


Analytic philosophy and scriptural interpretations

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The task of interpreting the Holy Scriptures has been a daunting enterprise throughout the history of the Church. This article explores how analytic philosophy could be promising in biblical interpretation. Notwithstanding the suspicion related to analytic philosophy, this article argues that analytic philosophy could creatively aid the interpretation of the Holy Scripture. My interest is in how its focus on coherence and clarity of description could add force to making sense of the truth claims of the Bible. I argue that when used creatively, analytic philosophy holds excellent prospects for biblical interpretation, especially in distinguishing between the presupposition of the message of a Bible text and the presupposition of the interpreter.

Contribution: The article argues that the omission of the Hebrew Bible from academic discussion in fields like political philosophy or psychology and mainstream philosophy because it is considered a product of revelation that must not be approached using reasoning is a false dichotomy because, in the Scriptures, we find God inviting us to *reasoning*.

Keywords: analytic philosophy; interpretation; philosophical hermeneutics; presuppositions; revelation; clarifications.

Introduction

There has always been an intense discourse between Christian theology and philosophy since the 1st century of the Christian era. This relationship has been both mutual and intensely hostile. At one point, philosophy appeared to serve (Antombikums 2022):

Christianity as a maid helping Christianity to actualise its purpose. At another point, she appeared to be an enemy of Christianity and, [in fact, of] theism in general. Yet, at another point, she appeared as a friend whose services were employed just like those of a catalyst in a chemical reaction, which, though it aids the reaction process, does not take part in the final product. (p. 111)

While teaching undergraduate students courses on *Twenty-first-Century Biblical Challenges* and *Christian Worldview* in the fall of 2023, a few students, mostly from Pentecostal backgrounds wondered why they were introduced to several philosophical ideas that shaped the 20th-century cultural revolution, not because they did not acknowledge the challenges that came with this cultural revolution, especially postmodernism while practising their faith as Christians but because philosophy seems boring to them. Just like these students, many theologians have sought to hurl philosophy out entirely from Christian thinking. Worst still is analytic philosophy and analytic theology, with its emphasis on coherency and language precision. The analytic philosophical method seems to be less attractive than other methods of philosophy.¹ In this article, we will explore how analytic philosophy can creatively contribute to the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures. Despite facing suspicion, both due to its obsession with clarity and from some continental philosophers, we will show that analytic philosophy has the potential to provide valuable insights in this area. My interest is in how its focus on coherence and clarity of description could add force to making sense of the truth claim of the Bible. This article argues that when used creatively, analytic philosophy holds many prospects for interpreting the Holy Scriptures. Further, I will utilise materials both from the analytic and continental traditions to show that philosophy as an enterprise overlaps internally and externally with other fields of endeavours. The relevance of this approach is to underscore the relevance of philosophy in theological discourse. After all, every tool may be utilised faithfully in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures notwithstanding that some tools may be more fitting than others.

1. See Diego Marconi (20011). See also Thomson (2019).

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What has Athens got to do with Jerusalem?

The Bible as God's Revelation

Because of the ontological distinction between God and humans, the Judeo-Christian God, according to the Bible, is the one who reveals Himself to the worshippers (Heb 11). Revelation creates an avenue for a mutual divine-human relationship and unveils what would not have been known except for revelation (Antombikums 2024). There are two kinds of revelations in Christian theism: the general and special revelations. The creation, according to the Psalmist (Ps 19), declares the glory of God and therefore is regarded as general revelation. The argument for the existence of God from design utilises this line of thought. Calvin (1540) called creation the theatre of God's glory. Special revelation is divided into the spoken Word and the incarnate Word, which is mainly regarded as the climax of revelation in Hebrews 1.

