

THE CHAOS OF THE CROSS AS THE FRACTAL OF LIFE: THE BIRTH OF THE POST RESURRECTION, MISSIONAL DIMENSION IN JOHN

Kobus Kok

University of Pretoria

Abstract

In this article the author argues from a post foundationalist point of view in favour of an interdisciplinary research methodology that could contribute to new innovative possibilities for doing research. In his article he brings chaos theory in discussion with NT studies with specific reference to John's view of the cross. He then goes on to illustrate how John's resurrection and appearance narratives can serve as an empowering metaphor for existential living that brings not only chaos theory and NT studies, but also missiology in a creative interdisciplinary dialogue with one another.

1. Introduction

A few years ago Diogenes Allan (1989) postulated: "A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the middle ages from the modern world." In the two decades after he articulated this profound statement, the world changed and it could indeed be called the age of revolutions (Barna 2005)– the technological revolution, the digital revolution, the communication revolution, the inter-connected world of cyberspace and internet with the revolution of knowledge. Thomas Bandy (2007, 31), and others like Leonard Sweet (2001, 17) rightly argue: "A sea change of transitions and transformations is birthing a whole new world and a whole new set of ways of making our way in the world."

The dramatic change from modernism to postmodernism not only impacted global society and culture, but also the academic world and its approach to doing research. In the modern paradigm academic disciplines functioned well within a rigid disciplinary framework and had more or less clear boundary lines. The problem with this approach however, is that the modernistic approach in actuality produced (rigid) disciplinary islands with a strong hierarchical distinction between the sciences (cf. natural, social and human sciences). According to Van Huyssteen (2005), a new liberating paradigm seems to be emerging, one that not only breaks down the old rigid disciplinary boundaries, but also creates new innovative possibilities. Van Huyssteen argues in favor of a post-foundational approach to

doing research. The latter can be differentiated from so called foundationalism on the one hand, which was a product of modernism in which the world consisted of objective, timeless truths that were true in every context imaginable, and also from non-foundationalism on the other, according to which no absolute truths exist and where everything is relative. Over and against this epistemology, we find post-foundationalism, a social constructionist epistemological approach in which the specific context is taken into consideration, as well as all other appropriate theory-laden experiences: “Post-foundationalism in theological reflection has therefore shown itself as a viable third epistemological option beyond the extremes of absolutism and the relativism of extreme forms of pluralism” (1999, 243). In this sense it thus represents a rather balanced epistemology that inherently strives towards deconstruction of discourses and the reinterpretation that will enrich and thicken previous discourses, creating a nuanced theoretical construction. Accordingly, postfoundationalism strongly advocates, as I understand it, an interdisciplinary approach to research methodology where insights from other disciplines are brought into dialogue with one’s own discipline (Van Huyssteen 1999, 243).¹

In this article I would like to bring three disciplines in dialogue with one another namely NT science, missiology and the philosophy of science’s chaos theory with specific reference to the fractal phenomenon.

2. The Chaos of the Cross

In the Gospel of John, during the last days of his earthly life, Jesus was not only shamefully betrayed by one of his friends and followers (18:2), but also arrested, scourged (John 19:1) and crucified (19:16vv.) because he *inter alia* made himself guilty of blasphemy (10:33; 19:1,7)(cf. Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt 1995, 82).² For this reason Jesus was labeled as a *deviant*³ person who fundamentally

-
- 1 Elsewhere Van Huyssteen (1998, 22) remarks, “Over against the objectivism of foundationalism and the extreme relativism of most forms of nonfoundationalism, I would like to propose a postfoundationalist model of rationality which would be thoroughly contextual, but which at the same time would reach beyond the limits of one’s own group or culture in interdisciplinary conversation.”
 - 2 The implicit reader on the other hand, knows that Jesus is δικαιοσύνης (16:10) and that he has no sin (7:18; 8:46). This makes the attack and questioning of the Jews even more dubious and proves that they are actually those who do not act in accordance with the truth.
 - 3 Malina and Neyrey (1991, 100) remark, “Behavior is deviant when it violates the sense of order or the set of classification which people perceive to structure their world.”

was “out of place” (cf. also Moxnes 2003, 3, 33-34) - someone who according to the laws of the Jews deserved the death penalty.⁴

In ancient times, death on a cross was no honorable death. It was reserved for criminals, the enemies of Rome, for those who deserved nothing less than brutal death. Neyrey (1994, 113-14) argues that the crucifixion process *per se* was marked by progressive public humiliation and was especially characterized by the deprivation and deconstruction of honor as Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998, 263-64) also argue:

- Crucifixion was the punishment reserved for slaves (Cicero, *In Verrem* 2.5.168), bandits (Josephus, *War* 2.253), prisoners of war (Josephus, *War* 5.451) and political revolutionaries (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.295).
- Furthermore, the public trials served as status degradation rituals, which inadvertently labeled the accused as a shameful person in the eyes of society, in a culture where honor was one of the most important social values (Malina, Joubert and Van der Watt 1995, 9-10).
- The victim's clothing was confiscated and they were shamed by being stripped naked and despoiled (Diodorus Siculus 33.15.1). They lost power and honor through the pinioning of hands and arms and the mutilation of being nailed to the cross (Philo, *Post.* 61; *Somn.* 2.2.13) and the crowds ridiculed and mocked the victims (Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 3.160) (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1998, 263-64). Especially shameful was the fact that in some cases the victims of crucifixion were denied an honorable burial.⁵

Crucifixion's ultimate purpose inevitably resulted in execution and shame. In John 19:30 the crucified Jesus breathed his last breath and uttered the words “It is finished”, bowed his head and died a horrible, shameful death. Malina and Neyrey (1991, 117) correctly argue: “Finally, the complete and irrevocable loss of status occurred when Jesus died.”

