



Living in the not-yet

Authors:

Darryl Wooldridge¹
Daniel Lioy²

Affiliations:

¹School of Continuing
Theological Studies,
North-West University,
South Africa

²Faculty of Theology,
North-West University,
South Africa

Correspondence to:

Darryl Wooldridge

Email:

theosisone@gmail.com

Postal address:

Private Bag X6001,
Potchefstroom 2520,
South Africa

Dates:

Received: 22 Nov. 2013

Accepted: 23 June 2014

Published: 30 Mar. 2015

How to cite this article:

Wooldridge, D, Lioy, D.,
2015, Living in the not-yet',
*HTS Teologiese Studies/
Theological Studies* 71(1),
Art. #2100, 9 pages.
[http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/
hts.v71i1.2100](http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i1.2100)

Copyright:

© 2015. The Authors.

Licensee: AOSIS

OpenJournals. This work is
licensed under the Creative
Commons Attribution
License.

Read online:

Scan this QR
code with your
smart phone or
mobile device
to read online.

This article is derivative of a larger study that discusses God as the centre of an often inarticulate, innate human desire and pursuit to enjoy and reflect the divine image in which every human being was created. The purpose of this article is to affirm the human elemental pursuit, as God's intent, to fulfil this created, intrinsic human desire in the now, or what is referred to here as proleptic, spiritual transformation (PrōST). Moreover, the primary aim of this article suggests investigation of whether individuals must wait for the afterlife to have purification and spiritual transformation fully or largely 'worked out'. That is, the eventual would demonstrate that PrōST, an experience of transformation and kingdom life, usually reserved for heaven in eternity, is greatly available today.

Introduction

There are eleven sections in this article. The first is this 'Introduction' explaining the direction of the article, including a brief description of the other sections and the interconnectedness in support of the above abstract. The second section ('Breadth') provides the intended breadth, methods, and limits of the article, before section three ('Beginnings') is explored, which examines the beginnings of human history and creation, followed by their importance to God. Section four ('God's heart and relationship') explores this importance to God with a brief review of God's heart, especially as God cares for humanity. 'Spirituality', the fifth section, naturally follows section four as a consequence of God's heart desire in providing proleptic, spiritual transformation (PrōST). 'Human and Divine *koinōnia*' is the sixth section showing that spiritual transformation is found in perichoretic fellowship (*koinōnia*) with God and other persons. The seventh section considers the extent of transformation in 'Full-orbed spiritual transformation' from *koinōnia*. 'Transformational anaemia?' is the eighth section, and asks the question of the state of Christian transformation, its history, and the state of *imago Dei* in its substantive, representative, and relational aspects. The ninth section ('Relationship') considers the labyrinth of human existence and the reciprocal drive of humans toward relationship with God. Included in the ninth section is the central question underlying this article, that is, whether individuals must wait for the afterlife to have purification and spiritual transformation fully or largely 'worked out' in living the kingdom life? The tenth and final section, 'Variegation', speaks to the help of deconstruction and post-foundationalism in arriving at the body and 'Conclusion' of this article, in which the article briefly reviews and points to a follow-on article that considers God's heart more deeply in the matters of this article.

Breadth

Having reviewed the sections of this article, the authors begin with the article's breadth. This article is limited to Christian traditions and expressions of faith (Schneiders 2005:1), and yet transversely considers 'pluralistic and interdisciplinary' fields as necessary to the subject (Van Huyssteen 2006:112, 159–160, 242). Nevertheless, a full-orbed and exhaustive inclusion of multiple scientific disciplines is outside the scope and intent of the present discussion. However, the authors employ an enlarged pluralistic view to inform and weigh-in on the concerns of this article. The research of this article investigates a wide contextual perspective and draws from a broad area of Christian spiritual traditions inclusive of Western and Eastern traditions, but mainly from three: Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant. Additionally, the authors have planned follow-up articles, as warranted, inclusive of thoroughly researched and consulted sub-categories of these main traditions along with sciences such as paleo-anthropology, philosophy, and cognitive science.

The authors broadly survey both biblical and extra-biblical literatures to measure and inform the assessment as well as the aims, goals, and objectives of this article. The authors view the Bible, within this approach, from an underlying progressive or trajectory hermeneutic (Webb 2001:30–34). Moreover, the authors view both testaments as progressively unfolding God's full



revelation and intent of a transformed universe in which such allowances as divorce and slavery are done away for fidelity and freedom (Gn 1:26–27; Pr 14: 31; Mt 7:12; 10:2–9; Ac 17:26; Gl 3:28; Phlp 8:1–21; Lioy 2011:55); where an eye for an eye gives way to turning the other cheek (Mt 5:39); and where only loving one's clan gives way to also loving one's enemies (Mt 5:4).

The hermeneutic utilised and underlying the broader study, of which this article is part, does not abandon the existential realities or position of the active interpreter (Palmer 1983:60). The research employs an eclectic hermeneutic and thereby leverages various approaches into an eclectic 'post-foundationalism'. For ease, the authors refer to and employ this broad and open approach as an eclectic hermeneutic, in which multiple interpretive techniques and principles are appropriate. This approach invites disparate elements of exegesis such as allusions, authorial style and leanings, genre, and earlier scriptural assumptions as well as history, grammar, and the sciences.

Whilst a post-foundational approach holds place, it is in seeking defensible rational to 'intersect transversally with theological arguments. . . [as to] what it might mean to talk about human uniqueness today' (Van Huyssteen 2006:112, 164, 242), consulting to best discern voices pertinent to the research. As in utilising different modes of transportation as conditions demand, this article moves within the eclectic hermeneutic that is inclusive of postmodern interpretations.

