

**Little faith as an alternating state of religious consciousness:
a pragmatic-empirical perspective on Matthew's
portrayal of Jesus' disciples¹**

Andries van Aarde

Department of New Testament Studies, Faculty of Theology,
University of Pretoria, South Africa

Abstract

This article argues that “fear” can be understood as an alternate state of religious consciousness. The aim is to demonstrate that fear is central to the state of being of Jesus’ disciples when their religious experience is characterised as “little faith” in the Gospel of Matthew. The nature of religious experience is explained by means of William James’s understanding of critical-empirical epistemology. A general overview is given of what alternating states of consciousness are. From the perspective of a radical-empirical approach to experienced reality, a distinction is made between an *alternation in a state of consciousness* and an *alternation in phenomenal property*. This insight is applied to that passage in the Gospel of Matthew where the implications of fear for the experiences of the disciples can be observed most clearly, namely Mt 13:53-17:27. In this passage their state of being is described as “little faith”, and it is suggested that the integrity of their message would not be accepted unless they overcome their fear. Transcendence of fear implies an alternation in phenomenal property. The article concludes with an illustration that “little faith”, which is “fear”, can be the psychological consequence of political hegemony on religious experience, both in antiquity and today.

To believe or not to believe

[T]here [is] really no scientific or other method by which men can steer safely between the opposite dangers of believing too little or of believing too much.²

¹ This article is in dedication of Prof. Dr Cornel du Toit, an academic and comrade for many years.

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This article focuses on fear as a religious experience. I view it through the lens of New Testament scholarship. Owing to my field of expertise, my focus is on the Gospel of Matthew. We know that Matthew used the Gospel of Mark as his main source. Fear is a key term in Mark. Fear is, as it were, Mark's last word (Mk 16:8). In their pioneering work on Mark's gospel, David Rhoads and Donald Michie³ comment as follows on Mark's ending:

This abrupt ending, which aborts the hope that someone will proclaim the good news, cries out for the reader to provide the resolution to the story. The reader alone has remained faithful to the last and is now left with a decision, whether to flee in silence like the women or to proclaim boldly in spite of fear and death.

Textual criticism has shown that two different endings were added to the conclusion of the Gospel of Mark in Codex Washington, either partly or more completely known by Irenaeus and Jerome,⁴ namely the so-called brief ending (Mk 16:9-10) and the so-called longer ending (Mk 16:11-20). The latter is also referred to as the "Freer Logion".⁵ In these additions, disbelief is the key term.⁶ The disciples are portrayed as followers of Jesus who would possibly, because of disbelief, not proclaim the vision of Jesus.

What is it about not believing that could impede the cause of Jesus? Is disbelief based on something you know but do not accept as legitimate, or is it based on something you do not know and hence cannot believe? My argument is that the reference to disbelief in these early Christian writings

² William James, "The Will to Believe and Other Popular Essays in Philosophy," in *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers and Ignas Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1897] 1979), 7.

³ David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1982), 140.

⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament* (third edition) (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 122-128; Kurt Aland, "Bermerkungen zum Schluss des Markusevangeliums," in *Neotestamentica et Semitica: Studies in Honour of Matthew Black*, ed. E. Earle Ellis and Max Wilcox (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969), 157-80; Kurt Aland, "Der wiedergefundene Markusschluss," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 67 (1970): 3-13.

⁵ William L. Lane, "Additional Note on the Theology of the Freer Logion," in William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 606-11; cf. Adolf von Harnack, "Neues zum unechten Marcusschluss," *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 33 (1908): 168-70.

⁶ Lane, *Mark*, 606: "The word of association which first attracted the gloss appears to be 'unbelief' (*apistia*), in Mark 16:14, 'and he upbraided them for their unbelief (*tēn apistian autōn*) ... And they made excuse saying: 'The age of lawlessness and of unbelief (*tēs apistias*) ...'"

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added to Mark's gospel (probably between 100 and 140 C.E.)⁷ does not pertain to a cognitive disposition. Neither does disbelief express a static disposition. In my opinion, disbelief should be understood in this context as an alternating state of religious consciousness.

The unknown authors of the additional Markan endings had at their disposal the concluding paragraphs of both the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The additional concluding sections to the Gospel of Mark deal with the beginnings of the Jesus cause and the circumstances in which it was proclaimed. Matthew and Luke end their Jesus narratives ("gospels") with two different perspectives on one issue respectively, namely how the followers of Jesus took the message further. Michael Wolter (2008:797) formulates the Lucan closure as follows: "An die Stelle Jesu treten die Jünger, und das Ende der Jesusgeschichte wird an dieser Stelle zum Beginn der Jünger Geschichte."⁸ On the other hand, David Turner (2008:691) formulates the Matthean closure this way: "When the restored disciples meet Jesus in Galilee (Mk 28:16-17), they worship him. Yet there is some hesitation. This is not surprising, since Matthew has already presented the disciples' weaknesses and foibles ..."⁹ The additional ending added to Mark's gospel indicates that the hearers could doubt this message because the reliability and integrity of the messengers' actions could compromise the legitimacy of the message. The term "disbelief" is used to describe such doubt (Mk 16:13-14).¹⁰

Mark's perspective on the continuation, or not, of the Jesus cause is that *fear (fobos)* is the reason for stalling. Luke's perspective on the disciples' perseverance is that they were courageous, overcame fear and did not remain silent. They spoke with boldness, frankness, confidence (*parrēsia*). Thus Acts 4:23-31 states that the prayer of the recipients was that the messengers would resist opposition and, like Jesus, not remain silent. However, this does not mean that they too, according to Luke, had not been prone to "disbelief and distortion" (*apistos kai diestrammenē*) (Lk 9:41). According to Luke, despite their initial disbelief, their message later turned out to be reliable. Like peasants who plough the land (Lk 9:62) and do not look back, they journeyed with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem. Peter journeyed even further, from Jerusalem to Samaria and Syria. Paul journeyed all the way from Damascus to Rome, the seat of opposition and the source of fear (Ac 28:31). Loveday Alexander, discussing the links between Luke's narrative in the Gospel and Luke's narrative in Acts, refers to the end of Acts as a beginning of another plot: "In this sense Acts is indeed an open-ended narrative, opening out into a world where even the words of the apostles are

⁷ Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 506.

