter of the biblical foundation for Anselm's argument. While most commentators trace Anselm's influence back only as far as Cyprian or Tertullian, Anderson has clearly illustrated that the metaphor of sin as debt is far older than this, and is even attested in Scripture since the latest strands of the OT (cf. 3.4). Furthermore, Anselm's appeal to the honour of God, though based on his exposure to the feudal system of his day (Siekawitch 2007-2008:6), makes complete sense within the social context of the ancient Mediterranean World. Structured around the core values of honour and shame, biblical anthropologists have illustrated how the world of the OT and NT was shaped and regulated by these ancient value systems.¹⁰⁷ The accusation that Anselm's satisfaction theory "with his feudal perspective of honor" relies "more on contemporary life and logic than the Bible" (Siekawitch 2007-2008:6), is therefore unfounded, since the feudal world had its emphasis on honour in common with the world of the OT and NT.

Still, Anselm's satisfaction theory is not without its problems. First, his argument that the honour of God served as the immanent and necessary attribute of the divine nature that grounded the absolute necessity of Christ's atoning sacrifice is a circular one. Setting out by assuming the non-negotiable necessity of Christ's atoning death, Anselm then sets out to find a foundation for this claim in the divine nature, and proceeds by projecting social values and protocols of his own time (which happened to agree with biblical times) onto the divine nature. On the first level, the problem is the circularity of the argument, rather than the appropriateness of using honour as a hermeneutical key to unlock the atonement mystery. The second level of the problem engages honour as an appropriate means for speaking of God.

As pointed out above, the Bible was shaped in a culture regulated by honour and shame, and the concept is in no way foreign to Scripture (cf., e.g. Isa 43:7; Heb 13:15; Rev 5:13, pointed out in Siekawitch's brief overview [2007-2008:8-9]). Hermeneutically, however, counter-traditions in Scripture capture the intuition that

¹⁰⁷ Cf., e.g. Lemos (2013); Neufeld & DeMaris (2010); Pilch & Malina (2009); Esler (2006); Mahlangu (2001); Malina (2001); Chalcraft (1997); Carter & Meyers (1996); Elliot (1993); Malina (1982:229-242). For the Oxford bibliography on "Social sciences and the New Testament," cf. Neufeld (2010:n.p.). For the Oxford bibliography on "Honor and shame," cf. Pilch (2012:n.p.). For an overview of the "The Context Group," a research group consisting of international biblical scholars who utilise social-scientific methods, cf. www.contextgroup.org.

God is decidedly *different* than human beings, who are obsessed with their own honour. In this sense, Anselm's claim that the mercy of God could not simply overlook sin, since the honour of God demanded satisfaction, runs counter to these alternative biblical traditions.

The story that best illustrates this is the parable of the prodigal son, which is the NT narrative that perhaps most exemplifies the relational nature of sin. In this parable, the son also insults his father's honour by demanding his portion of the inheritance and leaving his father's house for a foreign land. Instead of the father demanding satisfaction for his hurt pride, however, we find him longingly awaiting his son's return. Again, upon the son's return, the father shows little concern for his own honour, and in fact behaves rather shamefully by running to meet his son on the way, so protecting him from the scorn of the community. He offers the whole village a feast as a means of re-establishing his son in the community, and so restores not so much his own honour as that of his son and family (Rohrbaugh 1997:141-164).

Such counter-traditions in Scripture explain why Anselm's claim that satisfaction is the only way in which humanity could be forgiven, has been criticised as illogical. The same goes for the debt metaphor, since Scripture, Rabbinic, and Intertestamental literature all bear witness to cases where God forsook God's right to collect on the debt of sinners (cf. Anderson 2009). The idea of the necessity of the satisfaction theory seems to run counter to the ideal of the freedom of God, and so others, such as Aquinas, are of the opinion that, had God chosen to, God could have saved humans in another way (Siekawitch 2007-2008:8).

Staying with the debt metaphor, and having established that Anselm's argument of Christ remitting this debt is not unbiblical, we need to establish how the metaphor is used (Anderson 2009:193). One important matter concerns the owner of the bond. If humanity is in debt, who holds the bond to this debt? Much of early Christian thought simply assumed that the bond of indebtedness, signed in the Garden of Eden, was held by Satan, and that this debt was collected in the form of death (Anderson 2009:194). Rabbinic thought, for its part, consistently considers God to hold the bond, and does not trace the signing of the bond back to Eden, but to each individual act of sin (Anderson 2009:195). The early Christian conviction that

Satan held the bond of humanity's debt introduced a new problem, of course, formulated among other by Gregory of Nazianzus in the 4th century:

But if the ransom belongs exclusively to him who holds the prisoner, I ask to whom it was paid, and why. If to the Devil, how shameful that that robber should receive not only a ransom from God, but a ransom consisting of God Himself, and that so extravagant a price should be paid to his tyranny before he could justly spare us (*Orationes theologicae* 45, 22; translation cited from Kelly 1968:383).

It is for this very reason that Anselm rejects the Christus Victor model, and instead states that humanity's debt belongs to God, not the devil (Anderson 2009:195). In so doing, however, Anselm is faced with a second dilemma, for while the Christus Victor model presents God as the unqualified benefactor of humankind, viewing God as the holder of the bond may lead to viewing God as "an indignant being whose wrath against humanity must be appeased" (Anderson 2009:195-196). If certain OT examples where God would not forgive Israel until they had completed the payment owed for their sin, are applied to the NT, then

it would seem that the cross was nothing other than that moment in time when God extracted payment from humanity at large for the many debts it owed. The means of securing that price was to put to death an innocent victim who would stand in the stead of all humankind (the so-called "penal substitution" model). Christ's sufferings must be imagined as immeasurably great in order to counterbalance what is owed by the entire human race (Anderson 2009:196).

But Anselm's view is not that Christ atones for humanity's sin by becoming a penal substitute. Instead, Christ gains such infinite merit through his voluntary suffering and death, that the merits outweighs and nullifies the debt of human sin (Anderson 2009:197). This distinction between punishment and satisfaction is crucial for understanding Anselm:

Punishment, Anselm assumed, is suffering the just consequences for one's sins, something that happens to the sinner whether or not he or she wills it. Satisfaction, on the other hand, is a *voluntary* recompense for wrongdoing. Christ offers satisfaction in Anselm's view; he does not suffer punishment (Anderson 2009:197).

Anselm therefore did not regard Christ's suffering as the payment of a penalty. Instead, in complete solidarity with humanity, Christ endures the penalty due to humanity, to reveal the depth of his love (Anderson 2009:198).¹⁰⁸

4.3.2 Peter Abelard (1079-1142)

Peter Abelard has been called the greatest logician of the Middle Ages (King 2010:n.p.; cf. Guilfoy n.d.:n.p.). Yet his life, theology and philosophy were coloured by tragedy, both through his tragic love affair with Héloïse that led to him entering monastic life, and through the ecclesial charges laid against him.¹⁰⁹ Abelard's stance that reason has a limited role to play in theology brought him into conflict with both anti-dialecticians (who rejected the role of reason in theology, e.g. his fellow abbot

¹⁰⁸ To understand this dynamic of debt and merit that guides Anselm's thinking, we may draw upon the Rabbinic interpretation of the *akedah*, or the story of Isaac's almost-sacrifice in Gen 22. Post-biblical thought at the time of the Maccabaean uprising already shows a tendency to emphasise the voluntary nature of Isaac's sacrifice (cf. 4 Macc 13:10-12). This act of unparalleled supererogation earned Isaac such great merit that, when God threatened to destroy Israel for their worship of the golden calf at Sinai, Moses implored God to "remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel" (Exod 32:13). Moses' plea is usually interpreted by modern commentators with reference to Israel's covenant theology, but in Rabbinic thought the "great acts of piety accomplished by the Patriarchs," including especially Isaac's willingness to offer his own life, guaranteed such an amount of merit for their posterity that it greatly exceeded the debt incurred at Sinai (Anderson 2009:200). Not only is this extremely close to Anselm's thought,¹⁰⁸ but formative Judaism even accorded to Isaac's willing self-sacrifice an ongoing role in Israel's sacrificial service, just as Christ's self-sacrifice in the Christian liturgy of the Mass (Anderson 2009:200-202). It is in this same way, then, that Anselm could envision Christ's voluntary self-sacrifice as an act of supererogation that would accrue infinite merit on which believers may draw for the forgiveness of sin. Anselm's thought is indeed no stranger in the hermeneutical frameworks of biblical and post biblical thought.

¹⁰⁹ Somewhere around 1113, Abelard decided to study theology under Anselm of Laon. He soon became disappointed with his tutor's abilities, however, and due to mounting tension, Abelard returned to Paris and became a scholar-in-residence at Notre Dame (King 2010:n.p.). It is here that his fateful love affair with his student Héloïse was kindled, who though twenty years younger than Abelard, matched his brilliance. When Héloïse became pregnant, her uncle (the canon Fulbert) arranged a secret marriage between the two lovers. Héloïse entered a convent on Abelard's insistence, presumably because he was worried about her safety. Misunderstanding this to mean that Abelard had abandoned his niece, Héloïse's uncle had Abelard castrated, leading to him also entering monastic life (King 2010:n.p.). Correspondence between him and Héloïse continued from the time when, after he returned to teaching and was required by a synod in Soissons to make a public avowal of faith, he constructed an oratory named the Paraclete (King 2010:n.p.). Upon accepting an invitation to become abbot of the monastery of Saint Gildas de Rhuys in Brittany, Abelard handed the Paraclete over to Héloïse and her fellow nuns in 1126, since their convent had been expropriated (King 2010:n.p.). Following his condemnation to silence by the Pope due to Bernard of Clairveux's behind-the-scenes activism, Abelard remained under the protection of Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, until his death on 21 April 1142, after which he was buried at the Paraclete. Abelard and Héloïse's bodies are presently interred at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris (Guilfoy n.d.:n.p.; cf. Kaiser 2008:n.p.). Siekawitch agrees that Abelard's doctrine of atonement, which "exalts God's love over his need for satisfaction," is better understood when the tragic unfolding of events between him and Héloïse is taken into consideration (Siekawitch 2007-2008:10). Cf. Deen Schildgen (2007:60-61) for an overview of the scholarly debate regarding the authenticity of the correspondence between Abelard and Héloïse.

Bernard of Clairvaux)¹¹⁰ and those he called pseudo-dialecticians (who in Abelard's opinion attributed too much to the power of reason; King 2010:n.p.). His view on the atonement, furthermore, is often criticised for the way in which he challenged the accepted views that he had inherited from such daunting figures as Anselm of Canterbury (cf. 4.3.1; Williams 2004:n.p.; cf. Berkhof 1969:174-175). Abelard's atonement theory, which is found in its most complete form in his *Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, earned him the scorn of Bernard of Clairvaux, who accused him of both exemplarism and Pelagianism (Siekawitch 2007-2008:11; Williams 2004:n.p.).¹¹¹ In more recent times, the interpretation of Abelard's atonement theory as a typical example of the Moral Exemplarist Theories of atonement, have earned him both high acclaim¹¹² and severe criticism.¹¹³ There have also, however, been

¹¹⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux Bernard took issue with Abelard's application of logic and dialectic to matters that in Bernard's view were mystical and spiritual. Bernard was also the orchestrating figure behind two councils that condemned Abelard's works: Soissons (1122), where Abelard was forced to burn his *Theologia Summi Boni*, and Sens (1140), where a revised version (*Theologia Scholarium*) was again condemned and Abelard and his followers excommunicated. While the Pope lifted the excommunication following Abelard's appeal, he upheld the council's decision regarding Abelard's works, and the latter was condemned to silence (Guilfoy n.d.:n.p.; cf. Kaiser 2015:10-11; Berkhof 1969:175).

¹¹¹ William of St. Thierry was the initial instigator behind the controversy that led to Abelard's condemnation at the council of Sens. Since Bernard had greater influence, however, he became the main prosecutor in the case (Kaiser 2015:10). Cf. Doutre (2007:33-57) for a discussion of the commentaries on Romans by Abelard and William respectively, and especially their differences regarding their use of the Church Fathers, both resulting from and leading to their distinctive theological interpretations.

¹¹² A good example is that of Hastings Rashdall, who in his 1892 University Sermon at Oxford praised Abelard for "a theory of the Atonement which meets the demands of an age shaped in the spirit of Darwinism and historical criticism" (McGrath 1985:205; McGrath cites Rashdall 1893:137-50). McGrath quotes from Rashdall's 1915 Bampton Lectures (Rashdall 1920:358) to illustrate Rashdall's interpretation: "In Abelard not only the ransom theory but any kind of substitutionary or expiatory atonement is explicitly denied. We get rid altogether of the notion of a mysterious guilt which, by an abstract necessity of things, required to be extinguished by death or suffering, no matter whose. ... The efficacy of Christ's death is now quite definitely and explicitly explained by its subjective influence upon the mind of the sinner. The voluntary death of the innocent Son of God on man's behalf moves the sinner to gratitude and answering love – and so to consciousness of sin, repentance, amendment" (McGrath 1985:205-206). McGrath has gone to great lengths to illustrate the inaccuracy of Rashdall's interpretation of Abelard, as well as his theologically naïve presuppositions (McGrath 1985:205-220).

¹¹³ We have already noted the severe criticism of Bernard of Clairvaux, who was behind the *Letter to Pope Innocent concerning certain heresies of Peter Abelard*. It should be noted that Bernard's criticism of Abelard's work reveals that he often misinterpreted the latter (Williams 2004:n.p.; cf. Kaiser 2015:10); indeed his scorn for Abelard seems to have been based on more than a scholarly difference of opinion, and Abelard himself claimed that he was misunderstood and that the charges were based on either malice or ignorance (Kaiser 2015:10). Bernard's accusations made it seem as though Abelard taught "that it is possible for people to make themselves worthy of salvation on their own" (Siekawitch 2007-2008:11), a completely illogical accusation for someone who emphasised divine grace as much as Abelard. For a more recent condemnation, cf., e.g., Berkhof (1969:175).

those who have defended Abelard's view on the atonement as entirely orthodox, and even those denying that he taught an exemplarist theory of the atonement.¹¹⁴

It will soon become clear that Abelard indeed continues the Semitic trajectory as represented by the Greek Fathers¹¹⁵ and Pelagius, and it is exactly for this reason that his views on sin, grace, and the atonement is included here. It illustrates, namely, the presence of counter-traditions in the history of doctrine regarding the view of sin and grace. It will also become clear, however, that the labelling of Abelard's atonement theory as moral exemplarist is not a straightforward matter.

The exemplarism of which Abelard's atonement theory stands accused, points to the fact that, in Abelard's view, the suffering and death of Christ on the cross has "redemptive efficacy only as an unparalleled example of divine love" (Williams 2004:n.p.). According to this view, the passion of Christ facilitates no objective transaction that results in the reconciliation between God and humanity, whether this be in the form of a ransom¹¹⁶ delivered to God or Satan, or through the substitution theory (Williams 2004:n.p.; cf. Kaiser 2015:17; Mulcahy 2007:180; Berkhof 1969:174). Abelard shuns the idea that God would take such pleasure in the death of his Son as to make it the means of reconciliation, unnecessary as it was, since God, who is love, is eager to forgive the penitent sinner irrespective of any satisfaction (Berkhof 1969:174). When Abelard does speak of our justification and reconciliation by the blood of Christ, he means that

Christ revealed the love of God by assuming our nature and by persevering as our teacher and example even unto death. This great love calls for and awakens a responsive love in the heart of the sinner, and this is the ground for the forgiveness of sins, Luke 7:47. The newly awakened love redeems us by liberating us from the power of sin and by leading us into the liberty of the sons

¹¹⁴ Cf., for instance, Kaiser 2015:3-28; Siekawitch 2007-2008:12, 15-16; Williams 2004:n.p.; McGrath 1985:206; Weingart 1970.

¹¹⁵ Rashdall also picked up on this in his (perhaps overly positive) assessment of Abelard's atonement theory, "At last we have found a theory of the Atonement which thoroughly appeals to reason and to conscience. ... For the first time – or rather for the first time since the days of the earliest and most philosophical Greek fathers – the doctrine of the Atonement was stated in a way which had nothing unintelligible, arbitrary, illogical or immoral about it; in a way which appeals to the most unsophisticated intellect, to the most unsophisticated conscience, and to the simplest piety" (Rashdall 1920:360; cf. Williams 2004:n.p.).

¹¹⁶ Abelard firmly denied that the devil acquired any sort of right over human beings through their sin (Williams 2004:n.p.; cf. Siekawitch 2007-2008:14; cf. Bond [2007:14-16] for a detailed discussion). Neither is the ransom offered to God, under whose power humanity was kept, since it would be incoherent for God to demand payment from himself, not to mention cruel and wicked, since this price had been "arbitrarily" set at the death of his only Son (Williams 2004:n.p.).

of God, so that we obey God freely from the motive of love. Thus the forgiveness of sins is the direct result of the love kindled in our hearts, and only indirectly the fruit of the death of Christ (Berkhof 1969:174).

Abelard's atonement theory stumbled over the Roman Catholic belief that baptism plays a redemptive role through the forgiveness of sins (Berkhof 1969:174). Abelard's response to this conundrum was unsatisfactory,¹¹⁷ creating the idea that, while radical in his atonement theory, he was not prepared to take some of his ideas to their logical conclusion, which would have challenged established tradition. Perhaps it is also in this light that we should understand the apparent inconsistencies that have been pointed out with regard to Abelard's atonement theory. While at times vehemently denying that God needed to be and indeed was reconciled by the death of his Son, he at other times speaks of Christ bearing our sin, and of Christ's death as a sacrifice for sin (Berkhof 1969:174-175; cf. Kaiser 2015:15). These references have led to debate among scholars regarding whether Abelard's atonement theory is rightly categorised as moral exemplarist, and whether he did indeed deny the substitutionary function of Christ's death (Kaiser 2008:n.p.; cf. Williams 2004:n.p.; McGrath 1985:206; Kaiser 2015:3-28). It has indeed been shown that those who have painted a one-sided picture of Abelard as an exemplarist have done so based on an isolated section of his Romans commentary (McGrath 1985:208-209; cf. Williams 2004:n.p.; Kaiser 2015:12-13, 27).¹¹⁸ However, those who have claimed that Abelard's theory of atonement is one of satisfaction or even one of penal substitution, have likewise based this on a few isolated comments in the commentary.¹¹⁹

When this section is analysed in the greater context of the commentary, an important shift moves into focus. While it is absolutely true that the life and death of

¹¹⁷ Regarding adult baptism, Abelard responded that unless this kindling of love in our hearts is followed by either baptism or martyrdom, perseverance can be said to be lacking, with the implication that "the remission of sins does not really take place until baptism is administered, even though love was kindled before" (Berkhof 1969:174). Regarding infant baptism, however, "Abelard had to admit that the remission of sin was independent of the love kindled in the heart" (Berkhof 1969:174-175).

¹¹⁸ In the single *quaestio* (or excursus) in the second book of his Romans commentary that Abelard devotes to the nature of the atonement work of Christ, he "lays great emphasis upon the love which is aroused within man for God as a consequence of the death of the Son of God. It is this passage which has claimed the attention of theologians such as Albrecht Ritschl who used the term 'Abailardian' to refer to a theory of the Atonement which was purely subjective in nature – i.e., which was based purely upon the arousal of love for God within man. Nevertheless, the representative character of this brief passage must be called into question" (McGrath 1985:208).

¹¹⁹ E.g. Abelard's comments on Romans 4:25 (*Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, 153) and Rom 8:3 (*Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, 211).

Christ on behalf of humanity reveals the nature of divine love, and in so doing kindles in the believer a similar response of love,¹²⁰ Abelard understands this exemplary quality of the love of God revealed in Christ to be secondary and dependent upon its redemptive character (McGrath 1985:208 [citing Weingart 1970:125-126]). Abelard's soteriology is ordered by his theocentric understanding of salvation and his emphasis on divine grace (McGrath 1985:208-209). He emphasises the significance of God's love for humanity along with the necessity that humanity return this love. Yet it would be one-sided to understand this to mean that humanity is redeemed through the imitation of Christ as our example. It seems more likely that, having been redeemed by Christ, we are inspired by the newly kindled love in our heart to subsequently imitate him (McGrath 1985:209; cf. Siekawitch 2007-2008:12).¹²¹

But in what sense is humanity redeemed by Christ? Siekawitch proposes that Abelard married the mystical union of Eastern Orthodoxy with the Western satisfaction theory to construct his own version of an atonement theory that is fundamentally objective, even if it contains subjective elements (2007-2008:13).

Williams has argued that, when interpreted in relation to his view of original sin and divine grace, Abelard's theory of atonement is not exemplarist, and that in the passion of Christ an objective (rather than merely subjective) event takes place (2004:n.p.). He explains,

I look at Abelard's account of the dominion of sin over fallen human beings. This dominion has both an objective and a subjective aspect. The objective dominion

¹²⁰ Abelard's Romans commentary emphasises that our service of God should be motived not by fear but by love (*amore potius quam timore*) (Williams 2004:n.p.).

¹²¹ Bond's careful syntactical analysis of the Latin text of Abelard's *solutio* to the *quaestio* that he inserted in a gloss to Rom 3:26 is particularly helpful, since Bond prints in bold the words that would carry emphasis in the highly inflected Latin, enabling the English reader to recapture how the Latin reader would have read the statement: "**Nobis autem videtur, quod in hoc iustificati sumus in sanguine Christi et Deo reconciliati, quod per hanc singularem gratiam nobis exhibitam, quod Filius suus nostram suscepit naturam et in ipsa nos tam verbo quam exemplo instituendo usque ad mortem perstigit, nos sibi amplius per amorem adstrinxit, ut tanto divinae gratiae accensi beneficio nihil iam tolerare propter ipsum vera reformidet caritas**" / "To us, nevertheless, it seems that in this have we been justified in the blood of Christ and with God reconciled, that by this unique grace held out to us, that God's own Son has taken on our nature and in it us through word as well as example, by instructing he has persisted unto death, us to himself more fully through love has he bound, so that kindled by so great a gift of divine grace from enduring nothing for God's sake would the true love of anyone shrink" (Abelard, *Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos*, 117.242-248; Bond 2007:19). Having laid out the section in a diagram, Bond reveals the core of the statement: "Our justification and reconciliation consist in this: God has bound us more to God through love by the unique grace held out to us through Christ's Passion" (Bond 2007:20; cf. his detailed analysis of this section in 2007:20-24).

of sin is our being liable to the *punishment* of sin; in the Passion Christ delivers us from the objective dominion of sin by taking that punishment on our behalf. The subjective dominion of sin is our strong inclination to obey our disordered desires; in the Passion Christ delivers us from the subjective dominion of sin by inspiring us with the love of God (Williams 2004:n.p.).

The weak point in Williams' argument is that he claims that an exemplarist theory of atonement does not fit in with Abelard's emphasis on divine grace (implying that human redemption is entirely God's doing) on the one hand, and the kindling of divine love in the believer on the other. He seems to base this claim on the assumption that "God's redemptive action is found in the Passion of the Christ," so that it follows that, if Abelard understood God to redeem the sinner through divine grace, then it must imply that Abelard also thought this redemption to have taken place through the death of Christ, and that this further implies that Abelard must have understood some "objective transaction" to have taken place in the passion (Williams 2004:n.p.).¹²² We will return to this point later after considering Kant's contribution on divine grace and divine pardon (see 6.4.2). Suffice it to state, for now, that William's analysis of the objective and subjective dominion of sin, while helpful, does not necessitate that God requires the passion of Christ in order to release the human person from the guilt of sin, or that Abelard had to have seen it this way either.¹²³

¹²² His subsequent argument also does not convince. Williams claims that apart from such an "objective transaction" taking place, there would be nothing in the passion to inspire our love, and that, since Abelard considers the passion of Christ as both supreme manifestation of divine love and the means by which God kindles such love in the heart of the believer, it follows that Abelard must have understood the cross as having accomplished the objective forgiveness of sin (Williams 2004:n.p.). Williams makes the point that, unless Christ accomplished something through his passion that he had *intended* to accomplish, there is no reason for a human response of love or gratitude, since Christ's death would then have been accidental and not *for us* at all (Williams 2004:n.p.). This is a typical example, however, of what happens when the passion is seen as an isolated redemptive event, instead of nestled in the redemptive event of the incarnation. Nothing says "divine love" and "gift" as the Divine-Become-Flesh taking God's chosen solidarity with his creation to the point of such suffering as witnessed on Calvary. As Fiddes puts it, offering his own explanation in the face of Abelard's silence on why Christ's death should be seen as a revelation of love, "It is because God himself undergoes the bitter depths of human experience in the cross. God, we may say, shows his love by enduring to the uttermost the estrangement of his own creation. This is the depth of God's identification with us" (Fiddes 1989:157). That Williams does not see cause for gratitude and love in such a divine act is arguably due to his assumption that the cross is meaningless if it does not transact our redemption.

¹²³ There is decisive support for this point of view in a passage in which Williams describes Abelard's argument against the idea of the passion as a ransom paid to the devil. I quote the passage in full, since it undermines Williams' own interpretation that Abelard saw the passion as necessary for transacting our redemption. Abelard clearly thought differently, since by the same argument it follows that God could have freed human beings from sin without the passion: "Moreover, Abelard argues, we know that God can keep a human being free of sin from birth, since he did so for Jesus. If he can do

What is it about Abelard's writings on the atonement that has led to such opposing interpretations among scholars, though? It is possible, as Berkhof thought, that Abelard just was not prepared to take some of his claims regarding atonement to their logical conclusion, for not wanting to challenge certain traditions in the church, i.e. that of infant baptism (Berkhof 1969:175). It is also entirely possible that it was another reason altogether that kept him from drawing out the conclusions of his statements on salvation, perhaps as a way of safeguarding himself against the many accusations of heresy that were hurled his way. Whatever his reasons, Abelard was even in his own day judged notoriously difficult to assess:

It is no wonder that the French abbot Thomas of Mornigny, one of Abelard's contemporary opponents, compared him with the Homeric sea-god Proteus, "who slips through our hands and takes another shape before our description of him is complete" (Kaiser 2015:4).

Many scholars have attempted to claim the brilliant Abelard for themselves and their own agendas, and it seems his notorious shape-shifting abilities have not done much to counter this human weakness. Perhaps the best way forward is to consider what it is regarding the atonement that Abelard most emphasises. Taking his Romans commentary as point of departure, we see, first, that Abelard exalts divine grace and downplays human merit, implying the folly of boasting, since all human abilities have been received from divine grace (Williams 2004:n.p.). It would seem odd to accuse someone who so emphasises grace of Pelagianism (at least the traditional understanding of Pelagianism),¹²⁴ yet it seems true to say that Abelard

that for one person, he can do it for everyone. And if everyone were free of sin, then no one would need punishment, and so there would be no reason for the devil to have licence to torment anyone at all. So there was no need for the Passion in order to free us from the power of the devil, since 'the divine mercy had the power to free human beings from the devil's power by its mere say-so' (116)" (Williams 2004:n.p.).

¹²⁴ Quinn also denies that Abelard is a Pelagian (1993:292-295), as does Mulcahy in his discussion of Fiddes' soteriology (2007:180). Williams reserves outright judgment on the issue, stating first (under VII, "Grace"), that "if we define Pelagianism as the view that it is possible for human beings to act rightly even without divine grace, Abelard is clearly not a Pelagian," because he considers grace to be necessary for right action. In his conclusion, however, he states that "the issue of Pelagianism remains open. For Bernard's worry was that if our redemption consists in a change of heart brought on by our response to the Passion, then it is we who accomplish our own redemption; and Abelard certainly does think that our redemption consists precisely in such a change of heart. Whether Abelard is a Pelagian will largely depend on how we characterize Pelagianism. If we define it as the view that one can act rightly apart from grace, Abelard is (as I have already argued) no Pelagian. But then one might worry that he escapes Pelagianism only a technicality [sic], since he considers our natural powers gifts of grace... So suppose instead that we define Pelagianism as the view that human beings in their present state can will rightly through an unaided exercise of their power of free choice. On that definition Abelard is indeed a Pelagian" (Williams 2004:n.p.).

seems to steer closer to the trajectory of the Semitic tradition as expounded by the Greek Fathers and picked up by Pelagius (cf. Chapter 3; 4.1.1). The second motif that receives great emphasis in the Romans commentary – so much so that Quinn describes it as the central (but not the only) motif in Abelard’s account of atonement – is the transformative power of divine love (Quin 1993:296).

Concerning predestination, Abelard upheld free will by appealing to the foreknowledge of God. He insisted that God perpetually offers God’s grace to all people, both elect and non-elect, and that it is therefore not God who is responsible when people by their free will choose not to accept God (Kaiser 2015:21). The human heart has the capacity both to accept or to reject God, and indeed it is only on the basis of a free will that any person could be held accountable for zir choices or actions (Kaiser 2015:21). In this, Abelard stays close to the Semitic and Eastern position.

As a free action of a free person, sin therefore has a personal nature, and while he affirmed that all people “inherit” sin, he clarified “that the sin that is inherited is not the guilt of sin but the punishment for sin,” so distancing himself from the distinctly Augustinian interpretation of original sin (Kaiser 2015:21-22). He further held that it is this punishment that we are due on account of sin, or inherited sin, that Christ bore on the cross, receiving our punishment so we would not have to (Williams 2004:n.p.). Yet despite this personal understanding of sin, Abelard did not deny the universality of sin:

(H)e believed that sin (a) defaced God’s image in man, leading to the latter’s alienation from his creator; (b) caused a use of the freedom of the will to give preference to evil rather than righteousness; (c) made it impossible for man to initiate his own salvation; and (d) made man devoid of *caritas* (love) and brought him under the control of the *cupiditas* (cupidity, avarice, lust) the desire for the transitory, carnal, and unrighteous (Kaiser 2015:22).

Abelard further distinguishes between actions and intentions, and held that actions as *res* (things) were morally neutral, since they could only be judged within the context of the person and circumstances, and specifically “on the basis of the intention motivating that action” (Kaiser 2015:22-23). Intentions in themselves may be, therefore, good or evil, but “(o)nly a definitely intended action, even if it had not been carried out, could be regarded sinful” (Kaiser 2015:23). This means that it is the

evilness of a person's intentions that makes zir evil, moreso than any single action. To this Abelard adds that, in order for any action to constitute a "sin," it is necessary that the person understand the disgrace of the deed in God's eyes (Kaiser 2015:23).

Because Abelard considers sin to be tied to the inward disposition in this way, atonement and reconciliation requires more than an act of compensation (Kaiser 2015:24). True salvation requires a change in the inclination and motivation of the sinner, and it is this need that lies at the foundation of his emphasis on the saving love of Christ (Kaiser 2015:25). In this regard, Kaiser helps us by offering an integrated statement of Abelard's statements on the atonement:

The human ability to make free choices ensures that we are responsible for our own actions and eventually guilty for the sin we committed, and not God (the *summum bonum*) who allegedly predestined some to eternal damnation and others to eternal glory. Further, limiting sin to outward actions falls short of the true problem because sinful actions are only the outflow of a sinful disposition of the human heart. Starting from these two presuppositions, Abelard argued that true reconciliation between God and man can only occur if the inward disposition of love to God is restored in man, a change that cannot be accomplished by human effort but only by God's regenerative act in the heart of the person. Still the person has to accept God's efforts because God does not impose the change on the person. That is why Abelard emphasized the utter insufficiency of any atonement theory that would merely deal with our outward behavior or the solving of legal issues. He reasoned that atonement can only truly solve the bridge between God and man if it also reaches the root of the problem, namely the disposition of the heart (Kaiser 2015:26-27).

4.3.3 Thomas Aquinas (1227-1274)

Thomas Aquinas combines the satisfaction theory (which remains dominant in his account) and the ransom theory, and even includes the exemplary theory, albeit in a highly truncated form (Siekawitch 2007-2008:5). For this reason, Aquinas' theory of atonement has been labelled eclectic, and even as lacking unity (Berkhof 1969:177), notwithstanding his own contributions (Siekawitch 2007-2008:17-18):

He embraced a revised ransom theory and borrowed from both Anselm and Abelard. He contributed the most exhaustive understanding of the means of appropriating the benefits of the atonement. His view was more thorough than those previously discussed, but, it was also the most confusing (Siekawitch 2007-2008:18).

While Aquinas does not consider Christ's passion to be the only way God could have saved humanity (God could merely have willed people's forgiveness), he argues that the cross was the most advantageous way for humans to be redeemed (Siekawitch 2007-2008:18). This is because Christ's passion accomplished many things over and above mere liberation from sin (Siekawitch 2007:2008:18).¹²⁵

As mentioned above, Aquinas integrates a number of atonement theories. He modifies the *ransom theory* to state that Christ paid the ransom price to God, not the devil, thereby creating the possibility for people to be free from sin (Siekawitch 2007-2008:19). While the devil did not gain any rights over humanity for succeeding in leading them into sin, God gave permission for humanity to be delivered into the bondage of both Satan and sin (Siekawitch 2007-2008:19; cf. Berkhof 1969:178). The humility of Christ displayed in his passion won the victory over the pride of the devil, and believers who apply Christ's passion to their lives through faith, love, and the sacraments, are protected against evil assaults, while at the same time escaping eternal punishment (Siekawitch 2007-2008:19). Aquinas also follows both Irenaeus and Abelard in picturing Christ as the Head of the human race in which the fullness of all grace dwells, so that his "perfection and virtue" overflows to all members of the body who willingly belong to the head through this mystical union (Berkhof 1969:177, 179). In this way, Aquinas follows Abelard in certain aspects of the *exemplary theory*, stating that Christ's passion stimulates love (Siekawitch 2007-2008:20). This is especially due to the depth of suffering that Christ endured on the cross, both sensible pain from bodily injury (Aquinas claimed that Christ's sense of touch was more sensitive than other people) and inner pain (Aquinas held that Christ's purity increased the intensity of the inner turmoil caused by bearing the sins of the world; Siekawitch 2007-2008:20-21).

Mostly, however, Aquinas emphasises the *satisfaction theory*. God, who hates both sin and the sinner, must of necessity punish sin, and Christ, as acceptable

¹²⁵ Anselm names five privileges gained through the cross, apart from the forgiveness of sin. Firstly, it illustrates God's love to humanity and arouses in humankind a similar love; secondly, Christ offers us in the cross an example of virtues such as obedience, humility, constancy, and justice, which are necessary for humanity's salvation; thirdly, the cross merits to humanity the grace of justification and the glory of beatitude; fourthly, a person would now feel a greater obligation to avoid sin; and lastly, the fact that, even though humankind had been overcome and deceived by the devil, it is now also a Man who overcomes the devil, restores the dignity of humankind (Siekawitch 2007-2008:18; cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 3a. 46,3; cf. Berkhof 1969:178).

sacrifice to God, becomes a substitute for humanity. Aquinas' version of the satisfaction theory is thus a form of penal substitution (Siekawitch 2007-2008:21). The reconciliation achieved through the death of Christ means that humankind is made one with God, for Aquinas understands the extent of salvation achieved by Christ's passion to be potentially universal (Siekawitch 2007-2008:22). Since Christ's love abounds so greatly, since his life which he offered was one of "magnanimous dignity," and since he suffered such extensive pain, his sacrifice supersedes all the sins in the world (Siekawitch 2007-2008:22).

Aquinas considers the merits of Christ to extend throughout his earthly incarnation, so that his whole life contributes to the atonement (Berkhof 1969:178). However, in order to partake of the benefits of Christ's passion, it has to be appropriated, and Aquinas goes into some detail of how this may be done through baptism, the Eucharist, penance, the other sacraments, and good works (Siekawitch 2007-2008:23). When a believer is baptised, all sin up to that point in time is washed away, but this sacrament may only be received once. Any wrongdoing after baptism necessitates satisfaction through penance. Punishment born through penance does not have to be equal to what a person actually deserves to suffer, however, since Christ's satisfaction aids the believer's effort (Siekawitch 2007-2008:23).¹²⁶ A person who was not punished for any sins committed after baptism, would make satisfaction for them in purgatory (Siekawitch 2007-2008:23). This emphasis on penance earned Aquinas accusations of semi-Pelagianism, which seem to be warranted, as he considered penance a necessary component for reconciliation with God, implying that works cooperate with grace in effecting salvation (Siekawitch 2007-2008:24).

Aquinas built on the theories of Anselm and Abelard, but brought much greater clarity to their views, explaining in detail, especially, how the benefits of the cross are to be appropriated – something that was lacking in both his predecessors. However, the detailed explanations that he offered in this regard resulted in a system

¹²⁶ Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 3. 84,5, on the question whether penance is a necessary sacrament for salvation, "A thing is necessary for salvation in two ways: first, absolutely; secondly, on a supposition. A thing is absolutely necessary for salvation, if no one can obtain salvation without it, as, for example, the grace of Christ, and the sacrament of Baptism, whereby a man is born again in Christ. The sacrament of Penance is necessary on a supposition, for it is necessary, not for all, but for those who are in sin. ... Consequently it is necessary for the sinner's salvation that sin be taken away from him; which cannot be done without the sacrament of Penance, wherein the power of Christ's Passion operates through the priest's absolution and the acts of the penitent, who co-operates with grace unto the destruction of his sin."

of penance based on merit, which ultimately contributed to the reaction of the Reformers through their emphasis on *sola gratia* (Siekawitch 2007-2008:25).

4.3.4 The Scholastics in summary

The Middle Ages focused less on the question of the nature of Christ, which had so occupied the Church Fathers, and more on the doctrines of sin and grace (Berkhof 1969:114). In the wake of the Reformation, which will be treated in the next section, Catholic theology encompassed two general streams of thought regarding sin and salvation, with one tending toward semi-Augustinianism and the other toward semi-Pelagianism (Berkhof 1969:144). Rome clung to the notion of original righteousness, inherited from the early Western Fathers, but considered it to be a supernatural endowment, added by God well after humanity's creation to aid in the perpetual conflict of spirit and flesh (concupiscence) (Berkhof 1969:144-145). The advent of sin in the world meant the loss of this gift. Humankind was therefore brought back to its former position of neutrality: neither sinful nor holy, but subject to a conflict between flesh and spirit due to the very constitution of human nature (Berkhof 1969:145).

The great theologians of the Middle Ages contributed “substance and clarity” to the foundational elements of the doctrine of atonement formulated in the first ten centuries (Siekawitch 2007-2008:25).¹²⁷ Augustine’s insistence on humanity’s utter dependence on God for renewal, i.e. the idea of humankind’s spiritual impotence, did not find strong agreement among the scholastics. They adopted instead the notion of “synergism in regeneration, that is, that man co-operates with God in the spiritual renewal of the soul” (Berkhof 1969:146), as is seen in the growing emphasis on penance. It is this idea that a person could “prepare” and “dispose” zirself “for the grace of justification” (Berkhof 1969:146), that would lead to the bitter theological conflict during the era of the Reformation.

¹²⁷ Siekawitch’s idea of a steady evolution of the atonement theory through the Middle Ages is, however, an anachronistic projection. While his goal of a multifaceted approach to the atonement may be a noble one, claiming that the theologians of the Middle Ages followed such an approach is somewhat misguided. If any of them came close to such an integration, it is Aquinas, whom Siekawitch criticises for the tendencies toward Pelagianism in which this integration resulted (Siekawitch 2007-2008:24-25). It thus becomes clear that Siekawitch’s own approach to the atonement is not as multifaceted as he may claim. He clearly prioritises the theory of penal substitution and in this light considers the contribution of the Reformers, with their emphasis on salvation “by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ alone” as a breakthrough that corrected the “merit-based system of penance” (Siekawitch 2007-2008:25).

4.4 In protest: Sin and salvation in Reformational thought

Aside from largely following the doctrine of sin and grace as constructed by Augustine and Anselm, the Reformers contributed to the understanding of the relation between Adam's sin and that of his descendants by substituting the covenant idea for the realistic theory that had reached from Tertullian to Augustine, and finally to Anselm (Berkhof 1969:147). According to the covenant idea, as expounded especially by Beza, Adam is seen as both the natural head and the federal representative of humanity, with the result that the guilt of his first sin is ascribed to the whole of humanity, and that all his descendants are born in a polluted and corrupt state (Berkhof 1969:147).

Calvin follows Augustine in understanding original sin in more negative terms than mere privation, but goes further in seeing this corruption as not merely seated in the sensual appetites, but in both the higher and lower faculties of the soul, where it "operates" through these "as a positive evil" (Berkhof 1969:147). This hamartiology is more radical than that of the Roman Catholic Church, and was elaborated upon by the Reformers to include the "first movements of the desires" as actual, indwelling sins that make a person deserving of condemnation, even before the will assents to them (Berkhof 1969:147). The general view of the Reformation was that, post-fall, a person is "totally depraved, incapable of doing any spiritual good, and therefore also unable to make the least advance toward his recovery" (Berkhof 1969:148).¹²⁸ Despite this depravity, a person could still perform "civil righteousness," and Calvin points to a common grace of God that enables such deeds (Berkhof 1969:148).

An anthropology of a wholly depraved humanity requires as its natural counterpart a soteriology of absolute dependence on the grace of God, and Luther, Calvin, and Zwingly were unanimous on this point (Berkhof 1969:148).¹²⁹ Likewise, this radically negative anthropology necessitated an equally radical understanding of the predestination. Of the three, Calvin was the most cautious to avoid implying a

¹²⁸ This was softened somewhat by Zwingly (who speaks of original sin as "a disease and a condition rather than as sin in the proper sense of the word") and Melanchthon (who at first subscribed to this general view, but later modified his understanding) (Berkhof 1969:148).

¹²⁹ While this unity of opinion originally included Melanchthon, he later offered a synergistic theory of regeneration" (Berkhof 1969:148). In this light it is understandable that, among Luther, Calvin, and Zwingly, he was the least outspoken about the predestination (Berkhof 1969:148-149).

relation between divine agency and sin,¹³⁰ although he endorsed the double predestination along with Luther and Zwingly (Berkhof 1969:148).

The Synod of Dort (1618), in reaction to Arminianism (cf. 4.4.2), affirmed the doctrine of double predestination (based not on foreknowledge, but on God's good pleasure), as well as a strict doctrine of original sin (Berkhof 1969:152). Coupled with this view of the total corruption in every part of the being of the human person, Dort defined regeneration as strictly monergistic, with no room left for co-operation between the human and the divine (Berkhof 1969:153).

In continuation with Roman Catholic doctrine, the Reformers consider the passion of Christ as a satisfaction of infinite value for sin. Reformed thought maintains both the necessity and the objective nature of the atonement, and agrees that "the atonement through the sufferings and death of Christ is most in harmony with divine wisdom and highly appropriate" (Berkhof 1969:182). The Reformers understand sin in legal terms (as transgression of divine law, resulting in guilt), however, rather than the Anselmian injury to the honour of God (Berkhof 1969:183). This view of sin finds its dialogical counterpart in the formulation of the theory of penal substitution. Whereas Anselm views Christ's passion as "a superabundant gift to God in vindication of his honour," the Reformers require, in continuity with public law, a "penal sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God," satisfaction was made through punishment (Berkhof 1969:183).

4.4.1 *Socinianism*

There were alternatives to this radically negative anthropology within Reformation thought, however. Faustus Socinus (1539-1604),¹³¹ for example, picked up the trajectory of Semitic thought that ran through the Greek Fathers and was formulated, somewhat radically, by Pelagius. Because the Socinian view does not understand the image of God in which humanity was created to imply moral perfection or any such excellence of nature, but only dominion over the lower aspects of creation, it

¹³⁰ Calvin seems inclined, for instance, to "deny the doctrine of reprobation or to make it dependent on foreknowledge" (Berkhof 1969:148).

¹³¹ Fausto Paolo Sozzini, also known as Faustus Socinus or Faust Socyn, was an Italian theologian associated with the Polish Brethren, a Protestant Polish Church.

argues that Adam had no positive righteousness or holiness to lose upon sinning (Berkhof 1969:149):

Though he sinned and incurred the divine displeasure, his moral nature remained intact, and is transmitted unimpaired to his posterity. Man dies, not because of the sin of Adam, but because he was created mortal. Men are even now by nature like Adam in that they have no proneness or tendency to sin, but are placed in somewhat more unfavourable circumstances because of the examples of sin which they see and of which they hear (Berkhof 1969:149).

As for Pelagius, these “examples of sin” have no deterministic implication for the Socinians, who hold that it is still possible, though admittedly more difficult, to avoid sin altogether. Should a person become guilty of transgression, however, ze does not incur divine wrath, since the merciful Father readily forgives all who draw near with penitent hearts (Berkhof 1969:150). Slightly more radical is their belief that humanity therefore needs neither a Saviour nor any other intervention of God to ensure humanity’s redemption (Berkhof 1969:150). While the teachings of Christ are beneficial for pointing out the right way to live, the life, death and resurrection of Christ do not enact some change in humanity’s moral nature (Berkhof 1969:149).