More precisely, using the thought of Badiou (2010:401), in which he places the 'law of the future anterior ... [from which] a post-evental truth is being deployed', a statement is veridical. That is, it is possible to determine the truth of the present, although a passing, post-evental truth. This post-foundationalism allows that communal and historical conditioning whilst holding that one can work and reach beyond such preconditioning of culture, prior and 'received' knowledge, and human insularity.

Although this study presumes knowledge and understanding of objective reality (foundationalism), used here is a post-foundational, postmodern 'theological condition' as the materials indicate the need for deconstructing or 'un-peeling' the layers obscuring seeing. This assists the authors in looking past the obvious, delivered truth to the underlying plurality, discontinuity, and complexity of the 'un-deconstructible' (Vanhoozer 2003:4–5, 11, 13, 17). This approach further mines and deconstructs meaning utilising and transversing interdisciplinary constructs. Although not arguing for or defending deconstruction here, it assists and supports the eclectic hermeneutics of this study as an interpretive approach as the need presents.

Beginnings

Such eclectic hermeneutics assists the understanding of early beginnings against a usual popular interpretation. There have been numerous and varied records of the human

pursuit for God as first shown by the discovery of the scrawls of a half animal, half human in a cave of Dordogne, France, from the Paleolithic Age, dated about 30 000 years ago (Leroi-Gourhan & Michelson 1986:6–17). However, at the extreme, Harrod (1992:4–7) has argued that the first event may go back over 2 000 000 years. At the opposite extreme, Christian fundamentalism argues against any evolutionary account of creation and of the first humans for a young earth (10 000–20 000 years) created with a built-in age of 4.5 billion years (Grudem 1994:295–297, 304–306).

Although Genesis does not portray history in the sense of modern histories, the scientific evidence, rightly interpreted, does not conflict with biblical accounts and presents God-directed and precise biological evolution coming out of a less than idyllic swirl as the most viable explanation (Lioy 2011:25–26, 44, 85). Whether more recently or back into a nascent evolutionary forming, the human pursuit for God has reached across time, place, and all cultures and milieus (Cady 2001:23–25). The story of this search for God has been a particularly intense quest that, at times, is told and experienced in often opposing perspectives.

Humans, in legitimately exercising genuine freewill, rebelled against God, both wrongly expressing *imago Dei* [image of God] in choice and wilfulness, and thereby falling from God's intended purposes, and in this falling away, became like God (Welker 1999:75–76; Gn 3:22). This, unfortunately, is also on display in Christian culture as testified by the cant, although perhaps well intentioned, and other legalistically, rebellious ways of living such as the popular phrase, 'What would Jesus do?' as another approach of trying to discern an ethical expression of God without God, leaving aside the 'becoming'.

God's heart and relationship

Spiritual transformation

This 'becoming' from the fall, addressed above, well positioned human beings to receive the intent and heart of God. It seems that the world, and the extent of spiritual transformation, ranges from an etiolated theology to experiential fullness. This article contains beginning considerations about God's heart, in relationship, and its implication toward an image-bearing human spirituality and how the Edenic fall interrupted this intent. From this, God's heart has active interest in recovery of his fully, expressed image in humanity especially as experienced in PrōST (proleptic, spiritual transformation).

It appears presumptuous to speak as though one might know something about God's heart. After all, God is transcendent, eternal, immortal, immutable, and invisible – the magnificent creator of the universe and the maker of heaven and earth and all their content, seen and unseen, experienced and never to be experienced. What is to be experienced of God is to be found in Christ as facilitated by the participation of the Spirit, who brings Christ and his benefits, and through whom disciples find communion with God (Canlis 2010:154–155).

God, in unapproachable glory, is 'outside', 'above', 'below', 'before', and 'after' space-time, and yet contains space-time (Gn 1:31; Ec 8:17; 1 Jn 4:12; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:16). God contains all; all is in God (Job 12:10; Da 5:23b; Ac 17:28). God is the uncreated creator and uncaused cause of reality and all of its content. He sustains the entire 'universe by the word of his power' (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3). As Anselm famously said, God is that being 'than which nothing greater can be conceived' (Fairweather 1956:75). Yet this God, who is transcendent, is revealed in Christ Jesus (Jn 1:18; 6:46; 8:19; 14:7–10) in whom humans participate in communion in Trinitarian immortality 'in the Word, by the Spirit' only in 'relational context' (Canlis 2010:77).

Although much is claimed regarding the revelations of God's heart in creation – experiential tales by individuals and communities – God and God's heart is at the deepest level a mystery. John Calvin (2006:62) spoke to this mystery with poignant counsel in that the 'most perfect way' to seek God is not to attempt to satiate one's curiosity by attempting to probe and investigate his essence but rather to adore and meditate him as can be seen in his great works. It is by these works that God is close and known to his children, and by which he communes with his creatures (ICR 1.5.9).

Not only can God's heart be seen in his works, but as further considered below, the Judeo-Christian scriptures display the heart of God and help derive his desires (Ps 19:1; 50:6; 144:6; Rm 1:19–20). The anthropological personifications used in scripture to describe God, although only partial and incomplete, are adequate to the task of revelation for human understanding (2 Tm 3:15–17). More pointedly, in the hands of the Yahwist, they are the 'boldest anthropomorphisms' and necessary to God's, self-revelation (Von Rad 1972:25–26). God's heart is laid open in the histories, narratives, poetry, psalms, parables, allegories, and directives of Hebrew and Christian canon and deuterocanonical writings.

As testified by these writings, God determined to make known to humans the 'mystery of his will' which serves God's purpose (Eph 1:7–10; 3:3). This *μυστήριον* (Greek) indicates that God's will, in plan, was hidden. God's self-revelation opens his heart to human knowledge and experience. Moreover, God's self-revelation now makes possible that one might join and serve God's heart desire in fulfilling his will and plan (Chan 1998:140, 223–224; Willard 1997:97–99).

