

***Seeing* God's voice in creation:
A visio-spatial interpretation
of Genesis 1**

A.C. Rabie-Boshoff

**Seeing God's voice in creation:
A visio-spatial interpretation
of Genesis 1**

BY

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**Dedicated to my loving husband
Hennie Boshoff
(25 August 1949 – 14 May 2016)**

**Now we are children of God,
and what we will be has not yet been made known.
But we know that when Christ appears,
we shall be like Him,
for we shall see Him as He is.
(1 John 3:2)**

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- To God be all the glory!

DECLARATION

I, Annelien Carolina Rabie-Boshoff, declare that the thesis, *Seeing God's voice in creation: A visio-spatial interpretation of Genesis 1*, which I hereby submit for the degree Philosophiae Doctor at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not been submitted by me before for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

Signed: _____

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ABSTRACT

***Seeing God's voice in creation:* A visio-spatial interpretation of Genesis 1**

Contemporary Christians, evangelicals in particular, find it problematic to formulate and understand the relationship between the Christian faith tradition and natural science, with the result that they struggle in their understanding of the creation story in Genesis 1. The purpose of this study was to bring Christian theology and the science of linguistics into dialogue with each other in an attempt to understand the biblical creation story in modern-day terms. The motivation for the study is based on the belief and understanding that within the paradigm of the dialogue model disciplines other than theology, like linguistics, can bring insights to the world of the Bible and vice versa. The hypothesis for this thesis is based on the presupposition that God's voice, believed to be inaudible sacred sound as Pretorius (2011:1-7) envisions it, can indeed be seen by humans as it becomes visible in creation, and interpreted in a way similar to the way deaf people communicate. This interpretation finds support from insights gained from the world of the Deaf and the basic principles of 'Sign', the language used to communicate within the deaf community. Two significant characteristics of Sign that strongly resonate with the picture of the natural world emerging from Genesis 1, are its unique and complex use of three-dimensional space, and its rich modulation in time. This is explained in eloquent terms by renowned neurologist Oliver Sacks who says that, "...what occurs linearly, sequentially, temporally in speech, becomes simultaneous, concurrent, multileveled in Sign... and what looks so simple is extraordinarily complex and consists of innumerable spatial patterns nested, three-dimensionally, in each other" (Sacks 1991:88). These insights were fundamental in the development of the Divine Sign Language Model (DSL), which has proven to be a fruitful model to use in an effort to understand what it could possibly mean when the Bible talks of 'God speaking' or of 'God's voice'. Through the application of the DSL Model, ten basic image-concepts have been identified in Genesis 1, which form the foundation to a relational theology of Genesis 1.

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LIST OF KEY CONCEPTS

1. Creation
2. Communication
3. Dialogue
4. Sign
5. Language
6. Divine
7. Visio-spatial
8. Looking
9. Seeing
10. Perception
11. Sense-making
12. Reality
13. Image-concept(s)
14. Relationship
15. DSL Model

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE

Although there is a considerable range of opinions on the relationship between the sciences and theology, Ian Barbour (2003:760) writes that various categories have been proposed to date as to how the two realms can be related to each other. He proposes a four-fold typology of Conflict, Independence, Dialogue, and Integration, which will be discussed briefly in the Literature Review in Chapter 2. It is within the “Dialogue” paradigm that this thesis will be presented as it seeks to contribute to the dialogue between Christian theology and science in an effort to understand the first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4a within a contemporary modern-day context.

McGrath (2008:19, 20, 315) acknowledges that this dialogue is indeed an ongoing ‘event’, and says that it has in fact accelerated over the past few decades. Buitendag (2011:779-781), for example, utilizing the so-called “transversal plane” of Wentzel van Huyssteen as a common ground to enter into a conversation with Bram van de Beek (theologian and biologist), and bringing him into a conversation with John Polkinghorne (physicist and theologian), believes that it is a “fruitful plane [on which]... a variety of disciplines meet one another on mutual ground and interact in a dialogical and dialectical way in order to explore and even create (!) reality...”. Another example is that of Mark Pretorius (2011:1-7), who, by utilizing the same principle, brings “science and religion into discussion to further the general understanding of what reality is” by arguing that “God was the ultimate source of sound ... thereby bringing into existence reality as presently observed”.

1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

Contemporary Christians, evangelicals in particular, find it problematic to formulate and understand the relationship between the Christian faith tradition and science, with the result that they struggle in their understanding of the first creation story. They seemingly find themselves on a 'bloodied battleground' where 'defend your position and attack the enemy' is the current *modus operandi*. Contemporary readings of the first chapters of Genesis (Genesis 1-11), and especially the creation stories in Genesis 1-3, are distorted because, on the one hand, well-meaning Christians try to deal with the text from a scientific point of view by reading science between the lines as if the biblical texts were construed to accommodate modern scientific understanding, while, on the other hand, equally well-intentioned Christians try to defend the biblical text from a staunch fundamentalist position, which focuses on a straightforward literal reading of the biblical text, which does not allow for any constructive criticism of the text.

McFague (1993:73) seems to touch at the heart of the problem in that she believes that it is an issue of credibility that Christians struggle with. This dilemma is well-illustrated by two key questions she asks in her book, *The Body of God* (1993), namely, "How can one both be a believer and take the contemporary scientific view of reality seriously?", and "How can one avoid the schizophrenia that has beset so many Christians of the modern era?". The problem, as she explains, exists because Christians are challenged on the one hand by their doctrinal tradition, which tells a specific story of the creation of the world of which they read in the Bible, while on the other hand they are challenged by common stories of the natural world they live in, which are told to them by science.

This is clearly illustrated by what evangelical scholar, Todd Beall (2009:1-10), writes on the interpretation of Genesis 1. He situates the debate within the creation-evolution framework, arguing that,

Christians who are convinced that evolution is, to a large degree, correct, have needed to harmonize what they view as ‘science’ with their understanding of the Bible. For those who do not hold to an inerrant Scripture, this is not a big problem, since it is easy to say that the biblical accounts are not correct in such matters. But for those of us who call ourselves evangelicals, who hold to the inerrancy of Scripture, reconciling the teachings of modern ‘science’ with Gen. 1 and 2 is not so easy. How can one uphold the inerrancy of Scripture and still hold to evolution?

This framework upon which many evangelical scholars base their interpretation of the first creation story, imposes serious interpretive challenges on the reader. In this article Beall makes reference to the Time Magazine article, *God vs. Science*, which was published in November 2006, and focused on the debate between Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins, in which Dawkins suggested to Collins that he would “save himself an awful lot of trouble if he just simply ceased to give [his fundamentalist colleagues] the time of day. Why bother with these clowns?” Beall’s irritation is clear when he writes that, “If [taking the words of Genesis 1 at face value] causes some intellectuals to label [evangelicals] as ‘narrow-minded clowns’, then so be it”.

1.3 MOTIVATION

Old Testament scholar John Walton (2009:7) affirms the difficulties involved in understanding the first chapter of Genesis when he writes, “The first chapter of Genesis lies at the heart of our understanding of what the Bible communicates about God as Creator”, but at the same time acknowledges that this chapter is “...is anything but

transparent”. Lennox (2011:13) agrees that the topic of creation “is clearly a potential minefield”, but does not believe the situation to be hopeless. The motivation for this thesis is based on the belief which many scholars share, namely that within the religion-science debate science can bring insights to the world of the Bible and vice versa – as Lennox writes, “...there must ultimately be harmony between correct interpretation of the biblical data and correct interpretation of the scientific data” (Lennox 2011:13).

1.4 HYPOTHESIS

People throughout the ages have struggled to understand how God spoke in the Old Testament and how the ancient Israelites discerned God’s voice. This struggle is well illustrated by a discussion that Lennox (2011:25) recalls, which he had with one of his astrophysicist friends about God’s voice. His response to his friend’s argument highlights the difficulty people have in understanding what the Bible means when it talks of either *God speaking* or of *God’s voice*, resulting in the questions being asked whether these expressions are literal or metaphorical. Lennox agrees that because God is spirit, God does not have a physical voice, but nevertheless communicates. His own struggle, like that of many other, is apparent when he writes that the expression, “‘And God said’ denotes real, literal communication, but we do not have the slightest idea as to how it is done.”

Pretorius, however, engaging science as a dialogue partner, presents an exciting and creative interpretation of the Genesis creation story, and provides evidence that supports the idea that God’s spoken word could indeed happen through the medium of sound, although not audible to human beings (Pretorius 2011:1-7). He theorizes, with

reference to the science of cymatics, that sound frequencies and vibrations have the potential to create. He argues convincingly that, “*sacred sound*, embedded within the initial light”, was the medium by which God brought reality, as presently observed, into existence.

This thesis proposes to take this idea one step further by focusing on the idea that God’s voice, being inaudible sound (“sacred sound”, according to Pretorius) as God speaks creation into existence, can indeed be seen by humans as it becomes visible, and interpreted in a way similar to how deaf people communicate – thus, the title “*Seeing* God’s voice in creation: A visio-spatial interpretation of Genesis 1”. For the purpose of this thesis it is proposed that the ‘key’ for unlocking the mystery of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:4a is to be found in what will be called, God’s “Divine Sign Language” or DSL, which denotes real communication – an interpretation that can be elucidated and supported by the insights gained from the world of the Deaf and by the basic principles of “Sign”, the language used to communicate within the deaf community.

Two of the most significant characteristics of Sign, which strongly resonate with the picture of the natural world emerging from Genesis 1, are (i) its unique and complex use of three-dimensional space, and (ii) its rich modulation in time. Neurologist Oliver Sacks says that, “...what occurs linearly, sequentially, temporally in speech, becomes simultaneous, concurrent, multileveled in Sign ... and what looks so simple is extraordinarily complex and consists of innumerable spatial patterns nested, three-dimensionally, in each other” (Sacks 1991:88). Furthermore, Sacks (1991:89) refers to the work of Liddell and Johnson who see “signing not as a succession of

instantaneous ‘frozen’ configurations in space, but as continually and richly modulated in time”. He emphasizes the power of Sign when he writes that it has a direct “power of portrayal that has no analogue in, cannot be translated into, the language of speech”, and that it can “evoke a concreteness, a vividness, a realness, an aliveness, that spoken languages, if they ever had, have long since abandoned” (Sacks 1991:123). He furthermore refers to Lévy-Bruhl’s work on “image-concepts”, explaining that these image-concepts are “intensely visuospatial, tending to describe ‘the shape and contour, position, movement, way of acting, of objects in space’ – in a word, all that can be perceived and delineated”. He explains that the deaf person is as much an observer of Sign as he is an interpreter of Sign. In a similar fashion, and with reference to the natural world, human beings as observers of nature are not only passive spectators having distanced themselves from the natural world, but they are also active interpreters of the natural world whilst simultaneously being part of the natural world themselves.

1.5 METHODOLOGY

This study is approached from a Protestant evangelical position in which the biblical text will be used as the primary source, but drawing from the non-theological scientific work of Oliver Sacks (1991) and Lévy-Bruhl on Sign, the language of deaf people. Furthermore, the book of Genesis, particularly the first chapter dealing with creation, will be approached as a reliable and trustworthy document seen in the light of it carrying divine authority in all it reveals about God, the world, and mankind.

Defining “evangelical” is a rather difficult task, as Noll (1994:8) also highlights in his book, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*. In his explanation, Noll refers to four so-called “evangelical impulses”, which are helpful in elucidating the importance of the use of the biblical text as the starting point and primary source for this thesis. According to Noll, British historian David Bebbington has identified four impulses characteristic of evangelicalism of which a reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority is one – the others being, (i) an emphasis on the new “birth” as a life-changing religious experience, (ii) a concern for sharing faith, and (iii) a focus on Christ’s redeeming work on the cross. Noll (1994:8) highlights a facet of evangelicalism, which will form an important presupposition of this study, namely that, “All discussions of evangelicalism ... are always both descriptions of the way things really are as well as efforts within our own minds to provide some order for a multifaceted, complex set of impulses and organizations”.

Evangelicals often use an interpretive framework based upon the historical-grammatical approach for determining meaning. Mickelson has identified the task of the interpreter as “... [finding] out the meaning of a statement (command, question) for the author and for the hearers and readers, and thereupon transmit the meaning to the modern readers (Padilla 2009:193). Padilla, however, believes that this results in a static interpretation, which does not go far enough. He proposes to take the biblical message from its original context and produce the same impact in modern hearers as was intended in the original audience. The text illuminates the contemporary situation and, at the same time, the contemporary situation illuminates the text. According to Padilla (2009:194), this is an

...hermeneutical cycle which would make it possible for the contemporary readers or hearers to perceive present-day reality from a biblical perspective, even as the original hearers could perceive their own reality from the perspective of a worldview rooted in revelation.

Working within this paradigm, the hermeneutical cycle thus makes it possible for the interpreter to articulate an interpretation of the first creation story, which is both faithful to biblical revelation and relevant to one's own situation at the same time.

In order to achieve these goals of interpretation, Padilla has identified the socio-rhetorical model as a useful method. For the purpose of this thesis, the socio-rhetorical model of Vernon K. Robbins will be applied as it allows the interpreter to examine the text while she moves interactively into the ancient world of the people who wrote the text, and back into her own world.

Robbins (1996:4) explains that,

Underlying [this] method is a presupposition that words themselves work in complex ways to communicate meanings that we only partially understand. It also presupposes that meanings themselves have their meanings by their relation to other meanings. In other words, all of our attempts to name truth are limited insights into small aspects of the relation of things and meanings to one another.

He identifies five stages of exploring the texture of texts, of which inner textual analysis “focuses on words as tools for communication” (Robbins 1996:7). He points out that, “This is a stage prior to analysis of ‘meanings’, that is, prior to ‘real interpretation’ of the text”. This method enables the interpreter to look at and listen to “the ways in which the text uses the words (e.g. repetition of the same word many times, statement of almost the same thing in many different ways, careful sequencing of new terms that build to a

strong conclusion, etc.)”. Thus, for the purpose of this study the central organizing principle is the spoken word of God and its outcome as found in the repetitive phrase in Genesis 1, “Then God said; and it was so”, with the emphasis on the phrase. “...and it was so”.

This study proposes to present an interpretive approach, which will be a dialogue in essence, using contributions from both Christian faith tradition as well as contemporary science, specifically the science of linguistics. Freire (1989:19) describes two characteristics of the word “dialogue”, which are of particular importance to this study. He says that dialogue is composed of reflection and action – if reflection is lacking, the undertaking is diminished to mere activism, and if action is neglected, the undertaking becomes idle chatter.

Drawing on, and dialoguing with intellectual sources from outside the Christian tradition in an effort to develop a theological vision is something that is not new within Christian theology. Referring to the dialogues between early Christian theologians and Platonists and Aristotelians respectively, McGrath (2004:18) confirms that there is indeed a long tradition that underlies this approach, which, he clarifies, is “often referred to by the Latin phrase *ancilla theologiae*, a handmaid of theology”. He explains that this approach can be very helpful in “stimulating theological development”, as well as “enabling a dialogue to be opened between Christian thinkers and their cultural environment”.

Lastly, the definition of history, as proposed by Young (1999:24, 25), will be used for the purpose of this study, namely that,

history... includes the study of matters accessible to the human mind for investigation, but it may also include matters which the unaided human mind cannot investigate, but concerning which God has revealed information. Unaided... the human mind cannot study the creation, but it is legitimate to hold that God can reveal certain information about the creation.

1.6 OUTLINE STRUCTURE

1.6.1 Chapter One – Introduction

1.6.2 Chapter Two – Literature Review

Chapter 2 consists of two sections – a literature review focussing on the debate surrounding the first creation story, and a brief comparative study of Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies with specific reference to the Mesopotamian and Egyptian cosmogonies. The comparative study is necessary to show how differently the ancient Israelites viewed their world compared to their neighbours according to the proposed view in this dissertation. John Walton’s “Functional Cosmic Temple” approach will be briefly reviewed – it will include critiques levelled in favour of and against this approach, particularly focusing on the concordist view of Vern Poythress, and the critique offered by C. John Collins.

1.6.3 Chapter Three – Creation: God’s Divine Sign Language

The proposed research idea for this thesis will be presented in this chapter, namely that the first creation story presents a picture of the world emerging as God’s inaudible voice becomes visible to the human observer. This conceptual framework will be discussed with reference mainly to the work of Oliver Sacks (1991) and Lévy-Bruhl on Sign, the language of deaf people. Sacks (1991:101) talks of an “enhanced power of ‘movement parsing’” in signers (deaf people) – which is “analogous to the ability to break down and analyze speech from a continuous and ever-changing pattern of sound

waves” in hearing people – which, he says, “is essential to the comprehension of a visual language, which is extended in time as well as in space”.

The proposed research idea will be discussed in conjunction with a brief overview of Laughery and Diepstra’s notion that creation can be seen as “Sculpting in Space”, and Mark Pretorius’ interpretation of creation as God using creative “sacred sound, embedded within the initial light”.

An analysis of the text, according to the socio-rhetorical method of Vernon K. Robbins (1996), will also be presented in this chapter focussing on the creative words, which were spoken by God, with specific reference to the repetitive use of the phrase, “Then God said; *and it was so*”.

1.6.4 Chapter Four – God in Relation to Creation

In light of the proposed interpretation in Chapter Three, Chapter Four will focus on the divine title of God, *Elohim*, and God’s divine name, *YHWH*. The explanation offered in this thesis is expected to shed some light on the usage of God’s divine title and God’s name in other Old Testament passages. Thus, for the purpose of this discussion, reference will be made to Job 38 & 39 and Isaiah 40-55 to highlight and support the explanation, which the researcher proposes to advance, namely that the title *Elohim* points to the role that God is fulfilling as a workman (creator God) when God creates, and God’s personal name, *YHWH*, to God’s role as the relational God, when God reveals God self to humankind and establishes a relationship with humans.

1.6.5 Chapter Five – Jesus Christ in Relation to Creation

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some evidence that Creation and the right way of *seeing* it, forms the foundational interpretive framework for the outworking of sin and salvation in space-time. The argument is that if the Creation event is believed to be an event that has happened in the mists of times past, or even believed to be a symbolical story added to the Bible to teach certain theological truths, it will not have the inherent capacity to comment on the future, more so on the Christ event. The first creation story, however, transcends time and culture (transhistorical) if interpreted (*seen*) as above (eviternal), and as such provides a strong explanatory framework for sin and salvation and its ultimate time-space conclusion in the future. God reveals God self through God's son, Jesus Christ, who enters into creation (space-time), thereby demonstrating God's authority over creation. Jesus Christ was Creator and Sustainer before he demonstrated his love to the lost, as Saviour.

1.6.6 Chapter Six – The Human Being in Relation to Creation

The holistic, transhistorical view / eviternal nature of creation proposed in this thesis gives impetus to an eco-theological hermeneutic in which stewardship is an essential element. Creation of the universe is not just something that happened once off at a certain point in time, and only functions as a means to an end, i.e. to be used and abused at will by humans in their progression to a final state of spiritual existence – it is directly linked to Jesus Christ and His work of salvation on earth, in space and time, and as such should be cared for, based on the future hope of salvation that believers have in Jesus Christ. In this regard Paul writes in Romans 8:20-21 (HCSB 2007), "For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly, but because of Him

who subjected it – in the hope that the creation will also be set free from the bondage of corruption into the glorious freedom of God’s children”.

1.6.7 Chapter 7 – Findings

1.6.8 Reference List

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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The interpretation of the first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4a is characterized by a vast background of literature that addresses various aspects of creation, such as when God created, the means by which God created, how long it took God to create that which exists, and much more. The scope of this dissertation does not allow for all these issues to be discussed. However, a brief literature background is presented in this chapter in order to orientate the reader towards understanding some underlying issues in the interpretation of the first creation story.

2.2 LITURGICAL TRADITION

2.2.1 First Two Chapters of Genesis

Fretheim (1994:341) writes, with reference to Job 38:7, that the first two chapters of Genesis have a “certain doxological character”, and that the material may have had its roots in the regular liturgical use thereof as well as the regular round of the community’s praise of God the Creator. In this regard Brueggemann (1988:1) confirms that, “Praise is the duty and delight, the ultimate vocation of the human community; indeed, of all creation”. Brueggemann (2003:34) concurs that Genesis 1 and 2 need to be understood “in terms of an older, already extant liturgical tradition on creation”. He argues that, “The primary and proper context in which Israel articulated its creation faith is in doxology, the public, liturgical practice of lyrical, poetic utterance whereby Israel

sings its awe and wonder about the glory and goodness of God's creation" – here he makes reference to Psalms 19, 104, 145 and 148.

2.2.2 The Psalms

One of the very first doxologies of the Hebrew people about God, Psalm 29, extols the power and majesty of God as Creator of the heavens and the earth – in Craigie's (1983:249) words, "Psalm 29 is one of the most distinctive affirmations in the Bible, not only that God was Lord of Nature, but also that all the forces of nature so commonly attributed to Baal by the persons living in and around the Promised Land were actually attributes of the Lord". The praise begins with an affirmation of God's voice being "upon the waters" (vs. 3), and seven times within the psalm the Lord's voice is referred to explicitly (Psalm 29:3-9; Craigie 1983:247). Thiselton (2007:199) believes Psalm 8 to be a powerful hymn of praise in that it,

... arguably outstrips even Ps. 139 not only in its widespread fame and use, but in the power and poetry with which it ascribes praise and glory to God as creator, expressing breathless wonder at the stars of the night sky and at the glorious splendor of the sun-drenched day, and stopping in hushed awe to ask: 'What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them'.

In Psalm 33, an ancient hymn of praise to God as Creator in the world of nature, two creation themes are evident – first, the praise of the Lord's word in reference to its power in bringing forth creation (33:4-9), and second, in vv. 7-8 which, according to Tate (1990:273), is a parallel of the "Song of the Sea" (Exodus 15:1-18), the psalmist tells of God's creative acts. According to Anderson (1984:4), this passage is from the pre-monarchic period of the tribal confederacy, and "exhibits striking affinity with Canaanite (Ugaritic) literature". Westermann (1974:66) highlights the fact that in these hymns of descriptive praise to God, as he calls them, "the story of the creator and

creation has a fixed place”, and that God is thus praised as both “creator and as Lord of history”. The key characteristic of descriptive Psalms such as Psalms 33, 135 and 136, is therefore primarily observed in the way they link creation and history together in a way similar to what the Pentateuch does as a whole, but also in the way in which “the primeval event [is transformed] into primeval history within Gen. 1-11” (Westermann 1974:66). The correlation between creation and history, as well as praise to God as creator and Lord of history is most evident in Job and Deutero-Isaiah, according to Westermann (1974:66).

Lastly, in Psalm 104, another hymn of praise that reflects “upon Yahweh’s mighty power and loving care”, Allen (1983:32, 33) observes that the poet is looking to the natural world around him that bears witness to God’s mighty acts. Kraus (1989:304) points out that one must engage Psalm 104 by starting with the premise that Israel was unfamiliar with the term “nature”. Within this context Von Rad (1974:116) writes that, “Israel was not familiar with the concept of nature, nor did she speak about the world as a cosmos, i.e. about an ordered structure that is self-contained and subject to definite laws”. He says that for Israel, “...the world was primarily much more an event than a being, and certainly much more a personal experience than a neutral subject for investigation”. In reference to this Kraus writes that Psalm 104 nowhere describes rest, but movement is evident everywhere in the psalm. God is clearly at work by supporting and controlling the entire world through His great deeds. According to Kraus, the conception of “the heavenly king” stands behind the whole psalm, with the entire creation being dependent on him. McCann (1996:1096) concludes that, “...together the two psalms [Psalms 103 & 104] are another reminder that God’s creating work and God’s saving work... are finally inseparable”.

2.2.3 The New Testament

The same belief and understanding are affirmed by Christians as evidenced from their personal testimony, as well as the testimony from Scripture. The prologue to the Gospel of John (1:1-5), which is generally accepted as a hymn, has been eloquently described by Beasley-Murray (1987:3, 5) as “frequently... likened to an overture to an opera”.

With reference to the life of Jesus, Beasley-Murray (1987:16) writes that,

[It] is set in relation to the God of eternity, who is the Lord of the ages, Creator of all, Sustainer of all, and Redeemer of all. He in whom the Word took flesh is presented as the divinely appointed Mediator in all the works of God; he is Mediator of creation and new creation, and in and through both, the Mediator of revelation.

Another majestic hymn in praise of Christ is found in Colossians 1:15-20. It begins by asserting that Jesus Christ, “the Son of His Love”, is “the image of the invisible God” (O’Brien 1982:42, 43). In these magnificent words of praise the hymn emphasizes that the universe was established by Christ, and that all cosmological principalities and powers are subject to Him.

The same theme continues in Philippians 2:5-11, a passage, which, according to Thielman (1995:109), “is among the most informative statements in the Bible on the nature of Christ’s incarnation”, because it speaks of “Christ’s pre-existence, his equality with God, his identity with humanity, and the costly nature of that identity”. Moreover, he says, this passage “provides insight into Christ’s status after his incarnation and into the future submission of all created beings to his authority”. According to Hawthorne (1983:96), the statements in this passage are of “great christological significance”, and confirm what Peter preached in Acts 2:36 – that “God made Jesus, whom men

crucified, Lord and Christ. He appointed Him sovereign over the universe, the one to be served by all, the object of universal worship”.

2.3 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHRISTIAN FAITH AND SCIENCE

2.3.1 The Struggle to Understand

Du Toit (2012:1), writing about science and religion, points out that “People seem to live in two worlds: a mythical and a scientific one”. The problem that arises as a result of this paradox is the fact that although they talk “about either of these worlds in isolation... [they] cannot reconcile the underlying presuppositions”. It is very likely that this is one of the reasons why contemporary Christians, evangelicals in particular, find it problematic to formulate and understand the relationship between the Christian faith tradition and science, with the result that they struggle in their understanding of the first creation story presented. Lewis, in *Mere Christianity* (1944:139), for example explains that before Jesus came and claimed to be God, people already had a vague “knowledge about God”, but when a person becomes a Christian, “[s]he also knows that all [her] real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the man who was God”. As Christians grow in their knowledge of God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and integrate it into their worldview, many questions inevitably arise, specifically with reference to the early chapters of Genesis, and especially Genesis 1:1-2:4a. Walton (2009:7) affirms the difficulties involved in understanding the first chapter of Genesis when he writes, “The first chapter of Genesis lies at the heart of our understanding of what the Bible communicates about God as Creator”, but at the same time acknowledges that this chapter is “... anything but transparent”.

Oxford mathematician and science philosopher, John Lennox, tells of how a professor of literature once said to him, “We were taught at school that the Bible starts with a very silly, unscientific story of how the world was made in seven days” (Lennox 2011:12). This illustrates to some degree the confusion, which people experienced in the past, and are still experiencing today regarding the teachings of the Bible on the one hand and that of science on the other hand. This has caused major differences of opinion and serious disputes between people across religious and scientific spectrums, as well as within the Christian faith community with regard to the interpretation and understanding of the first creation account. Walton (2009:7), like many others, voices his regret on this issue when he writes that, “...an account of such beauty has become [such] a bloodied battleground”.

Contemporary Christians seemingly find themselves on this ‘bloodied battleground’ where ‘defend your position and attack the enemy’ is the current *modus operandi*, the reason for this being that Christians even today still find it problematic to formulate and understand the relationship between Scripture and science. Contemporary readings of the early chapters of Genesis (Genesis 1-11), and especially the creation stories in Genesis 1-3, are distorted because, on the one hand, well-meaning Christians try to deal with the text from a scientific point of view by reading science between the lines as if the biblical texts were construed to accommodate modern scientific understanding, while, on the other hand, equally well-intentioned Christians try to defend the biblical text from a staunch fundamentalist position, which focuses on a straight forward literal reading of the biblical text, which does not allow for any constructive criticism of the text.

Padgett (2003:122) explains that after the First World War pre-millennial eschatology became popular, especially among evangelicals, marking the beginning of the “fundamentalist movement”. Within this movement, according to Barbour (2003:760), “Some religious conservatives accepted a long evolutionary history, but insisted on the special creation of the human soul, whereas liberals were soon speaking of evolution as God’s way of creating”, with the result that evolution was beginning to be associated with liberalism, progress and biblical criticism. According to Padgett (2003:122), as a result of the book of Revelation being read in a literal way, Genesis was read in the same way, leading to evolution and Darwinism being “rejected in favour of biblical literalism and tribulation preaching”. Furthermore, as a result of this literal reading of Revelation, the imminent return of Jesus was expected hand in hand with an expectancy that the worldly culture would continue to decline until His return. Thus, the long, gradual process of evolution conflicted with the seven days of creation in Genesis, which some scholars interpreted literally.

Noll’s (1994:197) criticism is spot-on with regard to evangelical Christians in particular when he writes that they “make much of their ability to read the Bible in a ‘simple’, ‘literal’, or ‘natural’, fashion”, in what he calls, “a Baconian way”. He explains that so-called evangelical hermeneutics, as illustrated in creationism, “is dictated by very specific assumptions that dominated Western intellectual life from roughly 1650 to 1850 (and in North America for a few decades more)”. He clarifies the fact that before and after this time, “many Christians and thinkers have recognized that no observations are ‘simple’”, and concludes that, “no texts yield to uncritical ‘literal’ readings”. Waltke’s example (1991:6) is helpful in this regard when he points out that Henry Morris, well-known young-earth creationist, misleads people when he claims that, “The creation

account is clear, definite, sequential and matter-of-fact, giving every appearance of straight forward historical narrative”. Morris argues that it is “blatant deception” if this is not the case. Waltke (1991:6) stresses the fact, however, that, “The text ... is begging us not to read it this way”.

Bringing science into the picture, Morris (1978:iv) asserts that, “the Biblical record, accepted in its natural and literal sense, gives the only scientific and satisfying account of the origin of things”. Waltke (1991:8) argues against this, saying that Genesis 1 specifically is not scientific literature and therefore, “...cannot give a satisfying account of origins”. Waltke (1991:2) also observes that, “the attempt to harmonize the scientific data with a straightforward reading of Genesis is not credible, and as a result the Bible’s message is rejected as a viable option in the marketplace of competing world and life views”. Noll (1994:199) concurs and thinks that it is a tragedy when “millions of evangelicals think they are defending the Bible by defending creation science”. The reality is, he says, that, “they are giving ultimate authority to the merely temporal, situated, and contextualized interpretations of the Bible that arose from the mania for science of the early nineteenth century”. He believes that evangelicals have lost “the ability to look at nature as it was”, and consequently “lost out on the opportunity to understand more about nature as it is”.

Old Testament scholar John Goldingay’s (2011:7) biggest concern with the issue lies exactly therein that the search for scientific validation of this chapter distracts from its actual meaning. Walton (2001:94), on the other hand, believes that the wrong questions are being asked when people read Genesis 1:1-2:4a – he believes that one should rather be asking on what level the text is communicating its message, instead of asking

how the text should validate one's scientific understanding, or how the text describes the scientific system that is known to be true.

Van Huyssteen (2006:127) sheds light on the issue of fundamentalism as he points out that there has been “an increasing awareness that fundamentalist religious views... want to uphold the alleged superiority of extreme theological conservatism”, which, he says, is “remarkably similar to the views of scientists who believe that there are no real limits to the competence of science”. In this regard he makes reference to the invaluable contribution made by Mikael Stenmark who, in 2004, identified “these two opposing, but structurally similar, views as *scientific expansionism* and *religious expansionism*”. The important conclusion that flows from Stenmark's research is that, “[It] clearly implies that not only is science never ideologically neutral, but that religious expansionism must be taken seriously as scientific forms of expansionism” (Van Huyssteen 2006:127). In this regard the publication authored by Noll – *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994) – contributes significantly in terms of his explanation of how the major emphases of fundamentalism within the evangelical movement in the nineteenth century led to an attack on the harmony which, in fact, existed between science and evangelicalism at the time – an attack, he says, that was similar in nature to the attack that crippled evangelical political reflection at a somewhat earlier stage (Noll 1994:177-208).

True as all of this may be, McFague (1993:73) however, seems to touch at the heart of the problem in that she believes that it is an issue of credibility that Christians struggle with. This dilemma is well-illustrated by the two key questions she asks in her book, *The Body of God* (1993), namely, “How can one both be a believer and take the

contemporary scientific view of reality seriously?”, and “How can one avoid the schizophrenia that has beset so many Christians of the modern era?” The problem, as she explains, exists because Christians are challenged on the one hand by their doctrinal tradition, which tells a specific story of the creation of the world of which they read in the Bible, while on the other hand they are challenged by the common story of the natural world they live in, which is told to them by science.

2.3.2 Historical Relationship

Peterson (2003:756) points out that a primary concern for contemporary scientific and religious scholarship is the question of precisely how theology and science should be related. Padgett (2003:121) points out, with specific reference to the evangelical faith tradition, that scientists and theologians, “For the most part ... sought a harmony between science and Scripture” historically. This included leading figures such as John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield. Padgett (2003:121), for example, refers to Edwards, who “saw the glory of God revealed in a spider’s web, while Wesley could find the wisdom of God revealed in creation as understood by the natural science of his day”. According to Padgett (2003:122), two developments contributed to the change in this harmonious relationship – first, the cultural mood in the West in general, and among evangelicals in particular, changed after the First World War, and second, American church history saw the rise of religious fundamentalism as a result of the close association that developed between “populist pre-millennial eschatology and anti-evolutionary rhetoric”.

Although there is a considerable range of opinions on the relationship between science and theology, Barbour (2003:760) writes that various categories have been proposed to

date as to how the two disciplines can be related to each other. He points out that John Haught, for example, has suggested the four categories of Conflict, Contrast, Contact, and Confirmation, while Ted Peters has offered a more detailed eightfold classification. Barbour himself proposes a four-fold typology of Conflict, Independence, Dialogue, and Integration, which will be used here to highlight this relationship. Van Huyssteen *et al.* (2003:x) agree that, “In the contemporary discussion among [theologies] and sciences...the most influential attempt at representing the complex relationship between these two cultural forces has been Ian Barbour’s four-fold typology”.

2.3.2.1 The Conflict View

Barbour (2003:760) and Polkinghorne (2007:4) agree that the beginning of the alleged conflict between science and theology already started becoming evident as early as the seventeenth century. By proclaiming the revolutionary theory of a heliocentric planetary system (as opposed to the geocentric planetary configuration of Aristotle) in his treatise of 1543 – *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres (De revolutionibus orbium coelestium)* – Nicholas Copernicus (A.D. 1473-1543) inaugurated “the beginning of the end for the medieval worldview” (Grant 2004:1). Frei (1974:1-16) explains in the introduction to his book, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, that up until the start of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century, pre-modern Christian theologians and commentators, including notable figures like Augustine, have read the Bible in a kind of realistic way – a “realistic narrative reading”, as he terms it (Frei 1974:1, 6). According to this kind of reading, the biblical narrative told the all-encompassing story of the world from creation to final judgment (Frei 1974:1), which made “figural” interpretation possible. Figural interpretation, in turn, made it possible for Christians to make sense of their lives by locating their own

stories within the larger biblical narrative, and not the other way around (Frei 1974:3). Around the eighteenth century, however, people started reading the Bible differently, questioning the “real” meaning of the narrative. A reversal of the figural interpretation took place in which people allowed their daily experience now to define what was “real” – they consciously tried to understand the meaning of the Bible by locating it in their world.

Since the start of the age of Enlightenment, which was sparked off by philosophers such as Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and John Locke (1632-1704), and scientists like Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) with his publication, *Dialogue* in 1632, and Isaac Newton (1643-1727) with his publication, *Principia* in 1687, an acute awareness has developed over time with regard to the influence which science and technology exert on daily life, both on a global scale and also on a personal level. In the face of powerful scientific advancements over the past few hundred years, Christians in particular have found it increasingly difficult to articulate their understanding of the relationship between faith and science.

According to Anderson (1984:1), two historical events contributed to this unfortunate situation – first, the astonishing archaeological discovery in 1853 of the library of Ashurbanipal, the last great king of the Assyrian empire, at the site of ancient Nineveh, and second, the publication of Darwin’s great work, *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859, which continued to send shock waves through the religious community (populist evangelicals, according to Padgett 2003:122) of the time, continuing right into the twentieth century. In the first instance it came to light that the Nineveh library contained documents that related the biblical primeval history – a first

in the history of archaeology. This discovery plus Darwin's publication challenged the status quo at a time that Genesis 1:1-2:4a was "generally accepted as both 'gospel truth' and sober fact" (Anderson 1984:1, 2). Now suddenly, this traditional belief was brought into question – as Harrison (2007:426) points out – the long-established sources of authority of the medieval period, i.e. tradition, scripture, reason and experience, were seriously challenged as a result of the religious upheaval that occurred during this period, referring to those challenges that came to the fore with the new developments in the natural sciences, which, he says, "prompted a reevaluation of the medieval understanding of the relationship between science and theology".

As time progressed it became apparent that anyone adhering faithfully to biblical teaching, and even questioning the validity of some scientific assertions, would run the risk of being judged as fundamentalist, and even as dangerous and delusional. It is worth noting here that sociobiologist Richard Dawkins, today's foremost atheist proponent of evolution, for example believes that, "religion [is] dangerous precisely because it [is] irrational" (McGrath 2011a:vii). According to Barbour (2003:761), Dawkins, who works in a scientific materialist paradigm, believes that, "evolution provides proof that there is no purpose in the universe", that "our actions are determined by our genes", and that (iii) religion has always been harmful to human welfare". To this end Dawkins strongly holds to the belief that, "To fill a world with religion, or religions of the Abrahamic kind, is like littering the streets with loaded guns", and warns his adherents not to be surprised if they are used (McGrath 2011a:viii). Dawkins (2006:5) takes his argument to the extreme when he equates the so-called "God delusion" with a symptom of psychiatric disorder, and argues that,

“dyed-in-the-wool faith-heads are [anyway] immune to argument”. In his book, *The End of Faith* (2004), well-known atheist author, philosopher and neuroscientist Sam Harris comes from a slightly different angle when he, instead of defending atheism, rather portrays religion as dangerous and deluded. In the book, *God is not Great* (2007), the late Christopher Hitchens (a religious critic amongst other things) spelled out the same belief – that the world would be a better place if religion was eliminated, because it has led only to violence, intellectual dishonesty, oppression and social division (McGrath 2011a:18).

Edward O. Wilson, another well-known sociobiologist, working within the same paradigm as Dawkins, believes that “all human behaviour can be explained by biological origins and genetic inheritance”. According to Barbour (2003:761), Wilson acknowledges that, “religious traditions served as a useful function in the past by uniting groups around common loyalties, but [now] argues that this function can better be served today by loyalty to science”.

Proponents of the Creation Science movement, which had its beginnings in the nineteen sixties, have claimed in the past (and still claim) that, “there is scientific evidence against evolutionary theory and evidence for the sudden appearance of creatures in their present forms” (Barbour 2003:760). More sophisticated critiques against Darwinism have appeared since then, and the debate is still continuing.

Scientific Materialism, together with Creation Science, falls within the conflict paradigm, but find themselves at opposite ends of the theological spectrum. The popular image of “the warfare of science and [theology]” is propagated by both

views, and is “perpetuated by the media, for whom controversies provide dramatic stories”, as Barbour (2003:760) points out. Scientific materialism makes two assertions: (i) Matter is the fundamental reality in the universe; and (ii) The scientific method is the only reliable path to knowledge. The logical conclusion to this is that “science is the only valid path to knowledge” (Barbour 2003:761).

English logician and process theologian Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), commenting on the relationship between science and theology, argues that, “the very possibility of modern science depended upon the unconsciously held belief, derived from medieval theology, that the created order must be intelligible, thus finding an inextricable link between theology and science” (Davis 2003:126). Whitehead (1925:181) asserts, however, that in the latter part of the nineteenth century “the results of science and the beliefs of religion” found itself in a position “of frank disagreement, from which there can be no escape, except by abandoning either the clear teaching of science, or the clear teaching of religion”. Although the idea became popular that the so-called ‘war’ between science and theology arose during Darwin’s time, Davis (1999:77) clarifies this point by explaining that this idea only arose in the latter part of the nineteenth century as a result of John William Draper and Andrew Dickson White who, through their respective publications “had convinced a generation of scholars that conflict between religion and science was a ‘logical and historical necessity,’ so that ‘a state of war between the two was constrained to be continuous and inevitable’”, an idea which resulted in the so-called “warfare thesis”. Writing on *New Atheism*, McGrath (2011a:82) points out that this idea is still promoted today, especially by some New Atheist authors. He concurs with Davis’ explanation, and confirms that the warfare thesis did in fact arise later in

the nineteenth century with the publication of the “highly polemical popular works” of Draper’s *History of the Conflict between Religion and Science* (1874), and White’s *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* (1896).

Barbour (1968:4, 9), commenting on the notion of conflict between science and theology, is in agreement with Whitehead when he writes that people aligned themselves either towards the extreme of “scriptural literalism in which every word of the Bible was accepted as divinely revealed”, or towards the diametrically opposing extreme of “evolutionary naturalism and modernism in which the Bible was dismissed or virtually ignored”, while in-between there were those “well-meaning scientists and theologians [who] invoked ‘the God of the gaps’ to explain the scientifically unknown”. The problem was, according to Harrison (2007:426), the fact that “the appeal to reason raised significant questions about how truths of reason, including philosophical and scientific truths, could be related to truths of revelation – the latter usually being associated with the content of scriptures or, less commonly, truths known through personal religious experience”.

Ramm (1964:15) refers in a somewhat harsher tone to this conflict as a “battle” and states that, “The battle to keep the Bible as a respected book among the learned scholars and the academic world was fought and lost in the nineteenth century”. Referring to the Copernicus-event in the sixteen hundreds, Ramm believes that this event did not even “begin to have the influence on human thought as did the events of the nineteenth century”. He explains that during that time there was a “mush-rooming of anti-Biblical, anti-Christian movements”, and points out that, “There was the growth in radical Biblical criticism, and the emergence of religious modernism”.

He also points out that in philosophy “able representatives defended positivism, naturalism, materialism, and agnosticism. Orthodoxy was barraged from every side”. He believes that the battle was a “battle of strategy”, and that, “The victors were on the side of modernism and unbelief; not of evangelical faith and the Bible”.

2.3.2.2 The Independence View

The idea that science and theology belong to separate domains started in the nineteenth century when biblical scholars started noting that Bible stories “made significant affirmations that the world is good, orderly, and dependent on a purposeful God” (Barbour 2003:761). Philosophers argued that science and theology employed differing types of languages, which serve useful practical functions, that the two disciplines do different jobs and that they should not be judged by the standards of the other, and that “neither of them need to make truth claims that might lead to conflict” (Barbour 2003:761, 762). The idea of separate domains has been defended by natural scientists such as the famous Stephen J. Gould who used the term “magisterium”, which refers to a domain of teaching authority – “The magisterium of science covers the empirical realms, what is the universe made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The magisterium of religion extends over questions of ultimate meaning and moral value” (Barbour 2003:761). The Independence Model as such thus portrays differences between science and theology.

According to Davis (2003:126), “both world wars had a devastating impact” on the optimistic view held by liberal theologians that “the science of eugenics would help them establish the kingdom of God on earth”. The resultant confusion between

scientific and religious questions led twentieth-century thinkers to go to great lengths in trying to preserve the integrity of the two fields by insisting that “each field is autonomous and should attend to its own affairs without meddling in the other’s domain” (Barbour 1968:9).

Barbour points out that three movements have contributed to this separation. The first movement is Neo-orthodoxy as advocated by Karl Barth (1886-1968) and his followers, which emphasizes the distinctiveness of God’s self-revelation. This movement was dominant in the time period between the two world wars. Although its followers fully accepted the results of modern biblical scholarship and scientific research, they made a sharp distinction between religious and scientific questions on the basis that both scientists and theologians are free to carry out their work without fear of interference from one another, arguing that the respective methods and subject matter are totally dissimilar from each other. Their main aim was to seek to “recover the Reformation emphasis on the centrality of Christ and the primacy of revelation”, their argument being that God cannot be known apart from God’s revelation in Christ. Their firm belief was that no attempt by “natural theology” can reveal the transcendent God; it is only by faith in God (which depends on divine initiative and not human discovery through science) that humans can come to an understanding of who God is. Nature in itself cannot, and does not reveal God.

The neo-orthodox belief is that the Bible should be taken seriously, but not literally, the argument for this being that Scripture in itself is not revelation, i.e. the dictation of the text was not “the locus of divine activity ... but the lives of men and communities” (Barbour 1968:10).

The second movement is the existentialist insistence on personal involvement in religious questions, advocated by Bultmann and Schleiermacher, while the third movement involved the claim of analytical philosophers that scientific and religious languages serve unrelated functions in human life.

2.3.2.3 The Dialogue View

Ellis (2006:22) believes that the conflict between science and theology has arisen because people see things in a partial way, while believing they are seeing the whole picture. He believes that to understand the whole, people need to listen to what both science and theology have to say – both these realms can help humans understand the various aspects of reality. He concludes that all the aspects of religion, as well as that of scientific understanding, need to be taken seriously if one wants to understand the full picture. He stresses the fact that the dynamic dialogue between science and theology provides essential benefits to each other if both are taken seriously (Ellis 2006:3-6). The one does not pose a threat to the other, as is generally believed. This is well illustrated by what Gould (1999:59) once said, “No scientific theory, including evolution, can pose any threat to religion – for these two great tools of human understanding operate in complementary (not contrary) fashion in their totally separate realms: science as an inquiry about the factual state of the natural world, religion as a search for spiritual meaning and ethical values”.

Wilmot and Wilson (2002:21, 23) point out that although the conflict model has been modified and rejected by the nineteen fifties, leading historians of the nineteenth century – for some uncertain reason – still felt compelled to attack it well into the nineteen seventies. Regardless, during the sixties a relationship slowly, but surely

started developing between religion and science. Notable theologian, Thomas F. Torrance, for example, already started in 1969 developing, what McGrath (2004:26) calls, “a highly significant approach to the relation and interaction of Christian theology and the natural sciences” – an approach which McGrath calls *Scientific Theology*. This relationship gained momentum towards the late seventies. Towards the end of the eighties going into the early nineties “an explosion of the global dialogue on science and [theology]” happened, as Clayton (2006:63) puts it. He points out that not only did scientists and religious believers engage in a “more sustained, more rigorous, and more productive dialogue than perhaps any earlier point in history”, but that the same also started happening across specific religious traditions.

According to Van Aarde (2014:1), systematic theologian Johan Buitendag, is comfortable to be known as a “scientific theologian”. Buitendag does not maintain a static worldview or theology, in other words, his theological position is neither antithetic nor synthetic, but rather diastatic. As ‘scientific theologian’ he is in constant dialogue with natural science in his endeavour to understand reality. In this search for understanding reality he engaged various theologians such as Karl Heim, Friedrich Gogarten, Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann and Günter Altner (Van Aarde 2014:2). His critique of Barth, Heim and Altner specifically highlights his post-existentialist eco-theology.

According to Peterson (2003:756), a wide range of theories have developed historically to explain the relationship between science and theology. He points out that among the current theories on the relationship between religion and theology,

the most prominent has been that of critical realism, a view that has been “highly influential within the field of science and [theology] ... but also subject [to] significant criticism” (Peterson 2003:757, 758). For the adherents to this view, Peterson (2003:757) says, “science and [theology]... provide partial views of the world that may overlap on a range of issues”. Critical realism is defined as “a philosophical view of knowledge” – as Van Kooten Niekerk (2003:190) explains, “On the one hand it holds that it is possible to acquire knowledge about the external world as it really is, independently of the human mind or subjectivity”. On the other hand, he says, “... it rejects the view of *naïve realism* that the external world is as it is perceived”.

According to Van Kooten Niekerk (2003:191), the term was introduced into the dialogue between science and theology in 1966 by Ian Barbour, who used it “to cover both scientific realism and theological realism that takes seriously the cognitive claims of religion – that is, religion’s claims to convey knowledge of a mind-independent divine reality”. The rise in critical realism’s prominence in the dialogue between science and theology is credited to Barbour himself and two other important contributors to the field of science and theology, namely John Polkinghorne and Arthur Peacocke, who have all three originally practised as scientists and later moved on to the field of writing on issues pertaining to both science and theology.

Barbour (2003:762) highlights the fact that although the Dialogue View portrays “more constructive relationships between science and theology than does either the Conflict or Independence view”, it does not “offer the degree of conceptual unity claimed by advocates of Integration”. Dialogue does, however, emphasize “several kinds of similarity”, which include, (i) the presuppositions and boundary questions of the scientific enterprise, and (ii) methodological and conceptual parallels between

the two fields (Barbour 2003:762, 763). A similar thought is echoed by Van Kooten Niekerk (2003:191), who points out that Barbour, by bringing critical realism into the science-theology dialogue, showed that metaphors, models and paradigms play an equally important role in both scientific and religious language. According to Gerhart and Russell (2003:559-561), “The metaphoric process...brings about the changes in meaning that are found when science and religion are taken to be related and interacting cognitive fields of meaning”.

The vibrant dialogue across religious and scientific lines is well-illustrated in the following example: in a significant move in the Catholic Church in the early nineteen nineties, Pope John Paul, in the papal address he gave in 1992, which closed the work of the Galileo Commission (McMullin 2005:174), as well as in a report presented by Cardinal Poupard in the same year to the biennial meeting of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences (Coyne 2005:348), the pope and the cardinal stated that the pope “is fully committed to furthering the dialogue between faith and science” (Sharratt 2005:333). The pope concluded his address by encouraging theologians “to enter into that dialogue wholeheartedly”.

Noll (1994:188) refers to the warfare image as “a bit of historical mythology”, which, he says, “[was] manufactured by progressives who did not want to acknowledge the checkered, but very real, contribution” that Christianity made to the development of modern Western science. Polkinghorne (1991:74), writing on the so-called “cross-traffic” between science and the Western Christian faith tradition, gives three reasons from a theological viewpoint why it is possible for sciences to investigate the natural world. He explains that this tradition’s approach to the physical world has

been characterized by “a commitment to reality, rationality, and an acknowledgement of contingency”. First, he says, the nature of the physical world and the impetus to investigate and understand it, “derive from the doctrine that it is God’s creation”. Secondly, the world has a rational structure, which makes it possible for science to investigate it, which, Polkinghorne says, “is taken to be an expression of the Mind of the Creator”. Lastly, he says, the contingency of the world lies therein that God is free to create whatever God wills. As a result of this, a necessity is placed on both science and theology – on science, which implies experimentation and observation of the created world, and on theology, “with the implication, *inter alia*, that it must listen to what science has to say”.

Thiselton (2007:3) points out that people are nowadays encouraged to read the Bible with “fresh eyes”. This idea stems from current research in biblical hermeneutics, which, according to him, “has brought about radically new expectations and assumptions in the *reading* of biblical texts without in any way seeking to change the *content* of the biblical writings”. Within this context Van Huyssteen (2006:127) affirms the fact that in opposition to the two radical views of *scientific expansionism* and *religious expansionism*, which place “science and [theology] on a direct collision course, some of us, including Mikael Stenmark, are now arguing for more nuanced and multidimensional approaches to interdisciplinary dialogue that take seriously the contextual, social, and historical dimensions of both science and [theology] (and more specifically here, Christian theology)”.

Buitendag (2011:779-781), utilizing the so-called “transversal plane” of Van Huyssteen as a common ground by bringing Bram van de Beek (theologian and

biologist) into conversation with John Polkinghorne (physicist and theologian), believes that it is a “fruitful plane [on which]... a variety of disciplines meet one another on mutual ground and interact in a dialogical and dialectical way in order to explore and even create (!) reality...”. McGrath (2008:19, 20, 315) acknowledges that this dialogue is indeed an ongoing ‘event’, and says that it has in fact accelerated over the past few decades. According to him, this development has marked “the end of the widespread, yet historically implausible, notion of the permanent warfare of science and theology”. He believes that the approach to Natural Theology, which he offers in *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology*, “offers the possibility of a shared engagement with the natural world from different starting points and different presumptions, with the possibility of enhanced intellectual enrichment and creative discernment on both sides” (McGrath 2008:315).

McGrath (2011a:83) is in agreement with the findings of a study done by John Hedley Brookes as he elaborates on the idea of complexity within the disciplines of science and theology, writing that, “Everybody knows that science and [theology] are shorthand terms for enormously complex and diverse beliefs, practices and communities”. In his study, Brooke (1991:5) concludes that the history of science “has revealed so extraordinarily rich and complex a relationship between science and theology in the past that general theses [like the warfare thesis] are difficult to sustain”. The results of his study clearly indicate that the real issue is the measure of complexity in the relationship between religion and science. Referring to this enormously complex relationship, McGrath (2011a:83) warns that, “Crass generalizations are intrinsically dangerous here”.

Engaging with the New Atheism, McGrath (2011a:83) points out that the New Atheists are not happy with what is currently happening within the realm of the science-religion dialogue in that they are “angered and exasperated by the growing number of scientists interested in metaphysical and religious questions, frequently portraying such people in rather hysterical terms as collaborating with the enemy”. According to McGrath (2011a:98), it is this same anger “at the persistence of faith” that has “inadvertently stirred huge interest in the whole God question”.

Lennox (2011:13) concludes that the topic of creation “is clearly a potential minefield”, but does not believe the situation to be hopeless. It is generally asserted amongst those who are involved in the religion-science debate that science can bring insights to the world of the Bible and vice versa – as Lennox writes, “...there must ultimately be harmony between correct interpretation of the biblical data and correct interpretation of the scientific data” (Lennox 2011:13).

2.3.2.4 The Integration View

Proponents of the Integration View believe that traditional theological ideas must be re-formulated in a more extensive and systematic way than envisaged by those who advocate the Dialogue View (Barbour 2003:763). In natural theology, e.g. the Intelligent Design argument, it is argued that the existence of God can be inferred from the evidence of design in nature, while in a theology of nature, as Barbour (2003:763) explains, “the main sources of theology lie outside science, but scientific theory strongly affects the reformulation of certain doctrines”. He concludes that, “In a systematic synthesis...science and [theology] contribute to the development of an inclusive metaphysics, such as that of process philosophy”. Focussing on science

and religion, Du Toit's (2012:5) view is that, "Directly or indirectly, science and religion both display metaphysical features", but qualifies his view by concluding that although both religion and science are naturally part "of the human condition", they differ in the sense that they "do not function at the same level" (Du Toit 2012:8). Buitendag, in the formulation of his theology, recognizes and understands this difference, pointing out that the synthesis Barbour is talking about, does not recognize the fundamental difference between science and theology.

Utukuru (2007:92), elaborating on various paradigms, shows how the many and varied "knowledge databases", which have developed ('evolved') in human civilizations, are in fact integrated. Within the paradigm of religion and spirituality, he says, "the underlying core of all religious thinking" must be sought out, "rather than the specifics of any given religion, if we are to find connections among the religions, and between religion and science". Clayton (2006:70), on the one hand, believes that Christians would make a positive impact by acknowledging the fact that an inter-religious approach to the science-religion dialogue is indeed important, because of the absolutist claims within Christianity that have "sometimes manifested themselves in imperialist, colonialist, and warlike actions". Utukuru (2007:98), on the other hand, believes that scientists can make a positive contribution to religion if they acknowledge that "ethics, morals, values, and matters of the spirit" do not fall within their field of enquiry. He furthermore makes a significant statement by emphasizing that scientists "...will [also] do a great service to society by acknowledging that all knowledge is species limited and paradigm dependent". He sees it as a "great disservice to human societies if they [scientists] endorse a particular belief system as being unique or absolute", and believes that before long science will come to the

conclusion that, “There is only one thing that is absolute, and that is the underlying substrate of all that exists, the ultimate driving force no matter what name you give it” (Utukuru 2007:99).

2.4 WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO UNDERSTAND?

The general interpretation of the first creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4a reveals a picture of the created world having come into existence by God’s spoken word. This presents a mystery in the form of a paradox, the question being – how do I, the observer, understand the picture I see if I cannot *hear* God’s spoken word?

Noll (1994:199) reminds his readers that evangelicals, “In their enthusiasm for reading the world in light of Scripture...forget the proposition that the Western world’s early scientists had so successfully taken to heart as a product of their own deep Christian convictions – to understand something, one must look at that something”. Barth, dubbed by Brown (1967:9) as a “theological Everest”, is famously known for his expression, “the strange new world”, referring to the first creation story (Brueggemann 2003:xiii), while Walton talks of “the lost world” in his book, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (2009). When reading the first creation story and *looking* at the world described therein, it is curiously obvious that this world does not appear as “strange” as Barth thought it to be, nor can it really be termed “lost” as Walton describes it; it is rather overly familiar in terms of the natural features which are described, and which can also be distinguished within the world in which the reader is currently situated. In light of this curious observation the question being asked for the purpose of this thesis is simple – what does the first creation story reveal in terms familiar not only to the ancient reader, but also to the modern reader, and what does it mean?

2.4.1 Process of Inquiry

Augustine (Teske 1991:45), who had been writing much on the topic of creation in a time when knowledge of the natural world was very limited compared to that of modern day time, warned that,

It is not by assertion, but by way of inquiry that we have to treat the hidden matters concerning natural things which we know were made by God, the almighty maker. Especially in the books that the authority of God has commended to us, rashness in asserting an uncertain and doubtful opinion scarcely escapes the charge of sacrilege.

For Augustine the process of inquiry is of utmost importance before any conclusion can be drawn from the biblical account of creation (Teske 1991:45). This process of enquiry, through reading and studying the Bible, is a central activity in the lives of Christians. Apart from the fact that reading the Bible is imperative to Christians, *how* the Bible is read, is of equal importance to them. Polkinghorne (1991:60) rightly points out the importance of the correct usage of the Bible, asserting that, "... part of our exercise of reason in the pursuit of reality we have to consider what ... the proper usage [is] of the Christian Scripture". Petersen (1996:8) issues a warning to Christians that reading the Bible can get one into a lot of trouble. It is not only *how* one reads the Bible, but also reading it "rightly", thereby meaning "right-heartedly as well as right-mindedly, what the biblical writers referred to as uprightly".

2.4.2 Hermeneutics

With reference to biblical enquiry, Fee (1996:10, 11) reminds the reader that valid interpretation means, "... the determination of the originally intended meaning of the text", referring to the historical context of the Bible. He continues by reminding the Christian scholar that it is precisely because "our own histories, both personal and

cultural, are so different from those of the writers of sacred Scripture that we must engage in the interpretative process called *hermeneutics*" (Fee 1996:11).

McFague (1993:219) writes that one of the key insights of contemporary hermeneutics is the "realization that much of what we take as reality is a construction", i.e. an interpretation or understanding. The same applies when reading the Bible. It is not possible reading the Bible without interpreting as one reads. Thus, in an attempt to interpret and understand the biblical text, the researcher needs to employ a methodology in order to understand what is being communicated by a particular author through a particular passage.

2.4.3 Hermeneutics and Understanding

When reading the Old Testament one realizes how far removed the ancient biblical world is from the modern world, and what a formidable task it is to do exegesis of any Old Testament book. Ross (1996:13) quite rightly remarks that, "The exposition of Old Testament narrative literature has often been a problem for Bible teachers and preachers". Thiselton (2007:xvii) points out that four characteristics of serious hermeneutical inquiry have been identified by various leading writers in the field of hermeneutics, i.e. understanding, listening, love in action, and respect for the other. With reference to this he quotes Hans-Georg Gadamer, who said that, Hermeneutics is above all a practice, the art of understanding.... In it what one has to exercise above all is the ear, the sensitivity for perceiving prior determinations, anticipations, and imprints that reside in concepts.

'Understanding' reality is not straightforward concept, but a puzzling one at best, as Goldingay (2011:3-4) intimates by asking, "What is this thing called understanding, anyway? What makes it possible and what encourages it, what hinders it and what prevents it? How is it that communication takes place?". Van Aarde (2014:1) explains 'understanding' in terms of the hermeneutical circle, and says that within the circularity of understanding, communication and by implication also the hermeneutical process can be suspended at any given time with the result that understanding comes to an end. In reference to Heidegger (*cf.* Heidegger [1962] 2008:195), who noted that the question is not of how to get out of the circle, since communication can be suspended any time – rather, the question is how to get back into the circle in the right way, in other words, how to understand and communicate in concrete experiences. Interpretation does not take place from outside the circle by trying to observe the process of understanding objectively, but rather by a movement within the circle where one meets and experiences reality personally. This movement is characterized by a complex relational dimension and a deep personal understanding and existence. Van Aarde points out that the theology of systematic theologian Johan Buitendag, reflects a deep insight into these complex matters.

Goldingay (2011:3-4) believes that these questions are particularly baffling in depth when it pertains to the Bible in particular. He explains that 'understanding' involves two aspects – it can either be a "general task of understanding", i.e. a straightforward task when reading things like newspapers, novels, even Scripture, watching plays, advertisements and so forth, or listening to sermons, jokes etc., or it can be a situation of puzzlement where the person does not understand what she is reading, or seeing, or hearing. With reference to the Bible, Goldingay (2011:3) says that cultural differences

partly contribute to the modern readers' sense of confusion, because "they make little sense of ritual instructions in Leviticus or visionary material in Revelation, they are unsure (or are too sure) of what we are supposed to learn from stories in the Gospels or Acts, or they read Genesis 1-3 as more parabolic (or more historical) than it actually is".

Routledge (2008:23) also highlights the fact that the "historical, cultural and religious background" of ancient Israel is different from that of the modern age, and that its practices and beliefs might in some cases even be offensive to the modern person because of the unfamiliarity thereof. The issue of 'understanding' here then seems to extend to the authoritative status of the Old Testament, and the question becomes how to read the Old Testament in such a way as to retain its authority regarding Christian faith and conduct. Routledge (2008:23) points out that issues surrounding the authoritative status of the Old Testament became so contentious that, between the first and second world wars there were scholars, particularly German scholars, who wanted to remove the Old Testament from the canon in an effort to take away its authoritative status. He also points out that later liberal Protestantism shows "a tendency of downgrading the importance of the OT" in various respects.

2.4.4 Hermeneutical Approaches to the Old Testament

With reference to the different types of material found in Scripture, Goldingay (2011:4) points out that, "Understanding is a multiplex skill or art.... Ultimately a different approach is required for each form of the task". For the particular task of understanding the Old Testament, he proposes three broad scriptural genres, namely instruction texts, narrative texts and prayer texts. He expands his hermeneutical inquiry within these

paradigms in an attempt to understand the Old Testament, and believes that narrative allows the expression of complex theological ideas. Goldingay, however, writes from a post-modern perspective, in which a plurality of voices is recognized within the Old Testament. This is in agreement with Brueggemann's perspective of the Old Testament (although there are differences between their particular perspectives), in that they both agree "on the importance of a framework that reflects the thinking of the OT itself" (Routledge 2008:68, 69). Consequently, Goldingay argues that, "the OT should not be seen simply through NT lenses but, rather, it should provide the lens through which the NT is viewed".