In turning to the atonement, Socinus removed the entire concept of justice in God as Anselm and the Reformers understood it, so that God’s justice required no punishment of sin, but only referred to

(h)is moral equity and rectitude, by virtue of which there is no depravity or iniquity in any of His works. The justice which is commonly so called and which is opposed to mercy is not an immanent attribute of God, but only the effect of His will. This also holds for that mercy of God which is opposed to justice. It is not an internal quality in God, but is merely an effect of His free choice. Such mercy does not prevent Him from punishing anyone; neither does such justice keep Him from pardoning whom He pleases, and that without satisfaction of its claims (Berkhof 1969:184).

Since Socinus finds it inconsistent to speak, at once, of the grace of God and the merits of Christ as ground of reconciliation, he chooses to speak only of the first (Berkhof 1969:184). He also holds that, given the personal nature of guilt, the finite death that Christ suffered could not bear the exact penalty of the law, and that the idea of satisfaction and imputation are in any effect self-contradictory (Berkhof 1969:184-185).

If Christ rendered complete satisfaction, that settles the matter by setting the world free. It is inconsistent to make the enjoyment of its fruits dependent on divine imputation and on the faith of man (Berkhof 1969:185).

For Socinus, then, the forgiveness of sins is an act of pure mercy dependent on nothing but a contrite heart and the desire to render obedience to God (Berkhof 1969:185). But what to say of the passion of the Christ in a soteriology such as this? Socinus holds that

Christ saves sinners by revealing to them the way of faith and obedience as the way to eternal life; by giving them an example of true obedience both in His life and in His death and by inspiring them to a similar life ... and by bestowing eternal life, by virtue of the power received at the resurrection, on all those that attach themselves to Him in faith. God gave Him this power as a reward for His obedience (Berkhof 1969:185).

According to Socinus' view, then, there is no direct connection between Christ's passion and God's forgiveness of sinners. God is moved to forgive sin solely on the ground of God's mercy. Nevertheless, since after his death Christ received from God the power to bestow eternal life on sinners, Socinus was able to uphold the statement that Christ's death expiates our sins (Berkhof 1969:185).

As one would expect, Berkhof, who is a proponent of penal substitution, strongly condemns Socinian doctrine as "a concoction of several heresies condemned by the early church" (Berkhof 1969:185). Berkhof is not alone in his criticism. The Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) points out shortcomings in Socinus' arguments based on Roman law (to which Socinus himself had appealed; 1889). Nevertheless, he fails to give a satisfactory response to Socinus' central criticism, namely that "Christ did not and could not really bear the penalty of the law imposed on sinners" (Berkhof 1969:186). Grotius' (rather unsatisfactory) alternative is to argue that God does not demand that the requirements of the law be met in every particular, or that full satisfaction be made by the punishment imperative in the case of transgression.¹³² This approach raises the question, however, why God did

¹³² Because the law in question "is not a transcript of the inherent righteousness of God, but a positive law (as opposed natural law)," actively willed by God, God is not bound to this law and can alter and/or revoke it as God sees fit. This means that "(b)oth the law itself and its penalty can be modified or even abolished altogether by the Ruler of the universe" (Berkhof 1969:186). While the sinner deserves death, strictly speaking, God relaxes the law so that the penalty is dispensed without complete satisfaction. The satisfaction rendered by Christ is therefore not the exact equivalent of the penalty due to a person, and neither does it need to be: "It is only a nominal equivalent, something

not simply revoke the law in full, since it was possible to revoke it in part (Berkhof 1969:186-187).¹³³

4.4.2 Arminianism

Another alternative to the pessimistic anthropology of the Reformers arose in the Netherlands in opposition to Calvin's doctrine of sin and grace, and in principle corresponds to Semi-Pelagianism (Berkhof 1969:150). Arminius, a disciple of Beza and originally a strict Calvinist, denies the doctrine of reprobation and waters down the doctrine of original sin as taught by the Reformers (Berkhof 1969:150). While they allow that Adam's sin had some evil effect on his own spiritual condition, and that of his descendants, they resist the idea that Adam's guilt is imputed to his descendants. The "pollution" that they understood to be passed down to Adam's posterity, was seen more as a disease that weakens humanity's nature, than a sin that merits divine condemnation. The Arminians always

leave room for the free will of man in the material sense of the word, that is, as a natural power or ability in man to do something that is spiritually good, so that he can also in some measure prepare himself for turning to God and doing His will (Berkhof 1969:151).

The different degrees of grace described by the Arminians (preventive or common grace; the grace of evangelical obedience; the grace of perseverance) give expression to their conviction that divine grace, bestowed on all humanity, is sufficient as a means of counteracting the inherited pollution, and enabling a person to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in regeneration. When some fail at regeneration, then, the fault must be the failure of the person's will to co-operate with divine grace (Berkhof 1969:151). Congruent with their more optimistic anthropology, Arminians hold a weak doctrine of election (based on foreseen faith, obedience, and

which God is pleased to accept as such" (Berkhof 1969:186-187). The Reformers also appeal to the principle of relaxation, although they only apply it to the idea of the Divine Judge allowing for vicarious substitution, so that Christ could bear the penalty on behalf of humankind. Grotius, however, extends the principle of relaxation to apply to the actual substitution that is made, arguing that the substitution required may be a nominal equivalent, while the Reformers held that it had to be a real equivalent (Berkhof 1969:187).

¹³³ Grotius' response is that God needed to maintain order in the universe, and therefore could not remit the penalty, but had to illustrate the "inviolable nature of the law and His holy displeasure against sin" – an approach which is called the Governmental Theory of the Atonement (Berkhof 1969:187).

perseverance) and reprobation (based on foreseen unbelief, disobedience, and persistence in sin; Berkhof 1969:151).

The Arminian doctrine of atonement, formulated in large part by Curcellaeus and Limborch, follows the Reformers in grounding the necessity of the atonement in the divine nature rather than in the interest of moral order, thus steering away from Grotius' approach (Berkhof 1969:188). While the Arminians view Christ's passion as a sacrificial offering, they stress that the aim of the sacrifice was neither the payment of a debt nor a complete satisfaction of divine justice. Instead, they see it as "somewhat of a concomitant or a *conditio sine qua non* of the forgiveness of sins," preceded in the biblical association between the pardoning grace of God and the antecedent death of a sacrifice (Berkhof 1969:188). They follow Grotius in seeing Christ's passion not as a substituted penalty that was a strict equivalent to the punishment due to humanity; the substitution of the penalty may be of inferior worth, since Christ's passion was a satisfaction of benevolence (Berkhof 1969:188). Furthermore, the Arminians offer several objections to the official doctrine of atonement:

- (a) Christ did not endure the full penalty of sin, since He did not suffer eternal death, either in time or in degree. There was no endless suffering in His case, neither was there absolute despair.
- (b) If Christ completely atoned for sin, there is nothing left for divine grace to accomplish. If justice is satisfied, the remission of sin can no longer be a matter of divine compassion.
- (c) And if Christ rendered full satisfaction, God has no right to demand faith and obedience, nor to punish the sinner, if he fails to obey, for it is unjust to exact double punishment for one and the same sin (Berkhof 1969:189).

The Arminians held to a universal understanding of Christ's atonement, and accounted for the partial failure (evident in the fact that many are still lost) by holding the sinner responsible for defeating divine intention by declining the divinely offered atonement (Berkhof 1969:189). While the atonement was therefore universal in intention, it is not universally effective, due to the autonomy of human will (Berkhof 1969:189). Dort's response was that the atonement of Christ is sufficient for the whole of humanity, but yet was only intended for the elect, "to whom it is effectively applied" (Berkhof 1969:189).

4.5 More recent views of sin and redemption

The 18th century heralded a fundamental shift in the approach to the Person of Christ that likewise opened new avenues of thought for the categories of sin and redemption. The predominantly “high” (and often metaphysically speculative) Christologies of the early centuries and the Middle Ages came under increasing criticism, as the rationalist and empiricist ideologies of the *Aufklärung* impacted on theological faculties and seminaries. The medieval theological approaches and its resulting theocentric christologies were soon replaced by christologies “from below.”¹³⁴ With its affinity for anthropological analyses, and even for anthropocentrism, this point of departure ushered in an entirely “new Christological period” that was conceived by many as the “rediscovery of Jesus,” due to the increased interest in the Jesus of the (especially synoptic) gospels (Berkhof 1969:117). Despite some constructive results, the christological endeavours of this period suffered from the excessive ideological aversion to religious authority and the supernatural (Berkhof 1969:118), so characteristic of this time, as well as from the romantic reaction to these ideologies, seen for example in Schleiermacher.

Insofar as philosophical thought impacts on and influences theological thought, it is important that we include certain philosophers in our consideration of the story of sin, though some will be treated in greater detail than others. Leibnitz, for instance, takes a metaphysical rather than an ethical approach to the evil of the world, seeing it as the “natural result of the necessary limitation of the creature” (Berkhof 1969:158). Kant, in turn, assumes a somewhat negative stance for his day by “postulating a radical evil in man, a fundamental inclination to evil that cannot be eradicated by man” (Berkhof 1969:158). While this inherent evil precedes all empirical acts, Kant still insists that it is rooted in an autonomous will, resulting in guilt (Berkhof 1969:158). Because Kant denies both the historicity of the origin of evil in Christian accounts, as well as the realistic theory regarding its physical inheritance, he does not call this intrinsic evil “original sin,” but instead regards sin as “something that defies explanation” (Berkhof 1969:158).

¹³⁴ A christology “from above,” takes as its point of departure the Logos, i.e. the Second Person of the Trinity, and then interprets the incarnation (or human nature of Christ) as a way of doing justice to Christ’s divine nature as postulated in traditional church dogma, while maintaining the integrity and unity of both natures. Christologies from “below,” in contrast, prefer the historical Jesus as a methodological starting point (Berkhof 1969:117).

4.5.1 *The anthropocentrist approach of Schleiermacher (1768-1834)*

A soul connected with a physical organism must of necessity suffer from the bodily appetites that would interfere with the proper functioning of the spirit's determining power. So Schleiermacher understands sin: as the "necessary product of man's sensuous nature," which dominates the spirit (Berkhof 1969:158-159; cf. Schleiermacher 1963a:269). Sin only has subjective (and not objective) existence, however, due to the fact that it exists nowhere but in a person's consciousness.

Seen from his 66th proposition:

We have the consciousness of sin whenever the God-consciousness which forms part of an inner state, or is in some way added to it, determines our self-consciousness as pain; and therefore we conceive of sin as a positive antagonism of the flesh against the spirit (Schleiermacher 1963a:271; cf. McFarland 2010:39).

As long as the sensuous nature predominates, a person will suffer the consequential inadequacy of their God-consciousness, and as a result experience the sense of sin (Berkhof 1969:159). This feeling of inefficiency has actually been willed by God as a means of providing the possibility of redemption (Berkhof 1969:159). Original sin, then, "is simply an acquired habit that has gradually been formed, and that is now the source of all actual sin" (Berkhof 1969:159; cf. Schleiermacher 1963a:287).¹³⁵

For Schleiermacher, the uniqueness of the Person of Christ lay in the fact that, on the one hand, his sense of union with the divine was perfect and unbroken (Schleiermacher 1963b:385), and on the other,¹³⁶ that He realised the destiny of humankind to the full by maintaining his character of sinless perfection (Berkhof 1969:118).¹³⁷ Christ is both the climax and the culmination of the priesthood (Schleiermacher 1963:465). As the second Adam,

¹³⁵ Schleiermacher defends his modification of the doctrine on the basis of the universal need for salvation as worked out by Augustine, but understands the universality of sin as "a function of the social context within which human beings act rather than as the result of an ontological defect intrinsic to post-Adamic human nature" (McFarland 2010:40).

¹³⁶ Schleiermacher expresses this conviction concerning Christ, "that no more perfect form of the God-consciousness lies in front of the human race" (1963:377).

¹³⁷ To speak of the uniqueness of Christ is not to say that Schleiermacher takes a distinctly Christian approach in his philosophy of religion. In *On religion: Speeches to its cultured despisers*, he recognises a "potentially endless multiplicity of valid religions" and advocates tolerance. He has a developmental approach to religion, however, and arranges religions hierarchically, with monotheistic

He is the new spiritual head of the race, capable of animating and sustaining the higher life of all mankind. His transcendent dignity finds its explanation in a special presence of God in Him, in His supreme God-consciousness. He is the perfectly religious man, the fountain of all true religion; and through living faith in Him all men may become perfectly religious (Berkhof 1969:118).

Schleiermacher completely rejects the doctrine of penal substitution and penal satisfaction (Berkhof 1969:193). His view on the atonement has parallels with that of Abelard (as regards the subjective effects of Christ's passion on the human person) and the early Fathers (as regards the incarnation as the great redemptive act of Christ; Berkhof 1969:193). As the second Adam, Christ was truly man and yet remained perfect and without sin in complete obedience. As such, Christ is for Schleiermacher

... the archetypal man, the perfect prototype of humanity, whose uniqueness consisted in the fact that He possessed a perfect and unbroken sense of union with God, and also realized to the full the destiny of man in his character of sinless perfection. ... He was the spiritual Head of humanity, capable of animating and sustaining the higher life of all mankind, the perfectly religious man and the fountain of true religion, through living faith in whom others may also become perfectly religious (Berkhof 1969:193).

Through the fullness of the divine presence in him, Christ has become the "new leaven" for humanity, meaning that those who come into contact with him at once become receptive to the divine and receive a communication of "an inner experience of God-consciousness similar to His own. His activity is of a creative kind, an inspiring and life-giving influence of spirit upon spirit" (Berkhof 1969:194). According to this Mystical Theory of the atonement, Christ reveals both his deep love for humanity and his devotion to the divine task laid upon him, by voluntarily submitting to suffering and death. This intensifies Christ's influence on human beings who have become alienated from God (Berkhof 1969:194).

Schleiermacher's unique view on sin and salvation should be understood within the context of the blooming individualism of his time. It is a modification of the classical doctrine of original sin in a way that addresses human experience in line

or monistic religions at the top of the list. Because of the idea of mediation in Christianity, he placed Christianity at the very top of his list – a move for which he has often been criticised (Foster 2015:n.p.; cf. Schleiermacher 1963:31-52).

with “psychosocial dynamics of individual growth and maturation” (McFarland 2010:39).

4.5.2 *The teleological approach of Hegel (1770-1831)*

It is God appearing in the midst of those who know themselves as pure knowing.

(Hegel 2001:158)

Hegel, who regards human history as the sphere of God’s becoming,¹³⁸ the “self-unfolding of reason under conditions of time and space” (Berkhof 1969:119), understands sin as a necessary step in humanity’s evolution as a self-conscious spirit (Berkhof 1969:158).^{139, 140} This evolution from humanity’s original condition of naïve innocence in harmony with nature, but completely ignorant of good and evil, was necessary for humanity to reach zir destined state as a self-conscious spirit (Berkhof 1969:158).¹⁴¹ The Eden narrative points to the transition effected by

¹³⁸ This concept takes shape in Hegel’s view of creation: “God is able to create the world without any threat to God’s own radical freedom, which is complete in and for itself, and which gratuitously overflows into the world without any self-diminishment. God is an inexhaustible fount that releases its fecundity into that which is not-God. In this way the non-serious play of love with itself becomes deadly serious, subject to the ruptures, conflicts, and suffering of the finite world. God is not thereby diminished but enlarged, for the world (precisely in its otherness from God) remains a moment within the divine life. God does not abandon this world but preserves and saves it, and indeed is enriched and completed by it; but this is an existential, not a logical, completion. Both truths must be maintained: that God is complete apart from the world, and that God achieves completion through the world” (Hodgson 2005:144-145).

¹³⁹ Albrecht Ritschl follows this line of thought, and also picks up Schleiermacher’s notion that the human person knows sin only subjectively (cf. 4.5.1), i.e. within religious consciousness (Berkhof 1969:159). Actual sin, for Ritschl, consists only of those acts in which humanity fails to seek the Kingdom of God as the highest good, and instead ignorantly sets itself in opposition to the Kingdom of God (Berkhof 1969:159). As a person becomes increasingly aware of the ideal intended for zir, zir consciousness of sin also increases. This, however, is guilt that the human person imputes to zirself, since Ritschl could not entertain the thought of God being angry with humanity for the ignorance in which they presently live (Berkhof 1969:159-160).

¹⁴⁰ In his Hulsean Lectures (University of Cambridge, 1901-1902), Frederick R. Tennant engages with Hegel’s evolutionary philosophy (along with those of Malebranche and Kant) to challenge both the idea of original sin and the traditional interpretation of the Genesis narrative. In his mind, the impulses, desires and qualities inherited from humanity’s animalistic origin cannot be viewed as sin unless the actor is ethically aware and knows that the actions that derive from them is morally wrong (Berkhof 1969:160). Berkhof explains, “In the course of his development man gradually became an ethical being with an indeterminate will ... and this will is the only cause of sin. Sin is defined as ‘an activity of the will expressed in thought, word or deed contrary to the individual’s conscience, to his notion of what is good and right, his knowledge of the moral law and the will of God.’ In the measure in which the race develops the ethical standards become more exacting and the heinousness of sin increases” (Berkhof 1969:160). Tennant is not rightly accused of idealism, however, since he recognised the universality of sin in both our nature and environment, and therefore regards the realisation of our higher humanity as extremely difficult (Berkhof 1969:160).

¹⁴¹ This idea of Hegel picks up a trajectory found among the Greek Church Fathers (cf. 4.1.1). Ireneaus, especially, considers the human person as an immature creature who must be brought to the perfection and completion that God intended for it through moral growth and development. In this framework, he interprets the “fall” as an almost necessary event (Durand 1978:20).

knowledge,¹⁴² by which humanity falls out of zir paradisiacal bliss and enters a necessary stage of selfish, egoic existence (Berkhof 1969:158):

With the awakening of the self-conscious life, the beginning of the ego-sense, man involuntarily begins to follow his natural desires and makes the new-found self the centre of these, that is, he becomes selfish and thus evil. This is a stage, however, through which he must necessarily pass in his self-development (Berkhof 1969:158).

This selfishness in itself is sinful, and yet a person does not incur guilt on its account, unless ze wilfully chooses to remain in the selfish state, even after awakening to the higher consciousness that selfish existence is not zir destiny, and that ze must rise above it. In this way, then, Hegel considers the struggle against selfishness as the path to virtue (Berkhof 1969:158). Against this background, Hegel philosophically reconstructs the concept of reconciliation in such a way that it does not refer to atonement for sin, but to the unification of the seemingly incompatible, namely the finite and the infinite. As such,

(t)he awkward expression “divine and human nature” cannot mean two ontologically incompatible natures, conjoined miraculously. The condition of possibility for reconciliation is that unity is the original and the final divine-human condition, not something having to be brought about by an extrinsic action. From these definitions we see that “incarnation” and “reconciliation” are closely connected if not ultimately synonymous terms (Hodgson 2005:157).

God, then, becomes incarnate in humanity, and this incarnation in turn expresses the oneness of God and man (Berkhof 1969:199). In fact, the idea of this unity of divine and human nature is what possibilises reconciliation. Godself is “an eternal process of reconciliation – the dynamo of positing otherness and sublating estrangement that makes God to be God” (Hodgson 2005:157).:

This idea, the imago Dei, is not something alien to humanity but is its own substantial, though presently lost or distorted, nature. The vocation of humanity is to regain its own nature – not through striving or merit but as a divine gift. In addition, however, because “God is spirit in the process of differentiation and return, ...the unity of divine and human nature has a significance not only for the

¹⁴² “It is sometimes said that Hegel trivializes the problem of evil by connecting it too closely with knowledge and failing to recognize its absurd and irrational aspects. From Hegel’s point of view, what gives evil its extraordinary power is precisely its connection with knowledge. It is a distortion and perversion of what is highest in humanity, not of what is lowest, and thus it has a potency that far outstrips natural destruction as well as a capacity for self-deception that reason on its own cannot overcome. What is required is a redemption of reason, not its displacement” (Hodgson 2005:154).

definition of human nature but just as much for that of the divine.” God becomes fully God when the implicit unity of divinity and humanity becomes actual. The actualized unity of divine and human nature is Hegel’s philosophical interpretation of “incarnation” (Hodgson 2005:156).

This reconciliation is epitomised in Jesus of Nazareth as the culminating point of this process. Berkhof distinguishes two ways of seeing this historical manifestation of God in Christ (Berkhof 1969:119):

Humanity in general regards Jesus as a human teacher, bringing the doctrine of the Kingdom of God and a supreme code of morality, and giving us an example by living up to this teaching even unto death. But believers take a higher view. Faith recognizes Jesus as divine and as terminating the transcendence of God. All that He does becomes a revelation of God. In Him God Himself draws near unto us, touches us, and so takes us up into the divine consciousness (Berkhof 1969:120).

4.6 Metaphysical stories and their limitations

Our historical overview has illustrated that the development of metaphysical understandings of sin runs parallel to the “fall” perspective that had its beginning in Rabbinic thought during the Second Temple period. “Fall” language, of course, does not necessarily lead to metaphysical views of sin. This is clear from the fact that both Jewish thought and the Greek Fathers developed views regarding sin that are quite distinct from that of Western Christianity. Significantly, both these traditions had a different understanding of what the “fall” entailed, often building on Ezra’s suggestion that the consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin was a “fall” from the possibility of immortality. It is with the Western Fathers that we see the development of a highly pessimistic view of the *nature* of post-Eden humanity, so that “fall” here denotes a fall in human nature. At this point, sin truly becomes ontological, seen as nestled “in” the human person. Merely bearing this sinful *state* of existence is in itself already regarded as sin that mounts guilt on the individual.

Apart from the fact, as illustrated in Chapters 2 and 3, that “fall” thinking is entirely absent from Scripture, there are several further disadvantages to associating this manner of speaking with sin. One disadvantage is the ensuing assumption that pre-“fall” humans existed in a kind of exalted position, which was lost due to the fall. This included, but was not limited to, immortality. This is, of course, a profound case of eisegesis. At most, the Eden narrative suggests that God may have granted Adam

and Eve access to the tree of life at a later stage, granting them immortality. If anything, then, as Ezra claimed in 2 Esdras 7:118, Adam and Eve lost the *possibility* of immortality (Goldingay 2003:145-146). The “exalted” pre-“fall” state also presumably entailed a celestial closeness to God, but nothing in the Eden narrative or Scripture provides this sort of description about life in Eden (Goldingay 2003:146). Scripture also does not suggest that Adam and Eve lost, post-“fall”, some intrinsic capacity to obey God.

It is for all these reasons that we suggest a move away – finally and completely – from the idea that some historical disobedience resulted in a “fall” in human nature. “What happens in Eden begins a process or forms one description of humanity’s calamitous original wrongdoing, rather than in isolation bringing about a decisive change in humanity’s moral capacity” (Goldingay 2003:147).

Upon leaving this unbiblical idea behind, we may reimagine Eden as a mythical narrative that illustrates the eschatological openness of humanity, as well as the destruction that ensues when humanity, in an act of idolatry, forfeits this openness. In the words of Goldingay, then, “the tragedy of Genesis 1-3 is not that human beings fell from a state of bliss but that they failed to realize a possibility” (Goldingay 2003:147).

The tendency to imagine human sin in terms of a “fall” has decisively impacted upon hamartiology and soteriology. The usual charge brought against Pelagius that he denied the necessity of divine grace in salvation is only valid when the Augustinian version of a fallen human nature is upheld, for instance. As such, one of the greatest rifts in the history of doctrine may be traced directly to the biblically unsupported concept of an ontological “fall.”¹⁴³ Here we have, then, the result of an ontological understanding of sin: what has become defiled by the permanent fixture of sin upon the human soul, requires a regeneration by virtue of a special intervention of grace.

¹⁴³ Pelagius did not, of course, deny the work of grace in any way, but because he did not perceive a total fallenness of human nature, the divine *gratia interna* that regenerates, enlightens the mind and inclines the will toward the good (Berkhof 1969:206) was not viewed as a necessity. Instead, he regarded the natural grace in which humankind partakes by virtue of being divinely created, to be sufficient, providing the human person with a free will by which ze may choose between good and evil. In the case of Augustine, however, with his radically pessimistic view of humankind’s natural “state” of existence, a special grace over and above that which God extends universally becomes necessary.

The metaphor of sin as debt has also had a decisive influence on the doctrines of sin and salvation, and at times may be linked with the problematic ontological view of sin. This happens especially when, as with Anderson (2009), the metaphor is taken to imply that a “real” debt really does exist “somewhere,” a metaphysical “thingness” that is sin and that is registered in the heavenly annals (cf. 3.4). This creates a scenario that depicts God as somewhat powerless, as though God’s mercy is bound by a “set of financial obligations” (Anderson 2009:90).¹⁴⁴

Traditionally, Christology has wrestled with speculations about the “being” of Christ, which was increasingly understood as “a self-contained ontological exception” that was confined to Jesus alone. Quite separate from this ontological endeavour, soteriology tried to answer questions about what Jesus had actually *done*, and done in particular, *for humanity*, as though the person and action of Jesus could be so neatly separated (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Ratzinger illustrates the limitation of such thinking in his overview of one of the most influential theories on the atonement, namely Anselm’s satisfaction theory (cf. the detailed discussion in 4.3.1). Before moving to an overview of Ratzinger’s criticism, let us consider the following passage by Gregory the Great, one of the Latin theologians most influenced by Augustine, which perhaps best illustrates the consequence of an ontological understanding of sin, coupled with the artificial distinction between the person and the work of Christ. In one of Gregory’s writings, he describes what has been called “the completest synthesis of ancient Latin theology on the atonement” (Berkhof 1969:169):

¹⁴⁴ Anderson illustrates how this sort of thinking was addressed in 2 Maccabees, where the author was faced with a version of the classical question of theodicy. If God, namely, has elected Israel as God’s beloved people, why does it seem, as it must have at the time with Antiochus IV Epiphanes’ severe persecutions, as though Israel receives greater punishment for her sin than the surrounding nations (Anderson 2009:90)? The answer of 2 Maccabees runs as follows, and does not particularly illustrate God’s merciful forgiveness of sin. While God allows the sin (debt) of other nations to accumulate until God may justifiably step in to wipe them out (Anderson 2009:90), God does not treat Israel in this way but reveals mercy in the fact that God “never allows her sins to reach a level wherein he would be forced to disown her. Instead, he frequently intervenes and extracts payment from the chosen nation so that such a tipping point will never be reached. In other words, the unequal standards that caused one to question God’s justice now affirm it! Israel suffers more visibly because God wants to make sure that her register of debits never rises too high” (Anderson 2009:91). In later Rabbinic literature, it does sometimes appear as though God does not “administer his ledger in a mechanical fashion,” and that God is even at times willing to overlook various financial obligations for the sake of God’s mercy (Anderson 2009:106). Because the obligation of payment is to God, God is free to overlook the debt of sin if God so wishes. R. Eleazar affirms that while it is “God’s right to mete out justice” in accordance with human deeds, “this general affirmation should not be taken as an iron-clad rule,” since God’s “charitable inclination” may cause God to place God’s thumb on the scales of justice, so that the balance may tilt in the favour of zir beloved servant (Anderson 2009:109).

Man voluntarily fell under the dominion of sin and death, and only a sacrifice could blot out such sin. But where was the sacrifice to be found? An animal could not serve the purpose; only a man would do, and yet no man could be found without sin. Therefore the Son of God became incarnate, assuming our nature, but not our sinfulness. The Sinless One became a sacrifice for us, a victim that could die in virtue of His humanity, and could cleanse in virtue of His righteousness. He paid for us a debt of death which He had not deserved, that the death which was our due might not harm us (Berkhof 1969:169-170).

This quotation exemplifies what Ratzinger has called the “vulgarised form” that Anselm’s satisfaction theory has assumed in the way that it has impacted upon general western consciousness, looking “cruelly mechanical and less and less feasible” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Ratzinger admits that the theory commands respect, yet points out that the “perfectly logical divine-cum-human legal system erected by Anselm distorts the perspectives and with its rigid logic can make the image of God appear in a sinister light” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Commenting later on this popular view of the cross as means of atonement, he states:

In the Bible the Cross does not appear as part of a mechanism of injured right; on the contrary, in the Bible the Cross is quite the reverse: it is the expression of the radical nature of the love that gives itself completely, of the process in which one is what one does and does what one is; it is the expression of a life that is completely being for others. To anyone who looks more closely, the scriptural theology of the Cross represents a real revolution as compared with the notions of expiation and redemption entertained by non-Christian religions, though it certainly cannot be denied that in the later Christian consciousness this revolution was largely neutralized and its whole scope seldom recognized (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

The person and work of Christ are incomprehensible when considered separately. It is time to let go, finally and completely, of the notion that the work of Christ can be considered apart from Christ himself. Along with this, it is time to bid the idea farewell that the work of Christ is some “feat that God must demand because he himself is under an obligation to the concept of order” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Finally, a way forward in imagining atonement would involve seeing Christ not as “assuming” or “having” humanity, but instead emphasising Christ’s “being” human, and in Paul’s terms, being the “last” human (cf. Ratzinger 2004:n.p.; cf. also 6.2.2). It is from these assumptions that we will proceed in Chapter 6 when we attempt to imagine new stories regarding sin and atonement.

In being confronted with the diverse views of sin and salvation proposed in the history of doctrine, it is sobering to remember that this multiplicity stems from Scripture itself. Biblical tradition draws from a variety of metaphors and symbols to describe sin and salvation, and as Siekawitch reminds us, our thinking can only benefit from a rich, multidimensional approach that attempts to create dialogue, rather than rivalry, between the various theories of the atonement (Siekawitch 2007-2008:5).

CHAPTER FIVE: RICHARD KEARNEY AND THE POWERLESS POSSIBLE

Richard Kearney has established himself as a significant dialogue partner in the renewed philosophical quest for God.¹⁴⁵ This chapter¹⁴⁶ aims to give a human face to the ideas that will both engage and be engaged in the pages that follow, enabling the reader to interpret his phenomenology and hermeneutics of religion in a wider context.

5.1 The life and times of Richard Kearney¹⁴⁷

“Speaking from” across the North Atlantic, where he holds the Charles H. Seelig Chair of Philosophy at Boston College, this Irish philosopher (Kearney is visiting professor at University College Dublin) is a prolific author, whose work traverses numerous boundaries and interests, ranging from philosophy,¹⁴⁸ theology and

¹⁴⁵ At a time when the philosophical question of God was expected to be dead and buried under the onslaught of the Masters of Suspicion, this quest seems to have been resurrected to the extent that some now speak of the “Religious Turn in Continental Philosophy.” Kearney has been an active participant in this dialogue on God, as is seen especially from his involvement in the Villanova conferences (cf. Caputo 1997; Caputo, Dooley & Scanlon 2001; Caputo & Scanlon 1999, 2007). His essay “Re-imagining God” (in one of the Villanova conference volumes, Caputo & Scanlon 2007), comes closest in theme and scope to his proposal to envision God as possibility in *The God who may be* (2001; cf. Kearney 2007b:51-65). Kearney’s essay is an example of his characteristic hermeneutic exploration of the possible as a means of steering a middle way through philosophical extremes. Kearney utilises, namely, the vocabulary of possibility and impossibility to suggest that “the infinite is experienced as possibility, even ‘when such possibility seems impossible to us’ (51). He sets out three ‘concentric circles’ which he believes show how a God of the possible ‘reveals itself poetically’ (52). The first poetic mode is scriptural, the second is testimonial, and the third is literary. In each circle, he considers *dunamis* and argues for an understanding that discards the image of God as omnipotent ruler of a yet to come Kingdom, for and [sic] image of God as smaller, closer, and as making possible love and justice in this world. He imagines a god of small things who does not exclude, but rather continuously invites all to a feast” (Johnson 2010:63).

¹⁴⁶ As an overview of Kearney’s thought as it applies to the interdisciplinary dialogue between philosophy, theology, and philosophy of religion, this chapter incorporates material from two previous dissertations on Kearney’s thought (Steenkamp 2011; 2012 [published 2014]). Some of this material has been reworked, and new sources have in some places been incorporated. The University of Pretoria holds the copyright to all these works.

¹⁴⁷ This section has been reworked from previous overviews of Kearney’s thought provided by the author. Cf. Steenkamp (2014:17-29; 2011:13-18).

¹⁴⁸ Kearney specialises in philosophical theology, as well as both the French and German traditions of Continental philosophy (Marsoobian 2005:729). His work has been characterised by a commitment to understand and engage other philosophical thinkers. See, for example: *Dialogues with contemporary Continental thinkers: The phenomenological heritage* (1984a); “Kierkegaard’s concept of God-man” (1984b); “Friel and the politics of language play” (1987a); *Modern movements in European philosophy* (1987b); “Paul Ricoeur and the hermeneutic imagination” (1988b); *Poetics of imagining: from Husserl to Lyotard* (1991a); *Heidegger’s three gods* (1992a); “Between Kant and Heidegger: The modern question of being” (1992b); “Derrida and the ethics of dialogue” (1993a); *States of mind: Dialogues with contemporary thinkers on the European mind* (1995a); *Modern movements in European philosophy* (1996); “Aliens and others: Between Girard and Derrida” (1999b); *On Paul Ricoeur: the Owl of Minerva* (2004a); *Debates in Continental Philosophy: Conversations with*

religious studies,¹⁴⁹ to politics,¹⁵⁰ literary theory,¹⁵¹ aesthetics,¹⁵² including works of poetry and fiction¹⁵³ (Gregor 2008:147; cf. Ward 2005:369).¹⁵⁴

In Kearney one encounters a philosopher in dialogue. Thus, a good entry point to understanding his philosophy is to consider those whom he has been influenced by and in conversation with. Following in the footsteps of his mentors in hermeneutic practice, Gadamer and Ricoeur, he attributes most of what he has learned philosophically to critical exchanges with others (Kearney 2007a:x). In the foreword to *Traversing the imaginary*, he mentions five scholars by name who have had a formative influence on his philosophy (2007a:x-xiii). It is worth providing a somewhat chronological overview of these scholarly influences:

contemporary thinkers (2004b); "Time, evil, and narrative: Ricoeur on Augustine" (2005b); "Paul Ricoeur and the hermeneutics of translation" (2007c); "Returning to God after God: Levinas, Derrida, Ricoeur" (2009); "Eucharistic aesthetics in Merleau-Ponty and James Joyce" (2013c); "Ricoeur and Biblical hermeneutics: On post-religious faith" (2010a); "Paul Ricoeur" (2010b); "Paul Ricoeur: Dying to live for others" (2011a); "The hermeneutics of the gift" (2012b); "Two thinks at a distance: An interview with William Desmond by Richard Kearney on 9 January 2011" (2012c); "Forgiveness at the limit: Impossible or possible?" (2013b); "Disabling evil and enabling God: The life of testimony in Paul Ricoeur" (2014a); and "Derrida and messianic atheism" (2014b); "Preface: Beyond the impossible" (2015a). Kearney's recent work also reflects an interest in a philosophy of embodiment: "Carnal eternity" (2012a); *Carnal hermeneutics* (2015, ed. With Brian Treanor); "Between flesh and text: Ricoeur's carnal hermeneutics" (2016); *Flesh: Recovering our senses in an age of excarnation* (forthcoming).

¹⁴⁹ Cf., e.g.: "Ideology and religion: A hermeneutic conflict" (1990b); "Thinking after terror: An interreligious challenge" (2006b); "Introduction: A pilgrimage to the heart" (2008a); *Traversing the heart: Journeys of the inter-religious imagination* (2010, ed. with Eileen Rizo-Patron); "Interreligious discourse – War or peace?" (2010e); "Eucharistic imaginings in Proust and Woolf" (2013a); "Translating across faith cultures: Radical hospitality" (2014c); "Toward an open Eucharist" (2015b); *Reimagining the sacred* (2015, ed. with Jens Zimmermann).

¹⁵⁰ Kearney has published widely on Irish culture and politics, but also on politics in general. Cf., e.g., *The crane bag book of Irish studies* (vol. 1, 1982, ed., and vol. 2, 1987c, ed.); *Myth and motherland* (1984c); *The Irish mind: Exploring intellectual traditions* (1984d, ed.); *Transitions: Narratives in modern Irish culture* (1987d); *Across the frontiers: Ireland in the 1990's* (1988c, ed.); *Migrations: The Irish at home and abroad* (1990a, ed.); "Postmodernity and nationalism: A European perspective" (1992c); *Visions of Europe: Conversations on the legacy and future of Europe* (1993b); *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, culture, philosophy* (1997a); "Terror, philosophy and the sublime: Some philosophical reflections on 11 September" (2003b); "Thinking after terror: An interreligious challenge" (2006b); *Navigations: Collected Irish essays, 1976-2006* (2007d); "Memory in Irish culture: An exploration" (2010c); "Renarrating Irish politics in a European context" (2010d).

¹⁵¹ Cf., e.g.: "Utopian and ideological myths in Joyce" (1991c); "Poetry, language, and identity: A note on Seamus Heaney" (1998b).

¹⁵² Cf., e.g.: *Continental aesthetics: Romanticism to postmodernism – An anthology* (2001, ed. with David Rasmussen); "Sacramental aesthetics: Between word and flesh" (2007e); "Aesthetics and theology" (2010f).

¹⁵³ Kearney has published poetry volumes and written a number of his own novels. Cf., e.g.: *Angel of Patrick's hill* (1991b); *Sam's fall* (1995b) and *Walking at sea level* (1997b).

¹⁵⁴ In the diverse nature of his professional interests, Kearney follows in the example of Paul Ricoeur, his supervisor for his doctoral studies, who published more than thirty major works during his lifetime that ranged from "existentialism and phenomenology to psychoanalysis, politics, religion, and the theory of language" (Kearney 2005a:4).

Under the guidance of *Charles Taylor*, Kearney's teacher and thesis director for his master's programme at McGill University (Montreal, 1975-1976), Kearney began his important and influential work on the philosophy of imagination. Kearney also credits Taylor's work on Hegel and Heidegger as the determining factor in his choice of phenomenology as his field of inquiry, and states that he shares with Taylor a "commitment to investigate the often-neglected workings of the social and political imaginary as it deeply informs our lived everyday world" (Kearney 2007a:x).

It was upon Kearney's move to Paris (September 1977) with an International Traveling Studentship from the National University of Ireland that he came under the influence of arguably his greatest philosophical mentor, *Paul Ricoeur*, who served as the supervisor and director for Kearney's doctorate (Kearney 2007a:x). The following quote from the preface of *Traversing the imaginary* brings across the heartfelt personal and professional appreciation that Kearney feels toward Ricoeur:

I am so deeply indebted to Ricoeur as teacher, guide, and friend that it would be impossible to express my gratitude adequately in a foreword of this kind. Suffice it to say that his intellectual presence has pervaded almost all of my philosophical writing and teaching over the past thirty years (Kearney 2007a:xi).

Kearney speaks with great appreciation of Ricoeur's legendary weekly seminars where he presented his work to his colleagues and graduate students, and where he met many thinkers that would have a lasting influence on his work, including Jean-Luc Marion and Emmanuel Levinas (Kearney 2007a:x-xi). It was at these seminars, as well, that Kearney met *Jacques Derrida*, who was to have a "seminal influence" on his phenomenology of imagination. Kearney recalls their intellectual exchanges as having been dialogical from the start, referring to their first "spirited" exchange surrounding deconstruction and the Other in 1982 – an initial engagement that was, in Kearney's mind, "deepened and expanded" over many years through various written and recorded dialogical encounters (2007a:xi). Despite the differences in their philosophical approaches, Kearney writes of Derrida with great appreciation and with a grace that reveals a respectful friendship. The following incident serves as an excellent example:

Indeed, I recall one dramatic moment during a skirmish in one of our three roundtables at Villanova, when Derrida actually came to my rescue! I was within a hairsbreadth of being lynched by a zealous bunch of Derridean disciples – for

some question I raised concerning the ethics of undecidability – when Derrida intervened with this gracious pardon: ‘Richard Kearney’s difficulties with my work are my own difficulties with my work.’ He saved the day, for me at least, and I am grateful to him, for this small gesture and for so much more (Kearney 2007a:xi-xii).

Kearney’s exchanges with *Martha Nussbaum*, although they commenced only in 1993, would exert a great influence on his understanding of the role of narrative imagination, be it in ethics, literature, or politics. It is these exchanges, Kearney states, which confirmed in him “the view that narrative was a necessary but not sufficient condition for moral and political commitment.” Finally, Kearney considers his dialogues with *Noam Chomsky*, as well as Chomsky’s analysis of the “role of political imagination in ideology propaganda, and the media’s ‘manufacture of consent’” to have decisively influenced his thinking displayed in *Postnationalist Ireland* (1997a), *On stories* (2002b), and *Strangers, gods, and monsters* (2003a).

In light of the above overview of Kearney’s dialogue partners, we may now consider Kearney as a philosopher of “middle ways.” This is perhaps best illustrated by an anecdote in the foreword to *Traversing the imaginary*. Describing his work from the perspective of his mentors and fellow philosophers, Kearney states that, for Ricoeur, he was at times too deconstructive (but for Derrida too hermeneutic), and that Levinas found him overly aesthetic and “inordinately susceptible to the lures of imagination” (while Stanislas Breton thought him too ethical) (Kearney 2007a:xi).

This trend in Kearney’s work of creating “third,” mediating ways of “thinking” old problems anew, will become clear as we focus upon his contributions to the renewed philosophical engagements with the topic of God – a topic that he approaches through his “characteristic hermeneutical exploration of ‘the possible’ as an ‘imaginative’ way of casting light upon philosophical issues” (Masterson 2008:247). For Kearney, the perpetual return of the God question compels us to define exactly what we mean when we take the word “God” on our lips, and his growing body of work negotiates between extremes in the way that God has been perceived. He asks, for example: Is God a “deity of omnipotent causality or of self-emptying service? A mighty monarch or a solicitous stranger? A God without religion or a religion without God? A bringer of war or peace?” (Kearney 2011b:xi).

As philosopher in dialogue, Kearney finds himself, philosophically speaking, between the modern theories of phenomenology and existentialism on the one hand, and the postmodern ideas of poststructuralism and deconstruction on the other (2011:xv):

From the former I acquired ... an irrevocable respect for personal responsibility, choice, and agency; a belief in the possibility of thinking from concrete embodied experience; and a faith in the power of human imagination and action to transform our world. ... From the latter, postmodern theories I learned that human selfhood and identity are always part of a larger linguistic-cultural process, a web of layered significations that constantly remind us of the unfathomable enigmas of alterity (Derrida, Levinas, Kristeva). Both of these stances – modern and postmodern – combined to inform my own narrative hermeneutic in dialogue with Ricoeur (Kearney 2011b:xvi).

When it comes to Kearney's own spiritual heritage, he speaks of a "dual belonging" (2011b:xiv). His upbringing in a devout but liberal Catholic Irish family, fostering a deep sense of sacramental spirituality, was supplemented by the more critical consciousness of his Protestant maternal family, thus teaching him that "religion should be a matter of individual choice and conscience as well as of consent and mystery" (2011b:xiv). This same sense of double belonging was reinforced by Catholic and Protestant artists from Northern Ireland who reimagined their stories from the "other side": "Catholics and Protestants got into each others' minds, swapped stories, and began to feel what the 'enemy' felt" (2011b:xiv). This sort of interreligious hospitality only expanded through Kearney's dialogues with Jewish thinkers (e.g. Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida), the Islamic tradition, and finally beyond the three Abrahamic faiths through his encounters with Buddhist and Hindu thinkers (e.g. Choqui Nyma and Swami Tyagananda; 2011b:xiv-xv). Religiously, spiritually and artistically, then, Kearney has traversed many boundaries and extended many confessional circles.

In his most recent work, *Anatheism: Returning to God after God*, Kearney sets his interest in the God debate in a context of politics, religious background and philosophy (2011b:xi-xvii). Having grown up in Ireland during the thirty-year period of religious violence, he was a witness to the most arrogant forms of religious triumphalism on the one hand, but also to religiously motivated ecumenical dialogues and peace efforts on the other. In this context, Glenstal Abbey, where he studied for

five years, proved a lasting influence with their Benedictine commitment to uncompromising hospitality to the stranger. This radical interspiritual hospitality, which went so far as to consider even atheism as “indispensable to any wager of faith” (2011b:xii), was reinforced for Kearney by the sustained witness to Christian peace in Ireland, and made a lasting impression as to the potential of spiritual commitment to counter the perversion of religion (2011b:xiii).

It was during his period of stay in the radically secular city of Paris that his interest in the God question crystallised into the question that would eventually develop into his hermeneutics of religion, and specifically into his *Anatheism* project: Could one return to God after leaving God? If so, what *kind* of God would this be? (Kearney 2011b:xiii). From his doctoral studies under Paul Ricoeur and Emmanuel Levinas in Paris, his earliest volumes in French,¹⁵⁵ to two of the three volumes¹⁵⁶ in his recent trilogy *Philosophy at the Limit*, and his most recent volume on a renewed quest for a God after God, this question has remained an abiding concern (2011b:xiii). In addressing this question, Kearney subscribes to the move in contemporary philosophy of religion that places this God-after-God in a dialectical relationship with the metaphysical God of pure act, and strives to overcome it. Given the importance of his trilogy for the current study, we will provide a quick overview.