The theory and theology of an unknowable God, a God that is exclusively transcendent, ineffable and 'transcategorical, meaning beyond the range of our human systems of concepts or mental categories' (Hick 2001), is most often offered as the discussion's end point. Nevertheless, there is a vast list that can be numbered regarding the revelation of God's heart in scripture and following that God is to some measure and at some level knowable. The evidential testimony to God's heart as found in scripture is indeed, a priori, multitudinous. Nonetheless, the intent and subject of this study is specific to spiritual transformation and the possibility of proleptic, spiritual reality. God's heart specifically regarding this

subject graciously presents as seminal, knowable, vital, and central. It is a focus of this discussion.

Mystics and contemplatives variously claim that the Judeo-Christian God, in particular, is experienced in both presence and absence and sought in positive (cataphatic) expression and the negative (apophatic) expression (McGinn 2005:xviii). These differences of pursuit are not solely academic distinctions. Their paradigms portend existential outcomes. The nature of the Christian relationship with God directs or even determines any transformative effect of that relationship upon the life of the seeker, initiate, or seasoned disciple as they seek spiritual transformation. Moreover, and to the point of this study, God's heart still yearns for a full, rich, and transformative relationship with humanity (Ps 34:8; Can 8:1; Jn 14:23; 17:21–23; Rm 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18; 6:16; Grenz 2001:268; Van Huyssteen 2006: 118–123).

God seeks an intimate and vital relationship with humans and is injured by the loss of this relationship (Lk 13:34; 19:41; Jn 11:33; 13:21). God desires to be in conversational relationship with humans as friends, freely living in God's will and glory (Ex 29:43–46; 33:11; Ps 23; Is 41:8; Jn 15:14; Heb 13:5–6; Willard 1999:10). Toward this desire, after the Edenic fall, God's heart immediately reached out to restore fallen humanity to relationship within the Triune, perichoretic community, one another, and creation (Gn 3:8–11; Lv 26:12; Dt 23:14; 2 Cor 6:16).

Additionally, God must ontologically be an entity capable, available, responsive, and desirous of relationship with humans for any reasonable hope of intimate encounter with him. This might seem troublesome, since God is revealed as spirit, unsearchable, inscrutable, unseen, and as dwelling in unapproachable light (Ps 145:3; Jn 6:46; 2 Cor 3:17; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:16; Gn 1:2b; 1 Ki 8:27; Is 55:8; Jn 3:6, 8; 4:24; 1 Jn 4:12).

Trinitarian theology demonstrates that God is not only spirit and spiritual, but also that God is three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit, who are in a perfect and unique relationship of divine love within the perichoretic union of the Trinity (Moltmann 1993a:258). Borrowing from the Christian philosopher and martyr Boethius (c. 480–525) in that the nature of a person is its irreplaceable substance, Moltmann (1993b:172) juxtaposes this notion against Augustine's thoughts on relationship and concludes that each of the Trinity possess the 'same individual, indivisible and one divine nature' in varied ways, the Father of himself and the Son and Spirit from the Father. So then, they are independent in their divinity, but profoundly constrained and dependent on one another. It follows from this, Moltmann (1993b:173) claims that personality and relationships are connected and present simultaneously. The Trinity subsists in 'the common divine nature' and the Trinity 'exists in relations to one another'. In truth, to be a person, as is each of the Trinity, is to be in and moulded by relationship 'in accordance with the relational difference' and not constituted by the relationship but rather presupposed in it (Moltmann 1993b:172).



In what may be an unpopular contention, this article argues that humans are not hindered in the reality of *imago Dei* by the notion of also *being* sinners (Moltmann 1993a:216, 219). Although their actual sins do hinder humans in relationship with God, sins become a blockage to divine communion. It is a violation of image bearing, limiting human reflection of God (2 Cor 3:18) and the nature of such a relationship that image bearing suggests and requires. Sin is a violation of loving God and others (Mt 22:36–40). The act of being human is unrelentingly in relationship to God (Brunner 2002:150; Moltmann 1993a:220). Sin is a perversion of that relationship, but as a creation or gift from God, humanness cannot be annulled or rescinded except if God were to do it (Moltmann 1993a:233). Since sins do not stop one from being human, relationship with God cannot be fully broken nor can the *imago Dei* be lost (Feinberg 1972:245; Van Huyssteen 2006:135). Following this, sin and righteousness is determined in the relationship of love of God and neighbour (Mk 12:30–31). This is the same love that drew God into incarnation and his sacrificial work. This is the *imago Dei* that Christ's disciples are called to live in unseating sins (not any notion of original sin except as the first sin) to freely live in relationship with God, others, and the creation.

Spirituality

PrōST

The understanding of sin briefly presented above is important, for by it *koinōnia* is affected. The nature of the Christian relationship with God directs and even determines any transformative effect of that relationship upon the life of the seeker, initiate, or seasoned disciple as they look to spiritual transformation. The new academic discipline 'spirituality' probably began in France during the first half of the twentieth century and referred to a kind of liberation. Both ascetics and mystical theology seem to imply excessive inflexible and elitist concepts of divine activity. This prior concept is overwrought with distinctions between human nature and God's grace. Spirituality attempts to address a multifaceted range of human experience (Endean 2005:74).