In tension with this approach, is the Christological approach, which specifically looks at the Old Testament through a New Testament lens, and which, according to Routledge (2008:23, 24), is used by many scholars in an attempt to find "Christian, and more particularly Christological, significance in the OT". This is the one approach to Old Testament interpretation, which probably finds most favour with evangelical Christians. In the history of Christian theology Barth is probably best known for his particular Christological approach to the Old Testament, and specifically the first creation story. He interprets creation as sacramental/covenantal (Brown 1967:110, 111, 113; Bromiley 1979:111-118). This is the reason, according to Brown (1967:113), why Barth insists that creation is revealed doctrine and thus must be interpreted in light of the covenant, which ultimately finds its basis and fulfilment in Jesus Christ. Barth is adamant that, "Christology should be the focal point of dogmatic theology" (Gollwitzer 1961:87-92; Cortez 2007:1).

The christocentricity, as Mueller (1972:94-96) refers to Barth's approach to theology, or "radical christocentricity", as Von Balthasar (1992:30) describes it, is consistently characteristic of Barth's theology. For this reason many scholars have criticized Barth's theology as being christomonistic, i.e. a theology whereby everything is reduced to Christology. Brown, for example, in his criticism of Barthian theology, argues that Barth developed a speculative theology that is "more christocentric than the Bible" (Douglas 1978:108). Cortez (2007:17), however, concludes from his dialogue with McCormack on the christocentric nature of Barth's theology that, "Any attempt to describe Barth as a christocentric theologian must, therefore, bear in mind that his unique brand of Christocentrism always involved (1) both an unveiling and a veiling of knowledge in Christ, (2) a methodological orientation, (3) a particular Christology, (4) a Trinitarian focus, and (5) an affirmation of creaturely reality".

Apart from these approaches, there are various other approaches to Old Testament theology, which have developed over time. Routledge (2008:24), for example makes reference to allegory, which he says, "played an important part in giving value and relevance to the Old Testament, particularly in the (Greek) Alexandrian school" – an approach which the Church Fathers also used to interpret some Old Testament passages. Fuller (2001:18), an ardent proponent of "understanding the text according to its plain sense", offers a valuable overview of the use of such approaches in his article titled, *Interpreting Genesis 1-11* (Fuller 2001:18-27).

Routledge (2008:27-72) also presents a good historical overview of, and discusses various approaches taken by a number of prominent biblical scholars in their attempt to unlock the meaning of the Old Testament. These include the *systematic* theology

(*dogmatic*) approach, which “attempts to organize the central tenets of faith as a series of categories and propositions, and to collect the biblical material that relates to them”, with Gerhard von Rad (focusing on the “importance of *history* as the principal medium of divine revelation in the OT”) being the main proponent of this approach (Routledge 2008:27, 32-42); *biblical theology*, identified by Gabler in 1787 when he made a distinction between dogmatic and biblical theology, which, he proposed, should focus on the biblical text as its basis (Routledge 2008:30, 37-42); *historical theology*, which “tended to focus on how biblical statements reflect the religious ideas of Israel at the time they were written and how those ideas developed as historical circumstances, and the needs and understanding of the people changed” – the so-called ‘evolutionary view’ of the development of Israel’s faith, as advocated by Wellhausen (see Documentary Hypothesis; 2.4.5), falls within this category (Routledge 2008:31); the *history of religions* approach, which was popular until the nineteen twenties (Routledge 2008:32); *typology*, which “looks for correspondence between structures and narrative patterns within the canonical text – he warns that typology is open to misunderstandings and therefore has to be defined carefully (Routledge 2008:43-47); the *narrative structure* approach, which is a narrative model developed by A. J. Greimas from an analysis of Russian folktales and applied to biblical texts (Routledge 2008:47-50).

According to Routledge (2008:50, 51), the nineteen nineties saw “a burst of theological activity” in terms of a variety of new approaches that were being pursued, while old or discarded approaches were being revived in the process. Preuss, for example, went back to a “more *classical* approach”, but focusing on “God’s historical activity in electing Israel as the main organizing theme of the OT” (Routledge 2008:51, 52). Gerstenberger, on the other hand, approaches the Old Testament from an *historical-*

critical perspective, and more particularly, a social-scientific standpoint. He posits that the Old Testament, instead of having a theological centre, is rather “made up of diverse testimonies, conditioned by Israel’s historical and social conditions”, with the result that there is not one theology of the Old Testament, “but several theologies in tension with one another” (Routledge 2008:52, 53). Childs takes the *canonical* approach, in which he argues that the canon of Scripture, which “has been received and accepted by the believing community”, is the “proper context for the study of biblical theology” (Routledge 2008:55). Although House agrees with Childs on this approach, he has his reservations. Much negative criticism, though, in the persons of Barr, Brueggemann and Collins has been lodged against Childs (Routledge 2008:57). Clines uses the *narrative* approach, arguing that the Pentateuch should be viewed as a story, and adds that, “it is important to look at the Pentateuch as a literary whole”. He focuses on the inherent meaning of the text, and believes that it is not necessary “to consider whether parts of the story are believable or not; for the purpose of the story of the world it describes is real” (Routledge 2008:59, 60).

2.4.5 The Historicity of the Genesis One Document

All of the above-mentioned approaches to the Old Testament have influenced the interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:4a in one way or the other. Wenham (1987:xxvii) points out that before consensus emerged in the late nineteenth century with the Wellhausen-Graf Hypothesis (Documentary Hypothesis) for the authorship of the Pentateuch, a critical debate about Genesis specifically had already been ongoing for more than a hundred years.

The Documentary Hypothesis is the one approach that probably had the most influence on the interpretation of Genesis, and specifically the first three chapters. It is believed that in the Middle Ages Jews started using terms and titles such as *Elohim* and *El* as alternative names or substitutes for Yahweh “in an absurd attempt to conceal the sacred name” (QLYP 2001:1). Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra, a twelfth-century Jewish scholar from Spain, is said to have been the first to propose a multiple authorship for the Pentateuch, which eventually led to critique being levelled against the authorship of Moses for the Pentateuch. This critique, apparently, was taken up by early Jewish scholars, and even Protestant scholars like Martin Luther, and the philosopher Masius (1573). Hamilton (1990:12), for example, points out that various approaches like that of the early church fathers – e.g. Maimonides in Judaism, Augustine in Catholicism, and Calvin within Protestantism – agreed on the unity of Scripture, with the result that there was no disagreement amongst them with regard to the origin and composition of the book of Genesis. He terms these approaches “traditional” or “precritical”, and says that it remains to be seen whether someone like an Ibn Ezra “...would zealously have embraced the Yahwist, or a Luther ... would have expatiated at length in his writings on Genesis’ Priestly traditions”.

The hypothesis developed in the eighteenth century, and gained momentum in the nineteenth century in an attempt to reconcile seeming inconsistencies in the text of the Pentateuch, the reason being that the traditional view that Moses as author of the Pentateuch came under increasing fire in the seventeenth century. The hypothesis postulates that the Pentateuch derives from originally independent, parallel and complete narratives, which were combined by different redactors to produce the current form found in the Bible (Garrett 2001:29). This movement of questioning the Mosaic

authorship of the Torah seemingly started with Thomas Hobbes (1651), followed by people like Isaac de la Peyrè, Baruch Spinoza, Richard Simon, and John Hampden. Generally, the consensus is that the Documentary Hypothesis formally started with Jean Astruc (1684-1766), a French physician who was believed to be distinctly orthodox in his views. Astruc was convinced that he could uncover the sources of the Pentateuch by using the divine names *Yahweh* and *Elohim* as his guide (Hamilton 1990:12; Garrett 2001:29). He came to the conclusion that Moses was the redactor of Genesis, and not the author (Hamilton 1990:12). Originally, the consensus was that Genesis was the result of the compilation of only three sources, namely the Yahwist (J), the Elohist (E), and the Priestly (P) sources (Hamilton 1990:13). Contrary to this, Richard Simon (1678) used a critical method of investigating the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. This method would later become known as the historical-critical method (Meek 2014:134). It was only towards the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century that Wellhausen (1844-1918) definitively formulated the documentary hypothesis as it stands today, and identified and dated four, instead of three, major literary strands. These are the Yahwist (J; 850 B.C), Elohist (E; 850 B.C), Deuteronomist (D; 620 B.C.), and the Priestly (P; 550-450 B.C.) sources, as they are known today (Hamilton 1990:14).

According to Wenham (1987:xxvi), although the documentary hypothesis had been widely accepted from about 1878 to 1970, there had been “significant dissenters” along the way, including prominent scholars like Herman Gunkel and Gerhard von Rad, who have postulated and distinguished different sub-divisions for the J and E documents respectively. Wenham (1987:xxvii) points out that there have been those scholars who have also totally rejected the source-critical analyses, as well as the dates assigned to

them – here he refers to the “valuable commentaries” of Jacob (1934) and Cassuto (1944), which have dispensed “completely with the sources of JEP and attempt to understand Genesis as a coherent unity”.

Wenham (1987:xxxiv) writes that the so-called *New Literary Criticism* followed Source Criticism (Documentary Hypothesis) as method of interpretation, and explains that the new literary critic, although not “denying the presence of sources within the narrative”, now focused on understanding “how the final editor viewed his material and why he has arranged it the way he did”. Thus, the central concerns of literary criticism are, for example, the use of dialogue and direct speech, techniques of mimesis and scenic composition, type scenes and key words, exact repetition and repetition with variation, the fondness for groups of three, the use of chiasmus and parallel-panel writing, and many others, according to Wenham (1987:xxxiii). Wenham (1987:xxxiv) concludes on this issue that, “The [new] criticism aims to understand texts synchronically, that is, as coherent pieces of work written at a particular time; the older source criticism tended to think diachronically, that is, it asked how and when a work came into existence, what its sources were, and so on”. He believes that, “synchronic and diachronic approaches to language and literatures are both valid and complementary”. Rendtorff, who takes a canonical approach in his *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, believes the same and suggest that these two approaches are not mutually exclusive, but in fact may compliment one another (Routledge 2008:59).

According to Routledge (2008:124, 125), it is a commonly held view that the idea found in Genesis and Deutero-Isaiah of God being the creator arose during the exile period, and was influenced by the Mesopotamian primeval creation stories of Israel’s

neighbours, like that of the Babylonian Epic of Creation, *Enuma Elish* (“When on High”), which is also sometimes referred to as the Babylonian Genesis. He explains that the exilic period was a formative period with regard to the development of Israel’s theology. Their situation as exiles in Babylon – a strange country with a foreign culture and hostile polytheistic religion – led Israel to seriously evaluate their relationship with God, with the result that the creation story begot new meaning within their particular context.

It is generally accepted that there are questions concerning the dating of sources of the Pentateuch. This is evident in the slight difference of opinion between Routledge and Brueggemann, for example. Brueggemann (1982:14) acknowledges that working with the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2, one is aware of the problem of literary sources. Brueggemann (2003:36) believes that it is “a widely held assumption of scholarship that this [Genesis 1:1-2:4a] text – along with the Pentateuch – reached its final form during the sixth-century exile”. In an earlier publication he asserts that the P material of the first creation story “is commonly dated to the exile”, and deals with the problem of despair and hopelessness (Brueggemann 1982:14). He explains that the J material in Genesis 2-3, compared to the P material, “is concerned with prideful self-assertion”, which could well explain what Routledge says about Israel’s position during the exile. Their position (of despair and hopelessness) as exiles in Babylon created a need for them to confirm who God was – God the Creator of Israel is also God the Redeemer of Israel.

According to Routledge (2008:126), it is generally accepted that the P source, which includes the material of the first creation story, is post-exilic in its dating. Although the Babylonian Epic of Creation, the *Enuma Elish*, claims to have close parallels with the

first creation story, the differences outweighs the similarities. Thus, the P source, according to Routledge (2008:126), “focuses on creation to emphasize the power and majesty of God over against the gods of Babylon”. As a result, the biblical account of creation takes on a new meaning within the context of Israel’s exile, i.e. a new significance of assurance to the people of Israel dealing with many uncertainties in a foreign land and foreign culture. In the P document God’s power and priority over all the other gods are emphasized, and His powerful activity within creation becomes the focal point for Israel’s praise and worship. The same renewed emphasis is found in Deutero-Isaiah (Is. 40-55) – as Routledge (2008:126) puts it, “At a time when God’s people saw little of his activity in history, they focused, instead, on his power over nature, and on the fact that the God who created heaven and earth could give his people a new beginning (e.g. Is. 40)”. Brueggemann (2003:36) finds it significant that within the exilic context, “the claim that the world belongs to the God of Israel is a mighty and daring alternative to the dominant, easily visible claim that the world is governed by Babylonian gods”.

2.4.6 History and Salvation

Much debate had been generated over many years concerning the “correct” interpretation of the first creation account in particular. Milne (1982:77) quite rightly states that the divine origin of creation is not in question when one reads the opening chapters of Genesis, as they are fully inspired by the Holy Spirit – the real issue is “...the *correct* interpretation of the biblical teaching” (emphasis added). Schaeffer (1972:9, 10), in the preface to his book, *Genesis in Space and Time*, points out that the problem lies with how people read the early chapters of Genesis, when he writes,

The battle for a Christian understanding of the world is waged on several fronts. Not the least of these is biblical study in general, and especially the question of how the opening

chapters of the Bible are to be read. Modern writers commenting on the book of Genesis tend to treat the first eleven chapters as something other than history. For some this material is simply a Jewish myth, having no more historical validity for modern man than the Epic of Gilgamesh or the stories of Zeus. For others it forms a pre-scientific vision that no one who respects the results of scholarship can accept. Still others find the story symbolic and no more. Some accept the early chapters of Genesis as revelation in regard to an upper-story, religious truth, but allow any sense of truth in regard to history and the cosmos (science) to be lost.

Following this, he asks the question of how these early chapters of Genesis should be read, and whether they are in fact historical and “if so what value does their historicity have?” (Schaeffer 1972:9). He points out that Genesis 1-11

...are the most important [chapters] in the Bible, for they put man in his cosmic setting and show him his peculiar uniqueness. They explain man’s wonder and yet his flaw. Without a proper understanding of these chapters we have no answer to the problems of metaphysics, morals, or epistemology, and furthermore, the work of Christ becomes one more upper-story ‘religious’ answer.

Biblical scholarship generally concedes that there are primarily four hermeneutical traditions, which employ creation in their quest for understanding Biblical events and God’s working therein. According to Punt (2013:1), it is, for example, common for Jewish wisdom traditions to relate God to creation, while the Exodus traditions relate God to liberation. Then there are the prophetic traditions, which relate God to justice, while in the apocalyptic traditions God is related to eschatological renewal.

Brueggemann (2003:36) states in no uncertain terms that the purpose of the first creation story is “concretely existential” – that it is “self-evident that the text is not about ‘the origin of the world’, as the phrase is used in general reference to the first creation story. According to him, any expectations not in line with this understanding “completely

miss the point and function of the text in its original setting or in its durable canonical articulation”. He concludes that although the text of the first creation story makes “large theological claims ... it functions in and through these cosmic claims to sustain the specific community that relies on its imaginative tradition”.

The statement by Brueggemann raises the question of whether the first creation story is indeed as self-evident as he claims it to be. Reformed evangelical scholar Waltke (1991:2-10) argues that the early chapters of Genesis can only be interpreted adequately through the use of thorough historical study of the ancient world, carefully nuanced exegesis, and wide familiarity with scientific procedures and results. He concludes from his own studies that Genesis 1:1-2:4a is in a certain sense myth, i.e. in the sense of a story explaining how God works among humans. He also concludes that, by modern standards, it both is and is not “history”, and by the same token is not primarily “science” either. He suggests that it is “theology” in substance, but not in style, the reason being, he says, is because “the narrative report’s God’s actions, not reflects upon them”. He believes that the central meaning of this chapter is that God is to be worshiped as the source of matter, life, and human civilization, and that it is by any standard a complicated matter to move from this point to a point where a detailed explanation can be offered of how God brought creation into existence. With reference to Henri Blocher who suggested the literary genre of Genesis 1:1-2:4a to be a literary-artistic representation of the creation, Waltke adds that the purpose of the first creation story is “to ground the covenant people’s worship and life in the creator, who transformed chaos into cosmos, and their ethics in His created order” (Waltke 1991:9).

Westermann (1974:64-66), insisting that creation is an historical event, explains that the biblical primeval story (Genesis 1-11) links the primeval period (Genesis 1-3) with history. It is arranged in a strict order and forms the preface to a history in general, i.e. the history of the nations, and a history in particular, i.e. that of Israel which begins with the call of Abraham through a succession of generations – it is a story which leads up from the story of a primeval pair to the story of Abraham. Westermann focuses attention on an important aspect in the understanding of the theological significance of the primeval story (Genesis 1-11) as a whole – the “signpost to an understanding”, as he calls it, “points in two directions: toward the centre of the Old Testament itself and beyond, and toward the prehistory of the Old Testament and beyond to the beginning of the world and of the human race”. According to him, the practice usually is to look in the first direction, and leave it at that, but he points out that the obvious fact concerning Genesis 1-11 is that it is “linked at every step with what pre-Israelite tradition has said about the primeval events”. Brueggemann (1982:15) concurs with this idea, stating that Genesis 10-11 occupy a transitional position within the Genesis 1-11 structure. He distinguishes between *primeval history* and *world history*, and says that Genesis 10-11 effects the transitioning between the two histories.

Connecting the primeval story with the history of the nations and then to the history of Israel gives it a “new setting in life and a new meaning” – the text now speaks to Israel through “the medium of history”, which means that “God’s action, which Israel has experienced in its history, is extended to the whole of history and to the whole world”, as Westermann (1974:65) explains. This action includes the working out of the blessing given by God at creation – it extends to Israel and to all the nations. Taken further, God’s punishment and forgiveness for the sin, crime, guilt and revolt depicted in the

primeval story are not only restricted to Israel, as is told in the stories of the Old Testament, but extends to all nations through the link made between the biblical primeval story and history. According to Westermann (1974:66), the correlation between creation and history is most evident in the books of Job and Deutero-Isaiah – a deliberate union in the primeval account, as he writes, that reaches its ultimate conclusion [here]. It is within this union that humans realize who God is – the same God who created is also the same God who saves God’s people when they find themselves in distress and despair.

Although it is generally agreed that history is an important medium of divine revelation, the problem is how to understand history (Routledge 2008:40). According to Routledge, Von Rad for example, distinguishes between *actual* history, as discovered and confirmed by scientific analysis (i.e. the account of what actually happened), and *redemption* history (*Heilsgeschichte*, i.e. history as seen through the eyes of Israel’s faith, with little or no basis in what actually happened). Routledge (2008:40, 56) points out that one of the key problems in biblical theology was, and still is, the relationship between these two ways of understanding history. He questions whether Von Rad should be followed by making a distinction between them.

Barth believes creation to be historical, which explains, as Brown (1967:113) points out, “...why Barth is anxious to claim Genesis as saga and not myth”. Barth’s insistence on using the term ‘saga’ instead of ‘myth’ is based upon his definition of the two terms: he defines myth as expressing “certain recurrent, general relationships, clothed in the form of an apparently historical narrative, whereas saga records history, though expressed in the form of a tale with symbolic features” (SCM 1966:51; Brown 1967:113). According

to Young (1999:23), however, Barth holds to a position that “creation is *Geschichte*, but not historical *Geschichte*”. He explains that Barth distinguishes between *Geschichte* and *Historie*.

Young (1999:24) seemingly finds it difficult to determine what Barth has in mind when he uses the term *Geschichte*. It is clear that Barth believes history to be objective, i.e. “accessible and perceivable by men”, but does not hold creation to be history as one would normally understand history, the reason being that he doesn’t believe that any history of it can be given. Thus, for Barth, “It can therefore only be unhistorical *Geschichte* and only unhistorical history writing (*Geschichtsschreibung*) can deal with it” (Young 1999:23, 24). Hartwell (1964:30) sheds some light on this issue by pointing out that Barth assigns a very specific and concrete theological meaning to history. He explains that for Barth history “starts in eternity... before the creation of the universe”. Barth believes that, “The pure eternal being of God as the being of the Triune God already presents us with a ‘history’; in the dynamics of His inner life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit God is the specific type and ground of all history” (Hartwell 1964:30, 31). Frei (1974:64) clarifies this matter further by explaining that it is the so-called *heilige Geschichte* - ‘sacred history’ - which refers to the “supposedly revelatory salvific narratives” in the Bible.

Von Rad (1984:53) is concerned with the issue of which idea is the more relevant and immediate conception of God – the one of God as Creator or the one of God as Redeemer. In his essay, though, he does not make the first creation story the focus of his discussion, but refers to other biblical texts, such as Deutero-Isaiah (1984:56-58), the Psalms (1984:55, 59-62), and the doxologies in the book of Amos (1984:56) to state

his point. With the exception of Psalms 8, 19 and 104, which, he says, are generally regarded as the main evidence for the Old Testament doctrine of creation, he concludes that the creation of the world by Yahweh is never being considered for its own sake, but always, even in the case of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, “wholly motivated by considerations of the divine purpose of redemption” (Von Rad 1984:60).

Evans (2007:25) brings the relationship between history and salvation more into perspective when he writes that, according to traditional Christian teaching, salvation “is not merely something that is gained by the realization of some timeless, universal truth or truths” – rather, “[it] is something to be achieved in history, something to be won or lost in time”. He elaborates further by pressing the point that, “History is not merely the arena for acquiring timeless truths about God and the self”, and concludes that “history is [rather] the place where God and human beings interact, the story of God’s actions to make salvation possible and the response of human beings to those actions”.

2.4.7 A Catholic Perspective

Coming from a Catholic perspective, Bergant (2010:35-48) brings a different slant to the issue by explaining how references to, or pictures of, creation can bring about a renewed understanding of how God, the Lord of creation effects positive transformation, and not salvation *per se*, in people’s lives within their particular circumstances. Writing on *The Bible’s Wisdom Tradition and Creation Theology*, she makes reference to the books of Job and the extra-canonical book, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, explaining how transformation within people’s lives is effected by God, with creation forming the backdrop to these life-changing events. Focussing on two well-known passages in the book of Job (Job 38 & 39), she clarifies the fact that God’s

questioning of Job are not requests for information – rather, she says, “They are ironic questions that serve to correct Job’s shortsighted perception of his ability to grasp the mystery of life in general and his own life in particular” (Bergant 2010:38). In view of all that happens in the story of Job, the revelatory significance of nature is depicted in the way God uses it when God speaks to Job – the manifestation of the “awesome God” becomes visible through the natural world, i.e. “the *artistry of God* can be seen in the splendor of the universe; *God’s wisdom* in its delicate balance; *God’s imagination* in its delivery; *God’s providence* in its inherent fruitfulness” (italics added for emphasis). Bergant (2010:38, 39) continues by writing that, “The natural world was not only born of the *creativity of God*; it also bears the *features of His creativity*. Every property of creation mirrors something of the creator” (italics added for emphasis). Ultimately Job confesses that, “Now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5) – an extraordinary revelation, according to Bergant, within the context of creation that were not unknown to Job before this extraordinary event. In this process Job is transformed from one that struggles with the questions of life to someone who has “seen” God, and admits that, “he has been converted to God’s point of view”.

The Wisdom of Solomon, evidently a book that originated during the Hellenistic period with its author simply known as Pseudo-Solomon, is known for its midrashic approach, i.e. a Jewish interpretative methodology which takes “a biblical tradition that originated in one historical situation and makes it relevant in a new one” (Bergant 2010:41). She explains that this kind of methodology allows “aspects of the biblical tradition to give faithful direction to a new generation in an entirely new context”. In her discussion she deals with the particular story of the exodus for which a “Hellenistic form of comparison or contrast known as syncrisis”, is used to interpret the exodus as a “refashioning of

nature” instead of as a “military feat as is found in the book of Exodus” (Bergant 2010:41). Apparently, the sequence of events described by Pseudo-Solomon “follows the pattern of the creation narrative rather than the account of liberation of the people”, as described in Exodus. Instead of moving from salvation to creation, as one would find the focus to be in traditional Old Testament theology, the focus is reversed and moves from creation to salvation. She explains further that in the Ancient Near Eastern view, when chaos threatened the social equilibrium, “the sovereign ruler of the universe had to step in and reestablish order”. Pseudo-Solomon thus “seems to believe that the only way the social disorder of his time can be corrected is by means of a kind of new creation” (Bergant 2010:41). The conclusion to this is that, “...creation is indeed working in accord with natural laws, but in a transformed manner” (Bergant 2010:43).

2.5 ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN CONTEXT

Parker (1994:229) believes that, “All literature, including religious literature, and specifically the Bible, uses conventions and traditions – even when it is adapting or resisting them”. He reminds the reader that one needs to be aware of this as it will assist the reader in discerning the intentions and meanings of the author. Working with ancient literature, it is important to keep in mind that in ancient times all literature was oral and transmitted through performance. When written language was invented, this oral knowledge was preserved in the form of ancient written texts. Since there was no literature known from the Ancient Near East other than the Old Testament during the early time of the Christian church, there was no interest in the original literary context or background of biblical literature at that time. It is only in the last two centuries that a considerable number of ancient documents were discovered in the Middle East and

Egypt, which piqued scholars' interest and aided their growing understanding of the ancient background of the Bible (Parker 1994:228, 229).

Goldingay (2011:7) emphasizes the importance of narrative in the Old Testament. Having identified three types of Old Testament texts – descriptive texts, narrative texts, and prayer texts – he believes that the context of a text is precisely what matters most in narrative texts, which includes the first creation story (Goldingay 2011:4, 7). He explains that the various aspects of the message – what he calls “the world” of Genesis 1 – only becomes clear when the different contexts of the literary works to which this chapter belongs, are considered i.e. Genesis-Kings; Genesis-Exodus; Genesis 1-11 and 12-50; Genesis 1-2 and 3-11, as well as the characteristic features (“internal dynamics”) of the story, e.g. “its double climax in the creation of humanity and in God’s rest; its structured form with its recurrent features such as God’s speaking, God’s seeing, and God’s naming” (Goldingay 2011:18). He explains that interpretation of a narrative is aided by knowledge of its historical background – in the case of Genesis 1, an awareness of the exilic context from which it gains various of its features, enables the interpreter to “spot those features”.

2.5.1 Language and Culture

Walton (2009:9) writes that the Old Testament is God’s revelation first and foremost to the Israelites and “...secondarily through Israel to everyone else”. He highlights two barriers when it comes to reading the Old Testament, namely the *language* in which the original text was written as well as the *culture* in which that language operated.

Nida (Nida & Reyburn 1981:1), in dealing with translation and meaning across cultures, warns that, “All communication across cultures involves problems of meaning, for the words of any language have meaning only in terms of the ideas, values, and circumstances of concrete human lives”. In comparison to other religious writings, Nida finds the Bible to be (i) rooted in history, which consists of specific accounts of how God has entered history “to reveal God’s divine power, will, and person”, and to be (ii) unique in portraying actual events, which involved specific human beings (Nida & Reyburn 1981:29). The God of the Bible, he writes, is portrayed as a God who acts – not merely in generalized ways, but in specific instances. He points out that the specific historical context that the Bible recounts is both relevant and crucial in the sense that the events cannot be altered, and thus acquires very important theological implications (Nida & Reyburn 1981:29).

Routledge (2008:153) highlights an important feature regarding biblical literature, including that of the Old Testament, when he writes that it “reflects something of the cultural and ideological values of its writers”, pointing out that the cultural context of the writer plays an important role as it may serve a particular agenda. Walton (2009:9) agrees, and adds that in order to understand the text fully, it is the task of the researcher to translate not only the language, but also the culture, with the culture being the more difficult to translate. He warns though, that in any attempt to translate the culture, one runs the risk “...of making the text communicate something it never intended”, and suggests that instead of translating the culture, one must try to enter the ancient culture (Walton 2009:11). In making the cultural adaptation, according to Walton (2001:21-25), the researcher needs to determine the differences between the value systems of the ancient Israelite culture under investigation in the Old Testament

and that of the interpreter itself in order to avoid imposition of his/her own ideas, culture, and worldview on the text. With reference to the work of R. A. Simkins, Walton explains that, “the Bible lacks any explicit articulation of the Israelite’s worldview and values toward the natural world...it was [thus] assumed by all members in the society” (Walton 2001:24, 25). The worldview and values in question formed the presupposition of the biblical writers and were therefore not described in detail in the text. The problem is that these afore-mentioned unexpressed worldviews and values of the ancient Israelite culture are not publicly accessible entities that can be translated directly, and therefore a researcher, in order to gain access to them, must become acquainted with the particular culture by reading the text from the perspective it was written (Walton 2001:24).

2.5.2 Comparative Studies

A particular method, which helps interpreters to make the cultural adaptation that Walton is talking about, is that of comparative studies of Ancient Near Eastern literature – it helps the interpreter to become familiar with the world of the Ancient Near East of which Israel was part of (Walton 2001:25). Walton believes that it aids scholars to “reconstruct from [it] behaviour, beliefs, culture, values, and worldview of the people”. He warns, however, that one must not expect to find similarities and/or differences at every point (Walton 2009:12). By comparing the literature of some of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures with the first creation story, the aim is rather to identify those “common threads” and “distinctions” that will aid better understanding of the first creation story. This is not to suggest that Israel borrowed from the traditions and literature that were known to them, as some scholars like Delitzsch, for example believed (refer 2.6), but rather that ancient Israel held many concepts and perspectives in common with these

surrounding cultures through their interaction with the wider culture of the Ancient Near East. According to Lucas (2003:130), Ancient Near Eastern literature thus provides a helpful context within which to understand the biblical material. Parker (1994:234) concludes that, “A just comparison gives due weight to both commonalities and differences and seeks to explain both – as respectively part of the common culture Israel shared with its neighbors and antecedents, or as part of the particular culture or sub-culture of the individual work – or indeed creativity of its author(s)”.

Thus, in light of the important role context plays when interpreting the Old Testament and for the purpose of this study, a brief background of the Ancient Near Eastern literature and culture (creation stories) is provided in this chapter as a supporting framework within which to understand the context of which ancient Israel was part of. This background study also includes an overview of the so-called “Cosmic Temple” model proposed by Walton in his book, *The Lost World of Genesis 1*, a contextual/comparative study of Genesis 1 published in 2009.

2.6 MYTHS AND MYTHOLOGIES

Before engaging the Ancient Near Eastern creation stories, it is important to elucidate the meaning of ‘myth’ and ‘mythology’. In 1902 noted Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch, presented a series of controversial lectures under the banner of the German Oriental Society, entitled “Babel and Bibel” – controversial in the sense that Delitzsch claimed that biblical literature was dependent on, and even borrowed from that of cultures that surrounded ancient Israel at the time (Walton 2007:15). Delitzsch contended that, “The Mesopotamian evidence shows us not just parallels to Old Testament customs and ideas, but genuine evidence regarding their origin” (Larsen 1995:99). The problem, for

Larsen, was that Delitzsch concluded that the origin of the Old Testament was human, and not divine. The secondary conclusion that followed and caused the uproar was that the Christian faith thus had its roots in pagan mythology. Two more lectures followed in which Delitzsch went further and “questioned the appropriateness of the traditional theological terminology used to describe the Bible” (Walton 2007:16). According to Walton (2007:17), Delitzsch’s work gave rise to the so-called *Pan-Babylonian* movement, which views all world myths and Christian Scriptures as simply being versions of Babylonian mythology.

According to Brueggemann (2003:29), the material in the first eleven chapters of Genesis does constitute a particularly problematic section of the text in Genesis, and confirms that these Old Testament materials and their cultural antecedents have indeed for a long time since Gunkel been referred to as myths. Gunkel, probably the most notable proponent of this school of thought, believes that the narrative of the first creation story specifically “is merely the Judaic reworking of much older traditional material that originally must have been considerably more mythological in nature” (Gunkel 1984:44). He argues a polytheistic origin for Genesis 1, and believes that various individual traits of Genesis 1 points to this fact (Gunkel 1984:44-47).

Webster’s New World Dictionary (2001:254) defines the word “myth” in a popular sense as a tale or legend, which is...

- i) a traditional story of unknown authorship, ostensibly with a historical basis, but, serving usually to explain some phenomenon of nature, the origin of man, or the customs, institutions, religious rites, etc. of a people: myths usually involve the exploits of gods and heroes,
- ii) any fictitious story, or unscientific account, theory, belief, etc.,
- iii) any imaginary person or thing spoken of as though existing.

The study of such stories is collectively known as a mythology. It is usually the second and third definitions that intimate the idea that what is told, is just a story – something that is not necessarily true, but fictitious. With reference to the work of Delitzsch and the popular definition of myth as stories in which gods are the main characters (definition 1), many find the usage of this term unpalatable in its association with Old Testament material in general, and with specific reference to the status of Genesis 1:1-2:25 in which God (Elohim) is the main character who brought creation into existence. For them revelation from God and mythology can never be equated (Gunkel 1984:35; Walton 2009:15).

The concept of myth in Old Testament interpretation, however, holds a significantly different meaning for other Old Testament scholars. Brueggemann qualifies the usage of this term in a theological sense by stating that it does not imply “falsehood”, but refers to those poetic narratives that are foundational in a society’s understanding of the reason for its existence, and characteristically portrays “great founding events in which ‘the gods’ are the key actors and the actions undertaken are primordial in that they precede any concrete historical data” (Brueggemann 2003:29).

Walton (2009:14, 15) agrees, writing that certain literature is sometimes labelled as “myth”, because “...we do not believe that the world works that way”, thus implying falsehood. He points out, though, that the mythologies belonging to ancient people were real to them in the sense that these mythologies “...expressed their beliefs concerning what made the world what it was; it expressed their theories of origins and of how their world worked”. Aligning this with modern science, he calls science “our modern mythology”, which constitutes “[modern] theories of origins and operations”. He

concludes that, “[Modern] science provides what is generally viewed as the consensus concerning what the world is, how it works, and how it came to be”. Here, Walton is in agreement with what Von Rad (1974:116) writes referring to C.F. Weizsäcker’s *History of Nature*, i.e. that “the idea of unending Nature, existing by itself ... is the myth of modern science. Science, which began by destroying the myth of the Middle Ages, is now forced by being consistent to the knowledge that it has substituted another myth in its place”.

Routledge (2008:127), on the other hand, defines myths as “stories that reflect an early stage of humankind’s intellectual development and attempts to attribute events and phenomena that cannot be explained within that prescientific world view to supernatural intervention by gods or other beings”. He agrees with Brueggemann and Walton that myths “are not simply fiction; they convey a basic truth; they are reflections on what has taken place, through which people express their view of the world and their understanding of reality”. He issues a warning, however, that the term must be used with caution, and concludes that it was “a useful way of presenting truths that could not easily be expressed in other ways”.

Walton (2010:150) supports this, stating that, “Mythology by its nature seeks to explain how the world works and how it came to work that way, and therefore includes a culture’s ‘theory of origins’”. For the ancient cultures their myths related real events and held deep beliefs about the world they lived in. For these people their gods were real (Walton 2007:43, 44). One could therefore safely assume the same to be true for ancient Israel. Brueggemann (2003:30) confirms that the Old Testament materials did indeed emerge in an ancient cultural world where such “founding myths” were

commonly shared between cultures and that “Israel readily participated in that cultural heritage” by making use of the same cultural materials. Walton (2010:15) points out that regardless of some people’s aversion to the use of “myth” in reference to Genesis 1, one should recognize that “Genesis 1 serves a similar function of offering an explanation of origins and how the world operated, not only for Israel, but for people today who put their faith in the Bible”.

Davies and Rogerson (2005:114), on the other hand, argue that if a myth is defined as a story about gods, then Genesis 1-11 does not qualify to be identified as myth. According to them, there is nothing in these chapters of Genesis that is comparable to what is found in the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Greek myths “where many gods are present, often in conflict and disagreement, and struggling for ascendancy”. They suggest a definition for myth as that of “a story set in the beginning of time – a time different from that of the storyteller but one in which the conditions of the storyteller’s own time was established once and for all”. On this condition they argue that Genesis 1-11 can be defined as myth.

They propose that if this definition is accepted, the popular understanding of myth as something that is not true must then be rejected (Davies & Rogerson 2005:115). Like Walton, they believe that these stories were true for those who wrote and heard them, and that it was “not so much an intellectual truth as a truth that enabled the world to be coped with and lived in”. For these ancient people their coping strategies involved telling stories that “set humankind within some sort of cosmic framework”. Davies and Rogerson (2005:115) conclude by making an important point with regard to Genesis 1-11, namely that,

The truth of these stories is not to be measured by their agreement with modern astronomy, biology, geography, history, and linguistics. Their truth is bound up with their effectiveness in explaining for the Old Testament writers the origin and destiny of the world and humanity in the light of their belief in God.

According to Van Dyk (2005:863), “The rich explanatory function and potential interpretive value of the concept of myth have largely been ignored by Old Testament scholars in the past”. In a brief historical overview he shows how OT scholars in the past have differed in their views of how the Old Testament should be interpreted (Van Dyk 2005:864-866). He believes that many misconceptions about the exact nature of myths existed previously, and highlights those scholars’ difficult struggle in finding an acceptable definition for the concept of myth. He presents a “working” definition for the concept of myth set out in five distinct points (Van Dyk 2005:867).

Van Dyk believes that it was unnecessary for Gunkel to limit myths to polytheistic religions (Gunkel 1984:44-47; Van Dyk 2005:867)). He classifies the material in Genesis 1-11 as proper myths provided that myths are defined as narratives in which God is (monotheistic religion), or many gods are (in polytheistic religions) the main character(s). Explaining mythical frameworks, Van Dyk (2005:871) concludes that, “Taken together, all myths, ideas and concepts (circulating within a traditional community) formed a complex framework that can be called a mythology. This mythology acted as the necessary framework against which any specific myth had to be interpreted”.

2.7 COSMOLOGIES AND COSMOGONIES

Waltke (2007:188) strongly rejects the identification of Genesis 1 as myth, and argues that, although “Genesis 1 assumes the phenomenal worldview of the ancient Near

East...and employs the literary form of ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies, biblical literature never conceptualizes God in the theological notions of pantheism and polytheism, which informs Near Eastern myths”. He argues that Genesis 1 is an ancient Near Eastern cosmogony (Waltke 2007:188-203), and finds support in Henri Blocher, who wrote that, “[The] Bible’s artistic, literary representation of creation ... fits none of these literary forms because it is an ancient Near Eastern cosmogony” (Waltke 2007:197) – the literary forms mentioned being hymn, myth, theology, history and science (Waltke 2007:188-189). He distinguishes, rather vaguely, between cosmology and cosmogony by defining cosmology as referring to “views of how the world came to be and presently works”, and cosmogony as referring to a “particular account representing a worldview” (Waltke 2007:197).

Ross (1989:3), on the other hand, defines cosmology as “the study of the universe as a whole – its structure, origin, and development”, while Arnold (1998:47) and Walton (2001:86; 2007:88) both define cosmogony as an account of the origins of the world.

Lucas (2003:130), however, presents a more concise definition for both terms:

- i) Cosmology refers to the understanding of the whole universe as an organized structured entity;
- ii) Cosmogony is an account of how the structured universe came into being.

He points out, however, that it is difficult to separate these two concepts, explaining that cosmologies are often rooted in cosmogonies, i.e. “the way the universe *is*, is dependent on the way *it came into being*”, with the result that the term ‘cosmology’ is used in general in reference to creation stories. The term seemingly has a less contentious meaning than the term ‘myth’. Thus, instead of reverting to the use of the term ‘myth’ for the purpose of this study, the proposed term ‘cosmology’ as defined by

Lucas will be used in reference to the Genesis 1 and other Ancient Near Eastern creation stories.

2.7.1 Ancient Near Eastern Cosmologies

Many parallels, but also significant differences, have been identified between the first creation story and other Ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, which reflect a general Semitic background. Although comparative studies have been done *ad infinitum* with reference to the first creation story, only a brief account will be presented in this chapter to once again highlight the background of those important cosmologies that might have bearing on this study. For the purpose of this study the comparisons are necessarily selective and brief, and will focus on the Mesopotamian and Egyptian creation accounts.

2.7.1.1 Mesopotamian Cosmologies

According to Parker (1994:232), only small samples of Mesopotamian literature have survived in the third millennium. This changed, however, when numerous texts were discovered which date to the second millennium. Some of these texts include short myths and epics, as well as some independent stories about Gilgamesh. Lucas (2003:132) distinguishes between two Mesopotamian cosmologies – Sumerian and Akkadian.

a) Sumerian Cosmologies

Within the Sumerian cosmology, Lucas (2003:132) identifies two minor traditions – the Nippur and the Eridu tradition.

i) Nippur Tradition

According to this tradition, creation takes place when heaven (the god *An*) and earth (the goddess *Antum* or *Ki*) unite, resulting in the earth being fertilized and producing vegetable, animal and human life, which all sprout from the ground like plants.

ii) Eridu Tradition

According to this tradition, *Enki*, the god of fertility and wisdom, produces the spring water, which fertilizes the earth by means of rivers and canals, and resulting in life, including human life and cities that arises from its banks.

In both these traditions, there is no trace of divine conflict and human existence is viewed primarily as being necessary for serving the gods. Furthermore, in both accounts a thing or a person is assigned a destiny by the gods at the time of creation. Thus, the purpose of these two creation stories is to explain the nature or role of something.

b) Akkadian Cosmologies

In the major Akkadian traditions – *Enuma Elish* and the *Atrahasis Epic* – creation is described in terms of divine conflict with the mythical waters of creation. Both are said to have close parallels with Genesis 1.

i) Enuma Elish

Arnold (1998:47) writes that, “The greatest expression of the Mesopotamian worldview is the creation story known by its Akkadian title, *Enuma Elish* (the first words of the composition meaning, ‘when on high’)”. According to Routledge

(2008:125), it is sometimes referred to as the Babylonian Genesis. It focuses on the god Marduk, the city god of Babylon, and the cosmic conflict between him and the forces of Chaos symbolized by water, i.e. the monstrous Tiamat, mother goddess personifying the primeval ocean – a conflict that ultimately results in the construction of the world. In this account Marduk kills Tiamat and her conspirator, Kingu. He splits Tiamat's corpse in two, creating heaven from one half and the earth from the other half, and together with his father uses the blood of Kingu to create humankind. The purpose for creating mankind is to do the hard labour of the universe, leaving the deities free from work. This account also relates how the city of Babylon was founded and records a great feast in Marduk's new temple (Arnold 1998:47).

According to Gunkel (1984:35), this myth “answers the question of how Marduk came by his present sovereignty” – the hypothesis being that “Marduk is a relatively new god who only at a later time became the peer of his ‘fathers’ – indeed, became lord of the cosmos”. This account relates the origin of the world, and that Marduk, the Akkadians' own god, is lord of the world because he conquered the chaos and created the world. Gunkel (1984:35) concludes that, “The claim of Babylon to rule the world thus dates from the very beginning of the world!” – that is, according to the Akkadians.

ii) The Atrahasis Epic

The Atrahasis Epic is one of the more recent texts, which dates from the second millennium (Parker 1994:232). This epic, according to Arnold (1998:48), “...is the oldest Near Eastern primeval history in nearly complete form. It presents in

historical sequence both the creation of mankind and their near extinction in the flood in a similar sequence as in Genesis”. Although the main focus seems to be on the flood, it gives some background on the creation story.

It begins at a time when only the gods existed. In this story there are lesser gods, the Igigi, and senior gods, the Annunaki (Lucas 2003:132). The Igigi seem to be the working gods, who, after many years of labour rebel and go on a strike. According to Routledge (2008:125), the ringleader is killed. Enki (Nintu), the god of fertility and wisdom, and the mother goddess then creates human beings from clay, blood and the spirit of an Igigi, which resolves this crisis. In this process humans receive their bodies from the earth, while the immaterial aspect of their being comes from the gods (Lucas 2003:132). According to Arnold (1998:48), Enki (Nintu) uses some magic to pinch off fourteen pieces of the blood-clay mixture to form seven males and seven females. This is a close analogy to Genesis 2:7, where the first man is created from the dust of the earth and given life through the divine inbreathing of God. This story continues with close analogies to the Genesis flood story (Lucas 2003:132). The focus of this story seems to be the creation of human beings for the sole purpose of serving the gods (Routledge 2008:125).

2.7.1.2 Similarities and Differences

Israel's account of creation shows some similarities with those of the Mesopotamian creation stories. Gunkel (1984:35), for example, points out that, “The difference between the Babylonian myth and Genesis 1 is so pronounced, in terms of both religious attitude and aesthetic quality, that at first glance the two seems to have

nothing in common”. He believes, however, that Genesis 1 in its present form is not a free composition of its author, and identifies various mythological features in Genesis 1 that reflect ancient ways of thinking (Gunkel 1984:26-33).

Gunkel (1984:26, 31) concludes that, based on these considerations, it is quite unlikely that Genesis 1 could have arisen in Israel, but have rather “grown out of mythological tradition”, having been “blended together from older strands”. He argues that these mythological features are similar to those found in very ancient traditions that point to an original setting quite likely to be found in Babylonia (Gunkel 1984:33).

The consensus seems to be, however, that the dissimilarities between the Mesopotamian accounts and Genesis 1 are more striking than the similarities (Arnold 1998:49; Routledge 2008:124, 125). Arnold (1998:49-51) highlights several distinctive features comprising the dissimilarities between the Mesopotamian creation story and Genesis 1, and points out that the ancient creation accounts almost always involve *theogony*, i.e. accounts of the origins of the gods (Arnold 1998:50). Walton (2001:86) argues the same, and writes that in the ancient Mesopotamian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, the “cosmic gods [give] birth to the next generation of cosmic gods and thereby bringing the cosmos into operation”, and in ancient Egyptian creation stories, the “earliest gods [come] into being through bodily fluids (the creator god spitting, sneezing, sweating or masturbating) while the latter deities are simply born to a previous generation of deity” (Walton 2007:88). It seems obvious from these accounts that human beings play a relatively insignificant role, having been created almost as an afterthought, compared to the biblical

account, which attaches a much greater significance to the creation of human beings.

According to Johnston (2008:178), many scholars have for more than a century “read the Hebrew creation account in Gen. 1 in the light of parallels from Mesopotamia (particularly *Enuma Elish*), and more recently Ugaritic literature”. He disagrees strongly, however, with the notion that *Enuma Elish* “provides the conceptual background of the Genesis 1 creation account”, and argues that there are two fundamental problems related to this: (i) First, with reference to Hasel’s work (1974:81-102) on the polemical nature of the Genesis account, he argues that although both the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1 accounts begin by mentioning the original primordial waters from which creation would eventually emerge. He believes that, “the etymological connection between the name *tiâmat*, ‘Tiamat’, and the Hebrew noun *těhôm*, ‘watery deep,’ remains a matter of debate”. The second and more significant point that he argues in light of the work of A. H. Sayce on the Egyptian background of Genesis 1, is that there is no hint of divine conflict between God and the primordial waters in Genesis 1 (Johnston 2008:178). This is in accordance with what Walton (2009:52) writes, namely that, “In the ancient Near East the precosmic condition is neither an abstraction (‘Chaos’) nor a personified adversary”. He argues that the water motif in Genesis 1 does “...not portray any battle, nor does it indicate chaotic forces being held back, but there is a clear establishment of order from disorder” (Walton 2001:73). He argues that, “There is nothing sinister or menacing about this chaos in Genesis; it is simply the indication that God has not yet done his work” (Walton 2001:74).

2.7.2 Egyptian Cosmologies

More than a century ago pioneer British Assyriologist and linguist A. H. Sayce, and Old Testament scholar A. S. Yahuda, drew attention to parallels between Genesis 1 and Egyptian creation myths. They claimed that these parallels were tighter than the putative Mesopotamian parallels. According to Johnston (2008:179), their work fell on deaf ears for several reasons, but this changed in the second half of the twentieth century when biblical scholars started taking serious note of the importance of Egyptian creation traditions.

Walton (2007:48), for example, distinguishes between three creation traditions: (i) the Memphis tradition, (ii) the Heliopolis tradition, and (iii) the Hermopolis tradition, while Johnston (2008:180, 181), on the other hand, identifies a fourth tradition, the Thebes tradition. According to him, these four major versions of Egyptian religion feature the same basic mythic cycle of creation, each represented by the rival sanctuaries.

2.7.2.1 Memphis Creation Account

According to Walton (2007:48), the extant copy dates to about 700 BC. This creation tradition is believed to have originated during the time of the Old Kingdom. The creator god in this tradition is Ptah, the so-called craftsman deity and patron of Memphis. Significant in this tradition is that Ptah *speaks* the Ennead – nine deities representing all of creation – into existence instead of using bodily fluids as believed in the other traditions.

2.7.2.2 Heliopolis Creation Account

This account is dated to the mid-third millennium, and features Atum as the creator of the Ennead, the nine gods, from which all the rest of creation emerges (Walton 2007:48).

2.7.2.3 Hermopolis Creation Account

In this tradition in which Amun is the principal creator, four pairs of gods, the Ogdoad, figure prominently. According to Walton (2007:48), “creation proceeds through an evolving process from the ‘first occasion’ with Amun’s self-generation”.

2.7.2.4 Thebes Creation Account

In this account, Amun-Re, the great sun god of Egypt and patron deity of the holy city of Thebes, is given pre-eminence over all the cultic centers. He is the creator god, and king of Upper and Lower Egypt (Walton 2007:74).

According to Johnston (2008:181), these creation accounts are reflected in four major Egyptian cosmological texts:

- i. The *Pyramid Texts* (PT), from the Old Kingdom period (Dynasties 4-5: ca. 2613-2345 B.C.);
- ii. The *Coffin Texts* (CT) from the Middle Kingdom Period (Dynasty 1: ca. 1991-1786 B.C.);
- iii. The *Book of the Dead* from the New Kingdom period (Dynasties 18-19: ca. 1570-1220 B.C.);
- iv. The so-called *Shabaka Stone*, preserved in a text from king Shabaka (716-702 B.C), but dating to the Old Kingdom (Dynasty 5: ca. 2494-2345 B.C.).

He identifies ten distinctive technical features in the basic storyline, which enables him to draw three parallels between Genesis 1 and the Egyptian creation traditions, i.e. (i) lexical, (ii) structural, and (iii) thematic/conceptual (Johnston 2008:182, 183).

He believes that, although Genesis 1 shares thematic/conceptual parallels and maybe some lexical parallels with the Babylonian account, *Enuma Elish*, it does not share structural parallels in its overall storyline, as is the case with the Egyptian creation accounts.

With reference to the scholarly work of Sayce and Hoffmeier, Johnston (2008:182, 183) points out that Sayce “observed that the sequence of events in Genesis 1 essentially mirrors that of the tradition of Hermopolis, reflected in the *Pyramid Texts* and *Coffin Texts*, dating from the Old Kingdom period but still current during the Middle and New Kingdom periods”. He also points out that Atwell and Strange noted “parallels between the sequence of events in Genesis 1:1-2:4a and in the *Shabaka Stone*, representing ‘Memphite theology’, published during the New Kingdom period, but most likely going back to an original document from the Old Kingdom period” (Johnston 2008:183, 184).

Johnston (2008:185) furthermore shows that four thematic/conceptual parallels can be identified from this comparative study, and expounds them in detail – the four cosmic phenomena being: (i) empty formlessness, (ii) darkness, (iii) watery deep, and (iv) Spirit / Wind of God (Johnston 2008:186-191). He believes that the significance of these parallels is to be found in the fact that they are so remarkable that they cannot merely be attributed to coincidence. With reference to the work of authors like Ringgren, Redford, Atwell, and Hoffmeier and Currid who propose various reasons for the similarities (“thematic continuities”) observed between the Genesis 1 account and the Egyptian accounts (Johnston 2008:191), Johnston (2008:192) also focuses the reader’s attention on the more important differences

(“ideological discontinuities”) between these accounts. Although he concedes that several elements of the Genesis 1 passage reflect a general Semitic background, he believes and argues that “the majority of parallel elements are cast against the Egyptian mythologies”. He concludes that Genesis 1 “...appears to be a literary polemic designed to refute ancient Near Eastern mythology in general and ancient Egyptian mythology in particular” (Johnston 2008:194).

2.7.3 The Functional Cosmic Temple

Many scholars have over the years done in depth studies on the first creation story in order to gain an understanding of what the creation story means. Within the tradition of comparative studies, Old Testament scholar John Walton offers a different and thought-provoking interpretation of Genesis 1 in his book, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (2009). His approach (contextual) challenges the deeply entrenched idea that creation is an account of material origins. In the prologue, Walton (2009:7) states his thesis clearly, namely “... a reading of Genesis that I believe to be faithful to the context of the original audience and author, and one that preserves and enhances the theological vitality of this text”. He enforces the point by warning the reader that, “...we must be aware of the danger that lurks when we impose our own cultural ideas on the text without thinking” (Walton 2009:21).

The book is divided into 18 chapters, each laying out a proposition of which the first is that Genesis is ancient cosmology (Walton 2009:16), which Walton argues, is function oriented (second proposition) (Walton 2009:23). Walton (2009:103) offers a so-called “functional cosmic temple” interpretation of Genesis 1, “... which sees Gen. 1 as an account of functional origins”, rather than material origins. He expresses the importance

for the need to focus on the ontology of the world by asking the question, “What does it mean for the world or the cosmos (or the objects in it) to exist?” (Walton 2009:24). He explains that in modern culture, existence is viewed as material and that creation therefore is seen as a material act (Walton 2009:25). The alternative that Walton (2009:26) proposes in this book is, “...that people in the ancient world believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, *but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered system*”. He argues that the ideas of creation found in the literature of the Ancient Near East indicate that people did not think of creation in terms of making material things, but rather in terms of setting up functions (Walton 2009:35). Walton (2009:96) concludes that, although it would have been unthinkable that God was somehow uninvolved in the material origins of creation, “To the audience and author of Genesis, material origins were simply not a priority”.

Walton (2009:106) deals with various approaches that are employed in trying to interpret Genesis 1 in modern-day terms, like the concordist approach, day-age readings, literary or theological interpretations and concludes that all of these approaches struggle with the same basic problem, namely that, “They are still working with the premise that Genesis 1 is an account of material origins for an audience that has a material ontology”. He proposes that the alternative approach that he offers, does the following (Walton 2009:107): i) It recognizes Genesis 1 for the ancient document that it is; (ii) It finds no reason to impose a material ontology on the text; (iii) It finds no reason to require the finding of scientific information between the lines; (iv) It avoids reducing Genesis 1 to merely literary or theological expressions; (v) It poses no conflict with scientific thinking to the extent that it recognizes that the text does not offer scientific explanations.

He also suggests that the following affirmations can be made by employing the alternative approach he offers in this book (Walton 2009:151):

- (i) The world operates by Yahweh's design and under his supervision to accomplish his purposes;
- (ii) The cosmos is his temple;
- (iii) Everything in the cosmos was given its role and function by God;
- (iv) Everything in the cosmos functions on behalf of people who are in God's image.

Walton (2009:163) concludes that, "The account can be seen to be a seven-day inauguration of the cosmic temple, setting up its functions for the benefits of humanity, with God dwelling in relationship with his creatures". As a result he suggests that one may then safely look to science to consider material origin mechanisms that it has to offer, and in no way feel challenged since, "...we cannot on the basis of Genesis 1 object to any mechanisms they [scientists] offer" (Walton 2009:164).

2.7.3.1 Scholarly Endorsements

The following scholarly endorsements were published on the *InterVarsity Press* website (IVP), and in part on the back cover of Walton's book. Abridged versions are offered as background:

a) Francis S. Collins, head of the Human Genome Project and author of *The Language of God* (2007), says this about Walton's book,

[It] presents a profoundly important new analysis of the meaning of Genesis. Walton argues convincingly that Genesis was intended to describe the creation of the functions of the cosmos, not its material nature.

b) Tremper Longman III, from Westmont College and author of *How to Read Genesis*, writes,

John Walton offers a compelling and persuasive interpretation of Genesis, one that challenges those who take it as an account of material origins.

- c) **Bruce Waltke**, Professor of Old Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary and author of *Genesis: A Commentary* (2001), believes that,

Walton's cosmic temple inauguration view of Genesis 1 is a landmark study in the interpretation of that controversial chapter.

- d) **N.T. Wright**, bishop of Durham, believes that,

John Walton's expertise in the Ancient Near Eastern sources enables him to shed a flood of new and unexpected light on the deeper meaning of Genesis 1. The Creator, Genesis is saying, designed heaven and earth as a great temple with the intention of coming to live in it himself – and the Sabbath isn't just a nice break after the work is done, but the moment when he takes up residence in the world he has just made. The implications of this resonate right through the rest of the Bible.

- e) **Davis A. Young**, Professor Emeritus of Geology from Calvin College, and co-author of *The Bible, Rocks and Time* (2008), comments as follows,

Walton closely examines Genesis 1 in light of ancient Near Eastern literature and offers a compelling case that the creation account is far more concerned with the cosmos being given functions as God's temple than it is with the manufacture of the material structures of the earth and universe. In the process, he has blown away all the futile attempts to elicit modern science from the first chapter of the Bible.

- f) **Douglas J. Becker** writes in *Themelios* of November 2009 that Walton's book,

...will challenge many to think about Genesis in the way Christian scholars have been championing for many years now - as an ancient document, speaking to people with an understanding of the world very different from our own. Hopefully, it will open doors to a conversation that is long overdue.

2.7.3.2 Scholarly Critique

Apart from the positive endorsements that were published, various critiques against Walton's work were also published.

a) The BioLogos Forum vs Vern Poythress

In his book, Walton (2009:19) opposes the idea of concordism, which he defines as follows, “Concordists believe the Bible must agree – be in concord with – all the findings of contemporary science”. It is therefore no surprise that *The BioLogos Forum for Science and Faith in Dialogue* (hereafter BioLogos) showed much interest in Walton’s thesis on functional origins, because they said, “...it has direct bearing on what readers have the right to expect from Genesis” – the question specifically being asked, “To what extent, if any, does Genesis 1 concord with modern scientific investigation?” Walton’s answer in his book is none, an answer that BioLogos claimed, “requires those who hold to a concordist position to offer a response” (BioLogos 2010a). BioLogos, on their part, then reverted to the response that had come forth from well-known concordist Vern Poythress, Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia and author of the book, *Redeemed Science* (2006), arguing that his unfavourable review, which appeared in *World Magazine* of August 2009 (Poythress 2009: n.p.), was an inaccurate summary of Walton’s book. In his review, Poythress finds Walton’s position unpersuasive and offers several critiques against the book, and in the light of this BioLogos felt that the record had to be set straight, and that people had to be informed correctly of what Walton had said in his book.

Walton was subsequently invited to respond to Poythress’ critique (BioLogos 2010b). In his response Walton clarifies his position, and clearly shows his disappointment with Poythress’ review, when he writes that Poythress “misconstrued parts of it, misunderstood others, and spent so much space of the review simply offering his [unsubstantiated] opinions about what right thinking might look like”.

The real issue in this debate, however, seems to be the differing viewpoints of Walton and Poythress on the matter of evolution and how Genesis 1 comments on the means by which God brought the world into existence. Although Walton clarifies his position as not having written as an advocate of evolution (Walton 2009:164), it can be inferred that he is willing to accept the notion of theistic evolution (*teleological evolution*, as he describes it) as a description of the means by which God created – a position totally unacceptable to Poythress, who supports a concordist position, which warrants a literalistic interpretation of Genesis 1. The reason for Walton suggesting teleological evolution seems to be the issue of the mechanism(s) by which the world came into existence (Walton 2009:163). By proposing teleological evolution, it solves the problem for Walton in the sense that the mechanism(s) that science offers in terms of material origins would therefore offer no challenge to an interpretation of Genesis 1 in terms of a functional origin. Thus, he concludes, one can safely look to what science offers and not feel threatened, but in turn respond in a way that acknowledges that science can in fact aid one’s understanding of God’s creative work.

b) C. John Collins: Covenant Theological Seminary

C. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri, starts out his critique of Walton’s book by writing that, “John Walton... has contributed this book to argue for a new interpretation of Genesis 1 (really 1:1-2:4a), one that he thinks does justice to the concerns of the ancient Israelites” (Collins 2009:1). He explains that Walton’s goal is very simple, i.e. “He wants to read Genesis 1 as the same sort of thing as other ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, because he thinks that was the way the ancient Israelites took it”.

Collins believes that this goal is “wholly laudable”, but also “platitudinous” in that “few serious Bible students will dispute it”. “The challenge...”, Collins says, “...is to discern the intentions and literary conventions of the ancient authors and audiences”. Collins (2009:1) lists the six principal theses that Walton sets out in his book, with the last thesis reading as follows:

God’s rest on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1-3) is the rest of a deity in a temple, and this shows that Genesis 1 tells the story of God’s work of inaugurating the cosmos as his temple.

He argues that Walton, in this last thesis, “believes that he has found a way to read Genesis as an account of an actual set of events that took place over six regular days, without getting concerned with the scientific question of origins” (Collins 2009:2).

Collins (2009:2) acknowledges the fact that Walton, in his book, is aware of existing competing interpretations for Genesis 1, and mentions that Walton gives very brief discussions of why he does not follow these interpretations. Walton, for example, rejects the Young-Earth Creationist interpretation – which holds to the idea that the Genesis days are the first six days of the universe – “primarily because he thinks the exegesis is misguidedly concerned with material origins”. Walton also does not accept the Day-Age (Old-Earth) Creationist viewpoint – which interprets the Genesis days as long ages over which God has spread God’s creative activities – because this view is also concerned with material origins. Walton also questions “the high level of ‘concordism’ that this view assumes between Genesis and modern science”. Finally, Collins (2009:2) writes that Walton dismisses the Framework Hypothesis of Genesis 1 – which posits that the six days in Genesis 1 is “a literary device to display the creation week as a careful and artistic effort” – one which Walton calls “a literary/theological

approach to Genesis 1” – because “he [Walton] takes it to imply that Genesis 1 is nothing more than ‘theological affirmations expressed in a literary way’”, which Walton finds inadequate.

Collins (2009:2) believes that it is to Walton’s credit that he does not confine himself “to expounding his way of reading Genesis 1”, because he [Collins] says that “it would not be such a ‘hot topic’ if other issues did not hang on the reading” – some issues being (i) “theological points regarding the close connection of God’s ongoing creative role in the world”, and (ii) “the ‘culture war’ matter of whether our scientific discussions of biology have anything to do with purpose (or its absence)”. He makes reference to Walton’s Proposition 17, which contains theological points that Walton himself believes strengthens his view, i.e. (i) “God’s pervasive involvement in everything”, and (ii) “the importance of the Sabbath for people today”. He argues that these points are worth making, but that he sees “no grounds for implying that other readings of Genesis 1 weaken these in any way”.

Collins (2009:2, 3) criticizes Walton’s lack of explanation of why he [Walton] (i) thinks the connection between one’s faith and one’s interaction with the world is controversial, (ii) where exactly he [Walton] stands on the questions, and (iii) also why. He also points out two shortcomings in Walton’s discussion on evolution and intelligent design (Collins 2009:3). He believes that Walton “aims to be even-handed”, and that his discussion is superficial, because (i) “he never really expounds or defends his own metaphysic, which seems to favor the idea that ‘God might be working alongside or through physical and biological processes in a way that science cannot detect’”, and (ii) because the discussion is very brief, which Collins believes is because Walton “does not really seem

to [him] to have grasped the argument of the best design theorists”. “The short discussion in this book...”, says Collins, “...obscures the complexities that it seems to be trying to clarify”.