On Stories (2002b). In this attempt at writing a public philosophy, Kearney illustrates his hermeneutical approach to the role of narrative in our lives. He addresses narrative imagination and illustrates its role in personal and socio-political identity formation (Gregor 2008:148; Kearney 2002b:4), showing how stories provide a “shareable world” that contribute to this end (Kearney 2002b:3). Through a number of actual stories, Kearney addresses the interweaving of fiction and history, by first looking at the narratives of individual historical persons, and then considering a few national narratives. He outlines a philosophy of storytelling in the final section, concludes that narratives “matter,” and joins his voice to Aristotle’s in declaring theunnarrated life as not worth living.

¹⁵⁵ *Poétique du Possible: Vers une Herméneutique Phénoménologique de la figuration* (1984e), his doctoral thesis under supervision of Paul Ricoeur, and *Heidegger et la question de Dieu* (1980, ed., 2nd ed. 2009).

¹⁵⁶ *The God who may be: A hermeneutics of religion* (2001) and *Strangers, gods and monsters: Interpreting otherness* (2003a).

Strangers, gods and monsters: Interpreting otherness (2003a). This work is an attempt to unravel the experience of alterity and otherness by interpreting three defining contours of the contemporary profile: strangers, gods, and monsters (Hederman 2006:270). Kearney attempts to make philosophical sense of the Self-Other relationship disclosed by this “estranging phenomenon” in art, religion and psychoanalysis, and illustrates the question of immanence and transcendence with regard to the Other in “theological, philosophical, anthropological, literary and psychoanalytical categories” (Masterson 2008:252). The work illustrates how we often project our unconscious fears, which we recoil from in ourselves, onto others, and then make them into extreme others of whom we may live in terror, suspicion and hatred.

Hederman judges the contribution of Kearney’s book as a valuable “practical” (complementing Kant’s “theoretical”) explanation of evil, providing a “much-needed third way between the somewhat masochistic metaphysics of Levinas and the almost autistic psychoanalysis of Freud” (Hederman 2006:270-271). Kearney proposes a “hermeneutic pluralism of otherness,” and is convinced that no otherness is so exterior (Levinas) or so unconscious (Freud) that it cannot be at least minimally interpreted by a self (Kearney 2003a:81). He concludes that

one of the best ways to *de-alienate* the other is to recognize (a) oneself as another and (b) the other as (in part) another self. For if ethics rightly requires me to respect the singularity of the other person, it equally requires me to recognize the other as another self bearing universal rights and responsibilities, that is, as someone capable of recognizing me in turn as a self capable of recognition and esteem (Kearney 2003a:80).

The God who may be: A hermeneutics of religion (2001). Advocating an eschatological approach to interpreting the divine, Kearney attempts to retrieve the latent eschatological meaning of four biblical texts¹⁵⁷ in the light of contemporary phenomenological, hermeneutic and deconstructive debates (Kearney 2001:1). He proposes a God of the possible who transfigures and is transfigured in turn, enabling an eschatological kingdom that depends as much on human response to the divine invitation as it does on the God who possibilises it. Kearney imagines this God post-

¹⁵⁷ The accounts of the burning bush (Exod 3), the transfiguration on mount Tabor (Matt 17:1-13/Mark 9:2-13/Luke 9:28-36), the Shulamite’s Song (from the Song of Songs), and the promise to make the impossible possible (Matt 19:26/Mark 10:27/Luke 18:27 – note: not Matt 10 as Kearney mistakenly indicates in his introduction, 2001:1).

metaphysically, so that the God of posse is emptied of the metaphysical deity's "purported power-presence – understood metaphysically as *ousia, esse, substantia, causa sui...*" (2001:2). Throughout, he asks

... how we may overcome the old notion of God as disembodied cause, devoid of dynamism and desire, in favor of a more eschatological notion of God as possibility to come: the posse which calls us beyond the present toward a promised future (2001:3).

Kearney's trilogy saw the publication of three companion volumes comprising essays by his dialogue partners. *After God: Richard Kearney and the religious turn in Continental philosophy* (2006b), edited by John Panteleimon Manoussakis, gathers contributions to Kearney's philosophy of religion, many of which take a critical angle on Kearney's God of posse. Some of these points of criticism include exactly what "possibility" means with regard to God, Kearney's interpretations of other philosophers, and the methodological status of Kearney's hermeneutics of religion (Gregor 2008:149)

Traversing the imaginary: Richard Kearney and the postmodern challenge (2007a), edited by Peter Gratton and John Panteleimon Manoussakis, addresses Kearney's contribution to the fields of ethics, politics, culture, and aesthetics, focusing on the status of imagination in postmodernity, which has been a constant theme throughout his career, as well as on the role of narrative in his thoughts (Gregor 2008:148). The volume is organised into three parts. Part one, "The dialogical imaginary" features Kearney in debate with Paul Ricoeur, Jacques Derrida, Charles Taylor, Martha Nussbaum, and Noam Chomsky. Parts two and three address some of the implications of Kearney's work for political and literary analysis (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xx).

A more recent volume, *Reimagining the sacred*, co-edited by Kearney and Jens Zimmermann (2015), appeared in the Columbia University Press series "Insurrections: Critical studies in religion, politics, and culture." Kearney's characteristic search for "third ways" in thinking God and religion is continued, but this time in true dialogical fashion with the leading thinkers in the field.

Kearney makes a point of stating throughout his writings that, when writing on the God question, his approach is philosophical rather than theological (2011b:xv;

2001:9). Hermeneutically, he draws as freely from religious texts and their scholarly interpretation as he does from novelists and the writings of agnostic authors: “Imagination and narrative play as important a role in my inquiry as do faith and reason” (2011b:xvi). It is important that we take thorough notice of this self-imposed boundary of Kearney’s work. Indeed, much of the criticism levelled against him may be traced to a misunderstanding of Kearney’s philosophical intention and focus. Kearney does not write as a theologian, but as a philosopher who feels “entitled to draw from religious scriptures as sources, and to draw from phenomenology as a method” (Kearney 2006a:367). His work deserves to be considered theologically, but he asks us to remember that he is a philosopher doing a hermeneutic reading of texts – religious and otherwise (Kearney 2006a:367).

5.2 Kearney on imagination

Kearney started his work on the philosophy of imagination during his Master’s programme at McGill University in Montreal (1975-1976). Under the guidance of Charles Taylor, he traced the genealogy of the term through its Hebrew and Greek roots (*yetser* and *phantasia*) to contemporary concepts of fiction, fantasy, and imagining (Kearney 2007a:x). His phenomenology of imagination culminated in the publication of many of his first monographs, namely *Poétique du possible* (Kearney’s doctoral thesis under Ricoeur’s guidance, defended in 1980 and published in 1984e), *The wake of imagination* (1988a), *Poetics of imagining: From Husserl to Lyotard* (1991a, republished in 1998a under the revised title *Poetics of imagining: Modern and postmodern*), and *Poetics of modernity: Toward a hermeneutic imagination* (1999a [1995]). Kearney’s importance in the field of philosophy of imagination is perhaps best seen in the fact that the edited volume *Traversing the imaginary: Richard Kearney and the postmodern challenge* (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007a) has drawn contributions from three continents and eight countries. His multidimensional approach to imagination, in combination with such terms as “narrativity” and “possibility,” has brought the subject to the attention of diverse fields outside philosophy proper (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xix-xx).

Committed to the primacy of the possible over the actual, and of imagination over speculative reason, Kearney’s approach is a “characteristically hermeneutical exploration of the possible as an imaginative way of casting light upon a variety of

philosophical topics" (Masterson 2008:248), and of formulating ethically liberating interpretations of sacred myths and narratives (2008:249). Imagination is seen as a power – an intentional act of (not merely in) consciousness, which intuits and constitutes meaning and fashions truth (Masterson 2008:250). Insofar as imagination is intentional, it necessitates a hermeneutical turn in the phenomenological enterprise – a move from mere description to interpretation that considers imagination in terms of language (Masterson 2008:250):

5.2.1 The complex genealogy of imagination in the Western tradition¹⁵⁸

In *The wake of the imagination: Toward a postmodern culture*, Kearney takes a historical approach to illustrate that the human ability to "image" or "imagine" has been mainly understood in the history of Western thought as a representational faculty (reproducing images of some pre-existing reality) or as a creative faculty (producing images which often lay claim to an original status in their own right) (1988a:15).¹⁵⁹ Tracing the views of imagination from the Hebraic and Greek cultures through Medieval and modern perspectives, to the postmodern voices of structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction, he illustrates how the

... creative power of imagination which biblical culture identified with Adamic man, and Greek culture with Promethean or demiurgic man, reaches its ultimate humanist conclusion with existentialist man. And the logical implication would seem to be that the human imagination will disappear as man himself disappears. The concept of imagination cannot, apparently, survive the postmodern age of deconstruction (Kearney 1988a:30).

The Hebrew yetser (הצ'ר): Imagination in the Hebrew and Rabbinic tradition

Because of the decisive influence of the biblical heritage on Western culture, Kearney begins his study of the genealogy of the imagination with an interpretative exploration of the book of Genesis (Kearney 1988a:38). He reads the Eden narrative through the window of the "good and evil yetser," a term for human creativity that is a

¹⁵⁸ Parts of this section have been compiled from previous overviews of Kearney's thought by the author. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:74-78).

¹⁵⁹ Kearney identifies four main meanings of the term imagination. "(i) The ability to evoke absent objects which exist elsewhere, without confusing these absent objects with things present here and now. (ii) The construction and/or use of material forms and figures such as paintings, statues, photographs etc. to represent real things in some 'unreal' way. (iii) The fictional projection of non-existent things as in dreams or literary narratives. (iv) The capacity of human consciousness to become fascinated by illusions, confusing what is real with what is unreal" (1988a:16).

usurpation of the divine *yetsirah*, and which first appears in the OT in the Adamic myth, where it marks the fall of humanity into history (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii; Kearney 1988:39).

The story of imagination is as old as the story of creation itself. In *Genesis* it is suggested that the birth of the human power of imagining coincides with Adam's transgression of God's law. The Original Sin of our first parents marks imagination from its inception. The Knowledge of Good and Evil, which the serpent promises will make Adam and Eve "like gods," is henceforth identified with man's ability to imagine a world of his own making – a world of striving, desire, remorse and death which began with the fall from paradise into history. The Adamic myth of the first book of the Bible tells the tale of a fallen imagination. And, as we shall see, it is above all else an *ethical* tale (Kearney 1988a:39).

Derived from the root *yzr* (עַזְרָה),¹⁶⁰ Kearney interprets the *yetser* as the human person's "creative impulse to imitate God's own creation" (Kearney 1988:39). Associated with the *yetser* is both an ethical consciousness of good and evil and an historical consciousness of past and future (Kearney 1988a:39). Thus, Adam and Eve's eating of the fruit does not only impart knowledge of good and evil but also marks the beginning of time, enabling humanity to "project itself into the future through its creative activity" (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii).

Imagination enables man to think in terms of *opposites* – good and evil, past and future, God and man. Thus bringing about the consciousness of sin and of time, the fallen imagination exposes man to the experience of division, discord and contradiction (Kearney 1998a:40).

Drawing from the exegetical tradition of Rabbinic and kabbalistic sources, Kearney sees in humanity's *yetser* a likeness to the stigma of a stolen divine possession (e.g. the Promethean myth; Kearney 1988a:41). The essential ambiguity of imagination is made plain by the fact that the freedom acquired by Adam and Eve's exercise of their *yetser* was both a liberation and a curse: "Split between his present being and his future possibilities of becoming, the First Man feels torn inside, out of joint with himself" (Kearney 1988:41).

This loss of innocence, of contentedness with being what he is, is the cost of the freedom to *become* more than he is, to make himself *other* than his given self, to imagine alternative possibilities of existence. But the curse of shame, anguish,

¹⁶⁰ Cf. the discussions by Otzen (1990:257-265) and Schmidt (1971:761-765).

labour and death which Adam's sin entails also contains an ironic blessing. In his presumptuous bid to equal God his father, the human son loses Eden and gains history" (Kearney 1988:42).

This means that *yetser* is intimately related to the freedom of human beings to narrate their being as a choice between good and evil. Thus, Kearney designates the *yetser* as a "passion for the possible" that enables human existential experience (Kearney 1988a:42; cf. Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii).¹⁶¹

The Talmud almost consistently offers a negative evaluation of the *yetser* as the "evil inclination or impulse" (יצר הרע; *yetser harah*), following the notion in Genesis 6:5 that "... every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts (*yetser*) was only evil continually."¹⁶² These negative views advocate the suppression of the imaginative impulse represented by the *yetser*. The *yetser harah* is often identified with the human corporeal nature, and especially linked with sexual desire (Kearney 1988:44).¹⁶³ In view of the focus on *concupiscentia sexualis* that we saw in Augustine's construction of original sin, it is significant that the Talmud associates bodily lust with the *yetser* due to the part it was understood to have played in Eve's disobedience and "subsequent fall into the historical order of sexual procreation and shame" (Kearney 1988a:44; cf., e.g., *Sanh.* 43b; *Gen. Rab.* 27; *Yal. Shim.* *Gen.* 44; *Ta'an.* 24a; *y. Ned.* 41b).

Rabbinic literature thus reveals a suspicion of imagination as a drive toward idolatry, coupled with a particular antagonism toward the associated bodily desire (Kearney 1988a:45). The essential ambiguity of imagination remains intact, however, since the Talmudic suppression of the *yetser* only emphasises the fact that it is God

¹⁶¹ Kearney explains the relation to existentialism: "Man's ability to project imaginatively into the future opens up an infinite horizon of possibilities. He no longer lives in the immediacy of the actual moment. And so no longer present to himself, he is cast out into the chaos of a free-floating existence. (Indeed existence as the existentialist thinkers of our own century understand it – *existere*, standing out beyond oneself in a process of endless self-surpassing – may be said to have begun with the birth of imagination. ...) The *yetser* is evil to the extent that man loses all sense of belonging or direction, living according to his own way rather than according to God's way... In short, the human imagination becomes subject to evil in that it falls victim to its own idolatrous creations. Freed from the necessity of a divinely ordered reality, the First Man faces the arbitrariness of his own imaginings" (Kearney 1998a:43).

¹⁶² Gen 6:5, "... וְכָל־יִצְרֵר מַחְשָׁבָת לְבוֹ רָק רָע בְּלִיהוּם:

¹⁶³ In his thorough study of the *yetser*, Frank Porter cautioned against the temptation, due to the influence of Hellenistic dualism, to connect the *yetser harah* to the body, and *yetser hatob* (the good inclination) to the soul, "making them expressions of the character of two equally essential parts of man. Rather it is the nature of man as a whole that is in mind, and in it the evil tendency, or disposition, dominates" (Porter 1901:109).

who created humanity with this trait, and moreover, that humanity shares this trait with the divine (Kearney 1988a:45). Biblical tradition, furthermore, attaches a twofold character to the word *yetser* as both the human form and human nature. While the first was created by God, the latter could be regarded as something which God made (e.g. Ps 103:14), or as something which the human person creates or performs (Deut 31:21; Porter 1901:108-109).

This twofold nature of the *yetser* in the OT opens the possibility of a more benign view of the imagination, found in an alternative Rabbinic tradition that Kearney calls the “tradition of integration.” A number of Talmudic passages addresses the inherent tension of imagination, attempting to integrate the evil imagination into a good imagination (Kearney 1988a:46; cf. *Ber.* 61a; *Gen. Rab.* 48, 226; cf. Otzen 1990:265).¹⁶⁴

In its admission of a fundamentally good possibility for the *yetser*, this Talmudic body of opinion suggests a more lenient logic behind God’s creation of man as a creature of imagination. According to this positive reading, imagination is deemed to be that most primordial “drive” of man which, if sublimated and oriented towards the divine way (*Talmud*), can serve as an indispensable power for attaining the goal of creation: the universal embodiment of God’s plan in the Messianic Kingdom of justice and peace (Kearney 1988a:46).

A human *yetser* that is redirected toward the fulfilment of divine will and purpose (i.e. the divine *yetser*),¹⁶⁵ may therefore become partner with God in the task of historical recreation (Kearney 1988a:47). The possibility of such co-creation may explain why, after the sixth day of creation, having just created humanity with *zir yetser*, God declares creation “very good.”

In short, if the evil imagination epitomizes the error of history as a monologue of man with himself, the good imagination (*yetser hatov*) opens up history to an I-Thou dialogue between man and his Creator (Kearney 1988a:47).

¹⁶⁴ Cf. also suggestions in the OT that the imagination may be put to “good” use, i.e. Deut 31:21; 1 Chr 28:9; 29:18; as well as the command to love and worship God with the “whole” soul (Kearney 1988:47).

¹⁶⁵ This is suggested, also, by the image of God as Potter. Of the crafts referred to in the OT with the root יָצַר, pottery occurs most often. Interestingly, these passages almost always employ יָצַר in a theological context, referring to Yahweh as Potter and implying the creative activity of Yahweh as creator of humanity (or the smashing of pottery as divine judgment). Isaiah uses the image to suggest that God’s creatures must subject themselves to divine will. “Just as the work (*yēšer*) of the potter cannot turn against its maker (*yōšēr*), so human beings cannot turn against the will of the divine Creator” (Otzen 1990:259; cf. Schmidt 1971:764).

The *yetser*, in this view, is then in itself neither good nor evil, but may become either through human choice and action (Kearney 1988:48). Humanity is advised to turn to the Torah as guide in zir efforts to submit the inclinations of the *yetser* to God's plan for creation (Kearney 1988:49). Unlike the negative interpretive view of the *yetser*, the integrative approach does not identify *yetser harah* with the body and *yetser hatob* with the soul, effectively rejecting body/soul dualism (Kearney 1988:49). Importantly,

The distinction between good and evil is seen as a moral choice rather than a physical property of being. And this emphasis on the *ethical* rather than *ontological* character of the imagination is regarded by several commentators as one of the main features which differentiate the Hebraic from the Hellenic understanding of this concept. According to this Talmudic tradition, evil does not pre-exist man, either as a form of cosmic being or as a preestablished given of his own corporeal being. Evil, like good, is seen in the context of man's ethical horizon of decision (Kearney 1988a:49).

The fundamental ethical understanding of the imagination in the Semitic world returns us, Kearney concludes, to its fundamentally historical character (Kearney 1988:49).¹⁶⁶ As it was by free choice that human imagination was made evil, the human person may also by choice make it good: "Decision for the good results in the historical realization of man's *yetser* in accordance with the plan (*yetser*) of the Original Creator (*Yoteor*)" (Kearney 1988:51, citing *B. Bat.* 16a; *Ber.* 60b).

The ethical notion of goodness is thus linked in Hebraic thought with the historical notion of becoming. In contradistinction to Hellenic culture, this reveals a preference for the historical category of becoming over the ontological category of being (Kearney 1988:51). The implication is radical: the question is not whether the human person "is" good (or evil) *per se*, but that ze "may become so," based on the free orientation of the *yetser* to either extreme. It also means that goodness is never obtained as a condition or state of existence, since it is irreducible to any single act in the present. Rather, goodness is an

... eschatological horizon which opens up the path of history as a dynamic movement towards the end (*eschaton*) or goal of perfect goodness – a goal which would only finally be realized in the arrival of the Messianic era, what

¹⁶⁶ A significant use of *yetser* in this regard pertains to God's "shaping" of history and may refer to divine purpose. Cf., e.g., Isa 46:11, where Yahweh states, concerning Cyrus' advance, "I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have planned (צִיר), and I will do it (עֲשֵׂה)" (Otzen 1990:264).

Christianity later referred to as the Coming of the Kingdom. ... Hence the Judeo-Christian teaching that goodness must not *show* itself in the sense of reducing itself to the realm of *being* here and now – for such is the way of pride and idolatry. Goodness, in the full sense, must always remain a promise, as it were *beyond being*, until the ultimate coming of the Messiah, that is, until man and God are fully reconciled at the end of time (Kearney 1988:51-52).

Greek philosophy, moulded by the Hellenic understanding of time as circular, has no notion of the faculty of the will, as Hannah Arendt points out. In contrast, the Hebraic notion of history as *creation* (both human and divine), *return* and *becoming* – as a more linear path leading from a past to a future that may be altered by human intervention – introduces the concept of free will to Greek philosophy. Nevertheless, as opposed to the Hebrew concept of the *yetser* residing in the human person's free ethical choice, Greek philosophy still only manages to consider imagination from an epistemological point of view (Kearney 1988:52; see below).

Kearney's analysis leads him to describe the Hebraic concept of imagination in terms of four fundamental properties: (i) mimetic – as a human imitation of the divine act of creation; (ii) ethical – as a choice between good and evil; (iii) historical – as a projection of future possibilities of existence; and (iv) anthropological – as an activity that differentiates humankind from both a higher (divine) order and a lower (animal) order, and that "opens up a freedom of becoming beyond the necessity of cosmic being" (Kearney 1988a:53).

Kearney's reading of *yetser* as representing the human ability to freely choose between good and evil finds its theological precedents and parallels not only in typically Semitic views of sin (cf. 3.1; 3.2), but also in the trajectory of the Greek Church Fathers that would eventually be expressed in Pelagius' view that the human condition remained – even after Adam's sin – neutral and therefore with a capacity for both good and evil – a choice which could be freely made by a "free and entirely undetermined will" (Berkhof 1969:132; cf. 4.1.1). We will return to these ideas in Chapter 6.

To conclude this section, let us note that the OT seems to suggest a difference between the creative endeavours of humanity and divinity. God is the subject of two Hebrew verbs that denote God's work of creation, where *brh* (ברַחֲ, priestly account)

describes God's initial creation of heaven and earth, and *yqr* (אֶצְרָר, non-priestly account) describes the acts of creation that follow by ordering pre-existing created elements. While the latter is used of both divine and human acts of creation or creativity, *brh* is reserved for the divine alone. This seems to imply a fundamental difference between Creator and creature:

While man may be said to legitimately imitate God as *Yotser* in so far as his creative activities express his 'good imagination' (*yetser hatov*), he cannot presume to emulate God as a Creator *ex nihilo* (*Bore*) (Kearney 1988:70).

Mimetic imagination: The Greek phantasia and the Latin tradition

The Hellenistic tradition displays a negative evaluation of the imaginary. Plato holds imagination (*eikasia*) to be an imitation of the visible world, and since the visible world is itself a mere shadow of the real (the world of forms), the imaginary is regarded with suspicion (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii). Aristotle's assessment is somewhat more positive, designating imagination (*phantasia*) as a necessary component for the process of thought, since it describes the "process by which we say that an image [*phantasma*] is presented to us" (cf. Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii). While Aristotle understands imagination as the "passage between sense experience and reason," he still follows Plato's assessment that the act of imagination is reproductive rather than productive, i.e. imitation rather than origin, and therefore regards it as typically false (Kearney 1988a:112-113, cf. Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii).

Onto-theological imagination: The medieval period

The later Latin tradition combined the Greek *phantasma* with the negative aspects of the Hebrew *yetser* (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii). Augustine¹⁶⁷ and Bonaventure, for example, add the biblical suspicion of *yetser* to the Platonic belief that the imagination is harmful to the soul's search for truth. Aquinas, for his part, who agrees with Aristotle's more balanced view of imagination as intermediary for the soul and bodily perception, nevertheless judges imagination as corruptive because it might lead to confusion between images and reality (Gratton &

¹⁶⁷ Along with sense perception and memory, Augustine considers imagination as part of the "lower" activities of the soul, as opposed to those functions that pertain to reason and knowledge (O'Connell 1990:125).

Manoussakis 2007b:xvi-xviii). Kearney calls the Christian synthesis of Greek ontology and biblical theology “onto-theological,” but less in the Heideggerian sense of metaphysics in general than in the sense of medieval Christian thought that brings together the Judeo-Christian notion of a Divine Creator and the Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics of Being (1988a:114-115).

Productive imagination: The modern period

Modernism moved away from the Greek and Classic reproductive understanding of the imaginary (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii):

From the rationalist (Descartes and Malebranche) and empiricist (Hobbes, Locke, and Hume) traditions to the productive or creative power of the imagination in Kant, German idealism, and especially the nineteenth-century Romantics, the imagination was no longer tethered to reality as sense perceptions (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xvii).

A marked affirmation of man’s creative power most distinguishes modern views of imagination from its various antecedents (Kearney 1988a:155). The mimetic paradigm, that sees imagination as an intermediary agency that at best imitates some truth external to man, is replaced in modern times by the productive paradigm that makes imagination the immediate source of its own truth:

Now imagination is deemed capable of inventing a world out of its human resources, a world answerable to no power higher than itself. Or to cite the canonical metaphor, the imagination ceases to function as a mirror reflecting some external reality and becomes a lamp which projects its own internally generated light onto things. As a consequence of this momentous reversal of roles, meaning is no longer primarily considered as a transcendent property of divine being; it is now hailed as a transcendental product of the human mind (Kearney 1988a:155).

Kant and the German idealists (late 18th and 19th century) provided the theoretical impetus for the rise of the productive imagination in the romantic and existentialist movements.¹⁶⁸ Disillusionment was bound to set in, however, after the

¹⁶⁸ Kearney explains, “This was achieved, first, by demonstrating that imagining was not merely a ‘reproduction’ of some given reality (the fallacy of imitation) but an original ‘production’ of human consciousness; second, by showing that the image was not a static ‘thing’ (*res*) deposited in memory (the fallacy of reification) but a dynamic creative act; and third, by establishing that the image was not just a mediating courier between the divided spheres of the lower ‘body’ and the higher ‘soul’ (the fallacy of dualism), but an inner transcendental unity which resists this very duality. In thus denouncing the traditional interpretations of the image as *reproduction*, *reification* and *dualism*, the

extravagant claims for man's creative power in idealism and romanticism. The subsequent recession of imagination seemed to mean that the creative imagination could survive only as a recluse. While it could continue forming images, any attempt to transform reality seemed hopeless (Kearney 1988a:185). As Kearney states, "(t)he collapse of imagination's dream before the encroaching realities of historical existence, is the point where romantic idealism ends and existentialism begins" (1988a:188).

Distancing itself from the abstract affirmations of transcendental idealism, existentialism "explodes the monadic isolation of the transcendental 'I'" (Kearney 1988a:200). It rebukes the optimism of speculative idealism and proclaims the tragic consequences of human life left to its own devices (Kierkegaard). It declares truth an illusion, and elevates acceptance of the arbitrary and perpetual cycle of existence as the greatest act of individual courage (Nietzsche). With Sartre and the 20th century existentialists, the affirmative cult of imagination is definitively inverted when he pushes the humanist premise of romantic idealism to its absurd extreme, namely that the human act of self-creation is void of foundation or purpose (Kearney 1988a:200).

Furthermore, Sartre realised that the existential imagination's will to absolute autonomy resulted in each individual's imprisonment in its own self. The life of pathological negation to which the existential imagination was bound, ruled out the possibility of ethical commitment to others. In *Being and nothingness*, Sartre described how all attempts at ethical relations result in either sadism (the free subject negating the other as an unfree object) or masochism (the subject surrendering his freedom and submitting to the negating will of the other). While indifference is the only alternative to this intersubjective dialectic between sadism and masochism, Sartre realises that the human imagination can never remain completely indifferent to the existence of others (Kearney 1988a:247). He, then,

... failed to reconcile the conflicting claims of an existentialist imagination and a humanist ethics. The choice which Sartre ultimately faced was between the sovereign nothingness of an isolated imagination and the affirmation of a collective commitment to revolutionary action. By ostensibly opting for the latter,

modern philosophers hailed imagination as the power of the human subject to create a world of original value and truth. Man could now declare his autonomy from all given being. Meaning no longer required the orthodox mediations of reality to prove itself. It became its own guarantee – the immediate invention of imagination" (Kearney 1988a:156).

Sartre no doubt believed that he could give a second wind to the beleagured project of humanism. And even though Sartre himself never explicitly admitted as much, his arguments all point to the same unavoidable conviction: the existentialist imagination must die for humanist man to live on... (Kearney 1988a:248).

Parodic imagination: The postmodern period

Postmodernism has questioned both the reproductive and the productive models of the imaginary. Both the linguistic turn and the “death of man” has contributed to this contemporary suspicion – the former because it has taught us that we do not think wholly in terms of images, and the latter because “the idea of a human being as the center of creativity has fallen out of favor...” (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xviii). Outside philosophy proper, the omnipresent digital media with its reproduction-to-infinity of images that are always already a reproduction of another image has suspended a question mark over the distinction between image and reality:

In this way, there is no original meaning behind any image, let alone a meaning centered in a self-present subject, and each image refers only to other images in a disseminated field of imagery (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xviii).

In an age in which the image reigns supreme, it is interesting to note that imagination is not accorded the same privileged place in contemporary philosophy. The Graphic Revolution has contributed to both the demise of the creative humanist imagination and its replacement by a depersonalised consumer system of pseudo-images, resulting in a transformation of our ability to construct, preserve and communicate images. In the face of the technological innovations in image reproduction, the imaginary has become more persuasive than the real world (Kearney 1988a:252).

To this crisis of the imaginary, Kearney sees modern philosophies reacting in a variety of ways, but with the central feature that they undermine the humanist understanding of imagination as an “original” creation of meaning. Denying the very idea of origin, they deconstruct meaning into an endless play of linguistic signs that relate to each other in parodic circles with no possibility of a single founding reference (Kearney 1988a:252-253). Without the concept of *origin*, the concept of imagination itself collapses, for whether situated outside or inside a person,

imagination has always presupposed the idea that our images have derived from some original presence (Kearney 1988a:253):

While the premodern paradigm was expressed by the metaphor of the *mirror* (which reflected the light of a transcendental origin beyond itself), and the modern by the metaphor of the *lamp* (which projected an original light from within itself), the post-modern paradigm is typified by the metaphor of the *looking glass* – or to be more precise, of an interplay between multiple looking glasses which reflect each other interminably. The postmodern paradigm is, in other words, that of a labyrinth or mirrors which extend infinitely in all directions – a labyrinth where the image of the self (as a presence to itself) dissolves into self-parody (Kearney 1988a:253).

In its own curious way, then, postmodern philosophies of imagination return us to the *mimesis* model, but in the form of an inversion and a self-parody. Instead of an imitation of some pre-existing truth, we are now concerned with an imitation of an imitation that offers no access and bears no witness to some original beyond it.

5.2.2 A hermeneutic retrieval of imagination¹⁶⁹

Kearney is concerned that talk about the demise of the human imagination may fuel a kind of apocalyptic pessimism that will accelerate the end of humanity itself. Indeed, postmodernism may eclipse the potential of human experience for liberation, and by its rejection of narrative coherence and identity, may abandon “the emancipatory practice of imagining alternative horizons of existence (remembered or anticipated)” (1988a:30, 359). In view of these risks, Kearney’s approach to postmodernism is no mere afterthought to modernity (1988a:27), but is an occasion to reflect upon the inner breakdown of modernity (1988a:26). This explains his treatment of a postmodern imagination as envisioning “the end of modernity as a possibility of rebeginning” (1988a:27).

While Kearney fully endorses ridding imagination of the more naïve aspects of humanism (such as the confidence in the inevitability of historical progress and its elevation of and hope in the idealist subject), he warns that we should not let such healthy criticism deteriorate into “denying the creative subject any role whatsoever in the shaping of history. Deconstruction too has its limits and must acknowledge them” (Kearney 1988a:360).

¹⁶⁹ This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney’s thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:78-80).

Kearney suggests a way forward through proposing a model of a poetical-ethical imagination. He refuses a nostalgic return to the paradigms of either onttheology or humanism, and proposes a postmodern imagination that is capable of preserving, through reinterpretation, the functions of both narrative identity and creativity (what he calls a poetics of the possible). Such a postmodern imagination would move beyond humanism, but would remain faithful to its humanitarian intentions. It would seek to incorporate the lessons learned from the excesses of both the *premodern tendency* to “repress human creativity in the name of some immutable cause which jealously guards the copyright of ‘original’ meaning,” and the *modern tendency* to “overemphasize the sovereign role of the autonomous individual as sole source of meaning” (1988a:32-33). The postmodern imagination will enter into “the labyrinth of parody and play” and dispossess itself of inherited certainties. In this way, it will create the possibility that, at the heart of the labyrinth, it may explore “possibilities of an *other* kind of *poiesis* – alternative modes of inventing alternative modes of existence” (1988a:33):

Disinherited of our certainties, deprived of any fixed point of view, are we not being challenged by such images to open ourselves to *other* ways of imagining? Is our bafflement at the dismantling of any predictable relationship between image and reality not itself an occasion to de-centre our self-possessed knowledge in response to an otherness which surpasses us: a sort of *kenosis* whereby our subjective security empties itself out, dispossesses itself for the sake of something else? Might we not surmise here an ethical summons lodged at the very heart of our postmodern culture? And also a poetic summons: to see that imagination continues to playfully create and recreate even at the moment it is announcing its own disappearance? (Kearney 1988a:397).

Kearney’s call for a hermeneutic retrieval of imagination therefore does not reveal ignorance of historical and philosophical changes, for he is suspicious of traditional mimetic theories of imagination that appeal to either a referent or the autonomous subject (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xviii-xix). His “third way” – that of diacritical hermeneutics seeking out a middle path between the extremes of the Romantic individual and the nihilist versions of the postmodern – acknowledges “that the subject is already a stranger to itself, while remaining attuned to the ethical implications of the narrative imagination” (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xix). Kearney is not convinced that the media culture means the death of imagination, and suggests that the radical contemporary changes in media technologies “may actually

open up novel modes of storytelling quite inconceivable in our former cultures” (Kearney 2001:11). For Kearney, then, the subject is not powerless in the face of technological sign systems (Gratton & Manoussakis 2007b:xix).

5.2.3 *An ethical imagination*¹⁷⁰

In the midst of the postmodern play of indeterminate networks endlessly reflecting each other, the other that the individual or the collective group faces in a concrete historical situation, demands an ethical response (Kearney 1988a:361). Even if the epistemological status of the face of the other may remain undecidable, we may still – and should – acknowledge that we are being addressed by an other on an ethical level (Kearney 1988a:362).

But this primacy of the ethical response is not without its critical requirements, for a lack of critical discrimination that decides the difference between the face of a dictator and that of a slave, means that our ethical response might be manipulated for unethical purposes (Kearney 1988a:362-363). For this reason, Kearney proposes a radical reinterpretation of the role of imagination as a relationship between the self and the other as a fitting response to the postmodern dilemma (Kearney 1988a:363). But, lest deconstructionism degenerate into “an apocalyptic nihilism of endless mirror-play,” it must remain subject to (ethical) critique due to our (ethical) respect for the other (Kearney 1988a:364).

5.2.4 *A poetical imagination*¹⁷¹

An ethical imagination must give full expression to its poetic potential if it is to resist degenerating into “censorious puritanism or nostalgic lamentation” (Kearney 1988a:366). To ensure that it is ethical in a liberating way, the imagination needs to play – in the broad sense of “inventive” making and creating entailed by the word *poiesis* (Kearney 1988a:366). Kearney illustrates how the imagination in both its premodern and modern variations has always maintained some link between the claims of the ethical and the poetical. The postmodern imagination needs to explore this relationship, because it must be equally able to laugh as to suffer with the other (1988a:366-367). The postmodern paradigm of play, often used by

¹⁷⁰ This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney’s thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:80-81).

¹⁷¹ This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney’s thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:81-83).

deconstructionism in its negative apocalyptic aspects, may now be positively construed “as tokens of the poetical power of imagination to transcend the limits of egocentric, and indeed anthropocentric, consciousness – thereby exploring different possibilities of existence” (Kearney 1988a:367).

It is this aspect of poetry – allowing oneself to be imagined in another’s skin – that ties the poetical imagination to its ethical counterparts, for it empowers us to identify with the marginalised and to refuse “the condescending intolerance of the elite towards the preterite, the saved towards the damned” (Kearney 1988a:369). The space of the other that the ethical imagination safeguards may thus be seen as precondition to the poetical imagination, for otherness is essential to both the life of *pōesis* and that of *ethos* (Kearney 1988a:369):

Seen in this way, ethics and poetics open us to the otherness of the other in two different but complementary ways (Kearney 1988a:369-370). By bringing us to the threshold of the other, and by exploding both the chains of imposed reality and the *imagos* that keep us bound in a spiral of self-obsession, fixation and fear, the poetical imagination releases us into a play of desire for the other and so “discloses the language of the unconscious as the desire of the other” (Kearney 1988a:370).

But here poetics must admit its limitations. At the point of actually transcending the symbolic projects of unconscious desire and encountering the other in zir otherness, the poetic imagination must defer to its ethical counterpart. The other that is disclosed through the image of the face, bids me also to move beyond desire and accept responsibility to and for the other.

If a poetics of imagination is what keeps desire alive as an interminable play of possibility, it is an ethics of imagination which distinguishes between the desire which remains imprisoned in my subjective projects and the desire which responds to the otherness of the other’s face (i.e. not the other that I envisage but the other that envisages me) (Kearney 1988a:370).

Finally, committed to exploring different possibilities of social existence, a poetic imagination must seek, *on the one hand*, to move beyond both the “humanist fallacy of wilful mastery (voluntarism) and the onto-theological fallacy of submissive obedience (quietism),” and *on the other* to oppose the “inflation of pseudo-images which paralyzes our contemporary social consciousness (consumerism)” (Kearney

1988a:370). Most effectively, the poetic imagination nourishes the conviction that things can be changed by imagining that our current reality *may be* otherwise (Kearney 1988a:370-371).

5.2.5 An ethical-poetical imagination: Moving beyond the labyrinth¹⁷²

Kearney turns to his appeal for an ethical-poetical imagination when he seeks to find a way out of the mirrored labyrinth that is postmodernism. Its discontent with a mere mapping of the postmodern logic would, he holds, guide us toward (i) an openness to the concrete needs of the other in the postmodern context, and toward (ii) exploring ways to effectively engage in the transformation of our social existence (Kearney 1988a:386-387). Furthermore, it would accept that which it stands to learn from the postmodern deconstruction of the centralised human subject, but it would do so as a *via negativa*, as a “purgation which is not an end in itself but a point of departure for something else” (Kearney 1988a:387):

After the disappearance of the self-sufficient imagination, another kind must now reappear – an imagination schooled in the postmodern truth that the self cannot be “centred” on itself; an imagination fully aware that meaning does not originate within the narrow chambers of its own subjectivity but emerges as a response to the *other*, as radical interdependence (Kearney 1988a:387).

Sketching such radical interdependence as a source of meaning suggests, by implication, that alienation need not speak the last word in our society, and that after the *impasse* of choice, we may “eventually decide for a practice of imagination capable of responding to the postmodern call of the other reaching towards us from the mediated image” (Kearney 1988a:387).

While deconstructionism may object, on the basis of the indeterminate nature of the representational relationship between the image and its original, Kearney insists that epistemological undecidability does not necessitate ethical undecidability:

Perhaps we have to renounce the traditional habit of establishing ethical judgements upon epistemological foundations. For even where epistemological distinctions no longer seem available, we are still compelled to make ethical distinctions (Kearney 1988a:388).

¹⁷² This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney’s thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:83-87).

If the postmodern crisis (and its sense of impending catastrophe) is interpreted ethically instead of just epistemologically, it may be seen as a protest against the inhumanity of our times. By the same line, the postmodern demystification of humanist claims for sovereign subjectivity may denote a disguised ethical demand to recognise the irreducible alterity of the other (Kearney 1988a:389). “Viewed in this light,” Kearney states that

(w)e would be in a position to say that after Virtue there is still the possibility of ethics, that after Man there is still the possibility of humanity – and more than a self-parodying post-man wandering about in an anonymous communications system devoid of real senders or addressees. But the ability to grasp such possibilities remains the task of an ethical-poetical imagination, an imagination radically de-centred in the sense of being opened to the demands of the other in the postmodern here and now (Kearney 1988a:389).

The hermeneutic, historical, and narrative tasks

The ethical-poetical imagination draws some truth from each of the perspectives on imagination that Kearney has narrated by way of the historical epochs,¹⁷³ and yet it cannot be reduced to these paradigms of mimesis (premodern), production (modern) or parody (postmodern; Kearney 1988a:389). Because the ethical status of an image does not derive from its function (mimetic, productive or parodic) but from the secondary level of reflective interpretation (where the epistemological problem arises), an ethical-poetical imagination calls for a *critical hermeneutics* that can identify the hidden interests that motivate specific interpretations of images in specific contexts (Kearney 1988a:390). Such a hermeneutic should aim at discriminating between a “liberating and incarcerating use of images” (Kearney 1988a:390). To accomplish this, imagination will need to engage hermeneutically with its own genealogy by critically reassessing its traditions and retelling its stories and reading them against the grain, “allowing repressed voices to speak out, neglected texts to get a hearing” (Kearney 1988a:390). In the diverse spiritual writings of the Judeo-Christian tradition, Kearney finds

¹⁷³ “From the *mimetic* paradigm of onto-theology it learns that imagination is always a response to the demands of an other existing beyond the self. From the *productive* paradigm of humanism it learns that it must never abdicate a personal responsibility for invention, decision and action. And from the *parodic* paradigm of its own postmodern age, it learns that we are living in a common Civilization of Images – a civilization which can bring each one of us into contact with each other even as it can threaten to obliterate the very ‘realities’ its images ostensibly ‘depict’” (Kearney 1988a:390).

evidence of what might be described as a counter-current to the official onto-theological tradition: neglected movements which highlight the positive eschatological role of imagination as the property of *homo ludens* co-creating a Kingdom with a *deus ludens* (Kearney 1988a:391).

It is just such counter-currents that Kearney re-engages hermeneutically in his *God Who May Be* project, and which he utilises as content for his post-metaphysical and ethical-poetical approach to eschatology. Because the poetico-ethical imagination is capable of envisioning what things were like before, and might be like after postmodernism, it is fundamentally *historical*. It resists the grave error of anti-historical postmodernism to “neglect the hermeneutic task of imaginative recollection and anticipation,” and instead critically shatters the paralysing fetish of a timeless present (Kearney 1988a:392-393). By “refiguring” lost narratives from the past and “prefiguring” narratives of the future, the historical imagination aims at “transfiguring” the postmodern present. Paul Ricoeur’s “depth hermeneutic” of historical imagination therefore entails a necessary commitment to cultural memory that is able to counter the “apocalyptic aporias of postmodernism by introducing an ‘oppositional’ perspective nourished by the recollection of the struggles for a just society reaching right back to the very beginnings of Western history” (Kearney 1988a:393).

In the face of postmodern deconstructions of the ‘self,’ an ethical imagination, while remaining responsive to the demands of the other, and even out of fidelity to the other, urges the human subject to tell and retell the story of zirself (Kearney 1988a:394-395). It is the other that demands that I remain responsible, for no ethical relation can exist where there is no self to remain faithful to its promises. Ethics presupposes, then, the existence of a certain *narrative identity*:

... a Self which remembers its commitments to the other (both in its personal and collective history) and recalls that these commitments have *not yet* been fulfilled. This narrative self is not some permanently subsisting substance (*idem*). It is to be understood rather as a perpetually self-rectifying identity (*ipse*) which knows that its story, like that of the imagination which narrates it, is never complete (Kearney 1988a:395).

Because the identity of the narrative self must be ceaselessly reinterpreted by imagination, narrative identity (as opposed to the permanent “sameness” of egological identity), implies and includes change and alteration within selfhood. As the narrating self reinterprets zir own story in relation to larger narratives transmitted

by cultural memory, the notion of personal identity is enlarged to encapsulate communal identity, so that “(t)he self and the collective mutually constitute each other’s identity by receiving each other’s stories into their respective histories” (Kearney 1988a:395-396). This implies that the poetical and ethical aspects of this narrative task suggest a political project where the imaginative self comes to recognise more clearly – by narrating zir story to the other – the unlimited nature of zir responsibility to others.

5.3 Kearney’s diacritical hermeneutics¹⁷⁴

In her essay “An ethics of memory: Promising, forgiving, yearning,” Pamela Sue Anderson remarks that making narrative sense of our lives remains crucial to human knowledge, ethics, and justice. Memory informs, but is also informed by memoirs, myths and mimetic rituals that give shape to our communal and individual lives (Anderson 2005:233). But memory, providing the constant element (what Ricoeur calls promise-keeping) in the changing nature of our narratives, also looks to the future, giving diachronical coherence to one’s past, present, and future life (Anderson 2005:234, 238). Along the same lines, when commenting on Kearney’s hermeneutical approach to the phenomenology of imagination, Masterson notes that

- (i) in the context of sacred texts and narratives this activity of creative interpretation can point back to an ‘archaeological’ foundation and/or forward to a teleological or eschatological realm of human possibility (Masterson 2008:251).