In ancient times death represented the end of life and the end of possibilities. In antiquity, death was viewed as the point of no return (see Spicq 1994, 187; quoted by Salier 2004). Liess (2005, 430) is, in other words, correct when he states: “Das Totenreich gilt als Land ohne Wiederkehr” (Hi 7,9; 10,21; 16,22), als Ort der Finsternis (Ps 88, 7,13; Hi 10,21; 17,13) und des Staubes (Jes 29,19 u.ö.), des Vergessens (Ps 88,13) und Schweigens (Ps 94,17).” In classical Greek thought as Bultmann (1995, 312-13) postulates, death had negative connotative meaning: “Death destroys life; the shadowy existence of the dead in Hades is no true life.

4 Malina and Neyrey (1991, 117) correctly state, “The degradation of Jesus culminated in his crucifixion.”

5 See the article of Neyrey <http://www.nd.edu/~jneyrey1/shame.html> accessed on 7 September 2010.

The most that may be expected is the survival or transmigration of the soul. All must die, so that death casts a shadow on life and its meaning” (cf. also Aeschylus in *Ag.* 1295-1298).

Pilch (1991, 186) argues that even in Jewish thought, death and illness did not have positive connotations: “Life moreover, in a good state of being (e.g., clean, pure, whole) is preferable to life in an undesirable state (e.g., unclean with leprosy, blind, mute, death).” The value of life and the qualitative relationship between life and death is sketched by the writer of Ecclesiastes where he is of the opinion that a living dog is worth more than a dead person (lion), because once you’re dead there is no more hope : (cf. Eccl 9:4). *It thus becomes clear that the death of Jesus, through the eyes of unbelief amounts to nothing more than a situation of crisis and disorientation* (Kok 2008, 84), a *Sitz im Leben* where all hope is lost.

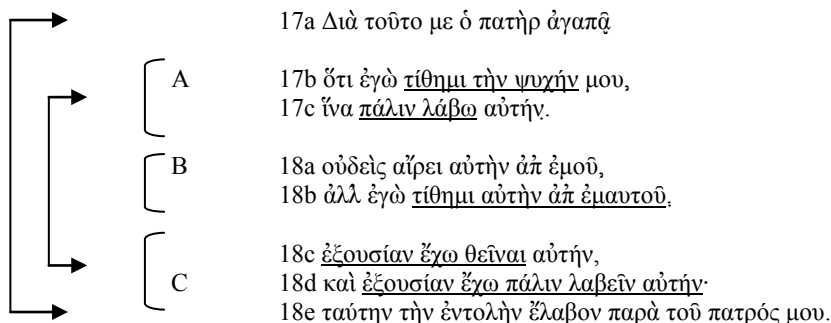
The reality of the death of John’s Jesus and the hopelessness of the situation becomes apparent when the reaction of the disciples of Jesus is studied. In the eyes of the world, the ministry of Jesus failed and Jesus died a dishonorable death (Deut 21:22-23). Therefore it is not surprising that after the death of Jesus, we find his closest followers behind closed doors (John 20:19 τῶν θυρῶν κεκλεισμένων when the ὄπου ἦσαν οἱ μαθηταί). John makes it clear that the “behind closed doors” scenario is motivated by, or a direct result of fear (διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων (20:19)(Köstenberger 2004, 570-74; Moloney 1998, 530). John thus sketches a scenario where the disciples are caught up in misunderstanding (cf. 2:22; 12:16; 13:7; 20:9), confusion, disorientation, fear (20:19 διὰ τὸν φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων) and hopelessness. Behind closed doors, engulfed by fear the missionary church would never have been born and the Jesus movement would have ended like a star that reached its burnt-out end, a ship that came to a halt in the absence of the east-wind. But, in his narratological brilliance the writer of John skillfully guided the implicit reader from early on in the narrative that death would not be the ultimate winner (John 2:22; 10:17-19). The chaos of the cross would eventually become the fractal of life.

In John 10:17-18 for instance, we note that in John, the cross and the resurrection are inseparably bound together:⁶ It is at the cross that the true identity of Jesus is revealed and where he is glorified (8:28).⁷ It is at the cross, the point of

6 Van der Watt (2000a, 48) remarks, “For him the cross, burial, resurrection and even the outpouring of the Spirit are different facets of one important integrated event (which we refer to as the ‘cross event/s’) which have changed the course of history. These events are treated in a close relationship with each other, without collapsing the different events into undistinguishable whole.” Wilkens (1998, 340-41) uses words like ‘ineinsgesehen’ and ‘ineinsfallen’ in speaking of the relationship between the cross and resurrection.