More particularly, this article defines spirituality or the lived experience of spirituality as one's conscious participation in life synthesis through an experiential integration of self-transcendence toward ultimate value (Schneiders 2005:1). More accessibly, spiritual transformation mainly points to a basic change in the place or character of the sacred as life's significance (Pargament 2007:21). Integration of one's life into the sacred is a change in spiritual quality, vivacity, function, character, or condition from one experiential level to another that may have collateral effects on soul, body, and creation. Moreover, such transformation will alter one's relationship with others as well as God. 'Transformation' is used and explored throughout this article. Although the terms 'ascetical' and 'mystical' are used in spiritual writings, a preference for the forms of 'spiritual' – a term more focused on the human experience, especially as it relates to God – is found throughout this article.

One may call the spiritual, transformation process sanctification, right and moral living, the Spirit-filled life, progressive *theosis*, divinisation, deification, divine filiation, or some other appellation to spiritual transformation. The problem presented here is not the naming of the process or state, but rather *the* proposed process and state, and who is included in what is mostly referred to herein as proleptic, spiritual transformation (PrōST). Proleptic here, meaning spiritual transformation usually thought reserved for the eschaton, is anachronistically enjoyed, to a measure, in the present.

In addition to the examples that one can find in scripture (e.g. Gn 2:7–9; Can; Mk 9:2–8; Gl 2:20; 2 Cor 3:16–18; 12:2–4; 1 Th 5:12–26; 2 Pt 1:4; 1 Jn 3:2), there are extra-biblical spiritual writings and authors, too numerous to list all of them here. They can be found starting in the first century C.E. onward (e.g. *First epistle of Clement*, Clement [c. 80–140 C.E.]; *The shepherd of Hermas*, Anon [c. 100–160]; *The cloud of unknowing*, Anon [c. 1375]; *The practice of the presence of God*, Brother Lawrence [c. 1605–1691]; *The imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis [c. 1380–1471]) until present times – e.g. *Absolute surrender*, Murray [1895]; *Streams of living water*, Foster [1998]; *The divine conspiracy*, Willard [1997]; *The wound of knowledge*, Williams [1991]; *Subversive spirituality*, Peterson [1997], *The return of the prodigal son*, Nouwen [1994]).

These writings example, discuss, debate, and instruct on what can be experienced of the spiritual and of God. Like *Celebration of discipline* (Foster 1988), these writings often present various methods and disciplines intended to facilitate a way to these spiritual experiences and encounter with God. The extent of experienced spiritual transformation ranges from initiation to deification or divinisation (Gk., *θεός*). This article generally means, by such terms (deification, divinisation, and *theosis*), a real knowledge of God and actual participation in God's divine life (Meyendorff 1985:350). Rarely is deification or divinisation spoken of in the fully developed, superlative meaning as a possibility for the present space-time continuum before eternity is entered. Deification is not in any way an issue of receiving God's incommunicable essence (e.g. aseity, incomprehensibility, omnipotence, omniscience), but rather only God's communicable attributes such as righteousness, holiness, love, dominion, intellect; glory (Kärkkäinen 2004:30–31; Gn 1:26; Dt 6:5; Eph 4:24; Col 3:10; 1 Cor 11:17). The organic flow of this reality is further considered below in the next section.

Human and divine *koinōnia*

Perichorisis

The scholastic position, represented here by Thomas Aquinas (1981:1140), speaks about 'partaking of the Divine Nature, which exceeds every other nature ... by a participated likeness'. Although, the position of this article posits a scholastic similarity (at least as held by Thomas) to Orthodoxy (Plested 2012:11, 27–28, 225), though route and methods may differ. This article sets aside the controversies of Orthodox

practices of Hesychasm, and its variants whilst holding to the desired possibility of direct experiential fellowship with God by which deification is enjoyed by measures, as Paul says from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18).

From a Reformed position, Carl Mosser (2002:38–40) finds deification in both Luther and Calvin (particularly 2 Pt). Canlis (2010:188) looks to Calvin and Irenaeus and argues that Irenaeus's anachronistic sense of deification is helpful in removing any competitive relationship between humans and the Creator. Although admittedly 'deconstructive concepts' were intended to destroy Gnostic 'radical incompatibility [laid] between heaven and earth' this deification makes humans more like God in *koinōnia* (Greek) or Triune, perichoretic relationship with God, adoption presented as proof of such a deification (Canlis 2010:190, 237). If deification is in any way an issue of receiving God's essence, it is not a matter of the incommunicable but rather only God's communicable attributes (Kärkkäinen 2004:30–31).

Whilst agreeing with Canlis (2010:236) that deification is a matter of fellowship and relationship of *koinōnia* (Greek), with God, to be direct and clear, this work holds most closely to an Orthodox position that the image breathed (Gn 1:26; 2:7) into humans was the beginning, inviolate deposit of those communicable divine energies or nature of God ultimately resulting in deification (Lossky 1974:98, 110; Mantzaridis 1984:15). Thus, the transformation spoken of here is coming into a fuller expression of that which is communicable, by removing the dross caused in the fall and protracted wilful acts on display throughout human history, that opens one to fellowship or *koinōnia* (Greek). It is God's communicable nature '[*extending*] to the whole human makeup, not excepting the "cloak of skin" ... penetrated by deifying grace ... what God is by nature' (Lossky 1974:139).

Grace is within the realm of deification in perfect conformity with God. Thereby, transformation is removing that which may obscure the *imago Dei* from being more fully expressed in humans, without limit to one particular human facet but 'the whole of human existence' (Mantzaridis 1984:16). It contains an ontological eventuality of full, unhindered, and expressed *imago Dei* as deification in relationship and expression not incommunicable divine essence.