Given that the spoken Words were revealed by the Spirit of God, how is analytic philosophy, with its obsession with precision and clarity of language, relevant in understanding the things of the Spirit? For instance, John Webster considers the task of Bible interpretation as a spiritual activity, with its nucleus in talking about God and other realities (Webster 2016:47). Wouldn't the rational analysis of analytic philosophy, which in some cases holds that there are several forms of genres in the Bible to be read like other books lead to the loss of the true meaning of the message of the Bible? One may conveniently argue that reading and interpreting the Bible using philosophical and rational tools may denude it of its authority. Theologians and Christian philosophers argue that one of the characteristics of the Bible is self-convincing because of its perspicuity. However, contemporary readers may not only face the tension of its eternal relevance and its historical particularity but also a few forms of obscurity that only rigorous *searching* could result in clarity.

Speaking of the challenges involved in unveiling the message of a given text in the Bible, T. F. Torrance (1995) argues that although the Bible was written in context and the writers employed the linguistic categorisations that were familiar to their listeners, its message is not always direct or explicit as one would expect. On the contrary, the Word of God sometimes comes to us in the written Word:

... in the limitation and imperfection, the ambiguities and contradictions of our fallen ways of thought and speech, seeking us in the questionable forms of our humanity where we have to let ourselves be questioned down to the roots of our being in order to hear it as God's Word. (Torrance 1995:2; Webster 2016:79)

Given the foregoing, the Word of God sometimes is beyond the mastery of human intellect or the thought of our minds. As a result of humanity's creation in the image of God, we are divinely wired for divine relationship through what is generally regarded as *sensus divinitatis* and *semenus religionis*. However, in traditional Christian theism, the Fall has, to

some extent, marred the *imago Dei*. Therefore, it is only through Christ's atoning work and its acceptance in repentance that this image is restored, and we may have further illumination (Webster 2016:79).

Philosophy as human intellectual exercise

Just as there is no universal definition for the term philosophy except for the fact that from its etymology, it means love for wisdom, so there is no universal definition of analytic philosophy. Because analytic philosophy is replete with a plethora of methodologies, including the possibility of contradictions, there is no agreed definition of what analytic philosophy is. Michael Beaney (2013) states that:

Analytic philosophy is characterised above all by the goal of clarity, the insistence on explicit argumentation in philosophy, and the demand that any view expressed be exposed to the rigours of critical evaluation and discussion by peers. (p. 3)

Right from its inception, especially in the philosophy of language, metaphysical and epistemological questions, mathematical logic and theory of judgement, analytic philosophy has continued to encompass a wide variety of subjects. It has employed different approaches to all sub-fields of philosophy. Today, we can speak about the analytic philosophy of religion, including analytic theology (Beaney 2013). Beaney argues that 'Russell's and Moore's rebellion against British idealism has often been taken as signalling the birth of analytic philosophy' (2013:5).

Another field the analytic tradition has been extended to is theology. Today, many analytic philosophers designate themselves as analytic theologians. Quoting Micheal Rea and Oliver Crisp, Simon Oliver lists a couple of characteristics associated with analytic philosophy in relation to analytic theology to include a particular style possibly unique to them. This style manifests itself in formal logic involving coherence and precision. He argues that other core elements of analytic philosophy include ensuring transparency of the meaning of every proposition and ensuring logical coherence of every claim. Not only the foregoing, but philosophers of the analytic tradition avoid literal extrapolation or assigning literal meanings to propositions unless such is necessary for clarifying an argument. Additionally, analytic philosophers try, on the one hand, to avoid over-simplification of propositions while trying as much as possible to break complex propositions into smaller chunks for the sake of clarity on the other hand (Oliver 2010:163–164; Rea 2019:4–6).