⁸ Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 797.

⁹ David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Academic, 2008), 691.

¹⁰ Bratcher and Nida, *Translator's Handbook*, 506.

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the subject of doubt and debate.”¹¹ Disbelief is Matthew’s way of conveying that their fear had not been conquered. According to Warren Carter, the “empire’s ruling class values hierarchy, verticality, vast inequality, domination, exclusion, and coerced compliance”.¹²

This article argues that, from the perspective of a pragmatic and empirical reading of the Gospel of Matthew, disbelief equals fear in Mark. Fear, that is, disbelief, can be understood as an alternating state of religious consciousness.

From the perspective of semantics, *disbelief* is seen as the antonym of *belief*. In my opinion, it is a misconception of Matthew’s intention. A semantic reading of Matthew would result in a cognitive understanding of disbelief. This was not his intention. A pragmatic reading of Matthew would therefore be more accurate. However, pragmatics does not exclude semantics.¹³

In ancient Christian literature, the term “believe” (in Greek: the *pistis*-group of words) forms part of the semantic domain of “to trust” and “to rely on”.¹⁴ In Greek, *apistia* is the antonym, and its distinguishing element is semantically described as *the state of being someone in whom confidence cannot be placed*.¹⁵ As far as this “state” or “condition” is concerned, it is not so much a cognitive mental act of accepting a specific proposition as being “true” or “authentic” or “correct”, but is rather a *state of being*, causing a person not to rely on it or to place faith in it. The positive presence or negative absence of placing absolute faith in someone is used by Paul as idiom when he, with the aid of the Greek term, *epanapauomai* (“rest upon”), in Romans 2:17, alludes to it being a *fata morgana* – an illusion – to believe that the symbolic universum, represented by the Torah, can provide a basis for total dependence.¹⁶ In contrast, Abraham is someone who has placed all

¹¹ Loveday C. A. Alexander, “Reading Luke-Acts from Back to Front,” in the Unity of Luke-Acts, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1999), 445.

¹² Warren Carter, *Matthew and Empire: Initial Explorations* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2001), 10.

¹³ See Anita Fetzer, *Pragmatics as a Linguistic Concept*, in *Foundations of Pragmatics*, ed. Wolfram Bublitz and Neil R. Norrick (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 30.

¹⁴ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains, Volume 1: Introduction and Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 376-79.

¹⁵ Louw Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 377.

¹⁶ See Robert Jewitt, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 222: “That ‘you find your comfort in [the] law’ (*epanapauē nomō*) conveys a sense of self-satisfaction and contentment. The verb in the middle voice implies finding such comfort by oneself ... In other contexts this verb conveys leaning on someone for support ..., but nowhere else does it appear in connection with the Torah. In the context of this diatribe, where Paul has already depicted the bigot in highly derogatory terms, this comfort in ‘a law’, as if there were no other law in the world, is a transparent claim of cultural and religious superiority. It matches the mood of 2 Bar. 48.22-24 that similarly places trust in the possession of the ‘one law’ that sets Jews apart from Gentiles.”

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his confidence in God (Rm 4:3). One who puts his or her faith in God will not be disappointed (1 Pet 2:6; Mk 11:22). The author of Acts mentions that Paul also refers to people putting a similar faith in Jesus Christ (Ac 24:24).

In Greek, all of the latter references to “faith” are expressed by means of the *pistis* group of words. When translation equivalents are sought, Louw & Nida¹⁷ point out that confidence presupposes that the object of the confidence should have the qualities of being trustworthy and dependable.¹⁸ In Jesus’ parable of the talents, the slave is called “good” because he possesses such qualities (Mt 25:21): *the state of being someone in whom complete confidence can be placed*.¹⁹ The quality of the person will assure the reliability of the message. In a few instances in the New Testament, the Greek term *bebaiois* is used to express: “pertaining to being able to be relied on or depended on.”²⁰

In the longer ending added to the Gospel of Mark (Mk 16:9-20), reference is made to the reliable message of the disciples during the post-Easter dispensation, stating that such reliability was based on miracles (*semeia*) that followed after their preaching (Mk 16:20). This steadfastness is also expressed by other terms such as *edraios*, *edraiōma* and *themeliō* (cf. 1 Tm 3:15 and Col 1:23 respectively) as “pertaining to being firmly established in one’s position or opinion.”²¹ Again, it is not a static state, but a dynamic state of being that inspires confidence. Disbelief (*apistia*) is the refusal to regard this “state of being” as reliable, which, in turn, leads to apathy towards the reliable message. The Gospel of Mark ended in fear. The additions called this fear “disbelief”. Belief and disbelief are not cognitive states, but states of being (Mk 16:16).

Little faith – which type of state of being is it?

The question is: What does the term “little faith” in Matthew’s gospel refer to? What type of state of being is referred to here? With regard to early Christian literature, this state of consciousness is only found in Matthew, and notably only with regard to the actions and attitude of the disciples. In Luke, disbelief is regarded as a state of would-be believers (Lk 9:41) and the question is put to the fear-stricken disciples on the stormy sea: Where is your

¹⁷ Louw Nida, Greek-English Lexicon, 377.