Collins (2009:8) concludes his review by saying that he is “at a loss to know exactly what role Walton thinks Genesis played in the life of ancient Israel, let alone what role it should play in the modern church”. He believes that one should say something about its “role in worldwide formation”. He furthermore believes that “one should comment on its connection to Israel’s universal mission” – “even...” he says, “...if it is to disagree with what has become a fairly common understanding of Israel’s calling” – and here Collins refers to the writings of Christopher Wright and N.T. Wright. Collins finds the absence of such comments in Walton’s book problematic. He also points out that he didn’t find anything with regard to “how Genesis 1 might (or might not) encourage people to enjoy God’s world, and to study it as an act of honouring the Creator – a theme that recurs frequently in science-and-religion writers”. Finally, Collins finds this book inadequate in addressing the above shortcomings in order for lay people especially to understand the topic better.

2.8 PROPOSED THESIS

In light of this brief background, and in particular the different models of interpretation, the researcher’s preference lies with the Dialogue Model as described by Barbour, the reason being that she believes dialogue between theology and science opens up a creative platform on which dynamic and productive hermeneutical exchange can take place. She does not support an integrative approach as she agrees with Buitendag that there are fundamental differences between theology and science. For this reason the

Dialogue Model is used to present a novel interpretation of the first creation story (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) in Chapter Three based on the Sign Language of deaf people, and in dialogue with neurologist and renowned author Oliver Sacks, who sadly passed away in 2015. This interpretation will endeavour in providing some understanding of what the author of Genesis 1 meant by the words, “And God said...”.

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CHAPTER 3

CREATION: GOD'S DIVINE SIGN LANGUAGE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The fundamental components of modern science, as suggested by Barbour (1997:106-107), are particular observations and experimental data, and general concepts and theories. The question for Barbour is how data and theories are related since the inductive method in his reasoning is an inadequate explanation as it allows for a direct 'upward' arrow from data to theories. This line of logical reasoning does not take into account the fact that theories, according to Barbour, "involve novel concepts and hypotheses not found in the data", but often "refer to entities and relationships that are not directly observable", which renders the line of logical reasoning instead indirect in representing "acts of *indirect imagination*".

Barbour (1997:110-111) explains that religious traditions, in comparison to science, also have sets of data, of which each tradition's data consists of "distinctive experiences of individuals and the stories and rituals" of the particular tradition. Religious experience, of which six distinctive types recur in various religious traditions world-wide, is interpreted by a set of concepts and beliefs, which are also not a product of logical reasoning like the concepts and hypotheses of science, but is a result of "acts of creative imagination". In both disciplines analogies and models figure prominently as modes of explanation.

In religion the function of models is two-fold, according to Barbour (1997:110),

- i) [Models] express the structural elements that recur in dynamic form in narratives;
- ii) [Models] lead to abstract concepts and articulated beliefs that are systematically formalized as theological doctrines.

This chapter presents a model called DSL – the Divine Sign Language Model – which suggests that creation in the first creation story (Genesis 1:1-2:4a) is the visible language of God.

3.2 ANCIENT REALITY OF GENESIS ONE

The author of Genesis introduces his readers to an ancient world in the first chapter – a reality far removed from the present day and age. Reflecting on the first creation story, however, conjures up a picture in one’s mind of a world characterized by surprisingly familiar features, immediately raising the question of what it means – what did it mean to the ancient writer to see the world in the way it is presented in the first creation story, and what does it mean today. To answer the second question, the author’s purpose is to present the proposed research idea for this thesis namely that the first creation story presents a picture of the world emerging as God’s inaudible voice becomes visible to the human observer.

Although ‘Creation’ is a major theme that runs through both Old and New Testaments, the meaning of the word is not immediately clear, according to Fretheim (2005:3). He lists as many as eleven different words that are used in the Old Testament in reference to creation, and points out that this is an indication that “...Israel’s thought about creation was wide-ranging and complex” (Fretheim 2005:1). He makes a very important and comprehensive statement concerning creation, which many, if not most, scholars

overlook or disagree with judged by the interchangeable use of the words ‘creation’, ‘nature’ and ‘world’/‘cosmos’/‘universe’ in academic literature. He focuses attention on the fact that, creation “...in the Old Testament is a *theological* category, [which] is not to be equated with *nature* or the *world*” (Fretheim 2005:4). According to him,

To speak of “creation” is to state that the cosmos does not simply exist; it was *created* by God. More particularly... the creative activity of God includes the work of originating, continuing, and completing creation. The word creation can also be used for the *result* of such creative activity, but not in the sense of a finished product, given the reality of continuing creation. Creation also includes the activity of creatures (human and non-human) in and through which God works to create in ever new ways.

3.3 WHAT THE WORLD IS ABOUT

Human beings have since earliest times yearned to make sense of their existence and of the world they live in. This is evident from ancient mythologies from all over the world. Walton (2009:14), in dealing with the first creation story, explains that mythology “by its nature seeks to explain how the world works and how it came to work that way”. It is mythologies of ancient cultures like that of Babylonia and Egypt that give modern-day people a glimpse into the ancient world and help us to see the world as the ancient people saw it. The mythology that a particular group held to can be understood in terms of a “real description of deep beliefs” for those people, which, according to Walton (2009:15), “expressed their beliefs concerning what made the world what it was”, including “their theories of origins and how the world worked”. These mythologies included stories of the involvement and activities of gods in the world of people.

In the present-day world the discipline of science provides the theories of what the world is, how the world works and how it originated, and thus, in a sense, is representative of a modern mythology, as Walton (2009:15) suggests. Science,

however, leaves no room for God. Religion, in contrast, works from the premise that there is a God who is involved in ultimate causes and who works through the natural processes of the world. Despite this disparity, both science and religion as valid knowledge bases are essential aspects of everyday common life – they are “necessary for [this] life and for each other”, as Gilkey (1993:9) points out. Both contribute to human beings’ knowledge and understanding of the world. According to Trigg (2003:714), both science and religion must be about *something*, thereby insisting that they “need a strong realist underpinning”. That *something* must be separate from the *self* of being human; it must be about the *real* world, thus his definition of *realism*, i.e. “the doctrine that existence is separate from conceptions of it”. Science, therefore, in its endeavour of investigating the natural world, must assume that this world has an independent existence. Religion, on the other hand, must assume that the reality it is concerned about is not that of human imagination.

Despite this understanding, the pervasive idea in modern society is that the only valid knowledge about the world is that offered by science. Sheldrake (2012:6) acknowledges this general misconception when he writes that, “The biggest scientific delusion of all is that science already knows the answers”. Barbour, scientist-turned-theologian, was the first, however, to recognize that there is a correspondence between the two disciplines in that they share similar methodologies, as well as linguistic and epistemological structures (Russell & Wegter-McNelly 2003:746). To this end, Polkinghorne (1991:4), in his book, *Reason and Reality* (1991:4), reminds his readers that it was the mathematician, J.R. Carnes, who pointed out that a similar relationship exists between theology and religious experience as the one which exists between scientific theory and humans’ ordinary experience of the world. In this regard he makes

reference to what Peacocke said concerning the scientific and theological enterprises, namely that both “share alike the tools of groping humanity”. These “tools” include those words, ideas and images that have been handed down through generations, and which are “refashioned” by people in their particular context “...in the light of experiment and experience to relate to the natural world and that are available, with God’s guidance, to steer our own paths from birth to death”.

Polkinghorne (1991:4) shares his own conclusion, stating that science and theology have one thing in common, and that is “that each can be, and should be, defended as being investigations of what is, the search for increasing verisimilitude in our understanding of reality”. Trigg (2003:714) reminds his readers that it is thus important to recognize the influential role of contemporary science in its challenge to, and its effect in reshaping “the God-nature problematic” for various theological perspectives, especially evangelical theology.

3.4 CONTEMPORARY HERMENEUTICAL APPROACHES

In light of the above, it is worth noting two contemporary hermeneutical approaches pertinent to this study, which make excellent use of dialogue in creating a platform for discussion between science and theology in an attempt to understand the first creation story.

3.4.1 ‘Sculpting in time’: A Narrative-Based Hermeneutical Approach

McGrath (1999:38, 39) presents three models of how people earlier on conceived of the creative action of God, which, he says, became widely established within Christian circles by the end of the fifteenth century. These are the Emanation Model, the

Construction Model, and the Artistic Expression Model, of which the last one has some bearing on the discussion that follows. According to this model, creation is seen as the “handiwork of God”, and compared to a work of art, which McGrath explains, “is both beautiful in itself, as well as expressing the personality of its creator”. Jonathan Edwards (1705-58) is particularly known for having used this model in his writings.

In their paper titled, *Sculpting in time: the drama of a narrative-based hermeneutical approach to the early chapters of Genesis* (2011), Gregory J. Laughery and George R. Diepstra present an argument on the direction of the so-called “hermeneutical arrow” between the “scientific informer” and the “biblical narrative”. The phrase in the title, ‘Sculpting in time’, is formulated by the authors as the “drama of a narrative-based hermeneutical approach to the early chapters of Genesis”, in which the enigma of time forms an important dimension of the authors’ focus, as they state in their introduction (Laughery & Diepstra 2011:291). In the process of their investigation they engage various scholars as dialogue partners, i.e. Augustine, Thomas Mann, Paul Ricoeur, Hans Frei and John Sailhamer.

Setting the stage for their exploration into the Genesis creation story, they explain how easy it is for one attempting to comprehend the contemporary world to become entrapped in scientific evaluations. As a result of scientific investigation and the progress that has taken place in people’s understanding of the world, according to them, the importance of the biblical text have undergone “considerable reassessment”. In light of this they ask the important question, “What *informing* stature does the Genesis portrait of beginnings have today?” (Laughery & Diepstra 2011:292).

With reference to the repercussions (a so-called “new disruptive configuration of nature”) that science had during the times of people like Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo, the authors explain that the door was opened “wide for productive and corrective hermeneutical exchange between science and Scripture”. As a result, however, of science having become an increasingly important informer (seemingly the primary/sole interpretive voice) in the world, the biblical informer ran the risk of becoming “inadvertently vulnerable to trivialization” (Laughery & Diepstra 2011:292). As a further result, people’s response to this situation was, and still is, to opt for either the one or the other informer – a so-called “reactionary heavy-handedness”, according to the authors. In seeking a more “open-handed approach” between the scientific and the biblical informer, the authors believe that it is not clear as to how the informers communicate with each other – a dilemma, they say, that “frequently leads to a significant disregard for one of the informers, scientific or biblical, and produces variable degrees of polarization between them”.

They conclude by arguing for an interpretive equilibrium between the scientific informer and the biblical narrative. They base their notion of an interpretive equilibrium on the following two key observations (Laughery & Diepstra 2011:304-305):

- i) The scientific informer has in the past invoked interpretive reconfigurations of the real world that has altered our theological vision.
- ii) The biblical narrative has always presented a disruptive vision of the real world by re-describing it as having meaning and purpose far beyond itself; that is, identified as creation by a Creative Being.

For the authors the hermeneutical arrow points in both directions, and an interpretive balance is achieved “that leads to novel reconfiguration possibilities”. They believe that

the real world is "...a necessary and persistent hermeneutical factor that has to be taken into serious consideration when interpreting the narrative world of Genesis". They furthermore argue that, "Biblical theology...is impoverished when it attempts to go it alone or embraces a single arrow trajectory that refuses to acknowledge the real world in time as a valid informer" (Laughery & Diepstra 2011:305). They also believe that when one is dealing with biblical hermeneutics, one has to be prepared to deal with changing contexts and real world knowledge, which may potentially impact one's interpretation and understanding of the biblical world. Here, they refer to the current discussion surrounding human origins, and explain that traditional interpretations of human origins, which are based "on exclusive and literalistic readings of the story of origins", are being challenged by scientific knowledge gained from different sources such as anthropology, palaeontology, and genetics. They point out that such readings are "frequently characterized by a high degree of hermeneutical closure and produce a corresponding disjunction with the real world as it becomes scientifically known" (Laughery & Diepstra 2011:304, 305). If the real world informer is allowed to have a say in the matter of hermeneutics, it will thus happen that some interpretations of the creation story will eventually be deemed outmoded, others will need to be modified, and there will be those which will remain the same.

Moving to the science side of the equation, Laughery and Diepstra (2011:306) strongly believe that science needs "to move away from its metanarrative tendencies of exclusion in ignoring the biblical world and its creation account of beginnings in Genesis". They argue, like many others, that science, although a valid informer up to a point, must acknowledge "its own lack of explanatory power for that which is not less, but far more than empirical data".

3.4.2 Sound: The Creative Language of God

Pretorius, with his article, *Sound: Conceivably the creative language of God, holding all of creation in concert* (2011) situates himself firmly within the paradigm of the vibrant science-religion dialogue, calling himself a metaphysician. He justifies his approach based on the presupposition that the science and religion disciplines in and by themselves are insufficient to explain reality. He explains the basic premise to his thesis as follows, “This paper [revolves] around the idea that sound within light is the primary medium God used to bring all of creation into existence (*creation*)”. He elaborates by theorizing that, “... the harmonic tones embedded within the initial spoken light of Genesis 1:3 are still reverberating within creation today...”.

Pretorius (2011:2) proposes, with reference to the super string theory, that “the hypothesis presented ostensibly maintains that all naturally occurring structures and shapes – from the subatomic electron to the individual atomic elements, and from microscopic forms to planets, stars and galaxies, were formed and sustained by sound (vibrating energy or electromagnetic radiation) conveyed by light”. He suggests that one can in this sense therefore “envisage the effect that sound (vibrating tones) has in affording us a particular view of the universe, which helps us to unravel some of its mysteries”. His hypothesis focuses on the phrases in Genesis 1:3, “when God *said*”, and “Let there be light”.

Pretorius (2011:2, 3) develops a ‘Theology of Sound’ through “the lens of the literary framework theory”, as he explains, considering the events of Genesis to be more figurative than literal. He engages Ernst Chladni (inventor and musician) and Hans Jenny (Swiss doctor, artist and researcher) in dialogue, and explains how Chladni, for

example, showed that it is possible to create consistent patterns in dust on glass and plates through the vibrations of a violin bow (Pretorius 2011: 4, 5). Two hundred years later Jenny, who further developed Chladni's work, demonstrated that shapes and motion-patterns could materialize in mediums such as sand, spores, iron filings, water and viscous substances, which were placed on vibrating metal plates and membranes. For the purpose of this research Jenny used an instrument called the tonoscope, "an apparatus for rendering sound visible by registering the vibrations on screen", to generate frequencies ranging from low to high. Jenny's work led him to further research the effects of certain vowel sounds, which he concluded had the capacity to form shapes, "depending on the frequency of the vowel sound itself" (Pretorius 2011:5).

Pretorius (2011:5) concludes that "sound and light have expressions of power from the super-macro of the universe, right down to the uttermost reaches of subatomic space", and that "all naturally occurring structures and shapes...were ultimately created from intelligently designed and organised bundles of waveforms, possessing precise elements, geometric structure and symmetry, formed and sustained by harmonic vibrating atoms, God's secondary cause".

3.5 KNOWLEDGE OF THE WORLD

Laughery and Diepstra argue convincingly that both the scientific and the biblical informer need to be taken into account to achieve a hermeneutical balance so as to gain proper knowledge and a clear understanding of creation and the world. Pretorius, having done exactly this, has shown how powerful such an engagement between the two disciplines can be in re-shaping theological perspectives concerning God's creation and God's creative activity in this world.

The researcher's personal struggle over a period of time in trying to understand a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 in terms of God having created over a short period of six days and resting on the seventh day was the impetus behind this study. Within the context of the researcher's training as a scientist, the dialogue between science and theology provided a logical starting point for such an investigation. Pretorius' hypothesis, which resulted from such a creative interaction, is indicative of the idea that the creative sound of God's voice – so-called "sacred sound" – is inaudible to the human ear, which rules out the possibility of human beings being able to hear God's voice as God speaks creation into existence. In light of this and for the purpose of this thesis, it is therefore proposed that the sacred creative sound (God's creative words) in terms of its visible outcome ("God said...and it was so"), and not its audibility, can be 'read' (in terms of *looking at*, and *seeing*) and understood by humans in the same way as deaf people use Sign language (hereafter referred to as Sign) to communicate with each other.

3.5.1 Making Sense of the World

Collicut (2008:80) points out that the relationship, which exists between human beings and the natural world, is complex. The complexity lies therein that humans are both inhabitants of the natural world, as well as observers thereof. As inhabitants they are dependent on it and subject to its laws, and as observers, she says, they are "uniquely capable of both what may be called 'quasi-objective' thought about nature and 'reflexive' thought about themselves as part of nature".

McGrath (2011b:2) for example, writes that "the rise of the natural sciences reflects a fundamental human longing to make sense of our observations of the world". In this

regard, and with reference to Genesis 1:27, McGrath (2011b:55) points out that Christian theologians' interpretation of the idea that human beings having been created in the "image of God" affirm two central themes, one being that "humanity has been created with the capacity to make sense of God's creation".

The concept of *meaning* is important to human beings' understanding of the world. Being part of the natural world, humans establish links that relate their lives to the surrounding world, which Hefner (2006:563) equates with the establishment of meaningfulness between humans and the world they live in. He thus defines *meaning* as the establishment of a 'link' or a 'fit' between that which is important to humans in their own lives and the world they live in, explaining that this world is inclusive of human nature, as well as "larger streams of terrestrial and cosmic nature". Meaning, he says, is established, for example, "...if a person can take into account one or more natural processes – say, the evolution of life on planet Earth or big bang cosmology – and come to the conclusion either that those processes are supportive of her or his deepest values or that they are hostile to those values".

Dealing with the natural world raises the important question of how human beings can know the world, which in turn raises questions like, "What can one know? Does knowledge require certainty, and how can one know?", as Murray (2003:266) points out. *Knowledge*, like the concept of *meaning*, is difficult to define – it is neither "self-evident nor grasped in a few words", as Chalker (2006:43) explains. He believes that knowledge "is deeply embedded in the world, and [that] it changes when the view changes".

3.5.2 Discernment

In human beings' knowledge of the natural world, and their search for meaning in the patterns they observe, discernment plays a crucial role. It is within the active engagement of human beings with the natural world that they are seeking insight and understanding – 'revelation', as Hefner (2006:566) calls it – "into the meaning of nature, the nature of the world and our own human nature". It is these kind of questions, which arise as a consequence of human reflexive thought, or spiritual discernment, that, "aim directly at what is most important to [them]", i.e. their nature, their purposes, their relationships to transcendence. Discernment, thus, for Hefner (2006:564), is fundamental "to the forging of meaning", but he says that it is "not often cited as a constituent of religion and science". He mentions several important characteristics of discernment – the most pertinent one for the purpose of this study being that it is,

...an embodied process of knowing and judging. It emerges in the depths of our person, in our biology and neurobiology, as well as in our emotions and our reason.

This very thought is echoed by Collicut (2008:81), when she writes, in reference to the work by Francisco Varela and co-workers, i.e. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Varela *et al.* 1991:536), that, "Human beings are embodied, and human minds are embrained". She explains that human beings, "more than any other species...can act strategically on the natural world, using their knowledge of nature to enable 'transcendence' of some of the limitations it would otherwise impose on them". Collicut (2008:82, 83) explains that the transcendent is accessed by human beings, and their spiritual life is expressed "exclusively through the medium of [their] mortal bodies". According to her, human beings located within the natural world experience and reflect on the 'transcendent' (or the 'spiritual') through functional

cognitive and perceptual systems, which is a necessary condition, but not sufficient in itself, to see the natural world in a particular way.

McGrath (2008:11) in turn explains that, because of “a deepening understanding of the psychology of human cognition”, there is now a wider recognition within the Judeo-Christian accounts of human engagement with the world that humans actively construct a “vision of reality”. This, he says, is consistent with “a ‘critical realist’ epistemology, which affirms both the existence of an extra-mental reality and the active, constructive role of the observer in representing and interpreting it”.

Thus, the relation of science and religion, as human knowledge-seeking disciplines, to reality is crucial, because both hold truth and both “essentially represent a relation to reality that is cognitive or believed to be so”, according to Gilkey (1993:11).

This idea is affirmed by Russell and Wegter-McNelly (2003:746), who state that both disciplines

...make cognitive claims about the world expressed through metaphors and models, and both employ hypothetico-deductive method within a revisionist, contextualist, and historicist framework.

This approach, called *critical realism* by Barbour, has also been pursued by notable scholars such as John Polkinghorne, Arthur Peacocke, and others (Russell & Wegter-McNelly 2003:746). Van Kooten Niekerk (2003:190) defines critical realism as a philosophical view of knowledge. In his explanation of what it is, he points out that the concept is based on the belief that, “it is possible to acquire knowledge about the external world as it really is, independently of the human mind or subjectivity”. He

furthermore points out that because “perception is a function of, and thus fundamentally marked by the human mind...one can only acquire knowledge of the external world by critical reflection on perception and its world” – thus the idea of *critical* realism. In this regard McGrath (2008:12) concludes in his explanation of the psychology of human cognition that, according to the critical realist view, “human thought is constrained and informed by an engagement with an external reality”.

3.5.3 Perception and Objectivity

Collicut (2008:92) points out that it is essential to appreciate that human perception is not objective, explaining that, “Perception always takes place from the point of view of the perceiver”. The world, she says, “...is therefore presented from the perspective of a location in physical space and time, a location in the social and cultural group, and in terms of personal agendas and goals”. Solms and Turnbull (2002:77) clarify this further by explaining that the mind is indeed “intimately bound with the first-person observational perspective. This is the only perspective from which everything we observe can be grounded in a background sense of self, which is ultimately generated by our inner awareness of living in a physical body”.

Torrance (1969:xvii) understands the problem pertaining to human objectivity when he writes that both theological and natural sciences share the same problem, which is “...how to refer our thoughts and statements genuinely beyond ourselves, how to reach knowledge of reality in which we do not intrude ourselves distortingly into the picture, and yet how to retain the full and integral place of the human subject in it all”. Torrance (1969:35) declares that,

It is important to distinguish this understanding of objectivity from a commonly held view that objectivity means detachment, impartiality, indifference toward the object – that is to

say, the attitude of standoff from the object in order to contemplate it calmly and dispassionately, in which we suspend active relation to the object in order to prevent our commitment from warping our judgment or even to exclude the influence of our subjectivity upon the object.

3.5.4 Looking and Seeing

Located in the world in the way they are, human beings are continually dealing with an influx of sensory information coming from both the outside world, as well as from their own inner bodies. Swanson and Webster (1977:2), for example, write that human contact with the world “is through [their] five senses of touch, taste, hearing, smell and sight”. These senses enable humans to “apprehend, and to visualize to [their] own satisfaction the world of reality external to [them]”. The sensory organs of human beings are highly complex and specialized, and allow humans to respond to stimuli like sound waves, light waves, movement and so forth. All the sensory organs are connected to nerve cells that operate through the transmission of electrical impulses to the brain, which ultimately constructs meaning from all the sensory data it receives. Collicut (2008:84) explains that it is this “brain-based process of perception that corresponds to our subjective experience of the world”. She describes two conditions, *cortical blindness* and *visual agnosia*, which illustrate how the process of visual perception specifically can be disturbed through damage to certain parts of the brain (Collicut 2008:84-86).

Cortical blindness is caused when there is damage to the visual cortex in the brain, with the result that such a person cannot see even though the eyes are healthy and intact, and are responding to light input normally. Visual agnosia occurs when a different part of the cerebral cortex is damaged, with the result that a person can still see, but cannot

make sense of what she sees – in Collicut’s words (2008:86), “What goes wrong is the linking of these physical characteristics with stored knowledge of *meaning*”. A person with cortical blindness thus *looks* at the world, but cannot *see*, while a person with visual agnosia *looks* at the world, can *see* it, but cannot make *sense* of that which she sees.

Similar perceptual problems and more are described by the late Oliver Sacks, best-selling author, physician and professor of neurology at NYU School of Medicine in his books, *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat* (1985), and *The Mind’s Eye* (2010), opening up a world of perceptual impairment otherwise unknown to, and not understood by ‘normal’ people. These impairments, which have a neurological basis, cause people to lose their ability to ‘navigate’ their world and make sense thereof, which could result in bewilderment and confusion in the individual.

Apart from these, another kind of visual impairment, *achromatopsia*, is also described by Sacks in his book, *The Island of the Colour-blind and Cycad Island* (1996). Achromatopsia is a congenital visual impairment syndrome, which does not affect a person’s ability to see the world or make sense thereof. Sacks explains in this book that people of the Micronesian islands of Pingelap and Pohnpei – so-called achromats – cannot see colour, but only black, white and shades of grey. The achromats’ vision is adversely impaired by bright light, but improves at low light conditions. As a result, they would either work under low light conditions, like the island’s matt weavers, or wear sunglasses or visors.

3.6 HUMAN SIGN LANGUAGE (HSL)

Reflecting on these perceptual problems in terms of human beings' vision and how they make sense of the world, as well as the hypothesis by Pretorius of God having created through sound and light, highlights the proposed idea that vision is not the problem in understanding the first creation story, but hearing God's voice, rather. People, who have lost their sense of hearing or who have been born deaf, seem to have the extraordinary ability to make sense, and find meaning in a world otherwise easily accessible to those who have all their perceptual abilities intact. Could it be possible that the world of the deaf person and how she makes sense of the world, can somehow shed light on how ancient people made sense of the world, and thus saw God's voice instead of hearing God's voice?

3.6.1 Seeing Voices – Oliver Sacks

The title of this thesis derives from the book by Sacks, *Seeing Voices* (1991), in which he provides the very answer to the above question as he relates his encounter with deaf people. "I was astonished to learn about the history of deaf people and the extraordinary (linguistic) challenges they face, astonished too to learn of a completely visual language", he says (Sacks 1991:xi). This book tells of the amazing feat by deaf people in making sense of their world through the acquisition of a language – as Sacks (1991:xii) explains – "...of an entirely different sort, a language that serve[s] not only the powers of thought (and indeed allow[s] thought and perception of a kind not wholly imagined by the hearing), but serve[s] as the medium of a rich community and culture".

Sacks (1991:38-43) opens up the world of the deaf, explaining in reference to Joseph, an eleven-year old boy he had met at the Braefield School for the Deaf, who had

entered school for the first time at that age with no language at all, that thought and language have separate biological origins, i.e. "...that the world is examined and mapped and responded to long before the advent of language, that there is a huge range of thinking – in animals, or infants – long before the emergence of language". It was clear to Sacks that Joseph had no problems with *perceptual* categorization or generalization – that Joseph could see, distinguish, categorize, and use. It seemed to Sacks, however, that the boy could not go much beyond this – as he explains, "he could nothold abstract ideas in mind, reflect, play, or plan. He seemed completely literal..." (Sacks 1991:40). This led Sacks to conclude that a human being who does not possess any language is not mindless or mentally deficient, but rather ".....severely restricted in the range of his thoughts, confined, in effect, to an immediate, small world".

In reference to the autobiographical letter by Theophilus d'Estrella, "a gifted deaf artist and photographer", which was published in 1893 by William James, Sacks relates the fact that d'Estrella did not start to acquire a formal sign language until the age of nine (Sacks 1991:40, 41). In this letter d'Estrella shared a significant insight with James – that before this, he "thought in pictures and signs before [he] came to school". In fact, he did consider himself to be a thinking person, even though he did not have any language. For him, language "served to 'elaborate' his thoughts without being necessary for thought in the first place". James drew the same conclusion as Sacks had with Joseph – that d'Estrella, although languageless, was "clearly inquisitive, imaginative, and thoughtful, even speculative, as a child" (Sacks 1991:41).

The idea that language is not necessary for thought processes is clearly supported by the testimonies of famous scientists. With reference to renowned mathematician, Roger Penrose, for example, James concluded that evidence points to the fact that thought (in

Penrose's case mathematical thought) can proceed in the absence of language. Penrose admittedly said that, "words are almost useless for mathematical thinking". For Albert Einstein the same seems to have been true – in his own words, "The words or the language as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought". Jacques Hadamard also admitted in *The Psychology of Mathematical Invention* that, "...words are totally absent from my mind when I really think" (Sacks 1991: 41, 42).

3.6.2 Characteristics of Sign

Sign was originally not regarded as a true language, even by signers. Roch Ambroise Bébien, however, was the first person to realize that Sign had an autonomous grammar of its own (Irvine 1985:146; Sacks 1991:76). Today, Sign is regarded as a true language, and not as mime or as gesture. It is "seen as fully comparable to speech (in terms of its phonology, its temporal aspects, its streams and sequences), but with unique, additional powers of a spatial and cinematic sort – at once `a most complex and yet transparent expression and transformation of thought", according to Sacks (1991:90).

For Sacks (1991:88) the single most remarkable feature of Sign is its "unique linguistic use of space". This is what he believes, distinguishes Sign from all other languages and mental activities. Edward S. Klima and Ursula Bellugi in 1970 conceived of the concept of 'grammar in space', or a 'grammaticization of space'. Sacks (1991:77) elaborates further by using the eloquent terms, 'spatial grammar', 'spatial syntax', 'spatial language', a 'linguistic use of space', which, he says, is extraordinarily difficult for

hearing people to imagine as they lack any personal experience of grammaticizing space, as well as any neural substrate for it.

Sacks (1991:80, 85) explains that Sign as a visual language is a highly expressive language, which, according to Beluggi's observations can be changed to express different meanings through grammar and syntax. The root sign for 'look-at', for example, can be modulated in space to provide a number of different meanings such as 'stare', 'look at incessantly', 'gaze', 'watch', 'look for a long time', and 'look again and again" (Sacks 1991:86).

Sacks (1991:88) writes that, "The complexity of this linguistic space is quite overwhelming for the 'normal' eye, which cannot see, let alone understand, the sheer intricacy of its spatial patterns". He continues by explaining that the linguistic use of space by Sign in terms of its lexical, grammatical, and syntactic constituents "is amazingly complex, for much of what occurs linearly, sequentially, temporally in speech, becomes simultaneous, concurrent, multileveled in Sign" – "what looks so simple is extraordinarily complex and consists of innumerable spatial patterns nested, three-dimensionally, in each other".

3.7 DIVINE SIGN LANGUAGE

In light of this it is thus proposed that the created world represents the 'linguistic space' within which God's sacred, inaudible voice becomes visible to the human observer, who interprets the 'signs' and makes sense of what she sees.

In Sign language, ‘sign’ denotes amongst other things the location, shape, and movement of the hand as the signer communicates with another person, as proposed by William Stokoe (Sacks 1991:78). Bellugi (1991:14) confirms this observation and explains, with reference to American Sign Language (ASL) and Chinese Sign Language (CSL), that Sign is “composed of simultaneously articulated layered elements consisting of a small set of handshapes, locations, and movements”. Moreover, she says that, “Morphological patterning is layered simultaneously with the root”. A diagrammatic representation in Fig. 3.1 explains the basic process between a human signer and a human interpreter.

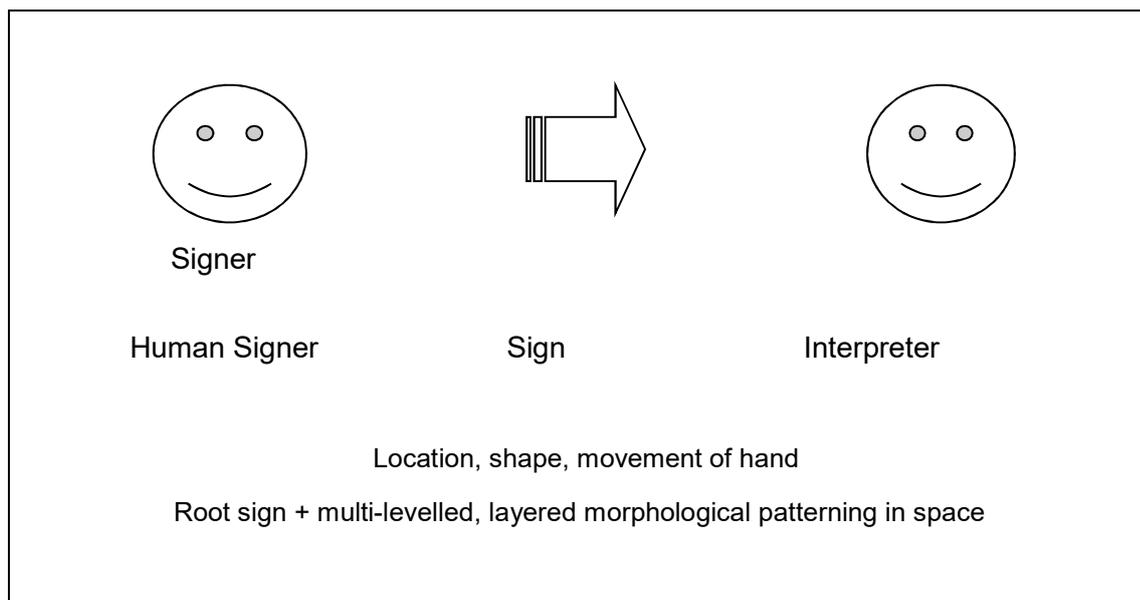


Fig. 3.1 A diagrammatic representation of signing between two human beings.

For the purpose of this thesis, the same basic principles of Sign will be employed to explain the proposed idea of creation being God’s divine Sign language (hereafter referred to as DSL). In this instance, though, ‘sign’ will denote slightly different, but equivalent elements compared to human Sign – (i) a signifier, and (ii) a pattern consisting of various internal referents. The additional element of divine revelation,

however, is needed in order for the signifier and the pattern to form a meaningful sign. Fig. 3.2 shows a diagrammatic representation of how the process unfolds as human beings observe and interpret creation as God's creative words (inaudible, sacred sound) in its visible outcome in the natural world.

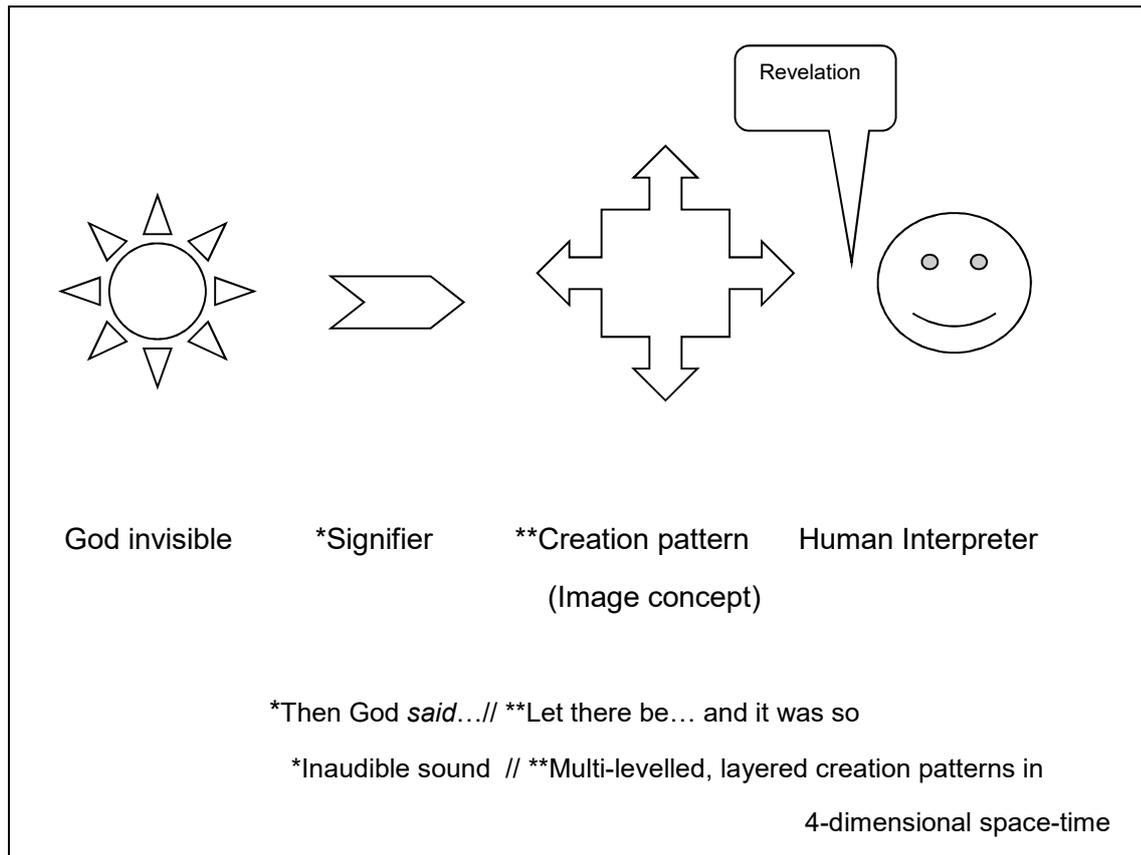


Fig. 3.2 A diagrammatic representation of 'divine signing' between God, through His creation, and the human observer (interpreter).

3.7.1 Analysis of Genesis One

For the purpose of this study the *signifier* denotes God's creatively spoken Word. Analysis of the first creation story, according to the method of Robbins (1996), indicates that there are ten signs that are introduced by ten signifiers, which correspond to those instances where God speaks, i.e. (i) *Then God said* – Genesis 1:3, 1:6, 1:9, 1:11, 1:14,

1:20, 1:24 and 1:26; (ii) *God said* – 1:28, and (iii) *God also said* – 1:29 (Table 3.1). The *signifier* is equivalent to the so-called *root signs* in Sign language, and is modulated in space and time similar to the way the root sign for ‘look’, for example, is modulated in space and time to give different meanings to it (refer 3.5.2). Each signifier is directly linked, in most instances, to two primary internal referents, which in turn are linked to various secondary referents. Together, they act as modulators, which modulate each signifier, giving rise to specific patterns, which become visible within four-dimensional space-time as a result of God speaking as God creates. These patterns are meaningless to the human observer without divine revelation, which forms an integral part of each divine creation sign.

Table 3.1 Analysis of Genesis 1, according to the method of Robbins (1996).

<p>A In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth [1:1]</p>
<p>B</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Now the earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the surface of the watery depths... [1:2]. • <i>Then God said, ‘Let there be light’</i> [1:3]. • <i>God called the light ‘day’, and He called the darkness ‘night’</i> [1:5]. • Evening came and then morning: the [first] day [1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31].
<p>C Creation patterns introduced by TEN signifiers. <i>Then God said, ‘Let there be..... and it was so’.</i></p>
<p>B'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By the seventh day, God completed His work that He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had done [2:2]. • God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, for on it He rested from His work of creation [2:3].
<p>A' So the heavens and the earth <u>and everything</u> in them were completed [2:1].</p>

3.7.1.1 Sign #1 (Genesis 1:3-5)

The first signifier in Genesis 1 is found in vs. 3, *Then God said*. This signifier is modulated by two primary referents, also in vs. 3:

Then God said: (i) *Let there be...* (ii) *...and there was.*

These referents form a boundary within which a bigger picture unfolds within four-dimensional space-time. The first signifier signifies light coming into existence through God's spoken Word (vs. 3),

Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light.

Three secondary referents modulate the signifier further, and allow a close-up look of what God does within God's work of creating light:

- i) God looks at His creation (v. 4): *God saw that the light was good,*
- ii) God separates (vs. 4): *God separated the light from the darkness, and*
- iii) God gives names (vs. 5): *God called the light 'day', and He called the darkness 'night'.*

Pattern: The first creation pattern is established between light and darkness, exhibiting a deceptive simplicity. Light and darkness, night and day, cannot and do not exist apart from each other – they form an inseparable unit within the pattern and with God's creative word, and they are nested in (linked to) with all the other creation patterns. It is only when the relationship between light and darkness is established that day and night becomes functional as a unit. Seen as separate creation entities light and darkness cannot be understood for what they are.

3.7.1.2 Sign #2 (Genesis 1:6-8)

The two primary referents (vs. 6, 7), which modulate the second signifier (vs. 6) are basically the same as for the first one, i.e.

Then God said: (i) *Let there be...* (ii) *And it was so.*

The second pattern emerging from the modulation of this signifier is that of an expanse appearing (vs. 6 & 7),

Then God said, 'Let there be an expanse between the waters, separating water from water'. And it was so.

Once again, the secondary referents allow a close-up view of God's creative activities within four-dimensional space-time in bringing the expanse into existence:

- i) God makes the expanse (vs. 7): *So God made the expanse...*,
- ii) God separates the waters from each other (vs. 7): *...and [God] separated the water under the expanse from the water above the expanse,*
- iii) God names His creation (vs. 8): *God called the expanse 'sky'.*

Pattern: This passage explains how God creates the expanse by separating the waters below from the waters above. The creation pattern is established between the expanse and the waters below, and the waters above. Similar to the pattern in the first sign, the expanse and the waters in this pattern cannot, and do not, exist in isolation from one another or from the creative word of God. Only as a unit it becomes functional in supporting life on earth.

3.7.1.3 Sign #3 (Genesis 1:9-10)

The first primary referent linked to this signifier is slightly modified, i.e. three times the word 'let' is used alone:

Then God said: (i) *Let...* (twice in vs. 9 & once in vs. 10),

while the second referent remains the same:

(ii) *And it was so* (vs. 9).

Here, land is created by God separating it from the water (vs. 9), which covered the earth (refer vs. 2),

Then God said, *'Let the water under the sky be gathered in one place, and let the dry land appear'. And it was so.*

Two secondary referents are linked with this, i.e.

- i) God gives names (vs. 10): *God called the dry land 'earth', and He called the gathering of waters 'seas', and*
- ii) God looks at His creation (vs. 10): *And God saw that it was good.*

Pattern: The third pattern is established between the sea and land through God's act of separating the land from the sea, and God giving names to it. Sea and land, although separated from each other, do not exist apart from each other on earth, or the creative word of God.

According to Walton (2007:187), the phrase "it was good" is repeatedly offered by the biblical text "to describe the successful setting of each piece in its ordered place".

The view offered in this thesis, however, disagrees with Walton's view – here, it is suggested in the context of the DSL Model that the phrase rather refer to the

successful establishment of the relationships between the created elements, and that these relationships work well.

The creation patterns up to this point have been relatively simple. As the patterns further unfold, it is evident that they are becoming increasingly more detailed and complex with God assigning functions to the material creation, which all form an integral part of the creation patterns.

3.7.1.4 Sign #4 (Genesis 1:11-13)

The fourth signifier in vs.11 introduces the next creation pattern in which the two primary referents modulate the signifier yet again and point to the bigger picture that unfolds:

Then God said: (i) *Let...* (ii) *And it was so.*

The pattern shows the earth producing vegetation according to God's spoken Word (vs.11):

Then God said, 'Let the earth produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants, and fruit trees on the earth bearing fruit with seed in it, according to their kinds'. And it was so.

This pattern is only completed when the signifier is modulated by a detailed explanation, which acts as the first secondary referent. Here, God, by God's creative Word, invests power in the land (earth) by enabling it to produce vegetation (vs.12):

i) *The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it, according to their kinds.*

The second secondary referent follows on this – here, once again, God is looking at God’s creative handiwork (vs. 12):

- ii) *And God saw that it was good.*

Pattern: This sign consists of a main pattern with smaller patterns nested within it. Here, the main pattern is established between the plants and the earth, i.e. plants need their earthly substrate, and do not exist apart from it. The smaller patterns identified within this pattern are that of, (i) plants producing seeds, and (ii) fruit trees producing fruit with seeds in them. Once again, these things do not exist apart from each other and from the earth, or from God’s creative word. The main pattern is nested in with all the other patterns. The detailed explanation in this creation pattern points to the fact that the earth and the particular vegetation mentioned here have an important role to fulfil – a fact which becomes evident in sign #7 (Genesis 1:24), and confirmed in the last sign (#10) when God tells human beings what their food, and that of the animals would be (Genesis 1:29, 30).

3.7.1.5 Sign #5 (Genesis 1:14-19)

This signifier, like the previous one, introduces another complex and detailed creation pattern with regard to the explanations offered about the functions of the objects created by God.

The signifier is modulated once again by the same two primary referents like before (vs. 14, 15):

- Then God said: (i) *Let there be...* (ii) *And it was so.*

Within this unfolding creation pattern God is making lights, and placing them in the expanse (vs. 14, 15),

Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky...' And it was so.

The signifier is modulated further by three secondary referents, which offer detailed explanations about the functions of the lights (vs. 14-18) – God made the lights (vs. 16), *God made the two great lights – the greater light... and the lesser light,*

- i) God placed the lights:
God placed them in the expanse... (vs. 17),
- ii) God gave functions to the lights:
 - a. *...to separate the day from the night (vs. 14),*
 - *...the greater light [will] have dominion over the day and the lesser light [will] have dominion over the night (vs. 16).*
 - *...to dominate the day and night (vs. 18)*
 - *...to separate light from darkness (vs. 18),*
 - b. *They will be lights in the expanse of the sky to provide light on the earth (vs. 15),*
 - *...to provide light on the earth (vs 17),*
 - c. *They will serve as signs for festivals and for days and years (vs .14).*
- iii) God looks at His creation (vs. 18): *and God saw that it was good.*

Pattern: This passage explains the creation of the various heavenly bodies and their placement in the expanse, with God naming them and giving them functions. The pattern is established between these bodies and their location within the expanse, and the specific functions given to them. These heavenly bodies do not exist apart from their specific location, and do not have any significance without their specific functions. The detailed explanations point to the fact that the lights, and their functions in particular, are of great significance within the greater scheme of creation.

This pattern is directly nested in with the first pattern, and by implication to all the rest of the patterns as indicated by the repetitive phrase, “Evening came, and then morning: the first [second, and so forth] day”.

3.7.1.6 Sign #6 (Genesis 1:20-23)

The sixth signifier also introduces a complex creation pattern with secondary referents that offer detailed explanations about the objects of creation. The signifier is still the same as the previous signifiers, while the first primary referent is the same as the one linked to the fourth signifier, i.e. only one word, *Let...* (vs. 20):

Then God said: (i) *Let...*

In this instance the second primary referent, *And it was so*, does not appear like before. Instead, there are detailed explanations about the creation of the sea creatures and the birds (vs. 20):

Then God said, ‘*Let the water swarm with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky*’.

The two creation patterns, which are introduced here are left ‘open-ended’, and are only completed together with the next creation pattern introduced by the seventh signifier. The signifier of these two creation patterns is modulated by four secondary referents of which the first one is repeated twice, while the fourth referent is new (vs. 21-22):

- i) First, God creates the sea creatures (vs. 21): *So God created the large sea-creatures and every living creature that moves and swarms in the water, according to their kinds;*
- ii) Secondly, God creates all the birds to live in the sky (vs. 21): *He also created every winged bird according to its kind;*

- iii) The third secondary referent is where God once again observes His work (vs. 21): *And God saw that it was good;*
- iv) The fourth secondary referent is a new referent, because God now blesses the creatures that He had made (vs. 22): *So God blessed them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth'.*

Pattern: Two creation patterns are introduced in this sign. The first pattern is the relationship that is established between the sea-creatures (and every living creature) and the waters (sea). Here, there is no specific reference to fish only, but a reference to sea-creatures and living creatures according to their kind. This points to some knowledge of the various kinds of sea-dwelling creatures, and the understanding from the passage clearly is that these creatures and the waters do not exist apart from each other. The waters do not have any significance or function in and by itself. It only becomes significant and functional in its support of living sea creatures, and *vice versa*.

The second pattern in this sign is the relationship that is established between the birds and the expanse (sky). From this pattern it is evident that birds and sky do not exist apart from each other either. In the ancient mind birds were made to fly, and they can only fly if there is an expanse. On the other hand, the “invisible” expanse becomes “visible” – a functional reality – only when birds are seen flying in it. Seemingly, the presupposition is that all birds fly. This picture does not reflect modern-day scientific knowledge of birds that do not have the ability to fly, like penguins, ostriches etc. Both patterns are directly linked to God’s creative word as well as God’s blessing.

3.7.1.7 Sign #7 (Genesis 1:24-25)

In vs. 24 the seventh signifier introduces the creation of creatures living on land,

Then God said, 'Let the earth produce living creatures according to their kinds: livestock, creatures that crawl, and the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds'. And it was so.

The first primary referent is the same as in the previous pattern, and the second primary referent completes this pattern together as well as the previous two patterns in Sign #6. Both these two referents appear in vs. 24 together with the signifier:

Then God said: i) Let... ii) And it was so.

This signifier is modulated by two secondary referents only (vs. 25):

- i) First, God makes the animals:
So God made the wildlife of the earth according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and creatures that crawl on the ground according to their kinds.

- ii) God once again looks at His creative handiwork:
And God saw that it was good.

Pattern: This sign introduces a pattern in which a relationship is established between the earth (land) and all animal life, which marks the dependence of animals on the land. The land in itself is not functional unless it supports animal life, in this case, plant life as described in sign #4, and human life by implication as described in sign #10. The same is true in turn for animal, plant and human life – it is not functional unless there is land to support it.

3.7.1.8 Sign #8 (Genesis 1:26-28)

The eighth signifier in vs. 26 introduces the creation pattern, which shows the creation of the first man and woman:

Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'.

This signifier is modulated only by one primary referent:

Then God said: (i) Let...

Once again, this creation pattern is left 'open-ended' and completed only later together with the last two creation patterns. The signifier is modulated by three secondary referents, which points to:

- i) A detailed explanation of how God creates man[kind] (vs. 27):
*So God created man in His own image;
He created him in the image of God;
He created them male and female.*
- ii) A description of God purposefully assigning a particular task (with reference to the animal world) to the human beings He is going to create (vs. 26):
*They will rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the livestock,
all the earth, and the creatures that crawl on the earth.*
- iii) A description of God blessing these human creatures after having created them (vs. 28):
God blessed them.

Pattern: In this pattern a relationship is established (i) between human beings and God in that they have been created in His image, (ii) between human beings as male and female, (iii) between human beings and all living creatures in that they must 'rule' over these living creatures. Human beings are creatures themselves, situated

within creation together with all other living creatures, but they are different in that they have a direct relationship with God, and the other living creatures by implication through human beings. Human beings are dependent on their relationship with God, and are only properly functional as human beings within this relationship with God, but also in their relationship with each other, all other living creatures and the earth. They are blessed functioning within this relationship with God and the rest of creation.

3.7.1.9 Sign #9 (Genesis 1:28)

The second last signifier is linked to the blessing in the previous pattern, which God had pronounced over human beings (vs. 28).

[God blessed them], **and God said to them...**

There are no primary referents in this pattern. It seems that the first primary referent here is inferred from the eighth signifier in vs. 26, and the second primary referent is inferred from the tenth and last signifier in vs. 29. There is only one secondary referent in this pattern (vs. 28):

God commands human beings directly to fulfil two specific tasks – one in reference to themselves, and the other in reference to animal world.

- (i) The first task is modulated by the use of three different words, emphasizing the importance thereof (refer vs. 22):
...and God said to them, 'Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, [and subdue it]'.
- (ii) The second task is equally important: *...and subdue it [the earth]* – this task is modulated by a description of how the earth must be subdued (refer vs. 26),

Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.

Pattern: This pattern is directly nested in with the previous pattern. A further relationship is established between human beings and the God-given functions they have to fulfil in their capacity as caretakers of the earth. Like all the other living creatures they are obligated to multiply and fill the earth, but also take care of the earth and everything in it. They can only do this as they stand in a relationship with God.

3.7.1.10 Sign #10 (Genesis 1:29-31)

The last signifier, which introduces the tenth pattern, consists of the signifier (vs 29), and the second primary referent (vs. 31):

God also said: *And it was so.*

This pattern is characterized by two secondary referents of which the first one reveals God communicating directly with the human beings He has created:

- (i) Here, God is telling them what He is giving them and all the animals as food (vs. 29 & 30):

God also said, 'Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth, and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This food will be for you, for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth – everything having the breath of life in it. I have given every green plant for food'. And it was so.

- (ii) God once again looks at His creation (vs. 31):

God saw all that He had made, and it was very good.

Pattern: In this final pattern God has the final say. God repeats what God has said before (sign #4) concerning the plants, which God has given for food to all living creatures, including human beings. The relationship that has been established between God and God's creation on earth is finalized with God as the source from which all life flows, and the source by which all life is sustained. God's creation in terms of all the relationships God has established in order to sustain life in the natural world as confirmed by the words, ... *and it was very good.*

3.8 THE DSL MODEL EXPLAINED

3.8.1 Spatial-Temporal Creation Patterns of Genesis One

Various spatial-temporal creation patterns have been identified in Genesis 1, which are nested within each other. The first feature of these patterns comparable to that of HSL is the fact that they do not, and cannot, exist apart from the creative word of God (sacred, inaudible sound). This is in accordance with the way in which the signs in HSL do not, and cannot exist apart from the person signing when she communicates through HSL. The creation patterns are generated by God's creative word as God creates, with the human interpreter reading and understanding the visible outcome as observed in nature. This feature is fully comparable to HSL whereby the patterns are generated by the person signing ('talking'), and another person interpreting ('reading' and understanding) the signs, enabled by the fact that she has learnt to use sign language, either being a deaf person herself or trained as an interpreter.

DSL exhibits one of HSL's most unique features, namely its "linguistic use of space", as Sacks (1991:88) calls it. DSL is thus fully comparable to HSL in terms of its spatial character, which in this case, is established by the primary and secondary referents.

This unique feature is evident in the way in which the creation patterns are inseparably linked to each other spatially – to use Sacks’ eloquent words referring to HSL patterns – “nested, three-dimensionally, in each other” (Sacks 1991:88), which adds to the overall level of complexity. Moreover, DSL also exhibits the temporal character which is characteristic of HSL. Stokoe was the first linguist who has brought to light the fact that HSL is the only language, which has to its disposal four dimensions – three spatial dimensions and one dimension of time (Sacks 1991:90). This space-time dimensional character of DSL results in the creation patterns being very simple, yet, at the same time very complex. Both the simplicity and intricacy of the spatial-temporal creation patterns are so overwhelmingly subtle to the human eye that it makes it impossible for humans to see them, and understand their significance. This is supported by what Sacks (1991:88, 90) says about HSL, “The complexity of this linguistic space is quite overwhelming for the ‘normal’ eye, which cannot see, let alone understand, the sheer intricacy of its spatial patterns” – “what looks so simple is extraordinarily complex and consists of innumerable spatial patterns nested, three-dimensionally, in each other”. Furthermore, he says of HSL spatial patterns, they are “...amazingly complex, for much of what occurs linearly, sequentially, temporally in speech, becomes simultaneous, concurrent, multileveled in Sign”. The same is true for all the creation patterns at every level – what is described in Genesis 1 in a seemingly linear, sequential and temporal sense, is, in fact, extraordinarily complex as all the creation patterns are nested in each other in four-dimensional space-time.

As a result of this spatial feature, DSL also exhibits the same unique, additional powers of a “cinematic sort”, which Sacks (1991:90) talks about in reference to HSL. This allows a ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’ effect as a result of the signifiers (*And God*

said...) being modulated by the primary (*Let it be...*) and secondary (*And it was so...*) internal referents. This effect is created by what can be likened to ‘parsing’ in other languages, including HSL. Here, God’s creative word is being ‘parsed’ by the use of seven verbs in Genesis 1, namely ‘separate’, ‘name’, ‘make’, ‘create’, ‘place’, ‘bless’ and ‘give’. By using these verbs God’s creative word is powerfully enhanced, with the result that the creation patterns are projected into three-dimensional space. Simultaneously, movement is rendered to the patterns, thereby extending them into the fourth dimension, namely time. This is once again elegantly illustrated by insights gained from HSL. Sacks (1991:101) talks of an “enhanced power of ‘movement parsing’” in signers, which, he says, is “analogous to the ability to break down and analyze speech from a continuous and ever-changing pattern of sound waves” in hearing people. He explains that it is “essential to the comprehension of a visual language, which is extended in time as well as in space”. This ‘parsing’ allows each of God’s ten creative words to be broken down into smaller units through the use of the seven verbs, and analyzed in a way similar to the so-called ‘movement parsing’ that Sacks talks about.

Laughery and Diepstra (2011:301) talk about the Genesis creation drama as being “...transhistorical in the sense that it has the capacity to break out of its immediate cultural context, without denying or effacing it, and to continue to show itself as a story that carries a temporal mark that is fitting for any time”. The interpretation in this thesis, however, points to more than first creation story being a mere story carrying “a temporal mark that is fitting for any time” – as a result of the four-dimensional space-time character of DSL, the creation patterns in Genesis 1 do not remain static or ‘frozen’ in one or two dimensions, i.e. part of an oral account of creation or an ancient

written document, but they become real and transcend space and time, thus becoming 'transhistorical' in real space-time acquiring an *eviternal* (perpetual) nature.

Fig. 3.3 demonstrates creation in four-dimensional space through the powerful, creative word of God, and shows how the creation patterns become transhistorical through the dimension of time, thereby attaining an eviternal nature. The creation patterns (relational) have been established by God once and for all in the beginning when God did God's divine work of creating the heavens and the earth (Genesis 2:3), but they extend into future time.

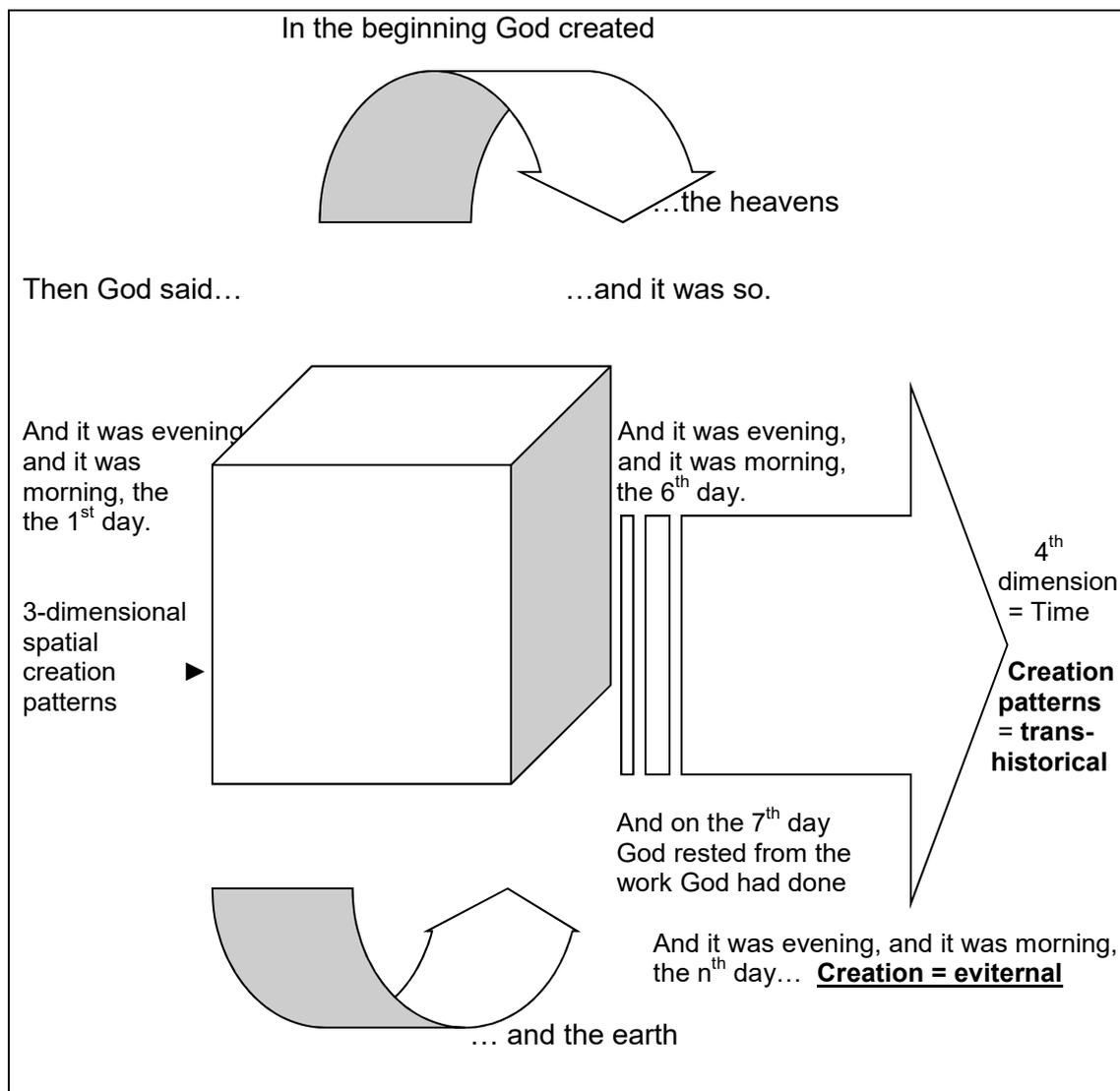


Fig. 3.3 A diagrammatic representation of creation by God's word in four-dimensional space-time.

3.8.2 The Relational Framework

The creation patterns introduced by the ten signifiers form part of a bigger picture. Together, they form an integrated whole, which is nested in two overarching creation patterns that 'frame' God's creative activity. The main pattern is established on the basis of five referents, i.e. (i) God, (ii) God's work of creating, (iii) the beginning and end (completion) of God's creative work, (iv) God resting, and (v) God blessing the seventh day.

This pattern is established in Genesis 1:1 with the use of the words,

In the *beginning* God **created** [the heavens and the earth],

and completed in Genesis 2:1-2,

So [the heavens and the earth and everything] in them were *completed*. By the seventh day, God *completed* His **work** that He had **done**, and He *rested* from His **work** that He had **done**.

This pattern is demonstrated in Table 3.1, and indicated by the letters A and A', and clearly shows that God's creative work encompasses all of creation – 'the heavens and the earth and everything' (Genesis 2:1). Nothing that exists, exists apart from God and God's creative word. The heavens and the earth in itself also do not exist apart from each other – they form an inseparable whole, and represent the totality of God's work of creating that which exists. This is supported by Waltke (2007:179), who explains that the use of the "biblical compound phrase 'heaven and earth' is a merism, a statement of opposites, that elsewhere indicates the totality of the organized universe (i.e., 'the natural world')". This idea of totality is confirmed in Genesis 2:1 by the use of the phrase, "the heavens and the earth *and everything*". This pattern firmly establishes, without a doubt, the fact that it is God who created *everything* that exists. This intricate pattern shows that God, God's work within four-dimensional space-time, rest and blessing are inseparably linked to each other.

The second pattern is somewhat more difficult to identify, but forms the bridge between the beginning and completion (not end) of God's work. For God to begin and complete God's work, there must be a duration of time – in human terms speaking. Thus, the

referents for this pattern – a time pattern – are the words “the first day” (Genesis 1:5), its repetitive use in Genesis 1:8, 13, 19, 23 and 31, and the words ‘the seventh day’ in Genesis 2:2-3 (B and B' in Table 3.1). Without this ‘time bridge’, the ‘beginning’ and ‘completion’ of God’s work of creation would be meaningless within the Genesis 1 story.