Calvin establishes his relational view as can be seen by a thorough review of his writings. He rejects any difference between image and likeness (Gn 1:27) as a difference between substance and qualities (Grenz 2001:166–167), stating that humans are the 'brightest mirror' of God's glory (Calvin 1999:85). Canlis (2010:3, 80, 92) reaches beyond 'brightest mirror' and further into Calvin's thought in which Christ brings humanity into 'obedient communion to the Father' by his descent from *koinōnia* with his Father, followed by his ascent back to the Father, bringing with him, in ascension, all of the lost. It is in this *koinōnia* in Christ to God that *imago Dei* is born and enjoyed (Canlis 2010:3, 65, 82, 85). It is a full-orbed transformation.

Full-orbed spiritual transformation Theosis

Amongst the main Christian bodies, the Orthodox Church, followed by elements of the Catholic Church, has been the most forthcoming in offering a theology and model of full-orbed spiritual transformation toward deification or divinisation as a full development toward *koinōnia* in Christ. The Orthodox Church, in fact, has been unequivocally explicit to call such a potential spiritual transformation deification or divinisation. The beginning of this process, according to the Orthodox Church, is available today, and yet they do not hold out the expectation for the main population of Christians for deification or divinisation before eternity. It seems that Orthodox theologians are united in their belief that human, culminating deification is not obtained until the *eschaton* with the so-called 'third birth', but that a very clear and firm beginning should distinguish all Christians presently (Clendenin 1994:377). The Church fathers and mothers, both early and later, have variously spoken of these experiences with God. Both the Orthodox Church and Catholic Church have owned these persons and mystical approaches in differing manners and degrees (Campbell 1907; McGinn 2005:149–157; Zizioulas 1985:38–40, 116–119).

Whoever might claim ownership, the early church fathers (e.g. Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen of Alexandria) spoke of deification (McGinn 2006:397). This language better harmonises with Orthodox theology. As per Steeves (1992:806–808), in the final analysis, within the Byzantine period, Orthodoxy's considerable mysticism, intuition, and amalgamation were firmly fixed. This was in sharp contrast to the West's philosophical, scholastic, and forensic design (809). History also records a number of smaller bodies of Christians that have reached for this 'glory' (2 Cor 3:16–18). Amongst them are Friends of God, Brethren of the Common Life, Quietists, Quakers, Pietists, and the Morovians (Cairns 1981:249–250, 378–382).

Where *theosis*, deification, and divinisation are not explicitly addressed by these early disciples and mystics, 'union' with God is proposed by such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila, and John of The Cross (McGinn 2006:427–429). Hero mystics of the Orthodox Church, such as St. Anthony the Great, St. Maximus the Confessor, St. Macrina (St. Gregory of Nyssa's sister), St. Symeon the New Theologian, and Gregory of Palamas, all left the church with examples of the spiritual life. However, their ranks are suspiciously lacking in the writings of women (Ashbrook-Harvey 2010), whilst the Catholic tradition has a number of women who left mystical writings for posterity. Examples of female Catholic writing mystics are Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila, and Therese of Liseux. The Orthodox Church and, to a less defined degree, the Catholic Church, are the two largest bodies that have continued with these beliefs, in varying modes.



In more recent times, in no particular order, some representative mystics or contemplatives that have shaped much of the present spiritual, transformational thought and expectations are the writings of Madame Guyon, William Law, John Wesley, Evelyn Underhill, Andrew Murray, Ruth Paxton, Watchman Nee, Simone Weil, Dallas Willard, Jacob Böhme, Richard Foster, Cynthia Bourgeault, Thomas Keating, Thomas Merton, Bede Griffiths from the Benedictines, and Mother Gavriellia Papaiannis from the Orthodox. Clearly, these representatives stand on the shoulders of the scriptures, the church fathers and mothers, and those mystics and seekers who have come before (Chan 1998:82–83, 103–109, 190; Foster & Griffin 2000:xi–xiv; Willard 1997:271–273). Some have already been cited above; nevertheless, there does not seem to be a unified theology or praxis or single guiding light.

Transformational anaemia?

Discussions about the extent of spiritual transformation range from the anaemic to full-orbed experience. The Church fathers and mothers have variously spoken of these experiences of God. Admittedly, the accusation of heterodoxy, aberrance, and even heresy sometimes trouble the words of these early innovators (McGinn 2006:481, 490, 511–512).

Although there is a rich and long history of mystics, seekers, and ‘common people’ simply desirous of the divine, there is no unified, broadly, accepted understanding of spirituality. What spiritual conditions or attributes of God are communicably and fully available to humans has not been clearly and thoroughly presented and made available in Christian literature. More specifically, there does not seem to be much, if anything, addressing ‘proleptic, spirituality transformation’ (PrōST). That is, what of the ‘not-yet’, if any, of these communicable conditions and attributes are available ‘now’ for humanity to enjoy of God’s restorative and progressive work of spiritual transformation?

Moltmann (1993b:216–217) says that ‘the truth of freedom is love.’ God’s love brings freedom, not constraint. Freedom constrains itself by love (Jn 14:21–24; 2 Cor 5:14). Moltmann continues that this freedom is directed toward the future in the hope of God’s coming and yet to be defined potentials. ‘In the Spirit we transcend the present in the direction of God’s future’. Such thought furthers the reality of proleptic not-yet living and draws it down in a ‘creative function’ into the now (PrōST).

Humans were originally created in the ‘image and likeness’ of God (Gen 1:26–27). This creation, in God’s image, joined with the natural world and has been expressed in both the immaterial and material worlds, that is, both ontologically and functionally, making them different than the animals of creation (Lioy 2011:86, 89). God’s ‘image’ *tselem* (Hebrew) ‘does not consist in man’s body which was formed from earthly matter, but in his spiritual, intellectual, moral likeness to God from whom [*humanity’s*] animating breath came’ (Harris, Archer & Waltke 1980:767–768). Neither does

this article enter the debate of whether ‘is’ or ‘in’ the image is the correct rendering except to say that the human being both *is* the *imago Dei* and *in* the *imago Dei* however found in this article.