¹⁸ With regard to 2 Peter 2:6, see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 427: “The Bible is replete with honor and shame language that reflects the centrality of these values in ancient Mediterranean culture and here it is God who is regarded as the ultimate conferrer or adjudicator of honor and shame .. Indeed the language of honour and shame, praise and blame, pervades the entire letter [=1 Peter].”

¹⁹ Louw Nida, Greek-English Lexicon, 377.

²⁰ Louw Nida, Greek-English Lexicon, 377.

²¹ Louw Nida, Greek-English Lexicon, 377-78.

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faith? (Lk 8:25). However, they are not being described as scared *and* having little faith, as Matthew does in Matthew 8:26. Whereas Luke used fear and implied disbelief, Matthew linked fear with little faith. What does Matthew say about the quality of the disciples' state of being and the consequences of that for their hearers? Louw and Nida²² refer to Matthew's narration (17:20) of the disciples who were not able to perform miracles and Jesus calling this inability "little faith" (*oligipistia*) as "the state of having little or insufficient faith". So also, where the disciples were terrified on the stormy sea (Mt 8:26), Jesus described it as "inadequate faith".

Terms such as "inadequacy" and "insufficiency" do not really describe the quality of the disciples and their hearers' state of being. In this article, I argue that *fear* as an alternate state of religious consciousness is the core of their state of being when Matthew portrays the disciples as people of little faith. I describe the critical-empirical epistemology of William James's religious experience. This is followed by a general overview of what alternating states of consciousness are. When Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud²³ described "hysteria" as a "conversion disorder" (which Donald Capps²⁴ later called "somatoform disorder"), James already used the terminology of an "altered state of consciousness."²⁵

I apply these insights to that part of the Gospel of Matthew where it is most evident what implication *fear* has for the lives of the disciples, in order to demonstrate that their state of being is that of little faith. Implicature – rather than semantic deduction – is the pragmatic approach where inference is regarded as the best explanation. My aim is to demonstrate that Matthew implies that if little faith, that is, fear is not overcome, the disciples' message will not be accepted as reliable. Finally, I show how little faith (fear) can also be the psychological consequence for people who have been subjected to political hegemony. The life of Steve Biko serves as an example of someone who helped people of today to overcome their *little faith – fear* – caused by hegemony.

Faith, experience and pragmatics

In earlier times when theological disciplines were not so rigidly compartmentalised, William James (1842-1910) could describe the experience of religious trust from a pragmatic perspective in terms of an overlapping of

²² Louw Nida, Greek-English Lexicon, 378.

²³ Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, Sigmund. Studies on Hysteria, transl. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 1957), 27-28.

²⁴ Donald Capps, Jesus the Village Psychiatrist (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 3-14.

²⁵ See Eugene Taylor, William James on Exceptional Mental States: 1896 Lowell Lectures (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984)

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philosophy and psychology of religion. Besides his work, *Principles of psychology* ([1890] 2007), James is well known for his “radical empirism”,²⁶ which Eugene Taylor²⁷ describes as “an epistemology of the Ultimate”. James’s comprehensive understanding of religiosity manifests particularly in his book, *The varieties of religious experience*.²⁸

Notwithstanding the various schools of pragmatic thought, at the core of pragmatics is its concern with the implicature of expressions, rather than with their lexicographic meaning. A pragmatic-linguistic approach, however, does not disregard what words, sentences and texts could mean.²⁹ In other words, pragmatics is not semantics, but it includes semantics. These two components of the study of the speech act, namely pragmatics and semantics, are therefore inseparable, but not integrated according to a pragmatic-linguistic approach.

Apart from what words (lexicography) and sentences (syntaxis) may mean, pragmatics concerns itself with the science that can be described as semiotics. Pragmatics is directed more towards the *con-text* and *co-text* within which a statement is made. The concepts “text”, “co-text” and “context” have pragmatic-linguistic connotations.³⁰ Peter Auer describes pragmatics as “situation-specific common background knowledge”.³¹ It has to do with that which is being said between the lines, that which is created or omitted by language users through conscious or unconscious gaps. Jeffrey T. Reed³² puts it as follows:

Essentially, what this implies is that language comes to life only when functioning in some environment ... The “context of situation” does not refer to all the bits and pieces of the material environment ... It refers to those features which are relevant to the speech that is taking place ...

Pragmatics concerns itself with the reason why a statement is made, that which is implied or could possibly be implied by a statement, the act that is associated with it, and the effect achieved by the statement. In other words,

²⁶ William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York, Cosimo Inc., [1890] 2007).

²⁷ Eugene Taylor, *William James on Consciousness beyond the Margin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 82-96.

²⁸ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, in *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers and Ignas Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985).

²⁹ Charles Travis, *Pragmatics*, in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, ed. B. Hale and C. Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 87-107.

³⁰ Michael A. K. Halliday, *Language, Context, and Text* (Victoria: Deakin University Press, 1985), 28-29.

³¹ Peter Auer, “From Context to Contextualization,” *Links & Letters* 3 (1996): 18-19.

³² Jeffrey T. Reed, *Discourse Analysis*, in *A Handbook to the Exegesis of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 189-218.

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pragmatics concerns itself with the intention behind the use of expressions. It is not bound by the convention of the logic of phonologic, syntactical or semantic regularities in terms of which meaning is defined linguistically, but rather focuses on those codes that proffer an indication of how notions (concepts) manifest in language, and how a user of language could, by listening or reading, infer notions (concepts) from certain words. Put differently, pragmatics aims to infer the truth conditions of the contents of what a language user believes. By asking about a language user's psychological state, the nature of the action (which *essentially* forms the basis of a certain expression) is explained. However, it does not simply make *deductions* in a logical-positivist manner.³³ Rather, it is *inductive* and *abductive*. Inductive and abductive reasoning seek to explain rather than declare and profess. What counts in pragmatics is "inference to the best explanation".