Memory is also a form of imagination (Anderson 2005:238), and it is this creative remembering and re-imagining of biblical texts that enable the possibilising of God and the kingdom in eschatological terms. For when we (individually and communally) recount our present situation in the light of past memories and future expectations, we bring about that which we begin to imagine: a kingdom of love and justice. It is now our task to investigate Kearney’s own hermeneutical approach to narratives. For this task, we turn to the first volume in Kearney’s trilogy “Philosophy at the Limit,” namely his 2002 publication, *On stories*.

It is Aristotle who first argued that storytelling provides us with a *shareable world*. In transforming random events into story, and in so doing making them

¹⁷⁴ This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney’s thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2014:76-82; 2011:67-74).

memorable over time, Kearney holds that we are ourselves transformed into full agents of our history and transitioned from a fluidity of happenings into society – a “meaningful social or political community” (Kearney 2002b:3). In introducing the self to another, we tell a story by interpreting our present condition in terms of past memories and anticipations of the future, thereby revealing a sense of the self “as a *narrative* identity that perdures and coheres over a lifetime” (Kearney 2002b:4).

While both historical and fictional narratives have a *mimetic* function, this involves much more than a mirroring of reality. *Mimesis* is fundamentally bound to *mythos* in the sense that scattered events are transformatively plotted into a new paradigm. “Narrative thus assumes the double role of *mimesis-mythos* to offer us a newly imagined way of being in the world” (Kearney 2002b:12). By seeing the world otherwise, we are purged of pity and fear through the experience of *catharsis* as we identify and empathise with acting and suffering characters in the story. And yet narrative also provides us with a form of aesthetic distance so that we find ourselves watching events unfold. By means of this conflation of empathy and detachment, narrative provides us with the necessary vision “for a journey beyond the closed ego towards other possibilities of being” (Kearney 2002b:13). For Kearney, the retelling of the past takes place as an “interweaving of past events with present readings of those events in the light of our continuing existential story” (2002b:46). This means that narrative can work for us in the present, while remaining as true as possible to the historical event (2002b:46).

The relevance of Kearney’s perspective on stories and story-telling for the present study becomes clearer as we approach his analysis of communal or national narratives. He recognises that “(h)istorical communities are constituted by the stories they tell to themselves and to others,” and that, in alignment with this fact, questions of historical revision and reinvention can be found in the genesis stories of the two major foundational cultures of Western civilisation (Graeco-Roman and biblical), both of which provide us with instances of “*nations as narrations*” (Kearney 2002b:79).

Unlike the Graeco-Roman dependence on mythologies transmitted by ancient poets, the “revealed” narratives of biblical Israel, recounted and reinterpreted by succeeding generations, complemented such stories by adding an eschatological dimension to the recollection of the ancient, founding events (Kearney 2002b:79).

Redeploying the same narrative tradition, Christianity drew from many narrations of the Christ-event to comprise the four Gospels, illustrating what Kearney calls the ultimate responsibility of historical communities for the “formation and reformation of their own identity” (2002b:80-81).

Yet a culture’s sense of constancy over time is accompanied by an “intendant imperative of *innovation*” that springs from the openness and indeterminacy of collective memory that is the result of a nation discovering that it is an imagined community, “a narrative construction to be reinvented and reconstructed again and again” (Kearney 2002b:81). This provides a nation with the freedom of always re-imagining itself (Kearney 2002b:81). The *mimetic* function of narrative can therefore be said to refer to invention in the original sense (*invenire*), meaning both to discover and to create, or, put differently, “to disclose what is already there in the light of what is not yet (but is potentially). It is the power, in short, to re-create actual worlds as possible worlds” (Kearney 2002b:132).

These words provide us with a key with which to approach Kearney’s re-reading and reinterpretation of Biblical narratives, such as the epiphany to Moses in Exodus 3:14. We see that his probing of Biblical traditions to speak, tell and narrate themselves again in such ways as to disclose new possibilities for living is preceded by his approach to narrative in general. The result is Ricoeur’s triple *mimesis*, where we move from *prefiguring* our life-world (as it seeks to be told) to the *configuring* of the text (in the act of telling), and finally to the *refiguring* of our existence (as we return from narrative text to action; Kearney 2002b:133).

Toward the closing of *On stories*, Kearney concludes with a look at the ethical role of storytelling. Most significantly in this respect, stories as a mode of discourse enable “the ethical sharing of a common world with others” (Kearney 2002b:150). It is precisely the interplay of agency that grants us the sense of narrative identity without which a particular experience of selfhood, indispensable to any kind of moral responsibility, would be impossible (Kearney 2002b:151). For a sense of self-identity stretching, on the one hand, across a lifetime of past, present and future and, on the other hand, across a communal history of predecessors, contemporaries and successors, will prove vital if the moral agent is to be capable of making and keeping promises (Kearney 2002b:151). The act of telling our life-story to both ourselves and

others provides us with a sense of selfhood – “a sense of being a ‘subject’ capable of acting and committing ourselves to others” (Kearney 2002b:151).

Against the postmodern tendency to overemphasise textual indeterminacy and anonymity challenges (and against the political paralysis that results from eradicating the subject), Kearney emphasises the intrinsically interactive nature of storytelling. He proposes that a model of narrative selfhood is able to satisfy anti-humanist suspicions of subjectivity without obliterating the possibility of the ethical-political subject:

The best response to this crisis of self is not, I believe, to revive some foundationalist notion of the person as substance, *cogito* or *ego*. ... A far more appropriate strategy, I suggest, is to be found in a philosophical model of narrative which seeks to furnish an alternative model of self-identity. Namely, the narrative identity of a person, presupposed by the designation of a proper name, and sustained by the conviction that it is the same subject who perdures through its diverse acts and words between birth and death. The story told by a self about itself tells about the action of the ‘who’ in question: and the identity of this ‘who’ is a narrative one. This is what Ricoeur calls an *ipse*-self of process and promise, in contrast to a fixed *idem*-self, which responds only to the question ‘what?’. In sum, I would wager that no matter how cyber, digital or intergalactic our world becomes, there will always be human selves to recite and receive stories. And these narrative selves will always be capable of ethically responsible action (Kearney 2002b:152).

To the extent that what we consider communicable and memorable corresponds to what we value, storytelling is never neutral (Kearney 2002b:154). But even if we deploy our own ethical presuppositions whenever we respond to a story, the fact that we always have something to respond to confirms that the story is confined neither to the mind of its author, nor to that of its reader, nor to the action of its narrated actors. Instead, the story comes into existence in the playfield between these influences, and the fact that the outcome is therefore never final explains narrative’s “open-ended invitation to ethical and poetic responsiveness” (Kearney 2002b:156).

Another aspect significant to Kearney’s hermeneutics is his understanding of the function of metaphor in religious texts. In this regard, he borrows “liberally” from Ricoeur’s notion of “semantic augmentation”: the “surplus of meaning” that may result from inventive hermeneutic readings of religious texts, giving rise to a “rich

play of metaphoricity" (2001:7).¹⁷⁵ Contrary to the narrowly Platonising use of allegory, where meaning is transferred only vertically from the sensible to the intelligible, and from the human to the divine, Ricoeur's new model of religious hermeneutics regains some of the original etymological charge of metaphor as *metaphora* (to transfer, transit, carry across), so that the production of metaphorical meaning becomes a two-way movement – "like Jacob's ladder with angels passing up and down" (Kearney 2001:7).

The sheer diversity of ways for metaphorising in religious texts (which Kearney illustrates by discussing Ricoeur's analysis of the desire of God in Song of Songs), points to the fact that none can claim superiority to the other, and that it is precisely from "the productive friction of the 'intersignification' that some transfer (*metaphora*) of meaning is eventually, if always tentatively, achieved" (Kearney 2001:8). Greater awareness of the fertile metaphorical interplay at work in religious texts enables the hermeneutic retrieval of certain lost meanings "within and between (*metaxy*) the texts themselves" (2001:8).

¹⁷⁵ Proceeding from the work of German hermeneutic thinkers such as Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer, Ricoeur "elaborated a complex set of enquiries into what he called the enigma of 'semantic innovation'. How does new meaning come to be, and, in doing so, reconfigure the meanings of the past? This fundamental hermeneutic question is based on the thesis that existence is itself a mode of interpretation (*hermeneia*), or, as the hermeneutic maxim goes: *Life interprets itself*. But where Heidegger concentrated directly on a fundamental ontology of interpretation, Ricoeur advances what he calls the 'long route' of multiple hermeneutic detours. This brought him into dialogue with the human sciences, where philosophy discovers its limits in what is outside of philosophy, in those border exchanges where meaning traverses the various signs and disciplines in which Being is interpreted by human understanding. Ricoeur thus challenged Heidegger's view that Being is accessible through the 'short route' of human existence (*Dasein*) which understands itself through its own possibilities; he argued instead that the meaning of Being is always mediated through an endless process of interpretations – cultural, religious, political, historical and scientific. Hence Ricoeur's basic definition as the 'art of deciphering *indirect meaning*' (Kearney 2004a:1). Texts are not, however, enclosed in a prison house of language games. Ricoeur advances a hermeneutic dialectic that "passes through the detour of the text in the name of something beyond it – what he calls the 'matter of the text,'" and that brings us to the ontological potential of a text: "the ontological horizon of world-meaning opened up by the textual workings of language" (Kearney 2004a:4): "This ultimate reference – to a world not merely represented by the text but disclosed by the text – brings us beyond epistemology to ontology. Thus the ultimate horizon of Ricoeur's work remains, from beginning to end, the horizon of being which signals to us obliquely and incompletely: a promised land but never an occupied one. We encounter here a truncated ontology – provisional, tentative, exploratory. And this limitation on the pretensions of speculative reason signals for Ricoeur a renunciation of Hegel and all other versions of systematic closure. The interpretation of being is always something begun, but never completed (Kearney 2004a:4)."

For Kearney the theological value of this “metaphorizing role of hermeneutic mediation” lies in the fact that it steers a middle way through the apophatic¹⁷⁶ and cataphatic¹⁷⁷ approaches to God. Traversing this frontier zone where the human imagination uses stories, parables and images to think the unthinkable and to say something about the unsayable, Kearney attempts to navigate a third way between the poles of negative and onto-theology. Here God is not approached as being or as non-being, but as the possibility-to-be, and where the intersecting of metaphors discloses latent and new meaning (Kearney 2001:8).

We may now focus on Kearney’s proposed diacritical hermeneutics. It is important for him to navigate between *romantic*¹⁷⁸ and *radical*¹⁷⁹ hermeneutics – an approach which he terms “*diacritical hermeneutics*” (2003a:17). Kearney thus opts for a middle way that is, in his view, actually “more radical and challenging” (Kearney 2003a:18). With specific reference to the way Kearney’s diacritical hermeneutics plays out in his *God Who May Be* project, Nichols gives good expression of the hermeneutic mark that Kearney sets for himself:¹⁸⁰

This is an enormous task for thinking, and ... this new dialectic has raised the bar for hermeneutic discourse one new level, both forbidding and demanding a

¹⁷⁶ The apophatic tradition, with its negative theologians like Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius, Levinas, Derrida, and Marion, “stresses the impossibility of saying anything meaningful about God,” so that God is placed too far beyond being (Kearney 2001:8).

¹⁷⁷ The cataphatic tradition risks embracing overly positive or foundationalist propositions when talking about God, so that God is sometimes reduced to being – “either as the most general or highest being: *ontos on – theion*” (Kearney 2001:8).

¹⁷⁸ By “romantic hermeneutics,” Kearney means “the view – endorsed by Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer – that the purpose of philosophical interpretation is to unite the consciousness of one subject with that of the other. This process is called ‘appropriation’ which in the German, *Aneignung*, means *becoming one with*.” For all three of these proponents, “the purpose of hermeneutic understanding was to recover some lost original consciousness” – For Schleiermacher the original message of the Kerygma, for Dilthey some kind of objective knowledge about the past, for Gadamer a fusion of horizons between ourselves and strangers – “by way of rendering what is past contemporaneous with our present modes of comprehension” (Kearney 2003a:17).

¹⁷⁹ Kearney describes “radical hermeneutics” with reference to Caputo’s rejection of the “model of appropriation, insisting on the unmediatable and ultimately ‘sublime’ nature of alterity” – an approach inspired by the deconstructive turn of Derrida, Blanchot and Lyotard. “To this end Caputo promotes the ‘hyperbolic hypothesis’ of Levinas and Derrida, defined as an ‘unphenomenological model’ in which ‘an invisible infinity comes over me and demands everything of me, the food out of my mouth’ – a new model ‘for the friend and for politics, which have always been understood in *egalitarian* terms’. In this light, radical hermeneutics invokes an irreducible dissymmetry of self and other” (Kearney 2003a:17).

¹⁸⁰ Nichols suggests, however, “to those who enter the orbit of Kearney’s discourse that his diacritical hermeneutics, despite the attempt to remain ‘in between’ romantic and radical hermeneutics, must necessarily lean more closely to the romantic side if it is to retain the possibility of having a *real* God-who-may-be. One could even say that diacritical hermeneutics *is* a version of romantic hermeneutics, but one that strives with incessant vigilance to remember its own potential for violent domination” (Nichols 2006:125).

resolution at the same time. When Kearney at times seems to fall to one side or the other in his attempt to define a radically new, yet comfortingly old, conception of God, we must with due charity recognize the virtual impossibility of his task, as well as that this is in fact the vanguard of thinking in the postmodern situation, and hence we are led down this new path with a sense of urgency and necessity, happy that a rough-hewn path has begun to emerge from the thickets and brambles (Nichols 2006:115).

It is doubtful whether Kearney would concede anything lying beyond hermeneutics. In fact, his whole phenomenologico-hermeneutical exploration of the *God Who May Be* is best understood as an attempt to poetically say the unsayable and thus engage the radical schools of thought that emphasise the otherness of alterity to the point where it becomes irredeemably strange. Kearney engages hermeneutically the textual treasure chest of the Judeo-Christian tradition, as well as works of literature, with the freedom that his philosophical point of departure lends him. His aim in this venture is not to suggest a final or even authoritative interpretation, but rather to engage poetically in an act of reinterpretation, or, more aptly, re-imagination – an act that can be described as applying Ricoeur’s “semantic innovation” and “surplus of meaning” in the field of Philosophy of Religion.

5.4 Kearney’s phenomenology of the Other¹⁸¹

The problematic of the other is the question of how to “think and speak of the Other *on the Other’s terms*, that is, without reducing otherness to a reflection of the Same – while, at the same time, being able to think and speak of the Other without falling into a sort of apophatic mysticism of the ineffable” (Manoussakis 2006a:xviii). Kearney’s approach to this dilemma is to seek a middle way between the unmediated, uncritical rapport with the Other (Levinas’ infinity, Derrida’s *différance*, Caputo’s *khora*) and the rigid, out-dated onto-theological and metaphysical conceptions (Manoussakis 2006a:xix). Understanding Kearney’s approach to the “Other” is not only helpful in understanding his ethics, but also provides the context and terminology to comprehend his eschatological vision. What follows is an overview of Kearney’s treatment of the problematic of the other in *The God who may be*, where he explores the theme of transfiguration in terms of a phenomenology of the *persona* – an approach in which he draws liberally from post-Heideggerian accounts of the self-other relation (Levinas, Merleau-Ponty, Kristeva, Ricoeur, Derrida) (Kearney 2001:9).

¹⁸¹ This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney’s thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:51-61).

5.4.1 *Persona: Figure of the Other*

While, for Kearney, “person” refers to others in terms of what is the same or similar (empirically, biologically, psychologically, etc.), he uses *persona* to denote the otherness of the other. Each person embodies a *persona*, which he understands as “that eschatological aura of ‘possibility’ which eludes but informs a person’s actual presence here and now” (Kearney 2001:10):

At a purely phenomenological level, *persona* is all that in others exceeds my searching gaze, safeguarding their inimitable and unique singularity. It is what escapes me toward another past that I cannot recover and another future I cannot predict. It resides, if it resides anywhere, beyond my intentional horizons of re-tention and pro-tention. The *persona* of the other outstrips both the presenting consciousness of my *perception* here and now and the presentifying consciousness of my *imagination* (with its attempts to see, in the mode of *as-if*, that which resists perceptual intuition). The *persona* of the other even defies the names and categories of *signifying* consciousness. It is beyond consciousness *tout court*. Though this “beyondness” is, curiously, what spurs language to speak figuratively about it, deploying imagination and interpretation to overreach their normal limits in efforts to grasp it – especially in the guise of metaphor and narrative (Kearney 2001:10).

The self cannot encounter another without configuring them in some way, and to configure another as a *persona* implies the paradox of configuration: “to grasp him/her as present in absence, as both incarnate in flesh and transcendent in time” (Kearney 2001:10). This paradox must be accepted, for to refuse it is to regard another as pure presence (thing), or pure absence (nothing), and thus to disfigure the other (Kearney 2001:10).

5.4.2 *Persona as eschaton*

In contrast to the fictitious totalities whereby we often respond to the enigma of *persona* as presence-absence (Kearney 2001:11), the eschatological notion of *persona* allows the irreducible finality of the other as *eschaton*,¹⁸² reminding us that we have no power over zir (Kearney 2001:12). Once we confront this primary disablement in front of another, it is the other who re-enables us (Kearney 2001:12). With the *eschaton* as *persona*, Kearney refers to the future possibilities of the other

¹⁸² *Eschaton* should here not be confused with *telos* “(i.e. a fulfillable, predictable, foreseeable goal)” (Kearney 2001:12). Instead, Kearney understands *eschaton* here “precisely in the sense of an end without end – an end that escapes and surprises us, like a thief in the night – rather than some immanent teleological closure” (Kearney 2001:12).

which I am unable to realise, grasp, or possess: the “vertical ‘may-be’ of the other” that “is irreducible to *my* set of possibilities or powers: my “can-be” (Kearney 2001:12). Appropriating the other’s *persona* would rob the other of zir otherness, temporality, futurity and alterity (Kearney 2001:12). For the absence of the other refers to a temporal absence – the sense in which “we might say that my *persona* is both younger and older than my person – pre-existing and post-existing the seizure of myself as presence (qua sum of totalisable properties). The *persona* is always already there and always still to come” (Kearney 2001:12). The *persona* is there where there is no one, and takes the place of the no-place without itself taking place:

Yet it does *give place* to the person and without it the person could not take its place. It is the non-presence that allows presence to happen in the here and now as a human person appearing to me in flesh and blood. It is, in short, the quasi-condition of the other remaining other to me even as s/he stands before me in this moment. But however non-present it is, *persona* is not to be understood as some impersonal anonymous presence (i.e., a Monarchian *deus absconditus*). Nor is it to be taken as a merely formal condition of possibility (Kant); nor indeed as some archaic and formless receptacle (Plato’s and Derrida’s *khora*). *Persona* is always inseparable from *this* person of flesh and blood, here and now (Kearney 2001:13).

5.4.3 Beyond fusion

The *persona* refuses to be turned into an alter ego – into some version of me by which I can quench my desire to grasp it or to fuse with it (Kearney 2001:13-14). And against the fusionary sameness of the onto-theological relation of “one-for-one,” or “the one-for-itself-in-itself,” Kearney proposes the “eschatological universality of the Other” (2001:15). Insofar as this notion of the universal envisions a possible co-existence of unique *personas* where their transcendence is secured, it is more ethical. And insofar as such an ethical universal remains an eschatological possibility that calls at us from the future, it resists contentment with the accomplished and instead creates “a sense of urgency and exigency, inviting each person to strive for its instantiation, however partial and particular, in each given situation” (Kearney 2001:15). Kearney proceeds to express this by means of the patristic metaphors of trinitarian discourse:

(T)he eschatological universal holds out the promise of a perichoretic interplay of differing *personas*, meeting without fusing, communing without totalizing, discoursing without dissolving. A sort of divine *circum in(c/s)essio* of the

Trinitarian kingdom: a no-place which may one day be and where each *persona* cedes its place to its other (*cedere*) even as they sit down together (*sedere*). The Latins knew what they were about when they played on the semantic ambidexterity of the *c/s* as alternative spellings of the phonetically identical root term *cessio/sessio*. They knew about the bi-valent promise of *personas* as both there and not there, transcendent and immanent, visible and invisible (Kearney 2001:15-16).

In the same way that the *eschaton* is a promise (not an acquisition), a possibility of a new future (but impossible in the present where “the allure of total presence risks reigning supreme”), the eschatological *persona* also defies my power and transfigures me before I can configure it. By acknowledging the asymmetrical priority to the other, that particular *persona* transfigures me and empowers me to transfigure in turn, to “figure the other in their otherness” (Kearney 2001:16).

5.4.4 Persona as chiasm

With the *persona* superseding all presentations and representations that seek to capture it as intuitive adequation, the *persona* can be said to surpass phenomenology that is understood in the sense of an “eidetics of intentional consciousness,” and strives toward a “rigorous science of transcendental immanence.” For this reason, the phenomenon of the *persona* calls for a new or quasi-phenomenology which, Kearney suggests, is mobilised more by ethics than by eidetics (Kearney 2001:16). As a quasi-figure that appears as if it was an appearance, the *persona* of the other “announces a difference which differentiates itself ad infinitum” (Kearney 2001:17).

Persona is infinitely premature and invariably overdue, always missed and already deferred. *Persona* comes to us as a chiasmus or crossover with person ... Which is why we cannot think of the time of the *persona* except as an immemorial beginning (before the beginning) or an unimaginable end (after the end). That is precisely its eschatological stature – the messianic achronicity which breaks open the continuous moment-by-moment time of everyday chronology. ... It marks a time that is always *more*, remaindered, excessive, sabbatical, surplus. And yet this extra-time reveals itself in time, in what Walter Benjamin called the *Jetzzeit* – the incursion of the eternal in the moment (Kearney 2001:17).

The time of the *eschaton* is therefore best explained as anti-clockwise, or even post-clockwise, in that the *persona* remains forever anterior and posterior to its manifestations, so baffling all cognitive attempts at understanding it (Kearney

2001:17). It is for this reason (the *persona* never being there on time, or never adequately there at all) that Kearney suggests that *persona* is literally *personne*:

It is *no-one*, if *some-one* means a person who is phenomenally symmetrical to me. But it is *this* one and no one but *this* one, if my neighbor appears to me eschatologically, defying the *as-if* figurations by means of which I try to tell its story. For the *persona* is always other than the other-for-me here and now. It is the figure which transfigures by absenting itself as *personne* in the very moment that it hails and holds me (Kearney 2001:17).

This calls for us to view the other as an icon for “the passage of the infinite,” but without construing the infinite as another being of some kind hiding behind the other. For *persona* is the “in-finite other in the finite person before me” (Kearney 2001:17). If we refer to this *persona* as the sign of God, it is because there is no other that is in such a way both bound to but irreducible to this embodied person. It is not the idolatry of seeing the other person as divine, but it is about the divine (as trace, icon, visage, passage) in and through that person (Kearney 2001:18).

5.4.5 Persona as prosopon

Kearney uses the term *prosopopoeic substitution* in a phenomenological and ethical sense to refer to “the otherness of the other in and through the flesh-and-blood person here before me. Trans-cendence in and through, but not reducible to, immanence. *Prosopon* is the face of the other who urgently solicits me, bidding me answer in each concrete situation, ‘here I am’” (Kearney 2001:18).

It is telling that, in the original Greek usage, where *prosopon* refers to the face of a person facing another, revealing itself from within itself, the term appears almost always as a plural noun, suggesting that the “*prosopon-persona* can never really exist on its own (*atomon*), but emerges in ethical relation to others,” so that it can be said to be “radically intersubjective, invariably bound up in some ethical vis-à-vis or face-to-face” (Kearney 2001:18).

Reinterpreted hermeneutically from a post-Levinasian perspective, one can see just how appropriately this Greek-Latin pair of *prosopon-persona* may serve to translate the Judeo-Christian primacy of ethics. It perfectly captures the double sense of someone as both proximate to me in the immediacy of connection and yet somehow ineluctably distant, at once incarnate and otherwise, inscribing the trace of an irreducible alterity in and through the face before me (Kearney 2001:18).

This paradoxical phenomenon, Kearney calls *prosopon-transfiguration*, which we allow, finally, to transfigure us (Kearney 2001:18). And therefore he proposes that we prefer icons over idols. For the counter-tradition of eschatology challenges the priority granted to being over the good by the tradition of onto-theology. For in the eschatological approach to the other, the good of the *persona* takes precedence over my drive to be and holds it to account, even caring for it where possible:

Against Heidegger I say: it is not our being that cares for itself, as being-toward-death, but the good of the *persona* that cares for being, as promise of endless rebirth. Natality transfigures mortality. Openness to the *persona* of the neighbor in each instant is, as Matthew 25 reminds us, the ultimate in eschatological awareness. And so we find ourselves, on foot of the above analysis, at the threshold of a phenomenology of religion (Kearney 2001:19).

5.5 Post-metaphysical God-talk: Kearney's God Who May Be¹⁸³

Pointing out the latent eschatological meaning of four biblical texts in the light of contemporary phenomenological, hermeneutic and deconstructive debates,¹⁸⁴ Kearney challenges the classic metaphysical view that possibility is something that needs to be eliminated from the divine, and indeed proposes that divinity's very "potentiality-to-be" is in fact the most divine thing about it (2001:2).

God neither is nor is not but may be. That is my thesis in this volume. What I mean by this is that God, who is traditionally thought of as act or actuality, might better be rethought as possibility. To this end I am proposing here a new hermeneutics of religion which explores and evaluates two rival ways of interpreting the divine – the *eschatological* and the *onto-theological*. The former, which I endorse, privileges a God who possibilizes our world from out of the future, from the hoped-for eschaton which several religious traditions have promised will one day come (Kearney 2001:1)

The *God Who May Be* is closely tied to Kearney's interpretation of the kingdom, which is – in the case of the God of *posse*¹⁸⁵ – never imposed or declared already accomplished from the beginning. Instead, it is by opening ourselves to the transfiguring power of transcendence that the *God Who May Be* offers each person

¹⁸³ This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney's thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2014:31-32, 41-53; 2011:50-51) for a more extensive analysis.

¹⁸⁴ The accounts of the burning bush (Exod 3), the transfiguration on mount Tabor (Matt 17:1-13/Mark 9:2-13/Luke 9:28-36), the Shulamite's Song (from the Song of Songs), and the promise to make the impossible possible (Matt 19:26/Mark 10:27/Luke 18:27 [not Matt 10 as Kearney mistakenly indicates in his introduction, 2001:1]).

¹⁸⁵ Borrowing liberally from Nicholas of Cusa, Kearney calls the God of the possible the "God of *posse*" (2001:2).

the possibility of realising a promised kingdom and thus also to transfigure God in turn, “by making divine possibility ever more incarnate and alive”:

This capacity in each of us to receive and respond to the divine invitation I call *persona*. In this sense, one might even say that it is, paradoxically, by first recognizing our own powerlessness – vulnerability, fragility, brokenness – that we find ourselves empowered to respond to God’s own primordial powerlessness and to make the potential Word flesh. According to this reading, God can be God only if we enable this to happen (Kearney 2001:2).

The God of posse is in Kearney’s view passionately involved in human affairs and history, and as such is truer to the biblical God who desires and promises than to the old deity of metaphysics (Kearney 2001:2). The God who reveals zirself to Moses is not the purely ontological, abstract subsistent being that scholastic theologians assumed (“I am who am”),¹⁸⁶ but the eschatological *One Who Will Be*:¹⁸⁷ “God will be God at the eschaton. That is what is promised” (2001:3-4).¹⁸⁸ But

¹⁸⁶ Inheriting the Hebrew אָהִיא אשר אָהִיא from the Greeks as ‘Εγώ εἰμι ὁ ὄν, both Augustine, Aquinas and other early and medieval Christian theologians equated this *ego sum qui sum* with the esse of metaphysics, with the result that the original Hebrew formula came to be seen as the “highest way of saying *vere esse, ipsum esse*, that is, Being-itself, timeless, immutable, incorporeal, understood as the subsisting act of all existing” (Kearney 2001:22). From this scholastic fusion of Greek metaphysics and the Semitic religious thought reflected in Exod 3:14, resulted the idea that “Being,” as the proper name of God, gave accurate expression also of the very essence of God, and as such in the fusion of Yahweh with the Hellenistic Supreme Being: “Thus did the God of Exodus secure ontological tenure in the God of metaphysics. And this tenure has come to be known, after Heidegger, as “onto-theology”: a tendency to reify God by reducing Him to a being (*Seiende*) – albeit the highest, first, and most indeterminate of all beings” (Kearney 2001:24).

¹⁸⁷ Taking medieval Jewish commentator Rashi as hermeneutic point of departure, who translates the phrase from Exod 3:14 as “I shall be what I shall be,” and interprets this name in terms of “mandate and mission,” Kearney argues for a more dynamic interpretation of God’s self-disclosure: “The transfiguring God is not a once-off deity but one who remembers the promises of the past and remains faithful to them into the eschatological future” (Kearney 2001:25). Moses’ response to Yahweh’s calling – “here I am,” signals that the ‘name’ should be read in the context of a dynamic mandate, pointing to the divine collaboration in the coming of justice on earth (Kearney 2001:26)

¹⁸⁸ Kearney engages the important formula אָהִיא אשר אָהִיא (Exod 3:14) hermeneutically to suggest that the usual translation “I am that I am” be adjusted to “I am who may be.” The Hebrew has been translated into Greek as ‘Εγώ είμι ὁ ὄν (*ego eimi ho on*), into Latin as *ego sum qui sum*, and into a variety of English forms, with “I am who am” and “I am he who is” being the most common (Kearney 2001:22). In the recent essay where he provides an overview of the philosophical reception history of Exod 3:14 from Platonism to postmodernity, Jaco Gericke illustrates the complexity of the Exodic formula by refraining from translating the verse, noting quite correctly that “(d)oing so would mean opting for a specific philosophical interpretation...” (2012:125). He lists several of the interpretations as reflected in the translations, pointing out the complete lack of consensus regarding the metaphysical assumptions of the verse “since the commencement of philosophical interpretations about 2300 years ago. It must suffice to take cognisance of the fact that familiar interpretations include: ‘Being’ (‘I am that which is’, following the LXX), ‘active presence’ (‘I will be present’, following the Talmud), ‘creative activity’ (‘I will cause to be what I will cause to be’, following Albright); ‘emotional intensity’ (‘I am definitely here to act,’ following emphasis via repetition in Hebrew) and ‘a refusal to commit’ (‘I shall be whatever I shall be’, i.e., the deity answers by telling Moses ‘whatever’)” (Gericke 2012:125). Gericke concludes, “The reception history of the verse can thus be compared to

because this is a promise rather than a *fait accompli*, the space of the possible calls at us from the free space that it leaves gaping at the very core of divinity. For the promise remains exactly that, and nothing more, until we respond to it: The transfiguration of the possible (the kingdom) into the actual is a partnership between us and the *God Who May Be*.

The divine possibility takes its leave of being having passed through it, not into the pure ether of non-being, but into the future which awaits us as the surplus of *posse* over *esse* – as that which is more than being, beyond being, desiring always to come into being again, and again, until the kingdom comes. Here at last we may come face to face with the God who may be, the deity yet to come (Kearney 2001:4)

Kearney portrays the way in which the “Other” and the “Same,” God and humankind, transcendence and immanence can be related together, in ethical terms (Masterson 2008:258). As a response to the “deconstructionist rejection of any access by human consciousness to the radically ‘Other’ in its deepest significance” (Masterson 2008:258), Kearney

seeks to navigate an interpretation of divine otherness as an ethical appeal which escapes the dilemma of a God either so transcendent as to be anonymous or so immanent as to be a mere projection (Masterson 2008:247).

Furthermore, rejecting onto-theology in favour of eschatology,

Kearney envisages the divine as an ethically enabling possibility. This possibility, he claims, enables us to achieve, beyond our own intrinsic resources, an ethical order of justice and love through which the kingdom of God – the God Who May Be – is accomplished. There is a co-relativity between the divine as enabling possibility and humanity which accomplishes this possibility (Masterson 2008:247).

Kearney aims to work out a third way beyond the polar opposites of onto-theology and negative theology:

My wager here is that at the chiasmus where '*ehyeh* meets *einai* a seismic shift occurs – with God putting being into question just as being gives flesh to God. At this border-crossing, the transfiguring Word struggles for carnal embodiment even as it dissolves into the flaming bush of its own desire” (Kearney 2001:34).

a metaphysical spectrum with realist Platonic or Aristotelian perspectives on the right, through semi-realistic German Idealism and Jewish existentialism, to more contemporary non-realistic post-structuralist and postmodernist readings. In all this the tendency seems to be a gradual move away from the metaphysical assumptions of onto-theology” (Gericke 2012:135).

Pointing to Exodus 3:14 and the extraordinary variety of interpretations of being that the translation of the Hebrew (**אָהָי**) into the Greek (**εἰναι**) and into the Latin (**esse**) gave rise to, Kearney holds that such a plurality of interpretation “reinforces the enigmatic resonance” of the phrase, and as such guards against conceptual idolatry (Kearney 2001:35). Kearney revisits Meister Eckhart’s contribution to the Exodus debate, and finds his ontological commentaries on the Exodic phrase – seen from an eschatological perspective – to take issue with much of the problematic aspects of the ontological reading, and to, instead, “carry a presentiment of God as pure *gift* and *passage*”:

Pure gift in the sense of self-giving beyond the economic condition of return. “Being,” as Eckhart put it, “is so superior in rank and purity and so much God’s own that no one can give it but he – as he gives himself.” ... Eckhart’s own best defense against the charges of onto-theology or mystical ontologism is the reminder that he deemed the dialogue between God and being to be *provisional* rather than final (Kearney 2001:37).

Such a move beyond ontology and essentialist theology surpasses the focus on the essence of God and proceeds toward a focus on his ultimate promise – a revelation of the *transfiguring* God: “Transiting through and beyond metaphysics, God reveals himself, in keeping with his promissory note in Exodus, as a God that neither is nor is not but *may be*” (Kearney 2001:37). At this point, Kearney reads Nicholas of Cusa’s notion that God is to be understood neither as *esse*, nor as *nihil*, but as *possest*, together with Eckhart’s deconstructive reading:

Transgressing the traditional scholastic capture of God as *esse*, Cusanus redefines God as *possest* (absolute possibility which includes all that is actual). “Existence (*esse*) presupposes possibility (*posse*),” writes Cusanus, “since it is not the case that anything exists unless there is possibility from which it exists.” God alone, he concludes, “is what he is able to be.” It is arguably this same hidden intellectual heritage which resurfaces, however obscurely, in Schelling’s definition of the God of Exodus 3:14 as the “possibility to-be” (*sein wird*) or the “immediate can-be” (*unmittelbar Seyn-konnende*); or again in Heidegger’s later understanding of the gift of being as a “loving-possibilizing” (*das Vermögen des Mögens*). Indeed we may even detect distant traces of it in Derrida’s enigmatic description of the transfiguring power of the messianic *Perhaps*” (Kearney 2001:37).

Such counter-readings are what inspires Kearney’s hermeneutic of God as May-Be: an onto-eschatological hermeneutics, a poetics of the possible. But he

stresses that God remains unconditional giving and at no point becomes a conditional God. For even “if God’s future being is indeed conditional on our actions in history, God’s infinite love is not” (Kearney 2001:37).

For Kearney, God is present as transfiguring, desiring, poeticising, and possibilising, where transfiguring is something that God does to us even as we do it to God through our creations of art, justice, and love. “We bring into being, through our actions – poetical and ethical – a transfiguration of the world. It’s a human task as much as a divine gift” (2006a:371). Kearney pictures God as the possibility enabling humans to respond ethically to an eschatological call (Masterson 2008:249). A transcendent deity who is accessible to human consciousness is explored by him as a horizontally beckoning possibility of ethical achievement rather than a vertically transcendent actual supreme being (Masterson 2008:256), so that any encounter with the true God must of necessity invite humans to sensitivity and care of their neighbours (Bloechl 2006:733). From his phenomenological perspective, avoiding questions of ontology, the point of speaking of God as “possible and possibilizing *eschaton* or finality of human aspiration, who is affirmed precisely as the not yet accomplished fulfilment of ethico-religious desire,” becomes clear. God encounters humans as the ‘impossible-possible,’ “transcending yet transfiguring human capacity by enabling it to achieve a kingdom of justice and love beyond its intrinsic own resources (Masterson 2008:259). Eschatology flows back into ethics, for the God that arrives as transformative possibility from the eschatological future, turns the attention to the other persons in the world:

To know oneself as being-toward-God while or perhaps even before one is being-in-the-world is to be awakened from any thought of relating to oneself as the locus of what offers itself to comprehension; it is to be opened out into the world and to others met in the world, without immediately gathering them around oneself. It is to be liberated from a heavier materiality, though not from material concerns altogether. The surprise is grace, and grace comes as a surprise, Kearney sometimes says. This grace renders us sensitive to the other person beyond what may be contained in a material understanding (Bloechl 2006:733-734).

5.6 After unbelief: Anatheism and radical religious hospitality¹⁸⁹

While religions have certainly been the cause of much hostility in human history, Kearney is convinced that they can (and should) also be a source of hospitality and healing. This is the case no less within certain religious traditions (Kearney's focus is on the Christian faith) than across religious divides – divides that have in their own turn spurred violence, misunderstanding and war (Kearney 2008a:3). During an international meeting in Bangalore in June 2008,¹⁹⁰ focused on inter-religious imagination, the Sanskrit term *Guha* – referring to the hidden spaces in earth and heart where the human and the divine host each other as guests – came to exemplify the crossing of thresholds “back and forth, in space and time,” that characterised this meeting, embodying “a mutual traversal of wisdom traditions” (Kearney 2008a:4). During this mutual hosting, the group in Bangalore rediscovered how the very alterity of the perspective and approach of the other may result in a fresh experience of certain aspects of one’s own religious tradition, contributing in this way to the process of religious self-understanding and growth. The experience of alterity thus has the potential to not only deepen one’s own religious imagination, revealing unexpected dimensions never anticipated, but also to serve a genuine dialogue between religions (Kearney 2008a:7).¹⁹¹

Following these sentiments, Kearney starts his 2011 monograph, *Anatheism*, with an exploration of the divine Stranger – an idea that forms the core of the anatheistic movement – and identifies imagination, humour, commitment, discernment and hospitality as five components that determine our response to the divine Stranger and enables interreligious dialogue (Soulouki 2010:446).

Kearney’s focus on the imagination as a portal to inter-religious dialogue that culminates in social awareness and action is an important contribution to the theology of religions in an age where, in Kearney’s words, “religions will be inter-religious or they will not be at peace” (2008a:32). But how exactly does Kearney

¹⁸⁹ This section comprises previous overviews of Kearney’s thought. Cf. Steenkamp (2014:24-25) for a more extensive analysis.

¹⁹⁰ A special issue of *Religion and the Arts* (12 [2008]) is dedicated to these proceedings.

¹⁹¹ Indeed, Kearney states that “(l)earning to let go of our inherited fears, attachments, and securities in order to meet the stranger, the guest, the visitor, the alien, the other who knocks at our gate from another culture, country, or faith is, I wager, the most sure and subtle key to opening the door to inter-religious imagination” (Kearney 2008b:1-2).

envision the theological basis for such dialogue? Since he is certainly not exclusivist in his thinking, does that mean that he is inclusive to the point of succumbing to an uncritical New Age-type relativism that out of principle puts all religious claims on equal footing? If we consider his reference to Fred Dallmayr's essay (2008:420-433) in the same issue of *Religion and the Arts*, this would appear not to be the case:

This kind of inter-religious overture is not, as Dallmayr writes in his essay below on Cusanus (the fifteenth-century ecumenical thinker), an invitation to relativism but to "relationism," namely, "the conviction that truth or true knowledge cannot be seized or monopolized by a dogmatic authority but is best promoted through the interrelation between distinct perspectives (with each sincerely searching for the truth). The upshot of this conviction is an unorthodox and innovative conception of the relation between the 'one' and the 'many,' where the 'one' serves only as a common loadstar but not as the domineering master of the 'many.'" Here, inter-religious relationality is not a finite means towards an end but an infinite good in itself – the gift and kenosis of divinity in and through the flesh of humanity (Kearney 2008a:24, note 6).

At this point Kearney refers his readers to the dialectic between faith as "infinite relational openness to others" and religion as "institutional limit and consolidation" in the thoughts of thinkers like Bonhoeffer, Ricoeur, Derrida, and Caputo and reflected in his (at the time still forthcoming) *Anatheism* (2011).¹⁹² Nichols argues that, while Kearney's ana-theism and ana-religion necessitates a plurality of interpretations of transcendence (so asserting the pervasiveness of hermeneutics in any and every attempt at knowledge), it also affirms the incarnate reality of lived history, where judgment concerning the truth or meaningfulness of phenomena is no longer a luxury but a necessity. In the complex pluralism that results, (an open space of "compassionate dialogue" where competing traditions may converse without seeking to convert one another), Nichols nevertheless claims that

the alternate historical contexts of such competing paradigms of transcendent compassion do in fact force the interpreter to choose between different, perhaps even irreconcilable, finite paths, since the finite forms of traditional experience must be reaffirmed and reappropriated (2006:111-112).

¹⁹² Cf. also the published proceedings of the three Villanova Conferences on "Religion and Postmodernism," on this matter (Caputo, Dooley & Scanlon 2001; Caputo & Scanlon 1997, 1999), representing the thoughts of leading contemporary theorists of the religion-faith debate (e.g. Derrida, Millbank, Marion, Vattimo, Keller, Hart and Tracy) (Kearney 2008a:24, note 6).

This requires that we ask whether all epiphanies of the *eschaton* in everyday experience, and in the various religious traditions, have the same transcendent source (i.e. an absolute identity), and also that this question be asked from the very tradition that has allowed for the possibility of asking the question in the first place (Nichols 2006:112).¹⁹³ Indeed, Kearney does not recommend that the multiplicity of interpretations of religious symbolism be renounced, but urges us to enter the conflict and “take sides,” based on which interpretations best resound the ethico-eschatological import of the Christ-event (2001:48-49; cf. Nichols 2006:113). Seen from this perspective, it seems that the relationality between religions that Kearney advocates assumes a “generosity of imagination” (2008a:26) that allows the sort of traversing across religious boundaries that enables true religious dialogue. This not only leads to a greater understanding of the religious other and a fresh experience of one’s own religious tradition, but of necessity always requires a *choice*, and must culminate, he insists, in the practical care of the downtrodden and oppressed.

With *Anatheism*, Kearney further attempts to provide an “anatheist space” where both theists and atheists may engage in debate, and where the free decision to believe or not believe may be both tolerated and cherished (2011b:xiii-xiv; cf. Soultouki 2010:446). The possibility of God after God exists only in relation to the alternative option of its impossibility, and for Kearney, it is the very transcendence of God that necessitates such openness:

So much depends, of course, on what we mean by God. If transcendence is indeed a *surplus* of meaning, it requires a process of endless interpretation. The more strange God is to our familiar ways, the more multiple our readings of this strangeness. If divinity is unknowable, humanity must imagine it in many ways. The absolute requires pluralism to avoid absolutism (Kearney 2011b:xiv).

While Kearney attempts in *Anatheism* to illustrate how certain proponent minds of the previous century responded to the conundrum of how to speak of the sacred after the disappearance of God, he does not propose anatheism as some necessary historical dialectic. The radicality of the traumas and disasters of the

¹⁹³ It is in this light that we should understand Nichols’ argument that Kearney’s “radical reenvisioning of God must be tempered and given meaning through reentering and reaffirming onto-theology in a qualified (hermeneutical) sense,” for this is the tradition that enables the re-imagining of the metaphysical God in the first place. Nichols proceeds to “sketch a possible renewal of meaning for the traditional Christian *parousia*-concept as a hermeneutical circle between Hegel’s systematic closure of Western metaphysics and Heidegger’s deconstructive appropriation of the hidden possibilities of presence within the onto-theological tradition” (Nichols 2005:750).

previous century demand that “God must die so that God might be reborn. Anatheistically. How this might happen is a matter of interpretation. A question of belief or disbelief – or some middle space between” (2011b:xvi-xvii; cf. Soultouki 2010:445). Anatheism is not presented as a new religion, but rather as the

re-encounter or recapturing of what we thought we already possessed or had relinquished. Anatheism is a movement back and beyond God, a concept that revisits the idea of God as a gift and suggests faith as a matter of reception and interpretation, rather than a teleological choice. What can be regained by the anatheistic movement, according to Kearney, is a new understanding of God in both secular and spiritual terms (Soultouki 2010:445-446).

5.7 Conclusion

The overview of Richard Kearney’s work provided in this chapter has attempted what is an almost impossible task, namely to present those aspects of Kearney’s diverse work and interests that are relevant to the topic under discussion, in a format that would make it intelligible to anyone who may have encountered Kearney for the first time. What will have become clear is that we have in Kearney a philosopher who is characterised by creativity in thought. Not of the sort that overeagerly does away with the old to grasp at the new, but of the more considered kind that creates the fresh and the novel by hermeneutically traversing both sides of every road he treads. What has made Kearney especially valuable to the religious community, and to theological thought in particular, is his passionate archaeology of the narrative worlds of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Theology has responded to Kearney’s invitation to join as dialogue partners in his phenomenological-hermeneutical project. This interchange is ongoing and is likely to provide material to facilitate constructive dialogue for decades to come. Since Kearney’s work is still in progress, the theological community may truly dialogue with him in a way that may prove meaningful to both sides.