3.8.3 Creation Patterns: Making Sense

Human beings have a strong propensity to ask questions, particularly questions about meaning. We observe certain things, and want to know what their meaning is, asking the question, “What is the deeper significance of the patterns around us?”, or in more common terms, “What is the point of all of this?”. This is one of the significant questions that people ask at some point in their lives, and it is the same question posed by F. David Peat as he writes about the maps that people have in their heads – so-called mental maps that help them navigate the world by making sense of their surroundings – mental maps, for example, of the “Natives of Micronesia [who] are able to navigate with accuracy far out of sight of land, the Naskapi of Labradore [who] can find last year’s trails under many feet of snow”, the “Blackfoot, the Cree and many other Indigenous American groups all [who] have maps in their heads, the Australian aborigines [who] know the dreaming tracks of their remote ancestors” (Peat 1989:2-3). These mental maps, as Peat explains, allow these people to make sense of their world, to understand how their world function, and help them find their way.

Western civilization has had a desire to understand the universe since the time of the ancient Greeks. Peat (1989:1) believes that the “spirit of that quest is still with us” as

human beings look for patterns within the universe. The high premium that is placed on the importance of science in this day and age demonstrates human beings' longing to make sense of their observations of the world. This human quest for meaning is highlighted by McGrath (2009:1) as he writes in his book, *A Fine-Tuned Universe*, that it is "a truth of nature that we yearn to make sense of nature". He elaborates further by saying that, "Science is about sense-making", and that the impetus behind the natural sciences is to try and identify patterns within the natural world (McGrath 2011b:22). He points out that the power of natural sciences as a sense-making endeavour points to more than just its ability to identify patterns in nature, but is to be found in its ability to seek out "the deeper structures" which can account for the patterns.

Hungarian chemist Michael Polanyi (1967:24) equates this "deeper structure" to a "hidden reality", writing that, "The pursuit of [scientific] discovery is guided by sensing the presence of a hidden reality toward which our clues are pointing". McGrath (2011b:3) also refers to these "clues", positing that, "The world around us seems to be studded with clues to a greater vision of life". For him it is almost as if human beings' "intellectual antennae are tuned to discern [these] clues to purpose and meaning around [them]" – clues, he believes, which are "built into the structure of the world" (McGrath 2009:2). McGrath (2011b:23) explains that the word "clue" is significant in the sense that it points "to a degree of uncertainty" in human knowledge, thereby leading to questions about meaning. The human mind, he says, is able to discern patterns within nature "that are laden with significance and meaning" (McGrath 2009:3). These patterns or "clues", according to McGrath (2011b:23), "are not hard proofs, but soft pointers".

Religion plays an equally important role in the quest for meaning despite many people's objection to the idea (Gilkey 1993:9; Trigg 2003:714). In religious terms, James (1956:51) for example, uses the word 'riddles', saying that, "Religious faith is faith in the existence of an unseen order of some kind in which the riddles of the natural order may be found and explained". These patterns, or riddles, or clues, whether formulated in religious, scientific or other terms, can be likened to the so-called 'dot-pictures' found in colouring-in books of children – to use McGrath's illustration – where the child has to join the dots in order to see the 'hidden' picture. The question is how the seemingly random, meaningless dots in this world should be joined in a coherent fashion so that the hidden picture can become visible, and thus be understood by human beings.

Sacks (1991:74) posits that reality is not given to people, but constructed by them in their own way. This is well illustrated by Collicut (2008:89, 90), who offers an answer from a psychological perspective, which is of particular importance to this thesis, explaining that humans join these dots by an active process of constructing mental representations of the physical world. This construction happens as a result of the process by which humans fit sensory data into mental maps – so-called "schemas", as they are called in psychology – "of varying complexity that represent the individual's environment in terms of its spatial layout, the identity of objects, and the relationship between them" (Collicut 2008:87, 88). Collicut explains that these mental maps of the world are "sets of rules or scripts for negotiating the world", which "help make the world understandable because they make it more predictable and manageable" (Collicut 2008:86, 87). She emphasizes the fact that there is no such thing as objective human perception, and that it "always takes place from the point of view of the perceiver" (Collicut 2008:92). With specific reference to how human beings perceive space, she

explains that it is not about the absolute location of X in space, but rather about where X is in relation to the observer.

Perception of space in this sense is particularly characteristic in the deaf person as she exhibits a keen sense of observing spatial relationships between objects in space, as well as their position in relation to her own. This is well illustrated by Sacks (1991:69-75) as he relates the story of six-year old Charlotte, a congenitally deaf girl, who learned to sign as a baby. Although profoundly deaf, her parents described her as being “interested, thoughtful, and competent” (Sacks 1991:72, 73). Having observed her closely, Sacks describes her as being “full of questions, full of curiosity, full of life – a delightful, imaginative, and playful child, vividly turned on to the world and others”. Having accompanied her and her parents on an outing into nature once, Sacks observed that Charlotte was fascinated by the natural world – that she loved it in an intelligent way, having had “an eye for different habitats, for the way things live together”, perceiving “cooperation and competition, the dynamics of existence”.

Peat also describes the mental maps of indigenous people exhibiting similar relational characteristics. He believes that these mental maps have to do with far more than just merely finding ancient tracks – for him it “involves the whole relationship between the land and the people” (Peat 1989:3). The relational character which HSL exhibits, as well as that found in Collicut’s schemas and Peat’s mental maps, strongly resonates with DSL as it describes creation in terms of various patterns that exist in relation to the word of God, in relation to each other, and in relation to the human observer. The first creation story culminates with the ultimate relational pattern – that which exists

between God and God's creation. This characteristic points to a total dependence upon God and God's powerful, creative word.

Within the framework of the DSL Model, this thesis posits that creation is not about a collection of individual, isolated objects that have been created on particular days or within a particular time period. In this paradigm the creation patterns of Genesis 1, exhibiting a particular relational character and nested in each other three-dimensionally, are not static, abstracted representations of space as historical interpretations of Genesis 1 insist upon. Instead, they are counterintuitive and form a network of mutuality – a complex web of interrelated, interdependent and interactive patterns, which do not lend themselves to absolute localization in space. This idea of non-local representations of space ask for complementary views of space, time and causality, as Peat (2012:2) suggests. The problem, as he explains, is that “terms like space, distance, location and separation have all become coloured by hundreds of years of thinking about space in a particular way”. He suggests that non-locality may “indeed play a significant role in mind and nature”, and argues that “non-locality is in many ways a more natural way of looking at the world and is certainly not alien to our deepest thinking”. Polkinghorne (1991:94, 95) refers to non-locality as a “strange togetherness-in-separation”, which perhaps, is more descriptive of the interrelatedness of the patterns identified in Genesis 1 than the word “non-locality” itself.

Collicut (2008:94, 95) emphasizes the fact that “the representation of space in human perception is highly egocentric and ‘enactive’”, but acknowledges that [some] humans do have the ability to achieve so-called “allocentric” representations of space, which

she explains, “free them [to some extent] from their own perspective and enable them to take a bird’s-eye view.....and requires the ability to carry out mental rotations”. She warns, though, that although these bird’s-eye views are not egocentric, they are not wholly objective in an absolute sense either. Peat (1989:1) offers a satisfying explanation in this regard, explaining that “the patterns of nature originate within the dynamic exchange between observer and observed”. These patterns, according to him, “exist neither totally objectively nor totally subjectively but in the space between” – that landscape where meaning is to be found. In reference to science, Peat (1989:2) says that science is “concerned with a landscape of meaning which has its origin both in thought and intuition as well as its various instruments of investigation and experimentation”, but he questions whether the landscape of science is truly satisfying. The answer to this is offered by Laughery and Diepstra’s argument that both the scientific and the biblical informer are important to achieve a hermeneutical balance.

Sacks (1991:96) talks about a ‘formal space’ in terms of HSL, explaining that signers develop a “new and extraordinarily sophisticated way of representing space; a new *sort* of space, a formal space”, which has no analogue in people that cannot sign. The establishment of such a formal space has led to an enhancement of visual-cognitive and visual-logical functions in deaf people, allowing them to be much more visually adept than people who can hear – in other words, to see ‘beyond’ that which hearing people cannot easily see. In comparison, Peat (1996:2) says that notions of space in current physics move beyond the two poles of Newton’s absolute space and Leibnitz’s relative space to “an order beyond”. This resonates well with James’ “unseen order of some kind” in terms of religious faith. It is significant that both science and religion point to some kind of an order ‘beyond’, which is not immediately obvious to humans. This

thesis posits that the same kind of ‘formal space’ that is characteristic in HSL is established between God and the human observer through DSL, with the result that the ‘order beyond’, as Peat calls it, or the ‘unseen order’, as James puts it, is revealed within that space in and through the creation patterns.

Part of Charlotte’s construction of her world is the fact that she displayed, what her parents called, “visual thought patterns” in space when she signed (Sacks 1991:74, 75). Charlotte’s mother concluded that “spatial reference is essential to [HSL]”, and that when Charlotte signed, “the whole scene is set up; you can see where everyone or everything is; it is all visualized with a detail that would be rare for the hearing”. Sacks was struck by the graphic quality and fullness of her descriptions – the same qualities that are indeed also evident in DSL. Reflecting on this characteristic of HSL and on the creation patterns, the inference could be made that the creation patterns in Genesis 1 are God’s thought patterns made visible through DSL.

Charlotte’s parents also related the fact that communicating with her in HSL, “startled” them into thinking differently about space, because of the expressions she used with her hands (Sacks 1991:72). Interpretation of the first creation story in terms of God’s DSL and divine visual thought patterns also challenges the *status quo*, and asks for a ‘reconfiguration of thought’ similar to what happened to Charlotte’s parents. This reconfiguration of thought requires a mental rotation, as Collicut explains, in order to access the landscape of meaning between God and the human observer, which has the potential of enhancing one’s understanding of God’s creation. It requires the observer to look differently at space in order to access the inherent relational character

of creation. Once this mental rotation has been achieved, the meaning of creation as a whole can be established.

3.8.4 Signs of Life

The world the Christian looks at, and the world the secularist looks at, is one and the same world, but they perceive it in different ways. Science, on the one hand, focuses on how the world came into being and how it works, while religion on the other hand is seeking the meaning of existence. McGrath (2008:115) points out that there is a critical distinction between *looking at*, and *seeing*, as Collicut has shown through the examples of people who have visual agnosia and cortical blindness. Although the Christian emphasis is on salvation, Christianity does allow human beings to look at the world differently and see it in new ways – as McGrath (2011b:50) explains, “Christianity has the ability to make sense of the world”.

Reflecting on the creation story as it is told in Genesis 1, and seeing the relational patterns brings one back to the question of what it means. The story begins with a description of what it looks like on earth (Genesis 1:2), “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths...”. Traditional interpretations of this verse are made in the context of the Ancient Near East where the existence of chaos was a central concern. McGrath (1999:36), for example, writes, “Religions of the ancient near east often take the form of a conflict between a creator deity and the forces of chaos”. Within this context the raging sea and darkness were seen as the forces of chaos in the world – as McGrath (1999:104) explains, “In the Genesis creation account, darkness is linked with the idea of chaos and confusion

(Genesis 1:1-3)". Walton (2001:72) explains that in the mythology of the Ancient Near East "the gods demonstrate their power by defeating and holding at bay the forces of chaos". The same motif is also used, for example in the book of Psalms where Yahweh is often portrayed "as defeating or neutralizing the forces of chaos" – e.g. Psalms 74:13-17, 89:9-10, and 104:7-9 (Walton 2001:72, 73). Walton, however, argues that Genesis does not portray such a battle, or indicate that chaotic forces are being held back, "but that there is a clear establishment of order from disorder", which, according to him, is described in verse 2 with the Hebrew terms, *tōhû wābōhû*. This phrase, generally considered to be a hendiadys, is rendered "formless and empty" in the NIV, and does not concern matter, which does not suggest that matter has not been shaped, or that the created world is empty of matter. Instead, Walton (2001:73; 2007:187) suggests that these terms concern functionality. It is characteristic of Ancient Near Eastern creation stories, including Genesis 1 that they regularly begin with an unordered and non-functional world. Creation then takes place through the ordering of things, and by the giving of names, functions and purpose (Walton 2007:185). Analysis by Youngblood (1980:964-965) of the Hebrew *tōhû wābōhû* in Genesis 1:2 confirms that these terms in fact indicate that the earth was indeed "empty space, without form". Renckens (1964:84) talks about "absolutely nothing whatever". According to Youngblood, the meaning of the word *bōhû*, like that of *tōhû*, is also uncertain and appears only in two other verses, i.e. Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23, both times in context with *tōhû*. For Walton (2001:73), it is the condition described by this phrase that is remedied by *bārā'* (refer chapter 4).

Walton (2001:73) suggests that the Egyptian concept of the "non-existent" in its view of origins may be close to what is expressed in Genesis 1, i.e. viewing the original

condition as “that which has not yet been differentiated and assigned function. No boundaries or definitions have been established”. This concept included the “absence of space and forms (i.e., some material aspects), but which was also made up of water and darkness, in which nothing was named or distinct” (Walton 2007:186). According to Walton (2007:186), this non-existent realm in ancient Egyptian thought “continued to be present in the sea, the dark night sky, and even in the desert, indicating places without role or function”. He explains that this concept “carries with it the idea of potentiality and a quality of being absolute”. Furthermore, he says, “These concepts are likewise supported in biblical usage where *tōhū* generally refers to a wasteland or to ‘emptiness’”.

According to Walton (2001:73, 74), the motif of chaos in Genesis is not “sinister or menacing”, as is the case in the *Enuma Elish*, in which the watery deep (*tēhom*) is personified in the Babylonian goddess, Tiamat, the rival of Marduk, with the result that any sense of evil is removed from the Genesis account, simply indicating that God has not yet started with God’s work of creation. Compared to the story of the deluge in Genesis 7, which paints a picture of chaos entering the world, and raging waters covering the earth – “on that day all the sources of the watery depths burst open, the floodgates of the sky were opened, and the rain fell on the earth for 40 days and 40 nights” (Genesis 7:11, 12) – the picture in Genesis 1:2 is not the same, but rather that of calm waters covered by darkness, with God’s Spirit hovering over the surface of the waters, creating an air of expectancy maybe, a waiting upon something to happen. Both the Egyptian view of the “non-existent”, and this picture of serenity support the view proposed in this thesis – once God starts with God’s work of creation, God transforms the earth from a place which cannot support life (undifferentiated and

without function, nothing exists yet) to a place which fully supports life (fully differentiated and functioning well). The extrabiblical book, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, for example, affirms God's creative purpose in the following words, "[God] created all things so that they might exist" (1:14; Winston 1979:99). This idea of a fully functioning, life-supporting earth is conveyed through the words, "And God saw that it was good", which are repeated five times in verses 10, 12, 18, 21, and 25 and confirmed by the words in vs. 31, "God saw all that He had made, and it was very good". Benner (2004: n.p.) explains that the Hebrew language always expresses abstract thought in concrete ideas. Thus, the idea of "goodness" is an abstract idea that cannot be understood with any of the five senses, i.e. seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt. In this instance, in a concrete Hebrew understanding, it would thus mean that to see the "goodness" of creation, God would have looked and seen that it was functioning well, as Walton (2007:187) suggests.

The initial condition of formlessness and emptiness on earth is indicative of the earth not yet being ready to support life, i.e. in the words of Tsumura (1989:31) – it lacks something. God then starts God's work of creation (*bārā'*) in bringing the earth into a state of readiness by establishing those relational patterns whereby life is made possible and sustainable. This, once again, does not negate the fact that God has indeed created the material elements of the world, but it shows that all the creation patterns within their relational interconnectedness are the cornerstones of life as it is known to exist on earth. In this view God transforms the earth from a place that cannot support life (only water and darkness cover the earth) to a place which is overflowing with the abundance of life.

The term 'life' is difficult to define. Albert Szent-Györgyi (1972:1) wrote that, "Every biologist has at some time asked 'What is life' and none has ever given a satisfactory answer". The difficulty in defining what 'life' is, is well illustrated by Swanson and Webster (1977:4-8) explaining that the basic unit of life is the cell, which is able to reproduce, mutate, and respond to stimuli. They conclude that the continuity of life has a cellular basis, i.e. that life exists only in cells containing nuclei, and they do extend their explanation to include the genetic component of cells as well. This explanation, however, runs into a conundrum, because viruses contain DNA (or RNA in the case of retro viruses), but not in nuclei. Yet, viruses are regarded as living entities and affect living beings. Webster's Dictionary (2001:828), on the other hand, defines life as "that property or quality of plants and animals that distinguishes them from inorganic matter or dead organisms". Swanson and Webster's inability to define what biological life is, is characteristic of human beings' inability in general to define what life is. Neither does Webster's definition do justice by explaining what life is. What makes it more difficult is that the biblical text in Genesis 1 does not define what life is either. Genesis 1:29-30, however, provides a clue to help the reader understand what the term may mean in the context of Genesis 1:

God said, "Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth, and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This **food** will be for you, for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth – everything **having the breath of life** in it. I have given every green plant for food. And it was so.

According to Benner (2004: n.p.), in ancient Hebrew thought the Hebrew word for life is *chy*, which is commonly translated as "life" in English translations of the Bible. The English word "life", however, is an abstract idea in Western thought, which means that the "concept of 'life' cannot be seen, heard, smelled, tasted, or felt". Benner explains

that the abstract thought behind this word is understood in terms such as “awareness” and “existence” – abstract ideas that the Western mind does not have any problem with. According to Benner (2004: n.p.), the concrete background to this term is not immediately obvious from the context in Genesis 1, but could be explained through an understanding that can be gained from Job 38:39. In this verse the Hebrew word for “stomach” is translated into the English language as “appetite”. The stomach, however, in Hebrew thought is understood to be “the seat of life”, which differs significantly from “appetite”. Thus, in concrete terms, food and water would be necessary to support the “seat of life”, and not to satisfy the “appetite”. In terms of ancient Hebrew thought and the fact that ancient Hebrew people led a nomadic existence, their primary goal would therefore have been to find food and water for their flocks and for themselves. In light of this it is thus highly significant that the last pattern, which is part of the tenth and last signifier, provides evidence that the food that God has provided in terms of seed-bearing plants and fruit-bearing trees (Genesis 1:29) are directly related to “everything having the breath of life in them” (Genesis 1:30). This evidence supports the idea that the ultimate goal of God’s creative acts was to transform the earth from a place that could not support life to a place overflowing with the abundance of life with God providing in the needs of all living creatures to sustain life.

Clifford (1985:509) explains that one of the differences between ancient West Semitic and modern concepts of creation is the product of creation, or the so-called emergent. The emergent for the ancients was an organized society being established in a particular place with no or very little discussion about life – “the emergence of a particular society, organized with patron gods and worship systems, divinely appointed king (or some kind of leader), and kinship systems”, compared to moderns for whom

creation issues in a “physical world, typically the planet in the solar system”. According to Clifford (1985:512), the *Enuma elish* is interested in the “divine establishment of Babylonian society”, an “Atrahasis, in the balance of elemental forces necessary for humans to live safely”. According to Walton (2007:44), in the Sumerian flood text, the *Eridu Genesis*, for example, the texts “briefly include brief allusions to the creation of people and animals and the establishment of rituals, divination, and kingship”. In the Sumerian Creation account, on the other hand, “the assembly of gods meet and determine to make humans (by slaying two divine beings) to labor at irrigating the fields” (Walton 2007:46). Clifford (1985:512) concludes that the biblical accounts point to the same idea – Ps. 89, for example, includes the “installation of the Davidic regent, whereas in Genesis 1 the focus is on the orientations of the human community as such”.

For moderns, community and culture are not of any consideration. Reflecting on the above, it seems more likely to deduce that relationships, as proposed in this thesis, is not the focal point for moderns either, but rather the creation of human beings, and specifically humans created in the image of God. This seemingly is more in response against what the theory of evolution advances concerning the emergence of human beings in biological terms than to what ancient cosmogonies were interested in. This thesis advances the idea, however, that creation in the first creation story is rather about the establishment of relationships in terms of the whole community of living creatures, including humans, in a particular place in the universe, namely on earth. This is supported by McGrath (2011b:58) who writes that, although it had been assumed since the seventeenth century that “no special initial conditions were required for the emergence of a life-bearing universe”, it is now clear that this is not the case. He

believes that, “The deep structure of the universe seems to have been designed to allow life to come into existence” (McGrath 2011b:59).

Theologians generally concede that Genesis 1 is anthropocentric in character. Bergant (2010:35, 36) rightly questions this anthropocentric focus imposed on the first creation story. She suggests that, “Most likely, this point of view was read into many biblical texts”, and explains that if Christians could put aside their anthropocentric bias, careful reading of the Bible will show that it is not as anthropocentric as has always been assumed. The view offered in this thesis points to the same conclusion, namely that the first creation story rather has a theocentric emphasis with God being the centre, inviting God’s creation into a life-giving relationship with Himself.

The relational character of the creation patterns is the key element in the first creation story, and specifically their relation to, and dependence on the creative word of God. Life cannot come into existence by itself, neither can it exist by itself – God is the source of all life. The “ordering of things” that Walton refers to would, in terms of this thesis, thus translate into God having established relationships between all that God has created – that is, between all the elements of creation, whether material (e.g. animals and plants) or non-material (e.g. light and sky). No life is possible otherwise, e.g. sea creatures cannot exist without the sea; birds cannot exist without a sky in which they can fly; plants cannot exist without an earthly (soil) substrate, or water, or sunshine; and humans and land animals cannot exist without the earth or each other, or water, or sunshine, or the natural cycles, or plants as food. Neither light, nor water, nor the sky or sun or earth can support life in and by itself. All the elements of creation

work together in mutual relationships to support life on earth. With reference, for example, to the functions assigned to the sun and moon, Walton (2007:187) suggests that the functions described in the first creation story are designed for the benefit of humans. He explains that the “functional nuance of ‘good’ in the biblical text is confirmed by a comparison of what is not good”, i.e. “it is not good for man to be alone” (Genesis 2:18). In this sense he believes that the world thus cannot be functional without the presence of humans, “because the functions are aimed at people”. In light of the relational perspective offered in this thesis it is suggested that Genesis 1 is focused on “life” in all its varied forms, abundance, and most of all the intricate, underlying relationships that bind everything together and not only on human beings alone. In this view the world can only be functional in and through its support of life as described within the relational framework identified in Genesis 1.

Viewed from a scientific context, McGrath (2011b:66-73), in reference to the carbon-basis of life, the Big Bang and stellar nucleosynthesis, DNA-based genetic systems in living organism and much more, agrees and concludes that “there has been a growing realization of the interconnectedness between certain fundamental principles of biology and astrophysics”, and that fine-tuning of the universe is insignificant in isolation as to the meaning of the universe, but “richly suggestive when set alongside other such clues”. This, for example, is well illustrated by the example of Mars where scientists have launched the Curiosity rover to search for signs of water and life. Signs are positive that the red planet may have had water in its distant past, and that there may even be water found in frozen deposits on the surface. As a result of this, scientists speculate that bacterial life may have existed, or may even be found on Mars. If such a discovery should be made, it must be borne in mind that it is a particular form of life in

isolation, and not life in all its abundance, diversity and inter-relational dependence as specified in the Genesis account. A bacterial life form in isolation on a desolate planet like Mars does not constitute life as defined in the first creation story.

The transformation brought about through God's work of creation had been carried over into the natural patterns of daily and seasonal renewal. Not only does God affect transformation in the natural world, but also in the lives of people by using nature to bring about a change of mind (a "renewing of the mind", in the words of Romans 12:2). In the book of Job, for example, Job in his situation of misery and pain is challenged by the beauty and wonders of creation (Job 38-42), ultimately resulting in his admission that he had been converted to God's point of view – in Job's own words, "I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eyes have seen you" (Job 42:5; Bergant 2010:38, 39). In this story God has taken human suffering and situated it within the entire context of material creation, thereby affecting transformation in Job's life by giving him a new vision of life – in Bergant's words, "creation itself has expanded Job's vision and called him to a deepening of faith that goes beyond understanding". This renewal of the mind in terms of moving from an anthropocentric to a cosmocentric worldview would require a "mental rotation", like Collicut suggests, with the result that a person's viewpoint is transformed in such a way that she (or Job in this example) comes to a new understanding of the universe, and also perceives God in a new way.

With reference to the controversy that arose between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner in 1934, McGrath (2008:162) explains that both theologians depended "upon implicit perceptual judgments in developing their approaches to natural theology". The issue at

stake here is how revelation is discerned by different people, with the question being asked of why it is that one person can interpret an event as God's self-revelation while another person interprets it as something natural, i.e. "with no divine connection or referent". He concludes that despite significant differences between Barth and Brunner, both "seem united in their belief that revelation involves an act of *perception*", and that "this perception is a human act that lies beyond unaided human endeavour, and must therefore be understood as resting on an act of divine grace".

McGrath (2008:164) explains that although both theologians recognized the importance of the activity of perception, Barth treated "the human mind as a bystander, rather than an active participant" in the process of revelation, while Brunner offered "such a psychologically naïve account of perception that his analysis of the divine-human interaction in revelation must be judged unworkable". McGrath emphasizes that "any theology of revelation always articulates an implicit anthropology and psychology, whether or not theologians choose to make this explicit".

Although serious scholars like Barth, Bultmann, and others believe that nature does not have the inherent ability to disclose God, McGrath (2008:125) believes that nature can tell us about God, but says that, "...nature is not self-evident. Nature is a 'mystery', something that needs to be disclosed. It is an 'open secret', a publicly accessible entity with a hidden inner meaning". He explains that nature can indeed disclose God if seen in a certain light, which he says, is not self-evident. He concludes that the ways that nature is seen, are shaped by history and culture, and points out that revelation takes place in and through nature and history, not beyond them. For him it is important that

when nature is seen in the right way, “when *illuminated*”, both nature and history have the capacity to disclose God.

McGrath (2008:116) points out that the teachings of Jesus “strongly endorse the notion that nature has the capacity to disclose the divine”. He makes reference to John Dominic Crossan, who “characterized the life and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth as the ‘Message of an Open Secret’” (McGrath 2008:121), and explains that, “To grasp the meaning of the parables, they have to be approached and interpreted from a certain angle. It is only when rightly interpreted by the human observer – only if intentionally ‘seen in this way’ – that any given aspect of nature has the capacity to illuminate the ideas and values of the kingdom of God”. With reference to the ‘I am’ sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John, McGrath explains that this intentional way of ‘seeing’ does not involve a direct appeal to nature, but rather to “existing *associations* of nature, already rooted in Israel’s past history and future hopes”. He says that such observations of nature are mediated by “an inherited way of ‘seeing’ [nature]” (McGrath 2008:130), as is especially evident in the texts of Isaiah 40-55. This in a sense, resonates with Moltmann’s argument (1985:53) that, “...the aim of our investigation is not what nature can contribute to our knowledge of God, but what the concept of God can contribute to our knowledge of nature”.

3.9 LITERAL OR METAPHORICAL?

Pretorius suggests a literal interpretation of the medium that God used to create. The DSL model, on the other hand, suggests an initial literal understanding of the images of the created world presented in Genesis 1, for example plants, animals, humans, earth, water and so forth, which then transitions into a metaphorical interpretation by

making use of image-concepts where two images exist within a relational unit with each other. Understanding these relational image-concepts within a four-dimensional space-time framework as God's creative words indeed supports a metaphorical interpretation.

Do these two interpretive methods present conflicting ways of interpreting the Bible and specifically the first creation story? The researcher believes, however, that the question should be framed differently by asking instead what either the literal or metaphorical method tells one about God in terms of who God is. In other words, one has to answer to whether either one (or perhaps both?) of these two interpretive methods detract from biblical truth. The literal interpretation presented by Pretorius is presented in a logical way, and although there may be critique levelled against his interpretation, one must be honest in acknowledging the fact that it does indeed not detract any attention away from God, but speaks to the theological truth of who God is in terms of God the Creator of the heavens and the earth. The same applies to the metaphorical interpretation presented in this study in terms of seeing rather than hearing God's creative words – an interpretation that supports a deeper understanding of who God is in light of God's relationship with God's entire creation. Research indicates that there is a wealth of publications on the use of metaphor in science, which does not detract from the truth claims science makes (*cf.* Brown 2004:811-815). Why then question a metaphorical interpretation of the Bible and God if it speaks to the same theological truth?

Does Laughery and Diepstra's idea of scientific and biblical informers cause any conflict with regard to the aforementioned? The answer is no – the scientific informer and the biblical informer inform us in different ways about the world, which in no way is in conflict with each other, although many scientists and theologians would argue otherwise. Craig (2017:n.p.) supports the idea that science and religion is of mutual benefit to each other, stating that, "Science and religion have discovered that they have important mutual interests and important contributions to make to each other, and those who don't like this can choose not to participate in the dialogue, but that's not going to shut down the dialogue or show it to be meaningless". He continues by suggesting ways in which "science and religion [may] serve as allies in the quest for truth". Laughery and Diepstra's argument for of a scientific and a biblical informer supports this in terms of their conclusion that the hermeneutical arrow points in both directions, thereby resulting in an interpretive equilibrium.

3.10 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CREATED ENTITIES

In this study the originating, continuing and completing creation activity of God is observed through the lens of the DSL Model, which allows one to focus on God's creative actions from a different angle. Within this paradigm creation is understood as the originating, continuing and completion of the relationships between the created entities such as darkness and light, water and earth and so forth. Here, creation is understood in terms of both the spoken words of God and the creative outcome or result of his words. Furthermore, in light of this, creation is understood as both a *completed* and *continuing* action of God – completed in terms of the relationships established in the first creation story, and continuing in terms of the open-endedness of

the story, which points to the idea that the human creature has the ability to change some of these created relationships.

One of the surprising facts that observations of the natural world have turned out is the idea of the so-called “fine-tuning” of the universe. McDowell and Morrow (2010:96) describe it as a “compelling feature of the universe”. McGrath (2009:85) explains that fine-tuning expresses the idea that...

the universe appears to have possessed certain qualities from the moment of its inception which were favourable to the production of intelligent life on earth... Nature’s fundamental constants turn out to be fine-tuned to reassuringly life-friendly values.

Polkinghorne (1991:77) and McGrath (2011a:63) concede that even the smallest variation in any of these fundamental specifications could render the world “anthropically sterile”. McGrath (2009:86) argues that these kind of observations call out for an explanation, and suggests that “one of the most productive ways” in dealing with it is to employ so-called “counter-factual thinking”, a method whereby an alternative situation is envisaged with its fundamental parameters being altered. He calls it “an art of imagination”, and explains that it entails “the construction and inhabitation of a world that did and does not exist, as a means of achieving a better understanding of the forces that shape the empirical world”.

Brueggemann (2003:9), in dealing with the Old Testament on the other hand, also writes about imagination, noting that “the tradition that became Scripture is a relentless *act of imagination*”, and explains that Old Testament literature “is not merely descriptive of a commonsense world; it dares, by artistic sensibility and risk-taking rhetoric, to

posit, characterize, and vouch for a world beyond the ‘common sense’”. The defining aspect of this idea in theological terms is that the world “is articulated with YHWH as the defining character”. This resonates strongly with Bergant’s view, and the view proposed in this thesis that the first creation story is theocentric, and not anthropocentric – anthropocentric in the sense of a literal reading of Genesis 1 as a six days creation/one day rest period, and theocentric in the sense that the Genesis 1 story revolves around God and his act(s) of creation, which, according to the DSL Model, is a result of his voice that can be seen in creation.

The researcher dares to say that the seminal beginning of this research lay in an act of imagination as well, positing the idea that God’s voice was inaudible, but could be seen in creation – to use McGrath’s words – “This observation called out for an explanation”. In search of a plausible explanation the act of imagination was taken one step further by the researcher whereby a real-life scenario was imagined, similar, yet different to that of the first creation story – a scenario where the speaker is human, but her words are inaudible to those around her. The title of Oliver Sacks’ book, *Seeing Voices* (1991), and the book itself brought illumination to this scenario, as Sacks relates in this book how deaf people communicate. The method of dialogue has enabled the researcher to articulate the particular interpretation of the first creation story as offered in this thesis. It has enabled her to look at this story from a totally new perspective, thereby bringing into sharp focus the intrinsic relational character of creation.

In dealing with the first creation story and reflecting on the familiar images of the natural world represented therein, the question originally arose as to how human beings

perceive God's voice – is it an audible sound, or more a spiritual discernment whereby something out of the ordinary is perceived? Seemingly, in the case of Samuel, it was an audible voice that the boy heard (1 Samuel 3:4-8). The first creation story is different, though, since there is no hearer to whom God's [inaudible] words are directed, like in Samuel's case, and it does not give any indication of what the words, "And God said...", may mean in its context. There seems to be an implicit cultural understanding, however, of what the author means by using these words – as Walton (2001:46) explains – in such cases, "familiarity with the culture provides a face value for the text that is not immediately obvious to the modern reader but may have been intuitive to the author and his audience".

An unexpected insight gained from the finding that the first creation story is about the relational character between the created elements bears significantly on the scientific concepts of "space-time" and "relational quantum mechanics". In physics, space and time are not interpreted as individual entities, but combined into a single continuum. Space-time is usually interpreted as space existing in three dimensions, with time as the fourth dimension, which is different from the spatial dimension. This concept has enabled scientists to describe how the universe works in a more uniform way at both the macro (supergalactic) and micro (subatomic) levels. Furthermore, Laudisa and Rovelli (2013: n.p.) explain that relational quantum mechanics is an interpretation of quantum theory (the general theory of physical motion), which "describes the way systems affect one another in the course of physical interactions". According to these researchers, "the physical world is thus seen as a net of interacting components... a net of relations..., and the physical structure of the world is identified as the net of relationships".

Furthermore, it also bears on the concept of “relational biology”, a term coined by Russian-born American theoretical biologist, Nicolas Rashevsky. Rashevsky’s research started in the 1920’s, but reached a turning point in the 1950’s when he started becoming uneasy about the basic question of what “life” is. He concluded that a purely reductionist approach could never work, and said that, “We must look for a principle which connects the different physical phenomena involved and expresses the biological unity of the organism and of the organic world as a whole” (Rashevsky 1967:139-150).

The ancient Incas of Peru also regarded space and time as a single concept, which they called “pacha” (Steele & Allen 2004:86). Three different levels of pacha were distinguished, (i) Hanan Pacha (world above; also the future and supra world), (ii) Ukhu Pacha (world below; also the past and interior world), and (iii) Kay Pacha (this world; the world of present and of here). These realms, for them, existed simultaneously spatially and temporally. This division of the world, however, was characteristic of the dualism found in Incan cosmology in the sense that everything that existed had both features of any feature, e.g. both hot and cold, positive and negative, dark and light. Although these worlds were distinct entities within Incan cosmology, there were a variety of connections between them, of which the most significant one was at Pachacutec, i.e. when a cataclysm would occur between all levels. This was described as those instances when all the levels would impact on one another, transforming the entire order of the world. This could happen as a result of some natural disaster like an earthquake. One of the Incan rulers even took the name of Pachakuti, as he was believed to be “Inca Lord overturner of space-time” as he set out to transform the Inca empire.

The first creation story in Genesis 1 stands in stark contrast with the Incan concept of the world, as well as with other ancient cosmologies, which are all characterized by dualism. Plato, for example, in his *Timaeus*, distinguished “two principles which underlie the world, God *and* primary matter”, which, according to Milne (1982:73), is refuted by “Scripture’s doctrine of creation [which] asserts the sole causality of God”. Furthermore, the use of phrases like “the heavens and the earth”, “and it was evening and it was morning, the first day”, clearly points to the non-dualistic nature of the first creation story, where “the heavens and the earth” and “day and night” are understood as concepts which describe the whole, and not the individual parts.

Solms and Turnbull (2002:306) conclude in their book, *The Brain and the Inner World*, that in the process of dialogue between neuroscientists and psychoanalysts, for example, “Leading neuroscientists had become much more open to psychoanalysis than [they] expected, and psychoanalytic authorities were similarly far less cautious about neuroscience than their previous behaviour had led [them] to expect”. They warn, however, that dialogues of this kind have their limits as well, but concur that it is “useful for educating the participants about each other’s fields, and for correcting misconceptions”.

For the purpose of this thesis the method of dialogue has been most helpful in affording the interpreter a new/different perspective in viewing the biblical creation story – in McGrath’s words (2011:53) – “It is as if... a bright sun has illuminated a mental landscape”.

CHAPTER 4

GOD IN RELATION TO CREATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Both science and theology, in their endeavour to make sense of the world, make certain cognitive claims about the world – science in terms of its search to understand the intelligibility that characterizes the natural world, and the theology in terms of its search to understand the meaning behind the existence of the world. Although the two *magisteria* seemingly operate in different spheres of enquiry, Peacocke (1993:4) points out that these two human activities are not exclusive to either science or theology, but believes that science and theology are, in fact, engaged in a common enterprise whereby both disciplines are searching for intelligibility and meaning. It is this commonality that characterizes the vibrant, ongoing dialogue between the two disciplines, and allows the participants to engage in a meaningful relationship of which the goal is that of understanding reality.

Within the framework of the proposed thesis, which is a dialogue between science and theology, the DSL Model has been found to be significantly informative and descriptive with regard to an understanding of the first creation story. Based on the central organizing principle of God's spoken word and its outcome – the repetitive phrase in Genesis 1, "Then God said; ...and it was so" – the topic of this thesis is the postulate that the first creation story presents a dynamic picture of the world emerging as God's inaudible voice becomes visible to the human observer. This in itself presents an apparent paradox, which is addressed by the model conceptualizing God's inaudible voice and its visible outcome in creation as God's 'divine Sign' – a model that is based

mainly on the ground-breaking work of Sacks (1991) and Lévy-Bruhl on Sign, the language of deaf people.

McFague's (1993:28) work provides invaluable insight into the use of models in Christian thought. According to her, models are not favoured by the majority of people, but she believes that "they do gain in persuasive power if they have helped millions of people for millennia make sense of their lives and world". In her book, *The Body of God* (1993), McFague reminds her readers that two models – the mechanistic model, which describes the world as a machine and the organic model, which describes the world as a body – are used to describe the natural order (McFague 1993:15-16). Evaluating the proposed DSL Model employed by this thesis suggests that it does not fall within either category – the mechanistic model or the organic model – the latter which is favoured by McFague (1993:28-29) in terms of its explanatory power over and against the mechanistic model. The reason for her critique against the mechanistic model is that she views it as being "anthropocentric and androcentric" in nature, presenting the world as "machine-like and devoid of God". In comparison to the organic model viewed by McFague as presenting the world's story as "a story of embodiment", the DSL Model herein could be viewed as a model whereby sound is visualized presenting the world's story as "a story of visualized hearing".

4.2 DESCRIPTIONS AND CONCEPTS OF GOD

The mystery surrounding God's being is especially striking where it concerns the divine names of God. In reading the Pentateuch, and particularly the first few chapters of Genesis, one is struck by the use of different names for God – the name *'Elōhīm* (God; Genesis 1-4), the name *YHWH 'Elōhīm* (the LORD God; Genesis 2-3), and the name

YHWH (the LORD; Genesis 4). This is a perplexing phenomenon, as Wenham (1987:56) points out, and the question that comes to mind is why different names have been used for God and what the significance of it is in the context of creation (Genesis 1-3). Many prominent scholars have attempted to explain this, with Wenham concluding that it has indeed “taxed the imagination of literary critics...”.

In light of this and the proposed DSL Model then, the question is how one is to understand God as creator of the heavens and the earth. Would there be any images and attributes which can be identified through the DSL Model that will broaden the understanding of who God is as Creator in terms of God’s names, *’elohim* and *yahweh*? In an effort to gain such an understanding, the focus of this chapter will be on those concepts of God, which can be identified through the DSL Model that are important for a theology of creation.

With reference to the subject matter of the Bible, Frame (2002:343) says the following,

Scripture reveals God to us by narrating **his** actions, by describing **him**, and by giving us a glimpse into **his** inner triune life. These three categories correspond roughly to our situational, normative and existential perspectives, respectively.

They are perspectively related because they do not deal with three distinct subject matters, but the same subject matter seen from three different angles. That subject matter is the Bible. The whole Bible is narrative; it is also description and Trinitarian self-disclosure.

Scripture thus reveals God to human beings in three different modes – by (i) narrating God’s actions, (ii) describing God, and (iii) giving us a glimpse of God’s inner triune life.

Within a three-fold scheme, Frame (2002:343) distinguishes three distinctive, biblically authoritative descriptions of God apart from God's actions, i.e.

- (i) Names – like *yahweh* ["Lord"], *'elohim* ["God"], and *'el shadday* ["God Almighty"]
- (ii) Images – like shepherd, king, and rock
- (iii) Attributes – like eternity, wisdom and love

Within this framework he regards,

- (i) God's names as existential – "for they distinguish **him** uniquely as a person",
- (ii) God's images as situational – "for they describe God by analogy to finite historical realities of our experience and thereby show how **he** enters our experience", and
- (iii) God's attributes as normative – "for they provide the most literal and detailed descriptions", which he says, "...necessarily therefore tend to govern our thinking about other kinds of descriptions".

Frame (2002:345) concludes that God's names connote both attributes and images. These descriptions are neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive of each other.

Using Frame's three-fold scheme as a framework, a 'concept of God' in the context of this chapter will thus refer to the images and attributes that are intimately related to God's names. Based on this, three distinctive images of God (*'elohim*) the Creator God in the first creation story have been identified, namely (i) Communicator, (ii) Transformer, and (iii) Partner, concomitant with three distinctive attributes – (i) *superior* communicator, (ii) *extraordinary* transformer, and (iii) *prime* (first) partner, which will be discussed in this chapter. Moreover, one distinctive image of God (*Yahweh*) has been identified in Genesis 3, which encapsulates all three images identified in the first creation story – it is also that of 'Partner', in this instance concomitant with the attribute, 'personal'. This chapter includes a brief literature background for both names as a reminder to some of the meanings attached to these names.

4.3 THE NAME OF GOD, *'elohim*: A Brief Literature Background

Historically, much scholarship has focused on the origin and meaning of the name *'elohim*. Overall, the form appears 2 570 times in the Old Testament (Ringgren 1974:267-284). These appearances include the singular (“a god”; “God”), and the plural (“gods”) meanings. According to Baker (2003:361), it occurs 225 times in the Pentateuch, referring to both the God of Israel as well to pagan gods (Exodus 20:3; 23:13; 32:1; Deuteronomy 4:7, 28; 5:7 and eighteen more times in Deuteronomy). In Genesis 1:1-2:4a alone it appears 35 times as the name of God, the Creator (Scott 1980:55). This name is seen as an appellative – a common noun – by Cassuto (1941:18), which was originally used together with the name *El* to denote any pagan deities as well as the One God of Israel. Bavinck (1951:101) and Wenham (1987:15) are in agreement with Cassuto that it is not a personal name (proper noun), like the names of the pagan gods, Marduk and Chemosh, or the names of God, *Yahweh* and *El Shaddai*. Wenham warns that although *Elohim* often acts as a proper name similar to the way the English word “God” acts, it must not simply be seen as a synonym for “God”.

Baker (2003:360) highlights the fact that the forms *El* and *Eloha* are problematic in that their derivation and etymology are unclear. In the Semitic culture *El* means “a god in the widest sense, true or false, or even an image treated as a god” (Genesis 35:2; Manley & Bruce 1996:420). In particular instances it was used as a proper noun, i.e. as the name of a deity in the Akkadian and Amorite cultures, but is best known as the head of the hierarchy of deities in the Ugaritic Canaanite culture, and most likely reflects the idea of power (Baker 2003:360). This is supported by the Ras Shamra

tablets, which show that *El* is the name of the Canaanite ‘high God’, whose son was Ba’al (Manley & Bruce 1996:420).

According to Baker (2003:360), *Elim* (‘*ēlīm*’), and not *Elohim*, is the plural form of *El*, referring to pagan gods in general (Exodus 15:11), and not the God of Israel. He argues that *Elohim* is the grammatical plural of the form *Eloha* instead, basing his argument on the “h” that is included in the word in both the singular and plural form. Bavinck (1951:100) argues the same in light of their derivation from the same root ‘*ûl*’, which means ‘to be first’, or from the root ‘*lh*’, which means ‘to be smitten with fear’, pointing to God as ‘the Strong and Mighty One’. According to him the singular is used infrequently in the Old Testament. Bavinck (1951:100) also points out that the name *Elohim* is used in a relational sense, describing God in God’s “original relationship and God’s continuous causal relationship to the universe”. According to him, it is “a designation of relationship, not a designation of immediate, inner essence”. Scott’s analysis supports Baker’s and Bavinck’s view that *Elohim* is derived from *Eloha*, suggesting that the idea of power and authority is invested in this name (Scott 1980:55).

According to Ringgren (1974:267-284), on the other hand, the forms *El* and *Elohim* are usually assumed to be related, the argument being that *Elohim* is the plural of *El* expanded with the *he*. Cassuto (1941:22) also suggests that *Elohim* (gods) is the numerical plural form of *El*, as do Manley and Bruce (1996:420) who believe that these gods may be no more than wood and stone images (Deuteronomy 4:28), or “the imaginary beings they represent” (Deuteronomy 12:2). McComiskey (1984:465) concurs, pointing out that the plural form, *Elohim*, is “commonly understood as a plural

of majesty”, an interpretation against which Bavinck (1951:100) warns. According to him, it must rather be regarded as “a plural of abstraction, or of quantity, or as an intensive plural, serving to indicate fullness and power”. According to Wenham (1987:14), the word is derived from the common Semitic word for god, *il*, while in Canaanite it appears as *ʾl*, and in Akkadian as *ilu(m)* (McComiskey 1984:465). It seems likely that these arguments may be supported by the general Babylonian usage of the appellative *ilu*, which, according to Cassuto, means *ʾēl* (god).

According to Ringgren (1974:267-284), the three forms, *El*, *Elohim* and *Elohah*, are used interchangeably in the Old Testament, and could have different meanings in different contexts, including references to God, for example “the living God” (*ʾelohim chai*) etc. In the plural sense *Elohim* is used in reference to the gods of the different nations – Gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12), the gods of the Amorites (Joshua 24:15; Judges 6:10), and the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, the Ammonites, and the Philistines (Judges 10:6) (Ringgren (1974:267-284). He points out that in other instances the word has a singular meaning when the Bible refers to Baal-zebul, the god of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2, 6, 16), Chemosh, the god of Moab and Milcom, the god of the Ammonites (1 Kings 11:33).

Cassuto (1941:22) explains that the plural form *Elohim* is construed in the Old Testament in the singular sense when referring to the true God of Israel. McComiskey (1984:465) and Baker (2003:361-362) are in agreement with this explanation. Cassuto explains this by way of using the example from the Aramaic version of the *Romance of Aḥiqar*, in which the plural form *Elahin* (*ʾElāhīn*) or *Elahayya* (*ʾElāhayyā*) for “gods” or “the gods” occurs several times. According to him, it seems probable that this plural

word has a singular sense similar to that of *Elohim*, and that the name must not be corrected to be read in the singular form, *Elaha* (*'Elāhā*). Manley and Bruce (1996:420) agree, and consider *Elohim* to mean “all that belongs to the concept of deity, in contrast to man (Numbers 23:19), and other created beings”. Referring specifically to Genesis 1:1, they believe that the word is “appropriate to cosmic and world-wide relationships”, the reason being that “there is only one supreme and true God and he is a person”. In this sense they believe that *Elohim* “approaches the character of a proper noun, while not losing its abstract and conceptual quality”. McComiskey (1984:465) also believes that the name *Elohim* in the Pentateuch “connotes a general concept of God”, explaining that God is portrayed as the transcendent creator of the universe. For him this name does not bear the same personal and manifest concepts that the name *YHWH* does.

Many attributes and actions of God are merged together into the name *Elohim*. Baker (2003:362) shows that in the first few chapters of Genesis alone, *Elohim* is presented as...

- (i) a creator (*'br* - “create”, Genesis 1:1, 27; 2:3, 4; 5:1), or maker (*'sh* - “make”, Genesis 1:7, 25; 2:2; 3:1, 21),
- (ii) one who creates by oral command (Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 16, 20-21, 24), by differentiating between elements (Genesis 1:4, 7), by setting in place (Genesis 1:17), and by molding and shaping material (Genesis 2:7, 21-22),
- (iii) the God who evaluates God’s creation through discernment (Genesis 1:4, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:18; 6:12), and categorizes it by giving names to its different elements (Genesis 1:5, 8, 10),
- (iv) the God who blesses or provides benefit for parts of God’s original creation (Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3), and most important
- (v) the God who has a special relationship with humankind in that **He** has created them in God’s image (Genesis 1:26 – 27).

Bavinck (1951:100-101) regards the names *El*, *Elohim* and *Elyon* as being descriptive of “God as the One who is exalted far above all creatures”, with the emphasis on God’s transcendence rather than God’s immanence. This radical transcendence of God is proclaimed in the book of Job when God asks Job out of the whirlwind, “Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?” (Job 38:4). God, however, is not only the transcendent God *Elohim*, but also immanent in the lives of God’s creatures, revealing God as the “God of grace” by the name *YHWH*. Underhill (1936:263), describes the transcendence and immanence of God most eloquently as, “the nearness yet otherness of the Eternal”.

Cassuto (1941:20-26) has shown conclusively that, with the exception of the book of Jonah and the second part of the book of Isaiah, the name *Elohim* is never used to replace the personal name of God, *YHWH*, in the prophetic writings. He found that in the poetic writings, with the exception of poems belonging to the category of Wisdom Literature, only *YHWH* was used – the same applies to legal literature. According to him, *YHWH* and *Elohim*, are both used in “close proximity” in narrative literature, like for example Genesis 2 and 3. In contrast to this, however, Cassuto found that the appellatives *El*, *Elohah*, and *Elohim* are found throughout the Wisdom Literature with the exception of Job 12:9, which is uncertain. Moreover, the most interesting phenomenon he discovered is that wisdom literature of the Ancient Near East referred to the Godhead by an appellative instead of using the proper names of the various deities. The Egyptians, for example, mostly used the common noun *ntr* (god), corresponding to *Eloha* or *Elohim* in Hebrew. In the same manner the Babylonian custom was to use the appellative *ilu*, which is similar to *El* (god). Cassuto (1941:23-24) clarifies the use of the names in the different types of literature by way of explaining that

the name *YHWH* is used in such categories that have a “purely Israelite character”. The biblical Wisdom Literature, on the other hand, has been influenced appreciably by the tradition of general wisdom writings of the time, with the result that the common nouns were used instead of the proper name *YHWH*.

4.4 CONCEPTS OF GOD, *'elohim*

4.4.1 Superior Communicator

The first concept of God, *'elohim* – that of ‘Communicator’ – is based on the central organizing principle of this thesis, God’s spoken word: “And God *said*, and it was so...”.

The words ‘communicate’ and ‘superior’, as well as ‘excellence’ are defined as follow,

a) Communicate

(verb: L. *communicatus* / noun: communicator – L. *communicatoris*)

- (i) To make known; give or exchange information, signals or messages in any meaningful way, as by talk, gestures, or writing;
- (ii) To have a sympathetic or meaningful relationship;
- (iii) To be connected.

(Webster’s Dictionary 2001:295)

b) Superior

(adjective: L. *supernus*)

- (i) Above average in quality; excellent.

(Webster’s Dictionary 2001:1437)

c) Excellent

(adjective: L. *excellens*)

- (i) Excelling, surpassing;
- (ii) Outstanding good of its kind; of exceptional merit, virtue etc.

(Webster’s Dictionary 2001:495)

Based on these definitions, the one who communicates, i.e. the communicator, by implication is the one (1) who exchanges information with another in one or more of the ways mentioned in the definition, (2) who is connected to another and has a sympathetic or meaningful relationship with that one, and (3) who communicates in a superior, most excellent or exceptional way. An example of such a meaningful human relationship is that between parents and their children.

4.4.1.1 Communication Initiated

The DSL Model lends itself very well in an effort to understand God's communication through Sign. It provides the means for drawing a significant parallel on the one hand between God speaking in/through creation and humanity 'seeing' God's voice, and on the other hand human beings communicating with each other, in particular the communication happening between a mother and her child. Sacks (1991:62), for example, explains with reference to the way both hearing and deaf children learn to communicate and use language that, "The *first* language use, the first communication, is usually between a mother and child, and language is acquired, arises, *between* the two". A person is born with so-called natural senses with which she explores the world, but language cannot be acquired by oneself. Sacks furthermore explains that language is a skill that falls in a unique category in the sense that a person needs an essential innate ability to acquire it, but that this ability can only be activated by "another person who already possesses linguistic power and competence". In the interaction between mother and child then, the mother leads her child "step by step to higher levels of language; she leads [her] into

language, and into the world picture it embodies”, which of course, is the mother’s world picture (Sacks 1991:63).

In similar manner, the DSL Model allows one to understand God the Creator who communicates by implication to be the one who possesses linguistic power and competence as he ‘speaks’ creation into existence, and also ‘speaks’ in and through creation. Thus, humanity with whom God interacts through divine Sign, is taken step by step to higher levels of divine Sign in the first creation story. God, in a superior way of communicating, progressively leads human beings into the world picture encapsulated by divine Sign. Starting with the simple basics in the first creation story – for example, darkness and light – the picture becomes progressively more detailed and complex until the observer sees a complete picture of creation – God’s world picture, and not that of human beings or of human imagination.

4.4.1.2 Corresponding Experience

In reference to human communication, the pre-requisite for the child to understand the mother’s world picture is that the mother’s words and the world they encapsulate can only make sense to the child if it corresponds to something in her own independent experience of the world through her senses. Once the mother’s language is internalized, the child can move from a sensational experience of the world to a world that now makes sense, i.e. she can now make the transition from sensation to sense, from a perceptual world to a conceptual world. The introduction of language to the child is not adequate in itself for this transition to happen, as Sacks (1991:68) explains – thought must also be introduced, otherwise this transition

will not take place. In this way dialogue is established between mother and child, which enables the child to learn and make sense of her world.

This interaction between a mother and her deaf child enables one through the DSL Model to envision God as the one who communicates in the most excellent manner conceivable – Sign, a language that is inaudible, yet visible – thus the concept of Superior Communicator. God, in this context, is not alone, talking to God, but initiates and enters into a relationship and a dialogue with God’s dialogue partner, humanity. As *’elohim* in the first creation story, God can thus be understood as the superior cosmic communicator, communicating to the whole of humanity. It is thus within this relationship – “a dialogue rich in communicative intent, [and] in mutuality”, as Sacks (1991:63) terms it – that humanity can transit from a sensational experience of the world to making sense of the world.

4.4.1.3 Power of Communicative Intent

Sacks (1991:67) highlights the fact that a “terrible power” lies with a mother in terms of how she communicates with her child, and what the child learns through her way of communication. Apart from those mothers who talk *to* their children, or *down to* their children, there are those who in a significant way, talk *with* their children by describing a big world with a history and a future, and “mediate their environment by endowing stimuli with meaning” (Sacks 1991:67). The mother’s communicative intent is the decisive factor determining in what kind of world the child will live, because, as Sacks explains, “children seem to faithfully copy the cognitive world introduced to them by their mothers” – the child will either remain in a perceptual world (powerless parent, poor dialogue, communicative defeat), or move from a perceptual world into

a conceptual world, which is cognitively significantly enhanced and enriched with symbol and meaning (powerful parent, creative dialogue, rich communicative interchange). Powerful parents dialogue *with* their children, in this way endowing them with power and autonomy (Sacks 1991:68-69).

In the dialogue that happens between God and humanity, God thus fulfils the role of the powerful parent whose communicative intent is for human beings to be endowed with power and autonomy. This idea is alluded to in Genesis 1:27 where God creates the human being in God's image, i.e. in the context of this chapter then the only creature who is enabled to communicate in a most unique way through the use of language compared to other creatures. The DSL Model suggests that God's power and autonomy in terms of God's communication *par excellence* are three-fold in nature, i.e. (i) naming, (ii) giving functions to, and (iii) pronouncing blessings. Based on this, Genesis 2:19-20 seems to suggest that the power and autonomy of human beings as communicating creatures are to be found in their ability, through the acquisition of language, to describe and name their world, and by so doing make sense of the world they live in.

Here, the story of Jean Massieu provides a good example of how acquisition of language provided the means by which an individual is empowered to make sense of the world he lived in. Sacks (1991:45-53) recalls the story of Massieu, who was languageless until the age of fourteen due to the fact that he was deaf, but later in life became "eloquent in Sign and written French". Until the age of fourteen Massieu had no idea of abstract and symbolic representations. With hard work and determination Abbé Sicard tutored Massieu, who, one day, "got it, got the idea of an

abstract and symbolic representation”. With his mind enlightened in such a dramatic way, Massieu now demanded to know the names of everything around him – in Sacks’ (1991:48) words,

With the acquisition of names, of words for everything, Sicard felt, there was a radical change in Massieu’s relation to the world – he had become like Adam: “This newcomer to earth was a stranger on his own estates, which were being restored to him as he learned their names”.

Sacks (1991:49) focuses attention on some pertinent questions, such as why Massieu and even Adam demanded names of things,

Why did naming give Massieu such joy, and cause his soul to expand and grow? How did they alter his relation to the things previously nameless, so that now he felt that he owned them, that they had become his ‘domain’? What is naming *for*?

He explains that this surely has to do with the “primal power of words”, i.e. “to define, to enumerate, to allow mastery and manipulation, to move from the realm of objects and images to the world of concepts and names”. It enabled Massieu to grasp the idea that ideas and concepts are a “generalizing power that could transform the entire world”; it enabled him to “know the world as home, the world as his ‘domain’ in a way that he had never known before”.

With reference to ‘generalization’, Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (Vygotsky 1962:5) said the following about words,

A word does not refer to a single object but to a group or class of subjects. Each word is therefore already a generalization. Generalization is a verbal act of thought and reflects reality in quite another way than sensation and perception reflect it.

Abbé Sicard, in a powerful way through dialogue introduced and guided Massieu to images, which are particular in nature, because, as Sacks explains, “one cannot have a generic image”. He then gradually inducted Massieu into so-called ‘image-concepts’, which are generalizations (Sacks 1991:49). This means that the acquisition of language allows a human being, through generalization, to make the transition from “a world of innumerable unconnected particulars to a connected, intelligible, and intelligent world” (Sacks 1991:54), a world described by general image-concepts.

God as the powerful parent does not talk *to* humanity, and neither does God talk *down* to humanity – God talks *with* humanity, and by so doing also leads humanity into a big world with both a history and a future – a world in which stimuli (visual image-concepts) are richly endowed with meaning. Particular images have no meaning in and by itself – however, once images are connected in a logical manner, like letters (symbols) in a meaningful word, it becomes generalized image-concepts (superior words), which convey meaning.

The world into which God leads humanity through divine Sign is not a dreary, dead world populated with static objects, but instead a highly creative and imaginative world – a very exciting and lively (living) world. This world has an existence of its own, distinct from God. In reference to this, Coppedge (2007:264) writes that words, although they originate in the mind of the speaker (communicator), attain a life of their own once they have been spoken. He concludes that words, after they’ve been spoken, “can be manipulated and recombined by the speaker, but [they] are no longer identical with the speaker” (Coppedge 2007:264) – they become distinct from

the speaker, and have an existence of their own, as would be in the case with creation.

4.4.1.4 Visual Thought Patterns

Language and thought go together, as do thought and speech (Sacks 1991:19, 75). These concepts are always personal – “our utterances express ourselves”, as Sack (1991:75) explains – it is “like an effusion, a sort of spontaneous transmission of self”. Clearly, dialogue launches language with external speech that follows. In this process, “thought is embodied in words”, says Sacks (1991:74). It is through these ‘embodied words’ that “visual thought-patterns”, in other words ‘image-concepts’, are generated, and allow Sign to have exceptional visio-spatial qualities and spatial reference. Through divine Sign, which exhibits the same exceptional visio-spatial qualities, it is thus envisioned that God’s innermost personal thoughts are embodied in a superior way in image-concepts (visual words) in and through creation, thereby revealing the mysterious God to humanity.

In celebrating Sign, Desloges (1779 [1984]:37) says that, “Nothing is more wonderful, or more to be celebrated, than something that will unlock a person’s capacities and allow [her] to grow and think...”. He continues by writing that,

The [sign] language we use among ourselves, being a faithful image of the object expressed, is singularly appropriate for making our ideas accurate and for extending our comprehension by getting us to form the habit of constant observation and analysis. This language is lively; it portrays sentiment, and develops imagination. No other language is more appropriate for conveying strong and great emotions.

Sign does not convey isolated facts, but connections, understanding; it conveys ideas and images that are endowed with sense and meaning, as Sacks (1991:73)

observed in little six-year-old Charlotte. Observing her brought him to a clear understanding that the passage from a perceptual world to a conceptual world was not possible without complex dialogue – in his words, “a dialogue that first occurs with the parents, but then is internalized as ‘talking to oneself’, as thought”.

The same can be said about divine Sign – the image-concepts representing God’s living, creative words, and expressed in and through creation are comprehensible in such a way that allows human beings to constantly observe and analyze the world and make sense of it. It is a language like none other that transforms the world from a perceptual world into a comprehensible conceptual world. God, in an all-powerful, superior way communicates *with* God’s human dialogue partner in a comprehensible way to make God known.

4.4.2 Extraordinary Transformer

The second concept of God, *’elohim* – that of ‘Transformer’ is based on the transformative power of Sign (divine Sign according to the DSL Model), and as such God as transformer is identified herein as Extraordinary Transformer.

Webster’s Dictionary defines ‘transformer’, ‘transform’ and ‘extraordinary’ as follow:

a) Transformer

(noun: L. *transformatrum*)

- (i) It is a person or thing that transforms [something].

(Webster’s Dictionary 2001:1520)

b) Transform

(verb: L. *transformare*)

- (i) To change the form or outward appearance of;
- (ii) To change the condition, nature, or function of.

(Webster's Dictionary 2001:1520)

c) Extraordinary

(adjective: L. *extraordinarius*)

- (i) Out of the usual order; not according to the usual custom or regular plan;
- (ii) Going far beyond the ordinary degree, measure, limit;
- (iii) On a special errand, having special authority or responsibility.

(Webster's Dictionary 2001:504)

In the interaction between mother and child, the mother fulfils the role of transformer as she leads her child into her world picture. In this role her communication with the child does not only transform the child in terms of the child's worldview through the means of language, but the child's world is transformed by the mother who is continuously introducing new things to her. In this way the child's world is enlarged and enriched by more and new stimuli endowed with meaning (Sacks 1991:68, 69).