Although there seems to be some ‘representational’ elements in image, for example, functional dominion over the earth as consequence of being God’s vicegerents, these elements fail to address either the substantive or the relational theories of image. That is, what, if any, is the structural, essential, spiritual sameness, or possession of humans as God’s image (substantive)? Moreover, what is the relationship of humans to God and creation in order to reflect God’s image back to God and creation in those relationships (relational [Herzfeld 2005:363])?

Relationship

The prior, present, and future condition of humanity is a labyrinth difficult to navigate and derive any coherent systematic that would assist this goal of God-reflection. Yet, the scriptures seem to reveal God’s desire for some large measure of relationship with his creatures as they bear God’s image in kingdom living. A primary question continues to surface regarding the extent of that relationship and image and the effects of that relationship and image upon the heart of God and the condition of humanity and creation. There is an ineffaceable drive within humans to find God. It is a reciprocated drive – a response to God who first sought and continues to seek humans – a correlate and concomitant seeking in response to God. Again, what of the ‘not-yet’, if any, of God’s communicable conditions and attributes are available ‘now’ for humanity to enjoy of God’s restorative and progressive work of spiritual transformation? Amongst the many secondary questions that can be asked regarding proleptic, spiritual transformation (PrōST), the following should be considered:

- What does God’s heart, in relationship, imply toward an image-bearing human spiritually, and what, if any, are the implications on this from the Edenic fall?
- In what measure is God actively interested in the recovery of his image in humanity as the remedy to the spiritual effects of the fall and in PrōST?
- What are the means by which God reveals or unveils his heart, truth, and intents toward creation and humanity in particular in the plan of spiritual recovery/PrōST?
- What are the transformative and soteriological implications of PrōST?
- What are the possibilities, if any, to develop a unified theory regarding PrōST from the conclusions of the study?

Although these questions cannot be fully answered in this short article, the central question underlying this article is to ask whether individuals must wait for the afterlife to have purification and spiritual transformation fully or largely ‘worked out’ – that is, the possible opportunity to greatly ‘work out [*one’s transformation*] with fear and trembling [*now*]’ (Phlp 2:12–13). This article answers that God’s



economy includes provisions for a present enjoyment of the *imago Dei* in transformation as inclusive of the life of Christ. This transformation, as the *imago Christi*, is to be reflected and represented by humans in time and in relation to God and creation as kingdom life in the 'now'.

To reach the ultimate aim of this study, the prior questions must be thoroughly addressed in future research. Each of them could become a separate study. However, the central theoretical argument of this article is that humans were originally created in the 'image and likeness' of God (Gn 1:26–27); nevertheless, the enjoyment and expression, not the essence, of this *imago Dei* has been greatly blemished, marred, and damaged by a God-defying wilfulness of humanity (Gn 2:16; 3). Despite this rebellion, God desires a full restoration of the enjoyment and expression of his image. God has not forgotten his intent that humans would express him in this life as his image (Rm 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 1:11; Col 2:13; 3:10; 2 Tm 1:9; 1 Pt 5:10). Moreover, the *imago Dei* now carries something more – the God-man (*imago Christi*). God's image in Jesus now carries the existential realities of his incarnate life toward which PrōST drives. This article should be followed by a re-examination of the conventional partitioning of the 'now' and 'not-yet' for a new balance and paradigm in expressed PrōST toward *imago Dei*.

Repeating, the present authors argue that *imago Dei* now carries something more – the God-man. God's image in Jesus the Christ now carries the existential realities of his incarnate life toward which PrōST (proleptic, spiritual transformation) drives in the now (Rm 8:29; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:5). In spiritual disciplines, there is no suggestion to immanentise the *eschaton*. Nor is there any suggestion in this article that any effort of human creatures can introduce the *kairos* of God prematurely. However, ushering in some measure of the 'not-yet' into the 'now', especially as spiritual transformation is defined, seems possible. Although this article makes no claims or suggestions of dominion theology or kingdom-now proposals, the implications of PrōST suggest a measure of the not-yet now – a living in the not-yet although the kingdom has not been fully manifested and the world is not yet fully transformed as God's kingdom. The authors are not alone in positing that 'salvation/liberation', as Hick argues (1996:185), is not an event to wait for until the afterlife but rather something that should be expected and entered into now.

Variegation

The approach to this transformed life is not a mixture or even a combinant. It is the tension between memory, faithfulness, preservation to what has been given and yet variegated, something original, and a departure from the prior (Caputo 1997:6). In this 'deconstruction is treated as an hermeneutic of the *kingdom* of God' as an approach to interpretation that assisted in seeing the prophetic spirit of the unpredictable and sometimes dissonant outsider – Jesus – who took a stand with the marginalised, disenfranchised, and downtrodden (Caputo 2007:26). Here may emerge a 'unified approach' for spiritual transformation and God-reflection.

Moreover, deconstruction occasionally supported this article by affirming, but without being self-certain and positive. Here it is not used as a position in opposition to Christianity or for that matter any other established or proofed belief or practice. Deconstruction is a disquieting tool by which to examine a stance or belief, about how not to hold too strongly any given stance or belief. It presses against seeing or holding a stance or belief as decided with too much complacency and certainty, and rather encourages permitting one's self to be held (Caputo 2007:55–56).

The authors of this article intended that post-foundationalism enfolded deconstructive principles and the eclectic hermeneutic described above to provide space in which an understanding of proleptic, spiritual transformation (PrōST) was best gained.