CHAPTER SIX: NEW STORIES? SIN AND REDEMPTION RE-IMAGINED

Theology in the contemporary public arena runs the risk so aptly illustrated by Kierkegaard's analogy in *Either/or*. Describing the crisis of an audience about to be enflamed by a devastating fire, the clown who runs to warn the audience – already dressed for his performance – is considered hilarious in his medieval and outdated outfit.

In a theater, it happened that a fire started offstage. The clown came out to tell the audience. They thought it was a joke and applauded. He told them again, and they became still more hilarious. This is the way, I suppose, that the world will be destroyed – amid the universal hilarity of wits and wags who think it is all a joke (Kierkegaard 1987:30).

In his *Introduction to Christianity*, Cardinal Ratzinger interprets this striking metaphor as a way of shedding light upon the way that the theologian is perceived by contemporary society as an outdated and irrelevant – if not hilarious – figure that fails to bring his message across (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). He suggests that the analogy does not merely point to the fact that theology must acquire a secular vocabulary and a change of “intellectual costume”:

Perhaps we should admit that this disturbing analogy, for all the thought-provoking truth contained in it, is still a simplification. For after all it makes it seem as if the clown, or in other words the theologian, is a man possessed of full knowledge who arrives with a perfectly clear message. The villagers to whom he hastens, in other words, those outside the faith, are conversely the completely ignorant, who only have to be told something of which they are completely unaware; the clown then need only take off his costume and his makeup, and everything will be all right. But is it really quite such a simple matter as that? (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Ratzinger's point is that a demythologised theology will not solve the quandary to which the analogy points, since the real crisis lies at a much deeper level. The theologian who walks into the world dressed in ancient intellectual regalia that makes zir seem as foreign to the world as this world seems to zir, is faced with the fundamental insecurity of zir own faith, “the oppressive power of disbelief in the midst of his own will to believe” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). For this reason, a believer who wishes to give an account of zir faith will learn that ze is, after all, not all that different from the “unbelievers” to which ze wishes to witness (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Ratzinger's description bears remarkable similarity to Kearney's concept of anatheism, and the position that Ratzinger takes in this regard is both radical and establishes a foundation for dialogue between believers and non-believers:

If, on the one hand, the believer can perfect his faith only on the ocean of nihilism, temptation, and doubt, if he has been assigned the ocean of uncertainty as the only possible site for his faith, on the other, the unbeliever is not to be understood undialectically as a mere man without faith. Just as we have already recognized that the believer does not live immune to doubt but is always threatened by the plunge into the void, so now we can discern the entangled nature of human destinies and say that the nonbeliever does not lead a sealed-off, self-sufficient life, either. ... Anyone who makes up his mind to evade the uncertainty of belief will have to experience the uncertainty of unbelief, which can never finally eliminate for certain the possibility that belief may after all be the truth. It is not until belief is rejected that its unrejectability becomes evident (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

This chapter, which attempts to engage critically with both the metaphorical clown and zir audience, proceeds from the assumption that the presence of doubt in both believer and non-believer,¹⁹⁴ à la anatheism, creates a hermeneutical space in which new stories regarding sin and salvation may be offered back and forth between the Christian tradition and the post-metaphysical philosophical assumptions of the secular world.

6.1 Imagining sin and redemption: A third way?

Chapter 4 traced, in some detail, Augustine's ontological perspective on sin, and the detrimental effects that this doctrine has had in the western history of doctrine (cf. ch. 4, esp. 4.2.2). In true Kearnean fashion, we will consider Augustine's anthropology anew in this section, this time with the aim of exploring third ways, which might traverse the boundaries between the polar opposite views of Augustinianism and Pelagianism on human nature. In this endeavour we will draw from the work of Roger Haight, American Jesuit theologian and former president of the Catholic

¹⁹⁴ Ratzinger is eloquent in his description of what I term the hermeneutical space for dialogue created by mutual doubt: "In other words, both the believer and the unbeliever share, each in his own way, doubt and belief, if they do not hide from themselves and from the truth of their being. Neither can quite escape either doubt or belief; for the one, faith is present against doubt; for the other, through doubt and in the form of doubt. It is the basic pattern of man's destiny only to be allowed to find the finality of his existence in this unceasing rivalry between doubt and belief, temptation and certainty. *Perhaps in precisely this way doubt, which saves both sides from being shut up in their own worlds, could become the avenue of communication.* It prevents both from enjoying complete self-satisfaction; it opens up the believer to the doubter and the doubter to the believer (Ratzinger 2004:28-29, italics YS).

Theological Society of America. Already in 1974 he pointed to the need for such a dialogue, decades before his *Jesus: Symbol of God* (1999) earned him the condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church (Haight 1974:26-48).¹⁹⁵

Haight prefers a broad approach to the Pelagian controversy, understanding it to involve more than just the “question of whether or not God’s internal grace is prior to and supportive of the exercise of man’s freedom in faith and the doing of the good” (1974:26). The broader approach that Haight prefers resists the oversimplified notion of Pelagius as the heretic who lost the debate. Instead, it sees the issue at stake as both larger and still relevant to the theological discourse of our day, rather than assuming that the matter has been settled and finds its proper place in church history rather than in dogmatics. He explains:

At stake is a much more basic conception of what the very nature of man is according to Christianity, the nature of Christian life and of the Church. Set in the context of human freedom, the Pelagian controversy asked the perennially radical question of the quality of human behavior, and the sources of good and evil in this world. There is no Christian spirituality, nor can one even give a retreat or preach a sermon, without explicitly or implicitly working on assumptions that underlie the Pelagian controversy (Haight 1974:26).

Haight’s analysis of the Pelagian controversy avoids choosing either opposing viewpoint over the other, opting instead to see the controversy as “involving two elements or poles that must always be held in tension” (Haight 1974:27). He considers each of the opposing doctrines to embody a feature of a more inclusive, holistic response to the world, and searches for the values contained in each of them as a way of pursuing a deeper understanding of the doctrines that may enable dialogue between them (Haight 1974:31). Indeed, any dialogue that may take us forward from the stalemate of the Pelagian controversy will need to incorporate the values that underlie both approaches to human nature (Haight 1974:31).

Beginning with Pelagius, we recognise that he represents the value of *humanity’s freedom, autonomy, and power of self-determination*. He wishes the Christian to become mature and responsible, to make a difference and live a life that demonstrates a complete break from the past, as exemplified by baptism following adult conversion. Pelagius’ view of the human freedom to create and define oneself

¹⁹⁵ For the Roman Catholic response to *Jesus: Symbol of God* (Orbis, 1999), see the official notification on the book, published online by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (n.d.).

resonates with the modern view of the human person's "possibility for self-determination, self-creation and world-fashioning" (Haight 1974:31). Pelagius' concern for the *universal possibility of salvation* embodies a second underlying value. Interpreting Christian tradition as teaching that God wills everybody to be saved, he understands that the possibility for such a universal salvation lay in human nature, which has been gracefully provided with the gift of freedom. Even if sin, in its great pervasiveness, may affect humanity through "the external mechanisms of social influences," a person remains able to respond to God's appeal, since humanity's internal nature and freedom remains fundamentally intact (Haight 1974:32).¹⁹⁶ From this follows Pelagius' resistance against Augustine's doctrine of predestination: "God ... is no respector of men, chosing some and not others; God appeals to all men of all times in like measure" (Haight 1974:32).

The central value underlying Augustine's doctrine, in turn, is "his experience of the *absoluteness of God and man's correlative total dependency on Him*" (Haight 1974:31). Looking around at his world, he sees no significant difference between believers and non-believers, and so comes to consider the ideals of perfection to be eschatological, not to be realised in this life. Haight judges that Augustine's bitter struggles with his own passion and concupiscence produced a theologian that was "a realist in the face of Pelagian idealism" (Haight 1974:32). Furthermore, Augustine's appreciation of God's grace as "absolutely gratuitous" underlies his doctrine of election and predestination. Faced with a disordered nature as a result of original sin, a person finds zirself unable to open to the Good without the intervention of grace as a "sudden and spontaneous movement." For this reason, Haight considers Augustine "a pessimist regarding man in the face of Pelagian optimism" (Haight 1974:32).

The values outlined above, if carried to the extreme, would become disvalues where the polar opposites would drive each other further apart. Haight illustrates what such extremes would look like in the case of Pelagianism:

¹⁹⁶ This fundamental optimism of Pelagius casts human history in a more positive light than in the case of Augustine. Pelagius' arguments for the freedom of human nature creates at least "the possibility of a human history that can be moving toward God without the help of explicit Christianity" – even if Pelagius simultaneously calls for a rigid asceticism (Haight 1974:35).

Pelagius' emphasis on man's freedom to obey seems to make God into a tyrant; the autonomous response of man to God does not appear softened by the dynamics of love. In this respect Pelagianism can be linked to the tradition of Stoicism. The key role of law and even the emphasis on it can easily degenerate into the very legalism that the gospel is meant to overcome. And the elitism and perfectionism that Pelagius recommends seems so narrow that Christianity becomes either unrealistic or inhuman, or else the Church becomes an exclusive society hardly capable of accepting men and breaking down the barriers that separate them. Pelagius wanted the whole Church to live the ascetic lives of monks. And, finally, the burden he places on freedom and autonomy is immense; Christianity ceases to be liberating and becomes terrifying (Haight 1974:33).

And in the case of Augustinianism:

The dangers of Augustine's position are more subtle but just as real. His doctrine of predestination cannot fail to be discouraging. Ultimately it offends not only human sensibility but also a Christian view of God. In the long run man's autonomy is really compromised, the very autonomy that the Christian believes is established by God in man as his birthright and guaranteed by his grace (Haight 1974:33).

The extremes to which the positions of Augustine and Pelagius may lead, however, as well as the negative consequences that this would hold (and have held) for the church, should not detract from the larger ideals¹⁹⁷ underlying each of them. To facilitate this, Haight distils from the opposing doctrines "two rather abstract but all embracing symbols that represent two opposing views of man, Christian life and Christianity itself" (1974:35):

They stand respectively for human autonomy and total dependency on God, for human freedom and the constriction of that freedom so that it needs internal divine aid to accomplish the good, for a universal possibility of salvation and an optimistic view of human nature over against a pessimistic view of man under the shadow of predestination (Haight 1974:35-36).

Haight uses these symbols, abstracted and generalised from the historical figures, as "guides for thinking and questioning" (1974:36). When seen in this way,

¹⁹⁷ For Pelagianism this would mean that the "Christian life was seen as a witness and sign of God and his grace to the pagan empire of this world. Pelagianism may stand for rigid asceticism or perfectionism; but the symbol should not distract from the issue of whether or not the Christian way of life is to be different..." (Haight 1974:33). The negative effect of an Augustinianism extreme would be that it would seem to justify a sort of Christian mediocrity. Even if the believer was saved, because zir nature continued to suffer the effects of sin, "Augustine's position allowed within the Church all the human failings that one finds outside it. And the effect was a leveling of the wholesale Christian witness to the common standard of the ordinary. And this could only canonize the double standard of a nominal Christianity that led people to flee to the monasteries" (Haight 1974:34).

rather than continually opposing Pelagius and Augustine and choosing whose theological doctrine to side with, the

... Pelagian controversy provides a splendid insight into the nature of human life and Christian experience. And therefore it provides us with some basic categories, heuristic concepts, with which one can see and analyse tendencies in Christian thought and their dangerous extremes (Haight 1974:36).

This means, essentially, that in interpreting the Pelagian controversy, we need to move beyond the mere study of doctrinal formulations. In analysing the elements of the controversy and elucidating its roots, we look at the dynamics interplaying in the genesis of the controversy, and are given the opportunity to ask questions about its meaning. This approach sees the doctrine as a departure point from which we may engage in further understanding of the Christian experience. In other words, we are not left with the doctrine itself as a final and definitive term for understanding: “(d)octrine is not an end, but a beginning for understanding” (Haight 1974:36).

If the two symbols and the values underlying them are taken to represent, when integrated, a holistic view of the human person and the Christian life, then it follows that a choice for, or even emphasis on one at the cost of the other, will result in the extremes of each position, as outlined above.¹⁹⁸ Haight therefore, as a theologian of “third ways,” views the symbols as “poles of human life and Christian faith experience that must be integrated in Christian life and understanding” (Haight 1974:36):

While the values of each must find a place in the Christian outlook, still, because they are opposing, they must be held in tension, one pulling against the other as the lines of force emanating from the two poles of one magnet (Haight 1974:36).

Haight moves on from here to engage a number of those assumptions held by both Augustine and Pelagius that no longer carry much weight. Such a criticism, he holds, will enable us to see that the values represented by each position “need not be opposed in such a way that they necessarily exclude each other (1974:37). Firstly, Haight brings Augustine’s conception of freedom of the will (or lack thereof,

¹⁹⁸ Veldsman’s reflection on religious experience from an evolutionary-theological perspective, brings him to a similar insight, namely that “both Augustine and Pelagius had it right. There are life situations in which our ability to choose are greatly (completely?) impaired by our biological make-up. But at the very same time there are life situations in which we are very capable of making free – and responsible – decisions. It is thus now our responsibility to discern between these two” (2014:439-440).

rather) to bear on the limited Pelagian idea that freedom means the power to choose, as though a person is able to direct zirself to either good or evil from a “purely detached or disinterested state of equilibrium” (1974:37). Augustine makes the valid point regarding human nature and human behaviour, later to be affirmed and expounded by Freud, that “there are levels in our life at which we are not in control of ourselves,” and that human desire often displays a tendency toward destruction, called “estranged existence” by Paul Tillich (Haight 1974:37-38).

The other side of the coin is, however, that Augustine does not do justice to the ideal of human freedom. Both Augustine’s conviction that unbaptised infants deserve damnation and his doctrine of original sin require fundamental revision. Haight judges the Pelagian doctrine as “much more plausible than Augustine’s quasi-physical inheritance theory that involves personal guilt” (Haight 1974:38). Augustine’s particularist interpretation of the doctrine of the universal salvific will of God, furthermore, voids the doctrine of any real meaning, and runs parallel with his view of God’s grace toward humanity as closely linked with historical and specific revelation, which denies a view of God’s grace as operating universally.

Another underlying assumption of Augustine regarding human freedom concerns his other-worldliness, often experienced as escapist by contemporary believers who feel at home in the world (Haight 1974:38). Finally, Augustine interprets the absolute and total gratuity of grace to imply its non-universality, implying the problematic notion that “God’s justice in punishing sin is needed to highlight his mercy in forgiving sin” (Haight 1974:39). It is, holds Haight, entirely possible to maintain a view of God’s grace as completely gratuitous, yet hold it to be at work in the life of every individual. This last assumption of Augustine drives the point home that his doctrine of predestination forms a congruent theological programme, co-determined by his anthropology and his doctrine of grace, and therefore not easily separated (Haight 1974:39). Haight concludes, therefore, that

Augustine’s man appears too dependent on God (if that can be said at all), that he ultimately robs man of autonomy and compromises the Christian God in so doing. A way must be found in which the total gratuity of grace and the dependency of man on God are affirmed in a way that also preserves man’s autonomy of self-determination and his ability to freely respond to God as a person and in genuine love (Haight 1974:39).

It is at this point that Haight moves to consider attempts that have been made at integration through maintaining the polarity, specifically with regard to theologians that have described “human existence as involving a fundamental polarity,” whereby they have managed to demythologise popular notions of original sin and its effects (Haight 1974:39). He begins with Rahner’s distinction between “person” and “nature,”¹⁹⁹ explaining that, for Rahner, concupiscence consists in this dualism – the tension between person and nature – and that it is in itself neutral, only appearing as sin when it “resists freedom and counter’s [sic] man’s free disposition of himself towards the good” (Haight 1974:40). Rahner considers the polarity in the human person to be only potentially dividing to the self, however, on the whole understanding the self to strive “for the unity and autonomy of personhood that comes with self-direction and self-positing” (Haight 1974:40).²⁰⁰

Secondly, Haight discusses Tillich’s idea that the polar structure of “Freedom” and “Destiny” acts as a constitutive element of the human person, each sustaining the other by “co-existing in dynamic tension”:

To say that man is a polarity between freedom and unfreedom is to say that he is not a machine whose course is entirely predictable, on the one hand, and on the other, that he is not a series of arbitrary acts. Freedom is exercised within a context of a whole series of systems and determinisms which are presupposed as the very matter to be assumed, directed and disposed by freedom (Haight 1974:40).

Haight brings these ideas to bear on freedom, sin, and grace by considering that the concept of such a polarity in the human person may provide us with a conceptual model for the operation of grace within the same human person. The polar structures²⁰¹ of nature-person (Rahner) and destiny-freedom (Tillich) roughly

¹⁹⁹ For Rahner, “person” refers to “that center of human autonomy and freedom by which he asserts, posits and creates himself.” “Nature,” in turn, “represents man under the laws of his particular kind of being; man as conditioned, limited, finite, determined. What Rahner calls ‘nature’ includes the whole of man’s being insofar as it is *prior to* his freedom and self-determination, and these ‘mechanisms’ can be understood at a variety of levels, that is, biological, psychological, social, and so on” (Haight 1974:39).

²⁰⁰ Rahner understood the two poles of nature and person to interact within the human person in such a way that ze can never completely determine zirself “either for the good or for evil. But the more man transcends these spontaneous mechanisms and posits his whole self, sometimes against these a-priori tendencies of ‘nature,’ sometimes in the same direction, the more he becomes a person” (Haight 1974:40).

²⁰¹ Rahner and Tillich’s polarity does not mean to introduce yet another dualism “of pure spirit being threatened by the power of sensuality and the material world as if the material world were somehow evil. Rather the moral dualism or polarity in which autonomy, freedom and personhood are threatened

correspond to Augustine's symbol of "the constriction and inner paralysis of habit, custom and sin that demand God's assistance and help through grace," on the one hand, and Pelagian's symbol of freedom, on the other. When seeking a truly satisfying description of human freedom and how grace relates to it, however, Haight turns from Pelagius to Augustine:

Augustine's probing analyses allows one to see the working of grace on a much deeper level than that of the overt mechanics of external alternative and internal choice. Ultimately, to preserve both the role of grace as well as man's freedom and autonomy one must conceive of grace operating in man in such a way as not to undermine that freedom, and this demands a relationship involving some sort of cooperation between God and man in the exercise of freedom and the doing of good (Haight 1974:41).

It seems that Augustine was aware of this, as he outlined the beginning of such an understanding in saying that grace establishes, rather than destroys, humanity's freedom (*Spir. et litt.* 52, *op. cit.*). Moving ahead with this idea, and using Rahner's definition of grace as God's self-giving to humanity, there are several ways in which grace may be said to establish human freedom and autonomy (Haight 1974:41). Haight briefly describes three levels in which grace operates to accomplish this. *Firstly*, God's grace fundamentally constitutes human autonomy. In the human existential experience of being unto death, "the personal address of an infinite and absolute God does guarantee the autonomy of man over against these forces" (Haight 1974:42). *Secondly*, grace expands freedom by giving liberty. Human autonomy in being wishes to express in free self-determination – a desire that is perpetually threatened by the temptation to follow the determinisms of "nature/destiny" (Haight 1974:42-43). Significantly, however, grace is not a necessary component for understanding how "person/freedom", inherent in the human person, is able to affirm itself despite the forces of determinism. We concur with Pelagius in this case, then, that grace is inherent in the very fact that God had

should be envisaged in the concrete systems of reality that modern philosophy and science have disclosed. These are the mechanisms and determinisms that are biological, psychological, educational, social, cultural, economic, political, ideological. All of these are the determinisms of 'nature' which man can 'suffer' or which he can transcend by putting them in service of his own personhood, by bestowing on them something of an absolute value and meaning, by controlling them for man. God's grace, then, insofar as it is a force that liberates man, guarantees his autonomy and expands his freedom, should be seen as unfolding in this world in terms of these imprisoning factors. Its vehicle will be men who in service of others attack and criticize the forces of dependence and alienation" (Haight 1974:46-47).

created humanity with the ability to determine zirself to some extent, and that for this no special and external bestowal of grace is required (cf. Haight 1974:43).

We should not lay the matter to rest prematurely, though. Augustine's discussion of how liberty expands freedom adds an even deeper dimension to the above insight of a person's ability to determine zirself to some extent. Grace, for Augustine, was a force that expands the horizon of vision to something that in Kearney's terms is eschatological, in that it includes "the possibility of decision that transcends this world in its intentionality" (Haight 1974:43):

The experience of being in contact with a transcendent and absolute God, the source and sustainer of all that is, and one who addresses man by personal gift and calling, draws the exercise of freedom beyond the limited and finite and ultimately disappearing values of this-world-taken-in-itself (Haight 1974:43)

We would amend, however, Augustine's conclusion that decisions in and for this world therefore fade away until only God remains as one's inspiration for action. What follows, instead, is an

entirely new dimension whereby decisions in and for this world are given a qualitatively different consistency precisely because they transpire in an entirely new context of the ultimately important and permanently valuable. It is not that concrete opportunities are numerically multiplied by this new liberty; it is rather that freedom is expanded because the objects of choice and decision exist in a new context of importance. In this way liberty expands freedom (Haight 1974:43-44).

Haight describes the overcoming of sin as the *third* level at which grace operates (1974:44). To recognise the depth at which sin is lodged in a person is to recognise the equally significant depth at which grace restores humanity. It is here that Augustine aids us yet again with his recognition that, while habit and custom (or "nature" as we used it above) certainly holds the will captive, sin itself goes deeper and is in the end more than passivity or capitulating to the determinisms of life (Haight 1974:45). Augustine understood sin to reside in the will of humanity itself – a "cupiditas by which man asserts himself but cannot transcend himself," so that, instead, the person in need of God's grace is someone who, in an act of perpetual idolatry, draws reality "into" him or herself, establishing the self as norm and using everything external to the self in order to satisfy the self (Haight 1974:45). Sin, lodged as it is inside the person, requires for Augustine a grace with a "medicinal"

quality that fundamentally reorients the person. For Augustine, *cupiditas* “becomes” *caritas* – “a love not only for the good as such but a love that ... establishes a basic reverence that allows the other to be what it is in itself (himself or herself) and tends to foster that value” (Haight 1974:45).

Haight concludes his discussion on the levels on which grace operates in the human person:

On these three levels, then, one can see how God’s personal gift of himself to man can establish and guarantee man’s autonomy, can expand the horizon of his freedom and personhood so that he can assert himself in, through and above the passive elements of his nature with new quality and force, and, finally, can liberate man from the inner imprisoning force of egoism and selfishness (Haight 1974:45).

This helps us to cast Kearney’s analysis of the imagination in light of the Eden narrative in language that is decidedly more theological. We see, specifically, Kearney’s concept of the *yetser* reflected in the polar structures of nature-person (Rahner) and destiny-freedom (Tillich), with Rahner pointedly describing the concupiscence as being neutral drives and passions, able to be placed in service of either good or evil. The above helps us move ahead by clarifying the role of grace in the process whereby the *yetser*, theologically speaking, becomes imagination-toward-death or imagination-toward-life. Following Pelagius, first, we would recognise grace already residing in the very existence of the *yetser* as exemplifying *posse*, namely the possibility to determine itself toward life, expansion, and expression.

There is a second, more profound level, however, that gives theological expression to Kearney’s philosophical description of the Eden couple’s idolatrous fixation on their own image. Haight’s reinterpretation of Augustine to describe grace as the experience of being addressed by an ultimate God – an experience that expands our freedom into the liberty of transcending earthly existence not by devaluing it but by casting it in a new, “ultimately important and permanently valuable” light – gives theological expression to Kearney’s description of the *yetser* as entirely fixed on its Creator, thereby allowing the human person to become more fully human. It is, paradoxically, in casting zir existence onto God that a person becomes more fully human. In Haight’s words:

Viewed in connection with the first level of the operation of grace, its constituting man's autonomy and absoluteness, here contact with God through his grace enables man to exert himself over the determinisms of nature in a new and qualitatively different way, in an ultimate and absolutely meaningful way that would not be possible without this intimate contact with God himself. Viewing the matter psychologically, as Augustine himself does, by reorienting man's elemental desire, interest and delight, and his understanding of being, over which he has little control, the touch of grace not only reconstitutes man's person but also his freedom of decision in a qualitatively new way; it gives personhood and its ability to posit itself an entirely new and absolute dimension. And this can in turn be translated into the concrete motivation and determination needed to pass into new forms of action (Haight 1974:44).

Before moving on to the possibilities that this opens for ethics, we should take a moment to consider – and ultimately assume a critical stance toward – the way that Haight's third level for the operation of grace uncritically follows Augustine's ontological interpretation of sin as though it were some “thing” “lodged” inside a person. Owing to the dialogical relationship between sin and salvation to which this thesis keeps referring, such an understanding of sin will require exactly the sort of salvation that Augustine offers as solution to the problem that his view of sin has created, namely a grace that changes the substance of sin, consisting in *cupidas*, to something less problematical, i.e. the *caritas*. Given the lack of Scriptural support for such a view (cf. Chapter 2), one has to ask if this final step is really as necessary as Haight seems to think.²⁰² There is no reason why a more dynamic view of the imagination as *yetser*, in itself neutral and capable of both good and evil (worship and idolatry), coupled with the dynamic way in which the *God Who May Be* beckons the soul, always not-yet-there and already-gone, ungraspable, but alluring the soul and in so doing capturing the imagination and transfiguring the person, may not provide fruitful ways to bring about new eschatological possibilities.

From this expanded viewpoint it seems more natural to move from Kearney's interpretation of the Eden narrative in terms of the imagination, to his concepts of

²⁰² Haight insists that the three levels on which grace operates cannot be separated: “Although autonomy and personhood are values in themselves, if they are separated off from the third level, there will be a tendency to interpret religious experience and the operation of grace in terms of personal fulfillment [sic] or psychological wholeness and integrity. To see religious experience or religion simply as a means of mental health and an integrated personality is the most fundamental distortion possible, and it is not uncommon” (Haight 1974:45-46). Haight is certainly correct in claiming that the Christian faith cannot be made into something that serves the same idolatry that lies at the root of the problem. He does not make clear, however, why an ontological understanding of sin is necessary to explain the origin of this idolatry.

narrative imagination, ethical imagination, and eschatological imagination. When we re-imagine God as Powerless Possible, in the sense that, following God's call to us to imagine new worlds of righteousness and gentle love, it means that God is vulnerable to our decision to respond to his gracious calling, or not to. Pending our response, God is forever the *One Who May Be*, calling us to co-create a world where the grace spoken of above becomes visible in terms of actually existing systems that affirm and enable human autonomy and work together to end the alienation of human persons (Haight 1974:46).

6.2 Interpreting Messiah Jesus eschatologically: The resurrection as hermeneutical key for the incarnation and the cross

Which hermeneutical key should guide us in interpreting the life of the Man from Nazareth? From a Reformed perspective, the answer to this question has always seemed simple: naturally, the cross, as God's means of atonement, must assume centre stage in the Jesus narrative. This answer means that the person, word, and work of Christ must be interpreted through the cross (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Yet this hermeneutical assumption must be questioned. To begin with, a reading of the gospels suggests that, rather than Jesus' life and teachings being reinterpreted in terms of the cross, it was really the resurrection that moved the first believers to look anew at the life, teachings, and death of the Man whom death could not hold (cf. Bryan 2011:35). Jesus was executed because of suspicions and accusations that he or others thought him(self) to be the Messiah. In the Gospel narrative, the fact that Jesus is raised from the dead functions as divine vindication of his Messianic identity (Juel 1988:26). At least to the extent that early Christian belief in the resurrection inspired followers of Jesus to gather as communities shaped by stories about Jesus, it may be said that the resurrection determined the way in which the early Jesus Movement took shape (Wright 1998:n.p.).

6.2.1 Between incarnation Christology and cross Christology: Resurrection

Two divergent lines of thought regarding Jesus may be distinguished in Church tradition, namely one that emphasises the cross as hermeneutical key for interpreting Jesus, and one that stresses the incarnation. While the first followed the Pauline tradition and came to largely represent Reformation thought, the latter

developed from Greek thought and is prevalent in Catholic traditions of the East and West (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Incarnation Christology

... talks of "being" and centers around the fact that here a man is God and that, accordingly, at the same time God is man; this astounding fact is seen as the all-decisive one. All the individual events that followed pale before this one event of the oneness of man and God, of God's becoming man. In face of this they can only be secondary; the interlocking of God and man appears as the truly decisive, redemptive factor, as the real future of man, on which all lines must finally converge (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

The view that incarnation theology takes is quite optimistic, in that human sin is often seen as "a transitional stage of fairly minor importance" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.), as we saw with Irenaeus (cf. 4.1.1). Instead of focusing on humankind finding itself in some state of sin from which ze must be saved by making atonement for the past, the emphasis is on "making progress toward the convergence of man and God" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Theologies of the cross avoid such ontological thinking and approach the atonement in transactional terms, asking merely, as the early believers did, if and how God acted in the cross and resurrection (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). This approach to the atonement

leads ... to a dynamic, topical, anti-world interpretation of Christianity, which understands Christianity only as a discontinuously but constantly appearing breach in the self-confidence and self-assurance of man and of his institutions, including the church (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

How should we go about searching for and constructing a "third way" between these two historically divergent ways of interpreting Christ? While the one evokes discomfort for its typically metaphysical obsession with (speculative) ontology, the other offends with its violence. To begin with, we would be wise to avoid, on the one hand, any attempt at an oversimplifying synthesis, and on the other, a siding with either polarity.²⁰³ It may be possible, however, to find the unity that holds the polarity

²⁰³ As Ratzinger cautions, "(t)he two fundamental structural forms of 'Incarnation' theology and 'Cross' theology reveal polarities that cannot be surmounted and combined in a neat synthesis without the loss of the crucial points in each; they must remain present as polarities that mutually correct each other and only by complementing each other point toward the whole" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). He proceeds, however, to suggest that "our reflections may perhaps have given us a glimpse of that ultimate unity which makes these polarities possible and prevents them from falling apart as contradictions. For we have found that the being of Christ ('Incarnation' theology!) is *actualitas*, stepping beyond oneself, the exodus of going out from self; it is, not a being that rests in itself, but the act of being sent, of being son, of serving. Conversely, this 'doing' is not just 'doing' but 'being'; it reaches down into the depths of being and coincides with it. This being is exodus,

together by taking our starting point neither in the incarnation, nor in the cross, but in the resurrection. We propose, therefore, to investigate the possibility that the resurrection as hermeneutical key to the significance of Christ may open possibilities for traversing the polarities of incarnation theology and cross theology.

As we saw above, the gospels show that it was the resurrection of Christ – not his birth (incarnation) nor his passion (atonement) – that caused Jesus' followers to reinterpret both his teachings and his death. Understanding the resurrection as God's vindication of Jesus as Messiah, his followers looked at both his teaching and his passion with new eyes. As time went by, the early believers even constructed birth narratives by which they gave mythical expression to the fact that, in and through the Man from Nazareth, especially in their post-Easter memory, they experienced the Transcendent as in some way present. Specifically, the presence of the Divine became mediated through Jesus due to the fact that his will, his *yetser*, was completely aligned with divine will. This, at once, opened to him an existential experience of eschatological personhood and enabled the *God Who May Be* to be possibilised through this eschatological personhood.

This means that it is not in the stories of the nativity that we should search for supernatural and metaphysical miracles of incarnation, but in the act of giving whereby Jesus surrenders his will and even his very life. The way to the incarnation of the Divine is through the surrender of the divinely created *yetser*, in other words, through a human being saying “yes” to God, “may it be with me as You have said” (Luke 1:38; cf. 7.1). It is in this way that the divergent traditions of incarnation theology and a theology of the cross meet one another, within the framework of Kearney’s eschatological *God Who May Be*, and in the form of a moral atonement theory. Jesus lives a life surrendered to the will of the Father, and therefore the Kingdom of God is possibilised through his person in a moment of Divine-human co-creation.

It is in the greatest act of this self-surrender and self-giving, namely his passion, that the *One Who May Be* is most actually possibilised through Jesus, so

transformation. So at this point a properly understood Christology of being and of the Incarnation must pass over into the theology of the Cross and become one with it; conversely, a theology of the Cross that gives its full measure must pass over into the Christology of the Son and of being” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

that one may speak of the divine becoming incarnated in that moment. From this perspective the cross and the incarnation are not separate events. Neither is Mary's surrendering her body to the will of God different in quality from Jesus' surrender, though one may argue that it is different in quantity. Incarnation of the *One Who May Be* takes place whenever a human being gains access to the eschatological dimension of existence by surrendering *zir yetser* to the Transcendent. Of this eschatological dimension, the resurrection is the symbol *par excellence*.

We must consider, at this point, the criticism of Berkhof against such an approach:

On the basis of the modern pantheistic idea of the immanence of God, the doctrine of the Person of Christ is today often represented in a thoroughly naturalistic way. The representations vary, but the fundamental idea is generally the same, that of an essential unity of God and man. Christ differed from other men only in that He was more conscious of the God immanent in Him, and consequently is the highest revelation of the Supreme Being in His word and work. Essentially all men are divine, because God is immanent in all, and they are all sons of God, differing from Christ only in degree. The latter stands apart only in view of His greater receptivity for the divine and of His superior God-consciousness (Berkhof 1969:122-123).

While the latter part of Berkhof's criticism regarding the difference in degree between Christ and the rest of humanity may still be aimed at the above proposal, and needs to be considered, it is important to notice that our proposal in no way proceeds from pantheism (or panentheism, for that matter). What is being described here is Kearney's post-metaphysical *God Who May Be* who "becomes" in space in time due to the positive response of the human creature to the transfiguring Spirit of God.

It is, however, not only due to the precedent set by the gospels in interpreting Jesus as the Christ through resurrection that we propose the resurrection as a "third way" hermeneutical key. The resurrection is the Christian symbol *par excellence* of the eschatological dimension disclosed by Christ. Pauline thought already envisioned Christ in this way, as the "last (*eschatos*) Adam," (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἄδαμ, 1 Cor

15:45).²⁰⁴ Taking the resurrection as hermeneutical key emphasises that Jesus of Nazareth embodied the eschatological future of humanity. A future that, in Kearney's terms, is not guaranteed, but a future that, just like the Kingdom of God, *may be*.

For this reason, Jesus of Nazareth is the "exemplary" human, to use Ratzinger's translation of Paul's "last (*eschatos*) Adam." How does Jesus become this "exemplary" human, this "*typos*" of transcendent humanity? Exactly by breaking through the boundaries of ordinary humanity that is directed upon itself, and becoming eschatological *being for others*. Human existence reaches its zenith as it moves from self-centred and self-directed living to living through the other, and being in communion with the other. This includes, perhaps first of all, an openness toward the Truly Other, so that the human person is more fully zirself as ze opens to God (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Accordingly, he is completely himself when he has ceased to stand in himself, to shut himself off in himself, and to assert himself, when in fact he is pure openness to God. To put it again in different terms: man comes to himself by moving out beyond himself. Jesus Christ, though, is the one who has moved right out beyond himself and, thus, the man who has truly come to himself (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

It is for this reason that the resurrection is such a powerful symbol through which to interpret the life and passion of Christ. The believer must ask *why* death could not hold this Man from Nazareth. Why did death have no power over him? The answer, in contrast to the first Adam, is that Jesus accessed the eschatological dimension of humanness by *being with and for the O/other*. It is exactly this that the Eden couple, in their grasping at self-serving and self-asserting knowledge, failed to do. In Kearney's terms, the death that the Eden couple died symbolises the almost sub-human state that a person embodies when ze inclines zir *yetser* to zirself so that zir existence implodes upon zirself. Jesus, in contrast, exploded the boundaries of his own humanness in surrendering his *yetser* and inclining it to Divine will. It is for this reason that Jesus became the Christ, the exemplary human, the symbol of humanity transcending its own limitations and accessing its eschatological state of being. Over such a human being, death and all it symbolises, has no hold.

²⁰⁴ 1 Cor 15:45, "Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the **last Adam** became a **life-giving spirit**." (οὗτος καὶ γέγραπται· ἐγένετο ὁ πρῶτος ἀνθρωπός Ἀδάμ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν, ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδάμ εἰς πνεῦμα ζωοποιοῦν).

It is this that Ratzinger calls the “Rubicon of becoming man,” or “hominisation” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). He means this within an evolutionary understanding of humanity making the transition from animal to logos, from “mere life to mind.” This he interprets to mean that the full hominisation process of humanity had always presupposed God’s becoming man in the sense that the Rubicon between creature and the Whole would have to be finally crossed over by the “creature of dust and earth” looking beyond zirself and addressing God as a Thou:

It is openness to the whole, to the infinite, that makes man complete. Man is man by reaching out infinitely beyond himself, and he is consequently more of a man the less enclosed he is in himself, the less “limited” he is. For – let me repeat – that man is most fully man, indeed the true man, who is most unlimited, who not only has contact with the infinite – the Infinite Being! – but is one with him: Jesus Christ. In him “hominization” has truly reached its goal (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Jesus of Nazareth, in his person, “binds humanity and divinity into a unity,” and in this the divine intention for humanity comes to light, for Jesus who became the Christ and the exemplary human, concerns all of humankind (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Just as the first Adam, in Pauline thought, impacted all of humanity, the second Adam (from the Hebrew אָדָם, meaning human) likewise embodies a corporate personality, so that

... if Jesus is called “Adam,” this implies that he is intended to gather the whole creature “Adam” in himself. But this means that the reality that Paul calls, in a way that is largely incomprehensible to us today, the “body of Christ” is an intrinsic postulate of this existence, which cannot remain an exception but must “draw to itself” the whole of mankind (cf. Jn 12:32) (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

We have therefore moved far beyond the obsession with individual salvation from some eternal damnation that so grips much of contemporary Christian imagination. Salvation is corporeal, a divine intention that includes the human race as such in an evolutionary sense (cf. 6.3; 6.7). And still we are not done with the divine intention, for as Paul envisions it, things get larger still, as God’s salvific intention includes the whole of creation. The resurrection as hermeneutical key points toward the Eschatos as a possibility for the entire creation to attain, for indeed the Creator is the very *One Who May Be*, characterised by the same open-endedness and very much still in the process of creation (cf. Southgate 2008; cf. 6.7).

Johannine theology displays a similar trend to Paul's corporate body of Christ with its allusions that Jesus, in his crucifixion, draws all humans to himself (cf. John 12:32). The cross forms the centre of both the gospel of John and Johannine theology, and for this reason the idea that Jesus draws all humans to himself through the crucifixion expresses the meaning of Jesus' passion, and even indicates "the direction in which the whole Gospel is intended to point" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). The passion of Christ as a "process of opening" draws the dispersed human-monads "into the embrace of Jesus Christ, ..., in order to arrive, in this union, at their goal, the goal of humanity" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.):

But if this is so, then Christ as the man to come is not man for himself but essentially man for others; it is precisely his complete openness that makes him the man of the future. The man for himself, who wants to stand only in himself, is then the man of the past whom we must leave behind us in order to stride forward. In other words, this means that the future of man lies in "being for" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

This idea is epitomised by the Johannine description of the piercing of Jesus' side on the cross, from which blood and water flows (cf. John 19:34). This climax of the crucifixion (and arguably of the gospel itself) at the end of Jesus' earthly life portrays a Jesus whose existence has become completely open. As existing entirely "for" the O/other, he is no longer a single individual but "Adam," from whose side a new eschatological community is born, symbolised by water and blood, the elements of the two sacraments (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

How would one, then, give theological expression to Kearney's eschatological approach to both God and personhood? The understanding of Christ representing the *telos* of humanity, the crux of what it means to be human, i.e. to live with openness to the O/other, reminds us that

Christianity, which as belief in the creation acknowledges the primacy of the logos, the creative meaning as beginning and origin, also acknowledges it in a specific way as the end, the future, the coming one (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

This is what Ratzinger calls the real historical dynamism of the Christian approach, namely that, from the standpoint of history, God stands at the end, while from the standpoint of being, God stands at the beginning – an all embracing horizon that, due to the dynamic interplay of history and existence, escapes both the pitfall of

speculative metaphysics and the future-orientated ideology of Marxism (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Since Abraham and until the return of the Lord, faith advances to meet him who is coming. But in Christ the countenance of him who is to come is already revealed: it will be the man who can embrace all men because he has lost himself and them to God. For this reason the emblem of him who is to come must be the Cross, and his face in this era of the world must be a bleeding, wounded countenance: the “last man,” that is, the real, the future man, reveals himself in this age in the last men; whoever wishes to stand on his side must therefore stand on their side (cf. Mt 25:31-46) (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

From a theological point of view, then, we can follow Ratzinger and interpret Kearney’s eschatological approach along these same lines, but with one proviso. This is a future that is not guaranteed. This is a future that *may be*, but it also *may not*. There is no necessity in the cross whereby the eschatological future of humanity is enforced upon time and space and human persons are turned into *beings-for-O/others* whether they have any interest to so evolve, or not. Ratzinger’s view of eschatology does not make enough provision for the radical impact of the free will of humanity. Whatever a soteriology of the *God Who May Be* might look like, it most certainly will exclude mechanical views of creation and its future.

6.3 Collective stories: Sin and salvation beyond the individual

As we have seen in Chapter 3, the picture emerging from Scripture envisions humanity in relationship. The human person lives in relationship with God as well as with zir community. Ze relates with family and lives as an individual. Ze communes with creation and gives unique expression to life by traversing the limits of suffering, mortality, and limitation in dialogue with abundance, celebration, and blessing. Humanity in Scripture is by definition a humanity addressed by God as “Thou,” and even a humanity commissioned by God act as steward of God’s creation (Goldingay 2006:521). This section reflects on what is lost when this corporate dimension is lost, and explores hamartiologies and soteriologies that interpret sin and salvation in social, relational and structural terms.

The biblical emphasis on humanity as being-in-relation serves as a corrective to the Western cultural bias toward the individual. The Cartesian grounding of philosophy in self-awareness (“*Cogito, ergo sum*,” or “I think, therefore I am”), “has

decisively influenced the fate of the modern mind right down to the present-day forms of transcendental philosophy" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Richard Kearney's reading of the Eden narrative has also followed this tendency, with his strong emphasis on the *yetser* of the individual. A fruitful integration is possible, however, between the greater emphasis on the individual in terms of the Eden narrative, and Kearney's other contributions regarding collective story-telling (cf. esp. 5.3). Integrating these approaches would cast the *yetser* in a collective light, reminding us that possibilising the Kingdom of God always involves *communities* of love and justice.

The African philosophy of *Ubuntu*, characterised by the proverb, "Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu," or "a person is a person because of people," testifies to the contribution which collectivistic cultures may offer in dialogue with the West and its individualistic tendencies.²⁰⁵ While discussing how the philosophy of *Ubuntu* may provide South Africa with a narrative imagination (in Kearney's terms) that may facilitate the development of a new public discourse, Michael Onyebuchi Eze states that

"A person is a person through other people" strikes an affirmation of one's humanity through recognition of an "other" in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative intersubjective formation in which the "other" becomes a mirror (but only a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon the other and me. Humanity is a quality we owe to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our creations: we are because you are, and since you are, definitely I am. The "I am" is not a rigid subject, but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance (Eze 2010:190-191).

²⁰⁵ *Ubuntu*, namely, gives expression to what Ratzinger describes as the communal, relational nature of both love and knowledge, which serves as a corrective against the Cartesian individualistic proposal: "Just as self-love is not the primordial form of love but at the most a derivative of it, just as one has only arrived at the specific nature of love when one has grasped it as a relation, that is, something coming from another, so, too, human knowledge is only reality when it is being known, being brought to knowledge, and thus again 'from another.' The real man does not come into it at all if I only plumb the loneliness of the 'I,' of self-knowledge, for then I exclude in advance the point of departure of his ability to come to himself and thus his most specific characteristic. That is why Baader, consciously and quite rightly, changed the Cartesian 'Cogito, ergo sum' into 'Cogitor, ergo sum': not 'I think, therefore I am,' but 'I am thought, therefore I am.' Only from man's being known can his knowledge and he himself be understood" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

It was a similar collectivistically oriented anthropological climate that formed the cradle for the whole of the Scriptural tradition. This ancient biblical context was, like the larger part of the world's cultures today still are, group oriented, doing justice to both the individual and corporate dimensions of human existence, even if it emphasises the latter (Neyrey 1993a:49-52; Malina 2001). This emphasis fits, however,

(w)ith the nature of Christian faith, where being a Christian means being grafted into the corporate body of Christ, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, as well as having an individual relationship with Christ. If Christ defines humanity, Karl Barth comments, humanness means not only being for God but being for other people. This is not merely an obligation but "something ontological" (Goldingay 2006:529, citing Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2:210).