This suggests that God as communicator also fulfils the role of transformer in the same way as the human mother does – God, however, becomes the transformer *extraordinaire*. Whereas the human mother is visible, God is invisible and God's spoken word inaudible. The excellence of God's transformative action(s) in and through creation (divine Sign) are three-fold in nature, and based on God's authority as communicator *par excellence*: (i) first, through God's spoken word God transforms space – to use the Sign term, God "linguisticizes" space through God's spoken word, or

“spatializes” God’s word (Sacks 1991:115) so that God’s spoken word becomes visible; (ii) secondly, God enables (cognitive transformation) God’s human dialogue partner in such a way that she can see God’s inaudible voice as it becomes visible in and through creation, and (iii) thirdly, God transforms her world by introducing step by step (simple to complex) new image-concepts in order to enable her to make sense of her world. God’s spoken word (inaudible yet visible) thus becomes the effecter of transformation at different levels.

4.4.3 Primary Partner

The third concept of God, *’elohim* – that of ‘Partner’ is based on the idea of God and humanity being dialogue partners within creation, with God being the primary or first partner who initiates the dialogue. Webster’s Dictionary defines ‘partner’, ‘partnership’, and ‘primary’ as follow:

a) Partner

(noun: L. *socius*)

- (i) One who takes part in some activity with another or other; associate.

(Webster’s Dictionary 2001:1050)

b) Partnership

(noun: L. *consociatio*)

- (i) The state of being a partner; participation;
(ii) The relationship of partners; joint interest; association
(iii) A contract by which an association is created; the [ones] so associated.

(Webster’s Dictionary 2001:1050)

c) Primary

(adjective: L. *primarius*)

- (i) First in importance; chief; principal; main;
- (ii) Firsthand; direct in terms of a *primary* source of information)

(Webster's Dictionary 2001:1040)

According to Sacks (1991:62), an “essential innate ability” exists within the developing child for the acquisition of language, but it can only be activated by another person who “already possesses linguistic power and competence”, in most cases the mother of the child. Sacks uses the term “transaction” in reference to this process, i.e. that the acquisition of language by a child happens through a process of transaction between mother and child”. Both terms are characteristic of what happens between partners, whether it is in business or otherwise. In terms of Van Huyssteen’s ‘transversal plane’ of dialogue this makes much sense as it is on this plane that the mother and child meet, and where dialogue becomes possible between them. The important requirement here is that the world behind the mother’s words must correspond to something in the child’s own experience, as Sacks (1991:63) cautions, otherwise there would be no transversal plane on which dialogue can happen. This experience of the world is given to the child by her senses. If her experience corresponds to her mother’s language, she will internalize the language and transcend from a sensational world into a conceptual world endowed with meaning.

This image of God as partner goes hand in hand with the images of communicator and transformer. As dialogue partner God can be said to also create a transversal plane of dialogue with God’s human dialogue partner, and by so doing “coaxes” her from a

perceptual to a conceptual world – a process which is called a “dialectic leap” (Sacks 1991:65). According to Sacks, this transition from a perceptual to a conceptual world is “crucially dependent” upon the dialogue between mother and child – the same can be said to be true of God and God’s human dialogue partner. It is within this partnering relationship that God reveals something of God’s self, making it possible for God’s human dialogue partner to gain knowledge about God, and so being enabled to make sense of her world.

4.5 THE NAME OF GOD, *Yahweh*: A Brief Literature Background

The name *Yahweh* – regarded by the Jews as “the name *par excellence*”, and by the church fathers to be the “unutterable or unpronounceable name” (Bavinck 1951:103), or the “Ineffable Name of God”, according to rabbinic teaching (Hyatt 1967:369) – is the divine name of God, descriptive of God’s essence. Much has been written on the divine name, and many different theories have been proposed in order to explain the original meaning of the name as well as the origin of Mosaic Yahwism (Hyatt 1967:369-370). Although many of these theories have merit, much critique has also been raised against a number of them.

According to Cohon (1951:587), the ritualistic use of the phrase, “the name of *Yahweh*”, represents a most ancient formula of worship, which is traced back to the days of Enoch through the Yahwistic account (Genesis 4:26). Moreover, Cohon (1951:589) stresses the fact that the phrase, “the name of *Yahweh*”, does not figure anywhere as a separate divine being, and concludes that it is generally equivalent to *Yahweh*. Abba (1961:322) concurs by pointing out that there are many indications that the name

Yahweh in itself is extremely ancient, but that new emphasis was placed on it in the exodus period.

According to Cross (1962:251), the name *Yahweh*, as it appears in epigraphic sources, is a primitive divine name, or, as he explains, “at least an element in a liturgical epithet or sentence name”. In extrabiblical sources dated before the exile, *Yahweh* is the so-called “invariable independent form”. He points out that the name appears as *yhw* in the seventh century Lachish letters, and also in a seal from the eighth century B.C., reading: *Imqnyw/ʔd . yhw* – “Belonging to Miqneiah, the slave of *Yahweh*”. Cross is convinced that the independent divine name appears in non-biblical sources such as the Meša’ Stone, which dates from the ninth century B.C., and believes it highly probable that the name may also appear in an unpublished list of South Palestinian place-names from thirteenth century Egypt. He finds it surprising that the jussive form, *yahū*, as an independent name, does not appear before the fifth century B.C. McComiskey (1984:464), however, points out that historically it had been difficult to determine the meaning of the tetragrammaton, exactly because of the “paucity of informative data relative to the various forms of the name *ya* in historical sources outside the OT”.

This difficulty is highlighted by the various theories proposed over the course of time (McComiskey 1984:464-466). One proposition, which “takes account of the broad representation of the name *ya* in extrabiblical cultures of the second millennium B.C.”, is that the tetragrammaton should be understood as a form of paranomasia, a view that Manley and Bruce (1996:421) support, which suggests that the name *Yahweh* is a “quadriliteral form”, indicating that the name is connected to the Hebrew form *hāyâ* –

meaning ‘to be’ (Exodus 3:14-15), or rather, as they explain, with a variant and earlier form of the root, *hāwā*.

With reference to morphological analytical evidence that the name *Yahweh* appears in Amorite personal names, Cross (1962:252, 253) contends that “this material strongly supports the view that the name *Yahweh* is a causative imperfect of the Amorite-Proto-Hebrew [triliteral] verb *hwy*, ‘to be’”, which corresponds to the meaning suggested by Manley and Bruce. McComiskey (1984:465) agrees that this is the most commonly held view amongst scholars, while Bavinck (1951:105) suggests that it rather derives from either *hwh* or *hyh*. Here, McComiskey has suggested that *hwy* should be translated ‘Sustainer, Maintainer, Establisher’”. Cassuto (1941:18) suggests that the name *YHWH* is “a proper noun, the specific name of Israel’s God, the God whom the Israelites acknowledged as the Sovereign of the universe and as the Divinity who chose them as a people”.

Although the divine name was revealed by God to Moses (Exodus 6:2-3), the Jewish rabbis placed extraordinary value on the sanctity of the name and withdrew it from ordinary use because of the heretical Gnostic teaching that the Creator God of the Old Testament – *Yahweh* – was believed to be an inferior deity in comparison to the so-called highest God (Cohon 1951:592). Consequently, it was this name, *Yahweh*, which was used by them in their so-called ‘formulas’. Furthermore, in contrast to the biblical teaching that God is knowable, they believed that the highest God or Divinity remained unknown and inexpressible. As a result of this heretical teaching, the rabbis believed that the divine name should be kept secret and thus placed a prohibition on the use of the divine name, resulting in the substitute name *Adonai* for God consequently coming

into use (Cohon 1951:583). According to McComiskey (1984:466), the root *'dn* in the name *Adonai* occurs in Ugaritic, meaning “lord and father”. He argues that it is thus “not difficult to understand how the connotation ‘lord’ developed”, if the “word originally connoted ‘father’”, and points out that the basic meaning of the word in the Old Testament is ‘lord’”. Manley and Bruce (1996:420-421), on the other hand, explain that the name *Jehovah* – a more commonly known form of the divine name – developed over the course of time as a result of the mentioned rabbinic prohibition placed on the use of the divine name. This form was advocated by the Franciscan Peter Galatinus, but was opposed by various scholars who believed that the vowels were borrowed from the word *Adonai* (Bavinck 1951:103). The argument is that the vowels of the name *Adonai* were combined with the consonants *YHWH* to give rise to the form *Yahovah*, and consequently to the name *Jehovah*. The divine name *Yahweh* is usually translated as *LORD* in English translations, and in a similar manner as *HERE* in Afrikaans translations in order to distinguish between *Elohim* – God (English and Afrikaans spelling the same).

These theories, like any other theories, are characterized by difficulties – in McComiskey’s words (1984:464), “It is evident that the problem is a difficult one”. He suggests that it is best to understand the theological significance of the divine name in light of the “theological content with which the name was invested in Hebrew religion”.

Cassuto (1941:17-19) believes that the use of the “Divine Names” in the Old Testament is not an arbitrary phenomenon, but came about as a result of design. He explains that the name *Elohim* acquired for the ancient Jewish people the same significance as that of a proper noun once they’ve understood that there is only one God – *YHWH* – and

that God is *Elohim* (1 Kings 18:39), with the result that *Elohim* became synonymous with *YHWH*. He warns, though, that synonyms are not identical in meaning, and that it should be borne in mind when using the two names, the reason being that the name *YHWH* expresses the “particular personality of Israel’s God”, while *Elohim* is used by the pagans to denote their deities as well. According to Cassuto (1941:19), and in reference to Zech. 14:9, it is only “...when all the nations would recognize, as did Israel, that ‘*YHWH, He is 'Elōhīm*, would *YHWH* be One and **His name One**”.

In light of human names carrying such high degree of significance in ancient Hebrew culture, it is reasonable to infer that the name of God would have exceedingly more significance. The significance is to be found in the connection between God and God’s name, which is established by God self in that God gives God a name, thereby revealing God as God is. Cohon (1951:582) states almost matter-of-factly that God is “essentially nameless”, by this meaning that God transcends any name given to God by man. God’s name is thus not an arbitrary connection established by human beings as was the case with ancient pagan gods (Epstein 1907:394), but as Bavinck (1951:84, 85) states without any doubt, “God’s name is, therefore, most of all God’s *revelation* of **himself** whereby **he** actively and objectively makes **himself** known”. This “*one name of God*”, he says, “...stands for his honor, glory, excellencies, revelation, and divine essence” – it is “inclusive of his entire revelation both in nature and grace... [and] is for us resolved into... many names”. Mejer (1977:76) concurs and with reference to Mic. 4:5, says that, “The name of God... is of the essence of deity, a revelation of **himself** and so self-expressive; it imparts knowledge of **him** and guides in the way of his service”. God’s names, as Cohon (1951:582) explains, are thus of spiritual necessity to human beings in that they “simply point to **His** reality and to **His** effects”.

The significance of God's name is brought out in Exodus 3, which relates Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush where Moses urgently requests God to tell him by which name he is authorized to approach the people of Israel. God answers Moses by introducing God as "I am Who I am" (Exodus 3:14), thereby revealing God's absolute existence as the Eternal One. Furthermore, God tells Moses, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers... has sent me to you. This *is* My name forever, and this *is* My memorial to all generations'" (Exodus 3:15).

The importance of God's name is carried further in terms of its absolute holiness (Mejer 1977:78). This is evident in Deuteronomy 28:58 where God tells God's people that God would bring all kinds of plagues and sicknesses over them should they ever disregard God's name – here God proclaims God's name as "...the awesome name, 'THE LORD YOUR GOD'". According to Mejer, Israel's greatest guilt lay in the fact that she forgot God's name. In Isaiah and Ezekiel it was regard for God's name and honour that moved God to act in protecting God's people (Isaiah 48:9-11; Ezrah 20:9, 14). From a modern ecclesiastical perspective, Tozer (1961:121) believes the Church to be in crisis – that she has lost her power; the reason, he says, is that the glory of God has departed solely because the name of God is not being glorified as it is supposed to be. His solution to this dilemma is simple – the Church must acquaint herself with God once again.

Although the name of God was used freely in the early Hebrew religion in prayers, oaths and in giving blessings, it was a grave sin to use the holy name lightly or in a false oath. In terms of invoking a blessing, it was practice to create [human] names that contained an element of the divine name – a practice that was continued until postexilic

times (Mejer 1977:77, 78), and a practice well-known to the Amorite culture (Cross 1962:252). Examples of such names as Ahaziah, Ishmael and others abound in the Old Testament, and it seems that in these instances the mother had the most influence in the choice of name (Genesis 26-30).

The awesome power of the name of the LORD is attested to in Deuteronomy 28:10, Amos 9:12, Isaiah 43:7 and Jeremiah 15:16; 7:10, 12 and 14, which points to God as the owner or proprietor of the land or the people over which God's name is proclaimed, and the blessing that flows from this proclamation to God's people. Cohon (1951:585) explains this in light of the customary belief in ancient religions that knowledge of the name of a spirit or deity was believed to give a person power over that deity, and the means of securing the deity's help. Improper mention of the name, however, could result in disaster. Caution on the side of humans were thus required in using a deity's name. As a result of this belief and with reference to the divine name of God, the expression – *called by God's name* – was used instead to designate persons and objects belonging to God. As God's 'property', they were entitled to God's protection. The power of God's name was thus communicated to those who possessed God's name.

The ark of God and the temple of God testify to the same power and holiness – in 2 Samuel 6:2 it is written that the ark of God, "...is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim", and in 1 Kings 9:3 it is written that the house of God, which king Solomon built, has been consecrated by God putting God's name there forever. It was from the mercy seat of the ark that God appeared to Moses

(Exodus 25:22; Numbers 7:89), and in the temple (“the house of the LORD”, 1 Kings 9:1) that God appeared to Solomon for the second time (1 Kings 9:2).

4.6 CONCEPTS OF GOD, *Yahweh*

4.6.1 Personal Partner

The one concept of God, *Yahweh*, identified in this thesis – that of Personal Partner – is based on the understanding that God in God’s personal capacity enters voluntarily and freely into a personal relationship with God’s creation, particularly with human beings within the setting of creation. God as personal partner initiates the relationship, and by implication the dialogue between God and humankind. In reference to the so-called “terrible power”, which Sacks (1991:67-69) refers to that lies with the powerful mother who *dialogues with* her child instead of *monologues at* her (powerless mother), God as the powerful personal partner enters into a relationship with human beings in which he dialogues with them as well – a process by which he empowers human beings, like the human mother does her child.

4.6.1.1 The Free Personal Partner

The descriptions of God as partner strongly resonate with what Barth has to say about God in his book, *The Humanity of God* (1961). In his appraisal of the reaction against nineteenth century liberal theology, of which he was the leading authority, he writes that evangelical theology had become “religionistic, anthropocentric, and in this sense humanistic” in its presentation of man at the cost of God (Barth 1961:35). He reminds one that God instead is the one to be exalted, describing the relationship between God and man also in terms of partnership, i.e. God being man’s free partner engaged in dialogue with man. This dialogue is ruled by God, and not man,

in a relationship that exists in a history inaugurated by God (Barth 1961:36). Barth (1961:42) explains that that “the *deity* of the *living* God... [finds] its meaning and its power only in the context of **His** history and of **His** dialogue with *man*, and thus in **His** *togetherness* with man”. According to him, this ‘togetherness’ is grounded in God, and “determined, delimited, and ordered through **Him** alone”. The living God, and the freedom which is God’s, does not reveal God in a vacuum to humankind, but as Barth says, reveals God “precisely and authentically in the fact that He exists, speaks, and acts as the partner of man, though of course as the absolutely superior partner”. Barth (1961:48) writes these profound words concerning the freedom of God in partnering with human beings,

He wants in **His** freedom actually not to be without man but *with* him and in the same freedom not against him but *for* him, and that apart from or even counter to what man deserves. **He** wants to be man’s partner, **his** almighty and compassionate Saviour. **He** chooses to give man the benefit of **His** power, which encompasses not only the high and the distant but also the deep and the near, in order to maintain communion with him in the realm guaranteed by **His** deity.

4.6.1.2 The Incomparable Personal Partner

Brunner (1949:117) writes that God is incomparable and cannot be defined. In line with this, Oden (1987:84) describes God in the superlative as “incomparably personal”, a befitting characterization of God as personal partner pointing to the direct interaction and personal relationship that is evident right from the beginning in Genesis 2 where God gives special attention to the creation of the first man, Adam, compared to other creatures. After God has created him, this man is named by God, in the process receiving his identity from God. In this scenario *Yahweh* enters into a personal relationship with a specific creature, the human being whom God names. As history unfolds in the Bible, it becomes progressively clear that this relationship is

extended to the rest of mankind through Eve and Adam's descendants. In terms of biblical history hereafter it is a very specific relationship that God establishes with Abraham through the covenant, thereby extending it specifically to the nation of Israel and later specifically to the church.

In reference to the relationship between God and Israel and to Isaiah's testimony (Isaiah 12:2), Oden (1987:81) emphasises that within the context of Israel's religious life the Holy One of Israel is "constantly addressed as intimate partner in dialogue, 'my refuge and defense'", which points to God's immanence. Here, Oden highlights the fact that the ideas of the transcendence and immanence of God, which are inseparable in the Hebraic faith, have mostly been portrayed in an imbalanced way in the sense that divine immanence has often been neglected in favour of divine transcendence. If this was true, however, God as personal or intimate partner would seem highly unlikely as God would have been unknowable, and there would also have been no biblical testimony to support it. Biblical testimony, in fact, reveals the opposite as Oden writes in reference to Isaiah 12:6, "Characteristically the Holy One (*gadosh*) of Israel is understood to be 'among you'".

God as personal partner finds its basis in the fact that God reveals God by his personal name, *Yahweh*, and he speaks in the first person as "I". With regard to the idea of personhood ascribed to God, Oden (1987:85, 86) explains that, "Whatever being can say 'I' is a person. For knowing oneself or another as capable of saying 'I' requires self-consciousness, intentionality, the will to communicate, and self-determination". By revealing God's personal name, God is thus not a "nameless energy or abstract idea. God is not an 'it'". Entering into a personal relationship

requires the two parties involved to interact in two modes of communication, i.e. that of talking and that of listening – as Oden (1987:84) puts it, “...the divine-human encounter is portrayed by Scripture as a personal relationship of meeting, speaking, listening, getting acquainted, becoming mutually committed and involved, experiencing frustrations and failures, splitting up, and becoming reconciled (Exodus 28:43; Numbers 11:33; 1 Samuel 10:1-5; Psalm 4:1; 17:1; 74:1; Hosea 14:1)”.

4.6.1.3 The Independent Personal Partner

Oden (1987:233, 234) states two truths about God and the world – (1) “The world is not God”, and (2) “God minus the world is still God”. God is not merged with the world. He is unmistakably distinct from the world. It is clear from Augustine’s confessions that he struggled with this issue, asking the question, “Do heaven and earth contain you because you have filled them, or do you fill them and overflow them because they do not contain you?”. He concludes this confession with the question, “Or is the whole of you everywhere, yet without anything that contains you entire[ly]?”, which seemingly is the answer to his first question (Augustine, *Conf.* I. iii (3); Chadwick 1991:4).

The world is not God, and God is not the world. Neither is the world an extension of God, or an emanation from God (Buddhist believe). God did not make the world out of God’s self, as Augustine argues, but the world is of God, “For you made heaven and earth not out of your own self, or it would be equal to your only-begotten Son and therefore to yourself” (Augustine, *Conf.* XII. vii (7); Chadwick 1991:249). The created world is finite, not eternal, and owes its existence to the “free and sovereign act of God”. Within this freedom and sovereignty God exists wholly independent from

God's creation. God chooses out of God's own volition and total independence to be humankind's personal partner. In this God reveals God's personal name, *Yahweh*, to them.

4.7 WHO IS GOD?

The effort invested in identifying the particular concepts of God concomitant with the particular interpretation of the first creation story presented herein serves to highlight for the researcher the difficulty in writing about God, struggling throughout with the self-same question that Augustine also asked, "Who then are you, my God?" (Augustine, *Conf. I: iv (4)*; Chadwick 1991:4). The difficulty is found in the fact that God is not an object that can be observed and tested scientifically. God is, what Oden (1987:2) calls, "our incomparable Subject", and it is only through faith that one can seek to understand and know the incomparable God. The fundamental biblical teaching that God exists forms the foundation on which theology rests – in Saucy's words (1984:459),

The opening passage [in Scripture] which reveals God as Creator and Sovereign of heaven and earth sets the pattern for the remainder of the Bible in which God is viewed as foundational for a view of life and this world.

This is echoed by McGrath (2011b:115), who, in reference to modes of Christian living, points out that the foundational framework for Christians to live purposefully and meaningfully in this world has at its core the living God. Bavinck's (1951:13) view of Systematic Theology (Dogmatics) underscores these statements as he writes,

The knowledge of God is the only dogma, the sole content of the entire field of Dogmatics. All the doctrines treated in Dogmatics – whether in regard to the universe, man, Christ, etc. – are but the explication of the central dogma of the knowledge of God. Everything is treated with God as center and starting-point.

The centrality of God forms a pivotal part of Tozer's writings as well. This is evident in his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (1961). Discussing the attributes of God and their meaning to Christian life, Tozer (1961:7) believes that God should always be the most important question before the church. With this in mind he writes that, "... the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his heart conceives God to be". For Tozer (1961:8) it means that Christians should have the right conception of God as this forms the basis to Systematic Theology and practical Christian living alike. Morey's work (1989:1) is marked by the same basic belief as that of Tozer when he writes, with reference to Proverbs 23:7, that what people think about God is very important, drawing a parallel between what people think and how they live. He maintains that the right view about God is essential for Christians to retain confidence in the fact that the God they worship today is the same God that was (i.e. the One they read about in the Bible), and also the same God that will be (the One in the future). For Morey God's immutability thus forms the very foundation of such Christian confidence. He believes that human understanding of God and God's relationship to the world and humans "has a direct bearing on [their] attitudes and actions". It is, however, within this particular sphere of human understanding that humans are found lacking as they are faced with the mystery of who God is.

The incomprehensibility of God (*cf.* Isaiah 40:25-26) points to the fact that there is "no universal abstract category of the divine", as Saucy (1984:460) explains. Both the Old and New Testament provide evidence throughout of people's innate struggle in comprehending who God is. While talking to Job, Job's friend Eliphaz, for example, tries to verbalize his understanding of God's deeds in such terms that reflects his own personal struggle verbalized in the following words, "He performs wonders that cannot

be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted” (Job 5:9). Later on Job’s friend Elihu is amazed by God’s greatness and exclaims, “How great is God – beyond our understanding!” (Job 36:26). The psalmist’s witness is similar when he writes, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (Psalm 139:6).

This trend continues in the New Testament. In the doxology presented in Romans 11:33, for example, Paul writes,

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable **his** judgments, and **his** paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been **his** counsellor?

Further on, in his charge to Timothy (1 Timothy 6:15, 16), he exalts God in similar language,

[God]... blessed and only Ruler, the King of Kings and the Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.

4.8 REVELATION IN PARTNERSHIP

Oden (1987:233) emphatically states that the drama of creation is all about a relationship, “The real story concerning creation is about the creature/Creator relationship, not about creatures as such...”. Within this paradigm the relationship between God and man is never an equal partnership, as Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (1933:32) argues, but one that is always initiated by God. Brunner (1944:31, 44) agrees by writing that the relationship is characterized by “God who approaches man.... and man who comes from God”. Saucy (1984:459) supports this and believes that human beings, as a result of the finite character of their minds, cannot reason to a “valid knowledge of the transcendent Creator”. Saucy and Bavinck support Brunner’s view of God’s self-revelation – in Bavinck’s words, “If God does not reveal **himself** in

his creatures, knowledge of him is evidently unattainable”. Bavinck is emphatic about the fact that the purpose of God’s revelation is so that people shall learn to know God (Bavinck 1951:14-15; 36, 41).

4.8.1 The Knowability of God

Morey (1989:151) points out that humanistic theologies work on the assumption that God is unknowable. Within this context the attributes of God are not revealed knowledge, but things attributed to God by man, and point to man’s ideas about God. Moreover, in religions such as the Hindu religion and Islam for example, the unknowability of God is emphasized by their teachings (Bavinck 1951:19, 20). The same is true for various philosophies, such as Greek philosophy of which Bavinck has the following to say,

Greek philosophy frequently taught a [similar] unknowability with respect to deity – for example, the philosopher Simonides to whom the tyrant Hiero had put the question, “Who is God?” kept on asking for more and more time to frame an answer. According to Diogenes, the treatise of Protagoras *On the Gods* began as follows: “Concerning the gods I am not able to know whether they exist or whether they do not exist. For there are many things which prevent one from knowing....”

Judging God’s existence by the ‘mysterious otherness’ and incomprehensibility that surround God’s Being, talking and writing about God does seem a wholly futile human activity. Bavinck (1951:14) agrees and questions such a presumptuous notion in light of a seeming lack of any kind of relationship and connection between God and humans, which would enable them to engage in such activity. Despite this seemingly unbridgeable chasm that exists between God and humans, and in contrast to Einstein’s postulate that the mysterious could be equated with the unknown, the Bible maintains without a shadow of doubt that God is knowable – this is evident from passages such

as Jeremiah 9:23-24; Daniel 11:32; John 17:3; Galatians 4:8-9; 1 John 4:4-8 and 5:18-21.

The Bible, instead of attempting to define God, presents descriptions of God and God's attributes, which make God knowable to human beings. Kaplan's (1967:342) words bear weight on this as he writes that, "the fact of godhood is a matter of having **His** worshippers take cognizance of the way He functions in their lives, in the history of their people, and in the world as a whole". The knowability of God is thus rooted in revelation. For Bavinck (1951:83, 84), the knowability of God is to be found in God's name. Convincingly, he states that, "All that which can be known of God by virtue of God's revelation is called by Scripture: God's *name*", which he says, "...is a REVELATION of God, first in the O.T., and even more in the N.T., where the Son, Jesus Christ, reveals God unto us". McComiskey (1984:464), in support of this, writes that "one of the most theologically significant modes of the divine self-disclosure is the revelation inherent in the names of God". Bavinck (1951:93) concludes that the names of God "do not give us an adequate, complete knowledge of God, but they give us a true knowledge of **him** for God has originated them".

The New Testament also testifies to this knowability of God through God's indisputable revelation of God in the world. This is well-illustrated by the experience that the apostle Paul had while visiting the city of Athens and his interaction with the Athenians at the Areopagus – the so-called "*locus classicus* of the concept of a 'general revelation' to all humanity", according to Peacocke (1993:197). While in the city, Paul found an altar inscribed with the words, "To an Unknown God" (Acts 17:23, 24) (To the Unknown God; NSB 1997:1853). Using this inscription as his point of departure, he addresses the

Athenians by acknowledging their religious leanings. Starting his argument with the general revelation visible in the world, he points out to them what the nature of their unknown god is in relation to the world by identifying God as God, the creator of heaven and earth in the words, “He is the LORD of heavens and earth...” (Acts 17:24; NIV 1984). Paul convincingly articulates the fact that God is not some unknown god, but a god that is known by God’s name and God’s relationship to the created world.

If all that can be known of God, is bound up in God’s name, as Bavinck asserts, how then does God reveal God’s name to human beings? Biblical teaching supports the fact that genuine communication can and does happen between God and humans. It is based on the belief that God has created humans in God’s own image, which, according to Saucy (1984:460), certainly “includes a likeness sufficient for communication”, and the belief that God is omnipotent, which “...implies that God can make a creature to whom he can truthfully reveal **himself** if he so wills”. In reflection to this and what has been said about the ‘knowledge of God’, Ramm’s explanation that language, being the root of knowledge and thus the root of knowledge of God in special revelation, rings true (Ramm 1961:132). Milne (1982:27) agrees that God “is well able to communicate with his own rational, verbalizing creatures on their own level, *i.e.* by language”.

4.8.2 Knowledge of/about God

Vriezen (1966:128) calls attention to this ‘knowledge of God’, explaining that “knowing God” – *da’ath’ Elohim* – is always spoken of in the Old Testament, but that its fundamental meaning is never specified, although the Old Testament makes it the first demand of life. Kaplan (1967:332), in support of this, explains that in the Jewish context

the “mental attitude which is expected of a worshipper of God (*YHWH*) is one of *knowledge*, i.e. cognizance of ‘*YHWH*’s way”.

Apart from this ‘*knowledge of God*’, both the Old Testament and the New Testament also talk of a ‘*knowledge about God*’. In Psalm 19, for example, the psalmist describes creation as a declaration and proclamation of the glory of God and “the work of **His** hands” (vs. 1). The psalmist observes that within creation the heavens are continuously communicating ‘*knowledge about God*’ (vs. 2) through a message that is visible to the whole world (vs. 4-6) – it is there for everybody to see. This message is affirmed in the New Testament as the same ‘*knowledge about God*’ that has been written about in the book of Acts and in Paul’s letter to the church in Rome.

While in Lystra, Paul, talking to the people of Lystra, informs them that God left a witness of God self in the world, explaining that God confirmed this by God’s kindness in giving them “rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, and satisfying [their] hearts with food and happiness” (Acts 14:17). Here, Paul sees the created order as witness to the existence of God and God’s goodness to human beings. In his letter to the church in Rome, Paul makes it clear that God’s invisible attributes, namely God’s eternal power and God’s divine nature, are not hidden from, and unintelligible to any person, because it has been made visible through the created order (Romans 1:18-24). As a result no one can claim ignorance of God’s existence and power (vs. 20). This passage clearly affirms that God has revealed enough *about God* “since the creation of the world” to oblige people to acknowledge God and give God glory and thanks. Paul sees this knowledge as being adequate for holding human beings accountable in responding to God, irrespective of who they are. In this regard Bavinck (1951:17-19; 36) believes that

the denial of God's knowability can be equated with the repudiation of God's revelation to God's creatures.

Judged by these standards, the two concepts – 'knowledge *of* God' and 'knowledge *about* God', do not have the same meaning. Vriezen (1966:128-129) draws a distinction between 'knowledge of God' (communion with God) and 'having a conception of God' (defining the nature of God), but warns that the two concepts have totally different meanings. He presents a definition of the 'knowledge of God' as "a communion with that God whose Being as such remains a secret and who is holy" (Vriezen 1966:128-129).

This communion with God, he says, is religious faith and not intellectual knowledge,

- (i) ...it is a knowledge of the heart and demands man's love (Deuteronomy 6);
- (ii) ...its vital demand is walking humbly in the ways of the Lord (Micah 6:8), and
- (iii) ...it is the recognition of God as God, total surrender to God as the Lord.

The troubling question is, however, how such a communion between God and humans is possible if, in Bavinck's profound words (1951:14),

...there is between **him** and [humans] a distance as between the infinite and the finite, as between eternity and time, as between being and becoming, as between the All-in-all and nothingness?

Ramm (1961:16-17) provides the answer to this with reference to God's revelation, explaining that because "the knowledge of God is prior to theology", this "knowledge *of* God must be a knowledge *from* God and the pursuit of this knowledge must be governed by the nature of God and his self-revelation". Here, he defines 'revelation' in broad terms as "the sum total of the ways in which God makes **himself** known". He

refers to God's revelation as God's "autobiography", i.e. "that knowledge *about* God which is *from* God". Ultimately, Ramm (1961:19, 139) does make a necessary distinction between 'knowledge *of* God' and 'knowledge *about* God' by equating 'knowledge about God' with general revelation, and qualifying the 'knowledge of God' as being "totally dependent upon special revelation" – for him it is the "central issue in special revelation".

Lewis' explanation corresponds with Ramm's understanding as he draws the same distinction. In the book, *Mere Christianity* (Lewis 1944:139), he sheds more light on the subject of general and special revelation, writing that before Jesus came and claimed to be God, people already had a vague "knowledge *about* God" (general revelation), but when a person becomes a Christian, "he also knows that all his real knowledge *of* God comes through Christ, the man who was God..." (special revelation). Peacocke's (1993:197) idea of a 'knowledge of God', however, causes mild confusion. In his explanation of the concept of general revelation, he equates general revelation with a 'knowledge *of* God', which he says, "is available to all humanity through reflection on the character of the created world". Berkouwer's and Vriezen's views, however, serve to reinforce the distinction made by Lewis and Ramm. Berkouwer (1955:63), on the one hand, talking about a 'knowledge principle', distinguishes between a 'knowledge through natural reason' and a 'knowledge through supernatural faith', but uses the one phrase, 'knowledge of God', in reference to special revelation. Vriezen (1966:133), on the other hand, although not drawing a distinction between 'knowledge of God' and 'knowledge about God', makes his understanding of the 'knowledge of God' clear in the statement that, "Israel owes this knowledge to special revelation granted to the prophets..." .

Although 'knowledge of God' was limited in ancient times, the Old Testament infers to this knowledge, which was mediated by priests and prophets. Despite this limitation, passages like Isaiah 11:9 and Jeremiah 31:34 allude to the fact that a time will come when God will make God known throughout the earth. When that time comes there will be no more need for these intermediaries to guide people in how to know God. In this regard the New Testament points to an increasing understanding of the concept as the story of Jesus Christ's life unfolds in fulfilment of the promises in the Old Testament. This 'knowledge of God' is of a 'peculiar kind' and very limited in character to humans – as Bavinck (1951:41) explains, "...that which God reveals of **himself** in and through creatures is so rich and so deep that it can never be fully known by any human individual". The apostle John presents the proper context in which to understand what this knowledge means in terms of eternal life, "And this is eternal life, that people may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John 17:3, 20:31). Bavinck is in agreement with the apostle John that 'the knowledge of God' in Christ is life itself. From this then, it follows that to gain access to the 'knowledge of God', humans need to be in a personal relationship with Jesus for God to reveal God to them. It is only the infinite that knows the infinite – a truth which is supported by Matthew who writes that, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and those whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matthew 11:27). It is thus only by God's Spirit that God reveals God to those whom God wills, according to the apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). Here, Lewis (1944:139) and Berkouwer (1955:137) are in agreement that the Bible's concern with knowledge is almost exclusively about man's 'knowledge of God' through faith in Jesus Christ.

Coppedge (2007:115) also presents clarity regarding the concept of revelation. Referring to revelation in the same kind of terms as Ramm, he explains God's general revelation to humans as a "shorthand résumé" of how God works. General revelation, he says, is made possible through the created world as it enables the Father to speak to his creatures in four general modes – i.e. "from physical creation, from reason, from conscience and from a variety of experiences". Coppedge (2007:116) argues that special revelation is "the control and interpreter" of general revelation – in other words, "General revelation is the presupposition of special revelation" (Berkouwer 1955:43; Ramm 1961:18). Ramm (1961:24) concludes that, "...only in special revelation is God authentically known".

Milne (1982:22) mentions two other aspects – history and man's universal religious sense – which could be added to Coppedge's list, but warns that their biblical basis is less certain. According to him, revelation interpreted as history points to the idea that, "God reveals **himself** in some sense through the process of judgment reflected in the rise and fall of nations and powers". Furthermore, he says, revelation defined in the context of a universal religious instinct in humankind may "reflect something of God's revelation of **himself** to man". In this instance he refers to John 1:9, which speaks of a light from God that "gives light to every man", the meaning of which he says is disputed (Milne 1982:22).

Based on God's revelation, Bavinck believes that there is then "*something*, however insignificant, which can be the object of our perception and therefore can lead to knowledge" (Bavinck 1951:36). McGrath (2011b:115), in keeping with this idea, says that God, who makes known "*something* of himself" through God's creation – "as a

voice that calls us from its depths and mysterious beauty”, as he so eloquently phrases it – is the same God who makes God known in and through the life, death and resurrection of **His** son, Jesus Christ, and in the pages of Scripture. Wenham (1987:38-39), also alluding to this ‘voice’, argues that man, having been created in the image of God, has been enabled by the divine image to enjoy fellowship with God. It is then within this relationship that man is enabled to discern God’s voice calling him. Bavinck (1951:1), in awe of God’s greatness and awesome power, concludes that God’s revelation “far surpasses human conception and comprehension”, with the result, he says, that Dogmatics is “concerned with nothing but mystery”. Brunner (1949:117) is in agreement, and believes that “The doctrine which lays the most stress upon the Mystery of God will be nearest to the truth”.

Ramm (1961:13), using the metaphor of a map in his explication of the ‘knowledge of God’, says that it is “the authentic map of the spiritual order”. He expounds on this idea by explaining that the purpose of maps, apart from conveying certain knowledge, is mainly to enable a person to find her way around. It thus follows that in life there are different kinds of maps of which ‘the knowledge of God’ is an authentic theological map that “not only conveys to [humans] what [they] need to *know* of the spiritual order, but also how [they] may ‘move about’ and ‘find [their] way’ in the spiritual order”. ‘Knowledge of God’ cannot be separated from worship or service of God, nor the ethical quality of human life, as Ramm (1961:15) adamantly points out, but it is necessary for the true worship of God. Having drawn the line through to theological research, he warns though, that the ‘knowledge of God’ is not equivalent with Systematic Theology (Ramm 1961:14, 15). Vriezen (1966:131) concludes that the Old Testament ‘knowledge

of God' is the basis of theology itself. As such it is thus the task of Systematic Theology to systematically describe 'the knowledge of God', as Bavinck (1951:14) points out.

Historical evidence points to the fact that a number of great scholars have, in the past, revealed a deep heart's desire to know God. Augustine, for instance, expresses this desire in the words, "I desire to know God and my soul. Nothing more". He continues by expressing his restlessness in the words of a prayer, "You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rest in you" (*Conf.* I. i (1); Chadwick 1991:3). Augustine equates this 'knowledge of self and of God' with 'knowledge of truth' (Colleran 1950:5). Calvin, having had the same longing, begins his *Institutes* with the 'knowledge of God and of ourselves' (*Inst.* I. I (1); Kerr 1964:3). Moreover, *The Catechism of Geneva* asks the question, "What is the chief end of human?", and answers accordingly, "That men may know God, their Maker". In more recent times (1998), Pope John Paul II has written in similar vein in the document *Faith and Reason* that, "God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth". McGrath (2011b:92) concurs, writing that, "Human beings long to know the truth, and are constantly searching for it – and in doing so, are led home to God, the creator and the ultimate goal of humanity".

4.8.3 The Importance of Names

The importance of names has dwindled over the course of history. This is most evident in modern Western Culture, which places much less emphasis in the meaning of a name compared to the ancient Middle Eastern cultural context of the Old Testament. Mejer (1977:76) explains, for example, that a name of a human being was, according to ancient Egyptian belief, "as much part of him as his ka or body"; thus, by mentioning

these constituent parts of a person in the books and inscriptions translated into a person's "totality of being", which, by implication, was equivalent to his name. The importance of a name was based on the fact that a person's perpetuity was dependent on that of the name, as Mejer explains; thus, the blotting-out of a name would have been seen in light of the destruction of the person. This idea is also alluded to in Exodus 32:32 and Revelation 3:5.

Most often, and with little thought invested in the process of naming-giving, children are named after parents, grandparents or beloved relatives, or named merely because the name sounds good. Baker (2003:360) agrees, but believes that the meaning of a name is "generally unknown and irrelevant in its choice". Research reveals, however, that names in general and Hebrew names in particular do carry meaning and most often correspond to the individual designated by the name, as well as providing important clues as to the character of the name-bearer. In reference to some biblical examples, Baker (2003:360) remarks that these names are "readily 'readable'" in the Hebrew context "by those who hear or see them". A name is important in that it provides a point of contact between two strangers when they meet for the first time and are introduced to each other – as Brunner (1949:123) writes, "The communication of a name is the disclosure of one's self to the other, and thus the establishment - or at least the beginning - of a personal relation and communion. When one gives oneself to be known, one gives oneself away". Human beings by implication are therefore not unknown entities, but known by [their] names.

This is supported by Bavinck (1951:83), who believes that the connection between a name and its bearer is not arbitrary, asserting that a name is not a mere number, but

something personal as it stands for “our honor, our worth, our personality, our individuality”. In reality it would mean that when a human being is stripped of her name, she would lose her identity as a person, and in a certain sense would not exist anymore, and could indeed become a mere number. This scenario is well-illustrated by the history of the Jewish people, for example, who were stripped of their identity in this fashion when they were incarcerated by the Germans, and numbers tattooed onto their arms by which they were known to their German captors instead of by their names.

In the context of primitive and ancient cultures and the process of name-giving, Mejer (1977:76) writes that, “...the functions and ideas attached to the name [were] exceedingly important”. This is found to be true in the ancient cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, where the existence of gods were measured by their destinies and functions (roles) they fulfilled on earth as embodied in the various elements of creation, and the names they were given in relation to their visible attributes (Walton 2001:86; 2007:90-91). In the Egyptian belief system, creation was expressed, through a name-giving process, as “by the mouth which pronounced the name of everything” (Walton 2007:88); creation was accomplished by the creator god’s pronouncement of “his own potent name” (Mejer 1977:76); and the creator god was identified as, “the one who pronounced the name of everything” (Walton 2001:86). This idea is well-illustrated in the *Ritual of Amun*, which identifies creation as “beginning when no god had come into being and no name had been invented for anything”. Plumley (1975:38) supports this, writing that, “...the actual pronouncing of a name was to create what was spoken” – in other words, within this thought paradigm nothing existed unless it was named. Similar evidence is found on tablets six and seven of the Mesopotamian creation story, the *Enuma Elish*, which demonstrates that the names of the gods – in this case that of

Marduk – are related to their destinies, which in turn are closely linked to their roles and functions (Walton 2007:90).

In the ancient world the birth of the gods points to the world becoming operational, starting to function under the divine guidance of the gods as names are given to them and their jurisdiction is established over the world. A name thus identified the god and was the means by which the god's existence was understood (Walton 2007:92). Neither the physical origin of the world, nor its structure was a point of interest or of any importance to ancient thought.

4.9 THE DOCUMENTARY HYPOTHESIS

Some scholars believed the two names ('designations'), *YHWH* and *ʿElohim*, to be identical in meaning in that they were "interchanged according to the wish of the writer for subjective reasons that the reader cannot comprehend" (Cassuto 1941:17, 18). These two names, according to Bavinck *et al.* (2004:150), "precede those of Father, Son, and Spirit. The first thing Scripture teaches us concerning God is that **he** has a free and independent existence and life of **his** own that is distinct from all creatures".

Other scholars believed that the use of different names for God could be ascribed to different sources (and by implication to different authors) that contributed to the compilation of the Pentateuch, i.e. the Jahwist (J), Elohist (E), Priestly (P) and the Deuteronomist (D) documents (Documentary Hypothesis). Historically, Witter and Jean Astruc, and their successors were convinced that these documents were combined to form the Pentateuch, resulting in the use of the different names for God. The Documentary Hypothesis (see Chapter Two; 2.4.5) has attracted major support from

many prominent scholars from as early as the seventeen hundreds – people such as Eichhorn (1780-1783), Ilgen (1798), Geddes (1792) and others, followed by Graf (1866), Kuenen (1869-1870) and lastly Wellhausen, who brought consensus to the matter, and in so doing ultimately assured the success of the hypothesis (QLYP 2001:2).

In his effort to refute Hobbes' and Spinoza's proposition that the Torah had multiple authorship, Astruc argued for single Mosaic authorship of Genesis, believing that a later editor combined different parallel documents to create Genesis. He used the names of God, *Elōhīm* and *YHWH*, as markers to identify consistent variations in the text of Genesis. His methodology was to create four columns – A, B, C and D – placing passages that use the name *Elōhīm* in column A, those that use *YHWH* in column B, and passages with so-called repetitions in column C, and those with interpolations in column D (Garrett 2001:29). Astruc argued that it would have been a mistake to conclude that the two names, *Elōhīm* and *YHWH*, were used as synonyms in Genesis (Wenham 2003:62-63). Instead, Astruc concluded that the best explanation would be that Genesis was compiled from two of three so-called 'memoires', referring to supposedly different documents (J, E and P) that would later support the Documentary Hypothesis.

This criterion, developed by Astruc, was later extended beyond Genesis, and used by other scholars to account for the development of the Pentateuch. Characteristic of the Documentary Hypothesis is the main postulate that the Jahwist source (J), believed to be the oldest source document, have used the name *YHWH* from the beginning of the story of creation (Cassuto 1941:6, Wenham 1987:56) – “early in the antediluvian

period”, according to Garrett (2001:29). Garrett (2001:29) writes that the J document, as a theological statement, “is often regarded as the work of a great, original thinker who gave shape to the Old Testament idea of the history of salvation”. According to the later E source, however, the name *YHWH* was first revealed to Moses (refer Exodus 3:15, an E text) (Cassuto 1941:6, Wenham 1987:56), and as such the E source uses the designation *’Elōhīm* in all the narratives preceding God’s revelation to Moses. According to Garrett (2001:29), the E document “is more sensitive to moral issues than J but it views God as somewhat more distant from man”.

Likewise, the Priestly Document (P) also refrains from using the name *YHWH* before Moses’ time (Cassuto 1941:6), because, according to Garrett (2001:30), it rests on the assumption that the name *YHWH* was first revealed at the exodus (refer Exodus 6.3, a P text). This document, having been written in the post-exilic period is said to “represent the triumph of the postexilic priesthood and it attempts to justify their form of worship and codify their religion” (Garrett 2001:30).

The D source, which comprises the main part of Deuteronomy, was written at the time of Josiah’s reformation and does not appear at all in the book of Genesis (Cassuto 1941:6, 17; Garrett 2001:30). Garrett points out that the D source uses both names, *’Elōhīm* and *YHWH*.

Cassuto (1941:14, 16), in dealing with the Documentary Hypothesis, maintains that the use of the different names for the Deity – according to him the first of five pillars on which the theory is founded and which supports “the entire structure of the documentary theory” – is “in truth the ultimate foundation of the documentary

hypothesis, not only historically, but also theoretically”. This idea is strongly supported by Bentzen (1948:27-28), who argues that the use of different divine names in Genesis 1 to Exodus 6 must be the one criterion by which to examine, and distinguish between, the different traditions, referring to the different source documents that support the Documentary Hypothesis (J, E, P and D). He believes that this strange phenomenon is not only a literary ‘constant’, but an inherent ‘constant’ of the Documentary Hypothesis.

4.9.1 Critique Against the Documentary Hypothesis

Not everybody agrees on this matter – there are those scholars who reject the source-critical analysis, as well as the dates assigned to the various documents. Here, the works of Jacob (1934) and Cassuto (1944) play a critical role in “an attempt to understand Genesis as a coherent unity”, according to Wenham (1987:xxvii). Cassuto (1941:16-17), probably the most notable scholar having dealt with the validity of the Documentary Hypothesis, says that although the divine names have in the course of time “become something that is self-understood and no longer need[ed] special emphasis.....the variations in the choice of the Divine Names did not come about accidentally but by design”.

In light of his argument that the use of the divine names is not an arbitrary phenomenon, Cassuto (1941:31) writes that, “...we may assume that in each case the Torah chose one of the two Names according to the context and intention”. By employing two rules, he provides numerous examples of the use of the divine names in specific contexts and with particular intention, which support his argument in favour of design (Cassuto 1941:31-40). The first rule he employs, states that the “[Torah] selected the name *YHWH* when the text reflects the Israelite conception of God” – it

“finds expression in the attributes traditionally ascribed to **Him** by Israel”. The second rule states that the “[Torah] preferred the name *’Elōhīm* when the passage implies the abstract idea of the Deity prevalent in the international circles of ‘wise men’ – God conceived as the Creator of the physical universe, as the Ruler of nature, as the source of life”. He therefore concludes that there is no reason why one should be surprised by the variation in the use of the divine names in the Torah. He does believe, however, that it would indeed be surprising if they did not vary, and explains that the variation in the divine names is not as a result of “disparity between documents, or of mechanical amalgamation of separate texts”. He reasons that the “primary signification” of the divine names compelled the Hebrew author to use them, and that the “general literary tradition of the ancient East”, and the “rules governing the use of the Divine Names throughout the entire range of Hebrew literature” demanded this (Cassuto 1941:41).

Surprisingly, Kuenen (1886:56), one of the founders of the classical Documentary Hypothesis, voices his doubt concerning the use of this criterion, explaining that the original distinction between the two divine names more often explains the preference in the use of the one name above the other. He warns against an exaggerated emphasis being placed on this feature (Kuenen 1886:61).

Raven (1910:118, 119) also believes that the traditional source division does not give a satisfactory answer as to why the J source prefers to use the name *YHWH*, while the E and P documents prefer to use the name *’Elōhīm*. He argues that if the Pentateuch was the work of one author, the use of the divine names is clear – they appear exactly where they should. Those portions of Genesis, which are allegedly constituted by the P document, are characteristically cold, formal, systematic, and logical. It is, he says,

precisely in such portions where one would expect the use of the name *'Elōhīm*, which is believed to be the general name for God, the name that bears no special relation to Israel, and which was often used in reference to the pagan gods as well. Raven argues that the same is true for the name Jehovah. The J document, which is characterized by being “naïve and anthropomorphic” in its understanding of God uses the name Jehovah accordingly, i.e. the national name of God, which accentuates God’s covenantal relationship with Israel. So, for Raven, the use of the two divine names does not warrant the argument in favour of different literary sources.

Archer (1974:112), in his survey of the Old Testament, argues that the name *Elohim* for God as the almighty creator is fitting in Genesis 1 in the context of the word’s possible meaning of God being powerful, strong, first (foremost). He argues the same for the name *YHWH* being used in Genesis 2 where it is clear that God is in a covenantal relationship with Adam and Eve. He explains that in Genesis 3 the name for God changes back to *Elohim* when the serpent talks, and argues that it is because God does not stand in a covenantal relationship with ‘Satan’ as God does with humans. In this scenario both the serpent and Eve refer to God as *Elohim*. It is only when God calls out to Adam (Genesis 3:9) and reprimands Eve (Genesis 3:13) that God’s name changes back to *YHWH*, as well as when God pronounces the curse over the serpent (Genesis 3:14).

With reference to the combined name, *YHWH Elohim*, Gordon (1959:132-133) sheds some light from an archaeological viewpoint, pointing out that ancient Ugaritic literature could possibly explain this in terms of the pagan gods having been referred to by such combined names. Two examples provided by him are the names of the gods *Qadish-*

Amrar and *Ibb-Nikkal*. He explains that most of the times the word ‘and’ was used between the two names, but that it could be left out. The best-known example of the use of such a combined name is probably that of the Egyptian god, *Amon-Re*, which originated as a result of Egypt’s triumph under the rule of the Eighteenth Dynasty. Amon was the ruling god of the city Thebes where the political power seat was established, while Re was the universal sun god. The two gods were combined because of the political rule in Thebes and the universality of Re. *Amon-Re*, however, was one god. Gordon explains that the combined name of God, *YHWH Elohim*, could be understood in the light of this – *YHWH* refers to specific characteristics of the God-head, while *Elohim* is a more general (universal) name for Deity. He concludes that the consolidation of the two names into the one name, *YHWH Elohim*, thus points to one and the same God of Israel, and not two separate gods. This stands in sharp contrast to the Documentary Hypothesis, which postulates that the consolidation of the two names is a result of two different documents (J and E) that were combined. Kitchen (1966:121) also points out that multiple names for gods were used in ancient Mesopotamia. The god *Enlil*, for example, was called *Nunamnir* in the prologue of the Lipit-Ishtar laws, and *Inanna/Ishtar/Telitum* and *Nintu/Mama* in the prologue to the laws of Hammurabi. As a result of these insights Gordon concludes that he does not support the division of literary sources either.

Wenham (1983:25), in an ‘evangelical assessment’ of Old Testament study done in 1983, refers to the Documentary Hypothesis as the “sacred cow of Old Testament critical scholarship”. According to him, various “influential liberal scholars” have since 1975 argued that, “in various respects the hypothesis is inadequate and ought to be abandoned or at least completely revamped”. Here, it is worth noting that although Van

Seters and Rendtorff have not dismissed source analysis altogether, they have challenged it on certain points and totally rejected some of the standard criteria including the use of divine names, which forms the basis of Astruc's argument in favour of different source documents (Wenham 1983:25). Westermann, on the other hand, has totally dispensed of the E source, which, according to Wenham, is "usually supposed to constitute a third of the Genesis narratives".

In more recent times Garrett (2001:28-41), professor of Old Testament at Gordon Cornwell University, wrote an article in which he refutes the propositions made by adherents of the Documentary Hypothesis, and in a scathing critique calls the Documentary Hypothesis the "Frankenstein" of biblical studies. His book, *Rethinking Genesis*, which was published in 1991, is described as probably "the most convincing refutation of the documentary hypothesis now in print" (back cover of book).

4.10 CREATION: FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

Against the back-drop of ancient pagan belief that the gods were created beings, the presupposition of Israel's faith was that God had no origin. Thus, within this belief paradigm they did not make any attempt to prove the existence of God, with the result that the Bible does not offer any rational explanations for God's existence. This is evident in the statement, "I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides me" (Isaiah 45:5) – a truth reiterated by Paul in Romans 11:36, "For of **Him** and through **Him** and to **Him** are all things, to whom be glory forever". Francis Schaeffer, in his book, *Genesis in Space and Time* (1972), focuses on the importance of the very same presupposition to Christian faith, stating that "Christianity, as a system does not begin with Christ as Saviour, but with the infinite-personal God who created the world in

the beginning and who made man significant in the flow of history” (Schaeffer 1972:97). Referring to creation, he concludes that, “Its existence shows the existence of the God who is” (Schaeffer 1972:66).

This belief stands in stark contrast to modern-day philosophical systems, in which there is an obstinate refusal in acknowledging the existence of the living God. Various Christian scholars have in the past few decades endeavoured to point out the futility by which non-Christian philosophers have attempted to provide coherent and consistent answers to fundamental problems of life and philosophy. Milne (1982:56), for example, summarizes the problem inherent to these systems correctly by asserting that, “all non-Christian philosophy is essentially a covert attempt to flee from the living God...”. This is well-illustrated by Schaeffer (1972:97), who draws a distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ reality, explaining that Christians see things as ‘abnormal’, i.e. “as not the way they have always been”, while non-Christian philosophers look at the world and see things as ‘normal’. The reason for the Christian interpretation of seeing the world as being ‘abnormal’, he says, is because of their understanding of sin – a moral Fall, as he explains, which resulted in an immediate separation of man from fellowship with God. Within this framework of understanding reality, he points out that even Martin Heidegger realized the futility of a philosophical position, which attempts to provide an explanation of reality from a viewpoint by which the world is considered to be ‘normal’, i.e. without God. Fully aware of man’s need of God in his ‘fallenness’, Heidegger still refused to acknowledge the existence of God and the knowledge man has through God (Schaeffer 1972:98).

McGrath, in his book, *Surprised by Meaning* (2011b), also provides a framework of 'looking at' the world and 'seeing' it in the right perspective, one that once again points to the futility of human philosophical considerations from which the living God is excluded. In this instance he likens Christian doctrine to a lens through which humans can look at the world, and see reality as a vast landscape brought into sharp focus by this lens. He also compares it to a map, which helps Christians "... to grasp the features of the terrain around [them by offering] a new way of understanding, imagining, and behaving". He believes that this reality, as seen through the lens of Christianity, is seen "...in light of the glorious Christian vision of God as Father, Son and Spirit: a God who creates, redeems and sanctifies..." (McGrath 2011b:53).

In an attempt to understand who God is within this 'abnormal' world and to provide a lens through which to look at the world, God's names – *Elohim* and *Yahweh* – are of great import, first through God's revelation to human kind through creation as *Elohim*, and then through God's self-revelation as *YHWH*, the God who stands in a personal relationship with individuals and nations. The creation account in Genesis 1:1 starts with God's name being revealed as *Elohim*, suggesting that this name is especially significant with respect to God's attributes and actions as the One who created the world. In light of this, then, the statements in Genesis 1:1 and 2:1-4a are foundational to the understanding of who *Elohim* is with Genesis 1:1 starting with *Elohim* – the God who works, and Genesis 2:4a concluding with *Elohim* – the God who rests. These verses provide a framework of reference to who *Elohim* is in relation to the 'beginning', *Elohim's* work (act) of creation, and to creation (the heavens and the earth) itself. Moreover, they also provide a framework for understanding the creation account in terms of *Elohim* as its Creator. By reading these verses together, and not as loose-

standing units, a deeper understanding can be gained with respect to who *Elohim* is, and also to the intrinsic relational character of creation as proposed in this thesis.

In the course of time various views for understanding the first creation story have been suggested, the traditional view being that vs. 1 is a main clause describing the first act of creation (Wenham 1987:11). Most interpretations of Genesis 1 are anthropocentric in nature, i.e. focusing on the creation of the world over a period of six days, and ultimately human beings on the sixth day of creation as being the climatic event of *Elohim's* creative action. The relational model proposed by this thesis, however, strongly points to a theocentric reading and understanding of the first creation account instead – i.e. with *Elohim* as the focal point, and not creation and the process of creation as described in the rest of the story, which concludes with the creation of humankind. This strongly resonates with Bergant's view that the Bible and creation is not anthropocentric as is generally interpreted, but rather theocentric in character (Bergant 2010:35-48).

Thus, in the first creation story, *Elohim* as the main focal point is projected as standing in a very definite relationship to 'the beginning', to the act of creation, and to *Elohim's* creation – 'the heavens and the earth'. This statement is foundational to the presupposition that *Elohim* had not been created like other gods, because it clearly points to *Elohim's* absolute existence before 'in the beginning', thus existing before the act of creation as well as *Elohim's* existence outside of creation (*cf.* Isaiah 45:5-7). This understanding of *Elohim's* relation to 'the beginning', and the belief that *Elohim* had no beginning contradicts in the strongest possible terms the ancient pagan idea that gods were created beings that came into existence at the same time the world did. Not only

does it contradict these ancient pagan beliefs, but it also contradicts modern scientific (naturalistic) theories like the Big Bang. This theory is based on the assumption that something must have existed before the Big Bang in order for the Big Bang to have happened, and that this something was a physical entity – a so-called singularity – which was infinitely hot, dense and compact in nature. According to modern cosmology, then, it is this singularity, which gave rise to the existing world.

Moreover, the statement in vs. 1 does not attempt to offer any explanation for *Elohim's* existence, or what is meant by 'the beginning' apart from conveying the idea that there was a beginning because of *Elohim* and *Elohim's* creative action. Based on this interpretation, 'the beginning' is thus rooted in *Elohim's* inexplicable, mysterious existence. There can be no beginning without *Elohim*. *Elohim* is the God who exists – the One who has no beginning, no origin. DeSilva (2000:1273) shows that a Platonic view is evident in Pseudo-Solomon – an interpretation that God created the world “out of formless matter”. In 2 Maccabees 7:28 creation is explicitly understood as *ex nihilo*, whereas in Wisdom 11:17 Wisdom takes on the two roles of the Stoic *Logos* – mediator between God and creation in all things, and the Stoic *Pneuma* – the all-pervading animating force that animates all things. The concept of *creatio ex nihilo* (Hebrews 11:3 taken with Genesis 1:1; indication of no pre-existent material), which teaches creation out of nothing by the divine Word, has important theological implications, of which the most important is the “distinction in essence between the Creator and the world and the contingency of the world in its dependence on God” (Bavinck *et al.* 2004:406).

The understanding of *Elohim's* relation to 'the beginning' furthermore opposes the ancient belief in the deification of natural forces, as explained by Kaufmann (1951:180).

In the biblical creation account *Elohim* is not understood as a natural force which was elevated to divine status by the ancient Israelites, thereby acquiring personhood, in other words someone with a 'biography' and a name like the ancient pagan gods, but as a divine all-powerful spiritual being. As a result of *Elohim's* uncreated status, *Elohim* therefore does not fulfil certain functions and roles with regard to the origin of natural phenomena, like the ancient pagan gods were believed to have done. On the contrary, *Elohim*, in relation to 'the beginning', is understood as the omnipotent transcendent God – the One who is believed to have created the natural phenomena and the natural forces, and assigned their functions and roles within a cosmic setting.

The Genesis 1:1 statement also inextricably links *Elohim* to the act of creation. This critical statement seemingly responds to the ancient pagan ideas of creation that also informed the ancient Hebrew mind. It clearly points to the contradictions that exist on the one hand between the biblical belief in *Elohim* as the Creator God and on the other hand in ancient pagan beliefs of creation, like that of the Nippur tradition for example, which describes creation as a process by which heaven (the god *An*) and earth (the goddess *Atum* or *Ki*) united, an act that caused the earth to be fertilized and vegetables to be produced, including animal and human life, which all sprouted from the ground like plants. The biblical creation account is clear that it is by *Elohim's* creative actions – speaking, making, separating, setting in place, molding, shaping, and giving names – that creation was brought into existence, and not by some natural process.

Within the context of ancient beliefs about creation, the belief that was prevalent that matter was eternal, linked to the idea that the prevailing condition was chaos. Within this paradigm the ancients believed that spirit emanated from matter and subsequently

subdued matter, which was in a chaotic state, thereby bringing order into the universe. This spirit subduing chaotic matter was represented in the ancient cosmologies as gods locked in a battle of cosmic proportions, whereby they defeated the monsters of chaos and subsequently reorganized their bodies into what they believed was the prevailing world order. This idea clearly comes to the fore in the two major Akkadian traditions – the *Enuma Elish* and the Atrahasis Epic – in which creation is described in terms of divine conflict. In the biblical creation account *Elohim* is revealed as Spirit – the all-powerful One who creates and who acts alone. *Elohim* did not emanate from matter like the pagan gods. *Elohim* is the eternal One as opposed to matter, which is temporal. There is no other god(s) besides *Elohim* that opposes *Elohim* in *Elohim's* act of creation, or monsters of chaos that *Elohim* engages in divine conflict and that *Elohim* has to defeat by trying to bring order to *Elohim's* creation. *Elohim* acts out of *Elohim's* own volition. There is no-one who acts with *Elohim*, or gives *Elohim* advice in how to create or what to create. There is also no-one else besides *Elohim* that creates. Creation is *Elohim's* work – *Elohim* alone creates, and there are no monsters of chaos that oppose *Elohim*.

Genesis 1:1 also positions *Elohim* directly in relation to His creation – ‘the heavens and the earth’ – the totality of that which exists. Understanding *Elohim* within this relational paradigm, the presupposition is that nothing which exists has come into existence by itself, or exists in itself, apart from having been created by *Elohim*, and exist in relation to *Elohim*. Within this cosmic setting *Elohim* is seen as the originator and creator of everything that exists – the entire universe. This model clearly shows that *Elohim*, although being in a relationship with *Elohim's* creation, is not part of the created realm, but is standing outside of it. The created world is then seen for what it is – a created

entity, which has no divine nature or inherent power as the pagan religions would have it with all the deified nature gods inhabiting nature. *Elohim*, standing in a relationship with *Elohim's* creation, is the divine One, while creation is understood for what it is – a created realm which cannot exist apart from *Elohim*. *Elohim*, in *Elohim's* relationship to 'the heavens and the earth', is portrayed as the cosmic Creator – the cosmic God – and not merely as a local deity. *Elohim* is the sovereign Lord, not only of the earth, but of the whole universe. *Elohim* is the One to be worshiped, not nature.