Utilising an eclectic hermeneutic, this research gained an understanding of what God's heart, in relationship, implies toward human spirituality, and what the implications of this are from the Edenic fall. Moreover, an eclectic hermeneutic affirmed that God's interest in recovery of his image (*imago Christi*) in humanity and PrōST is the remedy to the spiritual effects of the fall.

Utilising an eclectic hermeneutic, the authors hope for the reader a measure of understanding of the means by which God reveals or unveils his heart, truth, and intents toward creation and humanity in particular in the plan of spiritual recovery and PrōST.

To corroborate this purpose, the means and methods of God's revelation in unveiling his heart, truth, and intents toward creation and humanity in particular toward spiritual recovery and PrōST, should be examined. Moreover, the transformative and soteriological implications of proleptic, spiritual transformation (PrōST) would follow and then determine whether a unified theory regarding PrōST emerges. This same assisted an understanding of the transformative and soteriological implications of PrōST. Utilising this eclectic hermeneutic suggested further areas of supporting study.

Conclusion

The subject of this article leads to more questions than can be answered in such a short study. However, this article did affirm the human elemental pursuit as God's intent to fulfil this created, intrinsic human desire for spiritual transformation in the now. It seems clear that God created humans with a purpose to represent him in creation and through intimate relationship and that in *imago Dei*. Perhaps it is as simple as Calvin (2006:62) suggests when he says the 'most perfect way' to seek God is not to attempt to satiate one's curiosity by attempting to probe and investigate his essence, but rather to adore and meditate him as can be seen in his great works. It is by these works that God is close and known to his children, and by which he communes with his creatures (ICR 1.5.9).



Additionally, as already stated, Moltmann (1993b:216–217) says that ‘the truth of freedom is love’. God’s love brings freedom, not constraint. Freedom constrains itself by love (Jn 14:21–24; 2 Cor 5:14). Moreover, Moltmann continues that this freedom is directed toward the future in the hope of God’s coming and yet to be defined potentials. ‘In the Spirit we transcend the present in the direction of God’s future’. Such a thought furthers the reality of proleptic not-yet living and draws it down in a ‘creative function’ into the now (PröST).

This article answers that God’s economy includes provisions for a present enjoyment of the *imago Dei* in transformation as inclusive of the life of Christ. This transformation, as the *imago Christi*, is to be reflected and represented by humans in time and in relation to God and creation as kingdom life in the ‘now’.

This relationship (*koinōnia*) is intended to lead to full expression of God’s heart in a perichoretic experience of PröST (proleptic, spiritual transformation). The primary aim of this article answered that individuals do not need to wait for the afterlife to have purification and spiritual transformation fully or largely ‘worked out’. That is, the eventual demonstrates that PröST, an experience of transformation and kingdom life usually reserved for heaven in eternity, is greatly available today. This ‘not-yet’, experienced ‘now’, ushers in the kingdom life and a glorification of God in his creation especially in human beings in *prolepsis*. A deeper examination of God’s heart in these matters will be considered in a follow-on article scheduled to appear in this journal.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors’ contributions

D.W. (North-West University) was the sole author of this article. D.L. (North-West University) acted as doctoral promoter and provided advise and review of the article. The article was adapted from the doctoral thesis of D.W. entitled: Proleptic spiritual transformation: Living in the not yet.

References

- à Kempis, 1958, *The imitation of Christ*, Moody Press, Chicago.
- Ashbrook-Harvey, S., 2010, email to Darryl Wooldridge, 17 November 2010.
- Aquinas, T., 1981, *Summa Theologiae*, 5 vols., Fathers of the English Dominican Province trans, Christian Classics, Westminster.
- Badiou, A., 2010, *Being and event*, transl. O. Feltham, Continuum, New York.
- Cady, L.E., 2001, ‘Loosening the category that binds: modern “religion” and The promise of cultural studies’, in D. Brown, S.G. Davaney & K. Tanner (eds.), *Converging on culture: Theologians in dialogue with culture analysis*, pp. 23–25, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Cairns, E.E., 1981, *Christianity through the centuries: A history of the Christian church*, Academie Books, Grand Rapids.
- Calvin, J., 1999, *Commentary on Psalms* 5 vols., transl. J. Anderson, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids.