J.W. Gericke argues that 'Analytic traditions of the Wittgensteinian type, concerned with the philosophical clarification of meaning in ordinary language (allowing us to work descriptively with non-philosophical materials)' (2011:2). Analytic philosophy is:

... an investigation into concepts, a search for nontrivial, necessary, and sufficient conditions for something...revealing the true... a matter of carefully studying the way expressions are actually used in ordinary language, with a view to dissolving

rather than solving philosophical problems. (Barry Dainton & Howard Robinson 2015:569)

From the foregoing, analytic philosophy asks the same questions we find in the traditional fields of metaphysics, epistemology, logic, ethics and the like. However, some of the critical issues in analytic philosophy include language precision, lack of ambiguity, coherence and conceptual analysis (Antombikums 2022):

[B]y conceptual analysis in this study, I mean a rigorous examination that looks at a concept to ascertain whether it is genuine (i.e. factual) and not contradictory, how it agrees and differs from other concepts and if it is practically relevant to the purpose for which it is formulated. (p. 23)

I cannot but agree with Hans-Johann Glock, who argues that 'analytic philosophy is a loose movement held together both by ties of influence and by various "family resemblances"' (Glock 2008:i).

Analytic philosophy and Christian theism

Suspicion and hesitation

Although analytic philosophy has won the interest of many, it is not without those who are critical and suspicious about it because they think that it might introduce different meanings to the biblical text to suit the presuppositions of the analytic philosophers – for instance, distilling some propositions into smaller chunks for the sake of clarity while neglecting the fundamental presupposition of the Bible. Allan Torrance argued that:

If analytics may well be tempted to convert biblical language into something with which they are more comfortable, perhaps the analytical tendency should be kept away from the biblical text, as analytic thinking would only undermine theological hermeneutics. (2013:165)

Karl Jaspers, who is critical of the usage of philosophy in Christianity, argues that 'authoritarian church thought has condemned independent philosophy on the ground that it is a worldly temptation which leads man away from God, destroying his soul with vain preoccupations' (Mironov 2012:140).² Of course, this is a minority voice. However, it shows that not everyone thinks positively about philosophy just the way the Church sometimes was critical of science during the time of Charles Darwin and Isaac Newton.

This seeming rejection of philosophy stems from the fact that philosophy seems too preoccupied with clarity, consistency and the use of technical language; any means of dialogue or communication that falls short of the foregoing and the like is not considered philosophical. This mistrust or suspicion has not started today and, at least since Plato, had less regard for the everyday or ordinary use of language, seemingly because it was considered too simplistic, mistaken and illogical (Cupitt 2005).

2. See Karl Jaspers (1951:7).

This is not entirely the case today since the introduction of common sense philosophy, which acknowledges that ordinary language has its own logic separate from the philosophical enterprise undertaken in academia (Cupitt 2005):

... considerations such as these have prepared us very slowly for the idea that there really is an interesting philosophy and set of ways of thinking embedded in ordinary language, and that it is about time for us to dig it all out and take a good look at it. (pp. 14–15)

Prospects in analytic philosophy for hermeneutics

Contrary to the idea that analytic philosophers might approach a biblical text with the presupposition of analytic philosophy and therefore engage in reductionism by extrapolating what is not genuinely existent in the text, Ludwig Wittgenstein (2001b), in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, argues that this is not the case. He insists that philosophy does not aim or result in philosophical presuppositions but instead in clarifying them. Additionally, its primary purpose is to provide explanations of thoughts or concepts. As an intellectual activity, philosophy aims at the logical clarification of thoughts. 'Without philosophy, thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries' (Wittgenstein 2001a:51 cf. Gericke 2011:3). Webster also argues that the analytic philosopher does not approach the Bible with their presuppositions (which might not be the case always; however, the analytic philosopher's presuppositions will be subsumed by the statement and presupposition of the Bible when the philosopher is genuinely open to the message of the Bible). Webster (2016) contends that:

I determined to examine the Bible afresh in a careful, impartial, and unfettered spirit, making no assumptions concerning it, and attributing to it no doctrines which I do not find clearly therein set down. With these precautions I constructed a method of Scriptural interpretation ... (p. 55)³

MacDonald, in line with the foregoing, argues that philosophical activity is not solely concerned with the epistemic justification of certain truths but with clarifying them (2009:23). To show what this means practically, MacDonald looks at a philosopher interested in moral realism. He suggests that such a philosopher should examine the core of the subject, be interested in the subject and its coherence and be interested in how it relates to theism. So, analytic philosophers may do so in interpreting the Holy Scriptures. MacDonald (2009) argues that although such a philosopher as mentioned here:

... does not think that realism is true (perhaps she doesn't think it is false either), but finds it intriguing and worth investigating ... First, she gives some attention to analysing concepts central to moral realism ... Second, she is interested in the internal coherence or consequences of moral realism ... Third, she also takes an interest in moral realism's external relations: how does it square with a theistic view of the world ... etc. (pp. 23–24)

3. See Elwes (1883:8).

The distinction between ordinary language and philosophical language, on the one hand, and reasoning and revelation, on the other hand, seems further to make analytic philosophy an unsuitable product for biblical interpretation. In other words, because the Holy Scriptures are considered revelatory and not to be read from the point of reason, a distinction between how to read philosophical texts and the Hebrew Bible has been developed.⁴ However, it is no news now that many find this distinction alien to the Bible. For instance, Yoram Hazony argues that ‘the reason–revelation distinction is alien to the Hebrew Scriptures, and ultimately this framework is going to have to be thrown out as a basis for interpreting the Hebrew Bible’ (2012:4).

Contrary to the current notion of ‘reason’ or ‘philosophy’ as a rigorous intellectual exercise (of the human faculties) to arrive at a particular truth, medieval philosophers understood reason differently. Hazony argues that philosophers:

[U]nderstood *reason* as beginning with propositions whose truth is self-evident (or which derive indubitably from the evidence of the senses), and proceeding from these to other propositions deduced from them with absolute certainty. (2012:266)

One may ask, what difference does it make to use analytic skills, especially analytic philosophy, in interpreting the Holy Scriptures? In other words, what would analytic philosophy or theology do differently in the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures that philosophy has not done? In his response to this kind of question, Gericke (2011) argues that:

We are biblical scholars, utilising philosophy of religion to understand the Hebrew Bible historically, not philosophers of religion seeking to have the Hebrew Bible contribute to contemporary philosophical debates or hoping to prove its truth-claims wrong. (p. 8)

However, the analytic philosopher is a Christian philosopher who is interpreting the Bible using his or her analytic skills and at the same time holding tenaciously unto his or her faith as a Christian.

This article argues that the task of the analytic philosopher in relation to the Holy Scriptures will be one of clarification. Another way analytic philosophy might aid biblical interpretation is descriptive in nature. In other words, philosophical description helps in describing the nature of biblical truth. Analytic philosophy does to the Hebrew Bible, what philosophy of science does in relation to the cosmos or what philosophy of art does when exploring ‘aesthetic phenomenon rather than only trying to defend or criticise art’. Analytic ‘Philosophy is helpful in describing (the nature of) and appraising the hermeneutical process...’ (Gericke 2011:8).

In contrast to the idea that (Hazony 2012):

4.Hazony (2012). In a bid to provide a promising way of reading the Hebrew Bible, Hazony argues that ‘The first step involves coming to recognise the riches that the biblical texts have to offer as works of reason. The second step involves discarding the reason–revelation distinction completely, and learning to see the world as it appeared to the prophets of Israel – before the reason–revelation distinction was invented’ (2012:5).

The biblical texts bypass man’s natural faculties, giving us knowledge of the true and the good by means of a series of miracles. So what the Bible offers is miraculous knowledge, to be accepted in gratitude and believed on faith. (p. 1)

Hazony (2012) argues that:

[I]n reading the Hebrew Scriptures as works of ‘revelation’ (as opposed to ‘reason’), we come pretty close to destroying them. We accidentally delete much of what these texts were written to say – and then, having accomplished this, we find that the texts don’t really ‘speak to us’ as modern men and women. (p. 3)

In other words, the notion that the Holy Scriptures are purely revelatory and should not be approached with a philosophical or reasoning lens seems a disservice to understanding them. In the end, they are considered irrational, archaic and irrelevant.