Pragmatics thus transcends the so-called basic facts that are generally regarded as being the truth about something. Such "facts" are the professed objective information about the one who communicates, in other words, the convictions and beliefs that a person would allegedly hold, or the shared convictions of the one who communicates and the one who is on the receiving end. These "facts" include the alleged intention of what is being communicated, the *when* and *where* of the social conditions within which it is being communicated (for example a "vow" and "an affect" during a marriage ceremony). In other words, pragmatics focuses not only on the written communication, but also on that which is not literary, such as implicit factors, for example what is intended with the interaction, but is not directly said or written down.³⁴ It also inquires into aspects *behind* explicit or implicit communication, such as certainty or uncertainty of communication, the intention of what is being said, implied or formally declared, as well as the effect and affect achieved among those who hear it or among bystanders. Whereas *semantic information* deals with fixed linguistic aspects, *pragmatic information* is context-sensitive and aimed at extralinguistic aspects.

The relevance of these two aspects differs. The relevance of pragmatics is not so much determined by the meaning of words and sentences, but by the *experience* they create.³⁵ When too many words are used and the meaning becomes ambivalent, then such ambiguity is relevant. The same goes for when too little is said. Hence, there is something in communication

³³ See G.M. Jantzen, "For an Engaged Reading: William James and the Varieties of Postmodern Religious Experience," in *William James and the Varieties of Religious Experience: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. J.A. Carrette (London: Routledge, 2005), 89-96.

³⁴ See Kent Bach, "Semantic, Pragmatic," in *Meaning and Truth*, ed. Campbell, J. Keim, M. O'Rourke and D. Shier (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2002), 284-92.

³⁵ Kent Bach, "Pragmatics and the Philosophy of Language," in *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Laurence R. Horn and Gregory (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 463-487.

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that transcends “codes-up” because those on the other end of communication make inferences that transcend decoding.³⁶ In short, it means that where knowledge and convention lack, relevance fills the gap.³⁷ It is in this regard that pragmatics, approached from a psychological perspective, complements philosophical psychology,³⁸ because what thoughts (the mind) project and the experiences that such thoughts create in the lives of others should be distinguished from the emotional disorders that psychology conventionally studies. The effect that projection of thoughts has on others is a matter referred to as the “representational theory of the mind”.³⁹

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, William James, as religious psychologist and philosopher, objected to modern people’s growing attachment to materialism and naturalism, while being indifferent to the implications of underrating metaphysical values for religious faith.⁴⁰ During the period of 1975 to 1988, Harvard University Press republished James’s most important publications, edited by Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers & Ignas Skrupskelis.⁴¹ In a secularised environment, faith in God and an interaction with fellow human beings that is religiously founded on mutual trust have become matters of lesser importance. This has coincided with obsolete systems of rationality according to scientific law, implying that humankind is at the mercy of determinism. The conviction that a human being has a free will to exercise religious choices with practical consequences does not really have a place in such secularised,

³⁶ Cf. Kent Bach, “Semantically speaking,” in *Perspectives on Semantics, Pragmatics, and Discourse: A Festschrift for Ferenc Kiefer*, ed. I Kenesei and R.M. Harnish, (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001), 147-170; Kent Bach, “The Top Ten Misconceptions about Implicature,” in *Drawing the Boundaries of Meaning*, ed. Betty J. Birner and Gregory Ward (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2006), 21-30.

³⁷ Kent Bach, “The Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction: What is It and Why It Matters,” in *The Semantics-Pragmatics Interface from Different Points of View*, ed. K. Turner (Oxford: Elsevier, 1999), 65-84, online at <http://userwww.sfsu.edu/~kbach/spd.htm> (accessed June 19, 2013).

³⁸ Bach, *Pragmatics and the Philosophy of Language*, 463-487.

³⁹ Cf. Bach, *Pragmatics and the Philosophy of Language*, 124-162.

⁴⁰ See Eugene Taylor, “Metaphysics and Consciousness in James’s Varieties: A Centenary Lecture,” in *William James and the Varieties of Religious Experience: A Centenary Celebration*, ed. J. Carrette (London: Routledge, 2005), 10-25.

⁴¹ William James, “The Will to Believe and Other Popular Essays in Philosophy,” in *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers and Ignas Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); William James, “The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature,” in *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers and Ignas Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985); William James, “Pragmatism,” in *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers and Ignas Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); William James, “A Pluralistic Universe,” in *The Works of William James*, ed. Frederick Burkhardt, Fredson Bowers and Ignas Skrupskelis (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

humanistic and scientifically oriented ideological systems.⁴² In contrast to this, James emphasised the value of *lived experience*, including moral values motivated by religious principles. According to James, science should therefore not lose sight of concrete experience, no matter how diverse and complex real life may be. On the contrary, science should welcome epistemologies that are open to revise alleged “facts” in the light of experience. The scientist should take note that society is spontaneously influenced by transcendental values that can bring about change in the immanent world.⁴³

James strongly advocated the value of religion and morality.⁴⁴ He called his vision “pragmatics”.⁴⁵ The content of his *pragmatics* is a correlation between an empirical-scientific approach to the world and a religious perspective that has implications for a life of moral choice.⁴⁶ His religious viewpoints are particularly clear in *The will to believe* ([1897] 1979), *Pragmatism* ([1907] 1975), *The varieties of religious experience* ([1902] 1985), *A pluralistic universe* ([1909] 1977) and *Essays on religion and morality* (1982).⁴⁷ According to James, pragmatics constitutes a third option (*tertium datur*), which does not presuppose a mix of science and theology as a compromised middle ground, a so-called *via media* position. This “middle ground” was advocated in nineteenth-century European *Vermittlungstheologie*,⁴⁸ which gave preference to *fides quae* over *fides qua*. The consequence of such a preference is that believers trust in materialistic contents of ecclesiastical doctrines (*fides quae*), rather than in the Transcendent. *Fides qua* and *fides quae* (very much like “pragmatics” and “semantics”) are inseparable, but also cannot be integrated.⁴⁹ James’s pragmatics further pursues Friedrich Schleiermacher’s (1768-1834) dialectic distinction between the notions “emotion” and “feeling”.⁵⁰ Schleiermacher’s

⁴² Michael Slater, “William James,” in *The Routledge Companion to Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Charl Meister and James Beilby (London: Routledge, 2013), 95-106.