- Calvin, J., 2006, ‘Institutes of the Christian religion’, 2 vols, in J.T. Mitchell (ed.), *Library of Christian classics*, p. 85, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Campbell, T., 1907, ‘Asceticism’, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol 1, Robert Appleton Company New York.
- Canlis, J., 2010, *Calvin’s ladder: A spiritual theology of ascent and ascension*, Wm. B. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
- Caputo, J.D., 1997, ‘Deconstruction in a nutshell: A conversation with Jacques Derrida’, in J.D. Caputo (ed.), *Perspectives in continental philosophy*, no. 1, p. 6, Fordham University Press, New York.
- Caputo, J.D., 2007, *What would Jesus deconstruct? The good news of postmodernism for the church*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids.
- Chan, S., 1998, *Spiritual theology: A systematic study of the Christian life*, InterVarsity Press, Downer Groves.
- Clement, 2010, *First epistle of Clement*, Kessinger Publishing, LLC., Whitefish.
- Clendenin, D.B., 1994, ‘Partakers of divinity: The Orthodox doctrine of theosis’, *JETS* 37(3), 3665–379.
- Endean, P., 2005, ‘Spirituality and theology’, in P. Sheldrake (ed.), *The new Westminster dictionary of Christian spirituality*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Fairweather, E.R. (ed.; transl.), 1956, ‘The library of Christian classics: Ichthus Edition’, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia.
- Feinberg, C.L., 1972, ‘The image of God’, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129(1972), 235–246.
- Foster, R.J., 1998, *Streams of living water: Celebrating the great traditions of Christian faith*, HaperCollins, San Francisco.
- Foster, R.J. & Griffin, E., 2000, *Spiritual classics: Selected readings for individuals and groups on the twelve spiritual disciplines*, HaperCollins, San Francisco.
- Grenz, S., 2001, *Social God and the relational self: A trinitarian theology of the imago Dei*, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Grudem, W. 1994, *Systematic theology: An introduction to biblical doctrine*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Harris, R.L., Archer, G.L. & Waltke, B.K., 1980, 1923, *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., The Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.
- Harrod, J.B., 1992, *Two million years ago: The origin of art and symbol*, 47, viewed 04 November 2013, from <http://www.originsnet.org/old.pdf>
- Hermas, 2012, *The shepherd of Hermas*, Nabu Press, Charleston.
- Herzfeld, N., 2005, ‘Imago Dei’ in P. Sheldrake (ed.), *The new Westminster dictionary of Christian spirituality*, p. 363, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Hick, J.H., 1996, A pluralistic view. *Four views on salvation in a pluralistic world*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids.
- Hick, J.H., 2001, *Who or what is God?*, viewed 02 August 2011, from http://www.johnhick.org.uk/j/site/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=46:who-or-what&catid=37:articles&Itemid=58
- Kärkkäinen, V.-M., 2004, *One with God: Salvation as deification and justification*, Liturgical Press, Collegeville.
- Lawrence, B., 1958, *The practice of the presence of God*, Fleming H. Revell Company, Westwood.
- Leroi-Gourhan, A. & Michelson, A., 1986, ‘The religion of the caves: Magic or metaphysics?’, *The MIT Press Journals* 102(37), 6–17.
- Lioy, D., 2011, ‘Evolutionary creation in biblical and theological perspective’, in H Gossai (gen. ed.), *Studies in biblical literature*, pp. 25–26, 44, 55, 85–86, 89, vol. 148, Peter Land, New York.
- Lossky, V., 1974, *In the image and likeness of God*. St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Yonkers.
- Mantzaridis, G.I., 1984, *The deification of man: Saint Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox tradition*, transl. L. Sherrard, St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood.
- McGinn, B., 2005, *The foundations of mysticism: Origins of the fifth century. The presence of God: A history of Western Christian mysticism*, vol. 1, The Cross Roads Publishing Company, New York.
- McGinn, B. (ed.), 2006, *The essential writings of Christian mysticism*, The Modern Library, New York.
- Meyendorff, P., 1985, ‘Liturgy and spirituality’, in B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff & J. LeClerq (eds.), *Christian spirituality: Origins to the twelfth century*, p. 350, World Spirituality: An encyclopedic history of the religious quest, vol. 16, The Crossroad Company, New York.
- Moltmann, J., 1993a, ‘God in creation: A new theology of creation and the Spirit of God’, *The Gifford Lectures, 1984–1985*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Moltmann, J., 1993b, *The Trinity and the kingdom: The doctrine of God*, Fortress Press Minneapolis.
- Mosser, C., 2002, ‘The greatest possible blessing: Calvin and deification’, *SJT* 55(1), 36–57. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0036930602000133>
- Murray, A., 1895, *Absolute surrender*, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, Grand Rapids.
- Nouwen, H.J.M., 1992, *The return of the prodigal son: A story of homecoming*, Image Books, Doubleday, New York.
- Palmer, R.E., 1983, ‘Postmodern hermeneutics and the act of reading’, *Notre Dame English Journal* 15(3), 55–84.
- Pargament, K.I., 2007, *Spiritually integrated psychotherapy: Understanding and addressing the sacred*, The Guilford Press, New York.
- Peterson, E.H., 1997, *Subversive spirituality*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids.



- Plested, M., 2012, 'Orthodox readings of Aquinas', in S. Coakly & R. Cross (gen. eds.), *Changing paradigms in a historical and systematic theology*, pp. 11, 27–28, 225, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Schneiders, S.M., 2005, 'Christian spirituality: Definitions, methods and types', in P. Sheldrake (ed.), *The new Westminster dictionary of Christian spirituality*, p. 1, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville.
- Steeves, P.D., 1992, 'The Orthodox tradition', in W.A. Elwell (ed.), *Evangelical dictionary of theology*, pp. 806–808, Baker House, Grand Rapids.
- The cloud of unknowing*, Harper Collins Spiritual Classics, HarperOne, New York.
- Vanhoozer, K.J., 2003, 'Theology and the condition of postmodernity: A report on knowledge (of God)', in K.J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to postmodern theology*, pp. 4–5, 11, 13, 17, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CCOL052179062X.001>
- Van Huyssteen, J.W., 2006, *Alone in the world? Human uniqueness in science and technology*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids.
- Von Rad, G., 1972, *Genesis: A commentary*, transl. J.H. Marks, The Old Testament Library, Westminster Press, Philadelphia.
- Webb, W.J., 2001, *Slaves, women & homosexuals: Exploring the hermeneutics of cultural analysis*, InterVarsity Press Downer Grove.
- Welker, M., 1999, *Creation and reality*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis.
- Willard, D., 1997, *The divine conspiracy: Rediscovering our hidden life in God*, HarperCollins Publishers, New York.
- Willard, D., 1999, *Hearing God: Developing a conversational relationship with God*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove.
- Williams, R., 1991, *The wound of knowledge: Christian spirituality from the New Testament to Saint John of the Cross*, Cowley Publications, Cambridge.
- Zizioulas, J.D., 1985, 'The early Christian community', in B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff & J. LeClerq (eds.), *Christian spirituality: Origins to the twelfth century*, World Spirituality: An encyclopedic history of the religious quest, pp. 38–40, 116–119, vol. 16, The Crossroad Company New York.