Genesis 2:1-3 completes the framework for the understanding of who *Elohim* is in specific relation to 'the beginning', *Elohim's* divine creative action and the world which *Elohim* brought into existence. Interpreting Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:1-3 as a framework of meaning within which creation can be understood, 'the beginning' now only acquires significance in light of *Elohim's* creative action being described as 'work', which had been completed by *Elohim*, followed by a seventh day of rest (Genesis 2:2-3),

By the seventh day God [*Elohim*] had finished the work **he** had been doing; so on the seventh day **he** rested from all **his** work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it **he** rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Within the relational paradigm suggested in this thesis, the relationship between work and rest as such is thus interpreted as a fixed relational pattern created by *Elohim* to be followed by human beings in worship to *Elohim*, as is evident in the reading from Exodus 20:8-11. The biblical understanding of worship to *Elohim* is thus based on an understanding of *Elohim Elohim's* work of creation, i.e. 'six days work and one day rest'. Referring to *Elohim* in anthropomorphic terms then as 'the God who works', points to an understanding of work with its basis firmly established in creation as *Elohim* sets the

example of what ‘work’ means in terms of *Elohim*’s work of creation. Human beings, through creation, are therefore being called to work and rest like *Elohim* in the particular manner exemplified by *Elohim*, particularly as the way to worship *Elohim*. This understanding of Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 2:1-3 in relation to each other, and not as loose-standing units, thus provides the framework to a clearer understanding of who *Elohim* is in relation to *Elohim*’s creation, and how human beings should respond in worship to *Elohim*.

A theocentric understanding of who *Elohim* is within the first creation story’s context strongly points to the idea that it is not about the ‘what’ that was created every day over a six day period that is important, as that would move the focus towards an anthropocentric interpretation of the creation account – but that it is rather about the fact that *Elohim* is indeed the Creator of everything. It is proposed that the Genesis 1:1/Genesis 2:4a framework does not only serve as a framework of meaning by which an understanding can be gained as to who *Elohim* is in relation to creation, but that it also serves as a framework of reference which serves to ‘anchor’ creation within a space-time setting, which makes *Elohim*’s act of creation and creation itself an historical reality. Without this reference ‘anchor’ the creation story would have no meaning in terms of everything that has been said about *Elohim* thus far.

In the context of creation and ancient Israelite belief, Saucy (1984:459) points out that it is not whether God exists, but who God is. Ringgren (1974:267-284), however, points out that in the ancient polytheistic context in which Israel found themselves, the question, “Who is really God?”, is in fact “one of the fundamental questions of the Hebrew religion”. With reference to God’s incomparability, Ringgren discusses several

biblical statements in terms of God's name *Yahweh* (*YHWH*), stating that it was only as time passed by that the conviction grew stronger that *Yahweh*, in comparison to all the pagan gods, "is the only one who rightly wears the attributes 'glorious', 'holy', 'terrible'" etc., and that he is really God. *YHWH*, the One who really is God, reveals God to human beings by this personal name. Unless God does so, God remains unknown. Brunner (1949:120) writes that God's name *YHWH*, in terms of God's unknowability and the mystery that surrounds God's being, is "that which is peculiar to **Himself**, it is that which distinguishes **Him** from all else, that which cannot be expressed by any general conception". He concludes that the meaning of this "Sacred Name [of God] is precisely this: I am the Mysterious One, and I will remain so ... I AM the Incomparable, therefore I cannot be defined or named". God remains unknown until he makes himself known.

It is by communicating one's name to another that one discloses oneself to the other. Brunner (1949:121) explains that it is through this disclosure of one's self to another – i.e. "When one gives oneself to be known, [that] one gives oneself away". Applying this to God, he says that it is through the divine revelation of God's personal name that God "gives **himself** to whom **He** reveals **Himself**, and these, for their part, now have a certain right which has been given them – those to whom **He** makes **His** Name known have become '**His** own'". It is through this giving of God self, this self-disclosure, that communion is established with human beings which leads to a relationship. It is therefore through the revelation of God's personal name, *YHWH*, that God establishes a personal relationship – not with universal man and woman, but with personal man and woman who are known to God by their human names. In the first few chapters of Genesis the basis for this personal relationship is established with the first man and

woman, Adam and Eve, and thereafter with all those who are called “**His** own” – as Fretheim (2005:17-18) explains, “A relationship without a name inevitably means some distance”. “Naming”, he says, “enables truer, deeper encounter and communication; it entails availability and accessibility”.

4.11 THE GOD OF BENEVOLENT INTENTIONS

The first creation story calls one to look beyond that which is visible and immediately obvious – which is the created world and the created entities mentioned in Genesis 1 (i.e. the individual natural elements) – to that which is visible, but not immediately obvious, namely the created relationships between those entities (the image-concepts), and ultimately gain an understanding of God who created everything – the relational God who stands in a relationship with God’s creation. The ‘what’ of *Elohim*’s work of creation is characterized by *Elohim* speaking what is termed in this thesis as the ‘ten words of creation’ – “And He said...” (cf. chapter 3). Through these ten words of creation the created entities (land, water, plants, animals etc.) within creation are not only brought into existence, but more importantly are created within very specific fixed space-time relationships (image-concepts) with each other – relationships which hold them together in what can be described in Polkinghorne’s words as a “strange togetherness-in-separation”. This thesis posits that it is only once these relationships have been created and established by *Elohim* that the world becomes comprehensible and meaningful.

Based on this understanding, this thesis suggests that the order established by *Elohim* in *Elohim*’s creation, is not order as opposed to chaos, or order in terms of temporal order, i.e. of ‘what’ was created every day over a six-day period, but that the order is to

be found within these fixed relationships embedded within creation. The world is non-functional and chaotic, and life is non-existent until it exists in relationship with *Elohim*, and until *Elohim* has created and established the underlying fixed relationships (image-concepts) which make the world comprehensible, meaningful and orderly. It is through the creation and establishment of these relationships that *Elohim* transforms the world and specifically the earth into a functional and orderly world to support life. It is then within this overall framework that purpose is rendered to the world. Creation, which includes humankind, only has meaning and purpose in relation to *Elohim*. This would agree with Manley and Bruce's consideration of who God is in terms of the name *Elohim*, namely "all that belongs to the concept of deity, in contrast to man (Numbers 23:19), and other created beings", and with their belief that the word is "appropriate to cosmic and world-wide relationships", the reason being, according to them, that there is "only one supreme and true God and he is a person" (Manley & Bruce 1996:420). This theocentric understanding of who *Elohim* is, is also in accordance with Baker's interpretation of *Elohim's* actions and attributes, which he believes are merged together into this very name as presented in the first few chapters of Genesis alone (Baker 2003:362).

God portrayed as *Elohim*, the cosmic creator God, ultimately stands in a relationship with created humankind – the universal man and woman. It is thus within this relationship that God reveals enough of God through God's name *Elohim*, and through God's creative actions that human beings can gain an understanding of God's invisible attributes, namely God's eternal power and divine nature, of which Paul writes in Romans 1:20. This revelation is clear enough to allow people to gain adequate knowledge *about* God for them to respond to God in some manner. In Paul's estimate it

is more than adequate, thus his argument that no one can claim ignorance of God's existence and God's power. Paul, in fact, deems this knowledge *about* God more than adequate for all people to be held accountable by God for responding to this knowledge. Paul affirms that each person will be judged by God according to whatever light the person has received, whether it was through natural revelation (in creation), or by the Jewish law, or through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In consideration of ancient cultures' understanding of what existence meant, i.e. that something existed when it had a name and function, Walton (2007:92-93) argues that "the name of a deity is [thus] more than simply a moniker by which he or she can be invoked" – the god is identified by his name and the name frames his existence. In reference to the many names bestowed on Marduk, the head of the pantheon in the *Enuma Elish* cosmogony, and the on the Egyptian pharaoh, Amun-Re, Walton explains that such a multiplication of names "is one way to express the power and station of the deity". The question – "What was the role attached to *Yahweh*?" – begs to be answered within this ancient context. Unfortunately, as Walton points out, the etymology of God's personal name is uncertain, but argues that if Cross is correct in having identified a causative verbal element ('to be') in the name *Yahweh*, this name would identify God "as one who causes to be", i.e. the one who creates. If this is the case, he says, "there might be a parallel here to the Akkadian verb *banu*, which is used in names describing the personal god's engendering relationship to his protégé". This interpretation leans not so much towards an understanding of the idea of actual birth, but more towards an understanding of the concept of the initiation of a relationship. Thus, as Walton explains, "The name *Yahweh* would then designate 'a God who creates' in the sense of 'a God who enters a relationship'". In terms of God's creative action of separating, one

could then argue that man and woman are separated out from the rest of the animals, given a function(s) (Genesis 1:26-28), and caused to exist by *Yahweh*. The God *Yahweh* was forming a personal relationship with man and woman whom God knows by their names. It is then within this personal relationship that man and woman find meaning and purpose to their existence.

Nürnberg's (2013:140-178) distinction between the 'real human' and the 'true human' proves to be helpful in understanding the relationship between God and humans. He defines the 'real human' as the one who "is part of God's creation alongside other biological organisms", while the 'true human' is defined as the one who "is proclaimed the 'image of God... the representative of the 'true God' on earth". One could therefore argue that God *Elohim*, the Cosmic Creator God, through God's creative action, enters into a relationship with universal man and woman – the real human, while God *YHWH*, in God's personal capacity, enters into a relationship with those God calls God's own – the true human.

Knierim (1995:40), in accordance with Morey's idea that one's thoughts predicates one's life, takes this idea one step further by pointing out that "the way the interpreter works with creation has immense implications for the way in which one thinks about the God of the Bible". He maintains that "*Yahweh* is not the God of creation because God is the God of the humans or of human history. God is the God of the humans and of human history because God is the God of creation". He makes this profound statement saying that, "The most universal aspect of *Yahweh*'s dominion is not human history. It is the creation and sustenance of the world". For him this is the most fundamental aspect of creation, namely that creation exists apart from the history of the human and is totally

dependent on God. He maintains that existence and history depend on, and are measured against creation. Fretheim (2005:xiv) supports Knierim's analysis in the following words,

God is the God of the entire cosmos; God has to do with every creature, and every creature has to do with God, whether they recognize it or not. God's work in the world must be viewed in and through a *universal frame of reference*.

Fretheim (2005:16) emphasizes the fact that,

Israel's God is a relational God who has created a world in which interrelatedness is basic to the nature of reality; this God establishes relationships of varying sorts with all creatures, including a special relationship to the people of Israel.

The image of God as Creator is one of the principle themes of biblical theology, and forms the basis of the first article of the Christian creed, "I believe in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth". Wenham (1987:36), for example, writes that God as Creator "is the author of the whole world" in the light of God having created everything, as expressed in the words, "the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). For Wenham (1987:37) God is not only Creator of the heaven and the earth, but also Law-giver in light of His creative activities in the first creation story. Wenham (1987:39) furthermore sees God as a benevolent creator, who is concerned with man's wellbeing having created him in God's own image and blessed him. Clayton (1997:17) rightly states that God's relationship to the world is characterised above all else by God's *Lordship*, i.e. "known to **his** people as Lord" – and because God is known to God's people as such, he must "...also be the source of the world and everything in it". Nürnberger (2013:118) echoes this in his statement that God has the last word – "this God... [is] the ultimate Source and Destiny of reality ... a God of benevolent intentions".

CHAPTER 5

JESUS CHRIST IN RELATION TO CREATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Collicutt (2008:98-102), in dealing with the aspect of ‘significance’ in human perception, points out that human beings orientate themselves “in a certain direction because [their] attention has been attracted”. According to her, the notion of “attentional bias” refers not only to the so-called “physical salience” (such as loud noise etc.) of things in the environment, but also to other things that “are attended to because of human agendas and interests”, explaining that, “the perceptual system not only asks questions about the identity and location of things in the environment but, through the operation of attention, also asks questions about their significance”.

Within the paradigm of the DSL Model, attention has indeed been drawn to creation as the inaudible, yet visible, voice of God. In this chapter, attention is further drawn to Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word (*Logos*) of God, particularly in terms of his identity and significance in relation to creation. The same images that were identified in Chapter Four (*cf.* 4.2) in an effort to understand God’s (*Yahweh Elohim*) relation to creation, are used with reference to Jesus Christ, “by [whom] all things were created” (John 1, 2; Colossians 1:16), and “in [whom] all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). The images are, (i) Communicator (*cf.* 4.4.1), (ii) Transformer (*cf.* 4.4.2), and (iii) Partner (*cf.* 4.4.3), concomitant with one distinctive attribute, namely *One-of-a-kind*. Under the generic image of ‘partner’, five images are identified, i.e. (i) Jesus Christ as creation’s Loyal Partner; (ii) Jesus Christ as creation’s Conjoined Partner; (iii) Jesus Christ as

creation's Vulnerable Partner; (iv) Jesus Christ as creation's Wounded (hurting) Partner; (v) Jesus Christ as creation's Suffering Partner.

Traditionally, various images have been identified and ascribed to Jesus Christ. What follows is a brief literature background to show how complex this matter is, and that the character of Jesus Christ does not easily surrender to a simple generalization of who he is.

5.2 WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

McGrath (1994:29) writes the following concerning the Christian faith,

At the heart of the Christian faith lies, not so much a set of abstract ideas or beliefs, but a person – one of the most attractive and intriguing figures that the world has ever known. It is this person who stands at the centre of the Christian gospel, and who gives the Christian faith its distinctive shape and form. At the heart of the Christian faith is the person of Jesus Christ.

The central challenge with which readers of the New Testament are faced, is not as much about what Jesus teaches (focus of the Jesus Seminar), but who he is (McGrath 1994:31, 67, 68). The challenge really concerns the identity and relevance of Jesus Christ for Christians in particular, but also for the human race in general, and for creation as a whole, asking the questions, 'Who is Jesus Christ in relation to creation?', 'How does he relate to creation?', and 'Why is he important to creation?'. McFague (2000:30) emphatically states that to answer the first question, is for Christians to deal with Jesus as he is, "Emmanuel, God with us".

Knowledge of Jesus is based almost entirely on accounts in the New Testament, particularly those accounts found in the Synoptic Gospels (McGrath 1994:64; *cf.*

Frederiksen 1988:18, 36-61). McGrath (1994:65-66) points out that apart from the New Testament witness, brief reference to Jesus is also found in four classical authors, namely, (i) Thallus, a first century Greek writer, who reported that, “at the time of the crucifixion, there seems to have been some sort of supernatural darkness, which some explained in terms of a total eclipse of the sun” (cf. Habermas 1996:196-197); (ii) Pliny, the Younger, who reported that, “Christians worshipped Jesus as if he were God, abandoning the worship of the Roman emperor to do so, and thus risking execution under the severe laws of the period” (cf. Melmoth 1935:199); (iii) Tacitus, who reported that, “Christ had been condemned to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, during the reign of the Roman emperor Tiberias”, and who further wrote that “[Christ’s] followers were named ‘Christians’ after him” (cf. Ehrman 2001:59), and (iv) Suetonius, who “refers to a certain ‘Chrestus’ who he believed to have been behind recent rioting in Rome” (cf. Dunn 2003:141-143). According to McGrath (1994:67), the historical details of these authors’ writings add up to that found in the New Testament accounts. He makes it clear that the reliability of the knowledge of Jesus found in the Synoptic Gospels has been confirmed by responsible New Testament scholarship, rather than being challenged by it (McGrath 1994:68).

The gospels are concerned in portraying and communicating the unique significance of the figure of Jesus (Frederiksen 1988:18). According to Frederiksen, the language used in these particular texts was partly familiar to the communities it was written to as they were basically Greek in character with their scripture being the Septuagint (LXX). Familiar language, such as “Jesus is ‘Lord’, ‘Saviour’, ‘Son of God’, and God’s ‘Logos’”, appears in these texts, and would have been understood by these audiences, while unfamiliar language such as “Son of David”, “Son of Man”, “Kingdom of God”, “messiah”

and its Greek equivalent, “Christ”, also appears, but according to Frederiksen, predominates mostly in the synoptic gospels.

Despite the use of these images by the gospel writers, one is continually confronted with the mysterious and enigmatic character of Jesus Christ, which begs the question of who he really was and what his significance is. Bonhoeffer (1944), for example, in his letter to his friend Eberhard Bethge, written on the 30th of April 1944 from Tegel Prison, was continually (“incessantly”) bothered by the question of “what Christianity really is”, but moreover by the question of “who Christ really is, for us today”. Macquarrie (1990:55), again, addresses the issue of Jesus’ pre-existence in terms of whether Paul thought of Jesus as a pre-existent being, posing the question, “Did [Paul] already accept a full doctrine of incarnation in which this heavenly pre-existent being ‘came to earth’, to speak mythologically, as a man?”. Gunton (1992:16), on the other hand, asks the question, “Who, then, is the Christ of the Bible?”, with the main focus on who he is in relation to creation. Although he focuses attention on Jesus’ particular humanity in terms of his “particular genetic inheritance” as a Jew (Gunton 1992:41), Peacocke (2007:31) and Gregersen (2013:370-393) delve deeper, asking questions about Jesus’ identity in terms of his shared evolutionary history with human beings. Peacocke (2007:31) pursues this by addressing the question, “*Who* is this Jesus of Nazareth?”, in consideration of the deeper issue of Jesus’ [full] humanity, basing his statement very much on the same idea of Gregory of Nazianzus concerning doceticism, i.e. “That which [Jesus] did not assume, he did not redeem” (Greene 2003:17).

Peacocke (2007:31) argues that,

If Jesus is really to be fully and completely human, all that we know scientifically about human nature shows that he must share both our evolutionary history and have the same multi-levelled basis for his personhood. And that means he must be not only flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, but also DNA of our DNA. If he does not then, to use the traditional terms, our salvation is in jeopardy, for ‘what he has not assumed he has not healed’.

Greene and Gregersen pursue the question from a different perspective, asking ‘why’ instead of ‘who’. Greene (2003:38, 39), wrestling with the same kind of question as Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria did, asks “Why did the *Logos* become incarnate?”, concluding in reference to 2 Peter 1:4 that the “*Logos* incarnate came to repair the ontological fabric of the universe and so allow humanity ‘to become partakers in the divine nature’”. Gregersen, on the other hand, focuses on why God became human (*Cur Deus homo?*). He goes even deeper, however, by asking the question of why God became body and flesh (*Cur Deus caro?*), and whether the flesh of Jesus is a detractor or a facilitator of his universal significance (Gregersen 2013:370, 373-393).

Greene (2003:4) says, in reference to the biblical context in which the same kind of questions were being asked that, “The uncertainty and curiosity over Jesus’ identity originate in the encounter between Jesus and those to whom he speaks and ministers”. In one instance, for example, people respond in an outcry when Jesus enters Jerusalem, asking, “Who is this?” (Matthew 21:10). In the prologue to the Gospel of John it is significant that John steadfastly testifies concerning Jesus Christ’s identity when the priests and Levites question him on his own identity (John 1:19-28). Later, he acknowledges that even he did not know Jesus (John 1:31, 33) if it wasn’t for the one who sent him that told him who Jesus was (John 1:33). Despite John’s overwhelming

introduction of Jesus and his testimony concerning Jesus' identity in the prologue, he, much later, while being in prison, seemingly doubts who Jesus is and then sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?" (Matthew 11:3). Apart from John's own apparent uncertainty, Jesus' contemporaries seem equally confused and uncertain as to who Jesus is judged by John's remark that, "...the people were divided because of Jesus" (John 7:43). Their confusion is clear from recorded statements such as, "Surely this man is the Prophet" (John 7:40), "Others said, 'He is the Christ'" (John 7:41), while others asked, "How can the Christ come from Galilee?" (John 7:41). Even the tempter (Matthew 4:3), who is called the devil (Matthew 4:5) seemed unsure of Jesus' identity (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). It is worthwhile noting that Keck (2000:52) points out that it is most likely that "Jesus himself is responsible for the scholars' failure to classify him precisely".

The many questions that were raised about Jesus' identity are basically summarized in the one question the Jews posed to Jesus, asking "Who are you?" (John 8:25), with Jesus' enigmatic response to them, "Just what I have been claiming all along" (John 8:25). While being in Caesarea Philippi, Jesus himself raises the question about his own identity (Matthew 16:13-21) in light of all the public speculation and uncertainty (Moltmann 1974:103; Greene 2003:5). According to Greene (2003:4), Peter's confession brings a turning point in the gospels with his positive answer (public confession), "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". Tillich (1957:97) expounds on Peter and the disciples' acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, explaining this so-called 'turning point' in terms of it being "...also the moment of [Jesus'] rejection by the powers of history". He believes that it is precisely this that "gives the [Jesus] story its tremendous symbolic power".

5.3 IMAGES/ROLES OF JESUS CHRIST

In pursuing the question concerning Jesus' identity, a multitude of images or roles have been identified in an effort to explain who he is. In trying to find out who this elusive figure was to whom all the different and diverse Christological titles in the New Testament were ascribed, some scholars have historically been engaged in either a so-called Christology 'from below', for example, the 'Quest for the historical Jesus' project, or a Christology 'from above', like for example Karl Barth.

5.3.1 Historical Jesus: Colin J.D. Greene

Greene (2003:6-7), in addressing the question about Jesus' identity and his significance, points out that in the process of searching for the historical Jesus, it has been assumed "that the christological titles (such as *Logos*, Wisdom, Messiah, Son of God, Son of Man and the new Adam) actually amount to post-resurrection, public confessions of faith that tell us as much about the social, cultural and religious context of the early Christian communities as they do about the person of Jesus". In reference to the 'Quest for the historical Jesus' project, however, Greene (2003:7) says that,

One of the more fashionable trends proffered by representatives of this burgeoning industry of Jesus research is the attempt to equate the original Jesus with other discernible contemporary religious figures or types.

To answer the question concerning Jesus' identity, Greene presents a brief survey of some of the major findings of the third quest for the historical Jesus. In this exercise he adopts the schema (classification) of Ben Witherington, who wrote the book, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jesus of Nazareth* (1995). This schema is described by Witherington himself as "the first, the second, and the third quests [for Jesus]," (Greene 2003:7). According to this classification, Jesus is variously called, (i) the cynic (Greene

2003:7); (ii) the Spirit-filled mystic or Spirit-possessed healer (Greene 2003:8-9); (iii) the prophet or reformer (as a Jew) (Greene 2003:9-10); (iv) the sage (Greene 2003:10-11); (v) Personified Wisdom (Greene 2003:11); (vi) the Messiah (Green 2003:11-13), and (vii) the eschatological prophet (Greene 2003:13-15). Greene's review demonstrates that, whether "the move is made from the historical to the theological, they cannot and should not be separated in the manner of so-called objective historical research". He is adamant that the historical and the theological are "inextricably intertwined and form what [may be referred] to as the basic ecology of salvation" (Greene 2003:14, 15). His final conclusion is that,

Jesus of the Gospels can only be understood in terms of his own religious, historical and cultural context, and that of the early church. Jesus was a Jew and those who first sought to understand and interpret his significance did so within the context of Jewish spirituality, imbued as it was with apocalyptic and eschatological expectations.

5.3.2 The Gospel Writers and Paul: Paula Frederiksen

Frederiksen confronts the question concerning Jesus' identity by an in-depth analysis of the images portrayed by the various gospel writers and by the apostle Paul. In her study of Jesus, Frederiksen (1988:19) points out that,

The central figure of the new movement [Jesus movement] had been a Jew, the original disciples had been Jews, and Christianity claimed to be the fulfilment of the revelation embodied in the Jewish Bible. The past of the movement was Jewish. Its future, however, was with Gentiles.

Her analysis yields five significant images concomitant with the writings of these authors, (i) Matthew: The Christ of the Scriptures (Frederiksen 1988:36-43); (ii) Mark: The Secret Messiah (Frederiksen 1988:44-52); (iii) Luke/Acts: The Messiah of the Gentiles (Frederiksen 1988:27-36); (iv) John: The Stranger from Heaven (Frederiksen 1988:19-26), and (v) Paul: The Christ of the Parousia (Frederiksen 1988:52-61).

5.3.3 The Synoptic Gospels: Colin E. Gunton

Gunton (1992:16-34) points to the Synoptic Gospels for an answer to the question concerning the identity and significance of Jesus Christ. In both the gospels of Matthew and Mark, Jesus is portrayed as the Lord of creation, having authority over creation (Gunton 1992:17). In the story of Jesus being in the boat and calming the storm at sea, the terrified disciples asked the question, “*Who* is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!” (Mark 4:41). This question is framed in terms of Jesus’ identity, while in the gospel of Matthew, however, the question is framed in terms of Jesus’ authority (and by implication his identity), namely, “*What kind* of man is this? Even the wind and waves obey him!” (Matthew 8:27).

Gunton makes it clear that Jesus Christ’s work of representing the Kingdom of God (establishing/re-establishing “the promised reign of God”), is not only focused on the so-called “‘spiritual’ and moral realm”, but also on the material world – “it includes healing as well as teaching, the driving out of the demons that brings parts of the creation into slavery, and the miraculous multiplication of loaves and fish” (Gunton 1992:17). He concludes that,

...the stilling of the storm shares with the healing of the demoniacs the characteristics of being an aspect of the redeeming action of the one endowed with divine authority over all the world. The actions [of Jesus] are representations of the authority of Christ over creation.

5.3.4 Them and Jesus: James D.G. Dunn

Dunn, on the other hand, addresses the question concerning Jesus’ identity by asking two questions, i.e. “Who did they think Jesus was?” (Dunn 2003:615-704), and “How did Jesus see his own role?” (Dunn 2003:705-762). In the first instance, he identifies the following images of Jesus as, (i) the Royal Messiah, an image in which Jesus is

also seen as a Revolutionary (*cf.* Reimarus, 1694-1768: quest for the historical Jesus; Dunn 2003:622; Greene 2003:7), and of which Dunn (2003:617-627) says that, “Contemporary scholarship is more split on this question than ever”; (ii) the Priestly Messiah (Dunn 2003:654-655), (iii) the Prophet (Dunn 2003:655-666); (iv) “Doer of Extraordinary Deeds”, i.e. Jesus as Healer, Jesus as Exorcist, Jesus as ‘Miracle-worker’, and Jesus as ‘Magician’, the latter being brought into question (Dunn 2003:667-696), and (v) the Teacher (authoritative) (Dunn 2003:696-704). Of these roles or categories Dunn (2003:705-706) says that none of them seemed to have been “entirely acceptable to [Jesus]”.

In the second instance Dunn (2003:705) attempts “to trace out... what Jesus may have said or indicated about his own perception regarding his own role”, a task which Dunn points out is a difficult one indeed. For him the problem is that since, “Jesus seems to have broken through all the available categories to the extent he did, it becomes almost impossible to find suitable terms to describe his role or define his significance”. The question then becomes what to do if “all the available word-pictures and metaphors” prove to be inadequate. He suggests that the obvious answer would be to “coin a new word-picture or metaphor or to take a different one and fill it with new meaning”. He issues a cautionary word that one has to proceed with care in trying to ascribe a specific image or role to Jesus (Dunn 2003:707).

Within this context Dunn identifies only two images of Jesus, i.e. (i) Jesus: Son of God (Dunn 1989:12-64; Dunn 2003:708-724), and (ii) Jesus: Son of Man (Dunn 1989:65-101; Dunn 2003:724-762).

From his own analysis (Dunn 2003:761) concludes that,

- i) Jesus made no attempt to lay claim to any title as such;
- ii) That he rejected at least one which others tried to fit him to;
- iii) That it would appear that Jesus saw it as no part of his mission to make specific claims for his own status.

5.3.5 Jesus' Life and Redeeming Work: Thomas F. Torrance

Torrance approaches the question of Jesus' identity from another perspective, starting with Jesus' life and redeeming work. In doing so, he also identifies significant images of Jesus as (i) the obedient redeemer (Torrance 2008:121-122); (ii) the last [obedient] Adam (Torrance 2008:123); (iii) the perfect believer (Torrance 2008:124-126); (iv) the shepherd of sheep (shepherd-king and shepherd-priest; Torrance 2008:129-138), and (v) the king of the kingdom (Torrance 2008:138-160).

Torrance (2008:160) concludes that,

[The] creative work [of Jesus] in establishing *union and communication with the Father* forms the heart of his ministry, and of his great atoning work with its end or goal in the renewal of the whole of creation.

5.3.6 Christology from above: Karl Barth

According to Greene (2003:289), "Barth practised and consistently advocated a Christology from above, which began not with the historical Jesus, but with the pre-existent *Logos*, the second person of the Trinity, and also, ...because of the actualism of revelation, the man Jesus of Nazareth". Barth (1937-77:174) himself said that, "We are not dealing with a Christ-principle, but with Jesus Christ himself as attested by Holy Scripture".

Distinguished Catholic theologian David Tracy (1975:317) agrees with Barth that,

At the centre of Christianity stands not a timeless truth, nor a principle, not even a cause, but an event and a person – Jesus of Nazareth experienced and confessed as the Christ. Through the diverse genres, titles, confessions of the New Testament there is the constancy of a confession, constituted by the community’s present experience of its crucified and Risen Lord to this person Jesus of Nazareth.

5.3.7 Feminist Theology

Feminist theologians, dealing with the question of Jesus Christ’s identity from an historical perspective, and his significance for women in particular, have identified various images of Jesus in the context of ‘woman’s experience’, which they see, “as a new, legitimate focus of theological concern and enquiry” (Greene 2003:225). These concerns, which encompass experiences such as woundedness, vulnerability and suffering, have sparked cries of reform, which have resulted in Jesus having been identified by feminist theologians as ‘Liberator’ (*cf.* Elisabeth Johnson: *Jesus Christ Liberator* 1978; Jacquelyn Grant: *White Women’s Christ & Black Women’s Jesus*, 1990), an image that was ‘re-discovered’ by African feminist theologians, as pointed out by Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, and in the Asian context, as Chung Hyun Kyung points out (Greene 2003:233).

Dorothee Sölle (1990:102), also dealing with Jesus Christ’s identity, specifically asking the question, “Who is Jesus Christ for us today?”, argues that this question first of all poses a problem to those who don’t agree on the word, “today” as they tend to use the “eternal Christ... to distance themselves from their own history”. The second problem, she says, is that of individualism, which she does not see as a “sufficient [horizon] to express the significance of Jesus Christ” – it is rather, as she points out, in all the dimensions of life that Christ encounters a person (Sölle 1990:103). She believes that

what is done to people in the name of Jesus Christ affects the way one lives as a Christian – in other words, as Gunton (1992:39-40) expresses it, “We make or break ourselves and each other by the way we live together in the world”. Sölle (1990:106) expands on the question of Jesus’ identity by focusing attention on the question of why he is so special that “he [is] still present and effective, as he is in the text”, and why he could not be done away with.

In reference to Helmut Gollwitzer’s answer, for example, that “I’ve never been alone” while being in a Gestapo prison, Sölle points out that this is “a description of the function of Christ or the ‘works’ of Christ” – for Gollwitzer it meant that, “Christ does not give me up, he struggles with me, he is no despotic superego, he makes me more free, more open, more friendly and more joyful and...he will prove right”. Furthermore, in reference to J.D. Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* and an image called the ‘Fat Lady’, she believes that this image is one that disturbs and changes one’s perspective. She also believes that it is human fear towards such powerful images that causes hostility towards religion. She equates Jesus with this ‘Fat Lady’, writing that, “He disturbs and reconciles, he causes anxiety, just as the ugliness, stupidity and suffering of the Fat Woman disturb people and make them anxious” – it is precisely because of such an image of Jesus Christ that it makes sense to live, she says.

5.3.8 The Name ‘Jesus Christ’: Paul Tillich

Paul Tillich deals more with Jesus Christ’s name itself than with images of him, writing that, “Christianity is what it is through the affirmation that Jesus of Nazareth, who has been called ‘the Christ’, is actually the Christ, he who brings the new state of things, the New Being” (Tillich 1957:97). In reference to Simon Peter’s acceptance of Jesus as the

Christ, Tillich believes that the “first step demanded of christological thought is an interpretation of the name ‘Jesus Christ’”. He explains that the name ‘Jesus Christ’ must not be seen as an individual name, but rather as a combination of an individual name – the man ‘Jesus’, from Nazareth with the title, “the Christ”, which, according to him, is the expression “in the mythological tradition [of] a special figure with a special function” (Tillich 1957:98). In light of the Greek word *Christos* (Messiah), which means “the anointed one”, the name ‘Jesus Christ’ must thus be understood as “‘Jesus who is called the Christ’, or ‘Jesus who is the Christ’, or ‘Jesus as the Christ’, or ‘Jesus the Christ’”. According to Tillich, the context determines which phrase should be used, and concludes that, “‘Jesus Christ’ means – originally, essentially, and permanently – ‘Jesus who is the Christ’”.

5.4 INTRODUCTION OF JESUS

In John 1:1 Jesus Christ (*cf.* John 1:17) is introduced by John as the “Word” (Logos), i.e. (a) the One who was in the beginning, (b) the One who was with God, and (c) the One who was God. John continues with this introduction (John 1:2-34; NIV 1984:107-108) by explaining that the Word was the One ... (Table 5.1):

Table 5.1.../p.242

Table 5.1 An outline of John’s introduction of Jesus, the One “Who became flesh” (prologue to the Gospel of John; John 1).

<p>...through whom all things were made (John 1:3), -in whom was life (John 1:4), -who was the true light (John 1:4, 9), -who was in the world (John 1:10), ...through whom the world was made (John 1:10).</p>	<p>¶</p>	
	<p>...who was not recognized by the world (John 1:10), -who came to that which was his own (John 1:11), -who was not received by his own (John 1:11), -who gave those who received him and believed in his name the right to become children of God (John 1:12).</p>	<p>¶</p>
	<p>LENS ►</p>	<p>...WHO BECAME FLESH (John 1:14) -who came to dwell among people (John 1:14), -who was the glorious ‘One and Only’ (John 1:14, 18) / the ‘only begotten of the Father’ (NSB 1997:1757) / ‘one of a kind’ God, -who came from the Father (John 1:14, 18) / who declared <i>Him</i> (NSB 1997:1758), -who was full of grace and truth (John 1:14, 16, 17), -who came after John, but was already before him (John 1:15).</p>
	<p>...whom the priests and Levites did not know (John 1:26) -whose sandals John wasn’t worthy to untie (John 1:27), -who is ‘the Lamb of God’ (Jesus) (John 1:29), -who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29), -whom John did not know either, but was told by the one who sent him to baptize with water (John 1:33), -who [will] baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:33).</p>	<p>¶</p>
<p>...who is the “Son of God” (John 1:34).</p>	<p>¶</p>	

In John 1:1-12, John introduces the *Logos* as the agent of creation, i.e. the one through whom all things came into being (John 1:3), and relates the *Logos*' existence to "the beginning" by using the familiar phrase of Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning...". This phrase is an obvious allusion to the beginning of creation, saying that the *Logos* already existed before creation. This is followed by a description of the *Logos*' relationship to the world he has made (John 1:4, 9, 10) – a world that belonged to him, but which did not recognize him.

In John 1:14-29, the Incarnation of the *Logos* is described – the Word who became flesh (*sarx*; John 1:14), with vs. 14 being the centralizing theme of the Gospel of John. In this instance a different verb than *eina* (to be) is used, namely *ginomai* (to be; to become), which is a verb used to describe created beings. This statement, according to Hagner (2012:276), is radical in the sense that the Greeks thought it to be an absurdity that the *logos* which, "in Hellenistic thought the underlying principle of reality that provides coherence and intelligibility to the world", should take on flesh, while, for the Jews it was a "scandalous" idea to even consider the possibility that flesh could reveal the glory of God – "the glory of God" being "an allusion to the Shekinah glory associated with God's presence in the temple".

In John 1:18 John identifies the *Logos* as Jesus Christ, the One who stands in a unique and personal relationship with God, which is translated in the NSB (1997:175) from the Greek, *μονογενής υἱός*, as "the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (NSB 1997:1758), *μονογενής* meaning "only, only begotten, or unique" (#3439; Strong 2010:167), the latter which Johnson (1992:483) prefers in reference to Jesus Christ as "the unique one of God". In the NIV (1984:107) it is translated from the Greek,

μονογενής θεός (GNT 1983:322), as “God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side”, which also has the meaning of “the ‘only-of-its-kind’ God”, “‘one-of-a-class’ God” or “the ‘one-of-a-kind’ God” (#3411; HELPS™ Word-studies). According to Hagner (2012:277), the majority of manuscripts that were used for translation purposes, read *μονογενής υἱός* (“the only Son”), but the earliest witnesses, P66, P75, K, B, C, have *μονογενής θεός*, (“the ‘one-of-a-kind’ God”), which is attested to by Metzger (1971:198), who says that with the acquisition of P66 and P75, “both of which read *θεός*, the external support of the reading has been notably strengthened”.

Hagner uses an exceptional description in reference to describe Jesus as the one who reveals God, calling Jesus the “‘exegesis’ of God”, in reference to the phrase in John 1:18, “made him known”, which is “a translation of the [Greek word] *exēgēsato* ([from] the verb *exēgeomai*, [which] means ‘to relate, expound, explain’)”. John concludes his introduction and description of the *Logos* in John 1:34 by his identification of the *Logos* as the “Son of God”.

5.5 DESCRIPTIONS AND CONCEPTS OF JESUS CHRIST

Macquarrie (1990:343-344) believes that in the construction of a contemporary Christology it is important to address the question concerning Jesus Christ’s relation to the human race in the world today. According to him classical Christology has not been successful in its attempt of answering this question. Moreover, he says, one cannot avoid the hard questions about Jesus by saying, like Melanchthon did, “that to know Christ is to know his benefits” (*cf.* Pauck 1969:21-22). In this study image-concepts have thus far played a central role in bringing the creation story in Genesis 1 into clearer focus (*cf.* Chapter Four), and have supported a broader understanding of who

God is in relation to creation (*cf.* Chapter Four). In this chapter the idea of image-concepts is taken a step further in an effort to understand who Jesus Christ is in relation to creation. Here, the suggestion by Dunn was taken seriously, i.e. to “coin a new word-picture or metaphor”, or “take a different one and fill it with new meaning” when/if all the available ones have proven to be inadequate, with the result that new, or rather different image-concepts, were ‘coined’ to describe Jesus in relation to creation. This was done by bearing in mind Dunn’s (2003:707) cautionary words that one has to proceed with great care in trying to ascribe a specific image or role to Jesus. Moltmann’s (1981:103) reminder should also/always be a central concern when dealing with the “question of Christ”, that is that one must always be aware never to objectify Jesus Christ, but to keep in mind that he always is the subject of investigation. Finally, the wise words of Torrance (2008:1-2) bear much weight on this study,

We know [Christ] out of pure grace as one who gives himself to us and freely discloses himself to us. We cannot earn knowledge of Christ, we cannot achieve it, or build up to it. We have no capacity or power in ourselves giving us the ability to have mastery over this fact. In the very act of our knowing Christ he is the master, we are the mastered. He manifests himself and gives himself to us by his own power and agency, by his Holy Spirit, and in the very act of knowing him we ascribe all the possibility of our knowing him to Christ alone, and none of it to ourselves.

In chapter three the creation image-concepts that were identified, consisted of two images from nature, e.g. darkness-light, while in Chapter Four so-called descriptive image-concepts were identified for God, which consist of God’s name, an attribute and an image identified through the DSL Model. These images are mainly images which correspond to the mother within the mother-child dialogue (Sign language) that takes place while the mother is talking with her [deaf] child, teaching her and leading her into her world picture, i.e. from a perceptual into a conceptual world (*cf.* Sacks 1991:67). In

this chapter descriptive image-concepts using the same images are used in an effort to explain Jesus Christ's identity and significance in relation to creation, with the difference being that there is only one attribute, namely *One-of-a-kind*. The images are, (i) Communicator, (ii) Transformer, and (iii) Partner. Jesus Christ's name, the attribute *One-of-a-kind*, and the images are all related in some way, and tell the same truth about Jesus in varied ways, akin to seeing him through a prism.

5.5.1 Jesus Christ: *One-of-a-kind* Communicator

In popular literature Jesus as communicator is variously characterized as 'great', 'master', 'true', 'persuasive', 'revolutionary', 'good', 'meta', 'effective', 'divine' and 'perfect', all of which may be true, but not helpful in one's understanding of who he is as Communicator in relation to creation.

The same basic definition for 'communicator', according to Webster's Dictionary, that was applied in Chapter Four (*cf.* 4.4.1), will be applied here, but in modified form in an effort to explain the image-concept, Jesus~*One-of-a-kind*~Communicator' – that he as communicator is, by implication the one who, (i) exchanges information with human beings in a number of *one-of-a-kind* ways, (ii) is connected to them and has a *one-of-a-kind* 'sympathetic' or 'meaningful' relationship with them, and (iii) communicates with them in a *one-of-a-kind* way.

Jesus' use of language was so exceptional and innovative that O'Collins and Kendall (1996:64) describe Jesus "as one of history's most extraordinary communicators". They point out that although he spoke with authority, "he never employed linguistic skills to

dominate or manipulate his audience”. This is clear in the way he is portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels and John. The ‘I am’ sayings and the parables are exemplary of this.

5.5.1.1 The ‘I am’ Sayings: Enfleshment and Embodiment

Through the DSL Model of Genesis 1, creation has been characterised as the Divine Sign Language of God through which God’s inaudible voice becomes visible to human beings. In light of Sacks’ (1991:62) explanation concerning ‘first language’, i.e. “The *first* language use, the first communication, is usually between a mother and child, and language is acquired, arises, *between* the two”, which was applied to explain God’s Divine Sign Language in Chapter Four (*cf.* 4.4.1), the question now is how this applies to Jesus. The answer to this is that as Christ Incarnate (enfleshed Voice of God), Jesus Christ is the one who continues the dialogue, which God has established through creation with God’s human dialogue partner. Creation as God’s inaudible voice in visible form could thus be said to be the ‘carrier’ of God’s creative words – in other words, God’s creative words are *embedded* in God’s (visible) voice, namely creation. Now, in Jesus, a major transition happens in a radically unique and new (*one-of-a-kind*) way in the sense that Jesus in person now becomes the visible, audible Voice of God, and by implication God’s creaturely (human) body thus becomes the ‘carrier’ of the Voice of God – in other words, God’s voice becomes *embedded*, i.e. *enfleshed*, in Jesus’ body (John 1:14). As the enfleshed ‘Voice’, Jesus thus *embodies* the image of God the Father, the Word of God, “...the glory of the One and Only... full of grace and truth” (John 1:14; *cf.* John 1:17, 18).

The dialogue in and through Jesus now continues face to face, i.e. ‘God/Jesus–human being(s)’, whereas in the first creation story and elsewhere in the Old

Testament there was seemingly a ‘relational distance’ between God and God’s human dialogue partner with creation as God’s voice or the prophets being the intermediary(s), i.e. ‘God–creation–human being’ or ‘God–prophet–human being’. This face to face encounter finds support in Sacks’ (2010:82-83) explanation of the mother–child relationship that, “The reciprocal understanding mother–child relationship is possible only because of the continuing dialogue between faces”. It is noteworthy that Sacks points out that the face is considered by psychoanalysts to be, “the first object to acquire visual meaning and significance” (cf. Collicutt 2008:100-102). Not only does Jesus continue the divine dialogue that God has initiated through creation (real, indirect relationship), but as the enfleshed ‘Voice’ he now becomes the dialogue himself – he becomes the dialogue between God and humankind. As such, Jesus becomes the *One-of-a-kind* Communicator – the Voice of God. God, in Jesus, now stands in a ‘face-to-face’ (true, direct) relationship with humankind. Creation, as the voice of God, was the means by which God communicated God to human beings. Now, as the visible, audible Voice of God, the person of Jesus Christ acquires meaning and significance within creation and in relation to creation.

O’Collins and Kendall (1996:64) suggest the same. By comparing the Old Testament prophets with Jesus, they note that these mediators of old “were only partly identified with their message”, while “Jesus the Mediator was the message”, i.e. “the divine Communicator was the divine Communication”, so that in Christ, they say, “God was not only communicating with us, but also personally present”.

This mode of communication through enfleshment is taken further in the Gospel of John, where an appeal is made to the natural world in terms of images from nature in the group of so-called “I am” sayings, which, according to McGrath (2008:129), is “One of the most distinctive features of the Fourth Gospel”, and which, he says, plays “a characteristic and decisive role in the Johannine witness to the identity and significance of Jesus of Nazareth”. He explains that the phrase, “I am” (*egō eimi*) is linked with an “image-term” (e.g. bread, or light), and “an adjective with the article repeated, or a genitive phrase implying uniqueness” – a uniqueness, which, in light of this thesis, points to the attribute of *One-of-a-kind*.

The significance of the “I am” sayings are to be found on a much deeper level, however, than just a simple appeal to nature – as McGrath (2008:130) explains in reference to Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55), these sayings also make an appeal to “existing *interpretations* and *associations* of nature, already rooted in Israel’s past history and future hopes”. According to him, these sayings appeal to “natural objects” and to “aspects of nature” particularly in terms of the fact that “they have been assimilated and interpreted within the tradition of Israel”. According to McGrath, these associations and expectations that have been established in Israel’s history are now being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ.

In light of this a careful analysis points to the fact that a significant parallel exists between the first two “I am” sayings in the Gospel of John specifically and the first and last (10th) creative words of God in Genesis 1 (Tables 5.2a and 5.2b). What follows is based on the Jewish exegetical method of *sensus plenior* (Oss 1988:105-127; Thomas 2002:79-98).

Sensus plenior is defined by Thomas (2002:80) as giving “an additional or fuller sense than [a] passage had in its Old Testament setting. It is an ‘application’ because it does not eradicate the literal meaning of the Old Testament passage, but simply applies the Old Testament wording to a new setting” – in other words, it means that an New Testament writer, instead of using an Old Testament passage in its original context (grammatical-historical meaning / literal sense), will now go “beyond the grammatical-historical sense of the OT passage” and use the same passage in a non-literal sense by assigning “additional meaning in connection to its NT context”.

Table 5.2a.../p. 251

Table 5.2a Summary of the first “I am” saying in the Gospel of John, and its historical roots in Genesis, Exodus and Second Isaiah.

GOSPEL OF JOHN 1st “I am” saying	Reference	Context	Significance
<i>I am the bread of life</i> Jesus Christ: true bread (spiritual)	John 6:35, 41, 48 & 51	The people wanted more food after Jesus had fed the crowd of five thousand.	As bread sustains physical life, Jesus Christ offers and sustains spiritual life permanent/eternal.
HISTORICAL ROOTS			
GENESIS Creation: Day 6	Reference	Context	Significance
Human-plant-food Plants/wheat: real bread (physical)	Genesis 1:29 (Last, i.e. 10 th creative word of God)	Creation principle: function of plants = food to all living creatures.	Food for physical sustenance / biological life = temporal.
EXODUS	Reference	Context	Significance
<i>Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you.</i>	Genesis 16:4	The Israelites in the desert.	God blesses God’s people and personally supplies food to God’s people in need, i.e. ‘bread from heaven’ = manna.
SECOND ISAIAH	Reference	Context	Significance
<i>Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good.</i> God: ‘Spiritual’ Bread.	Isaiah 55: 2	A call to Israel to seek the Lord – the source of goodness and abundance.	An invitation to abundant (spiritual) life. <i>Let your soul delight in abundance (Isaiah 55:2).</i>
<u>Significance in Jesus Christ’s life and death:</u>			
<i>The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread...broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me” (The Lord’s Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:23, 24).</i>			

Table 5.2b. Summary of the second “I am” saying in the Gospel of John, and its historical roots in Genesis, Exodus and Second Isaiah.

GOSPEL OF JOHN 2nd “I am” saying	Reference	Context	Significance
<i>I am the light of the world</i> Jesus Christ: true light (spiritual)	John 8:12	A woman was caught in adultery, and was to be stoned to death. So that those who follow him, will not walk in darkness.	Human beings are stumbling about in a spiritual world of confusion (darkness – sin). Jesus Christ provides ‘spiritual’ light.
HISTORICAL ROOTS			
GENESIS Creation: Day 1	Reference	Context	Significance
Darkness-Light Light: real light	Genesis 1:3 (1 st creative word of God)	Creation principle: Function of light = to distinguish between night and day.	To make sense of the physical world - to bring order in a world of confusion (darkness: chaos?).
EXODUS			
Reference	Context	Significance	
<i>And the Lord went before them... by night in a pillar of fire to give them light.</i>	Exodus 13:21	The Israelites in the desert.	God blesses God’s people with his presence – he is personally present with them in a visible way.
SECOND ISAIAH			
Reference	Context	Significance	
<i>Then your light shall break forth...</i> <i>Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer.</i>	Isaiah 58:8, 9 Isaiah 60:1, 3	Salvation: a definitive outcome of God’s righteousness for those who listen to, and act on his promises.	Everlasting relationship with God. <i>For the Lord will be your everlasting light (Is. 60:20).</i>
<u>Significance in the inauguration of the ‘Kingdom of God’</u>			
Jesus Christ’s ministry on earth:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light... Light has dawned (Matthew 4:16; John 1:4; 1:9; 1 John 1:5).</i> 			
Jesus Christ’s eternal reign:			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light (Revelation 21:23).</i> 			

In both instances these two “I am” sayings have historical roots in both Exodus and Second Isaiah. With these sayings, Jesus is using familiar images-concepts laid down in the first creation story, i.e. ‘darkness-light’ (1st creative word; Genesis 1:3), and ‘plant-food’ (10th creative word; Genesis 1:29). These image-concepts are invested with particular meaning in the first creation story, but Jesus in his use of the ‘light’ and ‘food’ (bread) images, now invests them with new meaning by creating new and different (*one-of-a-kind*) image-concepts in reference to himself, i.e. ‘Jesus~Bread-of-life’ (Jesus~*One-of-a-kind*~Bread), and ‘Jesus~Light-of-the-world’ (Jesus~*One-of-a-kind*~Light), in order to communicate himself to human beings. Moreover, apart from new meaning that is invested in the two images, purpose is also now rendered as the images of ‘bread’ and ‘light’ are brought into these new image-concepts.

In the Genesis story the creation image-concepts convey functionality in the sense that it helps human beings make sense of (find meaning in) their world in terms of its functions, e.g. the image-concepts, ‘plants~food~creatures’ and ‘darkness~light’ – the function of plants in relation to humans and all living creatures is to provide food for them in terms of nourishment to their physical bodies (Genesis 1:29), and the function of light is to provide a ‘relational alternative’ to darkness in order for creatures to make sense of their physical world, and to find coherent order in a world of confusion (Old Testament understanding: darkness - chaos). *Functional creation* in and by itself has meaning (*implicate*), but no purpose. Through the new image-concepts in Jesus the creation images of ‘bread’ and ‘light’ become ‘actional’, in other words missional, thus conveying the ideas of both meaning and purpose. *Missional creation* thus now has *real meaning* as it is being *actualized* in Christ

incarnate. At the same time missional creation has purpose as it points to the future – a ‘beyond’ (a ‘not yet’) the here and now, when its *true meaning* will be fully *realized (realized creation)* in the risen Christ.

From Genesis, through Exodus and Isaiah there is a progression in the understanding of who the God of Israel is (Fig. 5.2a & Fig. 5.2b). First, God is the One who created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1), then God becomes known as the One who personally provides bread (manna from heaven) and light (fiery cloud at night) to God’s people for their physical needs in the wilderness (Exodus), and ultimately God is understood as the One who provides in their spiritual needs (Isaiah). In light of this, Jesus’ claims are thus deeply profound and challenging as he now claims to be the very same One. His claims in terms of the first two “I am” sayings go back right to the ‘beginning’ and even before that, which is the foundation of Israelite faith. This ‘beginning’ in Genesis 1:1, which is alluded to in John 1:1, is preceded by the existence of the One, “who is and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty” (Revelation 1:8). Indeed, the very first verse of Genesis lays claim to this belief, and Jesus’ statement clearly infers that understanding when he says to the Jews, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM” (John 8:58). These two “I am” sayings are thus foundational to Jesus’ claim to be the One who precedes creation – the One who is ‘behind’ the existence of world, the One who created the world. More so, he is not only the One who provides in his people’s physical and spiritual needs – he is the One who now becomes the provision himself by claiming to be the ‘Bread of life’, the *One-of-a-kind* Bread – the true bread, and the ‘Light of the world’, the *One-of-a-kind* Light – the true light. Jesus indeed claims to be the One

who is the true source of life understood holistically as ‘physical–spiritual’ life, and not in a disjointed, dualistic sense as physical and spiritual life.

The ‘beginning’ (Genesis 1:1) and ‘end’ (Genesis 2:4a) of the first creation story is of utmost importance as it indicates the full extent of God’s creative work, which finally culminates in God resting on the seventh day. In essence then, the first two “I am” sayings are inferences, in reverse order, to the ‘beginning’ and ‘end’ found in the first creation story through which Jesus claims to be the ‘end’ (Bread of life) and the ‘beginning’ (Light of the world). As such, these two “I am” sayings communicate the very being of Jesus Christ, thereby indicating that in reality, Jesus as Christ incarnate, is the Beginning and the End, i.e. the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last (Revelation 1:8; 22:13). This understanding points to Jesus Christ being God to the fullest extent – the same God who was before everything, the same God who created everything, and the same God who gives meaning and purpose to existence. Jesus Christ is, like Hagner (2012:277) says, “the exegesis of God” – the *One-of-a-kind* God – the true God, and as such, the *One-of-a-kind* Communicator. He uses existing creation image-concepts in an exceptional different way to communicate himself to humankind. This is a *One-of-a-kind* mode of communication as there is no one who can claim, as Jesus does, that s/he is the ‘Beginning and the End’ – the ‘Bread of life’ and the ‘Light of the world’.

The first “I am” saying finds its significance in Jesus Christ’s life and death, which is commemorated through the “Lord’s Supper” (1 Corinthians 11:23-24), with Jesus taking bread, breaking it and giving it to be eaten in a symbolic way of remembering

him through his body that was broken in order for his creation to be redeemed and healed from its own brokenness.

The second “I am” saying finds its significance in the idea of the Kingdom of God, in the sense that Jesus as the Light of the world inaugurates that kingdom. Frame (2002:277) describes it with much clarity in the following words,

We live in the tension between this age and the age to come. In Christ, the age to come has already arrived, but the present age, dominated by sin, will not expire until he returns. Christ has delivered us from the ‘present evil age’ (Gal. 1:4), so in him we already have the blessings of the age to come.

By claiming that he is the ‘Light of the world’, Jesus lays claim to the fact that he is the One whom Matthew wrote about (Matthew 4:16; *cf.* John 1:4; 1:9; 1 John 1:5),

The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light,
And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death
Light has dawned.

Matthew continues right after this with a significant reference to the kingdom of heaven in the following statement, “From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’” (Matthew 4:17). The passage that Matthew quoted in vs. 16, is from Isaiah 9:1-2, in which the reign of the Messiah in the coming kingdom is foretold. The phrase, “From that time Jesus began...”, marks the beginning of his earthly ministry in Galilee, which, in essence, was a preview of what was to come. Elsewhere in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 16:21), the same phrase anticipates his crucifixion and resurrection. Seemingly, Matthew is linking the idea of “light [that] has dawned” with “the kingdom of heaven [that] is at hand”, in other words, the dawning Light ‘inaugurates’ the kingdom of heaven.

By way of explaining the parallel between Jesus claiming to be the ‘Light of the world’ and the relation to creation, the *sensus plenior* principle is once again applied here, referring back to the creation account in Genesis. In Genesis 1 the creation of light ‘inaugurates’ the physical (created) world. The important point here, however, is the consideration of the importance of the seventh day in which God rested (Genesis 2:2; emphasis added in italics), and how it links up with the first day,

And on the seventh day God *ended His* work which **He** had done, and **He** *rested on* the seventh day from all **His** work which He had done.

Walton (2009:72) explains the seventh day as follows,

...day seven is mystifying. It appears to be nothing more than an afterthought with theological concerns about Israelites observing the Sabbath – an appendix, a postscript, a tack on.

Without hesitation [however] the ancient reader would conclude that this is a temple text and that day seven is the most important of the seven days. In a material account day seven would have little role, but in a functional account...it is the true climax without which nothing else would make any sense or have any meaning.

The importance of the seventh day is to be found in the fact that in the ancient world it was understood that, “Deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple” (Walton 2009:72). Divine rest, however, was understood not in terms of “disengagement from the cares, worries and tasks of life”, but rather in terms of a crisis that “has been resolved or even when stability has been achieved, when things have ‘settled down’” (Walton 2009:73). According to Walton (2009:74), and his reference to Psalm 132, the ideas of “divine rest, temple and enthronement” go hand in hand to describe God resting. A temple in the ancient world was built for the deity to “have a center for his rule” – as Walton (2009:75) explains, “When the deity rests in the temple it means that he is taking command, that he is mounting to his throne to assume his rightful

place and his proper role”. Jesus’ claim in being the ‘Light of the world’ is thus by implication a definitive claim to deity, a claim rooted in creation, in other words he claims to be the God who was before creation – by implication thus the God who created and who rested on the seventh day. Through this “I am” saying he is fundamentally claiming his rightful place and his proper role as the Cosmic Christ in his cosmic temple, namely creation. Through the remaining five “I am” sayings a progression is evident in which this fundamentally important claim of Jesus is settled.

In the third “I am” saying (John 10:7, 9) another image from nature is used to communicate Jesus’ true identity. By claiming he is the ‘door of the sheep’, he declares the religious leaders of Israel to be unfit shepherds of the nation. The sheep enclosures in ancient times had no doors, so the shepherd would sit or lie at the opening, thus protecting his sheep from predators. Through this claim, Jesus in essence is describing his care to those who belong to him. As the image of a door is enfleshed in the person of Jesus, he becomes the embodiment of the safety only he can guarantee for his people and the care that only he has for his people. Moreover, in a cosmic sense, within the setting of creation, Jesus Christ thus is the one and only door to the kingdom of God, the *One-of-a-kind* Door, and those who belong to him, including the entire world, are safe and cared for within this kingdom, i.e. under his rule. Through his actions of caring and safe-guarding that which belongs to him, he communicates who he is – Jesus, the *One-of-a-kind* Communicator.

Apart from claiming to be the door of the sheep, Jesus goes even further by claiming that he is indeed the good shepherd himself (4th ‘I am’ saying; John 10:11, 14), using another image from nature and one that is very familiar to Israel. Jesus, unlike

hirelings who might run away when the wolf comes, is committed to care for, and protect his people. This image-concept of Jesus is based on a certain kind of knowledge – in his own words, “I know my *sheep*, and am known by my own” (John 10:14). Moreover, Jesus roots this knowledge in an even deeper knowledge that exists between him and the Father, saying that, “As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father”, and based on this deep knowledge willingly lays down his life for his sheep (John 10:15). As the image of shepherd is enfleshed in the person of Jesus within the cosmic setting of his rule, he thus becomes the Great Shepherd (*cf.* Smith 2013:53-63) – the one who talks to his sheep, “...and they will hear my voice” (John 10:16) – thus, the *One-of-a-kind* Communicator. As such he embodies at an even deeper level the care and safety for that which is his own, his people and his creation.

In the context of Lazarus who died, Jesus, in speaking to Martha, claims that he is “the resurrection and life” (5th ‘I am’ saying; John 11:25). By claiming this, Jesus is really saying that he is Lord over everything – he alone is Lord of life and death, and he alone has the sole power to raise people from the dead. This image-concept of Jesus is based on faith, rather than knowledge, as he says, “I am the resurrection and life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25-26). As the resurrection and life are enfleshed in the person of Jesus, he becomes the embodiment of Life itself, but more so of the hope believers have of life after death. Indirectly, through Martha’s response Jesus is revealed as the Christ, “the Son of God, who is to come into the world” – the *One-of-a-kind* Son, who communicates with his people, i.e. Jesus, the

One-of-a-kind Communicator. This claim of Jesus leads up to his next claim of being “the way, the truth and the life”.

Within the context of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus (John 13:21), his own immanent departure (John 13:33), and Peter’s denial of him (John 13:38), the disciples are seemingly confused and “troubled” (John 14:1). In addressing them, Jesus tells them not to be troubled, and concludes by claiming that he is “the way, the truth and the life”, and that no one can come to the Father except through him (6th ‘I am’ saying; John 14:6). Jesus, through his death and resurrection, becomes the *One-of-a-kind* Leader, who leads the way from temporary life on earth into/through death and ultimately into eternal life. At the same time, as truth, he becomes the *One-of-a-kind* Revealer as he is the revelation of God (‘exegesis’ of God; cf. Hagner 2012:277), and as life on both sides of the grave, he is God’s fully realized communication to humankind – the *One-of-a-kind* Communicator.

With the final claim as being the “true vine” (7th ‘I am’ saying; John 15:1, 5), Jesus once again uses a familiar image from nature, the vine. In agrarian circles it is a well-known practice to graft one plant onto another, for example if a tree has a good root stock but does not bear good fruit, branches from trees which do not have good root stock, but produce good fruit will be grafted onto the tree that has a good, strong root. Certain fruit trees like the olive tree and the vine are good examples of trees that are grafted this way. By claiming to be the true vine, Jesus is in reality saying that he is a *One-of-a-kind* vine – the true vine with the one and only good root stock. As the enfleshed vine, Jesus thus embodies the true root stock in which the grafted branches can bear good fruit. This image-concept of Jesus (Jesus~True vine) is

based on both knowledge and faith, which come through the word that Jesus speaks, i.e. “You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3) – once again Jesus, the *One-of-a-kind* Communicator.

The image-concept of ‘Jesus~Light-of-the-world’ does not only have implications for God’s rule now (in Christ Incarnate), but points further to the importance of the temple-image itself (in the risen Christ). The image of the temple in which God rests at the end of his creative activity, and by implication Jesus also (Genesis 2:2-4; Walton 2009:72-75), is fully realized in Jesus Christ, the Lamb, and God Almighty. In support of this it is noteworthy that John, in reference to the New Jerusalem, writes that the city does not have any temple, because “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22). John goes further and says that, “The city ha[s] no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminate[s] it. The Lamb is its light” (Revelation 21:23). Jesus as the resurrected Christ thus ultimately embodies the true center of God’s rule (*cf.* Walton 2009:75) over all creation, sitting at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 8:1; 10:12).

5.5.1.2 Communication Through Parables

Parables, one of the most distinctive features of the teaching of Jesus, make an appeal to nature – “an aspect of the natural order”, according to McGrath (2008:117, 120). They point to the issue surrounding Jesus’ identity and the kingdom of God, raising the following questions (Blomberg 1990:326),

Who is this one who, by his teaching can claim to forgive sins, pronounce God’s blessing on social outcasts and declare that final judgment will be based on the responses people make to him?