⁴³ See especially Michael Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009).

⁴⁴ For a review of secondary publications on James’s work on ethics and religion, see Slater, “William James,” in *The Routledge Companion*, 105-106.

⁴⁵ James, *Pragmatism* ([1907] 1975, 9-26; cf. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, [1897] 1979, 48-52, 84-89, 114-140; James [1907] 1975:9-26.

⁴⁶ James, *Pragmatism* ([1907] 1975, 26.

⁴⁷ John J. McDermott published collected speeches and essays of William James presented and written over a period of twenty-four years in *Essays in Religion and Morality* (Works of William James) (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

⁴⁸ See Ragnar Holte, *Die Vermittlungstheologie: Ihre theologischen Grundbegriffe kritisch untersucht* (Studia doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensia 3) (Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala, 1964).

⁴⁹ Cf. James Alfred Loader, “Begegnung mit Gott als Zentralbegriff der niederländischen ‘Ethischen Theologie’”, in *Gott und Mensch im Dialog. Festschrift für Otto Kaiser zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Witte (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 1037-1051.

⁵⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, transl. of the 2nd edition, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, [1830] [1928] 1976), 16-17.

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“theology of feeling” should therefore not be confused with a *via media* position.⁵¹ Neither can Schleiermacher’s “absolute dependence” be used by liberal theologians to bar metaphysics from epistemology and replace it with absolute humanism based on cognitive rationality.⁵²

James’s point of view can be described as radical empirism. On the one hand, it permits the strong winds of scientific knowledge to blow away the ills present in certain forms of religiosity, such as intolerance and exaggerated anti-metaphysical abstraction in theological thinking. A radical-empirical approach to religion makes space for social sensitivity, real human need and experience. It requires a spirit of insight into the variation in religious experiences. Such a diversity of spiritualities should not be regarded as harmful,⁵³ for the “basis of religion” is found in feelings, emotions and experiences of individual humans, rather than in social institutions, stereotyped practices and doctrines.⁵⁴ Such an empirical view confirms James’s conviction that both experience and thoughts about experience are always open to reinterpretation and correction because of changing circumstances.⁵⁵ However, religious experience is not without scientific claim. There is a rational aspect to it because it requires argument and evidence. There is an affective aspect because emotion and feeling are important. There is a volitional aspect because we are moved to action as a result of having a religious experience.⁵⁶ Instead of withdrawing, religion brings people in touch with the realities in life, it opens new sources to be tapped for life, provides the energy to tackle challenges and it creates a peace and joy that scientific philosophy and rational knowledge of morality cannot offer.⁵⁷

Alternating state of consciousness

William James’s pragmatic perspective on religious experience thus has nothing to do with utility.⁵⁸ James is not interested in the materialist effect of religiosity. What he wants to emphasise is that the same world can be

⁵¹ See Kevin W. Hector, “Atunement and Explication: A Pragmatist Reading of Schleiermacher’s ‘Theology of Feeling’,” in Schleiermacher, the Study of Religion, and the Future of Theology, ed. Brent W. Sockness and Wilhelm Gräß (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 215-242.

⁵² See Gerald McDermott’s reference to Schleiermacher in his *The Great Theologians*: “We wind up doing anthropology and not theology. We have made God into a big human with a big voice. But this god is really an idol, a larger version of ourselves. In short, we end up worshipping ourselves”: Gerald McDermott, *The Great Theologians: A Brief Guide* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsityPress, 2010), 134-135.

⁵³ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 384.

⁵⁴ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 32-34, 341, 352.

⁵⁵ James, *The Will to Believe*, 22.

⁵⁶ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 15-20, 57-89.

⁵⁷ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 36-50.

⁵⁸ Slater, *William James on Ethics and Faith*, 103.

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observed with a “scientific (natural) state of consciousness” and can also be characterised by an “alternated state of consciousness”:

The world interpreted religiously is not the materialistic world over again, with an altered expression; it must have, over and above the altered expression, a *natural constitution* different at some point from that which a materialistic world would have. It must be such that different events can be expected in it, different conduct must be required.⁵⁹

According to him, our “normal” state of consciousness in which we rationally and consciously make observations and interact with other objects must be distinguished from a different type of consciousness, which is entirely different from the “normal waking consciousness”.⁶⁰ We can so easily just busy ourselves with leading an ordinary daily life with rational observations, decisions and interactions, and then suddenly we might find ourselves in another state of being. This alternating state of being is life’s reality just as much as the rational one is, but “[h]ow to regard them is the question, for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness.”⁶¹ Such a state of being can have a determining influence on attitude and behavior, but unlike the “rational” state, it is not easily definable in terms of formulas. To put it differently: “[T]hey open a region though they fail to give a map.”⁶²

From a social-psychological and anthropological perspective, Erika Bourguignon focuses on this phenomenon in, among others, her works *Religion, altered states of consciousness and social change* (1973), and *Psychological anthropology: an introduction to human nature and cultural differences* (1979).⁶³ She is of the opinion that religiosity, although not dealing with those aspects of life relating to empirical skill, is empirical in essence. Religiosity has to do with those empirical things people believe are beyond their control. It concerns matters that are indeed empirically observable, such as illness; windy and rainy conditions that have an influence on experience; the availability of basic necessities which impact on the fertility of human beings, animals and the earth; things that cause conflict; and the mysterious forces and powers descending externally from outside

⁵⁹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 406.