7 Kysar (1986, 140) remarks, “The cross is the decisive event which manifests Jesus’ true identity.” Schnelle (1998, 157) is thus correct when he points out that, “Die Erhöhung hat für Johannes Offenbarungscharakter; sie zeigt, dass Jesus der Sohn Gottes ist, weil sich am Kreuz die Liebe Gottes zur Welt offenbart (vgl. Joh. 3,16).”

no return, the symbol of death and the end of possibilities that He draws the world to himself. In other words, it is in the context of the crisis, in the midst of disorientation and loss of possibilities that the spiritual reality breaks open and reconciliation could take place – where those who were estranged from God could again be reconciled (12:31-32; 3:14-15).⁸ This is clearly seen in 10:17-18 as Van der Watt (2000a, 45) illustrates:



(a) According to (C – 18a-b) we note that no one takes Jesus' life from him (Maier 1984, 455). – “Deshalb vollzieht sich die Selbsthingabe Jesu nicht als passiver Akt, sondern er geht von sich aus und freiwillig den Weg nach [sic] Kreuz” (Schnelle 1998, 180). Jesus is in total control and lays down his life and chooses to drink the bitter cup of suffering (18:11). Therefore, the true power and authority (cf. also John 9:9-11 ἐξουσία) to crucify him belongs not to the opponents, but to God who is in control of the bigger picture (Kysar 1986, 121; Wengst 2000, 385; Moloney 1998, 496; Beasley-Murray 1999, 339). In other words, the humiliating death of Jesus takes place within the framework of God's plan (see Gnilka 1983, 84; Kysar 1986, 121) and not beyond the sphere of his control (Haenchen 1984, 49; cf. Van der Watt 2000a, 45).

(b) In the chiasmic pattern of B (17b-c en 18c-d) it is clear that the laying down (τίθημι) of his life and the taking up thereof (λαμβάνω) takes place within the context of a purpose statement in which he lays down his life in order/for the purpose (ἵνα) to take it up again (πάλιν). The ἵνα πάλιν construction thus has the implication that the death of Jesus had to happen (Schnackenburg 1971, 379) in

8 See Schnackenburg (1971, 492-493); Gnilka (1983, 29); Schnelle (1998, 74). Schnackenburg (1971, 493) argues, “Das Kreuz ist für Joh schon so sehr Ort der Verherrlichung und Beginn der Heilsherrschaft Jesu (vgl. 19, 37), dass Jesus nicht nur zu sich ans Kreuz, sondern auch in den himmlischen Bereich zieht.”

order to culminate in the life-giving dimension thereof.⁹ Therefore in B - 18c-d we stumble upon the word ἐξουσία (authority/power) by which the reader is guided to see that during all the destruction and disorientation, there was a bigger picture and purpose to what happened (Van der Watt 2000a, ad loc).

(c) Thirdly it is important to note that the Chiasitic structure of this text begins and ends with a reference to the Father (A – 17a and 18e). Although Jesus acts with authority and purpose, he nevertheless exists within a close relationship with the Father and all that happens: “[R]esultiert aus der Liebe zwischen Vater und Sohn” (Maier 1984, 454).¹⁰ The action that is done is to be seen as an ἐντολή (18e) or commandment of the Father and is motivated by love (17a – See also 3:35).¹¹

In 3:14-15 the cross as godly imperative (δεῖ) is compared to the snake that was raised by Moses in the desert (Num 21:4-9) and represents the determination of God’s plan (Kysar 1986, 54-55) and the place where the true identity of Christ is revealed (Dietzfelbinger 2001, 313). In the same way that the Israelites in the desert received healing and restoration when they looked upon the snake (Num. 21:9), those who focus on the elevated Christ (Schnackenburg 1965, 1.409) will receive healing and restoration (cf. John 9:40-41; 12:40-41) (Gnilka 1984, 28; Moloney 1998, 101; Brown 1971, 133), but this time it will be spiritual.¹² The chaos and destruction of the cross

9 Morris (1995, 456) postulates, “Christ dies in order that he may rise again. The death is not defeat but victory. It is inseparable from the resurrection.” Beasley-Murray (1998, 51) is correct when he remarks, “[T]he Evangelist views the death and resurrection of Christ as indissolubly one. The redemptive event is the crucifixion-resurrection of the Son.”

10 Schnelle (1998, 180) argues, “Die liebe zwischen Vater und Sohn (vgl. Joh. 3,35; 17, 24) und die sich darin bekundende Einheit steht im Zentrum ...”. Dietzfelbinger (2001, 313) is also correct when he says that, “Der Liebe Gottes zu Jesus entsteht also nicht erst aufgrund des Gehorsams, mit dem Jesus in die Passion hineingeht. Sie ist mit der Sendung da und ist ihre treibende Ursache.” Cf. also Theobald (1992, 41-87, 55-56).

11 Van der Watt 2000a; Cf. Maier (1984, 454) who argues, „Gerade das Kreuz Jesu führt ja den Heilsplan des ‘Vaters’ zum Erfolg. Auf diese Weise ist es geradezu der engste Nührungspunkt der Liebe des himmlischen Vaters und der Liebe des Sohnes zum Vater. Man erinnere sich an die Aussage des Täufers in 3, 35.” Dietzfelbinger (2001, 1.312) notes, “Die Liebe des Vaters zu Jesus ist nicht nur gleichzeitig mit der Sendung Jesu in die Welt getreten; sie ist der wirkende Ursprung dieser Sendung, in der die Liebe Gottes zur Welt (3,16) in die Geschichte hineingetragen wird” (cf. 15:9).