The theme of “mystery” or “secret” plays a major role in the discernment of Jesus’ identity, and the identification of the kingdom of God (Mark 4:11; McGrath 2008:121). In light of the DSL Model, it is henceforth argued that the “aspect of the natural order” that McGrath talks about, would thus refer to individual images from nature that are part of more comprehensive image-concepts, like for example, that found in the parable of the farmer sowing seeds in different kinds of soil (Mark 4:10-12), i.e. ‘farmer~seed~soil’. Each of the images in this image-concept represents something in real everyday life, which, in and by themselves don’t have meaning or purpose. However, used together in combination the images form an integrated image-concept of ‘farmer~seed~soil’, which now finds meaning in familiar everyday life – that which is accessible and readily understood by those to whom Jesus tells the parable. That which is familiar, however, is not an “*automatic...* gateway to deeper truths”, as McGrath (2008:121) points out. This is illustrated in Mark 4:11 where Jesus identifies two groups of people – those who are “on the outside”, and those “to whom the secret of the kingdom of God has been given”. By making this distinction, Jesus identifies the inability of the ‘outsiders’ to understand what the parables mean.

Here, McGrath (2008:121) argues that the *meaning* of parables is “often veiled”. It is suggested, however, that their meaning (real) is clear insofar as the meaning of their image-concepts are clear in relating everyday life. It is rather their true meaning and *significance* (in terms of their purpose) that is veiled – in other words, their original image-concepts have real meaning in what they say about everyday life (not veiled), but their true meaning and significance (purpose) is “veiled”, the “‘not yet’ of the kingdom of God” (McGrath 2008:122). Jesus, in response to his disciples’ question concerning the parables, ‘un-veils’ the meaning and significance for them by

‘translating’ (transposing) the images of the original image-concepts into different concepts, thus *creating* new image-concepts – in this instance, ‘farmer~word~people~life-problems’. The original image-concept thus becomes actualized in the new image-concept, i.e. it becomes missional and gains new (true) meaning as well as purpose within the new image-concept. This whole process forms the basis to a parable, and as a result of actualization the deeper truths become clear in the way Jesus uses the parables to teach the people about himself and the kingdom of God.

McGrath (2008:122-123) points out that parables are open-ended (ambiguous), and that the “responsibility of discerning the *correct* meaning actually lies with the hearer”. However, in light of the preceding explanation it would rather be the hearer’s responsibility to discern the *true* meaning and significance as s/he is invited to *look* at the familiar natural world, and to see it in a different way – in McGrath (2008:123) words, “The natural world, seen in a particular way, is presented as evidence for the character of the kingdom of God, or the attributes of the divine”. Parables offer much information, but do pose a challenge as Wright (1996:229) rightly points out, concluding that parables are “stories designed to evoke fresh praxis, to reorder the symbolic world, to break open current understandings and inculcate fresh ones”.

In concluding his investigation concerning Jesus’ identity, Blomberg (1990:327) points out that the parables contain concealed christological claims – “implicit claims to deity”. Blomberg notes, however, that, “Jesus’ parables leave no neutral ground for casual interest or idle curiosity. They sharply divided their original audiences into disciples and opponents”. The choice to accept or reject Jesus’ claims, however,

rests with the hearer. Indeed, people were called to “respond freely to the divine presence that was powerfully at work to heal and transform their lives”, according to O’Collins and Kendall (1996:65).

5.5.2 Jesus Christ: *One-of-a-Kind* Transformer

By using the descriptive image-concept, *One-of-a-kind* Transformer, to describe Jesus in relation to creation presupposes that something needs to be transformed, which by implication points to God’s character, which is relational in essence. The question that arises is whether this ‘something that needs to be transformed’ would indeed be relationships. The answer is indeed suggested by Paul. In his letter to the Colossian church he writes, for reasons not mentioned, that reconciliation was needed between God the Father and his creation (“things on earth and things in heaven”) (Colossians 1:20). The need for reconciliation is the result of what Schillebeeckx (1980:191) describes in ‘cosmic language’ as a “cosmic fault between the upper and the lower world”, while Greene (2003:39) talks of this reconciliation as “the repair of the ontological fabric of the universe”, which was repaired by the *Logos* incarnate. Reconciliation, in other words, “mending of this cosmic fault”, according to Schillebeeckx, has been effected by Christ’s death on the cross. Greene (2003:39) agrees, and writes that through the reparation that was affected by the *Logos*, humanity was allowed “to become partakers in the divine nature” (*cf.* 2 Peter 1:4). Thus, the rift that existed between heaven (God) and earth (creation including humanity) had been bridged by Jesus Christ bringing peace between God and God’s creation as described in Colossians 1:20, “...having made peace through the blood of His cross”. As *one-of-a-kind* transformer, Jesus finds himself in the role of *Suffering Peacemaker* in bringing about transformation of creation – of a world that has been in a relationship of enmity

with its creator – by *creating* a relationship of peace and friendship (cf. Romans 8:20-23; 2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

Within this relationship of peace and friendship, Jesus empowers his transformed human dialogue partner to become a transformer as well – not acting as co-creator with God, as some like Philip Hefner propose, but rather, as suggested in this thesis, as co-creative partner in the missional work of God through Jesus Christ. It must be noted here that Hefner has developed a dynamic theological anthropology by making use of the metaphor ‘co-creator’ and discusses it succinctly in his book, *The Human Factor: Evolution, Culture and Religion* (1993), particularly in terms of how this metaphor works in the chapter titled, *A Theology of the Created Co-Creator* (Hefner 1993:23-51).

As co-creative partner, the human partner is thus empowered to ‘create’ (establish) new relationships with and within the world at large, and bringing it into a new relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Drees’ (2002:220) eloquent explanation supports this as he suggests that human beings as “creative creatures” must rather be seen as “created creators”, rather than co-creators with God, which they are not. He defines ‘created creators’ as, “beings who genuinely act in creation”. Fretheim (2005:93) supports this, stating that God’s divine activity within creation does not entail human passivity, but rather humanity responding by taking up the divine call to responsibility.

Jesus, as the *one-of-a-kind* transformer, does not do his work of transformation from outside the natural order, but enters into the natural order, thereby not only illuminating and interpreting the created order, but also transforming its capacity to point to God – as McGrath (2008:173) puts it, “The disclosure of the glory of God thus comes *through*

nature, not *above* nature [emphasis added]. The enfleshed Word of God makes God known in and through the natural order”.

In the process of creating the relationship of peace and friendship, Jesus employs unconventional means to bring about the transformation. Central to this process is the challenge, which he poses to traditional Judaism in terms of that which forms the foundation of Israel’s existence and identity – the Torah and the “Jewish foundational belief in the inalienable election of Israel as a family, a nation, an ‘*am*, an *ethnos*” (Wright 1996:381). The problem was not simplistic, as Wright (1996:380) explains, but concerns Jesus’,

...implicit, sometimes explicit, claim: that in and through his own work Israel’s god was doing a new thing, or rather *the* new thing, that for which Israel had longed. And when that happened everything would be different. Torah could regulate certain aspects of human behaviour, but it could not touch the heart...But when the promises of scripture would be fulfilled, then the heart itself would be changed, and the supreme position of Torah would in consequence be relativized.

In his approach (‘I am’ sayings) Jesus uses familiar image-concepts by transforming them into new image-concepts applicable to himself, and pointing to his identity in terms of his divine status. The Pharisees, described by Philo as “a self-appointed, zealous, and quite effective body in their guarding of ancestral traditions” (Wright 1996:391), and masters of Jewish law, did not approve of Jesus’ claim and challenged him on legal grounds after he claimed to be the light of the world (John 8:17). In this context the Jewish court did not allow any man to testify on his own behalf. Based on this the Pharisees claimed that Jesus’ testimony is therefore insufficient to prove his case. Jesus acknowledges this (John 5:31) by presenting a counter-argument that his

witness is indeed legal and true in light of the fact that he had a witness – his Father (John 8:16), who witnessed on his behalf (John 5:32).

In equal measure, Jesus' use of parables also challenges his hearers in terms of its message concerning the kingdom of God. The parables are cause for an enraged response from the Pharisees once again. They despised Jesus and the message he preached, and were unwilling to humble themselves to seek God's truth and forgiveness. Their pride caused them to conform to what Isaiah called 'dull hearts', 'heavy ears', and 'shut ears' (Isaiah 6:1; Matthew 13:15). Jesus used parables effectively in revealing the truths of his kingdom to those who were faithful, and who were willing to humble themselves. Moreover, the parables were equally effective in concealing these truths from those who rejected it, at the same time revealing their unbelief. Transformation is brought about only in those who are willing to humble themselves and listen to Jesus' teaching.

Jesus, as *One-of-a-kind* Transformer, through the 'I am' sayings and the parables challenged Israel's worldview, namely the belief that she represented the superior elect people of the one true God with the exclusion of everybody else. The challenge involved the so-called "worldview-symbols", which Wright (1996:428) refers to, i.e. "land, family, Torah and Temple", in other words, "Jesus drastically challenged the existing familial and national symbolism" (Wright 1996:430). Jesus challenged the *status quo* in terms of redefining these symbols, i.e. "subverting the common interpretation..., and offered his own fresh and positive alternatives", according to Wright (1996:428). Here, O'Collins and Kendall (1996:65) speak of a so-called "symbol-clash with the authorities in Jerusalem" (cf. Wright 1996:435), who, in their estimate,

“did not understand the way Jesus used his central symbol of God’s kingdom”. Characteristic of this challenge was Jesus’ association with those who were deemed socially unacceptable and religiously impure, according to the Torah. Wright (1996:431) points out that this in itself would not have been significant if it was not for the fact that Jesus claimed, “in praxis and story”, to be “inaugurating the long-awaited kingdom”. The controversy arose because he did not celebrate the inauguration with Israel, the elect ones, but with the wrong people – in O’Collins’ and Kendall’s words (1996:65), the authorities in Jerusalem “were scandalized by the meaning expressed through such symbolic acts such as dining with public sinners and healing on the Sabbath”. Most of all, this symbolic inauguration of the kingdom “threatened the central religious symbol of the Sadducean ruling class, the magnificent temple in Jerusalem”.

Through his re-definition (transformation) of Israel’s world-view symbols, and his personal claims to divinity (‘I am’ sayings), Jesus was in essence instructing (teaching) people the truth about God and how one should relate in the right way to God, at the same time claiming to be God. With reference to the terms “enfleshment” and “embodiment”, it is thus suggested that the Torah is enfleshed in Jesus so that he then becomes the embodiment of God’s instruction for the right way of living, in other words the true way of relating to God through obedience, submission and worship.

5.5.3 Jesus Christ: *One-of-a-Kind* Partner

Jesus Christ acting as *one-of-a-kind* communicator in creation, co-opts (invites) humankind into a partnership of a different kind than merely that of a partner-in-dialogue. He invites his human dialogue partner into a deeper partnership with himself – a *one-of-a-kind* partnership. This partnership is characterized by Jesus, the *one-of-a-*

kind partner with all the resources, and humankind, the partner in need with no resources. Jesus acts voluntarily in obedience to God, while humankind living in disobedience to God is invited (called) to enter into the partnership in faith.

It must be noted that in this section the subject of discussion is not about the fundamental questions concerning God's im/mutability, im/passibility, and whether Jesus died on the cross. Much has been written and debated over the years concerning the issue, especially in reference to the 'Process Theology'/'Open Theism' of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1949; *cf.* Whitehead 1978) and Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000; *cf.* Hartshorne 1984). The focus of discussion here is rather on the particular partnership images that have been identified within the scope of the DSL Model, which would complete the image-concepts of Jesus Christ in an attempt to answer the question who he is in relation to creation.

5.5.3.1 Jesus Christ: Creation's Loyal Partner

Greene (2003:39) identifies Jesus Christ, the *Logos*, as the Father's co-partner, and argues that if "the *Logos* as the Father's co-partner created out of nothing a world of order, design and beauty, then it was the *Logos* incarnate, still the Father's co-partner, who could save and redeem and so prevent a return to disorder, disintegration and chaos by human sin and evil". Torrance (2008:116, 117), on the other hand, also dealing with the theme of partnership, writes from a slightly different perspective. In reference to Jesus Christ as the Son incarnate and in the context of his utter dependence upon the Father, he describes the partnership that exists between the Son and his human partner as a covenanted partnership (fellowship). Moltmann (1981:25), taking up the same theme, writes that God "makes God self a

partner in a covenant with his people”. Both views are in accord with Barth’s (1961:50) description of human beings as the “covenanted-partner[s]” of God. In line with this Barth calls Jesus Christ the Brother, and God the Father to all human beings (*cf.* Mark 3:33; Luke 8:21).

In reference to God’s deity, Barth (1961:33) writes that “God [is] absolutely unique in God’s relation to man and the world...”. It is this uniqueness that McGrath (2008:129) also makes reference to, and which forms the context within which Jesus is identified in this thesis as ‘One-of-a-kind Partner’, in particular creation’s ‘Loyal Partner’. This phrase was coined by Barth (1961:36), first making reference to God as “man’s free partner” in terms of the dialogue, which God initiated between God self and humankind through Jesus Christ. It is then within the context of this dialogue that Barth (1961:42) talks about God’s “togetherness” with humankind – a togetherness in which he further identifies God as humankind’s “superior partner”. This superiority could possibly be described in terms of Polkinghorne’s (1991:94, 95) term, a “strange togetherness-in-separation”, reflecting both God’s revelation and hiddenness. This explains that God, in Jesus Christ, is together with humankind in terms of immanence, but at the same time separated from humankind in terms of transcendence.

Greene’s *Logos* imagery (Jesus as co-partner), and Torrance’s ‘Son’ imagery (Jesus as covenant-partner) contribute significantly in answering the question of who Jesus is, but ultimately Barth’s (1961:43) identification of Jesus Christ as “loyal partner” to both humankind and God condenses both images beautifully into a description that describes Jesus’ uniqueness by taking into account his relation to both God and

humankind. The definition of 'loyal', i.e. "faithful to those persons...that one is under obligation to... be true to" (Webster's 2001:852), describes with so much clarity Jesus' unique relationship to both God and humankind and support what Barth (1961:64) wrote concerning Jesus, "Jesus Christ is in His one Person, as true *God*, *man's* loyal partner, and as *true man*, *God's*". In this unique relationship of being co-partner to God, and covenant-partner to humankind, Jesus becomes the "Loyal Partner" – loyal to God, who in God's freedom chooses to be with humankind, and loyal to human beings who in turn make a free choice to live in a relationship with God characterized by animosity (sin). Jesus, in obedience to the Father, becomes humankind's loyal partner by humbling himself and entering into a partnering relationship (communion) with humankind – a relationship through which mercy and love are freely and unreservedly given to humankind. Ultimately, Jesus' loyal partnership with his creatures/creation exposes him to their vulnerability, but more so exposing his own vulnerability in terms of his creatureliness, sharing his creation's pain, hurt and suffering.

Who then is Jesus Christ in relation to creation? Jesus as the loyal partner is, to answer through Barth (1961:45), "the sovereign Lord of the amazing relationship" – in other words, the *one-of-a-kind* relationship in which he is both human and divine, both *with* humankind, but also *different from* humankind. As loyal partner Jesus is not only the creator of his human partner and of the world, but ultimately, in his loyalty to both God and humankind, Jesus Christ is the one who redeems and saves by ratifying God's image in man.

5.5.3.2 Jesus Christ: Creation's Conjoined Partner

The loyalty of Jesus' partnership with creation is not merely superfluous. It runs much deeper than that, with the loyalty of his partnership being of a very specific kind – a *one-of-a-kind* loyalty. The assertion that the creator God and the saving (redeeming) God is one and the same God, “is deeply rooted in Hebrew faith” (McFague 2000:31) – an assertion, which McFague is quick to point out, “surfaces in John's incarnational Christology, Paul's cosmic Christ, Irenaeus's notion of Christ recapitulating all of creation, as well as in sacramental motifs in Augustine and Thomas”. Macquarrie (1990:48-68), in dealing with Pauline Christology, explains that by virtue of it being a Christology “from below”, it “considers only the unfolding of the human [creature]”, and that a complete Christology is needed to address God's action in everything (Macquarrie 1990:63). It is thus not only important to know the human history of Jesus Christ as set out in the New Testament – it is of equal importance to ask *why* God assumed flesh – a question that Melancthon also considered, according to Pauck (1969:22), “For unless you know why Christ put on flesh and was nailed to the cross, what good will it do you to know merely the history about him?”. By asking the same question, Gregersen (2013:370-393) does precisely what Macquarrie suggests, starting with God by addressing the important assertion referred to by McFague. In his attempt of seeking an answer, Gregersen (2013:374) situates the story of Jesus within a cosmic (universal) framework, explaining, in reference to 1 Corinthians 8:6 and Ephesians 1:4 & 10, that, “the concrete Jesus story is placed in an understanding of God's universal nature and will, while also in the context of heavens and earth”. He clarifies the biblical assertion that Jesus Christ is both Creator and Redeemer by explaining that the basic presupposition of Jesus Christ's relation to God supports the claim that he, “...has

something to do with the cosmic story” (Gregersen 2013:375). Gregersen points out that it is only within this particular context that the assertion is meaningful that Jesus Christ is “co-creator with the Father and the Spirit from the beginning”, and that it then can be said that, “‘God [is] with us’ (Emmanuel), the companion of any creature at any time and place” (*cf.* McFague 2000:30).

According to Gregersen, however, this explanation does not answer the question of *why* God assumed flesh. Although it points to Jesus Christ’s divine nature and his relationship with God (the *Logos* – *cf.* Greene 2003:38, 39), it does not explain God’s relation to humankind and the world as the Christ incarnate (the Son – *cf.* Torrance 2008:116, 117) – in Gregersen’s (2013:375) words, “Why did God assume flesh and become a feature within the picture of the world itself, rather than just remaining its creative frameworker?”. He suggests that the answer is that of ‘deep incarnation’, of which the purpose is that of, “reconciling humanity with God, and of conjoining God and the world of creation so intensely together that there can be a future also for a material world characterized by decomposition, frailty and suffering” (Gregersen 2013:375). In other words, God acts by ‘inserting’ God into the world in the creaturely body of Jesus Christ for the purpose of perceiving, communicating and acting in this world (*cf.* Macquarrie 1990:409). This proposition brings to light a different dimension of understanding why God assumed flesh in the person of Jesus Christ as it highlights not only Jesus’ relation to humankind, but also his relation to and relationship with the entire created world, which, as Gregersen explains, reaches right down into “the roots of biological existence” – tolerating, accepting, and incorporating “material existence... in a divine embrace”. It encompasses all levels of

existence – both the “lawlike or ‘logical’ aspects..., [and the] chaotic aspects of creation”. Gregersen (2013:375) concludes that,

From the perspective of deep incarnation, Christ is actively present at the bottom of the universe, including the strange yet fundamental aspects of physical creation: the intricacies of the indefinitely small and entangled quantum world that forever seems to defy our finite conceptual comprehension.

From this point of view, Jesus’ loyalty as partner extends beyond the merely superficial, beyond the human level – it extends to all levels of creation, making him the *one-of-a-kind* partner, i.e. the *conjoined partner* to creation. Gregersen’s (2013:376) argument that, “God conjoins *with* and *for* the material world at large as a concretely embodied human person”, supports and expands in an extraordinary sense Peacocke’s (2007:31) vision that Jesus, in his full humanity and his significance to human salvation, “... must share both our evolutionary history and have the same multi-levelled basis for his personhood.... [which] means he must be not only flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone, but also DNA of our DNA”. Within these radical dimensions of deep incarnation Jesus Christ as conjoined partner, in Gregersen’s (2013:375) words, incorporates both the “lawlike...and chaotic aspects of creation – “at once anguish-provoking and potentially creative”.

5.5.3.3 Jesus Christ: Creation’s Vulnerable Partner

Fundamentally, at the heart of shared human existence and experience, lies the issue of vulnerability. This shared vulnerability finds expression in three basic universal relationships, i.e. the primary relationship between human beings themselves, the relationship between human beings and the natural world, and the relationship between human beings and God. Within the first two relationships

vulnerability is expressed through a creature's physical needs and experiences, such as safety, pain, hunger, thirst, cold etc., or its mental needs and experiences, such as love, acceptance, grief, anger and more. This is attested to by the biblical witness of Paul listing the hardships he himself had suffered in terms of his ministry as evidenced in his first letter to the Corinthian church (1 Corinthians 4:11-13),

To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made the filth of this world, the off-scouring of all things until now.

Invariably, vulnerability is accompanied by the experience of suffering. On the one hand, Kazoh Kitamori (1916-1998), one of Japan's most prominent theologians, understood God's suffering in terms of his wrath in the face of human sin. Kitamori responded to the problem of suffering by writing that, "We are living in an age of God and pain....the world today seems to be stretched out under pain" (Bratcher 1965:153). He understood God's suffering in light of God's love, which he believed is not the same kind of love that is attributed to God by liberal theology, which Bauckham (1984:10) explains, "envisages no real obstacle to his immediate love of humanity". Kitamori's explanation was that God's immediate love of humanity turns to anger because of human sin. In the face of God's continuous love of humanity, "he [thus] suffers the conflict of love and wrath within him" (Bauckham 1984:10, 11). Ultimately, Kitamori concluded that, "In the victory of [God's] love over his wrath [his] pain mediates his love to sinners" (Bauckham 1984:11).

On the other hand, Placher (1994:xiii), amongst others, understands divine suffering in light of God's love for humanity. He writes, for example, in reference to the relationship between God and humanity, that,

To read the biblical narratives is to encounter a God who is, first of all, love (1 John 4:8). Love involves a willingness to put oneself at risk, and God is in fact vulnerable in love, vulnerable even to great suffering.

This is affirmed by Hopkins (1994:55) who writes that Christians have gained this remarkable insight into God's profound love for humanity and thus God's vulnerability as a result of "an intense process of communal grief and ecstasy". She points out that Jesus had prepared "the way for this spiritual revolution" through his ministry of "healing and exorcism", and in doing so, he "emphasized the compassionate presence of God amongst the sick and unhappy". The question is, however, *how* Jesus relates to the vulnerability of human beings specifically, and the vulnerability of creation universally.

In light of the 'vulnerability of God' inferred by Placher, three challenging ideas surface in various authors' writings concerning Jesus Christ as the self-revelation of God – these are (i) God's homelessness (*cf.* Dicken 2011), (ii) God's weakness (*cf.* Lienhard 1982; Caputo 2006), and (iii) God's powerlessness (*cf.* Bonhoeffer 1967). Jesus' vulnerability is especially evident in light of him wandering around with no place to lay down his head (Placher 1994:xiii; *cf.* Luke 9:58). In this context Dicken (2011:127-157) refers to him as the "Homeless God". In reference to the idea of Jesus' homelessness, Caputo (2006:36), writing about the "weakness of God", raises a thought-provoking question, "Suppose God most especially pitches his tent among the homeless, so that God has no place to lay his head?". Here, Caputo brings together both ideas of homelessness and vulnerability, which affect humanity most profoundly. Homelessness and vulnerability are two sides of the same coin, and give rise to a situation of human powerlessness, which projects the image of

weakness. In this context God's powerlessness is most prominently portrayed in terms of the idea of Jesus' vulnerability, which surfaces strongly in Jesus' portrayal as a servant washing the feet of his disciples (John 13:12; Placher 1994:xiii), a subversive act of self-sacrifice in which he opens himself up to people, thereby making himself vulnerable. Jesus' vulnerability is most evident in the event of his suffering and death on the cross, portraying his weakness and powerlessness in a unique way as creation's Suffering Peacemaker, and creation's Suffering Partner.

The weakness and powerlessness of Jesus, however, must not be seen in terms of a weak and powerless God, but rather in light of Jesus' humanness/creatureliness – as Placher (1994:16) writes, "...the obedient Jesus becomes most fully one with God in increasing human powerlessness". Heyward (1984:28) makes this startling remark when she writes that, "Jesus did not come to reveal God's power, God's might, God's victory". Instead, she believes that Jesus came "...into the pain, the passion, and the wonder of creation itself... [accepting] the vocation of being truly human in the image of an enigmatic God".

Lienhard (1982:61), reflecting on Luther's Christology, says that in light of the cross, "God appears there as the one who constructs by destroying and who makes alive by killing". He points out that Luther, by developing his "'theology of the cross' in relation to the crucified and weak Christ" (*theologia crucis*) often refers to what Paul has written to the Corinthian church concerning the power of the cross (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 1:18). Luther believed that the power of God is "hidden in weakness" in light of Paul writing that the power of God is to be found in the seemingly foolish message of the cross. According to Luther, it is within this weakness that God's glory

is manifested and God's wisdom is "affirmed against all reason" (Lienhard 1982:209). Migliore (1991:52) refers to the power of God as "a strange power", explaining that "it is not the power of force but the power of the Spirit". Could this 'strange power' be translated into a 'one-of-a-kind' power? Yes, it is this strange power that is set against the power of worldly gods – it is a one-of-a-kind power that is not based on power-images of fear, domination and violence, as Placher (1994:17) points, but is a power born out of love that transforms the entire world through the event of the cross. It's the kind of love, which is willing, in Placher's (1994:16) words, "...to take risks, to care for the other in a way that causes the other's fate to affect one's own, to give to the other at real cost to oneself, to chance rejection". This is precisely what Jesus does when he opens himself up by becoming vulnerable for the sake of humanity and creation – he faces rejection to the extreme, and it is by experiencing rejection that he becomes even more vulnerable, weak and powerless. This subversive act of Jesus is in contrast to human nature, which seeks power precisely because humans are afraid of weakness and rejection, as Placher (1994:18) points out. Jesus' act is the result of a choice made out of love, compassion and freedom (*cf.* Barth 1961:36 – 'man's free partner') in contrast to the fear-enslaving human drive for power in a desperate attempt to avoid risking vulnerability and facing rejection.

Does this mean that Jesus as Christ incarnate in his willingness to take risks and care for the other forfeits anything? In reference to God, Barth's (1956:159) answer is clear when he writes that God, "...does not forfeit anything by doing this...On the contrary...God shows Himself to be the great and true God in the fact that He can and will let His grace bear this cost, that He is capable and willing and ready for this

condescension, this act of extravagance, this far journey”. Barth believes that this is what marks out God above all false gods. As loyal partner to God Jesus identifies wholly with God’s vulnerability by becoming vulnerable in person. As loyal partner to humanity, Jesus as the man from Nazareth does in fact forfeit something – his creaturely, human life. It is through his willingness to risk vulnerability that God’s redemptive intentionality ultimately works out in and through the event of the cross, thereby bringing about transformation for the other. In and through Christ incarnate, God exposes God to the vulnerability of God’s creation by becoming/being the vulnerable God. It is this one-of-a-kind power, which, in Paul’s words, is a saving power for those who are redeemed (*cf.* 1 Corinthians 1:18).

5.5.3.4 Jesus Christ: Creation’s Wounded/Hurting Partner

By narrating an old legend from the Talmud in which Rabbi YOSHUA ben LEVI asks ELIJAH when the Messiah will come, Nouwen (1972:81) focuses his readers’ attention on ELIJAH’s answer – “The Messiah”, the story tells, “...is sitting among the poor, binding his wounds one at a time, waiting for the moment when he will be needed”. This is indeed a significant image of Jesus, the loyal partner to God and humankind, who came to liberate his creation, but in the process is wounded and hurt in order for his creation to be healed.

Nouwen (1972:83) alludes to four kinds of human ‘wounds’ – alienation, separation, isolation and loneliness, in other words, humankind’s ‘godforsakenness’ (Bauckham 1984:11). Reflecting on the idea of Jesus being the homeless, powerless and weak God in terms of God’s experiences as the Christ incarnate, these kinds of wounds would complete the picture. Paul, for example, reminds the Corinthian church (2

Corinthians 8:9) that it is for their sakes that Jesus became poor so that they may become rich through his poverty. It is in this state of poverty that Jesus becomes wounded and hurt, and it is in this state of utmost vulnerability that he offers healing in terms of forgiveness, justification, regeneration into a new life and ultimately the promise of eternal life and glorification. This woundedness of Jesus is alluded to in Isaiah 53:3-9 where Isaiah talks of the One who "...is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" – the One who was despised and not esteemed by humankind (*cf.* Isaiah 42:2; 49:7; 50:6; Mark 9:12). Jesus as the wounded Christ is, to use Nouwen's (1972:82) words, "...the wounded healer, the one who must look after his own wounds but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of other". In light of this Jesus is identified as the wounded partner – the one who has all the resources as God, offering healing not only to God's wounded and hurting partner, humankind, but also to the entire creation, which has no resources to heal itself.

By asking the significant question of how wounds can become a source of healing, Nouwen (1972:87) suggests that the answer is hospitality, which for him encompasses things like "care and compassion, understanding and forgiveness, fellowship and community". He believes that hospitality is that "virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveller" (Nouwen 1972:89). This is precisely what Jesus does – he offers hospitality to his human partner – in the words of the apostle John, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37b-38).

Nouwen (1972:89) concludes that hospitality as a healing power requires that, “the host feel[s] at home in his own house, and... that he create[s] a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor” – such a host will offer attention and communion to a weary traveller. Jesus as the wounded partner offers this *one-of-a-kind place* to his wounded human partner. As conjoined partner to creation and humankind, Jesus through his own woundedness offers attention and communion at the deepest level to each individual human being, thus effecting healing for his partner in distress (*cf.* Psalm 46; Jeremiah 6:16; Matthew 11:28-29; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-8; Hebrews 4:9-10). It is within this woundedness that God’s power is to be found – a *one-of-a-kind power* that transforms human lives by bringing about healing through forgiveness.

5.5.3.5 Jesus Christ: Creation’s Suffering Partner

Bauckham (1984:6-12) presents an in-depth review on prominent scholars – Luther, Barth and Moltmann, amongst others – who have addressed the issue of a suffering God in their theologies. Placher also takes up this theme, and in reference to the vulnerability of God reminds one that Jesus Christ as God’s self-revelation is the one who “suffers and dies on the cross – condemned by the authorities of his time, undergoing great pain” (Placher 1994:xiii; *cf.* Isaiah 53:3-9).

Bonhoeffer (1967:196-197) has probably made the most thought-provoking statement of all with his thoughts about God’s powerlessness, vulnerability and suffering, writing that, “God allows himself to be edged out of the world and onto 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... [I]t is not by his omnipotence that Christ helps us but by his weakness and suffering”. The question of “Who Christ

really is, for us today”, has always been foremost in Bonhoeffer’s thoughts (Bonhoeffer 1944). While being imprisoned for a lengthy period of time in Tegel Prison, a piece of scrap paper was smuggled from his prison cell on which he scribbled his heartfelt cry that, “only the suffering God can help” (Bonhoeffer:1944:279). Simpson (2006:422) points out that Bonhoeffer’s crucified Christ as the ‘suffering God’ reveals a “rich metaphor... [of] God as bearer” – the God who “... is a God who bears”. This ‘bearing’ constitutes in what Bonhoeffer understood as, “The Son of God [who] bore our flesh”. Bonhoeffer does not stop there, but saw Jesus, the Son of God as the One who not only bore flesh, but also bore the cross, thus attaining “reconciliation by his bearing”. ‘Bearing’ in Bonhoeffer’s view, as Simpson points out, is rich in meaning and, “constitutes incarnation, cross, resurrection, and ascension”, pointing to Jesus as “‘that kind of Lord’, rather than some other kind of lord” – in other words, a *one-of-a-kind* Lord.

In reflecting on the vulnerability of God, Hopkins (1994:56) writes that Jesus’ ministry was a life-affirming ministry with his goal having been the eradication of “pain and social distress”. His life-affirming ministry ultimately leads Jesus on the path to the cross. Here, Luther’s words ring true that, “God appears [at the cross] as the one who constructs by destroying and who makes alive by killing” (Lienhard 1982:61). The life-affirming quality of Jesus’ ministry does not, however, end with the decisive event of the cross, and the destruction and killing inferred by Luther, but is taken up in his resurrection and ascension to heaven, which Bonhoeffer refers to in his understanding of God as bearer.

The idea of a 'God who bears' is taken up by Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, an Anglican priest/poet and army chaplain during World War One. Ellis (2005:169), reflecting on pain and suffering, points out a remarkable and powerful metaphor in one of Kennedy's so-called 'war poems' in which Kennedy describes the pain and sorrow of a mother whose son died in the war. Ellis shows that Kennedy in this poem does not only "emphatically perceives the pain of the bereaved mother", but takes it further by suggesting something about the pain of God who "...knows the loss of a Son". Here, Kennedy perceives the pain of God as "the pain of the second birth [which] is born by God as the dead son is reborn in eternal life". The two metaphors of Bonhoeffer and Kennedy combined resonate with Moltmann's vision of the cross, which Moltmann, according to Bauckham (1984:12), does not believe to be "just a revelation of divine sympathy for those who suffer, but an act of divine solidarity with 'the godless and godforsaken'" (*cf.* Moltmann 1974:276-277). It is into this godlessness and godforsakenness of human existence that the Son enters, and as Bauckham (1984:12) explains, "Only as the godforsaken man Jesus and as the Father of the godforsaken man Jesus, could God suffer in the way that he did in the event of the cross".

The suffering Jesus as the Son of God who bore both flesh and the cross before death (Bonhoeffer), and the suffering God who bore both the pain of knowing the loss of a son unto death as well as the pain of God's dead son's rebirth (resurrection) into eternal life (Kennedy) prove to be powerful metaphors in understanding Jesus Christ as the suffering partner in terms of him being the loyal partner to both God and humanity (Barth), and even more so on a much deeper [quantum] level as creation's conjoined partner (Gregersen). Here, it is worthwhile mentioning that

Moltmann, in his theology of the cross, does not isolate the cross and the resurrection – as Bauckham (1984:12) explains, “In the cross all human suffering is taken within God’s own ‘trinitarian history’ in hope for the joy of God’s eschatological future”, and in Moltmann’s (1974:278) own words, “like the cross of Christ, even Auschwitz is in God himself....God is in Auschwitz, and Auschwitz is in God”.

5.6 REVELATION OF THE WORD

Amongst various problems that contemporary Christology faces with regard to the question of who Jesus Christ is the two issues that seemingly stand out is that of relativism, and linked to this the problem of particularity (Gunton 1992:40-41; Migliore 2004:163-166). According to Migliore (2004:165), the New Testament offers a rich treasury of pictures/images of Jesus. Sölle (1990:111), in defining ‘christology’ as “the attempt to grasp the mystery of Jesus”, answers the question concerning Jesus’ power to change and shape life by recapitulating some of the images of Jesus that have been identified through the “dogmatic language of orthodoxy”, i.e. a Christology from above. Accordingly, Jesus of Nazareth is...

the anointed, the messiah, the Lord, the Kyrios, the Saviour and Redeemer, the true King of Kings, the Son of God, true God and true man. He appears as Rex, Victor, Cosmocrator, and also as the Lamb, the Logos, the Mediator.

In addition to these New Testament images, according to Migliore, one finds another “remarkable treasury... [of] countless interpretations of Jesus in theology and art of the church and in secular art and literature”. Apart from the negative implications, he views this positively and believes that it “opens up to us aspects of [the] person and work [of Jesus Christ] that we might miss if we were limited to only one portrayal... and awakens us to our freedom and responsibility to interpret the meaning of Christ for our own time

and place” (Migliore 2004:166). The problem, which he highlights though, in reference to Hans Küng, is that now there are many different Christs – to the extent, he says, that “the question of which Christ is the true Christ becomes unavoidable and urgent”. In this he concludes that one must always be aware to distinguish between the rich diversity of interpretations in Christology and “an anything-goes relativism”.

The problem linked to the aforementioned relativism is what Migliore (2004:166) calls “the scandal of particularity”, which encompasses amongst other things the “fundamental scandal of the cross” (*cf.* Paul – 1 Corinthians 1:23; Migliore 2004:166). Gunton (1992:41) takes the idea of particularity further, and referring in almost derogatory terms to the so-called “liberal protestant, catholic liberationist [and] bourgeois feminist face” that is reflected from what he calls the “deep well... of an idealizing of Jesus”, warns that one must reject any [such] idealizing of Jesus and take cognizance of the fact that “he was a particular human being, a determinate person, made what he was in part by his genes and the history and society of the world in which he came to be”. He rejects outright any Christology that tries to evade this determinateness of Jesus as human being and his Jewish particularity in terms of genetic inheritance. Other “scandals of particularity” that the church and Christology face today is that of patriarchal theology and the “ontological necessity of Jesus’ maleness”, which are brought into question by feminist theologians (Hopkins 1994:82-97; Greene 2003:218-245; Migliore 2004:166), and “the scandal of Jesus’ ministry to the poor and oppressed”, as well as the so-called “false scandal of Christological imperialism” (Migliore 2004:166).

Sölle (1990:113-114) believes that Latin American liberation theology in particular makes “a unique identification with the poor Jesus of the Gospels and the life of its own people in wretched settlements”. It is within this paradigm that a number of images for Jesus are identified in the context of liberation – as Sölle (1990:114), explains, “They attempt to begin where Jesus began, where he lived, where the people met him...”. It is in the experiences of the suffering and struggling of the people where Jesus is found – the one “who looks and feels as we do, the *Christo trabajador*, Christ the worker”. It is this image of Jesus that Hopkins (1994:55-63) refers to as “the scandal of the vulnerable God”.

The focus of the study in this chapter was, however, not directly on the question of who Jesus is for us today, but rather who Jesus is in relation to creation, which includes also a response to who he is for us, today. It is within the bigger context of creation understood as God’s inaudible, yet visible voice that one sees a picture emerging of Jesus Christ as the One who is in a relationship with creation and humanity that corresponds to that of a mother and her deaf child. This relationship is characterized by communication, transformation and partnership in a unique way – a *one-of-a-kind* way. By re-interpreting the words of Moltmann (1981:116) that, “...the incarnation of the Son is the perfected self-communication of the triune God to this world”, it is suggested here that creation as the visible voice of God in Jesus is God’s communication in action – the partnership is not a static partnership, but a partnership through which God communicates through Jesus and by so doing brings about transformation. Jesus as the Voice of God points toward understanding the relationship between God and the world in terms of communicator, transformer and partner.

In Deane-Drummond's (2004:236) view Von Balthasar argues correctly that, "...because of human sinfulness the internal word of God *within* creation had to become a Word spoken as it were from the *outside* , in the Old Testament as the law and prophets and in the New Testament as the incarnate Word". The description in this study of Jesus being the enfleshed Voice of God (*cf. 5.5.1a*), and by implication the carrier of God's creative word resonates strongly with Von Balthasar's view, and is supported by the statement that, "The revelation of the Word made flesh is *within* creation, not alongside it, and it is in this that the Son becomes the expression of the absolute Being of God" (Deane-Drummond 2004:236).

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CHAPTER 6

THE HUMAN BEING IN RELATION TO CREATION

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The creation narrative in Genesis 2 testifies to the fact that human beings were created by God from the dust of the earth, and that God had breathed into their nostrils “the breath of life”, resulting in them having become living souls (*cf.* Genesis 2:7). From a first person perspective God affirms that, “It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it” (Isaiah 45:12). Schaeffer (1972:39), in dealing with the differentiation of human beings, points out that humans are unique – in his words, they stand “in marked contrast to everything which has been created before”. Williams (2013:36) agrees, writing that, “People are clearly portrayed as special and unique”, a distinction, he says, that is “not accorded to any other form of life”.

The special attention given to human beings in the first creation story is emphasized by the fact that God has breathed into “the man his divine breath”, has given them a special place to live (Eden) and special food (fruit and seeds) to eat, and even has brought the animals to be named. Schaeffer (1972:39), however, warns that this uniqueness should not be attributed to the soul human beings possess, and that one should thus not make too much of the word ‘soul’ since it is also used in reference to other living creatures. Rather, the basis to this uniqueness, or as he refers to it – the “distinction which is so overwhelmingly important to us” – should be sought in the specific act of God having created humans in his image.

Reichenbach and Anderson (2006:114), point out that, in contrast to other living creatures, human beings are unique in the sense that they have a transcendent aspect, which for them is evident from the emphasis that the author of Genesis places on the idea of human beings having been created in “God’s image and likeness”. For Santmire (2006:256), on the other hand, the ‘image of God’ and the way the Genesis 1 story tells of the creation of humans suggest that there is a special relationship between God and human beings. Santmire (2006:257) explains that this relationship “is reciprocally personal”, because it is where God for the first time in the story speaks in the first person (Genesis 1:26).

Page (2006:101), coming from a different perspective, suggests that differences between human beings and other creatures should not be made too absolute, explaining that, “There are great continuities between humans and animals”, like “similar sensations such as sight or the experiences of pain, ... and the capacity to perceive objects and persons as such, as well as sharing with [humans] emotions, instincts, curiosity and the love of play”. On the other hand, however, she believes that human beings are indeed special in terms of the ‘image of God’ in which they are made, and qualifies her belief in terms of human beings’ capacity for abstract thought.

Moltmann (1985:188), however, puts all of this in clear perspective by explaining that it is both the differences and the continuities between human beings and other creatures that bring about understanding of “what the human being’s designation to be the image of God really means (Genesis 1:26)”. He warns that although this designation “certainly sets [human beings] uniquely apart from the rest of creation...[it] is not identical with the natural differences between human beings and animals, and is in no way intended to

interpret these differences”. He points out that this designation affects the whole human being in that human beings as God’s image...

- i) Are God’s proxy in his creation, and represent **him**;
- ii) Are for God **himself** a counterpart, in whom **he** desires to see **himself** as if in a mirror, and
- iii) Are created for the Sabbath, to reflect and praise the glory of God which enters into creation, and takes up **his** dwelling here.

In his quest to understand rationality, Van Huyssteen also focused his research on human uniqueness, more specifically the distinctives that characterize humanness. In his quest for understanding he addressed the issue of human uniqueness from a totally different aspect through an engagement in an interdisciplinary dialogue with science. He believes that scientific ideas of human uniqueness may be helpful in grounding Christian theological notions of the distinctiveness of human beings in embodied experiences, and went as far as investigating the challenge posed by the evolutionary origins of human rationality (*cf.* Wildman 2007:346-363; Veldsman 2008:227; Drees 2010: n.p.; *cf.* Van Huyssteen 2006:127-153).

In this interdisciplinary exploration, Van Huyssteen made use of the prehistoric cave paintings of Western Europe in his effort to access the ‘embodied human mind’, and investigated various sources such as the “empirical sciences, cognitive evolution, imagination and Palaeolithic rock art, and symbolization and language”, and concluded that there are both continuities and discontinuities between humans and early hominids (Drees 2010: n.p.),

As evolving hominids passed through thresholds of self-reflective thinking and symbolization, i.e. new possibilities have become real. Religion is a part of this qualitative change: the evolution of those characteristics that made humans unique from even their

closest sister species, i.e. characteristics like consciousness, language, symbolic minds and symbolic behavior, is directly related to religious awareness and religious behavior.

In light of these unique characteristics, Van Huyssteen's concluded as follows (Veldsman 2008:229),

[T]heologians must rethink personhood in terms of imagination, symbolic propensities, and cognitive fluidity that acknowledges humanity's close ties with the animal world.

Veldsman (2008:229) explains that Van Huyssteen,

...develops theories of the *imago Dei* that recognize that this quality [personhood] has emerged by natural evolutionary processes and suggests that we reconceive of the *imago Dei* in a highly, contextualized, embodied sense.

Within the paradigm of 'uniqueness', God has put human beings in a unique position in this earth in terms of having given them the responsibility to work and to take care of it (*cf.* Genesis 2:15). As a result of sin, however, humans have become grossly negligent of their God-given responsibility, which have contributed significantly to the earth's devastation and nature's destruction down the ages. Christians are not excluded from this charge and are guilty of gross neglect of the environment, first of all by not taking seriously the obvious fact that the earth is indeed their home, and in the second instance by not taking seriously their responsibility towards their home – a lack of responsibility which has directly contributed to the oppression of the natural world.

In light of the relational qualities of creation that have identified in this study, this chapter's focus will fall on the relationship of human beings to creation. This is by no means intended to negate the role of the Holy Spirit in creation. Moltmann (1985:9), for example, highlights the fact that for a long time the work of God the Father as Creator and Lord of creation has been the focus in scholarly circles, and that continual attempts

have been made “to develop a specifically christological doctrine of creation”. In this regard Moltmann (1985:9) focuses attention on the trinitarian understanding of Christian belief in God and writes that,

According to the Christian interpretation, the Father creates through the Son in the Holy Spirit. The created world is therefore created ‘by God’, formed ‘through God’ and exists ‘in God’.

Environmental philosophers/ecofeminists like Val Plumwood, Freya Matthews, Kate Rigby, Deborah Bird Rose and others have been addressing the issue of the human relationship to creation for many years (Rose 2013:93-109). Bauckham (2010:1), coming from a theological perspective, asks the pertinent question of how the Bible constructs the relationship of human beings to the rest of creation.

6.2 RELATIONSHIPS

Reality consists of a complex system of relationships in which nothing exists by itself and for itself. Everything exists in an interrelated whole – as renowned American poet, Wallace Stevens (1957:163) once wrote, “We are not our own. Nothing is itself taken alone. Things are because of interrelations and interconnections”. The same idea has been eloquently expressed by well-known Afrikaans author/poet, J.D. du Toit (Totius; 1877-1953), who once wrote in reference to the changing character of the world around him that the world is not our dwelling place (Afr. – “Die wêreld is ons woning nie...”; Totius 1982). Tutu’s (1995:xvi) remark within an African context underscores this view of reality when he writes, “The African worldview rejects popular dichotomies between the sacred and the secular, the material and the spiritual. All life is religious, all life is sacred, all of life is of a piece”. Mbiti (1999:106) reiterates this sentiment, saying that in traditional life,

...the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must, therefore, make, create or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group.

Moltmann (1985:17), in reference to William Blake who said that nothing lives alone or for itself, explains that the trinitarian concept of life in terms of “reciprocal indwelling and mutual interpenetration”, is the determinate factor in an ecological doctrine of creation. This understanding forms the basis to Moltmann’s work on creation as he stresses the principles of interrelatedness and communal life by stating that, “There is no such thing as solitary life” – in the deepest sense it means,

God *in* the world and the world *in* God; heaven and earth *in* the kingdom of God, pervaded by his glory; soul and body united *in* the life-giving Spirit to a human whole; woman and man *in* the kingdom of unconditional and unconditioned love, freed to be true and complete human beings.

This striving for communality is well-illustrated by Pannenberg (1970:54), who, talking about “Selfhood” and human destiny, sees the human being moving unendedly into the open, a purposeful movement which he believes, is directed toward God – as Pannenberg puts it, human beings are “on the path toward [their] destiny, which is community with God”.

6.2.1 Paradigms and Images

Regardless of the context, various existential paradigms surface repeatedly in the work of scholars – that of community (and by implication, individuality), dependence, interdependence and independence. It is evident that human beings, like all other living creatures, function within a relational, communal context, and not as isolated individuals separated from the rest of creation. In this regard McFague (1993:105) writes that,

The common character of the [creation] story undercuts notions of human existence as separate from the natural, physical world; or of human individuality as the only form of individuality; or of human individuals existing apart from radical independence and interrelatedness with others of our own species, with other species, and with the ecosystem.

This insight of communality is supported by Moltmann (1985:186), who, in addressing the creatureliness of human beings, does not start with the *imago Dei*, but instead with the *imago mundi*. He justifies his stance by explaining that the human creature can only understand itself in community with all other creatures. From this point of view the human creature is but a member amongst many other creatures, and as such is dependent on all the others.

6.2.1.1 Biblical Faith

Within the context of biblical faith, Sölle (1990:43), for example, considers three *fundamental elements* of creation – the creator God, created human beings and the created world – as being the basis to a biblical belief in creation. With this she means that within a Christian context the concern is in “keeping the creator God present, to understand created human beings as free and ... to regard the creation as good and love it”.

6.2.1.2 Vocation

Fretheim (2005:269), working with a relational model of creation and specifically within the context of vocation, draws these three fundamental elements of creation together, proposing that *community* is important. He explains that, “All creatures of God together constitute a community in relationship”. He situates human beings in particular within a bigger framework, explaining that they are not to be understood as

“isolated creatures of God, but as part of a global community” (Fretheim 2010:9). He argues that not only should human vocation be taken into account within community, but that a holistic approach is needed in which the character of the nonhuman, the human, and God must be taken into account. It is within this interrelated, and therefore complicated, community that three fundamental relational issues become important – that of dependence, independence, and interdependence (Fretheim 2005:269).

With reference to the new creation, McFague (1993:201) views human beings as having a special vocation in terms of stewardship, and as such being “partners with God in solidarity with the oppressed”. She sees it as an “awesome vocation”, elevating it to a status “far higher... than being a little lower than the angels, subjects of a divine king, or even the goal of evolutionary history”.

6.2.1.3 Meaning

Williams (2013:12), subscribing to the notion of “community in relationship”, addresses the issue from a slightly different angle, suggesting that the question of what it *means* to be human should be addressed instead. He argues that *relationship* underpins what it means to be human, and identifies two overarching types of relationships, i.e. internal in which humans relate in/to themselves, and external (Williams 2013:151). Within the external type of relationship he identifies three sub-types (fundamental) relationships, which he believes “determine the nature of a person”, i.e. relating to others, relating to the world, and relating to God (Williams 2013:12). He draws both internal and external relationships together by explaining that, “As humanity rests in the relationships of a person, both internal and external,

that person is most human when the whole nexus of relationships are optimised” (Williams 2013:151).

Williams’ idea finds support in Barth’s idea of “coexistence as the ‘basic form’ of humanity”, meaning that “we are human only in relation to God and to each other” (Migliore 2004:105). Migliore, however, goes beyond Barth’s idea of ‘human existence-in-coexistence’, in saying that it “extends beyond the circle of human life, and that humans exist in a profoundly interdependent relationship with the rest of creation”. This is very true and endorses Berry’s (2000:128) belief that, “So integral is our inner world with the outer world that if this outer world is damaged, then the inner life of our souls is diminished proportionately”.

6.2.1.4 Ecotheology/Ecospirituality

Within the contexts of ecotheology and ecospirituality, Habel identifies three *grand narratives* in the Bible – a grand narrative about God, one about humankind, and one about the earth (Collins 2010:139). In marked contrast to this connectedness and relationality, which characterize the natural world, one finds in the modern/postmodern era a definitive disconnectedness of humans from the natural world – a distancing on the part of the human being. Chryssavgis (2000:83), on the other hand, uses a striking metaphor when he speaks of a kind of autism on the part of humanity, saying that “an autism with regard to the natural cosmos” has befallen humankind – “a certain lack of awareness, or recognition” has become part of humanity’s interaction with the natural world. He views this disconnection between human beings and the natural world as a voluntary confinement on the part of human beings describing it as human beings being “locked inside the confines of

[their] own concerns, with no access to the outside world. [They] have disestablished a continuity between [themselves] and the outside, with no possibility for intimate communion and mutual enhancement”. He is adamant that, “the human person must be associated with, and not dissociated from, the created world” (Chryssavgis 2000:85).

McFague (1993:102), in her formulation of an ecotheology, believes that humanity’s disconnection with the earth could be ascribed to the fact that Christians have over the centuries become convinced as a result of the emphasis on so-called “otherworldliness”, that they are only temporary sojourners in this world passing through on their way to a permanent home somewhere else (*cf.* Leviticus 25:23; Hebrews 11:9, 10; 1 Peter 1:11). This, she says, has furthermore resulted in them having “often not been allowed to feel at home on the earth”. She reiterates the fact that humans need to realize that earth is home – it is not only their space, but also their place where they belong.

Sölle (1990:43, 44), sharing the view that earth is home to human beings, feels that they should indeed have a sense of feeling at home on earth, the reason being that human beings as creatures have reason to trust and revere God as creator of this world and as such is *recognized* in creation – in her words, “We see transcendence in immanence”. Eaton (2000:118), in defining various foundational theological frameworks for ecofeminist theologies, proposes that the insight of “the earth [as] our home” must allow “our theological understanding to be transformed by this insight”.

The notion of Christian otherworldliness had been addressed by Plumwood, who viewed it as ecologically problematic (Elvey 2006:64). Elvey (2006:63), however, suggests that the notion of ‘the otherworldly’ may instead be helpful in gaining an understanding of the ‘otherness of nature’ in what she calls the other-worldly-[ness] of nature, but she warns that such an understanding of nature “presents challenges for both Christian theologies and environmental ethics”. She concludes that a challenge for environmental ethics is, “to allow that the otherworldly may be a category calling forth a [de-anthropocentrising] of the human in an orientation to a more-than-human earth (and cosmic) community” (Elvey 2006:79). This de-anthropocentrising would allow human beings to understand their place in the bigger scheme of things, and to see that they are not the center of the world, and not even the center of planet Earth – as McFague (1993:199) envisions it, in this new vision “this double reality *that* we belong and *where* we belong will be central”.

6.2.2 Human Identity

This notion of ‘belonging’ is directly associated with human beings’ identity as created beings. McFague (1993:103) argues that apart from their religious traditions, Christians in general don’t address the question of their identity, in other words of who they are, “simply as creatures of planet earth”. Instead, she says, Christians view themselves as radically different in view of the images offered by theological anthropology, in contrast to those image(s) offered by contemporary science, which for them has little or no bearing on their identity and place in the bigger scheme of things. This one-sided view allows Christians to believe that they are different/higher than other creatures, and that they cannot (even may not/should not?) be put on par with them. This has led to what McFague calls a ‘docetic’ reflection on the side of Christians who view themselves in

terms of the biblical picture of being a “little lower than the angels” (*cf.* Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:7), and not as “mundane, as being of this world, of the earth, earthy”. Within this context then, she says, Christians have “defined [their] duties primarily in relationship to God (First Great Commandment) and secondarily in relationship to other human beings (Second Great Commandment), but seldom in relationship to the earth, its creatures and its care” (McFague 1993:103).

Kaufman (2000b:24) believes that the ideas of God, and of humanity’s relation to God.... [have] in fact blurred or even concealed human “*embeddedness* in the natural order” as it is conceived of today. Diehm (2007:4), on the other hand, suggests that an awareness of human ‘embeddedness’ may be developed (perhaps even awakened?) through a process of identification with nature. Such identification presupposes an acceptance by human beings of their “ecospheric belonging”, and affirms that humans are “more than self-contained, isolated individuals, and even more than members of a human or social community”. McFague (1993:126) believes that such a “cosmological self-identification acknowledges that [humans] are part and parcel of everything on the planet” – as Diehm states more bluntly, “...to identify with the natural world in this way is to recognize that [humans] are part of nature, and that nature is part of [humans]”.

This sense of ‘ecospheric belonging’ is beautifully illustrated by the worldview of the Lakota Indians, of which Luther Standing Bear (2004:39) writes,

Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky, and water was a real and active principle. For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them. And so close did some of the Lakotas come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common language.

The animals had rights – the right of man’s protection, the right to live, the right to multiply, the right to freedom, and the right to man’s indebtedness – and in recognition of these rights the Lakota never enslaved the animal, and spared all life that was not needed for food and clothing.

An understanding of reality where Christians have to face/acknowledge their creatureliness, and by implication their relationship to the earth, causes a fundamental tension, which Kaufman (2000a:4) calls a conceptual and logical incompatibility between,

...on the one hand, the understanding of God, and of the intimate relation of humanity to God (as seen in our western religious and philosophical traditions), and on the other hand, the growing awareness on the part of human beings that their existence is essentially constituted by, and could never exist apart from, the complex ecological ordering of life that has evolved on planet Earth over many millennia.

Throwing a shadow over this, however, is the idea of ‘separateness’ between humans and nature, and the question concerning the distance of such separation (cf. 6.2.1) – as Palmer (2006:70) points out, “The question of how far humanity is separated from nature has been asked for thousands of years”. Bergant (2010:46) states that the extra-biblical book of the Wisdom of Solomon “teaches the interdependence of all elements of creation”. Palmer (2006:70) agrees with Kaufman and Bergant that, “humans are entirely part of, and dependent on, the natural world”.

Bergant believes that human beings have separated themselves from the rest of the natural world and assumed an attitude of supremacy, resulting in disdain on the part of human beings for that which is not human. According to her, it is this disdain that “gave rise to many of the ecological ills from which the earth suffers today”, and that if “we intrude into the workings of nature without replacing what we have taken or leave

behind only the debris of our manipulation, we throw out into jeopardy the balance of the environment that is essential for our survival” (Bergant 2010:47).

Would this notion of ‘separateness’ from nature be the reason why, historically, orthodox Christianity has variously been accused of having (had) no interest in the natural world and its well-being? Although not the first to seek the origins of the ecological crisis, Lynn White Jr., erstwhile professor of medieval history, is probably best-known for his critical approach to the ecological problem. In a brief, but influential paper titled, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” (White 1967:1203-1207), and based on a lecture with the same title that he had given in 1966, White raised harsh critique against Christianity by proposing that it was the influence of Judeo-Christian belief in particular that is the root cause of the ecological crisis in the twentieth century. He posed a challenge by accusing Christianity of bearing “a huge burden of guilt for environmental deterioration” (White 1967:1206), charging the Christian tradition for “espousing an ensemble of ultimately creation-disregarding beliefs: God is not nature, only human beings are in the image of God, creation exists for the sake of humans and nothing else” (Cowdin 2000:267). White’s main focus was on the so-called “excessive anthropocentrism” which, according to him, is projected by Christianity that led him in labelling Christianity (in its Western form) as “the most anthropocentric religion the world has ever seen”. Just over a hundred years earlier, Feuerbach had already levelled the charge against Christians that they were thinking only of themselves and the salvation of the human soul, claiming that, “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians” (Feuerbach 1957:287).

According to Harrison (2006:17), various critiques have been raised against White's thesis (*cf.* Berry 2006:4). He also points out that apart from these critiques, however, that "more nuanced historical accounts of the Western interactions with the natural world" have appeared, such as the influential work of John Passmore. Although Passmore championed an anthropocentric view of the world, he argued the important point that the origin of the "exploitative attitudes" of the West could be found more in Greek thought than in biblical sources. Habel (2000:29) furthermore highlights the fact that apart from Greek philosophical ideas that have been blamed, other scholars have also "blamed the Enlightenment period, while [still others] have accused the Industrial Revolution of contributing significantly to [the] contemporary ecological crisis". Despite this 'positive' trend in moving attention away from Christianity as the guilt-bearing party, Harrison concludes that White's thesis has proven to be so overwhelmingly persuasive (*cf.* Berry 2006:4), with the result that it's strong voice has been maintained in literature focused on the history of Western attitudes towards nature.

One of the most important critics of the idea of 'excessive anthropocentrism' in the Genesis creation passage is Norman Habel. Habel (2008:6), a key proponent of 'ecological hermeneutics', succeeds in identifying a three-fold anthropocentrism in Genesis 1:26-28, which for him undergirds the idea that humanity believes itself to be in a privileged position in relation to other creatures, based on the claim of having been created in God's image. Secondly, his argument is strengthened by the idea that humans have been given the biblical mandate to 'rule' – in other words, to have dominion (Heb: *radah*) over all living creatures, which Habel argues, "...involves the forceful exercise of power". In the final instance, humanity is commanded to subdue the earth (Genesis 1:28). In reference to this command, Habel argues that the verb

‘subdue’ (Heb: *kabash*) is also a term, which reflects the exercise of force. For Habel this anthropocentric bias has led to a suppression of the voice of the non-human creation, which includes the Earth. By applying his ecological hermeneutic, he proceeds to identify with the non-human characters in the first creation story, and finally to retrieve their suppressed voices. Within this context Habel concludes that there is no suggestion of stewardship of, or care for creation in the first creation story.

When Hall (2006:131) first read White’s newly publicised article, he came to understand that,

Behind the pillage of planet earth there stands the Hebraic-Christian religion with its too lofty estimate of the human species, its frank denigration of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, and its insistence that humanity has both the right and the duty to rule.

In light of the ‘dominion’ passage in Genesis 1:26-28 he concludes that the Hebrew words for ‘dominion’ and ‘subdue’, i.e. *radah* and *kabash* respectively, are very harsh words to use. Both convey the same meaning more or less of “treading” or “trampling” – in a strong sense “beating nature into submission”. Collins (2010:142) confirms that these two words have indeed been correctly translated into English to project these particular ‘hard’ meanings. In light of this understanding, and with White’s article and harsh criticism as his point of reference, Hall (2006:132) asks various important questions, amongst others the compelling question of, “How, in the face of much ecological bitterness directed at the Judeo-Christian world-view, can Christians describe the relation between humanity and extra-human creation – if not to exonerate ourselves from past guilt, at least to contribute something better to the future?”. Earlier, French’s (2000:478) statement that in the last two decades of the twentieth century “a growing number of Christian theologians and ethicists have begun to emphasize God’s

and humanity's relationship to the nonhuman natural world by reconceiving God as centrally manifest in the world of creation and humanity as thoroughly embedded in the matrix of natural creation", already shed some light on scholarly activity that was ongoing in an effort to describe the relationship between humanity and extra-human creation.

Moltmann (1985:189) concludes that the human being is neither isolated from the world, nor is she seen as being in confrontation with the world – in his words, “[S]he is viewed as belonging within the enduring cohesion of the whole world”, in other words, “both in creation and in redemption”. In light of this holistic view of human identity, Moltmann (1985:190) concludes that, “...in a Christian doctrine of creation human beings must neither disappear into the community of creation, nor must they be detached from that community”.

6.3 VISIONS OF NATURE

A number of words/phrases are used to express the notion of ‘natural world’, like for example, creation, extra-human creation, nonhuman creation, otherkind, world, nature, earth, etc. The words, ‘creation’ and ‘nature’, are perhaps the two words used more than any other to express various conceptions of the natural world. In order to understand and describe the relationship of human beings with the natural world it is important to understand what is meant by these two terms.

In general, the term ‘nature’ is used by scientists and lay people alike to describe the natural world. From a theological perspective, the word ‘creation’ is more often understood in terms of something that God did (creation as verb; *creatio activa*,

according to Buitendag 2005:68)), and more specifically as a once-off event by which God created at a specific point in time in the remote past. This interpretation follows a natural progression, which results in the logical conclusion that what had been created is (also) creation (creation as noun; understood as nature) as the product of divine action (“creatures as the product of divine activity”, according to Pannenberg, 1993a:34; *creatio passiva*, according to Buitendag 2005:68). In this context, Ware (2004:159) warns against interpreting creation merely as a past action on God’s part, explaining that creation is not “a past event but a present relationship”, which includes God’s continual act of creation.

Christians, in their conception of the natural world use both terms, ‘creation’ and ‘nature’, interchangeably, seemingly understanding it to be one and the same thing. A good example is the following statement, “Some Christians hold explicitly or implicitly that *nature* is there simply for human beings to exploit. They see human beings as having the right to dominate *creation* and to use it for their own benefit, without limits or constraints” (Edwards 2006:19). From a theological point of view, Sölle (1990:51) points out however, that a deeper meaning is invested in the notion of creation than understanding it as mere nature. Johnson (2000:4), on the other hand, proposes that the ‘natural world’, in other words ‘nature’, should be understood as ‘creation’ if it is viewed in relation to God.