⁶⁰ Cf. S. Krippner, “Altered States of Consciousness,” in *The Highest State of Consciousness*, ed. John White (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972), 5.

⁶¹ James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 388.

⁶² James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, 388.

⁶³ Erika Bourguignon, [Religion Altered States of Consciousness and Social Change](#) (Columbus, OH: Ohio State Univ Press, 1973); Erika Bourguignon, [Psychological Anthropology: An Introduction to Human Nature and Cultural Differences](#) (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979).

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people which they did not desire or perhaps had desired.⁶⁴ These things are being *experienced* while people find themselves within social *empirical* contexts, and according to her, alternating states of consciousness begin to play a role where empirical experience overlaps with the “mysterious”. For example, ancient people could be within the safety of walled cities or temples, yet still be at the mercy of elements over which people had no control.⁶⁵ It is similar to dreams in which daily life is interspersed with another life.⁶⁶

According to Peter Berger, these experiences occur particularly in situations where people are involuntarily forced out of the centre of society as outsiders, or have involuntarily allowed themselves to be marginalised for whatever reason. These experiences therefore occur less often than the “normal, rational state of being” – happening on the margins of life, rather than in everyday “normal” lived experiences. Seen from his critical-empirical perspective, William James would say that the frequency varies according to the extent to which consciousness of religiosity is allowed to play a role in the rational state. Berger, however, points out that religion is the cohesive aspect that gives people some “control” over their lives and alternates between the rational and alternate states of consciousness. In circumstances where religion plays a lesser role in a secularised context, the alternation between states of being will be less meaningful than otherwise. Nevertheless, people do experience more than one “reality” in life.

D’Aquili & Newberg,⁶⁷ too, see in an altered state of religious consciousness the value of capacitating people to transcend trauma, more specifically to transcend themselves by somehow achieving a sense of connection with a “higher” order – call it “divine” – which gives people a coping mechanism to experience a kind of serenity during which fear is either displaced fictitiously or is genuinely assimilated. Such “tranquility and a lack of fear ... verif[y] the existence of the power sources that are believed to be able to change the environment.”⁶⁸

Adam Rock & Stanley Krippner emphasise the importance of making a distinction between a “state of being” (*state of consciousness*) and the

⁶⁴ Bourguignon, [Religion Altered States of Consciousness](#), 4.

⁶⁵ Bourguignon, [Religion Altered States of Consciousness](#), 4.

⁶⁶ Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967), 41-43.

⁶⁷ Eugene G. d’Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, “The Neuropsychological Basis of Religions, or Why God Won’t Go Away,” *Zygon* 33 (1998):187-201; Eugene G. d’Aquili and Andrew B. Newberg, *The Mystical Mind: Probing the Biology of Religious Experience* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 159-61.

⁶⁸ Jonanda Groenewald, *Baptism, Eucharist, and the Earliest Jesus-groups: From the Perspective of Alternate States of Consciousness*, DD dissertation. (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2005), 91.

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“content”, in other words, the “mental episode” accessible to empirical observation and inquiry:

Theories containing the consciousness/content fallacy would need to be revised to avoid fallacious contentions such as consciousness is simultaneously: (1) the cognizer of shifts in, for instance, subjective experience, and (2) the shifts in subjective experience themselves ... Fundamentally, ASC theories would need to be reformulated such that the phenomenon being explained is alterations in phenomenal properties rather than consciousness.⁶⁹

By distinguishing between “alterations in phenomenal properties” and “alterations in consciousness”, pragmatic linguistics creates the possibility for exegesis to recognise the occurrence of *verba sentiendi* in texts⁷⁰ and to try and understand its pragmatic implication. William James’s radical empirism helps us recognise expressions such as “I felt great joy”, “I doubt” and “I fear” as expressions of “alternating states of consciousness”. However, these *verba sentiendi* do not refer to a static state of consciousness. These are expressions of experience that occur during the course of a discourse or narrative and should be described as “alteration in phenomenal property” and not as “alternating states of consciousness”. Moreover, thanks to the radical-empirical insights of William James, these *phenomena* of experiences will be observed in Immanuel Kant’s terms as religious *noumena*.⁷¹ Against this background, James’s radical pragmatics helps us to understand the concept of *little belief* in Matthew in terms of an “epistemology of the Ultimate” – and notably as an “alteration of phenomenal or noumenal property”, because trust in the *Ultimate* (God) was lost.

⁶⁹ Adam J. Rock and Stanley Krippner, “Does the Concept of ‘Altered States of Consciousness’ Rest on a Mistake?,” *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 26 (2007): 37.

⁷⁰ Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form*, transl. Susan Wittig (Berkeley, CA: Berkeley University Press, 1973), 85.

⁷¹ See, among others, Andrews Reath, “Kant’s Critical Account of Freedom,” in *A Companion to Kant*, ed. Graham Bird (Oxford: Blackwell 2006), 276: “The distinction between phenomena and noumena opens up the possibility of viewing human actions under two different aspects or from two different standpoints. When we view human beings as phenomena, we treat their actions as events in the natural world that are causally determined by facts about their psychology and their circumstances. So regarded, actions are to be explained by a person’s desires and interests, and by the psychological traits that Kant terms a person’s ‘empirical character.’ Likewise a person’s empirical character can be causally explained in terms of formative influences such as the person’s environment, native temperament, and so on ... But when we think of ourselves as noumena, we ascribe free agency to ourselves, and the same actions may be thought of as flowing from an agent’s free choices.”