Indeed, it is "something ontological" about the true human being that ze becomes most zirself when belonging to the whole: the whole constituted by humanity at large, history, and the cosmos (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). Rebellion against this conviction that personhood is "shaped, nourished and sustained in community" in itself constitutes sin (Goldingay 2006:529). Furthermore, humanity as being-in-relation to God by virtue of being created by God and in the image of God carries social consequences.

Whatever the actual meaning of being made "in God's image," it establishes a fundamental mutual likeness among human beings. Being made in God's image is a fundamental statement about humanity, and all human beings are made in that image (Goldingay 2006:543).

This fact already serves as an intra-biblical corrective to the many examples of vilifying and oppressing those who are sexually, physiologically, economically or socially "other." While examples of this sort of devaluation of human diversity abound in Scripture, counter-traditions are also present. Such counter-traditions commonly treat outgroup members as though they were ingroup members, standing in tension with those traditions in biblical literature that tend to construct social boundaries between people. Among such counter-traditions, Luke-Acts stands out for the consistent manner in which this gospel reverses social status.

This idea of a common humanity, created in the image of God, is confirmed by the recognition that, in actual fact, the individual can never be truly separated from the social, so that we are a corporate humanity after all. Every human contains,

on some level, the past, present and future of humankind, as though humanity really is only one single “Adam” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). No single individual human being is ever a *tabula rasa*, nor is the option open to any person so start planning zir life from square one in complete autonomous freedom. This is so because the individual cannot but live zir life based on the collective and linguistic pattern in which ze finds zirself already “being thought,” and which is even already [epi]genetically received (cf. Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). It is only against this background of linguistic and genetic development spanning the collective past of humanity, as well as the collective moving toward and co-constructing the future, that the individual is able to “self”-realise. In this sense, then, the “Cogito ergo sum” being is truly a figment of the modern imagination, for no such isolated individual has ever existed, or will ever exist. The human person’s only access to humanity is through “the web of history that impinges on the individual through speech and social communication” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Unlike western intellectual thought, the Eastern Orthodox tradition largely escaped the individu-idolising tendencies of the Cartesian heritage. One of the gifts received from ecumenical relations with the Eastern Church has therefore been its rich theological heritage of communion. From intra-trinitarian communion to the relations through which humans are formed, this tradition has greatly aided especially the Western Church to become conscious of zir tendency to focus on the individual and the intra-personal at the expense of the collective and the inter-personal. Also, when it comes to questions of sin and salvation, the Western tendency has often been to interpret both in terms of the individual.

The Platonic worldview of the Eastern Fathers allowed for their formulation of theosis as the salvific plan of God for humanity. This deification of humanity is not a vision of the individual, however, but is understood to be possibilised by the hypostasising of human nature in the event of the incarnation:

Since human nature is a universal in which all individual human beings participate, the divinising of the humanity of Jesus by the Logos, is also available in differing degrees to those who identify with him (Mulcahy 2007:182).

This soteriological vision of course proceeds from a parallel vision of “fallen” humanity, where the sin of Adam is thought to have corrupted universal human

nature, so that all individuals also participate in this fallenness. The “second Adam” makes salvation for individuals possible by their partaking in the divinising of the universal human nature.

The tendency of the Western Church, on the other hand, to construct intra-individualistic approaches to sin, i.e. as rebellion against God in the heart of the individual, have likewise called for soteriologies that would heal the personal will of the individual and reconcile the individual with God. The main negative consequence of such an individualistic approach is that the social dimension of sin is often either ignorantly overlooked or blatantly ignored. One of the strongest Scriptural themes for reflecting on sin, as we have seen, is precisely the destructive effect that it has on the human network of relationships.

Paul Fiddes, in addressing the question of how the past act of Christ’s passion becomes a salvific event for the contemporary believer in the present, has turned to the thoughts of Bonhoeffer on the corporate presence of Christ, while introducing some aspects of Orthodox thought on the Trinity to enlarge Bonhoeffer’s vision. Fiddes draws first from Bonhoeffer, who understands Christ, as pro-existent reality, to be present in every epoch as the “Man-for-others” whose *raison d’être* is to exist for the sake of others (Mulcahy 2007:187).²⁰⁶ At this point, Fiddes draws from John Zizioulas to expand this view of Jesus’ inclusive pro-existent reality. Zizioulas has contributed much to our understanding regarding the revolution of Greek philosophy through which the Cappadocian Fathers identified “hypostasis” with “person” (“by dissociating *hypostasis* from *ousia* and attaching it to *prosopon*”) (Mulcahy 2007:187).²⁰⁷ In doing so, they

²⁰⁶ Fiddes explains, “As ‘the man for others’ Christ must be a ‘corporate person,’ present in the human community. When we find the form and the place in which Christ is present, then we discover the power of Christ to shape our lives to his pattern... Christ is ‘for us,’ and so lives a life that includes us, because the God who is always ‘for us’ is uniquely present in him” (Fiddes 1989:163).

²⁰⁷ In Greek philosophy, the term “hypostasis” had no connection with the term “person”: “... ‘person’ would have been regarded by the Greeks as expressive of anything but the essence of man, whereas the term ‘hypostasis’ was already closely linked with the term ‘substance’ and finally was identified fully with it. It is precisely this identification of substance with hypostasis, diffused so widely in the Greek thought of the first Christian centuries, that created all the difficulties and disputes concerning the Holy Trinity in the fourth century. ... A mode of expression thus had to be found which would ... give an ontological content to each person of the Holy Trinity, without endangering its biblical principles: monotheism and the absolute ontological independence of God in relation to the world. From this endeavour came the identification of hypostasis with person” (Zizioulas 1997:36-37).

were insisting that to be in personal relationship belongs to the very essence of God and is not something accidental added on to the divine nature. Since Being itself is communion, God exists always and everywhere in communion with us. Since God is totally present in Christ, Christ himself must also be always in relationship with us (Mulcahy 2007:188).

Christ is, then, a totally personal, “fully relational reality,” so that “(i)n Jesus Christ there is a new kind of human being, who could not and cannot exist except in relation to us” (Fiddes 1989:163; cf. Mulcahy 2007:188). Seen from this angle, the atonement confirms that “human being is *being* in communion with God” (Mulcahy 2007:188):

The christological mystery, as declared by the Chalcedonian definition, signifies that salvation as truth and life is possible only in and through a person who is ontologically *true*, i.e. something which creation cannot offer, as we have seen. The only way for a true person to exist is for being and communion to coincide. The triune God offers in Himself the only possibility for such an identification of being with communion; He is the revelation of true personhood. Christology is founded precisely upon the assertion that only the Trinity can offer to created being the genuine base for personhood and hence salvation. This means that Christ has to be God in order to be savior, but it also means something more: *He must be not an individual but a true person* (Zizioulas 1997:107).

If we keep in mind Haight’s concept of grace as God’s giving of Godself to humanity, and that on a personal level this gift of grace affirms human autonomy, enables the expression of this freedom in view of the more passive elements of human nature, and also liberates the human person from the prison of egoism (Haight 1974:45), then we may assume that the manifestation of grace on a collective level will take the form of the systemic enabling of humanity, in the same way. Putting this in Kearney’s terms, the coming of the Kingdom, or the enabling of the *God Who May Be*, begins to take shape in response to the human “yes” to the “yes” of God’s grace transfiguring the human will. The result, if we are to move beyond our obsession with the individual, has to take the form of a systemic affirmation of human autonomy, enabling freedom and its expression, and freeing individuals from egoism. The historical task of creation is essentially a collective enterprise that is based on dialogue and co-creation, both between human persons and between humanity and God (Kearney 1988a:55).

6.4 Christ the Messiah, capturing the imagination

This section explores the proposition that realising eschatology is possibilised through the imagination. Christ as prototype of the divinely intended *telos* of humanity becomes an existential possibility via the transfiguration enacted on the imagination.

6.4.1 Jesus or Christ: From above or from below?

Chapter 4 briefly mentioned the revolutionary impact of Enlightenment thinking on the classical Christologies “from above” that had characterised the theological tradition up to that point (cf. 4.5). During the course of the 18th century, Christology experienced a gradual shift in methodology, the consequences of which would be felt in soteriology as well. The theocentric Christology that prevailed up to that time resulted from scholars who took their point of departure in the Logos, the Second Person of the Trinity, and subsequently sought to interpret the life and death of Jesus in a way that would do justice to this Person, the Saviour (Berkhof 1969:117). This deductive approach was steadily replaced by a methodology that took its point of departure in the study of the historical Jesus, an anthropological approach that resulted in an anthropocentric Christology (Berkhof 1969:117). While an “anthropocentric” approach to Christology need not be problematic (and indeed this starting point for imagining the Person of Christ opened various fruitful avenues to theology), it is also true that the new approach reflected the rationalism of the time, so that it was clouded by an aversion to authority and the supernatural, on the one hand, and an overly zealous appeal to reason and experience, on the other (Berkhof 1969:118).

This resulted in the famous distinction – in my view heuristically necessary but always to be framed in a hermeneutically responsible way – between the historical Jesus and the Christ of the Church (Berkhof 1969:118). In practice this meant a picture of Jesus that was stripped of all things supernatural, and that “the doctrine of (concerning) Christ gave way for the teachings of Jesus,” so that “He who had always been regarded by the Church as an object of divine worship now became a mere teacher of morality” (Berkhof 1969:118). In the face of this epistemological shift, two approaches eventually defined itself in relation to the importance of the

historicity of Jesus, with one emphasising the historical (e.g. Von Harnack 1900 as proponent), and the other downplaying the historical (Bultmann is often cited as proponent, though this is contested).

Binary oppositions such as these, of course, seldom produce fruitful results, as confirmed by the criticism often aimed at both Christologies “from above” and Christologies “from below.” Ratzinger explains,

The dilemma of the two courses – on the one hand, that of transposing or reducing Christology to history and, on the other, that of escaping history completely and abandoning it as irrelevant to faith – could be quite accurately summarized in the two alternatives by which modern theology is vexed: Jesus or Christ? Modern theology begins by turning away from Christ and taking refuge in Jesus as a figure who is historically comprehensible, only to make an about-turn at the climax of this movement – in Bultmann – and flee in the opposite direction back to Christ, a flight, however, that at the present moment is already starting to change back into the new flight from Christ to Jesus (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Of course, we have no access to the historical Jesus except through the very textual traditions that already, albeit in an early and protochristological form, interpret the man Jesus in terms of the salvific relevance that he was thought to have for believers. This basic fact naturally leads to the hermeneutical point of departure that the binary opposition between a pre-paschal Jesus and a post-paschal Christ, while certainly helpful for heuristic reasons, in essence is nothing but interpretation reductionism. Any discourse on the Man from Nazareth must by necessity proceed, simultaneously, from Jesus to the Christ and from the Christ to Jesus. Indeed,

... the one (Jesus) cannot exist without the other (Christ), that, on the contrary, one is bound to be continually pushed from one to the other because in reality Jesus only subsists as the Christ and the Christ only subsists in the shape of Jesus (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

6.4.2 *The exemplarist theory of atonement: A critical engagement*

The *Aufklärung*, that great age of optimism and hope in the triumph of human reason over superstition and religious authority, led to a rapid development in soteriology in the direction of strongly moralist understandings of the death of Christ (McGrath 1985:210). The divine was understood to be interested in advancing human happiness, morality, and perfection, and the life and death of Christ was often seen as part of this divine initiative (McGrath 1985:210). Doctrines such as that of original

sin, predestination, the imputation of Christ's righteousness, and the satisfaction theory of atonement came under criticism and were suspected of posing a threat to morality (McGrath 1985:210 [McGrath cites Steinbart 1778]).²⁰⁸ The denial of original sin simultaneously mirrored a naïve emphasis on what was deemed to be the natural moral capacity of the human person. The *Aufklärer* denied an ontological alienation from God, but allowed for the existence of an "ontic" alienation, i.e. alienation imposed by the human person upon zirself by acts of sin (McGrath 1985:211).²⁰⁹ The essence of sin was seen in the destructive effect that it had on humanity itself, so that God was only indirectly implicated insofar as God might contribute to humanity reaching zir proper end (McGrath 1985:211):

Sin ... is most emphatically *not* understood as an offence against God, for which an appropriate satisfaction is required. If Christ's death is to have *any* significance for man, this must therefore be *located in the effect which it has upon man himself*. This important conclusion finds its most natural expression in an exemplarist or moral theory of the Atonement, which is characteristic of the later Enlightenment theologians ... For these theologians, the predicament from which man requires to be delivered is not that of bondage to sin or demonic powers, but *ignorance or misunderstanding concerning God* (McGrath 1985:211).

In Christ, then, as the theologians of the *Aufklärung* would have it, humanity has been liberated from the false conception of God as punishing tyrant, and now that critical reason has removed any obstacles that still remained, the human person is saved by imitating the example of Christ (McGrath 1985:212).

This leads to the question, however, whether the human person is at all capable of working out zir own salvation by imitating the example of Christ. The Enlightenment answer would be a hasty "yes," the spirit of the time clouded as it was with naïve optimism before being dealt the double blow of the two World Wars. The analysis of Immanuel Kant as laid out in his *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (1793) is of great importance here, as McGrath has illustrated in his critical discussion of the Moral Theory of the Atonement (see his discussion of Kant's

²⁰⁸ Steinbart (1778) argued that "a historico-critical approach to these doctrines suggests that their historical origins lay the doctrines themselves open to criticism. For example, Augustine's statements on original sin are the result of Manichaean influence, whereas the truly Christian understanding of the matter is that of Pelagius and the Greek Fathers" (cited by McGrath 1985:210). Our historical overview has brought us to much the same conclusion (cf. Chapters 3, 4).

²⁰⁹ Such acts of sin were understood to be dysteleologic, i.e. they worked against the human person's own interest, defined in terms of happiness and perfection (McGrath 1985:211).

analysis, 1985:213-217). Because McGrath clearly illustrates the impact that Kant's analysis has had on *post-Aufklärung* Moral Theories of the atonement, we now turn to consider this and its implications for Kearney's ethics of imagination.

Kant asserts the priority of humanity's moral obligation over everything else, and in this sense continues the Enlightenment emphasis on the fundamentally moral nature of Christianity (McGrath 1985:213). Given this presupposition, it is understandable that Kant likewise took great issue to illustrate the *possibility* of moral perfection as the "necessary presupposition of man's duty to pursue the highest good" (McGrath 1985:213).²¹⁰ On the basis of the necessity of this possibility, Kant introduces the ideas of divine grace and divine pardon – both concepts that Enlightenment theologians have judged to have become redundant. Kant, however, "is quite unable to accept the moral naïvété of the *Aufklärung* on both these points" (McGrath 1985:214), recognising both that the human person is a free creature and is capable to misuse this freedom. The conclusion that the human person may ignore zir apprehension of categorical moral obligation, constitutes for Kant a radical evil that leads him to specify that

moral perfection is not to be defined in terms of the *achievement* of such perfection, but rather as a *disposition* towards this objective. In effect, the idea of absolute moral perfection is maintained as an archetype (*Urbild*), which man recognises as good, and towards which he works – yet which he ultimately cannot attain (McGrath 1985:214).

In order to deal with this mutual incompatibility (Kant's "antinomies"), Kant affirmed the "necessity of divine grace, which is thereby accorded the status of a postulate of *practical reason*" (McGrath 1985:214). Kant defines as a "good disposition" the intention to work toward the above archetype of moral perfection, and sees divine grace operative in God's verdict of such a person: A human person of such good disposition is, namely, "by grace" (*aus Gnaden*) treated by God as if ze was already in full possession of this moral perfection:

²¹⁰ This is because the "denial of the possibility of moral perfection thus entails the denial of the possibility of the highest good, as the former is the unconditioned component of the latter. Thus, according to Kant, the denial of the possibility of the highest good entails the rejection of the moral law – which is an *absurdum practicum*, and thus impossible. If Kant's moral philosophy is to be consistent within itself, the apprehension of *das Sollen* must have as its fundamental and necessary presupposition the possibility of moral perfection" (McGrath 1985:213).

Thus the divine judgment in reckoning man righteous on account of his disposition towards good “is always one of grace alone.”²¹¹ If man works towards his moral development “in so far as it lies within his ability” (*so viel in seinem Vermögen ist*),²¹² he may rely upon God to “supplement” (*ergänzen*) any deficiency through grace (McGrath 1985:214).

Kant’s recognition of the ethical and theological significance of radical evil moves him, then, to negate the naïve moralism of his peers by proposing a human dependence on divine grace, weakening in his stride “the foundations of the exemplarist view of the atonement” (McGrath 1985:214-215).

The question then arises for Kant how God can justify an individual who, after an immoral life, changes to the good disposition, thus being well-pleasing to God. What of this person’s moral guilt (McGrath 1985:215)?²¹³ Kant answers that such an individual is sufficiently renewed after zir adoption of the good disposition that ze is a wholly new person,²¹⁴ and Kant proceeds to argue “that the new (i.e., good) disposition takes the place of (*vertritt*) the old in respect of the guilt which rightly belongs to the latter disposition²¹⁵” (McGrath 1985:215). It is this principle, in Kant’s view, that underlies the Christian doctrine of reconciliation, and the importance of this doctrine is seen in the freedom it offers the morally renewed person from despair over guilt for zir former ways (McGrath 1985:215-216).²¹⁶

The importance of Kant’s moral philosophy for exemplarist theories of atonement becomes clear, then,

... in that the concepts of *divine grace* and *divine pardon* are shown to be postulates of practical reason – i.e. assumptions without which moral progress is impossible, or seriously impeded. ... The concept of the “forgiveness of sins”

²¹¹ McGrath cites Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, 75.1-76.6, referring also to 62.14-66.18.

²¹² McGrath cites Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, 117.14-15.

²¹³ McGrath explains the background leading to Kant’s answer to this question, “Kant, as is well-known, unequivocally rejects the concept of vicarious satisfaction (*stellvertretende Genugthuung*): man’s guilt, like all his moral qualities, is strictly non-transferable. Nor can God relax the moral law in order that the individual’s guilty disposition might be pardoned: for Kant, a judge who is lenient, in that he does not enforce the strictness of the moral law, is a contradiction in terms” (McGrath 1985:215; McGrath cites Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, 141.9-142.3).

²¹⁴ “The discontinuity between the former evil disposition and the present good disposition is such that Kant feels able to *deny* that they may be predicated of the same moral individual” (McGrath 1985:215).

²¹⁵ McGrath cites Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*, 74.1-75.1.

²¹⁶ Because such a heavy burden of guilt would result in “moral indifference or quietism,” it was vital that Kant develop a moral philosophical equivalent of absolution, especially given his overwhelming emphasis on the importance of the moral life (see above).

was thus conceded to be an essential feature of a moralist understanding of the significance of the death of Christ (McGrath 1985:216).

Also,

... the existence of radical evil was found to necessitate a revision of the naïve optimism of the *Aufklärer* concerning man's moral capacities. Although Kant ... continue(s) to regard Christ's death as essentially exemplary and symbolic, the moral framework within which this symbol was to be interpreted had been revised in such a manner that the concepts of *divine grace* and *divine forgiveness* were necessarily implicated in the overall scheme of the Atonement. ... Although Kant cannot be said to have restored the Orthodox doctrine of reconciliation to its former position – and this was certainly not his intention – he nevertheless demonstrated that the rejection of the doctrine ... was unacceptable on moral grounds (McGrath 1985:216-217).

Amidst the overly optimistic age of Enlightenment, Kant's anthropology thus prepared a way to take seriously the weakness of human nature, especially in the wake of the excessive violence of the early 20th century.

It is at this point that we attempt a dialogue between, one the one hand, Kant's vital contribution with regard to the necessity of divine grace and divine pardon, and the debate regarding Abelard's theory of the atonement (cf. 4.3.2) on the other. The reader will recall Williams' argument that, for Abelard, sin has both objective and subjective dominion over us. While the subjective dominion of sin pertains to our personal struggles with our passions and desires, Williams argued that, for Abelard, the objective dominion of sin entails "our being liable to the punishment of sin," and that the Passion of Christ has released humanity from this dominion by means of an objective transaction.

Phrased in Kant's terminology, we might say that on account of divine grace, the objective dominion of sin is broken by the divine forgiveness that God offers the person who has turned from the evil inclination to the good inclination. God treats this individual "as though" ze has reached the ideal of moral perfection, even though practically ze continues to strive to this perfection (i.e. the subjective dominion of sin). It is here that we have to make a particularly important point regarding Kant's understanding of divine grace and divine pardon. As McGrath himself admitted (see quotation above, 1985:216-217), Kant continued to interpret Christ's suffering as exemplary and symbolic, even though his moral philosophy illustrated the necessity

of divine grace and divine pardon. It is therefore not only entirely possible, but also philosophically (and I would argue theologically) quite sound to maintain a moral exemplarist view of atonement and still understand divine grace and forgiveness as primary and foundational to the subjective effect that Christ's life, death and resurrection has on the believer.²¹⁷ We are not without biblical or theological precedent in pursuing such a line of thinking, since the Semitic understanding of sin and forgiveness paints a picture of a merciful God who stands ready to forgive and receive the penitent sinner without demanding satisfaction.

Since the objective dominion of sin is then dealt with through the divine pardon, it would seem appropriate to understand, following Abelard, that it is in relation to the subjective dimension of sin that divine grace calls at us through the person of Messiah Jesus, capturing our imagination so that we are subjectively transfigured, and the Kingdom of God is possibilised in and through us. This nuanced version of the moral exemplar theory emphasises divine grace as fundamental in terminating both the objective and the subjective dominion of sin over individuals. It is therefore not pseudo-Pelagianism where, having received divine forgiveness (objective sin), the individual is left to zir own, natural efforts in working out subjective redemption apart from grace. Neither is what is natural excluded in this process of transfiguration either, for the *yetser* is transformed through this process of divine beckoning to become the eschatological maybe. The whole event is beckoned into becoming and lured into reality by the divine, transfigurative grace of the *God Who May Be*, and yet the importance of Kearney's emphasis on the vulnerability of the Kingdom of God remains: we are free to respond to this call, or not.

This corresponds once again to Abelard's understanding of grace as necessary for right action, so that it underlies and initiates the very possibility of freedom from the subjective dominion of sin, i.e. our ethical being-in-the-world. This does not imply, however, that the blame for anyone's failure to act righteously should be laid at God's feet:

²¹⁷ It may prove a fruitful exercise to explore whether this window of understanding does not perhaps open new ways for understanding (and maybe to some extent resolving) the tension between various conflicting ways in which Abelard's theory of atonement has been interpreted (cf. 4.3.2). Such an endeavour falls decidedly outside the scope of this study, however.

He respects the divine initiative by insisting that we cannot be saved unless God does what is necessary to draw us to him. But he makes sinners culpable for their own damnation by insisting not only that God does this for everyone (and not merely for those who will be saved) but also that everyone has the power to accept or reject God's wooing. On this picture, grace is not like a steroid injection to give otherwise unavailable strength for good works, a new injection being needed for each new good work. Instead, it is simply a divine offer of a good that we already have the power to accept (Williams 2004:n.p.).

While Abelard does not state this explicitly, he seems to believe that the human person needs grace in order to accept grace, yet holds that "the grace in question is simply God's creating our nature appropriately" (Williams 2004:n.p.). In continuity with Abelard, then, we may imagine, in Kearney's language, that divine grace has already been extended to us in the act of creation (*yetser*), having been created with the ability to accept or refuse the further grace toward salvation and righteousness that God extends to us, not least by arousing our desire and luring our imaginations to envision *shalom*: an eschatological maybe that might be called "Kingdom of God."

The faithfulness of Messiah Jesus: A yetser inclined to higher will

One may draw considerable parallels between Kant's "good" and "evil" inclination and Kearney's concept of the *yetser*. In fact, many possibilities open up when one does so. One avenue of thought that is especially promising is that it is the "faithfulness" of Jesus to God's will that especially captures the imagination of believers. As opposed to the first Adam, whose *yetser* was fixed on himself in an act of self-idolatry, the second Adam lived a life defined by devotion to his heavenly Father.

In section 3.3.1, we saw how Paul interprets Christ's death as an apocalyptic event that has God as agent. Paul's argument in Romans is that Christ's passion is an apocalyptic event whereby God defeats the anti-god power of *Sin*. In Romans 3:21-26, it becomes clear that this defeat takes place by the faithfulness of Jesus to God's initiative. Paul interprets the genitive in διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (*dia pisteos Iesou Xristou*) as a subjective genitive, meaning "the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus," rather than "faith in Jesus," an objective genitive (Toews 2013:40).²¹⁸ This means

²¹⁸ See Toew's detailed exegetical treatment in his commentary on Romans (2004:108-111).

that the saving righteousness that God is revealing takes place not through human faith in Jesus, but through the *faithfulness of Jesus* (Toews 2004:103). Explicating Romans 3:21-26, Toews explains that

the emphasis on faith centers uniquely on the faith of Messiah Jesus – mentioned three times. This christological interpretation of faith follows from Paul's messianic reading of Habakkuk 2:4 in 1:17. The faith of believers is mentioned once (v. 22b); such faith is important, but is not the critical point of this text. There are three subjects of faith, Christ's (the faith of Jesus), the believer's (to all the ones believing), and God's (the revelation of God's saving righteousness). Jesus is the focal point where the divine and human meet. His faithfulness is the supreme expression of faith in God and the embodiment of God's covenant and saving faithfulness to the world. Believers "faith" – mimic the faithfulness – the faithfulness of Jesus as God's act of salvation, just as Jesus "faithed" God (2004:107-108).

Jesus' unquestioning faithfulness to his Father's will is made unmistakably clear by his prayer in Gethsemane, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."²¹⁹ This act of submission to the Father's will, even in the face of his own death, exemplifies the second Adam as a human being embodying the eschatological dimension enacted by a *yetser* fully fixed on divine will.

Two humans, Adam and Christ, by their two acts brought about two results. The two acts are disobedience (*parakoe*) and obedience (*hupakoē*). The one was unfaithful to God, the other faithful. What makes the second person so amazing is that he is able to undo the disastrous outcome of the first person's disobedience. The faithfulness of Christ reverses the unfaithfulness of Adam and assures righteousness for all who faithfully commit themselves to God (*who receive the abundance of grace even [rather than and] the free gift of righteousness*, (JET) v. 17," (referring to Rom 5:17; Toews 2004:160-161).

From this perspective, then, it is the faithfulness of Jesus – the orientation of his *yetser* on building not his own kingdom but that of God – that forms the basis of righteousness. "His obedience is God's way of making humans righteous and overcoming the Sin of Adam" (Toews 2004:160). Expounding the differences (and therefore the differing consequences for humanity) of the actions of Adam and Christ in Romans 5, Toews explains,

²¹⁹ Luke 22:42, "Λέγων· πάτερ, εἰ βούλει παρένεγκε τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἀπ' ἐμοῦ· πλὴν μὴ τὸ θέλημά μου ἀλλὰ τὸ σὸν γινέσθω."

This text is about “one person.” “One person” is the most frequent word (12 times); “through one” is the most dominant phrase (10 times). “One person” does something for “the many.” There are two “ones” in this text, Adam and Christ. Each is a representative figure. The action of each has universal consequences and introduces cosmic powers that far transcend the one act: **Sin** and **Death** by the one, **Grace** and **Life** by the other. Each has a cosmic legacy. Each creates and represents a people who live with the effects of each one’s action. There is an Adam people and a Christ people. The concern is the big picture, the large canvas, not the individual trees (2004:161-162).

Importantly, also, Paul’s line of thinking regarding Adam and Christ is both “profoundly Jewish” and profoundly radical. As we have seen (cf. 3.2), Rabbinic thought interpreted Adam both as the first and great sinner, yet also as the “first patriarch or as the paradigm of salvation and hope” (Toews 2004:162-163). While Paul agrees with the former, portraying the first Adam as the pathway by which *Sin* entered the world, he rejects the latter and instead portrays Christ as the first patriarch, “the paradigm of salvation and hope”:

Christ replaces Adam. Christ is both the Last Adam, the reality of end-time humanity, and the means by which the new humanity is attained, a feature in Jewish theology not ascribed to Adam (Toews 2004:162-163).

The eschatological dimension that opens as Jesus orients his *yetser* to the Father, enables the Divine to accomplish through him something that truly exemplifies the kingdom of God. It is this example of Christ in his moment of truest humanity – humanity oriented to the Transcendent in an act of worship – that captures the imagination of humanity. This does not mean, as we shall see, that we are merely addressed at an emotional level (see below). Instead, the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus, by capturing our imagination, *creates* in the believer a similar saving faithfulness.

The notion that Messiah Jesus captures the human imagination in such a way that it could be described as effecting the salvation of the human person indeed falls squarely, as we have seen, in the often shunned (and arguably more often underestimated) Moral Exemplar Theory of Atonement. Normally, this is taken to mean that Jesus saves by being the example *par excellence* of a godly life, and the theory is often dismissed under the accusation that the transcendent Christ is ignored in favour of a reductionist view of the human Jesus as exemplary teacher of morality. Furthermore, if humanity is saved by following the perfect example that

Jesus set for us, then it seems to follow that we have come full circle to an extreme form of Pelagianism that seems to imply that we are saved by our own efforts rather than by the grace of God.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the moral exemplar theory does not, in fact, argue that we are saved by the teachings of Messiah Jesus, but by his example which, through the power of story, changes the life of the believer. Aric Clark makes this point in an article posted on a public theology website:

It isn't only what Jesus said that is salvific in this understanding it is the entire pattern of his life, death, and resurrection [sic]. Jesus' example doesn't give us a list of instructions, it provides us a trajectory, a paradigm, a narrative to live into. Jesus as Moral Exemplar becomes the context which reframes our entire existence. Incarnation, Mission, Crucifixion, Resurrection – these become the sea we swim in, the grammar that structures our every waking moment. What we are talking about here is the power of story to reshape lives. What this atonement theory grasps in a way the others miss is that a saved life must be a transformed one. And the criteria of a transformed life is whether it conforms to the example of Jesus (Clark 2013:n.p.).

Clark continues to illustrate in a rather humorous (and let's be fair, oversimplifying) way, that an often overlooked advantage of the moral exemplar theory is its existential tangibility:

One may reasonably ask of the Christus Victor model, what is the evidence in the world around me that God has triumphed over sin or death or decay? Or of the Ransom model, what is the evidence that Satan or the powers of Evil have been defeated or that my eternal fate has been altered? One may reasonably ask why anyone bothers with Penal Substitutionary garbage [sic] at all. There is just no way to tell if it's true that we're saved from the devil, or death, or God's wrath, so a saved life and an unsaved life in these theories are indistinguishable. Into this insubstantial mess Moral Exemplar theory injects refreshing immediacy. Through it we understand that Christ's example saves us from a meaningless vicious lie, raising us to a beautiful, virtuous one. What we are saved from is tangible. That we are saved (or not) is observable. This alone gives it considerable interpretive power (Clark 2013:n.p.).

Jesus, according to this eschatological reading, is not a mere teacher of morality, and therefore not merely another version of an Enlightenment Christology that shuns the theological Christ in favour of the historical Jesus. Neither is there any body of "teaching" that Jesus left behind that could be separated from the life he lived and the death he died in devotion to the Transcendent. It is the Man from

Nazareth that captures us with his example, with the manner of life he lived and the manner of death he died, i.e., the very strangeness of his existence. What happens in the human person due to the transfiguration is dynamic, and has tangible existential and pragmatic consequences. We are truly changed when our imaginations are captured by Christ. Something happens within time and space when the believer's imagination is captured by this Messiah. Something that *transforms* and *transmutes*, or *transfigures*, in Kearney's terminology.

There is no convincing reason to maintain the suspicion against the moral exemplar theory when it is expressed in this way. The transfiguration that possibilises the imitation of Christ is real and tangible salvation both of the estranged self and the cosmos, in that it opens the way for humanity to partake in God's continuing work of creation. Scripture is less concerned with knowledge about God than with imitation of God, and it is the "walking in this way" that enables the Messianic Kingdom of justice and peace. The human person thus is free to redirect their "creative imagination to the way of divine creation – pursuing the way of *imitation* – or to continue his wandering through the desert of idolatrous fantasies, man's ethical choice remains a *free one*" (Kearney 1988:50). We will return to this point in 6.7.

Creative suffering and the past in the present: The contribution of Paul S. Fiddes in dialogue with Kearney

But *how* exactly does such transfiguration work? It is here that I wish to draw on the valuable and recent contributions of Paul S. Fiddes, British Baptist theologian and professor of systematic theology at the University of Oxford. One of his foremost contributions have been in the field of narrative theology, where he utilises ideas on the power of (past) narrative to elucidate the transformative presence of God in the present. In this way, Fiddes attempts to construct a bridge between the objective dimension and how it becomes subjectively actualised, i.e. presently and personally appropriated. The aim of this section is to fill the statement that "Christ captures the imagination" with greater depth and clarity.

It is in pursuit of understanding exactly "*how* the hearts of men and women today can be moved to make the constitutive meaning of the Calvary event their

own” that Fiddes turns to Abelard, a theologian who has been of great influence in his reflections and who is closely associated with the subjective (exemplarist or moral influence) approach (cf. 4.3.2; Mulcahy 2007:178, also n. 228). Fides challenges the usual claim against Abelard’s theory of the atonement as “merely” exemplarist, and claims that what Abelard actually offers, though admittedly with limited success, is a far more objective theory of atonement, and that he “is far from saying that merely imitating the love of God displayed by Jesus on the cross will result in our redemption” (Mulcahy 2007:179). Rather, Abelard meant that “God’s love has the power not simply to elicit imitation, but to actually *create* or *generate* love in human hearts” (Mulcahy 2007:179). Indeed, Abelard

... has grasped the power of the divine love to *create* or *generate* love within human beings. When God “binds himself” to us by love he takes the initiative in overcoming the defects in human nature that bind us in a circle of lovelessness. Through the life and death of Jesus he actually renews the bond of love that he implanted in creation (Fiddes 1989:141).

The act of God in Christ is “creative,” in that the Christ event draws human persons in their freedom to respond in love to the love which the Christ event itself reveals (Fiddes 1989:139). In this chapter of *Past event and present salvation*, Fiddes applies to the image “love” what he has applied to the key soteriological images of sacrifice, justice and victory in previous chapters, to reinterpret them to show that “the past event of the cross has a creative power which enables sacrifice, victory and justice to be realities also in our own present experience” (Mulcahy 2007:179). Like Fiddes, Abelard wished to illustrate that the passion of Christ has an ongoing impact on the lives of believers, and so Fiddes draws from Abelard’s attempt to convince his readers

to think of the passion not merely as a past event but they were to envision the suffering Christ as a person who is present now and who works on people also currently. This thinking was in contrast to the established transactional theories of Abelard’s contemporaries, which tended to depict the sacrifice of Christ purely as a past event. ... Christ works on the human heart to provoke a change in the believer by displaying himself through his passion and by focusing his personality on them. Thus grace is not merely a thing or a legal action; it is God acting upon the human spirit so that the heart is changed, Christian life is awakened, and the mind is drawn in love to Christ and away from sin when the believer discovers what Christ has done for him. Human beings are unable to bring about this change or make themselves worthy of salvation (Kaiser 2015:19-20).

Fiddes begins by motivating Abelard's rejection of the ransom theory on the one hand, and Anselm's idea that the passion restores God's honour on the other. In doing so, Abelard clears God of any external necessity, so that only the motive of pure love can remain for the incarnation and redemption:

There is no other necessity in God than to be faithful to his own being. But God is Love. Love is his very nature. Moved by love to create in the first place, God is once more moved by love to re-create fallen humanity. How does God do this? Once again by being faithful to God's own identity – through love. There is no need for God to change; no need for God to be reconciled. On the contrary, it is human beings who need to change and be reconciled. How does this come about? Precisely, through love. *The love of God revealed in the life and death of Jesus creates that change. The transforming energy of God's love in Christ generates the reality of love in the hearts of sinful men and women, setting them free from the slavery of sin and bringing them back to the Father.* Abelard is worlds away from claiming that salvation is simply a matter of imitating Jesus' love. He is no Pelagian. It is obvious that for him the initiative is entirely with the God who "makes righteous," "frees us," "incites," "acquires us," "enkindles" love in our hearts (Mulcahy 2007:180, italics YS; cf. Fiddes 1989:144 cf. Kaiser 2015:15-16).

The divine love revealed in Christ is not only *demonstrative*, but also *communicative*, in the sense that it infuses love in the believer and is therefore "objectively restorative and recreative" (Mulcahy 2007:180, 186). This takes place, according to Fiddes, by "the power of the *story of love*," and at this point he draws from Reinhold Niebuhr and R. S. Lee and their application of psychological insights in their theories of the atonement, to show how it is possible that the *story of the cross* may bring about fundamental change in the human person (Fiddes 1989:147-150; cf. Mulcahy 2007:181).

Niebuhr, to begin with, understood the "wisdom" and "power" in the cross to, on the one hand, reveal "God's kenotic love and humility," and, on the other, be able "to break open" our distorted and self-centred egos that "seeks inauthentic strategies to be secure" (Mulcahy 2007:181; cf. Fiddes 1989:147). For Niebuhr, it is the story of the cross itself that transforms through wisdom (enlightenment) and power (the shattering of the inauthentic ego):

The story of Christ's death on the cross is an encounter with truth. For it is an event which reveals both God's love and his wrath (his verdict on the consequences of human freedom). Such an encounter has the power to shatter my ego. Here is displayed a love which does not resort to inauthentic strategies

for survival, but which selflessly trusts in the Creator (Mulcahy 2007:181; cf. Fiddes 1989:147).

R. S. Lee, who builds on Freud's understanding of the ego, id and super-ego, takes a healing rather than a destructive approach to the ego. Since the ego continually searches for models with which to identify, the ego will grow in "authentic relationship with the world" the more an individual identifies with Christ (Mulcahy 2007:181; cf. Fiddes 1989:148-149):

Christ calls his disciples to identify with him in his selflessness, his non grasping love and firm trust, even to taking up the cross. His life-style and his relationship with the Father and with others, indicate a healthy pattern for the ego to follow. ... (I)f we take the figure of Jesus into our imagination, especially in his relationship with his Father, we are absorbing a model which enables both our ego and super-ego to find authentic fulfilment (Mulcahy 2007:181).

These two psychological interpretations of the passion illustrate that the revelation of God in the passion has a far deeper impact on the human person than a mere moving of emotions. Quite to the contrary, these psychological processes show how the "story and image of Christ – teacher and crucified one – can transform the mind" (Fiddes 1989:150). There is a link between

the perception of a truth and the transformation of the self. The revelatory power of the Christ event is something far more than an exemplary demonstration of a spiritual truth – there is also a power which enables the truth to be lived (Mulcahy 2007:182).

The reader will recall Fiddes' conviction that all revelation, including that in the person of Christ, is both *demonstration* and *communication*. God does not only inform us of his love, but actually communicates it to us (Mulcahy 2007:186):

The revealing of his love is at the same time God's opening of himself, for revelation can be nothing less than the self-unveiling of the being of God. ... If revelation were the communication of certain statements from God to us, then we would have God under our control... But God remains the sovereign Lord if the "Word" of God is nothing less than God's expressing himself, an act in which we encounter him and in which he remains free always to surprise us with new things (Fiddes 1989:160).

With this understanding established, Fiddes returns to the question of exactly *how* the past event of the passion is made a present reality for the contemporary believer. Since he finds Abelard's answer of God's presence in the sacraments too

limiting, he widens the admittedly intense locus of the encounter with God in the sacraments, to include the believer's whole life in the world as "the privileged arena" for encountering the divine presence (Fiddes 1989:161; cf. Mulcahy 2007:186). He also adds a corporate dimension to the immediacy of God's presence to the believer, a move in which he draws from Schleiermacher and Bonhoeffer to elucidate God's presence in and through the church, but also among the weak and powerless (Mulcahy 2007:186-189). We will return to this development in 6.5, but for now we must first consider the role of the Spirit in making the past event of salvation in Christ a present reality to the believer.

6.4.3 A transfiguring God: *The luring of the Spirit*

Kearney's phenomenological approach to exploring God post-metaphysically reveals a great sensitivity to the dynamic nature in which the divine Stranger interrupts upon our lives as the ever-luring, ever-eluding, ever-inviting presence. His hermeneutical approach, in turn, reinterprets stories from the Judeo-Christian tradition to illustrate that our ancient sacred traditions bear witness to this experience of the divine. It is on this basis that Kearney speaks of the transfiguring God.

How would a theological interpretation of such a phenomenological-cum-hermeneutical attempt at post-metaphysics look? This section explores how a post-metaphysical reflection on the salvific "luring" of the *God Who May Be* might be expressed through the pneumatological treasure chest of the Eastern theological tradition.

The eastern tradition turned to pneumatology when they wanted to elucidate the "salvific link between the particular nature of Jesus Christ and the rest of humanity" (Mulcahy 2007:183). It is God in the Person of the Holy Spirit, namely, that renews the divine image of Christ in human souls (Mulcahy 2007:183). When Abelard speaks of the divine love that is infused in human hearts through the passion of Christ, then he expresses this in pneumatological language as well: it is through sending the Holy Spirit that Christ poured out his sheer love into us, by

which it becomes possible for us to love God for his own sake (Mulcahy 2007:183).²²⁰ Mulcahy explains:

In referring to the Holy Spirit who is the Love in person between the Father and the Son, Abelard clearly has in mind the dynamic power of God's love that can generate love in our hearts. It is the Spirit who reactivates our love in response to the love shown in the passion and death of Jesus (Mulcahy 2007:183).

It is especially through the regenerating presence of the Holy Spirit, that Abelard understands the past event of Christ's passion as bringing about a change in the present. The Holy Spirit, who is love, is

shed abroad into our hearts, creating a new principle of life in our hearts so that sin is removed from our heart and that we show forth love too. This kindling love does not merely occur on a psychological level by reflecting about Christ's exemplary life and passion (moral influence) and thus as a result of human initiative; rather, the restoration of an attitude towards God is a real regenerative effect generated through the Holy Spirit, who wants to restore people to fellowship with God and transform them into sons of God. This infusion of love is the principal work of God's regenerative grace. ... It is love that unites man to God, creating a bond between the two. Thus the two key concepts of Abelard's view become visible – the freedom of human choice and love (Kaiser 2015:26).

Fiddes points out, however, that Abelard does not take the work of the Spirit far enough in his soteriology. While Abelard separates "the pouring out of the Spirit of love from the actual act of love in Christ,"²²¹ Fiddes rightly insists on a more active role for the Spirit, who is "God's love in person," and who for this reason cannot but "be active in the actual infusing of divine love into human hearts" (Mulcahy 2007:183-184; cf. Fiddes 1989:154). The saving presence of Christ becomes transformative, then, through the work of the Holy Spirit (Mulcahy 2007:189).²²²

It is this luring of the Spirit of God that we propose should form the theological backbone when interpreting Kearney's notion of the transfiguring God. Humanity can

²²⁰ Mulcahy refers to Abelard, *Expositio in Epistolam ad Romanos III*, 3:15.

²²¹ Abelard works here with Rom 5:5 (NRSV), "... because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." What Abelard means is that "the revelation of God's love in Christ is also a real infusion of restorative and transforming love. But the Spirit seems merely to prepare the human mind to perceive the revelation of love" (Mulcahy 2007:183).

²²² The Pauline corpus makes clear that atonement theology remains incomplete until it acknowledges the Holy Spirit as transformative catalyst. In 1 Cor 12:13, Paul speaks of believers being incorporated into the body of Christ in the context of the Spirit, and Rom 8:19-27 describes the regenerative work of the Spirit on all of creation, sighing with creation and "fulfilling them in the divine being. Our salvation remains incomplete without the creative influence of the Spirit of God on our personality (Mulcahy 2007:189).

hardly pull zirself up from the miry pit of self-idolatry, from a *yetser* fixed on itself. *Sola gratia* in this sense would mean not only that God has created the *yetser* free, so that it is able to turn from a fixation on itself to the Divine in an act of worship, but also that God eternally lures and invites human beings to turn in this way toward the unfolding of their eschatological nature as possibility.

6.5 A vulnerable God, a powerless possible, an uncertain outcome

The metaphysical God of *esse*, God of Pure Being, is invulnerable to change and suffering, and so medieval interpretations of the cross could envision only the human nature of Jesus suffering in his passion and death (Mulcahy 2007:184). Upholding the two nature Christology as formulated at Chalcedon, the divine nature was safeguarded from suffering and death and the divine essence always remained impassible, absolute and immutable (Mulcahy 2007:185; cf. Fiddes 1989:157). For this reason, a theologian such as Abelard was unable to adequately explain the mechanism of one of his most basic claims, namely that it was specifically in the “*death* of Christ that God’s saving love is demonstrated perfectly” (Mulcahy 2007:185).