12 Brown (1971, 133) argues, “For he who turned toward it was saved, not by what he saw, but by you, the Saviour of all” (cf. *Midr. Wis.* 16:6-7). Brown (1971, 133) also remarks that Jesus becomes the source of life (12:32) and those who see him hanging on the cross actually see the Father (14, 9). Beasley-Murray (1998, ad loc) postulates, “The brief kerygmatic formula of vv. 14–15 makes evident the presuppositions of v. 13. It is closely related to the synoptic predictions of the Passion (Mark 8:31, etc), but illuminates the meaning of the Passion by the prediction of Moses lifting up a bronze snake for the healing of Israelites bitten by snakes (Num 21:4–9). To the lifting up of the snake on a pole that all may live corresponds the lifting up of the Son of Man on a cross that all may have eternal life.”

and death of Jesus was designed to flow over in the life giving, restorative missional plan of God.

The resurrection as the fractal of life

Suddenly the resurrected protagonist appears, breaking through the conventional definitions of reality. Jesus surprisingly makes himself visible to the disciples, who still are caught up in fear and hide behind closed doors. In the prologue (John 1:1-18) John presented Jesus as the life-giving Word, associate creator from the dawn of time who now as resurrected Son of God utters life creating words. Over and against the life drowning character of fear (20:19 φόβον τῶν Ἰουδαίων) in which the disciples are caught, Jesus speaks life creating words of peace (John 20:19 εἰρήνη ὑμῖν). Where fear inhibits, peace creates and prevails. Twice (John 20:19, 21) Jesus utters the words εἰρήνη ὑμῖν. The *Wiederholen* is significant and should not be reduced to mere greeting status (See Beasley-Murray 1998, 387-89). For the Jewish disciples εἰρήνη had important connotative meanings. Of all the words John's resurrected Jesus could have said, εἰρήνη (peace) was chosen in the context of the contrasting existential reality of φόβον (fear). Earlier in John 14:25-27 Jesus said to his disciples:

These things have I spoken unto you, being *yet* present with you.²⁶ But the Comforter (παράκλητος), *which is* the Holy Ghost (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον), whom the Father will send in my name (ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι μου), he shall teach you all things (διδάξει πάντα), and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you (ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν).²⁷ Peace (εἰρήνην) I leave/give (δίδομι) you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled (μὴ ταρασσέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδία), neither let it be afraid/cowardly (μηδὲ δειλιάτω)(KJV).

In John 16:33 Jesus again reminded them of the same truth in the context where he says that he came to the world but will soon return to his father:

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me you might have peace" (ἵνα ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε). The ἐν ἐμοὶ εἰρήνην ἔχητε (in me you might have peace) construction is put in antithesis to the ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ θλίψιν ἔχετε (in the world ye shall have tribulation).

Against the daunting reality of the θλίψιν (tribulation) the disciples should however be of good cheer and courage (cf. the imperative θαρσεῖτε). The latter is qualified by the statement of Jesus that he has overcome or conquered the world (ἐγὼ νενίκηκα τὸν κόσμον). The verb tense used by the writer to express the idea of this victory (νενίκηκα) is written in the perfect indicative active tense which describes a completed verbal action that occurred in the past, but which produced a

state of being or a result that exists in the present. In other words, the emphasis of the perfect is not primarily on the past action so much as it is on the present “state of affairs” resulting from the particular past action (Heiser 2005). Thus, John makes it clear that the disciples (will) share in this victory paradigm and should not be paralyzed by fear but be of good courage.¹³

Let us get back to the Resurrection and appearance scene in John 20. The associative meaning John created becomes clear in the action of Jesus that is flowing over from the action line of the εἰρήνη proclamation. After the second εἰρήνη ὑμῖν speech act Jesus gives the disciples their missionary commission (20:21 καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, κἀγὼ πέμπω ὑμᾶς), blows over them and utters the life creating words λάβετε πνεῦμα ἅγιον·(receive the holy spirit)(Barrett 1978, 395-396; Carson 1991, 412; Gnilka 1983, 14; Schnelle 1998, 34). At this point a clear narratological development is seen from φόβον (fear) to εἰρήνη (peace) to πέμπω, from being disoriented to being reoriented, empowered, equipped and commissioned on a missionary journey that would last until the end of time. In-between φόβον (fear) and εἰρήνη (peace) we find the element of *recreation* as the early church father Irenaeus rightly argued. Just as God breathed life giving spirit into Adam in the creation narrative (cf. Gen 2:7), in the same way Jesus breathed life-giving fear-less spirit into the life-less situation of the disciples. John leaves the implicit reader with this life creating, empowering picture and creates the next scene where the “restored” disciples are no longer caught up in fearful silence but bold proclamation - ἑώρακαμεν τὸν κύριον (we have seen the [post Easter] Lord)(Köstenberger 2004, 572-573). This would be the revolutionary message of the early missionary church.

The interesting fact is that the “restored”, recreated and equipped disciples were not the first to proclaim the revolutionary message that they have seen the resurrected Jesus. In John, Mary Magdalene, a woman, someone who would be out of place¹⁴, have already done so in John 20:18 using similar words (Maria in 20:18 ἑώρακα τὸν κύριον [I have seen the Lord]; Disciples: ἑώρακαμεν τὸν κύριον [we have seen the Lord]). The implicit reader is then guided to see that earlier on it was Mary Magdalene, a woman who was the first person to get it right. She in other words becomes the first person to proclaim the missionary message of the resurrected Christ. Ironically enough, it was even earlier that the Samaritan woman (cf. John 4:1-42) became the first to recognize that Jesus is the Messiah and went out boldly to proclaim that she has met the Messiah, becoming a missional figure even before the disciples of Jesus.