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This insight will now be discussed by focusing on one of the narrative discourses with which Matthew alternated the five didactical discourses in his Gospel,⁷² namely Mt 13:53-17:27.⁷³ In a recent contribution in recognition of the exegetical contribution of South African Hermie van Zyl towards the understanding of the Matthean Gospel, I made the remark that Matthew is probably *the* Gospel with the finest composition in the New Testament.⁷⁴ Ulrich Luz⁷⁵ refers to “the evangelist’s deliberately intended structure.”⁷⁶ He also remarks that the understanding of a certain composition is not merely neutral, but offers important premises for a possible understanding of the Gospel.⁷⁷ The structure of Matthew’s Gospel, too, is of pragmatic relevance. The composition of Mt 13:53-17:27 is of particular relevance for an understanding of the disciples as persons of little faith.⁷⁸

Little faith in the Gospel of Matthew

With regard to Mt 13:53-17:27, Matthew not only follows the narrative form of Mark’s version, but – through finely nuanced adaptations – makes a peculiar pragmatic imprint on the structure of this passage. In my opinion, Peter Ellis⁷⁹ has identified the most functional *co-text* of Mt 13:53-17:27 to date. He indicates that this narrative discourse comprises three main units, namely 13:53-14:33; 14:34-16:20; and 16:21-17:27.⁸⁰ The closing pericope of each of the three units comprises a section in which Peter plays a significant role.

⁷² Charles H. Lohr, “Oral Techniques in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961): 427; David L. Barr, “The Drama of Matthew’s Gospel: A Reconsideration of its Structure and Purpose,” *Theology Digest* 24 (1976), 354-55.

⁷³ See Andries G. van Aarde, “Matthew’s Portrayal of the Disciples and the Structure of Matthew 13:53-17:27,” *Neotestamentica* 16 (1982): 21-34.

⁷⁴ Andries G. van Aarde, “Gemeenteteologie en Horisonversmelting in die Matteusevangelie: ‘n Bestekopname,” *Acta Theologica* (Forthcoming, 2013).

⁷⁵ Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus, 1. Teilband: Mt 1-7* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1985), 17.

⁷⁶ “Der Evangelist *bewußt beabsichtigten* Gliederung” (emphasis by Ulrich Luz).

⁷⁷ Ulrich Luz: “Prämissen für ein mögliches Verständnis des Evangeliums.” Cf. H.J. Bernard Combrink, “The Structure of Matthew as Narrative,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 34 (1983): 61-90; Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 17-18; William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Volume 1: Introduction and Commentary on Matthew I-VII* (London: T&T Clark, [1988] 2004), 58-63; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 44-62; David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Baker Grand Rapids: Academic, 2008), 8-10.

⁷⁸ Cf. Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 573.

⁷⁹ Peter F. Ellis, *Matthew: His Mind and His Message* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1974), 132.

⁸⁰ Cf. also Barr, “The Drama of Matthew’s Gospel,” 330.

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What makes those three closing sections all the more remarkable is that they contain content that does not feature at all in any of Matthew's main sources, namely the Gospel of Luke and the Sayings Source Q. It is therefore unique to Matthew and, in technical language, it is described by the German term, *Sondergut*. The first of these sections tells of Peter walking on water, his doubt and his sinking (Mt 14:22-33). In the second, Jesus bestows a beatitude on Peter (Mt 16:13-20). The third passage narrates that Peter, of his own accord, paid the temple tax on behalf of Jesus and himself (Mt 17:24-7). Jerome Murphy-O'Connor,⁸¹ too, is convinced by Ellis's insight into the structural build-up of Mt 13:53-17:27 because this narrative discourse connects in a logical way where the "parable discourse" ends in Mt 13, and because it, in turn, ends where the "community discourse" starts in Mt 18. His only objection is that this tripartite classification does not really explain how the three stories about Peter (walking on the water; being praised as the rock of the *ekklesia*; and payer of the temple tax) show a climactic lead-up (Murphy-O'Connor 1975:371). In my judgement, my 1982 article on "Matthew's Portrayal of the Disciples" indeed illustrated such a climactic build-up.⁸² The pragmatic relevance and implicature of this climactic structure is of great importance, especially when bearing in mind that almost the entire narrative (Mt 13:53-17:27) is based in its entirety on the structure and content of Mk 6:1-9:32. It is one of those sections in these two synoptic gospels where Matthew's structure and content are very similar to that of Mark. Thus, those instances in those sections where Matthew deviates from Mark have pragmatic implications which should not be overlooked.

Chapters 6-9 constitute the central part of the Gospel of Mark.⁸³ Mark's plot consists of two narrative sequences in the co-text that oppose each other. The first tells the success story that Jesus establishes in word and deed the immanence and reality of the kingdom of God amidst the empirical everyday struggle of people to survive. The disciples are positive and courageous agents. However, right in the centre (Mk 8:27-33), the success story takes a negative turn. Opposition to Jesus mounts, the blunder of the crowd who followed blindly is revealed, and the disciples are portrayed as people who simply cannot grasp what Jesus meant with his message about the establishment of God's kingdom amidst the empirical reality of forthright rejection and the concealed arrogance of seeking one's own interest. They are increasingly portrayed as people who either stall or project fear away from

⁸¹ Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The structure of Matthew XIV-XVIII," *Revue Biblique* 82 (1975):369.

⁸² See Van Aarde, "Matthew's Portrayal of the Disciples and the Structure of Matthew 13:53-17:27," 21-34; cf. Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus*, 2. Teilband: Mt 8-17 (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1990), 380-383.

⁸³ Dan Via, *Kerygma and Comedy in the New Testament: A Structural Approach to Hermeneutic*. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1975), 113-158.