The contradiction in terms begs the question of what is meant when the word ‘nature’ is used. Webster’s Dictionary (2001:960) defines the word depending on the secular context in which it is used, i.e. in reference to the quality of something like the character of a human being, or in reference to the natural world. According to one definition,

nature is “the sum total of all things in time and space; the entire physical universe” (*cf.* McFague 1993:215). Another definition refers to some kind of power or force, “the power, force, principle, etc. that seems to regulate the universe: often personified, sometimes as Mother Nature” (*cf.* McFague 1993:215). Yet another is phrased in more general terms, “A simple way of life close to the outdoors”, or “Natural scenery, including the plants and animals that are part of it”, and even “Not cultivated or tamed; wild”. McFague (1993:215) points to an important characteristic of contemporary science, which is evidenced by the fact that it does not recognize the various distinctions traditionally made in theology, such as ‘nature’ versus ‘culture’, or ‘matter’ versus ‘spirit’, and ‘body’ versus ‘soul’. Instead, contemporary science insists that, “nature (the sum total of all matter) consists of infinite arrangements of atoms, giving us a picture of reality characterized by continuity, interrelationship, and transformation among states of matter”.

The various attempts at defining ‘nature’ focus attention on the fact that the concept is indeed difficult to grasp. In reference to Lovejoy who “has identified dozens of definitions”, and with even more waiting to be identified, Santmire (1985:11) concludes that the term ‘nature’ is “notoriously difficult to define”. He views the term as one of those terms which are so “deeply rooted in the precognitive depths of a culture... [that] it resists definition”. Santmire takes the term, in his words – “as a synonym for a more concrete theological term, rooted in biblical parlance, ‘the earth’”, in reference to the phrase in Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. In this context, he says, it is thus “the first portion of what the Nicene Creed refers to as ‘all things visible and invisible’”. Gilkey (1993:178), on the other hand, explains nature as having two meanings. First, he says, “nature is represented in both archaic religion

and modern science as the all-encompassing source or ground of all there is in concrete experiences: the entities, inorganic and organic; the system of nature; ourselves; and even historical communities are products of nature”. Within this model of nature there is *nothing outside* of nature. In the second instance Gilkey talks of nature in terms suggestive of *being outside* nature – in other words, “Nature as a word, a concept, a symbol, signals.....our distinction from, even our distance from this environment”. Here, nature is understood as a construct, in part, of the human mind. This construct, as Gilkey explains, allows human beings to reduce nature as the source of their being “to a level below [them]; to a means, to a system of objects to be examined, manipulated, and used; to a warehouse for goods needed by [them]”.

McGrath (2008:9, 125) argues that ‘nature’ is a fluid (malleable) concept, and like Gilkey views it as a construct. He believes that there is more than one concept of ‘nature’ and ‘the natural’, and that these concepts “are themselves the outcome of a process of interpretation and evaluation, influenced by the social situation, vested interests, and agendas of those with power and status”. He suggests that ‘nature’ is “an intellectually plastic notion”, and that definitions of nature “may well tell us more about those who define it than what it is in itself”. McGrath (2008:128) concludes that nature itself is,

... ‘seen’ in ways that, though provisional and in principle open to revision, are shaped by history and culture. An aspect of nature is thus ‘seen’ and interpreted through a lens which is a cultural or social artefact – but must still be regarded as being ‘natural’, despite having been constructed.

McFague (2008:121), in accord with McGrath and Gilkey, writes, for example, that there is no part of nature anymore that, “has not been interpreted, constructed, or changed by human beings”. In agreement with Catherine Keller, McFague highlights the struggle

that postmodern people have with their social constructions of nature in the sense that they don't know how to speak of nature anymore. Keller's (2007:7) response is that humanity finds itself within this reality called 'Nature', and argues that, "in the effort to expose the human social constructedness of the category 'Nature' we do not yet have an adequate vocabulary for naming that reality that *is* us and is *more* than us, that *something* in which we are embedded and which remains, however we (re)construct it, irreducible to us".

The following constructions of nature, only a few of many, highlight the problem pointed out by McFague and Keller. It does, however, serve to help Christians understand some of the underlying issues, which are problematic in the way human beings relate to nature, and how they use and abuse nature for their own purposes.

6.3.1 Nature as Space

According to Pannenberg (1993b:140), meditations on time have played a significant role in theology since the time of Augustine. This emphasis has been especially pronounced in theology's preoccupation with history in modern times, with the result that "meditations on space are rare". McFague (1993:100), working within a paradigm of embodiment, emphatically supports the idea that space is indeed an important element to consider as it is a basic necessity for bodies, in other words, living creatures, which includes human beings that need space in which to exist.

Pannenberg (1993b:147) employs a so-called "*ecological* concept of space", which he explicates as follow, "every living thing has its own world in which to live, a world to which it is adapted and which suits it". Thus, this 'world' is what he calls, "primarily *living*

space” (Pannenberg 1993b:148). This ‘living space’ is described by him as, “...the environment to which a particular life is related, because it accords that life the conditions in which it can live”. McFague (1993:99), on the other hand, in defining an ecological theology based on the model of embodiment as a “theology of space and place”, expands on this idea by explaining that “space is not an empty notion... but a central one”, and that it is the first thing needed by bodies in order to obtain that which is necessary to exist – things like food, water, and air.

In consideration of the idea of ‘living space’ (‘lived space’, according to Soja, 1989:17), one thus becomes increasingly aware of the importance of shared space in particular. Human beings are not the only living creatures that exist in ‘living space’ on earth. They share this living space with non-human life-forms. Humans, in general however, are not very likely to entertain the idea that space is equally important to all living creatures. Sharing the same space, and by implication the same resources proves to be a powerful levelling constraint, which, according to McFague (1993:100-101; 2008:123), “places [human beings] on a par with all other life-forms”. It is through sharing space and resources that all creatures, including humans, are united in an inescapable world consisting of “complex networks of interrelationships and interdependence”.

McFague calls attention to the fact that it is this particular perspective of spatial nature that highlights the “relationship between ecological and justice issues”. These issues are especially pronounced in Western culture where individualism reign supreme, and where the individual’s strive to be self-sufficient results in unqualified competition for scarce resources, resulting in other life-forms, including fellow human beings, in becoming “resources or objects toward one’s goal of self-sufficiency” (McFague

2008:44). It is this lopsided imbalance caused by unsustainable, and in most instances power- and greed-driven, human practices and scientific endeavours that lead to injustice being done to other living creatures and the environment (*cf.* Moltmann 1985:21). Moltmann (1985:27) believes, and quite rightly so, that,

As long as the acquisition of power is the concern prompting the scientific search for knowledge, power will be the very mould in which the sciences are cast; power will be the actual form they take.

It is this imbalance what is currently known as the ecological crisis, which directly affects the interdependence and interrelatedness amongst all living creatures, and between living creatures and their habitat. In light of this McFague (2008:44, 124) firmly believes that not only is a different view necessary of who human beings think they are and where they fit in, but a paradigm shift is indeed demanded of the way humans live.

In light of the broad Western emphasis on time and history, and by implication the same emphasis in Christian thought, McFague (2008:123) sees this shift in focus to space and place as “a necessary corrective”. She highlights four advantages of such a corrective, which are especially important to Christian concerns as they bring space and place sharply into focus. The first corrective, focusing on the earth, and specifically humanized spaces such as cities where most humans live now, puts the spotlight squarely on the relationship Christians have with the world at large, begging the question of what their place is in the bigger scheme of things.

As the global crisis progresses and deepens, there is a growing awareness of people committed to finding alternative ways of preserving the environment. This ecological movement reaches over ethnic, political and religious boundaries, and as such

Christians and the church are also called to participate and witness to Jesus Christ's and God's love for creation. Christians have traditionally displayed a disturbing lack of concern to issues of space and place, which has probably been the main factor that has contributed to their general lack of awareness in matters concerning the environment. Edwards (2010:3) agrees, writing that a "commitment to ecology has not yet taken its central place in Christian self-understanding".

This lack of awareness amongst South African clergy had been highlighted by sociology professor emerita Jacklyn Cock (1992:174-185) early in the nineteen nineties. Her investigation focused on three aspects, the environmental awareness of church leaders as well as official church publications, and resolutions on the environment. At the time she concluded that there is a "blind spot" and a "deep silence" within Christian churches in South Africa on environmental issues. This conclusion points back to White's earlier critique (1967), and seems to confirm that Christians in particular, with their emphasis on the other-worldly, should indeed be held responsible for the current state of affairs regarding the environmental crisis. Thirteen years after this report had been published, Conradie *et al.* (2004:668-669) conceded that this "discouraging state of affairs ha[d] improved somewhat", but at the time pointed out that, "the church is not (yet) an important role player toward eco-justice in South Africa and that some degree of resistance against environmental agendas remains prevalent". This could possibly be ascribed to the fact that ecological issues or "green issues", as Van Dyk (2009:188) terms it, "have received limited attention, especially from biblical and Old Testament scholars" in South Africa.

6.3.2 Nature as Wilderness

Wild nature, i.e. non-humanized, uncultivated space, is more often interpreted as 'wilderness' or 'the wild'. Southgate (2006:191), for example, uses the two terms, nature and wilderness, interchangeably, and seems to infer ecological space to be space where human beings do not live, although he does not make a clear distinction. In a secular sense 'wilderness' is understood as "an uncultivated, uninhabited region", or even "any barren, empty, or open area, as of ocean" (Webster's 2001:1637). The IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) defines 'wilderness' (category 1b) as, "A large area of unmodified or slightly modified land, and/or sea, retaining its natural character and influence, without permanent or significant habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural condition (IUCN, nd). Another definition drawn from the Internet (Wilderness.net, nd) suggests the following meaning, "Wilderness is the land that is – rare, wild places where one can retreat from civilization, reconnect with the Earth, and find healing, meaning and significance".

According to Merchant (1980:131), the image of nature as wilderness is an important element in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Santmire (2006:265, 268), in dealing with the idea of wilderness in the book of Job, probably gives the most apt description of what can be understood as wilderness or wild nature by making a distinction between two divinely created domains – the world of wildness, in other words wilderness, and the world of human community. Here he focuses attention on what he calls, "a world at the edges of Eden". This "experience of wildness" in the Book of Job, as Santmire puts it, is "the world of nature beyond the creative intervention and sensitive caring of human engagement" – a world which he describes as "untouched by the divine curse". It is in this 'world of wildness' where nature remains innocent – the 'wild place' that "is nature

as it is in itself, apart from human culture, raw and bloody, yet teeming with life, populated with exotic creatures with their own domains” (Santmire 2006:266).

Brunner *et al.* (2014:42-43), in reflecting on the ideas of ‘darkness’ and ‘wildness’, put the two images on par with each other in terms of the human response toward it, and suggest that the human relationship with both are characterized by feelings of “foreboding, fear, and even death” (*cf.* Van Dyk 2009:193). With regard to this, Thomas Hobbes’ (1588-1679) ideas would probably resort under the paradigm of ‘darkness’. He presents, for example, a model of conflict in his work, *Leviathan*, which proposes that the ‘state of nature’ and political society are at odds with each other. In this scenario he envisions the state of nature as being a state in which nature is at war, i.e. where every man fights against every man in an attempt to survive (Piirimäe 2006:3, 4). This picture paints the condition of humankind as one in which humans find themselves in a state of continual fear of danger and violent death. The reason for this fear is because nature does not provide security in terms of “industry, agriculture, commerce, science or arts”, which can protect them against violent death, and therefore the need of a political society. It could very well be argued that the feelings of continual “foreboding, fear, and ...death”, which Brunner and co-workers identified, and presented in Hobbes’ idea of the ‘state of nature’ being at war, could have led to the dissociation of human beings from the natural world.

Rousseau’s (1712-1778) ideas, on the other hand, are in total contrast to that of Hobbes. According to French (2005:1428), Rousseau did much in popularizing “a growing sense of reverence for nature”, strongly pointing to an effort to re-connect with nature. Rousseau perceived modern society to be distorted in the sense of nature being

characterized by inequality and possessing a “false consciousness”. He appealed to the ‘state of nature’ “as an ideal in whose light the general distortions of modern society could be measured and remedies proposed” (French 2005:1428). Although having been born a Calvinist, and later converted to Catholicism, Rousseau eventually adopted a deist view of nature. His sentiments now being more inclined towards “natural religion” rather than revealed truth, he suggested that the remedy should be sought in an educational programme, which protects “the natural feelings and growing virtue of young people by having them first engage the challenges posed by the natural environment, rather than the alienation, prejudice, and competitiveness thrust at them by society”.

Brunner *et al.* (2014:42-43) balance these two extremes by proposing that in an effort to reconnect with the wild, human beings “must reconsider [its] definition of wilderness” so that instead of a relationship of fear, a different kind of relationship is envisioned in which the wilderness, in other words nature, is not seen as only wild and terrible, but is seen as having a ‘both-and’ character – *both* wild and terrible, *and* good and beautiful. They conclude that, “It is only by accepting the complexity of definitions, embracing both the darkness and the light, the violence and the compassion of the natural world, that [humans] will see reality and the holiness of the wild”.

6.3.3 Nature as First and Second Nature

By envisioning nature as space, and wilderness as a particular portrayal of that vision, the question arises concerning what ‘urban space’ then is. Is it nature or is it not nature, and if it is not nature, does it exist outside of nature and as such as a separate space? McFague (2008:122) distinguishes between what she calls “first nature” and “second

nature”. With the phrase, “first nature”, she refers to that which is “more than us”, that which is “never reducible to us and our constructions”, that which humans beings call “nature” that is the life-source for all living beings providing air, food, habitat and water. With the phrase, “second nature”, she defines the transformed space of cities, i.e. urbanized space – that, which humans “have built from, transformed from and changed from ‘first nature’”.

In evaluating geographer Edward Soja’s suggestion that urbanized space, lived space, in his words, should be seen as a hybrid space, McFague (2008:123) points out that “Highlighting space is a necessary corrective to the Western and Christian emphasis on time and history”. She is adamant that this change in focus from time and history to space and place is recognition that all living creatures “are not robots or cyborgs, but bodies in need of space” (McFague 2008:124).

6.3.4 Nature as the “New Poor”

It is within a particular space where living creatures are either valued or oppressed, and where they either flourish or perish. The notions of non-humanized, uncultivated space and of humanized, urban space highlight the idea of segregated space(s) – the urban space where human beings reign supreme as the dominant species, and nature where other living creatures are dominated by human beings. At the same time, within the urban space, those human beings who are in powerful positions and have the means to do so, oppress those (human beings) who are weaker and poorer – the vulnerable, powerless ones in society.

In her vision of nature as the “new poor”, McFague (1993:164-165) distinguishes between the “old poor”, i.e. humans as “oppressed, vulnerable, suffering *bodies*, those who are in pain due to the indifference or greed of the more powerful”, those who exist in second nature, in those transformed, humanized spaces she describes it, and the “new poor”, which is nature itself. In proposing that nature is the “new poor”, she insists that it does not mean that the “old poor” is being replaced by the notion of nature as the “new poor”. Her proposal focuses on two interrelated issues, which bear on the notion of nature as the new poor, namely (i) “nature’s value as such and to God”, (ii) “nature’s relation to human beings as well as what human beings are presently doing to nature” (McFague 1993:165). Talk about nature as the “new poor” brings “the integrity of creation” into focus as well. In order to demonstrate what is meant by this, McFague (1993:165) refers to the definition proposed by the World Council of Churches that defines the integrity of creation as, “The value of all creatures in and for themselves, for one another, and for God, and their interconnectedness in a diverse whole that has unique value for God, together [constituting] the integrity of creation”. This integrity termed as ‘Ecological integrity’ by the Earth Charter, is one of the major themes of the Charter (earthcharter.org), which is concerned “with the transition to sustainable ways of living and sustainable human development”. The Earth Charter recognizes “that the goals of ecological protection, the eradication of poverty, equitable economic development, respect for human rights, democracy, and peace are interdependent and indivisible”. Under the heading, ‘Ecological Integrity, the Earth Carter lists a number of initiatives as guidelines of how the sensitive ecological systems on Earth should be managed and protected (pp. 2-3).

In light of the definition she goes further by making a distinction between two critical issues, that of the intrinsic and the instrumental value of living beings, which she believes is the critical issue here. She defines the “*intrinsic* value” as the value that “each living being has in and for itself as a creature loved by God”, while the “*instrumental* value” is defined as the value that “living beings have for one another and for God as parts of an evolutionary, weblike creation”. This basically means that planet Earth and all living creatures upon it have not been created for human benefit. Moreover, it means that if humans should consider using it for personal benefit only – like McFague points out – for “food, experimental material, recreation and spiritual uplift” – it would be to transgress “the integrity of creation”. She concludes that nature is not poor in and of itself, but has been made poor by humans because of their sin that has grown out of greed and thoughtless, selfish excesses. She acknowledges that all of creation, which includes humanity, “have instrumental as well as intrinsic value”, but points out that when other creatures are used for human benefit, it should be used with “humility, respect, and thanksgiving for [those] other lives” (McFague 1993:166). If this does not happen, nature becomes an object of sole utilitarian value with grave consequences.

6.3.5 Nature as Utility

Nature is perhaps most often interpreted as something that can be used and abused as humans think fit, without giving a second thought to the consequences of their destructive actions and behaviour. Here, three utilitarian models of nature are briefly touched on as they are closely linked to each other and even intersect, namely Nature as resource, Nature as instrument, and Nature as commodity.

6.3.5.1 Nature as Resource

Within the context of the stewardship model of the natural world, Palmer (2006:72) questions, what she calls “the most pervasive and powerful” belief associated with this model, namely that the natural world is there for humans to be used as a resource. She uses the two metaphors of ‘estate’ and ‘money’ to explain her view of how the stewardship model works out in practice, and is perhaps even abused for selfish human purposes and personal gain. In the feudal perception of stewardship, for example, the human response towards nature is implicit, in which “the natural world is regarded as an estate, to be treated as the master chooses”, while in the financial model of stewardship the response is explicit, in which the natural world is seen in terms of money.

In this context Palmer (2006:72-73) explains the obvious – that money is a human invention, which had been created by humans to be used by humans as a human resource, and thus functions only within human society. It has absolutely no value within the natural world, which functions outside of human society. As such the natural world is not like money although, she says, “the language of financial stewardship insists in treating it so”. In order to survive, all living things must use other living and non-living materials. This understanding, of course, includes human beings. In the financial stewardship model of the natural world this idea, according to Palmer, is implicit in that other living creatures and the non-living part of nature are seen as the only reason for why they exist. In this respect Palmer (2006:73) likens nature to a huge bank account, which humans feel the right to use as and when they are in need thereof.

For Palmer, quite rightly so, the assumptions that lie behind both the feudal and financial stewardship models, are anthropocentric in nature. In terms of this she sounds a warning, namely that “the environmental ethic that flows from this is entirely human-centered”. She is adamant in her conclusion that the pronouncement by Pope John Paul II that, “all created goods are directed to the good of humanity”, is one of the most dangerous assumptions as the implications for the natural world are immense (Palmer 2006:73).

6.3.5.2 Nature as Instrument

Edwards (2006:19, 20) is of the same belief as Palmer, namely that humanity, including some Christians, view nature as something to be used for their own gain – a view that perpetuates exploitation to the extreme. This view has its origin in the idea of ‘human rights’, i.e. human beings having the *right* “to dominate creation and to use it for their own benefit without limits or constraints” (Edwards 2006:19). As such nature is seen as an instrument to be used to attain certain (selfish) goals. This view falls squarely within the dominion model. The domination of nature works out in a way, which does not favour nature, but favours human beings who view their own accountability, in modern terms like for example in large corporations, “in terms of profits for their shareholders”.

Edwards (2006:19, 20) warns that proponents of this view invoke biblical texts to support their own actions, however unjustified it may be. He agrees that some biblical texts are not “earth-friendly”, such as the ‘dominion text’ in Genesis 1:28, and may be even become dangerous when human beings use it “to legitimate ruthless exploitation”. According to him, this dominion text “has become a symbol of the way

in which Christianity has contributed to the crisis we face”. It is most probably this extreme anthropocentric view of nature, which has contributed to White’s harsh critique against Christianity accusing Christians as being largely responsible for the ecological crisis.

Edwards (2006:20) suggests that the Genesis creation account “points to the human vocation as a ‘kingly one’”. Within this paradigm and within a Jewish context, humans as ‘kings of nature’ bring “human intelligence, courage, and work to bear on the land so that herds might flourish and crops might grow” in the same way as God, in his role of king, shepherds, loves and delights in all his creatures. Moreover, in reference to Mark 10:42-45, Edwards highlights the fact that within the Christian community, “Jesus’ life and death stand as a radical critique of all dominating views of power and authority”.

Edwards (2006:20) believes that it is unfaithful to the biblical tradition to abuse biblical texts such as the dominion text to justify selfish human ambitions, and rightly so. He is adamant that the dominion model must be rejected as being destructive and false. As such he views the dominion model in a negative light and not supportive of “an ecological theology of human beings in relation to other creatures”. Birch and Cobb (1990:162) agree that human beings “have great instrumental value for one another and for other creatures”, but at the same time warn that, “to treat any individual chiefly in terms of instrumental value is inappropriate”.

6.3.5.3 Nature as commodity

Another vision of nature that also expands on the vision of nature's utilitarian value, is the one presented by Wallace (2000:52), who believes, like Palmer, that, "in our time nature has been commodified and domesticated into a piece of real estate". He likens nature to a consumer item – one more in a list of many – "to be bought and sold in order to maximize profits", an idea that echoes Palmer's and Edwards' notion of nature's value, which could be measured in terms of profits generated to its shareholders (Edwards 2006:19). Rasmussen (2000:523) verbalizes the issue in an unusual and insightful way, writing that,

Nature itself is increasingly colonized by capital. Life-forms are more and more the organic plastic of engineering and patents as rights *to* nature are favoured over the rights *of* nature, if indeed the rights *of* nature get any hearing at all.

Wallace bemoans the idea that the "power and mystery of the earth" has been exchanged for the "invisible hand of the marketplace", and believes that humankind are all the poorer for it. This vision of nature does not present a positive picture of nature since nature is not functioning as "wild and sacred space" anymore for – what Wallace calls, "the eruption of the sublime or the manifestation of transcendence". He proposes a contemporization of the ancient appellation to The Nicene (Constantinopolitan) Creed, which names the Spirit as "the Lord, the Giver of Life", and suggests a so-called "life-centered model" in which the hope for a renewed earth "is best found on belief in the Spirit as the divine force within the cosmos who continually works to sustain all forms of life".

The afore-mentioned three models prove to be good examples of the way nature is envisioned as being under the control of human beings for the sole purpose of their

use. In his critique of human beings as managers or capable stewards of nature, Berry (2006:72) addresses the notion of human ownership of nature, which both Edwards and Wallace, like Palmer, also reject. In doing so, Berry questions the idea of whether humanity is actually in control of the natural world. He is adamant that to be an able or successful manager or steward, “either in the feudal or financial sense, it is necessary to understand that which is being controlled”. With reference to the depth and uncertainty that surrounds human beings’ lack of understanding the natural world in all its complexity, Berry concludes that human beings cannot be stewards of the natural world, and thus be in complete control of that world. He suggests that humans have only partial control, and must see nature in the sense “...of the many things [they] do not know and perhaps will never know”.

6.3.6 Nature as suffering

The afore-mentioned visions of nature highlight the fact that human beings in their forward thrust to develop highly organized, technology-driven societies have become thoughtless and reckless in the way they interact with nature. Much of this, if not all, is the result of human greed operating under the pretext of how new technological developments will/can enhance and benefit human life. For this technological progress to happen, raw materials from the earth are in great demand. Moreover, as a result of medical technology that has progressed in leaps and bounds in the past number of years, human life has benefitted enormously in terms of longevity, which is measured in lower infant mortality rates, and the extension of people’s lives who would previously have died due to incurable diseases. These developments alone have put immense demands on available living space and food resources, which is still the case. As a

result of ‘harvesting’ the much needed raw materials, either living or non-living, unprecedented harm and suffering are imposed on nature.

Brunner *et al.* (2014:44) present the problem of suffering in the natural world in clear terms, stating that it is a demanding exercise for humans to navigate their way through the “thorny question of suffering”. They believe that to address the problem of suffering only on the spiritual level, like Luther did with his theology of the cross, runs the risk of “ignoring the systemic nature of suffering and sin”. They thus propose a balanced approach in which both the spiritual aspects and the systemic nature of sin and suffering are taken into account in addressing this issue.

They distinguish between two types of suffering in the natural world – suffering that is non-destructive, and suffering that is disintegrative. Non-destructive suffering is described as the kind of suffering, which “is part of the struggle as finite creatures change and grow, which, in reference to Carl Jung’s view, is ‘legitimate suffering’ (Brunner *et al.* 2014:44). Disintegrative suffering, on the other hand, has been described by Rasmussen (1997:289) as suffering that “negates life and destroys the realization of creation”. In evaluating these two types of suffering, they could perhaps best be explained by the general understanding of the world as being dualistic in nature – as Southgate puts it, a world of profound ambiguity. Southgate defines this ambiguity theologically in reference to Genesis 1:31 in the Old Testament where God looks at his creation and sees that everything he has created was “very good”, and in Romans 8:22 that presents a picture of the suffering world that is “groaning in labour pains”.

Within the context of suffering in the natural world, the issues of morality and ethics are highlighted, particularly in terms of the “moral status of otherkind in Christian ethics” (Cowdin 2000:268-290). In order to address these issues, theological ethics have developed in highly creative ways, which serve to highlight different aspects of nature. Like all scholarly work, these ethical models are open to critique, and both their strengths and weaknesses serve to put into much clearer perspective the way human beings respond to and interact with nature. They furthermore serve as important reminders that humanity must take cognisance of the natural world that is suffering as a result of ruthless human action towards it.

Two of these models, which address animal suffering specifically, lie towards the one end of the spectrum. Andrew Linzey and Jay McDaniel, well-known scholars – so-called animal theologians – in this field advocating animal rights in terms of their intrinsic value as God’s creatures, have, according to Wade (2004:1-12), “attempted to develop a theology beyond the traditional cruelty-kindness ethic”. Linzey, for example, has developed a so-called animal theology, which has been described and published in various publications on the topic, most notably in three of his works entitled, *Animal Rights: A Christian Perspective*, published in 1976, *Christianity and Animal Rights*, published in 1987, and *Animal Theology*, published in 1994. According to Wade (2004:2), Linzey’s “thinking is grounded in a theology that gives particular account of the value and purpose of animals as God’s creatures”. Linzey addresses the issue of animal rights by questioning humanity’s role in relation to animals with a particular focus on their liberation from cruel human oppression. The answer to this is given in terms of human liberating service to animals, in other words, in terms of Christian “merciful and generous” actions toward animals. These actions, according to Cowdin (2000:269),

could at times even be “costly and sacrificial, action toward animals, on the model of the higher serving the lower”, and is believed to be “participation in the work of the Holy Spirit, partially, but truly operative”.

McDaniel, on the other hand, addresses the same issue, but from a “panentheistic relational perspective”, which, according to Wade (2004:7) has been shaped by “Process theology and the thinking of Arthur Peacocke”. Wade explains that McDaniel’s notion of relational panentheism “translates into stating that God is immanently present as Divine empathy to [suffering animals] and yet God’s presence is not totally defined by this presence”. In this context, “God is not considered all-powerful... [and] as a result of chance, God has no control over dead ends, which arise in nature” as a result of the evolutionary progression of the world (Wade 2004:7). McDaniel’s work concludes that animals have intrinsic value, albeit some in a lesser and some in a greater sense, and “are worthy of reverence and care from moral agents”.

Towards the middle of the spectrum lies Aldo Leopold, a forester who “understood nature in terms of ‘land’, and is well-known for his introduction of the term, “land ethic”, which Cowdin (2000:271) describes as “a complex, critical, moral-scientific modern insight”, summarized as follow:

Land is understood not just as a collection of individual elements but as an ecological pyramid of interdependencies within a broader evolutionary process. Human beings are understood as essentially connected to the land, but unique within it: we are the only species which can value beings and systems beyond our own kind for their own sake. We not only need the land, but are capable of respecting it as such. Hence, a land ethic is both ‘an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity’.

The strength of this ethic is based on the fact that it takes into account morality, compared to the views of Linzey and McDaniel, which deal primarily with the intrinsic value of creatures – as Cowdin (2000:271) explains, for Leopold, “a land ethic mean[t] that [human] use of land in itself becomes subjected to moral analysis”. In light of this insight, land now acquires moral status, and can therefore no longer be seen as mere property. Leopold’s approach is also characterized by certain strengths and weaknesses, which, according to Cowdin (2000:273) presents Christianity with a problem – “something of a theological knot” in terms of how Christian ethics should incorporate a land ethic. This has been addressed by various scholars, amongst them Michael Northcott, Rosemary Radford Ruether and John Haught (Cowdin 2000:273-277).

Habel (2000:25-37), like Santmire, lies toward the other end of the spectrum. Working from a much broader perspective, he envisions nature as ‘earth’, and proposes an ‘earth ethic’ instead. Within the scope of this earth ethic, Habel, for example, does not refer to an ecological crisis, but in much broader terms to an ‘earth crisis’. Within his well-developed ecotheology, Habel (2000:24) proposes six guiding ‘ecojustice principles’, which form the basis of the Earth Bible Project. These principles touch on similar ideas that have been expounded by other ecotheologians, but deal with those ideas in much more depth and scope. The ecojustice principles have been developed to guide human beings, particularly Christians, in their relating to nature (Habel 2000:37).

These different approaches, although described very briefly, highlight the fact that the earth is in trouble, but so much more is humanity. French (2000:487) verbalizes an

unsettling thought that may not have crossed too many people's minds, namely that, "The refrain of nature's fragility is not always well balanced with a similarly needed stress on nature's awesome power and humanity's vulnerability in the context of nature's demise".

6.4 VISIONS OF HUMANITY

Rifkin (1983:219), in his outspoken resistance against the kind of genetic research that will give rise to so-called algeny, i.e. the transformation of genetic material with the purpose to enhance organisms or to create new organisms, believes that humankind has "managed to construct a concept of nature that is remarkably sympathetic to the way [they] happen to be managing nature". Upon further reflection though, it could be added that human beings' vision of themselves in relation to nature has shaped the way(s) in which they manage nature.

6.4.1 Human Beings: Relational Creatures

Fretheim (2005:93) proposes that Genesis 1-11 provides two visions of humanity, which he argues, are "carried through the rest of Genesis". On the one hand is the vision of human beings as *individuals*, and the other a vision of human beings in *community*. Within the context of community, he distinguishes three *fundamental human relationships* – that of human beings in relation to family, to nation, and to land. He points out that, "interest in and concern for the 'natural' world" is evident in the foundational narratives of Israel, and that one of the key [nature] themes found in Genesis 12-50 is indeed that of "the land", which is one of the promises of God (Fretheim 2005:97). The land is, however, subject to natural ecological disasters such

as famine, drought, etc., which the biblical texts do not always attribute to human sin, although human sin does play an important role.

Fretheim (2005:97) highlights two examples of instances where the cosmic order is linked directly to the moral order. In the first example the biblical text (Genesis 3:17-19, 23-24) describes the first encounter by human beings of the harsh, unforgiving side of nature when God 'banishes' (Genesis 3:23) / 'drives' (Genesis 3:24) them out from Eden – a necessary, forced transition that was directly the result of human sin. The second example is that of Lot who chooses land close by to Sodom and Gomorrah. This land, in Fretheim's words, "is described in paradisiacal terms" (Genesis 13:10). In contrast, however, the text points the reader to a looming disaster (Genesis 13:10), which ultimately happens (Genesis 19:23-29) as a result of God's judgment on human sin. It is thus clear from certain biblical texts that a strong correlation is drawn between human sin and God's judgment, which becomes visible in how the natural world is affected.

6.4.2 Kinds of Human-Nature Relationships

Hall (2006:132-143) conceives of a different vision of humanity in which *three different kinds of relationships* between human beings and the natural world are envisioned, which he terms, (a) Humanity above nature, (b) Humanity in nature, and (c) Humanity with nature.

6.4.2.1 Humanity Above Nature

In the first approach the human being is the center of attention, and is conceived of being placed "on a very high rung of the ladder of being". This approach insists that

nature is simply there for humans to use (Hall 2006:132). This approach places emphasis on the human being as individual, who as a rational being having been created in the image of God, and as such is “deemed superior to the rest of creation” (Chryssavgis 2000:85).

In reference to philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, René Descartes and Francis Bacon, Hall shows that, compared to the mediaeval view that regarded nature as something mysterious and had to be approached with caution, the modern period did not view nature in the same manner. Instead, in light of scientific advances, nature was seen as something that is open to enquiry and a source of information that added to human knowledge through scientific enquiry. This knowledge proved to be a fundamental source of power. With specific reference to the North American attitude towards nature, Hall laments the idea that people believe that, “humanity is nature’s lord and possessor”, and that they have been endowed with the capability of “making over what God rather thoughtlessly put together in the first place”. In terms of the re-structuring of nature, he points out that the goal of bioengineering living organisms, for example, is precisely to make them compatible with an environment created by human beings (Hall 2006:134-135). He is adamant that Christianity is not guiltless in this process, having openly supported “the notion of human mastery” (Hall 2006:136).

Hall (2006:135) clarifies the role of the Judeo-Christian tradition in this scenario explaining that, although the accusation against Christianity “in its typical form”, including White’s thesis, may be justified in some ways, it does represent “a rather naïve understanding of the Scriptures of Israel and the church”. In reference to

Isaiah 24:4-11, he, like Fretheim, points out that nature suffers as a result of human sin, and not because of human beings doing what they are supposed to be doing “in God’s intention” (Hall 2006:135, 136). He believes that to trace the ecological problem back to the biblical tradition is a too simplistic approach to the problem, and that both a biblical and historical analysis is needed to get to the “historical roots” of the ecological crisis.

6.4.2.2 Humanity *In* Nature

Hall (2006:137) proposes a second way of conceiving humanity’s relationship with the natural world. In this model the focus moves away from the human being as master over nature to that of human being as mere creature, in fact one of many creatures, a creature *in* nature, just another animal. According to Hall, this is a rather modern conception, although earlier civilizations and religions may hint at the possibility. He points out, however, that in the biblical literature and other ancient sources humanity has hardly ever just been viewed as simply another creature. He believes there is a mystery involved here that prevents human beings from being viewed in mere creaturely terms in light of them being a different kind of animal, i.e. a rational, thinking, speaking animal.

According to Hall, this view of humanity must be seen as a clear response against the tendency of placing humanity above nature (Hall 2006:138). He proposes that this approach has much value in serving as a necessary corrective to the first approach, but warns that it is a dangerous approach as it has no foundation in reality. As such this approach may be problematic in certain contexts, especially

where there is already a tendency “towards apathy and irresponsibility on the part of whole segments of human society”.

6.4.2.3 Humanity *With* Nature

This approach is viewed positively by Hall (2006:139) as he believes that, “it is without a doubt the approach that belongs in [Christian] religious tradition”, because humanity is seen as existing alongside other creatures. Although humanity is distinct from all other creatures, humanity is also seen as living in solidarity with them – it is a ‘both-and’ approach, and not an ‘either-or’ approach. In support of this Hall points out that biblical literature has a bias towards the use of the preposition ‘with’. He asserts that the use of this preposition is not accidental as it points to two things – on the one hand, “a strong sense of the interconnectedness of everything that ‘is’”, and on the other hand the unique distinctness of each creature.

In support of the above approach it is important to note that, “the human person is characterized by paradoxical dualities”, as Chryssavgis (2000:87) points out – “humanity is limited yet free, animal yet personal, individual yet social, created yet creative”. According to Chryssavgis, Gregory the Theologian (fourth century) likens the human being to “another universe... standing at the center of creation, midway between strength and frailty, greatness and lowliness”. It is these dualities in particular that make Hall’s third approach a highly favourable one. He uses the phrase, “ontology in communion” to describe what he calls the “underlying theory of reality... [of] participation and individuality, and commonality and uniqueness” (Hall 2006:139, 140). Ultimately, the human being having been created both in the image

of God and from the dust of the earth may be understood as, “the meeting point of all the created order... a bridge, a point of contact and order” (Chryssavgis 2000:87).

This ‘bridge’ or ‘point of contact’, which Chryssavgis refers to, is elegantly illustrated by Moltmann (1985:186-190), who describes human beings both in terms of the *imago Dei* and the *imago mundi*. In terms of both images the human being act as “the representative of all creatures” (*imago mundi*) as she stands before God – living, speaking and acting on behalf of the creaturely community, while at the same time she also acts as “God’s proxy in the community of creation” (*imago Dei*), interceding “for God before the community of creation” (Moltmann 1985:190).

6.4.3 Structures of Human-Nature Experience

Within the paradigm of justice and sustainability within the world, and particularly within the scope of economic growth, Birch and Cobb (1990:262) conceive of yet another vision of humanity in which they envision human beings as either *part of* nature or *outside* of nature (*cf.* Gilkey 1993:178). In this vision the limitation to economic growth defines the two so-called “structures of experience [or] two faiths, which confront each other here”.

6.4.3.1 Humanity *Part of* Nature

Within this paradigm Birch and Cobb (1990:262) identify that group of human beings who are “sensitive to the fundamental features of living things”. Within this ‘structure of experience’ humanity is seen as being a remarkable part of the natural world. The element of transcending is the central focus here as this group of human beings is seen as transcending “most successfully as they respect most sensitively the

conditions of all life”. Attention “to the strategies of life” teaches the importance of what true growth really is. Through this learning experience this group of human beings may develop “appropriate goals and find deep satisfaction in their attainment”. Birch and Cobb (1990:262) describe this as placing “faith in Life”. This approach corresponds strongly with the model proposed by Hall, which envisions humanity as existing *with* nature in which human beings are not focused on themselves and their own selfish aspirations.

6.4.3.2 Humanity *Outside of* nature

On the other end are those who are seen as being outside of nature, who see nature as their object, in other words their possession, to use for their own selfish human goals (Birch & Cobb 1990:262). This group is indifferent in their response to other living things in the natural world. Living creatures other than human beings and the inanimate world are seen as, “resources for human management, manipulation and consumption”. Within this structure of experience human desires such as human intelligence and human ingenuity play key roles. These human attributes, in their expression through science and technology, are seen to aid “growth in numbers and in consumption for as long as [humans] desire”. This approach corresponds closely to the approach proposed by Hall where human beings are seen to exist *above* nature, and focus on themselves and their own selfish aspirations regardless of the damage being done to nature in their drive to fulfil these aspirations.

6.4.4 Humanity vs Environmental Responsibility

Within the paradigm of environmental stewardship, Dubos (1974:136) advocates the idea that, “Reverence for nature is compatible with willingness to accept responsibility

for a creative stewardship of the earth”. The notion of ‘creative stewardship of the earth’ is the hallmark of the Benedictine monks’ attitude towards nature. Dubos (2006:56-57), in distinguishing between Franciscan conservation and Benedictine stewardship of nature, leans towards a preference for Benedict as the patron saint of nature. He believes that the involvement of Benedictine monks in nature had been a constructive enterprise in the sense that they had inspired a way of life in which both “practical and theoretical skills [ultimately became] embodied in the same person”. Through their particular way of life (monastic), these monks established close contact with the natural world, which translates into what Attfield (2006:83) calls, a serious effort by the Benedictine monks “to enhance the beauty and fertility of their lands”. Attfield points out that Dubos in fact is the person who characterized the “constructive example of stewardship” set by the Benedictine monks as ‘environmental responsibility’.

Hall (2006:141-142), in the model of ‘Humanity with Nature’, points out that human beings as part of nature in terms of their creatureliness can never escape the fact that they are, according to the biblical witness, also different from all other creatures. He emphasizes the fact that this does by no means infer that human beings are superior to animals, but it does mean that human beings “are more complex, more versatile, and also more vulnerable than most other creatures”. He is adamant that this difference in no way means that humans can lord it over animals, but rather “exercise a unique responsibility towards them, a unique responsibility for them”, in other words,

...have dominion... that is, that [human beings] should be servants, keepers and priests in relation to the others. That [human beings] should represent them before their Maker, and represent them to their Maker’s tender care.

Attwell (2006:83-84) points to other examples in the Bible and in history, which present positive attitudes towards “the enhancement and adornment of nature” similar to that of the Benedictine order. Not all interventions in nature, however, are as constructive as that of the Benedictine order and others. Human beings by their very presence intervene into natural systems in ways that can be very destructive as well.

6.4.4.1 Humanity Dominating Nature

Professor Sir Ghilleen Prance, in the foreword to the book titled *Environmental Stewardship* (Berry 2006), plainly states that the more he studies the Bible, the more he has become convinced that the Bible is not a textbook that champions environmental destruction. Instead, he believes that the Bible is “a compelling work on the care and stewardship of creation” (Prance 2006:ix). Page (2006:97) views stewardship as a good model, and supports it in terms of its usefulness in describing the relationship between humans and the rest of creation, and also in terms of it being a biblical model. She issues a warning that this model, like any other model, must be used with care.

While recognizing that relationship is at the root of stewardship and that this particular relationship “generally indicate[s] positive interactions” such as caring for the environment, Berry (2006:1) points out that the idea of ‘stewardship’ and that of being a ‘steward’ conjures up negative connotations (“traits”) for some people, such as “subservience and hierarchy, absentee landlords and exploitation”. The concept of stewardship is indeed critiqued by certain modern theologians who associate it with “the managerial arrangements of private property regimes” (Northcott 2006:215). Northcott is adamant that this understanding is “unfaithful to the origins of

the term in the common property arrangements of hunter-gatherer and premodern agrarian and nomadic societies such as those of ancient Israel”.

6.4.5 Humanity in Trouble

Humanity finds itself in a very difficult place – as McFague (2008:29) sees it, human “interrelationships and interdependence with all other human beings and other life-forms...had been deadened by the hand of a consumerist/militarist paradigm that exalts the comfort and superiority of elite individual human beings”. It is this kind of exaltation that gives rise to “ecologically illiterate” humans, implying those humans who think of themselves “as superior and independent of the rest of the planet” (McFague 2008:56). Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess speaks of this privileged place of human beings in the biosphere as “ecological egalitarianism” (Naess 1973:95).

McFague (2008:49) uses another ecological-related term and writes that humanity must be “ecologically literate”, arguing that literate in this sense reminds humanity “of where [they] come from and where [they] belong: from nature and in nature”. She addresses the important question of what will happen if humans refuse to become ecologically literate (McFague 2008:56), and points out that if humans would stop seeing themselves as superior and independent of nature, it might bring about the necessary change in behaviour that is needed for planet Earth’s survival.

6.4.5.1 Destructive Attitudes/Practices

In light of White’s accusation against Christianity, Migliore (2004:93-94) points out that destructive attitudes “are present in many strands of Christian theology and even in the Bible itself”, and that White’s accusation cannot merely be brushed

aside. Instead of responding in a defensive manner, Christians need to take this accusation seriously and engage in a constructive process that involves “serious self-criticism”, and identifying “some of the deep-seated attitudes and practices that underlie the ecological crisis”. Migliore (2004:94) suggests that Christians should “consider the searching questions [these attitudes and practices] pose for Christian theology and the church”. These attitudes and practices include anthropocentrism, power of domination, denial of interconnectedness, assumption of limitless resources, and unchecked consumerism (Migliore 2004:94-96).

One of the important questions Migliore addresses, is whether Christian theology has contributed in some way to these views and practices. Unfortunately, the answer is in the affirmative in terms of an anthropocentric view of the world, and here he refers specifically to Thomas Aquinas, who, despite his affirmation “that the goodness of God is displayed in the diversity of creatures”, declared that, “the life of animals and plants is preserved not for themselves, but for man” (Migliore 2004:94). In terms of the power of domination, the answer is also affirmative. Although Migliore (2004:95) believes that Christian theology has contributed to this view only in part, he questions the understanding of humanity as nature’s master instead of its guardian and protector. According to him, these two views/practices “feed and are fed by theoretical and practical denials of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all forms of life”. He questions whether a reductionist view of nonhuman forms of life is really compatible with a responsible Christian doctrine of creation.

With reference to the basic assumption that natural resources are unlimited, Migliore (2004:96) wonders whether the Christian doctrine of creation has indeed been presented in a way that counters these ideas. Lastly, he also questions current consumer mentality. He believes that not only is the goal of consumerism the maximization of one's possessions and the use of worldly goods, but he points out that even persons and relationships are commodified nowadays (Migliore 2004:96). For him the issue is whether this uncontrolled consumerism has any basis in biblical teaching or Christian theology or even ethics. He concludes that the ecological crisis is "not primarily a technological [crisis] but a theological and spiritual crisis", and believes that this challenge must be met by the church in theological, spiritual and concrete practical terms.

6.4.5.2 Stewardship

One of the human practices that is under the magnifying glass of theologians, is that of stewardship. Professor Sir Ghilleen Prance, for one believes the Bible to be "a compelling work on the care and stewardship of creation" (Prance 2006:ix). Page (2006:97) views stewardship as a good model, and supports it in terms of its usefulness in describing the relationship between humans and the rest of creation, and also in terms of it being a biblical model. She issues a warning that this model, like any other model, must be used with care.

While recognizing that relationship is at the root of stewardship and that this particular relationship "generally indicate[s] positive interactions" such as caring for the environment, Berry (2006:1) points out that the idea of 'stewardship' and that of being a 'steward' conjures up negative connotations ("traits") for some people, such

as “subservience and hierarchy, absentee landlords and exploitation”. The concept of stewardship is indeed critiqued by certain modern theologians who associate it with “the managerial arrangements of private property regimes” (Northcott 2006:215). Northcott is adamant that this understanding is “unfaithful to the origins of the term in the common property arrangements of hunter-gatherer and premodern agrarian and nomadic societies such as those of ancient Israel”.

6.4.5.3 Final Hope

In terms of fellowship between all creation, Page (2006:99) points out that apart from the orderly picture of creation that is painted in the Psalms there is a strand in the Old Testament which, although “aware of troubles and conflict in the present... describes harmony among all creatures not as a present reality but as a final hope”, e.g. Isaiah 11:6-9. Moreover, she also points out that the New Testament also expresses visions of such hope in Revelation, “where ‘every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea and all that is in them’ will join in praise of the Lamb” (Revelation 5:13). For Page, “stewardship exists only in the service of such praise, being concerned with making it possible by creating conditions for life rather than managing life”. She concludes that, “Men and women are in a position to enhance or obstruct that praise”. The enhancement of such praise is perhaps what McFague (2008:39) has in mind when she describes it as a way of life that would allow creation to flourish – in what she calls “the way of the cross” in reference to Jesus’ suffering. Here, she clarifies by explaining that, “Jesus did not live in order to die; rather he died in order to live – in order that all of us might see a new way to live”, a way of living in solidarity with other, “even when it involves sacrifice and suffering”.

6.5 How Should We Live Then?

Walker (2004:277), in his paper, *African-American Resources for a More Inclusive Liberation Theology*, emphasizes that, “our moral obligation to contribute to the well-being and empowerment of others includes obligation to plants and animals”. Edwards (2006:22) reiterates this sentiment by writing that, “There is a unique moral demand made upon [humans] to respond urgently, creatively, and wisely to the ecological crisis they have created”. In light of this human beings, Christians in particular, then have to ask themselves the question of how they should live in order to fulfil this obligation.

Attfield (2006:82-83) points out in reference to the Old and New Testaments that human beings have not been given “unconditional domination” over creation, but “conditional tenancy” in which human responsibility and accountability are important requirements. In this regard René Dubos has characterized the constructive form of stewardship, which the Benedictine monks have practiced as “environmental responsibility” (Attfield 2006:83). Characteristic of the Benedictine attitude towards nature is the enhancement of both the beauty and fertility of their lands, an attitude that was also held strongly by Basil the Great who conceived of “humanity as partner of God”. This conception was popularized in the West by Ambrose whose teaching in turn influenced Benedict (Attfield 2006:84).

Apart from responsibility and accountability, “peaceable companionship” with animals is another idea that comes to the fore in the thinking of Bauckham (1994:3-21), an attitude which seems to have been emulated “by saints from St Antony (third century) to the Celtic saints, to Cuthbert (seventh century) and to Francis of Assisi” (Attfield 2006:84).

This idea of peaceable companionship is linked to what Edwards (2006:22) calls human kinship with creation, which, according to him, “finds expression in the spirituality of Francis Assisi”, specifically in his *Canticle*. Edwards (2006:24) believes that the kinship model “is the essential foundation of a truly ecological theology of human beings in relation to other creatures” as

...it involves a new way of seeing and acting. It involves extending the love of neighbour to embrace creatures of other species. It involves extending the love of enemy to involve creatures that confront us as other and inspire fear in us. It involves loving and valuing others as God loves and values them.

This new way of seeing and acting that Edwards talks about, is also echoed by Miller (2010:vii), who proposes that the magnitude of the problem of environmental degradation requires human beings to rethink and re-orientate their way of being in the world. He believes that it requires both a transformation of the will as well as the imagination, explaining that it is “the capacity to think of other possible ways of being, thinking, and acting in this world”. Bergant believes that such transformation can be brought about and suggests that attitudes can be transformed through experiences with creation, like in the case of Job (Bergant 2010:40). She acknowledges that human beings are the only creatures who “can take hold of the powers of creation and reshape them for [their] own advancement” (Bergant 2010:47). She issues a warning, however, that “We alone have the future Earth’s well-being and survival in our hands”.

6.6 Humanity with Hope

Rasmussen (2006:179) points out that the ‘symbol of partner’ “is a variation of the stewardship model that attracts those who reject homocentrism and would give humans a humbler place”. Santmire (2006:254) picks up on this idea of partnership, and believes that the Church is faced with an important challenge, namely to set forth “in

light of recent scholarly research...as concisely and as accessible as possible, a more complete statement of the biblical theology of nature, as it depicts the human relationship with nature as God has intended it to be". He is adamant not to use the term "stewardship" because of its problematic character, and instead suggests that a biblical theology of partnership with nature offers a much broader scope on the subject. He explains that it has a complex and rich character, which is fundamentally expressed three-fold – "creative intervention in nature, sensitive care for nature, and awestruck contemplation of nature". He expounds on three micro-narratives that he has identified within the bigger macro-narrative of the "Great Story of the God of grace and the God of glory...that runs from creation to new creation, with the Christ-event as its interpretive middle" (Santmire 2006:254-255), and concludes that the Church has a "complex and rich biblical theology of partnership between God and humans, between God and all creatures, and between humans and every other creature" (Santmire 2006:269). He (2006:269) is correct in saying that theological scholars take for granted the idea that God has a partnership with humans, but that they very rarely consider the idea of God partnering with nature or even that human beings have a partnership with nature.

Human partnership with nature is described by Rasmussen (2006:179) as a partnership between humankind and otherkind. Other creatures, in Rasmussen's terms 'otherkind', or more creatively, "co-siblings of creation in the drama of a shared life", must be respected by humans because of the "interconnectedness and interdependence among all things...in exercising their considerable power". Migliore (2004:98) supports the idea of respect by writing that, "the command of God to humanity to have dominion calls for respect, love and care for the good creation". Such respect goes hand in hand with responsibility, but Page (2006:101) believes that, "The emphasis on responsible

action...was lost in the history of theology”, explaining that “the image came to be expressed solely in terms of what made humanity superior to everything else”. If, however, “we understand ourselves as trustees rather than masters of the earth”, in Migliore’s words (2004:99), we will start living our lives in true faithfulness to God’s calling by being holy, merciful and just in our dealings with nature.

By linking the goodness of creation with God’s purposes, Rae (2006:294) believes that God’s intention with creation is to bring about “a particular form of relationality between himself and the world”, which finds its expression within the covenant love paradigm. It is within this context then that creation can be understood as “a project in progress” that is carried forward “under the blessing and promise of God”.

Having identified creation as God’s project and not that of humanity, Rae points out that this understanding, which is “the first theological principle that distinguishes a biblical conception of humanity’s relation to the environment from other accounts of that relation”, is of immense importance.

Chapter Seven.../p. 344

CHAPTER 7

FINDINGS

Buitendag (2008:1) writes that understanding Scripture is the one debate to which theological scholars return to time and time again. One of the themes that is in the spotlight continually is biblical creation over which many battles have been fought, and which in turn have led to serious disagreements between Christians. When it comes to the interpretation of the first creation story, perhaps the one issue amongst others that attracts most attention is the question of whether this story should be interpreted literally or not. For those who defend a fundamentalist position, a straightforward literal interpretation of the text is demanded with the result that no other interpretations are considered as valid. This implied “superiority of extreme theological conservatism” is placed on par by Van Huyssteen (2006) with a similar view held by scientists that “there are no real limits to the competence of science”. Others try to read science between the lines as if the text was construed to accommodate a scientific understanding. For Goldingay (2011:7) the biggest concern is this search for scientific validation of Genesis 1:1-2:4a. McFague (1993:73) points out that the problem lies with the two different stories told to us – the one being a specific story of creation told by the Bible, and the other a common story of the natural world told by science.

In light of this struggle, a complicating factor in the interpretation of first creation story is the idea of a creator God who speaks creation into existence. This in itself has resulted in a struggle of understanding how God spoke in the Old Testament and how the ancient Israelites discerned his voice. This question has led the researcher

to formulate the hypothesis and methodology of this research by way of interdisciplinary dialogue in which the non-scientific work of Oliver Sacks and Lévy-Bruhl on Sign, the language of deaf people, was used to create a dialogue with the first creation story. Through this dialogue the DSL Model was developed, which allows for God's inaudible, sacred voice (as postulated by Pretorius, 2011) to be visualized.

By applying the DSL Model in the interpretation of the first creation story does by no means suggest that traditional hermeneutical methods are not important to biblical studies. Neither is the purpose to deny traditional hermeneutical methods, or even replace them. The socio-rhetorical method of Vernon K. Robbins (1996), for example, has provided a creative way in which the researcher could move between the ancient world in which the text was written and her own world. This study, however, finds overwhelming support in Buitendag's (2011:780) suggestion that the 'transversal plane' of dialogue is indeed a "fruitful plane", in other words a fertile interdisciplinary territory, on which disciplines can meet and interact in a creative way "to explore and even create (!) reality...". The DSL Model has provided such a creative way of exploring reality in the first creation story. This has resulted in the surprising discovery of an underlying relational structure to the created world, which had been described in this study in terms of image-concepts. It must be noted that notable theologians such as Karl Barth (1961), Terence E. Fretheim (2005), David T. Williams (2013), and Klaus Nürnberger (2013) have also developed relational theologies of creation, but based on traditional hermeneutical methodologies.

This research suggests that it is through image-concepts, like the ones described in the first creation story, that human beings are enabled to make sense of the world they live in in terms of the underlying relationships between created entities. Moreover, the relational character of creation enables human beings to make sense of who the creator God is as it points to God as being the One who stands in a relationship with the entire creation, and more particularly with human beings. The question that may come to mind is whether this could perhaps be described as a natural theology, with which Barth would have totally disagreed, of course! The answer is 'No!' – it is a creational theology, which starts (and ends) with God in the biblical creation story and not with nature as would be the case with a natural theology. The existence of God is not inferred from nature, but from creation, two terms that differ greatly from each other. It is for this reason that it was suggested in Chapter Five that the 'six days creation-one day rest' pattern should not be interpreted literally, but should rather be understood as a framework of worship – an interpretation that is supported by the work of Fretheim (1994) and Brueggemann (2003) who believe the material of Genesis 1 and 2 to be liturgical in essence and used by Israel in her praise of God as creator. Such an interpretation would agree with Walton's (2009) rejection of both the Young-Earth Creationist and Day-Age or Old-Earth interpretation as well as the Concordist View and Framework Hypothesis. This aspect, however, needs to be further researched within the DSL Model's framework, especially in terms of what importance the Sabbath holds for people today.

The first creation story is known as a cosmology – the story of God's creative Word bringing into existence the heavens and the earth, his continual creative actions in

the world and his interactions with his creation. In context of the DSL Model, the first creation story confidently retains its 'identity' as a cosmology. The DSL Model points to the fact that the first creation story is not a cosmogony, i.e. an account of how the structured material universe came into existence. The fundamentalist position which necessitates a literal understanding of the first creation story, seemingly presupposes it to be such an account, which, in Walton's (2009:106) view struggles with the basic problem of understanding the story, because they work with the premise that the first creation story deals with the material origins of the world. This research challenges this idea by suggesting a different way of 'looking' and 'seeing' (understanding) of what creation is in the context of the DSL Model. Creation is about the physical origin of the world, but is much more – it is about God bringing into existence that which had not existed before, including the underlying relationships that have been identified through this study through the use of image-concepts.

Laughery and Diepstra (2011:304-305) suggested that if science as a real world informer is allowed to have a say in hermeneutics, it may happen that some interpretations of the creation story will eventually be deemed outmoded, others will need to be modified, while still others will remain the same. In the case of the interpretation of creation presented in this study it seems that science in fact supports the interpretation as similar scientific interpretations of the natural world, such as relational Biology and relational Quantum Physics also point to an underlying relational structure to the natural world, although on a much different level.

This study does by no means suggest that the understanding that flows from this research was the original intent of the author of the first creation story. It does suggest that one should consider the creation story in terms of the human quest for meaning, in other words asking the question, “What does it mean to exist?”, instead of asking the question, “How did everything come into existence?”. In light of this question this study suggests a way of looking at the world picture in the first creation story and seeing (discerning) it in a different way – discerning creation as encapsulating that deeper relational structure, which embodies a deeper meaning within which the transcendent can be discerned. With regard to this Polanyi (1967:24), for example, writing about the pursuit of discovery, believes that human beings are “guided by sensing the presence of a hidden reality toward which [their] clues are pointing”. The interrelated patterns identified through this study in the creation story are believed to be the clues pointing to the 'hidden reality' Polanyi is referring to – that “deeper structure, which makes sense of [human] observations and experiences of the world” (*cf.* McGrath 2011:23). These clues serve as constant visible reminders of the fact that all created things, exist in relation to each other and to God, the Creator.

Having used the Sign language of deaf people to gain an understanding of the biblical creation story, implied the use of the human sense of ‘seeing’. This focused the researcher’s attention on the question of how blind people, for example, make sense of their world. It is common knowledge that their other senses such as hearing, touching and smelling are better developed, but the question really is how they ‘see’ their world when these underlying relationships are not accessible to them. Is their world disjointed in some way? If not, how do they join the dots, as McGrath

speaks of the sense-making process of human beings. This should be challenging research theological-wise and may perhaps render interesting findings of how blind people make sense of God. The same kind of research with schizophrenic patients may give much insight as to how they perceive their world and God.

Another aspect that has not been addressed in this study is the image of God. Much scholarly work has been done to date to gain an understanding of how the image of God in the first creation should be interpreted. The DSL Model might provide a surprising understanding of the image of God and what is meant by humankind having been created in the image of God. From this it follows that the DSL Model may have something to contribute to the debate on homosexuality – an issue worthwhile investigating in order to gain a deeper understanding of some of the underlying issues.

There are three central questions that need to be answered by this study. The first question is how this interpretation applies to the life of the church. The answer is suggested by Tozer (1961) in his book that focuses on the centrality of God, *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Tozer (1961:7) quite rightly considers God to always be the most important question before the church, by writing that, "... the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his heart conceives God to be". In other words, Christians should have the right conception of God, says Tozer (1961:8). He is adamant that this understanding forms the basis to Systematic Theology and practical Christian living alike. Morey (1989:1) suggests the same by explaining, with reference to Proverbs 23:7 and by drawing a parallel between what people think and how they live, that what people

think about God is very important, For Morey the right view about God is an essential element for Christians in retaining confidence in the fact that the God they worship today is the same God that was (i.e. the One they read about in the Bible), and also the same God that will be (the One in the future). Morey is convinced that such Christian confidence rests firmly on the belief in God's immutability, and concludes that human understanding of God and His relationship to the world and humans "has a direct bearing on [their] attitudes and actions". Such an understanding of God's relation to creation should thus ultimately find expression first in the life of the interpreter, and then in the life of the church – as Van der Merwe (2015b:5) points out, "The culmination of interpretation should be the embodiment of the text". Vanhoozer (1998:430) believes the church to be "the interpreting community today", and explains that, "it takes the congregation – a living commentary – to display 'what it means'". By translating this into an embodiment of relationality it would mean that the congregation would thus need to appropriate this in terms of their identity, and live it out as a testimony of who they are in Christ.

The other two questions central to this study is of what academic interest this interpretation is, and whether this is the final word on the interpretation of Genesis 1? The answer would be that this interpretation adds, in a modest way, to past insights gained through the application of traditional hermeneutical methods. Moreover, this interpretation is by no means the final word on the interpretation of Genesis 1. Speaking to this point, Vanhoozer (1998:420), for example, points out that, "Particular interpretations may make valuable contributions without needing to make the further claim that they have said everything that needs to be said". Most important, the suggestion that this interpretation corresponds to certain scientific

concepts does in no way validate the biblical text. The biblical text is sufficient in itself – to reiterate Polkinghorne’s (2000:960) words, “I see the interdisciplinary interaction of science and theology as being part of the noble quest for understanding”. “For me”, he says, “...theology, as it seeks to speak of God, the ground of all that is, is fulfilling the true role of a Theory of Everything”. He therefore believes a theological view to be “a total view, based on the claim that at the deepest level the universe makes total sense”. For Buitendag (2011:781), “Every discipline has its own rightful place in [a] dialogue”. He concludes that, “different disciplines challenge, enrich and stimulate one another. It is not only in a specific discipline that growth and change occur, but also interdisciplinary – between different disciplines”.

Conclusion.../p. 352

CONCLUSION

From a personal point of view this has been a challenging study indeed. My journey began many years ago while I was still actively working as a researcher in the field of Plant Physiology, first at the University of Pretoria and then at the University of the Free State. I have been fascinated by nature and science since a young age and have in Grade 6 already decided that I would become a scientist. My work as a Plant Physiologist focused on the cellular processes of plants, and I was continually reminded in and through my work of God's creative power and the beauty of his creation.

Another aspect that baffled me more than it fascinated me, was the idea of evolution. Having read the local Afrikaans newspaper for a long time and being confronted with extremely hostile letters between other readers and some local reporters and scientists who wrote articles for the newspaper on science matters and particularly evolution, I became very agitated as most of the readers in their letters kept referring to the Bible for support of their arguments. The reporters and scientists, on the other hand, mostly wrote from an evolutionary point of view. In these interactions the first creation story was continually the focus of this heated, volatile debate. Because I was struggling for a long time to understand the first creation story in terms of the literal interpretation, especially the six days creation-one day rest pattern, I decided to find out for myself what is really behind the creation story.

I explained to our in-house psychologist/lecturer what I was busy doing, and she gave me the book of Oliver Sacks referred to in my thesis. At first I couldn't understand what the connection, if any, there was between what I explained to her

and what I was reading, until one morning the light dawned on me concerning the relational character of the Sign language of deaf people, and realized that is what I was seeing in the first creation story. I contacted prof. Buitendag as he had indicated earlier on that if ever I decided to do my PhD in theology, he would be happy to be my promoter. He introduced me to model of dialogue between science and theology, something that was totally new to me! This is where my journey to discovery started – challenging, but highly satisfying as I’ve learned such a lot through this research, which in itself has challenged some of my own underlying presuppositions. I can confidently say I am an enlightened person today!

Reference List.../p. 354

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