13 Köstenberger (2004, 572); contra Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998, 282-284) who see the resurrection appearances as alternate states of consciousness.

14 Malina and Rohrbaugh do mention the role of Mary Magdalene, but unfortunately but do not bring it in relation to the traditional role of woman as witnesses, which they have referred to in many of their other writings.

From the very beginning there were those who would not believe the revolutionary message of the resurrected Jesus. Thomas, one of Jesus' own disciples (and archetype of those who are caught up in unbelief) is portrait in his unbelief (20:25 οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω), not even slightly anticipating the restoration that would later become a reality (cf. 20:9- οὐδέπω γὰρ ἤδεισαν τὴν γραφὴν ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι).¹⁵ In the eyes of Thomas, the cross is not understood as δόξα but as a σκάνδαλον and he could not see the bigger picture. From a position of orientation and naïve faith, he experienced the deconstruction of disorientation and unbelief. Nevertheless, the implicit reader knows that Thomas was merely on a journey that would eventually lead him from disorientation to reorientation and the crystallization of new hope. That has been the pattern throughout the resurrection narratives. In the last few sentences of the Gospel of John, the resurrected Jesus appears to Thomas, again behind closed doors. Jesus immediately looked at the unbelieving Thomas and said to him: εἶτα λέγει τῷ Θωμᾷ· φέρε τὸν δάκτυλόν σου ὧδε καὶ ἴδε τὰς χεῖράς μου καὶ φέρε τὴν χεῖρά σου καὶ βάλε εἰς τὴν πλευράν μου, καὶ μὴ γίνου ἄπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός. After this, the unbelieving Thomas' perspective was transformed from disorientation to reorientation, from critical unbelief to faith and he immediately declared that Jesus is ὁ κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου (My Lord and My God) (cf. 20:28)¹⁶ – The highest Christological title given to Jesus thus far by one of his disciples (see Carson 1991, 659; Morris 1995, 753; Ridderbos 1997, 647-648). Again we see the *progression* in John's presentation of the growth of the disciples' faith: from φόβον (fear) to εἰρήνη (peace), from οὐ μὴ πιστεύσω (I will not believe) to the confession that Jesus is Lord and God (κύριός μου καὶ ὁ θεός μου).

The implicit reader is skillfully guided towards the culminating words of Jesus in the post Easter Resurrection scenes in John 20:29: ὅτι ἑώρακάς με πεπίστευκας; μακάριοι οἱ μὴ ἰδόντες καὶ πιστεύσαντες (Do you [only] believe because you have [physically] seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen but who believe) and who makes the missionary commission (20:21 καθὼς ἀπέσταλκέν με ὁ πατήρ, καὶ γὰρ πέμπω ὑμᾶς) their own.

To the implicit reader, this would serve the purpose of reorienting the *zukunftige* reader towards the aim of the Gospel that is stated in John 20:30-31: Πολλὰ μὲν οὖν καὶ ἄλλα σημεῖα ἐποίησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἐνώπιον τῶν μαθητῶν

15 Wengst (2000, 1.113) postulates, "Ihr will er hiermit deutlich mache, dass Jesus nur angemessen wahrgenommen werden kann unter der Perspektive seines Todes am Kreuz und des Zeugnisses, dass Gott ihn von den Toten auferweckt hat."

16 Van der Watt (2000a, 50) argues, "This confession of Thomas represents the pivotal point in the Gospel. It formulates the identity of Jesus, the Agent of God who died on the cross, but now lives and therefore may be identified as Lord and God. The cross events not only illustrate that the living God, the Lord of life, is with Jesus, but that Jesus himself is involved in His own resurrection and should therefore be confessed as Lord and God himself."

[αὐτοῦ], ἃ οὐκ ἔστιν γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τούτῳ· ταῦτα δὲ γέγραπται ἵνα πιστεῦ[ς]ητε ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστὸς ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ἵνα πιστεύοντες ζωὴν ἔχητε ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ.

John's resurrection scene reminds the implicit reader of the great acts of God in Israel's past that according to Brueggemann (1995, xvii) clearly illustrated that "conventional definitions of reality do not contain or define what God will yet do in Israel". In John, Jesus time and again breaks through the conventional structures of the day (cf. healings on the Sabbath, etc.) that inhibit people's possibilities to live a life of fullness (Barrett 1978, 395-396; Köstenberger 2004, 31).