The absolute, impassible God of Greek metaphysics has been subjected to increasing theological reinterpretation. This section wishes to bring Kearney’s notion of a *God Who May Be*, who is vulnerable to human response and who is a “God of small things,” into theological focus. We will focus on recent contributions surrounding, especially, the suffering of God on the cross – the event of divine vulnerability *par excellence*. Indeed, nothing draws a line across the easy and cheerful romanticism of progress like the cross of the Man from Nazareth. It is through suffering and vulnerability that Jesus becomes the Man “for others,” the exemplary, “last” Man who embodies the eschatological future of humanity as *being-for-O/other* (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).²²³

Paul Fiddes has greatly contributed to the notion of a vulnerable God in his *The creative suffering of God*, where he insists that we remain conscious of the fact

²²³ Ratzinger elaborates, “For to be the man for others, the man who is open and thereby opens up a new beginning, means being the man in the sacrifice, sacrificed man. The future of man hangs on the Cross – the redemption of man is the Cross. And he can only come to himself by letting the walls of his existence be broken down, by looking on him who has been pierced (Jn 19:37), and by following him who as the pierced and opened one has opened the path into the future.”

that, when we think of God, we think of One who has experienced death, yet without being dead, thereby overcoming non-being (Fiddes 1992:265). Building from Abelard's notion of the intrinsic necessity in God of acting in fidelity to God's own nature, and following the Barthian axiom of the freedom of God,²²⁴ Fiddes describes God on the cross by arguing that, "(i)n his freedom, God has chosen to empty himself in the incarnation, reaching a climax of humility in Christ on the cross" (Mulcahy 2007:185). This brings him to his argument of God making Godself vulnerable to humanity, by the freedom of God's choice: "But if we take seriously the freedom of God to love, then we can say that he desires fellowship with us, and that by his own eternal choice his being is enhanced by relationship with us" (Fiddes 1989:159). Mulcahy comments:

Paradoxical though it may seem, human beings can "add" something to God, can increase God's joy. In other words, through love, creation must be able to "affect" God, in some way. There is no question of external necessity here. God has no need of human affection or relationship, but out the [sic] freedom of his love God "determines to be in need" (Mulcahy 2007:185, Mulcahy quotes from Fiddes 1989:159).

This vulnerability runs both ways, however, since humans cannot but be affected by such a revelation of love in the person of Christ. God's total and complete identification with "a desolate and condemned human being dying outside the city walls on Calvary," demonstrates the "value and significance humanity has in God's eyes" (Mulcahy 2007:185). Fiddes follows Abelard here, for this demonstration of God's love for humanity elicits a like response in the human person as receiver of this love (Mulcahy 2007:185). To a large extent, this openness of humanity to be impacted by the illustration of God's love in Christ facilitates our salvation, enabling us to "accept that we are accepted"²²⁵:

Because God in Christ now knows us "from the inside," because he has entered the furthermost point away from God in identifying with a forsaken dying man, we have the courage to believe that we are really acceptable in his sight. Such

²²⁴ It will be recalled that Abelard, in his theory of the atonement, wanted to safeguard God against any extrinsic necessity in the economy of salvation (such as the idea that a ransom had to be paid to the devil, etc.), insisting that the only necessity the divine nature is bound to, is that of acting in accordance with its own nature, which is love (see 6.4.2 under the section *Creative suffering and the past in the present: The contribution of Paul S. Fiddes in dialogue with Kearney*; cf. also Mulcahy 2007:185).

²²⁵ Fiddes draws here from Tillich (1968:202-203 [vol. 2]; 1968:239-243 [vol. 3]).

acceptance is an integral dimension of what it means to be “saved” (Mulcahy 2007:185-186; cf. Fiddes 1989:159)

For Fiddes, this forms part of the larger question that orients his work on the atonement: how does the past act of salvation in Christ become an immediate presence to the believer? How then, does God’s revelation of love in Christ become a communication of the very being of God, i.e. love, to the believer? Fiddes draws from both Schleiermacher and Bonhoeffer in answering this question. From Schleiermacher he appropriates the idea that the presence of the Saviour dwells in the community of believers, through which this presence holds “a transforming power over human attitudes towards God” (Mulcahy 2007:186). Practically, this means that humanity’s broken God-consciousness becomes transformed through the perfect God-consciousness of Jesus Christ that he communicates to his disciples (Fiddes 1989:161-162; cf. Mulcahy 2007:168-169). The conclusion that Fiddes draws from this is that Christ, whose presence is able to influence and transform personalities, “must bring about a new kind of ‘corporate life’ between himself and those whom he transforms, and also between those who are seized by his influence” (Fiddes 1989:162; cf. Mulcahy 2007:187).

Fiddes now turns to two aspects of Bonhoeffer’s thinking to bring balance to this insight of Schleiermacher. First, Bonhoeffer’s emphasis on the suffering God serves as a corrective to Schleiermacher’s Jesus whose “communion with the Father is untouched by pain and suffering” and who “goes into death with trusting and serenity.” Second, Bonhoeffer’s interpretation of Jesus’ experience of God-forsakenness on the cross serves as a corrective to Schleiermacher’s confidence in a “universal” religious experience that seems at odds with a contemporary sense of the loss of God-consciousness (Mulcahy 2007:187).

Bonhoeffer, like Schleiermacher, understood Christ’s presence to dwell in the community of believers. Unlike Schleiermacher, however, Bonhoeffer did not identify the Church as the presence of Christ with the glorified Christ at the right hand of the Father, but rather with the humiliated Christ on the cross. In his prison letters, Bonhoeffer enlarged his understanding of Christ’s presence to include all life in all of the world, including even the secular world who lives in ignorance of God (Fiddes

1989:164; cf. Mulcahy 2007:188).²²⁶ Bonhoeffer accomplishes this by linking Christ's experience of abandonment on the cross with the contemporary loss of a sense of God. That God revealed Godself as *Deus absconditus* through a scorned human being who felt himself abandoned by his heavenly Father, denotes a God who reveals zirself in weakness (Mulcahy 2007:188). This means not only that God suffers with the destitute and forsaken, but also that

God is "there for us" in places where he appears to be redundant, where no one calls for a God to intervene, where human beings are exercising their freedom to be adult. There God suffers his humiliation, crucified "at the hands of the world" (Fiddes 1989:165).

Contemporary Christians, in Bonhoeffer's view, are called to engage with the secular world in a radically different way. In several of his letters from prison, he ponders at length the nature of what he calls a "religionless Christianity," and in the end comes to value how, in the secular world, God is not pushed aside to the fringes, to that which humanity cannot control or understand, and therefore seeks a god-of-the-gaps that may complete these borderline experiences of humanity. Because the secular world has done away with God altogether, the *Deus absconditus* is able to be present in the very centre of human life. In order for Christians to testify to this, they must themselves be, with conviction, *in* the world:

²²⁶ During his time in prison, Bonhoeffer indeed began to perceive the world as living in ignorance of God: "The thing that keeps coming back to me is, what is Christianity, and indeed what is Christ, for us to-day? The time when men could be told everything by means of words, whether theological or simply pious, is over, and so is the time of inwardness and conscience, which is to say the time of religion as such. We are proceeding towards a time of no religion at all: men as they are now simply cannot be religious any more. ... Our whole nineteen-hundred-year-old Christian preaching and theology rests upon the 'religious premise' of man. What we call Christianity has always been a pattern – perhaps a true pattern – of religion. But if one day it becomes apparent that this *a priori* 'premise' simply does not exist, but was an historical and temporary form of human self-expression, i.e. if we reach the stage of being radically without religion – and I think this is more or less the case already, else how is it, for instance, that this war, unlike any of those before it, is not calling forth any 'religious' reaction? – what does that mean for 'Christianity'?" (Bonhoeffer 1959:122).

In this context Bonhoeffer asks, "If religion is no more than the garment of Christianity ... then what is a religionless Christianity?" (Bonhoeffer 1959:123). It becomes clear, then, that Bonhoeffer had to broaden his understanding of the presence of Christ to include the secular world and not only the Church, since he saw the world changing in front of his eyes into a world where the presence of "Church" to a secular person in a religionless world, becomes largely irrelevant. "How do we speak," he asks, "of God without religion, i.e. without the temporally-influenced presuppositions of metaphysics, inwardness, and so on? ... In what way are we in a religionless and secular sense Christians, in what way are we the *Ekklesia*, 'those who are called forth,' not conceiving of ourselves religiously as specially favoured, but as wholly belonging to the world? Then Christ is no longer an object of religion, but something quite different, indeed and in truth the Lord of the world" (Bonhoeffer 1959:123).

(L)ike Christ himself ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?") he must drink the earthly cup to the lees, and only in his doing that is the crucified and risen Lord with him, and he crucified and risen with Christ. This world must not be prematurely written off (Bonhoeffer 1959:154).

If God is then willing in God's great love to be pushed aside by the world, so must the contemporary Christian learn to follow in the way of the seemingly invisible, seemingly absent. This is the way of the Church who corporately bears witness to the presence of Christ in the world, while the secular world lives in ignorance of this presence.

God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark 15:34). The God who makes us live in this world without using him as a working hypothesis is the God before whom we are ever standing. Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us. Matthew 8:17 makes it crystal clear that it is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us, but by his weakness and suffering (Bonhoeffer 1959:164).

These words of Bonhoeffer are perhaps as close as we have come to a theological formulation of Kearney's emphasis on a powerless and vulnerable God. Bonhoeffer even expresses, in the same letter, thoughts regarding the post-religious world of Europe that come very close to Kearney's ideas of anatheism (cf. 5.6).²²⁷ Here, Bonhoeffer links the idea of a powerless God with the world's coming-of-age, so that a world coming into its own has been able to substitute a suffering God for the *Deus ex machina* that existed as a projection of a fearful humanity.²²⁸ The point

²²⁷ Bonhoeffer: "Religious people speak of God when human perception is (often just from laziness) at an end, or human resources fail: it is really always the *Deus ex machina* they call to their aid, either for the so-called solving of insoluble problems or as support in human failure - always, that is to say, helping out human weakness or on the borders of human existence. Of necessity, that can only go on until men can, by their own strength, push those borders a little further, so that God becomes superfluous as a *Deus ex machina*. I have come to be doubtful even about talking of 'borders of human existence.' Is even death to-day, since men are scarcely afraid of it any more, and sin, which they scarcely understand any more, still a genuine borderline? It always seems to me that in talking thus we are only seeking frantically to make room for God. I should like to speak of God not on the borders of life but at its centre, not in weakness but in strength, not, therefore, in man's suffering and death but in his life and prosperity. On the borders it seems to me better to hold our peace and leave the problem unsolved. Belief in the Resurrection is not the solution of the problem of death. The 'beyond' of God is not the beyond of our perceptive faculties. The transcendence of theory based on perception has nothing to do with the transcendence of God. God is the 'beyond' in the midst of our life" (1959:123-124)

²²⁸ "This is the decisive difference between Christianity and all religions. Man's religiosity makes him look in his distress to the power of God in the world; he uses God as a *Deus ex machina*. The Bible however directs him to the powerlessness and suffering of God; only a suffering God can help. To this

is, then, that those who want to find God must look for God among the weak, powerless and suffering, where he is present as weak, powerless and suffering – and this implies that the contemporary believer must engage zirself in complete commitment in the secular world (cf. Mulcahy 2007:189).

Paradoxical though it may seem, the saving presence of Christ in the community of the Church or the community of the wide world is revealed in weakness and suffering, and yet possesses a power to transform the personalities of those who strive to follow him (Mulcahy 2007:189; cf. Fiddes 1989:165).

In this summary of Bonhoeffer's answer to the question of who Christ is and where he may be found, we find ourselves very close to a theological formulation of Kearney's argument for a *God Who May Be* that exemplifies the powerless possible. Indeed, there is great irony at the core of the revelation of the Divine in and through the human being from Nazareth. If the miracle is that God has come so close to humanity that we may only take a few steps, reach out our hand and touch God-in-flesh, then it also discloses the unspeakable vulnerability to which God subjects Godself in the world. Indeed, while some hands may reach out to the God-Man in the desperate hope that a simple touch may heal a lifetime of shame and social ostracising (the woman with chronic blood flow), and some hands might reach out in an act of worship (the woman washing Jesus' feet with her tears), other hands may point fingers and shout, "crucify him." As Ratzinger so aptly states,

The very thing that at first seems to bring God quite close to us, so precisely, also becomes in a very profound sense the precondition for the "death of God," which henceforth puts an ineradicable stamp on the course of history and the human relationship with God. God has come so near to us that we can kill him and that he thereby, so it seems, ceases to be God for us (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

It is in this context that we have to take seriously the biblical symbols of judgment, punishment, and death.

By contrast, hell is simply wanting to be oneself apart from God's grace and in isolation from others. Hell is that self-chosen condition in which, in opposition to God's agapic love and the call to a life of mutual friendship and service, individuals barricade themselves from others. It is the hellish weariness and boredom of a life focused entirely on itself. Hell is not an arbitrary divine punishment at the end of history. It is not the final retaliation of a vindictive deity.

extent we may say that the process we have described by which the world came of age was an abandonment of a false conception of God, and a clearing of the decks for the God of the Bible, who conquers power and space in the world by his weakness" (Bonhoeffer 1959:164).

Hell is self-destructive resistance to the eternal love of God. It symbolizes the truth that the meaning and intention of life can be missed. Repentance is urgent. Our choices and actions are important. God ever seeks to lead us out of our hell of self-glorification and lovelessness, but neither in time nor in eternity is God's love coercive (Migliore 2004:347).

Kearney is often criticised for proposing that possibility, which he imagines characterises the Divine as *God Who May Be*, makes both God and the divine purpose vulnerable to human choice and action. Kearney insists, namely, that it remains the human prerogative to respond negatively, or positively, to the transfiguring Spirit luring us to the eschatological future where *God May Be*. We would propose, however, with Kearney, that the certainty that Christianity has often projected onto the Eschaton as a guaranteed future, should pass through the purifying fires of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche. We may very well find an idol lurking in the midst of this assurance, a sublimated projection of human angst when faced with the uncertainty that characterises our existence. Kearney's anatheistic project purposefully invites faith to open itself to the necessary death of such gods of comfort and control. On the other side of our idols, we may *believe again*.

6.6 Before the seventh day of creation: Sin and salvation in evolutionary perspective

One of the avenues being explored in the contemporary dialogue between natural science and religion is what has been termed “Deep Incarnation.” Developed from the kenotic self-emptying of Christ, described in Philippians 2:7,²²⁹ deep incarnation theology interprets the redemptive work of God in Christ to include all of creation, similar to the Pauline understanding.

... when we consider our world, we need to confess that we are in the grips of powers that are larger than ourselves. We see this not only on the world stage but much closer to home. Those who have watched a loved one ravaged by cancer or who have wrestled with addiction or mental illness know that the language of cells and body chemistry does not entirely suffice. Nor does it suffice to say that human beings who lived in Jerusalem in the first century put Jesus to death. God handed Jesus over to death, handed him over to these same powers in order to bring about their defeat and the eventual deliverance of all creation (Gaventa 2007:144).

²²⁹ Philippians 2:6-11, the famous hymn used by Paul to encourage believers to follow in Christ's footsteps in seeking not their own interests, but the interests of others, mentions in v. 7 that Christ “emptied himself” (ἐκαντὸν ἐκένωσεν, from the verb *kenosis*).

Ratzinger follows this thinking in his discussion of Christ as the final, last, or “exemplary” human that typifies the eschatological hope for the whole of humankind. Ratzinger means this in an evolutionary sense. Not only did Jesus unify divinity and humanity in his person, but as the exemplary human, Christ symbolises that this is the divine intention for the whole of humanity. In this context, Ratzinger briefly discusses Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s attempt to bring such Christian thinking into dialogue with the modern view of the world, and in so doing gave greater accessibility to these ideas. Like Ratzinger, who made the point that the exemplary human is one who is open to and lives for the O/other (cf. 6.2.2), Teilhard stressed that the human monad becomes fully zirself when ze ceases to be alone. Pinning this thinking against the background of his theory that the real order of evolution perpetually drifts toward greater and greater complexity,²³⁰ Teilhard postulates that, while humanity may so far have reached the maximum in complexity of all the creatures of creation, the mere human-monad cannot represent an end. Instead, zir growth “demands a further advance in complexity” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.):

That is to say, man is indeed, on the one hand, already an end that can no longer be reversed, no longer be melted down again; yet in the juxtaposition of individual men he is not yet at the goal but shows himself to be an element, as it were, that longs for a whole that will embrace it without destroying it (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Given that Teilhard accepted the notion of complexification from above,²³¹ what such a statement really implies is that there is a “cosmic drift” toward “an incredible ‘mono-molecular’ state” in which every individual ego will be transcended

²³⁰ Ratzinger explains, “In the background is the idea that in the cosmos, alongside the two orders or classes of the infinitely small and the infinitely big, there is a third order, which determines the real drift of evolution, namely, the order of the infinitely complex. It is the real goal of the ascending process of growth or becoming; it reaches a first peak in the genesis of living things and then continues to advance to those highly complex creations that give the cosmos a new center” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

²³¹ Teilhard did not follow the ideas of Physics in this regard, but held that “Great Stability” is not “below” in the “infra-elemental,” but rather “above” in the “ultra-synthetic.” Ratzinger comments that “we are confronted here with a crucial statement; at this point the dynamic view of the world destroys the positivistic conception, which seems so obvious to us, that stability is located only in the ‘mass,’ in hard material. That the world is in the last resort put together and held together ‘from above’ here becomes evident in a way that is particularly striking because we are so little accustomed to it” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

without becoming obsolete (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).²³² I fully concur with Ratzinger's assessment of Teilhard's thinking along these lines:

One can safely say that here the tendency of Pauline Christology is in essentials correctly grasped from the modern angle and rendered comprehensible again, even if the vocabulary employed is certainly rather too biological. Faith sees in Jesus the man in whom – on the biological plane – the next evolutionary leap, as it were, has been accomplished; the man in whom the breakthrough out of the limited scope of humanity, out of its monadic enclosure, has occurred; the man in whom personalization and socialization no longer exclude each other but support each other; the man in whom perfect unity – "The body of Christ," says St. Paul, and even more pointedly "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28) – and perfect individuality are one; the man in whom humanity comes into contact with its future and in the highest extent itself becomes its future, because through him it makes contact with God himself, shares in him, and thus realizes its most intrinsic potential. From here onward faith in Christ will see the beginning of a movement in which dismembered humanity is gathered together more and more into the being of one single Adam, one single "body" – the man to come. It will see in him the movement to that future of man in which he is completely "socialized," incorporated in one single being, but in such a way that the individual is not extinguished but brought completely to himself (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

Kearney's approach to the human *yetser* as the passion for the possible presents us with creative possibilities for imagining how humanity might form part of such an eschatological future. In the context of deep incarnation, however, this does not only refer to the human species. Instead the whole of creation may be seen as God's work, still in progress, in which humanity is called to participate. This line of thinking invites us to imagine God's continued creation, as it pertains to human beings, along biological-evolutionary lines. As Veldsman points out, this would require a "fundamental anthropological revision of the traditional problematic viewpoints on 'original sin'" (2014:439-440). Rees explores what a theology of free

²³² Ratzinger refers to another strand of Teilhard's thinking that explains this conclusion: "The Universal Energy must be a Thinking Energy if it is not to be less highly evolved than the ends animated by its action. And consequently ... the attributes of cosmic value with which it is surrounded in our modern eyes do not affect in the slightest the necessity obliging us to recognize in it a transcendent form of Personality.' From here it is possible to understand the final aim of the whole movement as Teilhard sees it: the cosmic drift moves 'in the direction of an incredible "mono-molecular" state, so to speak, in which ... each ego is destined to attain its climax in a sort of mysterious superego.' As an 'I,' man is indeed an end, but the whole tendency of his being and of his own existence shows him also to be a creation belonging to a 'super-I' that does not blot him out but encompasses him; only such an association can bring out the form of the future man, in which humanity will achieve complete fulfillment of itself" (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

will (for its part) would look like, one that dialogues with Kearney and the Semitic tradition on the one hand, and with evolutionary biology on the other:

As for the term “original sin,” it is “certainly not a good one,” especially when it has been stripped of almost all its Augustinian associations and has been reduced, if not to a cliché, at most to serving as a convenient synonym for man’s tendency to evil or as a useful antidote to modern notions of perfectibility. If we wish to employ it to express this tendency to evil, we must remember to allow for another, opposing tendency which man has developed in response to the civilising influence of human culture. Man’s tendency to do evil is not the result of a sin committed by his first ancestor but of his genetic inheritance, which stretches back to that moment in time when molecules first merged to form DNA and pairs of cells joined and multiplied in the primeval soup. In the course of human evolution this tendency has been to some extent counteracted by a tendency to altruism, stimulated and encouraged by ethical constraints and religious experience; both of these tendencies have reacted and continue to react to man’s physical and social environment *in utramque partem*, leaving him as a pig-in-the-middle, caught in the perennial encounter between the forces of good and evil. The Christian’s choice between these opposed forces stems not from a divine election made once and for all in the remote past, but from the way in which he or she responds or fails to respond to the message and example of Jesus and to the subconscious pressures of the Spirit, deftly applied (Rees 1991:74).

Or, put in terms of Kearney’s “passion for the possible”:

The benign Talmudic interpretation runs thus: the Divine Potter, never unmindful of the final goal for his clay, recognized only too well that while imagination had become explicitly evil by virtue of the fall, one of its future historical possibilities remained a return to the good. Of course, this return could never signify a return to the pre-lapsarian harmony of Eden. But it could manifest itself as a covenant between man and God with regard to the future direction of history. Though contaminated by the original sin of Adam, imagination might yet serve as the midwife to an ultimately good end – the opening of a new dialogue between man and God which would issue in the Messianic Kingdom. Put in the form of an hypothesis: is it not conceivable that imagination was created by God as an invitation to join Him in the completion of His creation? Was this not part of the Potter’s plan from the outset? Was this not the reason Yahweh decided to rest on the Seventh Day of Creation – so as to leave a free time and space for man to realize his creative potential by actively contributing to the venture of historical creation? Moreover, did this not signify, as one Hasidic reading has it, that “man was created as an open system, meant to grow and to develop, and was not finished, as the rest of creation”²³³? (Kearney 1988a:50).

²³³ Kearney quotes here from Fromm (1966:142).

Such an eschatological openness – one interpreted historically through a continuous re-engagement of our religious textual tradition – implies that God has tied Godself to creation in an eternal move of kenotic creation. Along these lines, Richard Kearney and John Manoussakis has described a “fourth reduction,” which Hederman interprets in his reflection on Kearney’s *God Who May Be* through four “descents in the *kenosis* of God”:

The first, “transcendental,” reduction is situating God as above and beyond anything which we experience subjectively as “us,” God as beyond and above our epistemological radar screens. The second, “ontological,” reduction could be interpreted as creation of the world: “The world is charged with the grandeur of God,” in Hopkins’s phrase. This involves more specifically the first person of the Trinity as Father, originator, and creator. The third, “dosological,” reduction is the *kenosis* of the Son, the second person of the Trinity, who emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave. Incarnation is more properly viewed in terms of this third level of gift or “givenness” in terms of “hypostatic union between phenomenon and phenomenality,” as Manoussakis puts it: Christ as gift and sacrifice of himself. The fourth, or “prosopic,” reduction becomes most fittingly, then, the further *kenosis* of the Trinitarian God in and through the ‘impersonatisation’ of the Holy Spirit. “The eschatological reduction retrieves and repeats the *possibilizing* of essence, being and gift which seemed impossible before the return to the gracious deep underlying and sustaining them” (Kearney). This is not incarnation as such, but the deeper impregnation of the personhood principle constitutive of an ecclesial world. “Prosopon, therefore, is not the face of the Other (a ‘where’) but rather the way (the ‘how’) of the relationship through which the Other gives himself or herself to me” (Manoussakis). Through the Spirit, with the Spirit, in the Spirit, the mystical body of the communion of saints is “prosoponised,” allowing Christ to play “in ten thousand places,/lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his/To the father through the features of men’s faces” (Hopkins). The fourth reduction of God is the fourth person of the Trinity: ourselves as recapitulated into the body of Christ, through the pleromatic personhood of the Holy Spirit (Hederman 2006:277-278).

A theological formulation of such co-creation will benefit from a hermeneutical re-engagement with the concept of *imago Dei*, the idea that humanity bears the “image of God,” which Christianity has always judged to express something about the uniqueness of the relationship between Creator and creature. Van Huyssteen has already done seminal work in this regard, bringing the religious tradition into

dialogue²³⁴ with the science of human development (2006, esp. 111-162). Exploring the *yetser* in this regard may yield fruitful results.

Creative avenues are being pursued in this regard by Danish theologian Niels Gregersen (cf., e.g., 2015:225-252; 2013a:251-262; 2013b:270-293; 2003 [ed.]; 2001:192-207). Describing a comprehensive view of salvation in relation to Luther's theology of the real presence of the humanity of Christ in creation, he refers to the "whole divine fullness" ($\pi\lambda\gamma\rho\omega\mu\alpha$) that dwelt in the extensive body of Christ, and expresses the unity of the incarnational approach by stating that there "is here no longer any separation possible between the church as the particular body of Christ and the cosmos at large, for also the cosmos is reconciled to God in the *shalom* of reconciliation" (2013:260). He proceeds to outline the Scriptural basis for this line of thinking, and expresses the heart of deep incarnation:

The point of deep incarnation is thus not only expressed in the foundational text of the Prologue of John but also in the Pauline corpus. Elsewhere I have argued that also the Gospel of Luke brings sustained reflection on the social nature of the body of Christ. The body of Christ thus becomes accessible to all people at all times by virtue of his resurrection and ascension. Deep incarnation – from cave to cross – is thus continued in the deep resurrection of the social body into God's trinitarian life. Just as the eternal Son entered into the world of creation, so the social body of the incarnate Son entered into divine life forever. Accordingly, incarnation is not only a passing episode in God's involvement with God's own world of creation. For incarnation is not only about the removal of sin and the transformation of sinner, but also about the world of creation, in which there shall be neither separation nor confusion between Christ and creation. Accordingly, incarnation must be perpetual. As Martin Luther once remarked, "What is born from eternity is born every moment" (Gregersen 2013:260-261).

In dialogue with Kearney's poetical imagination, deep incarnation may guide us to faithfully – and playfully – imagine new worlds based on the conviction that not only the incarnation, but also the groaning of creation, may be seen as God's eschatological "yes" for humanity and all of creation. Humanity may partake in this creation by transfiguring the Divine-In-Cosmos, even as humanity finds itself

²³⁴ Indeed, an interdisciplinary approach will prove vital in this regard. States Van Huyssteen: "What we have learned from the history of this canonical tradition is that the idea that humans are created in the image of God never should be argued in abstraction from the concrete historical and social ways we find ourselves situated in today's world. On a postfoundationalist view this also calls for a very consciously pluralistic and interdisciplinary approach to theological reflection" (2006:160).

imaginatively transfigured and opened to new possibilities by the *God Who May Be.*²³⁵

6.7 Conclusion

Credo. What does it mean for the dialogically engaged Christian to make a confession of faith to zir contemporary context? What does it mean for the believer to “always be ready to give an answer when someone asks you about your hope” (1 Pet 3:15b)? The point made at the outset of this chapter was that a shared hermeneutical space for dialogue is opened up by the existential human experience of doubt that both the believer and the non-believer partakes in. In this sense, then, we must again follow Ratzinger in describing an aspect of what “credo” means as the transcending of a merely positivistic approach to reality. “Credo,” he asserts,

... means that man does not regard seeing, hearing, and touching as the totality of what concerns him, that he does not view the area of his world as marked off by what he can see and touch but seeks a second mode of access to reality, a mode he calls in fact belief, and in such a way that he finds in it the decisive enlargement of his whole view of the world. If this is so, then the little word credo contains a basic option vis-à-vis reality as such; it signifies, not the observation of this or that fact, but a fundamental mode of behavior toward being, toward existence, toward one's own sector of reality, and toward reality as a whole. It signifies the deliberate view that what cannot be seen, what can in no wise move into the field of vision, is not unreal; that, on the contrary, what cannot be seen in fact represents true reality, the element that supports and makes possible all the rest of reality. And it signifies the view that this element that makes reality as a whole possible is also what grants man a truly human existence, what makes him possible as a human being existing in a human way. In other words, belief signifies the decision that at the very core of human existence there is a point that cannot be nourished and supported on the visible and tangible, that encounters and comes into contact with what cannot be seen and finds that it is a necessity for its own existence (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

It is this description of “credo” as pointing to an existential mode of being human that I would cast in Kearney’s language of eschatological personhood, unlocked by a *yetser* that is entirely fixed on the strange and inviting voice that calls in the wilderness. If conversion, in the sense of “turning back” means anything, it means a redefinition of human existence by orienting the imagination not to what can merely be seen and touched in a perpetual act of self-idolatry, but by orienting the

²³⁵ Of course, the very capacity of human imagination must in this context be described along evolutionary lines. Cf., e.g., Van Huyssteen’s pioneering work in this regard (2006, esp. 261-267).

imagination, instead, to the divine, and in so doing possibilising the kingdom of God in time and space.

This description of “belief” as prioritising the invisible over the visible, i.e. for the human person to convert from zir natural inclination toward the visible and physical toward the invisible (cf. Ratzinger 2004:n.p.), is still too limited, however. Furthermore, it echoes the ancient and unfortunate suspicion of the physical world as less-than-holy at best, or simply evil at worst. What “credo,” or a life oriented by belief, is really about, involves a conversion from self-idolatry – the human inclination to fix the *yetser* on zirself in an act of self-contained and self-oriented worship. It is not enough to describe “belief” as “a leap … across an infinite gulf, a leap, namely, out of the tangible world” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). History has shown, time and again, how the human imagination grasps at what it believes the intangible to be and uses it in zir own self-interest, so that even religion often becomes an act of self-idolatry, as Barth so aptly reminds us. Ratzinger himself recognises this, and later describes the specifically Christian mode of belief as

entrusting oneself to the meaning that upholds me and the world; taking it as the firm ground on which I can stand fearlessly. … (T)o believe as a Christian means understanding our existence as a response to the word, the logos, that upholds and maintains all things. It means affirming that the meaning we do not make but can only receive is already granted to us, so that we have only to take it and entrust ourselves to it (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.).

What is necessary, then, is a voluntary act of worship, an orientation of the imagination on the divine that opens the eschatological dimension of humanness as defined by relation to the Divine. Such belief is profoundly personal. The believer does not believe in “something,” but confesses that “I believe in You” (Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). The ground of all meaning is addressed by the believer as a “Thou,” as the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” This God is a radically Other, who reveals zirself in relation to humanity as the Divine Stranger that captures the imagination and invites us to embody the eschatological dimension of our being while here on earth. To meet this Strange, imagination-capturing Visitor, we turn to a Scriptural narrative that exemplifies such an eschatological opening to possibility.

CHAPTER SEVEN: OF NAZARETH: STORIES THAT CAPTURE THE IMAGINATION

We started our journey through the landscape of sin and salvation with what we called “a story gone wrong.” It was not only that things went wrong in Eden – humanity has always had a sense that things “are not” as they “could” or “should” be. It is also that our interpretation went wrong, and the ancient tale that exemplifies the human experience, and in which we each should each see ourselves like in a mirror, has become clouded with the fog of our projections. Chapter 1 was about recovering this story as story, allowing it to be as ambiguous as life itself.

We revisited the story in Chapter 5. Good stories never finish with us. This time, with the help of our hermeneutic detour through a phenomenology of the imagination, à la Kearney, we saw the text mirror our tendency to idolise the self. We observed what happens when imagination goes wrong and our *yetser* is put in service of the self. We recognised the estrangement in the symbol of exile from the Garden, for it is a separation with which we are all intimately familiar.

Now, toward the end of our exploratory voyage, we turn to story once more, this time to consider a case where imagination does not lead astray, but instead enables Divine Presence in the world. We do this to bring our thoughts to conclusion, by asking, one final time, if imagination may truly aid us in rethinking sin and salvation, post-metaphysically. Even if we may understand the transgression in the Garden in terms of imagination-toward-death, where do we find stories that show us new possibilities of imagination-toward-life? For an example of such transfiguration and impossible possibility, we turn to the familiar narrative of the Annunciation. Again, as in the Garden, a stranger approaches a woman. But she is not a woman, only a girl. And whereas the first story became a mirror of past error, the one that now encounters us briefly opens a window on a possible future where *God May Be*.

7.1 “May it be,” or “*May God Be*”: On possibilising the Messiah

What we call things. How we name them. The short story of the Divine Messenger announcing the possibility of the Messiah’s birth to a young girl in Nazareth seems rather obsessed with this. There are the more obvious, almost expected references

Section	Thematic development		V.	Luke 1:26-38 (NA 28)	
1	1.1.1 The Divine Stranger breaks into human experience and brokenness	Section 1: Humanity addressed as Thou	Section 1.1 The divine messenger is sent to a young girl in a small Galilean town Section 1.2 Bewilderment as the divine messenger addresses a simple girl and bestows grace freely	26a b c d 27a b c d 28a b c d 29a b c εἰπεν χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, οὐκέτι σοῦ. ἢ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο καὶ εἰσελθὼν πρὸς αὐτὴν χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, οὐκέτι σοῦ. ἢ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἶη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος. Καὶ εἰπεν ὁ ἄγγελος αὐτῇ. μὴ φοβοῦ, Μαριάμ, εὔρες γὰρ χάριν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ. καὶ ἴδου συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν. οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος. εἰπεν δὲ Μαριάμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον. πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἰπεν αὐτῇ. πνεῦμα ἄγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι. διὸ (...) ἄγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ. καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον καὶ ἴδου Ἐλισάβετ ἡ συγγενίς σου καὶ αὐτὴ συνείληφεν υἱὸν ἐν γήρει αὐτῆς καὶ οὗτος μὴν ἔκτος ἔστιν αὐτῇ τῇ καλουμένῃ στείρᾳ. ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα. εἰπεν δὲ Μαριάμ. ἴδου ἡ δούλη κυρίου. γένοιτο μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου. Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτῆς ὁ ἄγγελος.	26a b c d 27a b c d 28a b c d 29a b c εἰπεν χαῖρε, κεχαριτωμένη, οὐκέτι σοῦ. ἢ δὲ ἐπὶ τῷ λόγῳ διεταράχθη καὶ διελογίζετο ποταπὸς εἶη ὁ ἀσπασμὸς οὗτος. Καὶ εἰπεν ὁ ἄγγελος αὐτῇ. μὴ φοβοῦ, Μαριάμ, εὔρες γὰρ χάριν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ. καὶ ἴδου συλλήμψῃ ἐν γαστρὶ καὶ τέξῃ υἱὸν καὶ καλέσεις τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ Ἰησοῦν. οὗτος ἔσται μέγας καὶ υἱὸς ὑψίστου κληθήσεται καὶ δώσει αὐτῷ κύριος ὁ θεὸς τὸν θρόνον Δαυὶδ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, καὶ βασιλεύσει ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον Ἰακώβ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, καὶ τῆς βασιλείας αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἔσται τέλος. εἰπεν δὲ Μαριάμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον. πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἰπεν αὐτῇ. πνεῦμα ἄγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι. διὸ (...) ἄγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ. καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον καὶ ἴδου Ἐλισάβετ ἡ συγγενίς σου καὶ αὐτὴ συνείληφεν υἱὸν ἐν γήρει αὐτῆς καὶ οὗτος μὴν ἔκτος ἔστιν αὐτῇ τῇ καλουμένῃ στείρᾳ. ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα. εἰπεν δὲ Μαριάμ. ἴδου ἡ δούλη κυρίου. γένοιτο μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου. Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτῆς ὁ ἄγγελος.
2	2.1	Section 2: With God, all things are possible The Messianic Kingdom desires to become manifest in reality	Section 2.1 Grace, gifts, and promises: The Divine Messenger discloses his intention to enter the world as Messiah Jesus Section 2.2 How can that be? Faced with the Impossible Possible	30a b c 31a b c 32a b c 33a b 34a b c 35a b c d e f 36a b c 37 εἰπεν δὲ Μαριάμ πρὸς τὸν ἄγγελον. πῶς ἔσται τοῦτο, καὶ ἀποκριθεὶς ὁ ἄγγελος εἰπεν αὐτῇ. πνεῦμα ἄγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι. διὸ (...) ἄγιον κληθήσεται υἱὸς θεοῦ. καὶ τὸ γεννώμενον καὶ ἴδου Ἐλισάβετ ἡ συγγενίς σου καὶ αὐτὴ συνείληφεν υἱὸν ἐν γήρει αὐτῆς καὶ οὗτος μὴν ἔκτος ἔστιν αὐτῇ τῇ καλουμένῃ στείρᾳ. ὅτι οὐκ ἀδυνατήσει παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ πᾶν ῥῆμα.	
3	3.1 3.2	Section 3: A girl transfigured The Messianic Kingdom is possibilised	Section 3.1 A <i>yester</i> inclined to divine will becomes co-creator with God Section 3.2 The otherness of the Divine Other upheld	38a b c d εἰπεν δὲ Μαριάμ. ἴδου ἡ δούλη κυρίου. γένοιτο μοι κατὰ τὸ ῥῆμά σου. Καὶ ἀπῆλθεν ἀπ' αὐτῆς ὁ ἄγγελος.	

Fig. 2. A structural and thematic analysis of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38)

to this, such as what people and places are called: Nazareth, Joseph, and the young Mary (cf. 26d, 27c, 27d).²³⁶ There is the almost-familiar pronouncement of an unlikely pregnancy,²³⁷ along with a directive of what the child's name is "to be called" (31c). Ἰησοῦς. Yeshua (from ψω, "to save"). Deliverance. A rather weighty name for a baby, yet it is soon outshined by the angel announcing that this baby will "be called" "Son of the Most High" (32b) and "holy Son of God" (35e). The manner in which the angel addresses Mary leaves her perplexed: "Favoured one," along with the standard Greek greeting, both words derived from the root $\chi\alpha\rho-$, meaning "favour" and "grace," and certainly not the way a young girl was commonly addressed. The text has a point to make: what we call things and how we address people "matters."

Most deeply, the narrative takes issue with "what we call" or define as possible and impossible, and in the person of the young Mary it invites us to imagine again, so that the impossible may become possible. The Strange Messenger is sent to Mary (26-27), addresses her three times (28; 30-33; 35-37), upon which she responds in kind, three times (29; 34; 38a-c), before the angel leaves her (38d). The first two addresses by the angel leaves Mary confused. At first she is only perplexed by his highly favourable words toward her, a lowly child from a poverty-stricken town, and ponders his greeting. But his second address is so extravagant in its promises, that Mary cannot but question the possibility of these things: "*How may this be?*"²³⁸

²³⁶ The structure I have outlined in *Fig. 2* reflects the unfolding of the story as a dialogue framed by the arrival and departure of God's messenger. Cf. also LaVerdiere (2004:viii-ix).

²³⁷ The announcement of an unlikely pregnancy is a familiar theme in the Israelite literary tradition. Cf., e.g., Esther Fuchs's detailed study of annunciation (and temptation) type-scenes of the biblical mother figure (Chapter 3 [2000:44-90]). Typically, the type-scene is told entirely from the perspective of male characters, with the birth announcement often made to the husband instead of his wife, and involving the mother figure only insofar and up until she births the son who allows the story to move forward (Fuchs 2000:46). As such, "the telos of nativity narratives is the birth of a male heir, and the happy re-establishment of patrilineal continuity" (Fuchs 2000:44). Also, "(t)he birth of the son leads to the inevitable mimetic and diegetic death of the mother. She will either die at childbirth, like Rachel, or, as happens most of the time, through the suppression of information" (Fuchs 2000:46). Luke strays from this norm, however, in that the Annunciation is told entirely from Mary's perspective, includes the Magnificat, and in that Mary remains a character in Luke-Acts (Wilson 2012:512).

²³⁸ Kearney interprets Mary's being "perplexed" at the angel's greeting, as well as her questioning response, "how may this be?" in terms of a hermeneutic wager that leaves her traversing the boundaries of fear and consent. Finding herself preceded by a literary tradition of birth announcements to unlikely mothers, this is very much a hermeneutic dialogue between her own frightened heart and a tradition that has taught her how Divine Possibility may present itself as strange visitors, showing up unexpected and unannounced (Kearney 2011b:24-25; cf. 2015c:220). The hermeneutic pause in encountering strangers and aliens is vital, since strangers are not always angels, as we clearly see from the mythical rendering of the temptation narratives of Jesus in the

The third and final address by the Divine Stranger speaks to the young Mary of the possibilising power of the Spirit that will “overshadow” her (35cd). This is poetic language, as we recognise from the typically Semitic parallelism: πνεῦμα ἄγιον ἐπελεύσεται ἐπὶ σὲ, καὶ δύναμις ὑψίστου ἐπισκιάσει σοι. This poetics of the possible is meant to capture Mary’s imagination and transfigure her, so that she may become a window through which the Eternal may be actualised in time and space. The angel reminds Mary of Elizabeth, a family member, who even at an advanced age finds herself six months pregnant – *she who “had been called” barren*. And if this wasn’t enough to break through the boundaries of Mary’s imagination, the angel concludes, “See, with God nothing will be (or may be) impossible” (37).²³⁹

By the time Mary responds a third time, she has been transformed into an eschatological agent. At first a lowly and lonely child in a dire situation,²⁴⁰ the limits of

desert. Cf. Kearney’s discussion of Ricoeur’s hermeneutic approach to hospitality, which “argues for a prudent interpretation between different kinds of strangers” (Kearney 2015d:173-184 [175]).

²³⁹ Luke chooses words for the angel that are similar to those in Gen 18:14a, where the divine visitors announce Sarah’s pregnancy to Abraham: “Is anything too wonderful for the Yahweh?” (*היפלא דבר מיהוה*).

²⁴⁰ The dire position to which I refer pertains to Mary’s social status and the fact that she had likely fallen pregnant out of wedlock. As for her social status, the fact that she lived in Nazareth means that she formed part of a small agrarian community that was both extremely poor and looked down upon by other Palestinian, not to mention Judaean, towns (cf. Crossan 1995:26). Furthermore, as a young, unmarried female, probably around thirteen years of age, she had no standing in society. As for her pregnancy, the traditional view of Mary as virgin – even perpetual virgin in some cases, cf. *Prot. Jas.* – took shape amidst a patriarchy that enforced its values on women through the stories they told. As such, Mary was often pictured as a paragon of purity, a “Second Eve” who corrects the mistakes of the first (Wilson 2012:512-513, 515; cf. Fornberg 2002:158; cf. e.g., Gambaro [1999:51-58] for Irenaeus’ description of the parallel between Eve and Mary along the same lines as Adam and Christ in Paul). The reality was no doubt very different. The emphasis on Mary’s purity may probably be traced back to a Jewish polemic “that identified Mary as a harlot who conceived Jesus out of wedlock” (Wilson 2012:512-513; cf. Stewart 2012:49). While we simply lack the evidence that would shed any kind of light on the circumstances surrounding Mary’s pregnancy, historical research does suggest that Jesus was an illegitimate child. It is vitally important for the interpretation of both the Annunciation and Jesus as Messiah that we recognise that we encounter in Mary and Jesus a mother and son who would have lived in utter poverty on the fringes of society. Van Aarde understands the fact that Jesus grew up “fatherless in Galilee” (Joseph being a fictional character) as the very reason for his intimate relation to God as “Father” (2001:119-134). It is regrettable that we have forfeited this perspective on the “historical Mary,” and I propose that theology boldly engages the theological implications of the likelihood that the one we call Messiah was not only naturally conceived, but also bore the brunt of his contemporaries for being shamefully illegitimate. We must engage hermeneutically with this perspective, since it illustrates that the Powerless Possible found expression in this world through a mother and child who would have been perceived as the lowliest and most unlikely vessels for divine grace. If we imagine Mary as she likely was: a pregnant girl, ousted, suffering from malnutrition, terrified, uneducated, and alone, then we may perhaps understand how radical her openness to the Divine Stranger really was. There is a subversive *dynamis* to this young pregnant girl that begs hermeneutic rediscovery (cf. Wilson 2012:516). Indeed, “(t)he ‘dangerous memory’ of the young woman and teenage mother Miriam of Nazareth, probably not more than twelve or thirteen years old, pregnant, frightened, and single ... can subvert the tales of mariological fantasy and

her existence have been exploded by the poetic nudging of a Strange Visitor. At the end of this encounter, she has turned into an agent (δούλη, “slave, servant”) of the Divine, not entirely different from the angel – a Messenger of God – for Mary’s body becomes the portal through which the Messiah steps into the world. Her final words are simple but filled with dynamic potency, “May it be with me according to your word” (γένοιτό μοι κατὰ τὸ ρῆμά σου).

Let’s linger here a moment, for the Greek is rich in subtle wordplay. First, there has been a development from the angel’s “word” (λόγος, *logos*, 29a), which perplexed Mary upon hearing the angel’s greeting, to “according to your word” (ρῆμα, *rhema*, 38c). While *logos* and *rhema* really function as synonyms in the biblical text, our passage seems to imply development here in terms of the mere “words” that the angel has spoken, to the weight of these words and the impact that they have had on Mary. *Rhema* follows in 38c upon the angel’s use of the word, which is here better translated as no “thing”: “For nothing ($\pi\tilde{\alpha}\nu$ ρῆμα) will be impossible with God.” When the young Mary receives the Stranger, it seems she opens to, and is opened by, possibility.