Gericke, in his ‘Philosophical Criticism of the Hebrew Bible and the Analytic-Continental Divide’, argues that the divide has now gradually been reduced. Gericke (2016) argues that recently, a proposal has been made for the introduction of philosophical criticism (PC) as a new species of biblical criticism:

[I] was idiosyncratically constructed as a proposal for the introduction into biblical studies of a descriptive form of philosophical exegesis aimed only at the clarification of what, if anything, the texts of the HB. Yet despite this seemingly prescriptive specificity as to the form a ‘philosophical’ approach should take, it was nevertheless granted that philosophical interpretation per se cannot be limited thusly. (pp. 85, 85–99)

As in Biblical hermeneutics, an analytic philosopher engaging in biblical interpretation using the methods of analytic philosophy does not necessarily have to be free from a supposed authoritative or divine being in order to employ such methods. In fact, even Greek philosophers were not always assumed to make their presentation merely through the exercise of their faculties but also from a transcendent being or notion. Parmenides is a classical example of an Eleatic philosopher who believed his thoughts were shaped by divine power.⁵ Therefore, employing analytic philosophy in interpreting the Holy Scriptures is (Gadamer 1976):

[O]ntological rather than methodological. It seeks to throw light on the fundamental conditions that underlie the phenomenon of understanding in all its modes, scientific and nonscientific alike, and that constitute understanding as an event over which the interpreting subject does not ultimately preside. (p. xi)

In philosophical hermeneutics, ‘the question is not what we do or what we should do, but what happens beyond our willing and doing’ (Gadamer 1976:xi).

Philosophy is an activity and, therefore, could encourage conversation with the text. This conversation can only be started if the interpreters willingly and genuinely open themselves to understanding what the text is saying, not based on what they understand. In other words, the text has

5.See Coxon (1986).

the truth claim or presupposition and the interpreter has to understand this claim (Gadamer 1976):

It is precisely in confronting the otherness of the text – in hearing its challenging viewpoint – and not in preliminary methodological self-purgations, that the reader's own prejudices (i.e., his present horizons) are thrown into relief and thus come to critical self-consciousness. (p. xxi)

Conversing with the biblical text requires language. However, what is the correct language? Technical or ordinary language? I insist that both are useful. This will help the interpreter to take ordinary language seriously in the same way technical language is upheld. This is because (Gadamer 1976):

Language is by no means simply an instrument or a tool. For it belongs to the nature of the tool that we master its use, which is to say we take it in hand and lay it aside when it has done its service. That is not the same as when we take the words of a language, lying ready in the mouth, and with their use let them sink back into the general store of words over which we dispose. Rather, in all our knowledge of ourselves and in all knowledge of the world, we are always already encompassed by the language which is our own. (p. xxiv)⁶

In using language, we do not assume that by doing so, the truth we ought to know is laid bare before us. Instead, while conversing with the biblical text through the use of language, we are discovering what was previously unknown to us. 'Their [*language*] diversity is not one of sounds and signs, but a diversity of world perspectives' (Gadamer 1976:xxxix).⁷

In the Hebrew Bible, we find God inviting humanity to engage in *reasoning* with Him. The Hebrew word translated as *reason* (for instance in the ESV) in Isaiah 1:18 is יָכַח (yakach). In the context of Isaiah, it means to adjudge, to prove, set right and to justify, which is basically what philosophy does. In that case, analytic philosophy could creatively aid the interpretation of the Bible by its insistence on clarity and consistency, taking every statement of the Bible seriously at first-hand value as the premise for understanding the message of a given text. This article suggests that taking the following seriously in reading the Bible could serve as a hermeneutical tool in unveiling the message of the Scriptures.

Although there are historical-critical issues raised against the holy Scriptures today, there are also philosophical issues threatening its authenticity.⁸ In that case, a Christian analytic philosopher may need to address objections against the Bible using philosophical methods. Despite that, my interest here is not mainly in apologetics; in some instances, one is compelled to offer some responses or clarify misinterpretations before advancing with the course of interpretation. The value of analytic philosophy or reflections in biblical interpretation is invaluable because they help the '... interpreters to arrive at a cursive reading of the biblical text in its final canonical form' (Sarisky 2018:167). One of the ways it does that is by

6. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964:62).