Against the background of the transformation of the unbelieving Thomas from a position of disorientation to reorientation, lies a much greater theology of restoration, reorientation and transformation in John's universal godly narrative. Dietzfelbinger (2001, 1.312) notes: "Die Liebe des Vaters zu Jesus ist nicht nur gleichzeitig mit der Sendung Jesu in die Welt getreten; sie ist der wirkende Ursprung dieser Sendung, in der die Liebe Gottes zur Welt (3,16) in die Geschichte hineingetragen wird." (cf. 15:9). The *missio Dei*, or God's missional plan motivated by love for a lost world, is the *Ursprung dieser Sendung* – the motivation for the sending of the Son (John 3:16; 20:30-31) and the consequent sending of the disciples (20:21) to imitate Jesus' mission. John 16:33 discussed above is closely followed by 17:1 (cf. ταῦτα) where Jesus' priestly prayer is presented as being followed shortly after he has spoken the words referred to above. In John 17:18 Jesus prays to the Father that his disciples might be taken up in the missionary dimension: "καθὼς ἐμὲ ἀπέστειλας εἰς τὸν κόσμον (As thou hast sent me *into the world*), καγὼ ἀπέστειλα αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸν κόσμον (in the same way I also sent them *into the world*). Jesus' priestly prayer in John 17:25 culminates (cf. the ἵνα construction) in Jesus' prayer that the love of God may be within them as well (ἵνα ἡ ἀγάπη ἦν ἠγάπησας με ἐν αὐτοῖς ἢ καγὼ ἐν αὐτοῖς) with the purpose that the world might also see the reality and implication of this (missionary) love dimension (cf. 3:16 οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον)(Barrett 1978, 216; Carson 1991, 205; Morris 1995, 203-204).

To recapitulate: In John the humiliating death of Jesus was eventually perceived as a situation of crisis, disorientation and loss of hope and we find the followers of Jesus behind closed doors, full of fear (cf. 20:19). In 12:24 Jesus stated that just as a seed needs to die in the ground in order to give life, in the same way he needs to die, in order for new life to be created out of his death. *The destruction of death thus becomes the occasion for the restoration to life*. That is the irony in John, and only through the eyes of faith (3:3, 6) will the believer be able to grasp the fullness thereof. After the followers of Jesus experienced the resurrected Christ, they were transformed from being disoriented victims to newly oriented and restored witnesses that emerged as people with hope, as we see in the dynamism of the early church (cf. Acts 2 etc.).

Against the background of the disorientation and loss of life of the cross we learn that it was all part of a bigger picture (cf. the $\delta\tau\iota + \delta\epsilon\iota$ motive). In other words, *the crisis and chaos of the cross in actuality had a bigger picture of order*. Those who believe, without having seen the physical reality thereof (20:29), will be those who will receive life and hope. For them the chaos of the cross will become the fractal of life, the impetus for a missionary movement of hope (20:21).

3. Fractals: Order in Chaos

In a recent book, Wheatley (2006, 115). discusses the relationship between leadership and the new science in a chapter entitled “chaos and the strange attractor of meaning” and argues that there is an interesting “return to mythic wisdom” in the post modern world. In her book she then discusses some elements of chaos theory and relates that in an interdisciplinary way with organizational leadership. Here I will draw on Wheatley’s discussion and bring the chaos theory and the strange attractor of meaning (kind of fractal) into an interdisciplinary dialogue with NT studies.

In recent years the behavior of chaos has been revealed by means of modern computers in which the evolution of the chaotic system is tracked on a computer screen, displaying each moment of the system’s chaotic behavior. When the chaotic system is viewed it at first seems to be nothing more than unordered chaotic movement as the system careens back and forth with raucous unpredictability (2006, 115).

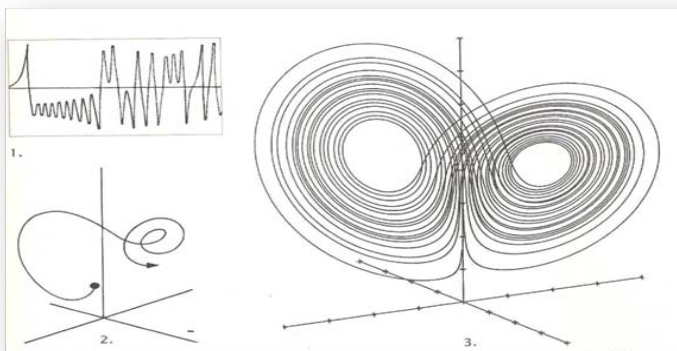


Figure 1: A Strange Attractor of Meaning from a One-Dimensional (1) and Multi-Dimensional Perspective (3) (Wheatley 2006, 117)

But then, over time, the chaotic behavior weaves into a pattern, and before our eyes order emerges on the computer screen. Over time, within the evolutionary development of the chaos system, the chaotic movements have formed themselves into a distinctive shape, which scientists call a “strange attractor” – a kind of a fractal.

This is however only to be seen when the evolutionary process of the chaotic system is observed over a prolonged time, and from a multi-dimensional perspective. From this we infer the very interesting phenomenon, namely that there seems to *be order inherent in chaos* – that which scientists refer to as fractals. Briggs (1992, 148, cf. also 13, 22, 137) explains that “fractals are unique patterns left behind by the unpredictable, seemingly chaotic movements of the world at work.” Below is a self-portrait of a chaotic system called the “three-winged bird” where we can clearly see the ordered pattern, the fractal character that has emerged:

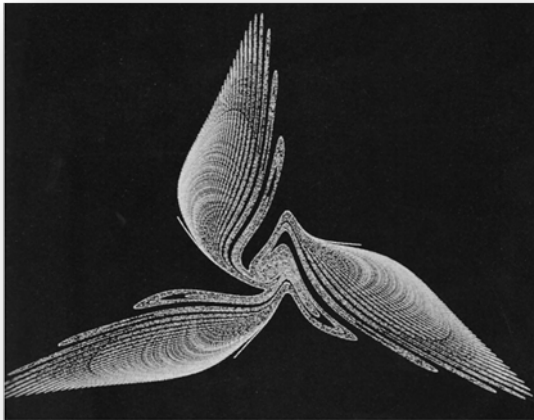


Figure 2: The Three-Winged Bird (Wheatley 2006, 124)

In the above “self-portrait” of a chaotic system, the system’s behavior was plotted over millions of iterations. At first the system appears to wander chaotically, but over time a deeper order, - a shape- clearly emerges – the inherent fractal nature of the system. In reality the order was always implicit in the chaotic system, but it was not revealed and discernable until the chaotic movements were plotted in multiple dimensions over an extended time.