Another striking – this time intertextual – wordplay suggests that Mary, in opening to Divine Will, becomes co-creator with God in God’s continuing creation. The modal form of γίνομαι, “come into being, become, happen” (γένοιτό, 38c), may be translated as either “let it be” or “may it be.” Interestingly, a similar form of the same verb (though imperative rather than optative) appears as the word by which God creates in Genesis 1, “Let it be” (γενηθήτω, LXX). It is also similar to the modal form of the Hebrew היה “to be,” found in the epiphany to Moses and translated by Kearney as “I am who may be” (cf. 5.5).

cultural femininity. In the center of the Christian story stands not the lovely ‘white lady’ of artistic and popular imagination, kneeling in adoration before her son. Rather it is the young pregnant woman, living in occupied territory and struggling against victimization and for survival and dignity. It is she who holds out the offer of untold possibilities for different christology and theology” (Schüssler Fiorenza 2015:205-206). Cf. Maeckelberghe’s hermeneutical study of Mary, especially the feminist reinterpretation of Mary as symbol, based on the hermeneutic contributions of Paul Ricoeur and Rosi Braidotti (1991). Cf. also Fornberg’s study of the reception history of the Annunciation, which proposes a new way forward by fresh ways of reading the text, so that “... we get a new picture of Mary, who is no longer an ideal of humility but rather of strength and willpower in this world. In this way Mary becomes a pattern of life for all those who want to make justice a present reality in this world” (Fornberg 2002:180).

Richard Kearney remembers the Annunciation in the first chapter of *Anatheism*, where he reflects on instances of hospitality to the Uninvited Guest from the three Abrahamic faiths. Encounters with the Divine Stranger in Scripture is marked either by *hospitality* or *hostility*.²⁴¹ There is either an opening to or a withdrawing from, and when Mary responds to the divine invitation in “the first act of Christian anatheism” – “thinking again, believing again, trusting again” – she bears a child and possibilises the advent of the Messiah (Kearney 2011b:17, 24). Kearney appeals to Andrei Rublev’s striking *Icon of the Trinity* (1411 c.E.), featuring three angels seated around an empty chalice,

... symbol of the gap in our horizons of time and space where the radically Other may arrive, unexpected and unknown. And this empty receptacle at the core of the circle is, arguably, none other than the womb-heart of Mary herself (*khora*). As the Greek inscription of the *Mother and Child Mosaic* of the Monastery of the Khora in Istanbul reads: *Khora akhoraton* – ‘Container of the Uncontainable.’ Mary is the *khora* opening the heart of divinity. The aperture, without which, as in all human openings to the stranger, the sacred could not be embodied (Kearney 2011:25-26).

The result is a captivating poetics of becoming. A young girl is met by a strange yet divine wager – the announcement of a would-be Messiah. She receives the Stranger as host, yet finds herself perplexed in the face of the seemingly impossible. The Divine Messenger entices her, however, to believe more, and so become more. Confronted by the *One who may be*, Mary finds herself transfigured by a poetics of the possible. Her imagination is so captivated – we could say that her *yetser* opens to Divine intention – that in the face of her “yes,” she becomes co-creator with God of a new, eschatological world. Having initially received the Stranger as host, she finds that she has become guest to the Stranger – witness to and partaker of God’s initiative of continuous creation: “The Nazarena’s double response – to hosting the stranger’s impossible love – is perhaps our condition too?” (Kearney 2015c:222). This double hospitality expresses the paradox of the

²⁴¹ Kearney reminds us of the way Matthew (25:35-44) suggests the “surprising divinity of the *hospes*,” when Jesus identifies himself with “the least of these,” a “stranger” who is welcomed or turned away: “Eschatology is realized in the presence of the alien in our midst. Love of the guest becomes love of God. The cut comes, once more, in this crucial and ultimate choice: to welcome or repudiate the *hospes*. So it is not surprising that when Jesus, in another episode, is asked by the lawyer, ‘who is my neighbor?’ he replies with the story of the Good Samaritan – the alien outsider who brings healing to the wounded and the dying (Luke 10:25-36). Theophany as the guest become host” (Kearney 2011b:29).

Powerless Possible: God as possibility, or as the “impossibility of impossibility,” is vulnerable to human response insofar as *God may be God* in the form of the eschatological Kingdom of love and justice.^{242, 243} A human “yes” to this divine wager at once turns the human host into guest as ze is “overshadowed” with the possibilising power of the Spirit. Says Kearney:

...divinity – as Father, Son, or Spirit – is described as a possibilizing of divine love and logos in the order of human history where it would otherwise have been impossible. In other words, the divine reveals itself here as the possibility of the Kingdom – or if you prefer to cite a *via negativa*, as the *impossibility of impossibility* (Kearney 2007b:52).

7.2 Dazzled: Messianic transfiguration²⁴⁴

We will briefly pause at two further biblical stories that serve as examples of texts that capture our imagination when read post-metaphysically, in terms of Kearney’s eschatological hermeneutics and phenomenological approach to transfiguration. While the first story bedazzles us, the second motif leaves us enlarged by the radical otherness of Divine Desire.

Kearney discusses the events on Mount Thabor as a biblical example of the act of transfiguration, where Jesus is metamorphosed into the *persona* of Christ not

²⁴² Bernard of Clairvaux also expressed this sentiment in his *Hom. 4, 8-9: Opera Omnia, Edit. Cisterc.* 4 [1966]: 53-54: “You have heard, O Virgin, that you will conceive and bear a son; ... The angel awaits an answer; ... In your brief response we are to be remade in order to be recalled to life. ... Answer quickly, O Virgin. Reply in haste to the angel, or rather through the angel to the Lord. Answer with a word, receive the Word of God. Speak your own word, conceive the divine Word. Breathe a passing word, embrace the eternal Word; Open your heart to faith, O blessed Virgin, your lips to praise, your womb to the Creator. See, the desired of all nations is at your door, knocking to enter. If he should pass by because of your delay, in sorrow you would begin to seek him afresh, the One whom your soul loves. Arise, hasten, open. Arise in faith, hasten in devotion, open in praise and thanksgiving. Behold the handmaid of the Lord, she says, be it done to me according to your word.”

²⁴³ Cf. Paredes’ monumental study of the Kingdom of God in relation to Mary. His contribution is extremely valuable – a “theoretical-practical or, if you will, existential Mariology, that will be meaningful for Christian living” (Paredes 1991:12). Paredes has structured and organised his synthesis of Mariology according to the Kingdom of God as focal point of Jesus’ teaching, for “(i)if all the expectations of the Old Testament were flowing towards this point, if the Church marches towards the eschatological completeness of God’s Kingdom, then, it is also fitting to place the reflections on Mary in this context. ... From the horizon of God’s Kingdom, people and institutions attain a surprising dynamism and an historical meaning. Mary is one of the central personages within the great project of the Kingdom of God, within that Kingdom which was initiated in her and which persists in history until the day of its total unfolding. ... To place Mary in the context of the Kingdom of God, as the Woman who surrendered herself to it, leads us to contemplate on how its values and requirements were shaped in her. Thus, Mary acquires relevance for those who take the Kingdom of God as the inspiration and goal of their life. She becomes the paradigm of the Church that wants to be faithful to the dynamism that restores the Kingdom” (Paredes 1991:12-13).

²⁴⁴ This section has been reworked from previous overviews of Kearney’s thought provided by the author. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:57-59).

by abandoning his original person and becoming someone else, but by undergoing a change of “figure” that allows his divine persona to emanate through his “flesh-and-blood embodiedness” (Kearney 2001:39). As the person of Jesus transforms into his *persona* – the “very divine otherness of his finite being,” He becomes the “*prosopon par excellence*,” while refusing idolatry and remaining *some* one that is still recognised as himself, so that “the transfiguration signals a surplus or incommensurability between *persona* and person even as it inscribes the one in and through the other” (Kearney 2001:40-41). In phenomenological idioms,

we might say that the transfigured Christ breaches the limits of intentional consciousness. The very otherness and uniqueness of his *persona* exceed the horizontal reach of our three main modalities of noetic intentionality: It goes beyond *perception* (the dazzling whiteness and the cloud, recalling the veil protecting the holy of holies), beyond *imagination* (the refusal of Peter’s cultic imaginings), and beyond *signification* (the observing of silence). ... The Transfiguration reminds us that when it comes to the *persona* of God – marking the unique thisness (*haecitas*) of each person – it is a question of the old enigma: now you have him, now you don’t. One moment there, one moment gone (Kearney 2001:42).²⁴⁵

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul interprets the Mount Thabor scene as a call for everybody to become transfigured in the light of Christ. While we receive this transfiguring as a gift by the “grace-giving *persona* of Christ,” it is also something that we can do to others (Kearney 2001:44). Referring to Christ as the final Adam (*eschatos Adam*) in 1 Corinthians 15:49-58,

Paul suggests that the transfigured – or what he calls “heavenly” – body of Christ is in fact the secret goal of divine creation aimed at from the very beginning, though it is only fully revealed in the *eschaton*. And this eschatological revelation or *pleroma* will be one in which each person may find itself altered according to Christ’s image and likeness. “And as we have borne the likeness (*eikon*) of the earthly man, so we shall bear the likeness (*eikon*) of the heavenly one ... we are all going to be changed, instantly, in the

²⁴⁵ By reminding the three apostles that the transfigured Christ is his “beloved son” (Mk 9:7), God “confounds the apostle’s ‘natural’ expectations and announces Christ as the possibility of all humans becoming ‘sons of God’ – that is, by being transfigured into their own unique *personas*. Accordingly, Christ is held out to us as a promise inscribed in the long prophetic path pointing toward the coming kingdom, and already signposted by Moses and Elijah (the iconoclastic and messianic prophets, respectively). Indeed it is no accident that both these predecessors are harbingers of exodus (*ex-hodos*, the way outwards) rather than of closure. Their accompaniment of Jesus in his moment of metamorphosis on the mountain serves as reminder that the transfigured Christ is a *way* not a terminus, an *eikon* not a fundamentalist fact, a *figure* of the end but not the end itself. A point powerfully brought home to us by Christ’s insistence on his own exodic ‘passing’ in the days to come. The Mount Thabor narratives may thus be said to speak to us of a God of passage rather than of literal presence. God as way, truth and light – but never as *fait accompli*. The very discretion of Christ’s *prosopon-persona* is a prohibition against premature possession” (Kearney 2001:43).

twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet sounds" (1 Corinthians 15:49-52). That at least is the promise of the messianic *persona*. It is *all* humanity that is invited to be transformed according to the image-*eikon* of Christ. In this universalist scenario, the "old self" is "renewed in the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:10-11) (Kearney 2001:45).

Moving on to Levinas and Derrida's concept of "Messianic time," Kearney understands the story of transfiguration (as epilogue of Adam and prologue of Christ-to-come-again) as surpassing the limits of history as it is commonly understood (2001:45). It is in the sense of its unicity that the *persona* is "eternal," and irreducible to the laws of causal temporality, because its *eschaton* is neither subject to laws of cause-effect or potency-act, nor exhausted in "the world-historical mutations of some teleological plan à la Hegel or Hartshorne" (Kearney 2001:45-46). Paul's description of the kingdom coming in a "blink of an eye" hints precisely at the unpredictable and unprogrammable character of its coming, and suggests that we understand the paradoxical language of anterior-posteriority regarding the kingdom's coming as being already amongst us, even as it is still to come:

the eschatological *persona* is transfiguring always, in each moment, but always remains to be ultimately transfigured, at the end of time. Which is another way of saying, its temporality exceeds the limits of ordinary time (Kearney 2001:46).

Exploring Kearney's perspective of the "other" is thus helpful for understanding how he connects his onto-eschatological approach to God as Other with the ethical appeal of a kingdom of love and justice that is always already there, and yet still to come.

7.3 Excess gift: The transfiguring desire of God²⁴⁶

Another way in which Kearney discusses transfiguration is to speak of the desire of God, for through such desire, the God of *posse* finds voice through many different *personas*. Where the transfiguring God shows zirself through the faces of *eros*, *persona* becomes the passion of "burning love" and "endless waiting" (Kearney 2001:53). From the primacy of the Shulamite in the Song of Songs, Kearney deduces that God is the other who seeks human persons before they seek him – a "desire beyond my desire" that does not indicate lack or deficiency but is its own reward of excess, gift and grace (Kearney 2001:54). For Kearney, the lovers in the

²⁴⁶ This section has been reworked from previous overviews of Kearney's thought provided by the author. Cf. Steenkamp (2011:59-61).

Song of Songs “come across as carnal embodiments of a desire which traverses and exceeds them, while remaining utterly themselves” (Kearney 2001:56). They are much more than personifications, representations, or mouthpieces for some spiritual message. With the poetics of the Song of Songs saying the unsayable, it indicates, for Kearney, that “burning, integrated, faithful, untiring desire – freed from social or inherited perversions – is the most adequate way for saying how humans love God and God loves humans. It suggests how human and divine desire may transfigure one another” (2001:58). Kearney concludes his hermeneutic explorations of the Song of Songs with the following summary hypothesis:

While God’s lovers will always continue to seek and desire him whom their soul loves, they have always already been found, because already sought and desired, by him whom their soul loves. Their eros occupies a middle space, a two-way street between action and passion, yearning and welcome, seeking and receptivity. ... When it comes to God at any rate, you rarely have one without the other. *Attente* and *accueil* are the two Janus faces of desire. Why? Because desire responds to the double demand of eschaton and eros. God’s desire for us – our desire for God. The Shulamite loves as she is loved (Kearney 2001:79).

While Kearney is very engaged in the deconstruction of otherness, and greatly appreciative of it, he disagrees with its claim that otherness is wholly inaccessible to human appraisal – a view which, for him, results in intellectual and ethical paralysis (Masterson 2008:255). To avoid moral standoff, deconstructionist approaches need to be supplemented with a hermeneutics of practical wisdom, enabling us to discern between justice and injustice (Masterson 2008:256):

Prompted by a sensitive phenomenology of the self-other dyad, this hermeneutics involving narrative imagination and judgment suggests that the other is never absolutely transcendent nor absolutely immanent but somehow between the two. Others are intimately bound up with selves in various ways which constitute real ethical relationships between them (Masterson 2008:256)

Kearney reminds us, then, that even if narrative imagination is not “always on the side of angels” (Kearney 1999a:106), it still enables us to “disclose dimensions of otherness” that are both multiple and traversable (Kearney 1998a:255; 2002b:11) in a way that welcomes what is different (Kearney 1995a:xvi).

CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION – TOWARD A POST-METAPHYSICAL UNDERSTANDING OF SIN AND SALVATION

The Christian faith finds its crescendo not in a set of ideas, but in a Person. It would be a thorough misunderstanding of this thesis if it were seen as an attempt to merely cast traditional language regarding sin and redemption in new language, or in the image of Kierkegaard's analogy, dress the clown in the attire of the audience whom he wishes to warn of the fire. Christianity may not lose its scandalous insistence that at its centre stands a revelation that brings the divine presence into historical time and space (cf. Ratzinger 2004:n.p.). It is on this revelation of the eternal in the temporal, and for the purpose of seeking understanding of the faith that we share, that this thesis has focused on exploring ways of re-imagining sin and salvation post-metaphysically.

8.1 Chapter two: Of Eden: Reclaiming a story gone wrong

Christian thought has traditionally ascribed the “fall” of the human race to the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Through a thorough literary analysis, Chapter 2 engaged the Eden narrative on its own terms to show that this way of reading the Eden story is completely unfounded. An analysis of the literary motifs within their ANE context has revealed a narrative saturated in ambiguity, that resists any attempt to reduce its rich context to a supposedly singular interpretation. One reason for this is found in the parallels of the literary motifs with Canaanite and Mesopotamian mythology, suggesting that the narrative may have served the polemic function of condemning the worship of other deities, especially the goddess Asherah, during the development of monotheistic Yahwism. A responsible hermeneutic approach to this complex text would allow the multiplicity of meaning in the text to have its way with the reader. The Eden narrative, namely, confronts its reader with a unique view on the puzzling ambiguities of zir own life. The reader is not only reminded of the vulnerability of human existence but also sees, in the mirror of the text, a self who is often dissatisfied with the boundaries of zir existence. A self who perpetually pushes against these boundaries, grasping at knowledge that always seems to disappoint.

The disobedience of Adam and Eve in the garden leads to estrangement, separation, and exile. Such a relational way of understanding sin is a typically Jewish way to read the text and, save for the Pauline corpus, stands in continuity with the whole of Scripture in its thought on sin. The Eden narrative does not support an ontological view of sin of the kind formulated by Augustine in his doctrine of original sin. Neither is there any association of the serpent with the devil or any sexual connotations to the couple's disobedience. The sexual elements that are present function on a different level of the narrative to polemically shun the Asherah cult from the official cult of Yahweh. Finally, the narrative makes no mention of a fall and does not suggest that the moral nature of Adam or Eve was altered as a result of their disobedience. Instead, the punishment of their disobedience serve an aetiological function, and at the same time endorses the view of the pessimistic wisdom tradition that wisdom disappoints. Finally, the narrative does not view human mortality as a punishment for sin, but as a natural end for a life characterised by creatureliness.

8.2 Chapter three: The story of sin and salvation in biblical perspective

Chapter 3 continued our exploration of the story of sin and salvation by tracing its development through the OT, Second Temple Judaism, the Jesus Movement, and the remainder of the NT. We are met in the OT with a general optimism about life lived in relationship with God. Death is seen as the natural culmination of a life blessed with many years, and not as a punishment for sin. The OT has nothing that resembles the doctrine of original sin or a personalised Satan figure as an attempt to explain the origin of evil. While sin (intentional or unintentional) is always a serious matter that may threaten the well-being of the community as much as the individual, the world is never described as being in bondage to sin. Furthermore, any consideration of the reality of sin was determined by a basic trust in the grace and goodness of God (רַחֲם), and indeed good pre-exists evil in the Israelite worldview. The OT attributes the fact that all humans sin (the universality of sin) to human creatureliness, and different corpora of the OT canon have different approaches to the nature of such sin. So, e.g., priestly emphasis on cultic and unintentional sin is met by an emphasis on wilful disobedience and rebellion in the historiographic and prophetic corpora. While, as stated above, the OT consistently acknowledges the universality of sin, the generalisations of "the wicked" or "the righteous" establishes

that the OT considers it quite possible for human beings to keep God's will, since blamelessness does not denote perfection. The OT's view of sin is profoundly relational, so that the nature of sin is that it destroys relationships. These relationships need to be repaired – with Yahweh, if the sin was committed against God, or with both Yahweh and one's neighbour, if the sin had a social dimension.

The Second Temple Period saw a developing interest in the origin of evil, as is seen from the figure of Satan that develops as adversary of God. A different strategy to account for the presence of sin in the world was accomplished through the reinterpretation of the Eden narrative. The early literature from this period offers very optimistic reinterpretations of Adam and Eve. After the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., these reinterpretations become increasingly negative, however. Adam is held responsible for the introduction of sin into the world, and as a result of this sin is understood to have missed out on the possibility of immortality for both him and his progeny. "Fall" terminology entered the theological tradition through the inclusion of 2 Esdras in the Apocrypha, which spoke of a "fall" from the possibility of immortality. It is also in this literature that we encounter, for the first time, the idea that Adam's disobedience had cosmic consequences, in that it effected a change in the apocalyptic ages by introducing the present evil age. Despite general agreement that the creative impulse of humanity, the *yetser*, is evil and causes individuals to sin, Second Temple literature is adamant that any act of sinning flows from a free choice, and that it is indeed possible to keep Yahweh's will.

Our overview of NT approaches to sin revealed continuity with the OT insofar as sin or sinners could refer to (i) individual, wrongful acts and (ii) social groupings of persons who live with no regard for God's will. The early Jesus movement also perpetuates the same relative optimism regarding human nature. While the universality of sin is maintained, i.e. the view that all people sin, it is still considered quite possible to live a life of righteous devotion to God. Acts of sin call for atonement, and aside from typically Israelite means of atonement that were continued in certain contexts, the NT proclaims that, in Christ, the sacrificial system has been superseded, and that God may now be approached freely and directly "to obtain mercy" (Heb 4:16). The delay of the parousia necessitated means of atonement for sins committed after conversion – something the early Jesus

Movement did not provide for – and developed into the system of penance that characterised the Middle Ages.

In the Pauline corpus, we encounter a third view of *Sin* as a personified, cosmic power that is opposed to God, grips the world in its power and leads humans into slavery. The rulership of *Sin* does not remove personal responsibility for acts of sin, however, since it is still possible – as illustrated by “the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus” (Rom 3:22) – to obey God. Paul’s arguments in 1 Corinthians 15:22 and Romans 5:12-19 have played a decisive role in both hamartiology and soteriology, and illustrates that Paul understands Adam’s disobedience as an apocalyptic event that introduced the power of *Sin* into the cosmos, enslaving it to the power of universal, cosmic sinfulness. Paul continues to interpret both Christ’s death and resurrection as further apocalyptic events that reveal God’s saving righteousness and signals the inauguration of the age to come. Paul understands the present time to play out “between the ages,” in an overlap of the present evil age and the age to come, which would commence with the Second Coming. Certain logical inconsistencies suggest, first, that Paul invented his pessimistic understanding of the human plight in order to accommodate his soteriological convictions, and second, that Paul was influenced by aspects of a dualistic worldview. Be that as it may, Augustine leaned heavily on Paul’s thinking (misunderstanding and mistranslating it at times) in working out his doctrine of original sin. This leads us to restate, following our overview of sin in Scripture and the Second Temple period, that the impact of the Eden narrative on the remainder of Scripture has been surprisingly small in view of the important role the narrative later came to play in Christian thought on sin.

The metaphor of sin as debt and virtue as merit, which begins to emerge in late OT times, developed into the leading metaphor for sin in formative Christianity. This again illustrates the dialogical nature of sin and salvation, since as the metaphor of sin changed to debt, human virtue came to be seen as merit, leading to the emergence of almsgiving as a way of “gathering up treasures in heaven” that could counterbalance one’s debts of sin. The metaphor determined discourse on sin and salvation first in the Syriac Church, and steadily penetrated Greek and Latin theology until it was developed into the satisfaction theory of the Atonement in Anselm of Canterbury.

8.3 Chapter four: Metaphysical stories? The story of sin and salvation in the theological tradition

The Eden narrative does not play the central role in the *Eastern Fathers* that it would later play in the Latin Church. Where the Eastern Fathers do refer to the Eden narrative, they do not describe inherited guilt, and tend to allegorise the story. The view proposed by Irenaeus that Adam and Eve's transgression was understandable, and even necessary, was commonly held and entailed that, as children, humanity needs to learn through sin and its consequences, until they reach their divinely intended *telos*. The consequence of sin is more generally understood as *deprivatio* rather than *depravatio*. The East does not know an ontological view of sin, which it understands as freely committed acts that damage relationships. As such, the Eastern Fathers continue the biblical view of sin, and show affinity for the later teachings of Pelagianism.

Among the Latin Fathers, Tertullian's traducianism prepares the way for a doctrine of innate sin that is passed on to posterity via the father. His description of an "original moral fault" also suggests that the whole human race was contained in Adam, and leads Cyprian to link "original guilt" with the salvific effect of infant baptism. Ambrose's introduction of the doctrine of Adam's "original righteousness" suggests the unbiblical idea that Adam was in a perfect state before his sin, and also internalised Adam's sin by linking it to pride. Ambrosiaster wrote a commentary on Romans from which Augustine later drew the exegetical foundation for his doctrine of original sin. In this commentary, the Greek $\epsilon\phi'$ $\hat{\omega}$ was mistranslated, causing Augustine to base his doctrine to a large extent on a mistranslation.

While the Western Fathers were able to, albeit forcibly, hold on to free will, Augustine could not maintain this tension in his extreme formulation of original sin, and it is precisely here that the heart of the conflict with Pelagius is to be found. Whereas Augustine postulates a humanity so ontologically marred by sin that it may come to seek the good only by means of a special infusion of grace, Pelagius defends a freedom of the will that for him is grounded in the threefold grace of creation, revelation, and redemption. The rationality and freedom in a person are divine gifts that, if properly utilised, enable persons to accomplish God's will. For Augustine, on the other hand, concupiscence so characterises the fallen person that,

even if free will has strictly speaking remained intact, practically speaking the only option available to a person is the way of selfish pride, with sexual concupiscence as the apex of this self-centredness. Augustine regards sexual concupiscence as a punishment for primordial sin, and understands this punishment to be transmitted as original sin through sexual procreation. This view comes close to the Manichaeism of Augustine's youth, and may indicate that Augustine's doctrine of original sin stems, in part, from the typically gnostic disdain of the physical and, especially, the sexual. Despite the lack of Scriptural support and despite the fact that Augustine's formulation of original sin stood in discontinuity with theological tradition, original sin became official doctrine of the Church at the Council of Orange in 529. The Semi-Pelagian protest against certain extreme features of Augustine's doctrine bears witness to the fact that, seen symbolically, Augustinianism and Pelagianism represent two opposing anthropologies, which may only be integrated by maintaining the tension through a "third way" that traverses the boundaries of both polar opposites.

Anselm of Canterbury heralds a new era in soteriology with his satisfaction theory of the atonement. Anselm grounds the necessity of the atonement in the immanent divine attribute of the honour of God, and argues that the passion of the innocent God-man, as a work of supererogation, generates infinite merit that annuls the debt of humanity's sin. However, certain counter-traditions in Scripture (e.g. the parable of the prodigal son) challenge Anselm's view that, since God's wounded honour demands satisfaction, God may not simply overlook sin, but must demand satisfaction.

The diverse scholarly interpretations of Abelard range from those who either condemn or praise him for his moral exemplarist view of the atonement, to those who deny that he teaches an exemplary theory of the atonement, to those who defend his atonement theory as entirely orthodox, and even to those who claim that he holds a penal substitutionary view. This seems to be due to Abelard's notorious theological shape-shifting abilities, combined with the fact that many interpreters want to claim his brilliance for their own agendas. Be that as it may, it seems that Abelard continues the trajectory that we have traced from Scripture's views on sin to that of the Eastern Fathers and Pelagius. Abelard understands the Christ event to

reveal the nature of divine love, so kindling in the believer a similar response of love. But this is not mere exemplarism. Abelard seems to understand that, having been objectively redeemed in Christ, the newly kindled love in our hearts inspires us to imitate Christ's example of supreme love. Abelard emphasises divine grace and downplays human merit, and may rightly be called the theologian who most expounds the transformative power of divine love.

Thomas Aquinas takes an eclectic approach to the atonement, incorporating ransom theory, exemplary theory, and even a theory of mystical union, integrating these into the satisfaction theory, which remains dominant in his thinking. Specifically, Aquinas' version of the satisfaction theory takes the form of penal substitution. Aquinas' contribution in terms of the appropriation of Christ's benefits through baptism, the Eucharist, penance, the other sacraments, and good works, left a legacy that in the Roman Catholic Church developed into a system of penance based on merit, inviting the protest of the Reformers through their dictum, *sola gratia*.

The Reformation reacted strongly against the Scholastic affirmation of synergism in regeneration. Instead, the Reformers return to Augustine's insistence on humanity's spiritual impotence, formulating the depravity of the human person more radically than any predecessors in the history of doctrine. From this naturally follows the Reformed emphasis on a person's absolute dependence on the grace of God, as well as predestination. As for the imputation of original sin, the Reformers substitute the covenant idea for the realistic theory, which sees Adam as both natural head and federal representative of humanity, resulting in his sin being ascribed to the whole of humanity. Since the Reformers understand sin in legal terms, their soteriological counterpart takes the form of penal substitution, where satisfaction is made through Christ bearing the punishment due to humanity.

Socinianism and Arminianism function as counter-narratives within the Reformation circle. Socinianism picks up the Semitic trajectory that run through the Eastern Fathers and finds a somewhat extreme expression in Pelagius. Socinus emphasises only the grace of God in the forgiveness of sin, denying any direct connection between Christ's passion and the pardoning of sin. Christ "saves" believers through his example of faith and obedience and by bestowing eternal life on believers – a power which God gave him as a reward for his obedience.

Arminianism, for its part, steers close to Semi-Pelagianism in that it denies the doctrine of reprobation and softens the Reformed expression of original sin.

The more recent approaches to sin and salvation of Schleiermacher and Hegel both reflect, even in philosophy, the new Christological period that followed upon the dawn of the *Aufklärung*. Schleiermacher, with his emphasis on the essence of religion as a feeling of absolute dependence, interprets Christ in terms of the restoration of God-consciousness in the human person. Original sin consists of a corporate, underlying sinful inclination of humanity, or “habit,” which impacts negatively on humanity’s capacity for God-consciousness. A new corporate life of restored God-consciousness is introduced into humanity by Jesus of Nazareth, and redemption consists in a partaking of this God-consciousness in the same way as original sin consists of partaking in the corporate sinful habit. Christ embodies the perfection of human nature, characterised by the rule of God-consciousness over sensual desire. It is clear that Schleiermacher’s focus is on the inward life of the individual.

Hegel, for his part, takes an idealistic approach to philosophy, and interprets such elements as sin and salvation within his grand narrative of history as the sphere of God’s becoming. In this paradigm, sin is a necessary evolutionary stage of selfish, egoic existence, which may be transcended by accessing a higher consciousness in which one realises that such egoic existence is not one’s destiny. Reconciliation thus refers to unification of the finite and the infinite. God becomes incarnate in humanity, expressing the oneness of God and humanity – a reconciliation which is epitomised in Jesus of Nazareth. While not devoid of personal focus, Hegel’s scheme is holistic and all-encompassing, so that the individual finds meaningful existence and purpose only through reconciliation with that which infinitely transcends *zir*.

Our overview of the *Dogmengeschichte* regarding sin and salvation revealed that ontological understandings of sin run parallel to the idea that the transgression in Eden constituted a “fall” in humanity. This notion is unsupported by Scripture, however, and once we leave it behind, we escape the totalising ontological view of sin as having brought about a corrupt state in human existence. We are then free to re-imagine Eden as a mythical narrative that testify to the eschatological openness of

humanity, as well as to the devastation that ensues when humanity, in an act of idolatry, forfeits this openness.

8.4 Chapter five: Richard Kearney and the powerless possible

As an established dialogue partner in the renewed philosophical quest for God, Richard Kearney's phenomenology and hermeneutics of religion deserve a considered theological response. As a "philosopher of third ways," he explores the category of the possible from a hermeneutic perspective, drawing on a phenomenology of the imagination to traverse the limits of philosophy and create new ways of "thinking" old problems.

Kearney provides an archaeology of imagination in his *The wake of the imagination: Toward a postmodern culture*, which shows that Western thought has mainly approached the human faculty of imagination as either a representational, or a creative faculty. Kearney's discussion of the Hebrew *yetser*, through which he interprets the Eden narrative, is especially important for this thesis. As a creative impulse, created by God, the *yetser* is related to the human freedom to narrate existence as an ethical choice. Because it enables existential experience, Kearney interprets the *yetser* as "a passion for the possible."

Despite a predominantly negative evaluation of the *yetser* in Rabbinic thought, a counter-narrative understands the *yetser* as a neutral creative impulse that may be used for either good or evil. When the *yetser* is aligned with divine will and purpose, a person may become partner with God in historical recreation. This tradition draws attention to the Hebraic tendency to interpret good and evil in terms of a moral choice, avoiding the Hellenistic preference for viewing the imagination and existence in ontological categories. Because the Semitic understanding of imagination is fundamentally ethical, it has a predominantly historical character. The ethical notion of goodness is thus linked in Hebraic thought with the historical notion of becoming. In contradistinction to Hellenistic culture, this reveals a preference for the historical category of becoming over the ontological category of being.

Greek philosophy judged imagination negatively, seeing it as an imitation of the visible world (i.e. mimetic imagination). Medieval thought combined this Hellenistic condemnation of imagination with the biblical suspicion of the *yetser* to

create an onto-theological synthesis. With the dawn of modernism, the reproductive understanding of the imaginary was replaced with a productive view, accompanied by the affirmation of human creative ability. The extravagant claims regarding the human subject in idealism and romanticism invited disillusionment, however, which was expressed in existentialism as the inversion of the affirmative cult of imagination in modernism. This results in a postmodern parody of the imagination as endless reproduction of images, leading to confusion between image and reality. In view of this implosion of the imagination, Kearney proposes a hermeneutic retrieval by means of a poetical-ethical imagination. Such an approach to imagination calls for a critical hermeneutics that may identify the hidden interests that motivate specific interpretations of images in specific contexts. By refiguring past narratives and prefiguring future ones, the historical imagination aims at “transfiguring” the postmodern present.

Kearney proposes diacritical hermeneutics, following Ricoeur, as a means of navigating between romantic and radical hermeneutics. Since the self has a narrative identity, and because what we choose to narrate is determined by what we value, story-telling is never ethically neutral. Re-telling stories, especially foundational stories, opens new possibilities for existence, in that we move from prefiguring our life-world to the configuring of the text in the act of telling, and eventually refigure our existence, according to Ricoeur’s triple mimesis.

Coming to Kearney’s phenomenology of the Other, he seeks to steer an interpretive middle way between the unmediated, uncritical rapport with the Other (of radical hermeneutics) and the rigid, out-dated onto-theological and metaphysical conceptions (of romantic hermeneutics). Kearney’s approach to the “Other” provides an interpretive window on his ethics, and provides the context and terminology to comprehend his eschatological vision. In *The God who may be*, Kearney explores the theme of transfiguration in terms of a phenomenology of the *persona* – a description of the other in which he draws liberally from post-Heideggerian accounts of the self-other relation.

Kearney challenges the classical metaphysical view of God, through his wager that God neither is, nor is not, but *may be*. He proposes a new religious hermeneutic that evaluates two opposing ways of conceptualising God, namely the

eschatological and the onto-theological: “The former, which I endorse, privileges a God who possibilizes our world from out of the future, from the hoped-for eschaton which several religious traditions have promised will one day come” (Kearney 2001:1). When we open ourselves to the transfiguring power of transcendence, the *God Who May Be* offers each person the possibility of realising a promised kingdom and thus also to transfigure God in turn, by incarnating divine possibility.

With his concept of anatheism, Kearney wishes to create an interpretive space, defined by radical interreligious hospitality, for dialogue between believers, non-believers, and post-believers. The possibility of God after God exists only in relation to the alternative option of its impossibility, and it is the very transcendence of God that necessitates such openness. Kearney advocates a relationality between religions that assumes a “generosity of imagination” that allows the sort of traversing across religious boundaries that enables true religious dialogue, culminating in the practical care of the downtrodden and oppressed.

8.5 Chapter six: New stories? Sin and redemption re-imagined

As a first proposition of a “new story,” we reconsidered Augustine’s anthropology in dialogue with Pelagianism, drawing on the work of American Jesuit scholar, Roger Haight. Haight considers each of the opposing doctrines to embody a feature of a more inclusive, holistic response to the world, and searches for the values contained in each as a way of pursuing a deeper understanding of the doctrines that may enable dialogue between them. Exploring the polar structures of nature-person (Rahner) and destiny-freedom (Tillich), Haight brings these ideas to bear on freedom, sin, and grace by considering that the concept of such a polarity in the human person may provide us with a conceptual model for the operation of grace within the same human person. Proceeding from Rahner’s definition of grace as God’s self-giving to humanity, Haight proposes three ways in which grace may be said to establish human freedom and autonomy, namely (i) God’s grace fundamentally constitutes human autonomy; (ii) grace expands freedom by giving liberty; and (iii) grace facilitates the overcoming of sin.

Kearney’s concept of the *yetser* is reflected in the polar structures of nature-person and destiny-freedom, with Rahner pointedly describing concupiscence as

neutral drives and passions, able to be placed in service of either good or evil. The above helps us move ahead by clarifying the role of grace in the process whereby the *yetser*, theologically speaking, becomes imagination-toward-death or imagination-toward-life. Following Pelagius, first, we recognise grace as already residing in the very existence of the *yetser* as exemplifying *posse*, namely the possibility to determine oneself toward life, expansion, and expression. Second, Haight's reinterpretation of Augustine to describe grace as the experience of being addressed by an ultimate God gives theological expression to Kearney's description of the eschatological dimension that is possibilised when the *yetser* is entirely fixed on its Creator, thereby allowing the human person to become more fully human.

A second proposed "new story" involves the resurrection as hermeneutical key to facilitate an eschatological interpretation of Messiah Jesus. Faced with two divergent lines of interpretation in Christology, namely that of the incarnation and that of the cross, this section proposes the hermeneutical consideration of the resurrection as "third way." We note that the gospels reveal the resurrection of Christ – not his birth (incarnation), nor his passion (atonement) – as the stimulus that causes Jesus' followers to reinterpret both his teachings and his death *in light of his resurrection* as God's vindication of Jesus as Messiah.

This means that it is not in the stories of the nativity that we should search for supernatural and metaphysical miracles of incarnation, but in the act of giving whereby Jesus surrenders his will and even his very life. The way to the incarnation of the Divine is through the surrender of the divinely created *yetser*, in other words, through a human being saying "yes" to God. It is in this way that the divergent traditions of incarnation theology and a theology of the cross meet one another, within the framework of Kearney's eschatological *God Who May Be*, and in the form of a moral atonement theory. Jesus lives a life surrendered to the will of the Father, and therefore the Kingdom of God is possibilised through his person in a moment of Divine-human co-creation. Taking the resurrection as hermeneutical key emphasises that Jesus of Nazareth embodied the eschatological future of humanity as the "last (*eschatos*) Adam," (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἄδαμ, 1 Cor 15:45). Jesus of Nazareth, in his person, "binds humanity and divinity into a unity," and in this the divine intention for humanity comes to light within an evolutionary understanding of God's intended *telos* for

humanity. In Kearney's terms, however, this future is not guaranteed, but, just like the Kingdom of God, *may be*.

A third "new story" concerns collective understandings of both sin and salvation that takes humanity-in-relationship as point of departure. Drawing from the rich symbol of communion in the Eastern tradition of trinitarian theology, this approach seeks to bring balance to the overly individualistic focus of Western hamartiologies and soteriologies. Remembering Bonhoeffer's contribution regarding the corporate presence of Christ, and bringing this to bear on Zizioulas' interpretation of the Eastern tradition and its definition of the Being of God in terms of communion, both Christ and salvation emerges as a fully personal, fully relational reality. The historical task of co-creation is essentially a collective enterprise that is based on dialogue and co-creation, both between human persons and between humanity and God.

A fourth "new story" proposes rethinking salvation, and in particular the Moral Exemplary theory, in terms of Christ the Messiah capturing the imagination, thereby transfiguring humanity. In attempting a dialogue between Kant's analysis of human dependence on divine grace and divine pardon, on the one hand, and Abelard's theory of the atonement, on the other, this section proposes that, on account of divine grace, the objective dominion of sin is broken by the divine forgiveness that God offers the person who has turned from the evil inclination to the good inclination. Noting that Kant continued to interpret Christ's suffering as exemplary and symbolic, even though his moral philosophy illustrated the necessity of divine grace and divine pardon, illustrates that it is both possible and theologically sound to maintain a moral exemplarist view of atonement while at the same time understanding divine grace and forgiveness as primary and foundational to the subjective effect that Christ's life, death and resurrection has on the believer.

Since the objective dominion of sin is addressed through divine pardon, we may understand, following Abelard, that it is in relation to the subjective dimension of sin that divine grace calls at us through the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus, capturing our imagination so that we are subjectively transfigured and the Kingdom of God is possibilised in and through us. This nuanced version of the moral exemplar theory

emphasises divine grace as fundamental in terminating both the objective and the subjective dominion of sin over individuals, thus steering clear of Semi-Pelagianism.

The eschatological dimension that opens as Jesus orients his *yetser* to the Father captures the imagination of humanity. This does not mean that we are merely addressed at an emotional level. Instead, the faithfulness of Messiah Jesus, by capturing our imagination, *creates* in the believer a similar saving faithfulness. Drawing from Niebuhr and Lee, we consider that human persons are truly changed when our imaginations are captured by Christ. The psychological effect of being confronted with the story of humanity-for-the-other, exemplified in Man from Nazareth, is that we are *transformed* and *transmuted*, or *transfigured*, in Kearney's terminology. Theologically, this finds expression through the luring of the Spirit, who renews the divine image of Christ in humanity. This pneumatological dimension should form the theological backbone when interpreting Kearney's notion of the transfiguring God.

A fifth proposal of a "new story" engages Kearney's perspective of God as the Powerless Possible. Theologically, this is expressed through the creative suffering of God (Fiddes), which contributes to our understanding of a vulnerable God. In this perspective, God makes Godself vulnerable to humanity, by the freedom of God's own choice. This vulnerability runs both ways, however, since humans cannot but be affected by such a revelation of love in the person of Christ.

Fiddes draws from Schleiermacher and Bonhoeffer to illustrate how God's revelation of love in Christ (past) becomes a communication of the very being of God (present). Schleiermacher illustrates how humanity's broken God-consciousness becomes transformed through the perfect God-consciousness of Jesus Christ that he communicates to his disciples. Bonhoeffer's emphasis on the suffering God serves as a corrective to Schleiermacher's Jesus, who is untouched by pain and suffering. Bonhoeffer's interpretation of Jesus' experience of God-forsakenness on the cross further serves as a corrective to Schleiermacher's confidence in a "universal" religious experience that seems at odds with a contemporary sense of the loss of God-consciousness. Bonhoeffer interprets God's willingness, in great love, to be pushed aside by the world, to mean that the contemporary Christian must learn to follow in the way of the seemingly invisible, seemingly absent. In this, we find

ourselves at Kearney's anatheism, where Bonhoeffer links the idea of a powerless God with the world's coming-of-age, so that a world coming into its own has been able to substitute a suffering God for the *Deus ex machina* that existed as a projection of a fearful humanity. Those who want to find God, then, must look for God among the weak, powerless and suffering, where Godself is present as weak, powerless and suffering. This implies that the contemporary believer must engage zirself in complete commitment in the secular world.

In this context, the vulnerability of God, by God's free choice, may be translated as a vulnerable outcome. Creation's future is not certain. God's intended future for creation may be, or it may not, depending on the free choice of humanity to respond (or not) to God's transfiguring presence, becoming co-creators of the Messianic Kingdom of justice and love. This means that the biblical symbols of judgment, punishment, and death, reveals the frightening reality that the "meaning and intention of life can be missed," and that the choice to open to God's intended future is an urgent one (Migliore). God's love is not coercive.

A sixth and final proposal to tell a "new story," places sin and salvation in an evolutionary perspective. Along the lines of Deep Incarnation, which interprets the redemptive work of God in Christ to include the whole cosmos in an ongoing act of creation, sin (particularly original sin) may be re-imagined along biological-evolutionary lines. Redemption, for its part, may be expressed in terms of an eschatological hope, in which believers sigh, along with a groaning creation, waiting for the *shalom* of the seventh day of creation to break forth into reality. In dialogue with Kearney's hermeneutical phenomenology of the *yetser*, humanity as bearing the *imago Dei*, is invited to become co-creators with the Divine of this Kingdom of love and justice, cosmically understood.

8.6 Chapter seven: Of Nazareth: Stories that capture the imagination

We concluded our journey through various stories of sin and salvation by considering stories that show us a new way. What happens, namely, when human imagination does not lead astray, but instead possibilises Divine Presence in the world? For such narrative examples of imagination-toward-life, we turned, first, to the Annunciation. In Mary's encounter with the angel, we observe a moving back and forth between doubt

and faith, until, in a moment of radical hospitality to the Divine Stranger, the young, pregnant and decidedly vulnerable girl from Nazareth is transfigured into an eschatological agent. As she aligns her *yetser* with divine intention, she finds the limits of her existence exploded into new possibilities. Mary becomes co-creator of God's Kingdom of justice and love by becoming the portal through which the Messiah steps into time and space.

In the story of Messianic transfiguration on Mount Thabor, Jesus is metamorphosed into the *persona* of Christ, signalling in that moment the divinely intended *telos* of humanity. This transfiguration takes place not by Jesus abandoning his original person and becoming someone else, but by him undergoing a change of "figure" that allows his divine persona to emanate through his "flesh-and-blood embodiedness." Paul's reinterpretation of this story in 2 Corinthians 3 sees it as a call for everybody to become transfigured in the light of Christ. While we receive this transfiguring as a gift by the "grace-giving *persona* of Christ," it is also something that we are enabled to do for others.

Our final story discusses transfiguration in terms of the desire of God, suggesting that, in burning, faithful, untiring desire, the human and divine may transfigure one another. From the primacy of the Shulamite in the Song of Songs, Kearney deduces that God is the other who seeks human persons before they seek him – a "desire beyond my desire" that does not indicate lack or deficiency but is its own reward of excess, gift and grace (Kearney 2001:54). In this desire, we lose ourselves, only to be found, swept along, to an impossible future.

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