7. See Wilhelm Von Humboldt (1963:19–20).

8. See Mark Harris (2024).

clarifying '... the difference between statements the Bible is making and the presuppositions of those statements' (Sarisky 2018:167). For instance, critics of the Bible have accused it of being unscientific in many instances, therefore referring to some of its truth claims as not valid: the Bible speaks about the four corners of the earth (Isaiah 11:12 [ESV]),⁹ the sun stood still in Joshua 10:12–14 (NIV)¹⁰ and the like. How an analytic philosopher responds to this depends on a number of things. For instance, the Hebrew word translated as 'corners' is קַנְפֵי [kanaph], and it can be translated as edges or borders. This could be a form of linguistic response to the critics. Still yet, one will want to ask why some translations still use 'corners' instead of edges or borders. In my estimation, this is where analytic philosophy comes in.

As stated earlier, the Bible interpreter, whether a theologian or an analytic philosopher, takes it for granted, as was the case in the medieval age (reasoning from an established truth) that the biblical statements contain presuppositions, which the analytic philosopher should not only clarify the distinction between such statements and the presuppositions of such statements but converses with the text, taking every wording seriously. After all, one's '... belief is true if and only if it is part of a coherent system of beliefs'.¹¹ If the analytic philosopher cannot authenticate the truthfulness of the claim in Isaiah, including whether the sun stood still in Joshua, then his or her belief system becomes incoherent. Contrarily, the analytic philosopher must demonstrate that the text does not presuppose that the earth has literally four corners as does a house. Instead, we must see that the creator transcends the cosmos (truth claim), and it is right before Him like one holding the map of the earth. So, when applied to returning the exile to the promised land, it could connote that God, because of the fact that the cosmos is right before Him and He beholds everything in it, is able to gather all the children of Israel scattered all over the world and return them to their homes.

Additionally, talking about the sun standing still in Joshua might not evoke the same linguistic responses as in Isaiah. The analytic philosopher could also build on the idea of presupposition or the notion of truth-claim mentioned earlier to offer creative responses to the critics. It seems that the message here is not strictly on whether the sun stood still or not but on the fact that Israel defeated his enemies. Further, because this was well deserved after a long fight, which reason for such could only be God, one has no doubt but to see that long-awaited period as more than the ordinary day. This is always the case when we are expecting something spectacular. The waiting periods always seem longer than usual. Lastly, because God is the creator of the cosmos and

9. 'He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth' (Isaiah 11:12 [ESV]).

10. 'On the day the Lord gave the Amorites over to Israel, Joshua said to the Lord in the presence of Israel: "Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and you, moon, over the Valley of Aijalon". So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, till the nation avenged itself on its enemies, as it is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped in the middle of the sky and delayed going down for about a full day' (Joshua 10:12–14 [NIV]).

11. See Glanzberg (2023).

has power over the solar system, halting the earth's rotation, which is interpreted in Joshua as the sun standing still, is possible.

Richard Swinburne (2007) discussed this extensively in his chapter on presupposition and statement. He argues that it is not always the case that when one speaks, especially with respect to their audience, they mean what they say in the literal sense as far as the apparent meaning of such expression entails (Swinburne 2007:27). In other words, sometimes, the presupposition of a proposition may not actually entail the true meaning of what the speaker is communicating to the audience. Swinburne argues that this is the case because the speaker '...can express his belief more succinctly and intelligibly and make it more acceptable to his audience if he uses such a presupposition to clothe his message' (Swinburne 2007:27). For instance, if one were to address John, whose son was fired from a Bank and there seems to be an assumption that he was instead not fired but resigned, the speaker who wants to think positive about the aftermath of the dismissal may likely mention that it seems clear that John's son was fired. However, he seems much happier with such a new state of affairs than when he was working. The allusion to being fired seems irrelevant compared to John's son's current state of mind. Swinburne (2007) argues that:

Because of the irrelevance of such presuppositions to the job which the speaker is trying to do with his sentence, it is natural to understand the sentence as expressing a statement which does not state the presuppositions in terms of which it is cast, and to whose truth-value the truth or falsity of the presuppositions is irrelevant. (p. 27)

Using analytic philosophy to the notion that Christ is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, Swinburne creatively interprets this notion contrary to this traditional understanding. He argues that:

... while Jesus may well be regarded as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies in all the ways which the New Testament claims, we cannot have an argument to his Messiahship from all of those prophecies interpreted as such by independent criteria. Often, but not always, the way prophecy is to be understood is shown by what happened to Jesus, the Messiah, rather than Jesus being the Messiah being shown by his fulfilment of prophecy. (2007:170)

In other words, Swinburne presents a different Christocentric understanding of this notion based on his application of the notion of the distinction between the literal meaning of a statement in the presupposition of the speaker although even the traditional understanding has been believed to be Christocentric.

Another way Christian philosophers and theologians have employed logic, especially in Bible interpretation, is by appealing to the laws of non-contradiction, for instance, in interpreting Paul and James on faith and work. John Sanders argues that classical theologians, in reading and interpreting Paul and James on salvation by faith and salvation by works, insist that '[if] two contradictory assertions are both true...we

simply have to hold onto both of them and not sweep one of them under the rug in the name of compulsive logical neatness' (2007:35). This also applies to the debate on divine sovereignty and human responsibility or exhaustive divine foreknowledge and human freedom.

The story of the offering of strange and unauthorised fire by Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10:1–2 might be used to illustrate the tension between divine foreknowledge and human freedom, especially the argument that exhaustive foreknowledge renders human freedom redundant. In other words, God's knowledge of a contingent action makes it a necessary action, given that God does not hold a false belief. At time 1 ($t1$, $t2$ and $t3$ henceforth), God saw that Nadab and Abihu would offer a strange fire at $t2$. Yet, He permits them to execute the said act at $t2$ while planning to eliminate them at $t3$. Nadab and Abihu freely chose the part of rebellion at $t2$. However, the question is whether their action at $t2$ is entirely free from any antecedent. The answer is obviously no! Their action at $t2$ depends on God's decision at $t1$ to overlook what they will do at $t2$ and the subsequent consequences of their action at $t3$. If God did the contrary at $t1$, namely stopping them, Nadab and Abihu would not have offered the strange fire at $t2$ (Antombikums 2022; Welty 2019:146–147).

A classic example of the tension between divine sovereignty and human freedom in relation to culpability is David's census in 2 Samuel 24. At $t1$, God is angry with the Israelites. To vent His anger on them, He incited David to take a census of the Soldiers at $t2$ while planning to eliminate 70000 persons at $t3$ as soon as David yielded to this incitement. David won the argument against Joab, who persuaded him not to do such a thing because a higher power initiated it. At $t4$, David asked for forgiveness, including buying a piece of land to build an altar to appease the wrath of God. Why atone for his sins despite being only the secondary cause of such a state of affairs? And what about the innocent people? (Antombikums 2022). These questions cannot be quickly answered. As far as we are concerned, these two examples are not meant to establish or support the doctrines mentioned. But to show that while reading these narratives carefully, we realise that the writer is inviting us to reason about God and human nature.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the Holy Scriptures are a collection of literature. Although revealed by the Spirit of God, He invites us to read them using all kinds of tools in as much as our attention remains fixed on the statements and presuppositions of the words of the Bible. I argued that there is a false dichotomy between reasoning and reading the Scriptures, which has led to the omission of the Scriptures from every domain that requires seriously using the human faculties because they are considered a product of revelation not to be approached using reason. However, the Scriptures show that God is inviting humans to reason. Further, I argued that contrary to the rejection and mistrust, analytic philosophy holds many prospects in interpreting the Bible because of its

insistence on clarity, the use of language and painstaking and patient reading of the holy text.

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A.S.A. declares that they are the sole author of this research article.

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