Wheatley (2006, 115) correctly remarks: “Chaos has always partnered with order – a concept that contradicts our common definition of chaos...” She is correct for we know that in ancient Greek philosophy it was believed that Chaos was present at the beginning, as the endless, yawning chasm devoid of form and fullness, but so was Gaia, the mother of the earth, the one that brought forth form, stability and order.¹⁷ In Greek mythology Chaos and Gaia were primordial powers that engaged in a duet of opposition and resonance, creating everything in this world. Others like Peters also argue that “some organisms are not made to adapt beyond a certain point, beyond that point, death is the only way to life.” Inherent in chaos, one might find the fractal, the inherent order in chaos. *In other words, it is sometimes the very context of death, destruction and chaos that seems to be the impetus for new life, restoration and a new form of order.* Here it is not my intention to argue that the ancient Greeks or Biblical authors in their “mythic wisdom” had “fractals” in mind. I use chaos theory as an illustration and metaphor to illustrate the point that chaos is not always to be interpreted as being meaningless and that both ancient wisdom and modern scientific discoveries reveal the fact that there might be “order” in “chaos” – depending on the interpretative “lens” one looks through.

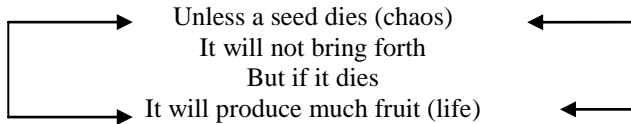
4. Developing the Eyes to See

According to Briggs and Peat (1989, 74-75) the challenge lies in the way we view the world, and the things that happen to us in this life, which demands a holistic view in which we shift our view from the parts to the whole. When we tend to focus more on the individual parts or moments of experience, we will most probably only see chaos and not see the fractals, the strange attractors of meaning – the order that might appear in the midst of chaos. But if we develop the ability to see from a holistic perspective, from the whole, we would most likely over time also come to see how things are taking shape.

In the Gospel of John, we see that after the death of Jesus, the disciples were caught up in a life situation full of chaos, destruction and fear because they did not see the bigger picture and the significance, the order that was inherent and implicit

17 Hansie Wolmarans (2010) argues that we create stories to create meaning...; Visions give rise to stories. He also draws the parallel between Mythic Cults and Christianity and argues that Christianity is simply a result of a process of syncretism with these pagan cults. According to him Jesus was interpreted within the core narratives of mystery cults, and that Jesus looks very much like the heroes of the mystery cults. I argue against Wolmarans that this do not prove mere syncretism. The question is rather what the differences are between Christianity/Jesus and the pagan cults/heroes. It is like saying that a gorilla and human is the same thing because it looks so much like the other – they have the same hands, eyes, ears and even smiles. The difference between the two species is rather the determining factor.

in the chaos they focused on. When they experienced the resurrected Christ, their vision and their hope was restored and they were transformed into active missionary witnesses. In the final words of Jesus in John's Gospel, he reminds them that those who are blessed are those who believe, who reconstruct the story of hope and open possibilities although they have not seen the resurrected Christ with their own eyes. In this way the resurrection becomes a symbol or metaphor of hope that reminds us to have a passion for the possible and to believe in God's impossibilities that can shatter every contained view of reality (Brueggemann 1995). Those who hold fast to this metaphor of hope will know: "It is chaos' great destructive energy that dissolves the past and gives us the gift of a new future. It releases us from the imprisoning patterns of the past by offering us its wild ride into newness." (Wheatley 2006, 119). The destruction that was created by chaos was necessary for the creation of something new, as we clearly see in John 12:24:



In John, the glorification of Jesus will take place in the context of his death (Kok 2008, 365-366). According to Köstenberger (2004, 378) the "death" of a kernel of wheat that "relives" when it sprouts is often used to refer to the eschatological resurrection of the dead. Also in the pagan fertility cults and mystery religions the never ending cyclical pattern of sowing and reaping, death and life, constitutes a recurrent religious motive and metaphor of life experiences. Here, as Brown (1966, 471) notes, Jesus is speaking of death as the means of gaining life. Not dying is thus presented as an unproductive scenario and death as a productive, creative and necessary scenario (cf. Peters 1998). In John, the death of Jesus created new life. In fact, the death and consequent resurrection of Jesus brought about the eschatological era of the Spirit and the birth of the missional dimension of the early church – a continuing movement from chaos to order, from death to life...

Bibliography

- Allen, D. 1989. *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Bandy, T.G. 2007. *Spirited Leadership: Empowering People to Do what Matters*. Danvers, MA: Chalice.
- Barna, G. 2005. *Revolution*. Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale.
- Barrett, C.K. 1978. *The Gospel According to St. John*. Second Ed. Philadelphia: Westminster.

- Beasley-Murray, G.R. [c1987] 1999. *John*. Waco, TX.: Word [WBC 36].
- Briggs, P. and F.D. Peat. 1989. *Turbulent Mirror: An Illustrated guide to Chaos Theory and the Science of Wholeness*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Briggs, J. 1992. *Fractals: The Patterns of Chaos*. London : Thames & Hudson.
- Brueggemann, W. 1995. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Bultmann, R. 1995. Death. Pages xx-xx in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Kittel et al. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Brown, R.E. [1966] 1971. *The Gospel According to John*. Garden City, NY.: Doubleday [ABC 29].
- Carson, D.A. 1991. *The Gospel according to John*. Michigan: Eerdmans.
- Carson, D.A. 1994. *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*. Third Edition of *The New Bible Commentary*. Edited by D. Guthrie and J.A. Motyer. 1970. Leicester; Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Dietzfelbinger, C. 2001. *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag [Zürcher Bibelkommentare].
- Gnilka, J. 1983. *Johannesevangelium*. Wurtzburg: Echter Verlag.
- Haenchen, E. 1984. *John*. Philadelphia: Fortress [Hermeneia].
- Heiser, M.S. 2005. *Glossary of Morpho-Syntactic Database Terminology* (Perfect). Logos Bible Software.
- Köstenberger, A. 2004. *John*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic [Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament].
- Kysar, R. 1986. *John*. Minneapolis: Augsburg [Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament].
- Kok, J. 2008. *Siekte en Gebrokenheid teenoor Genesing en Restourasie in Johannes*, UPeTD, University of Pretoria, South Africa.
- Maier, G. 1984. *Johannesevangelium I*. Stuttgart: Hänslers [Bibelkommentar 6].
- Malina, B., Joubert, S.J., and Van der Watt, J.G. 1995. *Vensters wat die Woord laat oopgaan*. Halfway House: Orion.
- Malina, B. and R. Rohrbaugh. 1998. *Social Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*. Minneapolis: Fortress.
- Malina, B.J. and J.H. Neyrey. 1991. Conflict in Luke-Acts: Labeling and Deviance Theory. Pages 97-122 in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*. Edited by J.H. Neyrey. Peabody: Hendrikson.
- Moloney, F.J. 1998. *The Gospel of John*. Collegeville, Ill.: Liturgical [Sacra Pagina].
- Morris, L. [1974] 1995. *The Gospel According to John*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Moxnes, H. 2003. *Putting Jesus in His Place: A Radical Vision of Household and Kingdom*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox.
- Neyrey, J H 1994. Despising the shame of the cross: Honor and shame in the Johannine passion narrative. in Matthews, H & Benjamin, D C (eds), *Honor and shame in the world of the Bible. Semeia* 68, V, 1996, 113-137, 119-120.
- Peters, T.J. 1998. *The Circle of Innovation*. Coronet: Philadelphia.
- Pilch, J.J. 1991. *Introducing the Cultural Context of the New Testament*. New York: Paulist.

- Ridderbos, H.N. [1987] 1992. *The Gospel according to John: A Theological Commentary*. Translated by J Vriend. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Ridderbos, H.N. 1997. *The Gospel of John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Salier, W.H. 2004. *The Rhetorical Impact of the Semeia in the Gospel of John..* Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck [WUNT 2, Reihe 186].
- Schnackenburg, R [1965] 1968. *The Gospel according to St John I: Introduction and Commentary on Chapters 1-4*. Translated by C. Hastings, F. McDonagh, D. Smith and R. Foley. London: Burns & Oates.
- Schnackenburg, R. 1971. *The Gospel according to St John II: Introduction and Commentary*. Translated by C. Hastings, F. McDonagh, D. Smith and R. Foley. London: Burns & Oates.
- Schnelle, U. 1998. *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*. Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt [THzNT].
- Smyth, H.W. 1983 [1926]. *Aeschylus II: Agamemnon Libation-Bearers. Eumenides. Fragments*. Cambridge, Mass./ London: Harvard University Press/ Heinemann [LCL].
- Sweet, L. 2001. *Soul Tsunami*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Spicq, C.O.P. 1993. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Vol 2. Translated by James D. Ernest. Peabody: Hendrikson.
- Theobald, M. 1992. Gott, Logos und Pneuma. "Trinitarische" Rede von Gott im Johannesevangelium. Pages xx-xx in *Monotheismus und Christologie. Zur Gottesfrage im hellenistischen Judentum und im Urchristentum*. Edited by H.-J. Klauck. Freiburg: Herder.
- Van der Watt, J.G. 2000a. *Family of the King: Dynamics of Metaphor in the Gospel according to John*. Leiden: Brill.
- Van der Watt, J.G. 2000b. *Die Teologie van die Johannesevangelie en Briewe*. Unpublished New Testament Lecture Notes. Universiteit van Pretoria.
- Van Huyssteen, W. 1999. *The Shaping of Rationality: Towards an Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science*. London: Eerdmans.
- Van Huyssteen, W. 2005. *Public Lectures on Post-foundational considerations and the Imago Dei*. University of Pretoria. South Africa.
- Wengst, K. 2000. *Das Johannesevangelium Teil 1: Kapitel 1-10*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Wheatley, M. 2006. *Leadership and the New Science*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler.
- Wilckens, U. 1998. *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Wolmarans, H. 2010. Unpublished Resurrection Paper delivered at the NTSSA, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, South Africa.