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them by falling asleep in a time and context (the Gethsemane episode) in which Jesus is fighting for life and death. When Jesus is on the “way of the cross”, fear gets the better of them, and they run away. The narration about the empty tomb forms a denouement in this tensive narrative. Whereas the men flee from death out of fear, women become witnesses of rebirth and new life that follow after death. However, when the women are called by the risen Jesus to be messengers of his gospel, they run away from life, for they, too, become afraid. And here ends Mark’s narration (Mk 16:8). Morna Hooker⁸⁴ puts it as follows:

The story ends, then, with a total human failure. The religious authorities have failed to accept Jesus. Pontius Pilatus has caved in to pressure, the crowds have melted away, the disciples have run away. Judas has betrayed him, Peter has denied him, and at the end even the women – hitherto faithful – have failed him. In spite of the centurion’s confession, the story appears to be a tragedy. Yet Mark introduced it as “the beginning of good news,” and now we realise that it is, only the beginning. The very fact that the story is now being told means that the women must have overcome their fear and that the disciples did indeed obey the command to go to Galilee. There they had to learn all over again what discipleship meant: taking up the cross and following Jesus. The message entrusted to the women is a message of forgiveness. The disciples – even Peter – are being given a second chance.

Therefore, having knowledge of episodes in Luke’s and Matthew’s Gospels, early Christian authors added to Mark’s abrupt ending by giving the followers of Jesus a second chance.⁸⁵ Yet responding positively to the given second chance has not been accomplished easily. Some of the added episodes pertain to the disbelief of the messenger, others to the disbelief of the audience of those messengers – be they male or female. What these early authors observed empirically from the synoptic gospels is that trust as a “phenomenal and noumenal religious property”⁸⁶ changed into disbelief. It is clear that the “property” that is at stake here has nothing to do with a cognitive state of consciousness, but with a psychology of fear. According to Craig Keener’s interpretation of Matthew’s vision, “a life of faithful

⁸⁴ Morna Hooker, *Good News About Jesus Christ, the Son Of God, in Mark as Story: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Kelly R. Iverson and Christopher W. Skinner (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 180.

⁸⁵ The so-called “Freer Logion” (see note 5 above): Lane, “Theology of the Freer Logion,” 606-11; Harnack, “Neues zum unechten Marcusschluss,” 168-70.

⁸⁶ See note 70.

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obedience to God invites martyrdom as well as God's power."⁸⁷ These two dispositions, however, pertain to two alternating states of consciousness, that is, "to trust" or "to fear". In the Gospel of Matthew, this alternation of phenomenal and noumenal property" is portrayed as "little faith" in the empirically observable life of the disciples. Little faith is Matthew's version of Mark's version of the two alternating states of consciousness in the lives of the followers of Jesus. The Gospel of Mark revolves around "knowing" and "not knowing" – not in a cognitive sense, but as "lived experience". It is to experience success and confidence (faith) and to overcome fear.⁸⁸ Matthew, however, does not take over Mark's opposing tensive narrative sequences⁸⁹ because he reinterprets the disciples' faith as an "alternating state of religious consciousness".

This interpretation becomes clear when the climactic build-up of the three subsections of Mt 13:53-17:27 is noticed. In Mark's structure, an alteration occurred in Mk 8:27-33. Jesus went forth from Galilee to Jerusalem; Peter is the obstacle (stumbling block = *skandalon*) in his way. The positive narrative line alters into a negative one. In Matthew's case, this alteration occurs in a different manner. In Matthew's *co-text*, one narrative line does not alter by metamorphosing into another, as is the case with Mark. In Matthew's Gospel, the alteration takes place in the *experience* of the character of Peter as mouthpiece of the disciples.⁹⁰ This experience is described as "little faith" (*oligopistia*). Unlike Mark's "alteration" of the characterisation of the disciples from believing to disbelieving ("little faith"), Matthew does not create a radical break between Mt 16:20 and Mt 16:21. Peter's *confession* ("Jesus is the Son of the living God" – Mt 16:16) and his *anathematisation* ("Peter is like Satan, a stumbling block for Jesus" – Mt 16:23) represent two sides of the same face. This empirical observation is described as "little faith". Seen from a pragmatic perspective, it is an "alteration of phenomenal and noumenal religious property".⁹¹ David Garland formulates this observation as follows:

While on the one hand the disciples in Matthew's gospel comprehend who Jesus really is, they are yet, on the other hand, inclined to make common cause with the Jewish leaders, the

⁸⁷ Craig Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 442.

⁸⁸ Cf. Norman R. Petersen, "Point of view in Mark's Narrative," *Semeia* 12 (1978): 60.

⁸⁹ John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew: Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 94-5.

⁹⁰ Cf. Jack D. Kingsbury, "The Figure of Peter in Matthew's Story: A Literary-critical probe," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98 (1979): 72.

⁹¹ See note 70.

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opponents of Jesus. The disciples as leaders are susceptible to the same cataracts that blinded the scribes and Pharisees.⁹²

As endings to the three sections of Mt 13:53-17:27, the three Peter pericopes give expression to this “alteration of phenomenal and noumenal religious property” in a climactic rising tone. Each of these pericopes states that the disciples were fully aware of who Jesus was (Son of God) and of who they were (faithful apostles).

Little faith as fear – an alternating religious state of consciousness

What exactly this consciousness entails becomes increasingly apparent in the *co-text*, as Mt 13:53-14:33 is followed by Mt 14:34-16:20 and then proceeds into Mt 16:21-17:27. The preceding “parable discourse” ended with an assertive confirmation that the disciples understood the nature of the kingdom of God, as expressed in the parables (Mt 13:51). Jesus asks: “Do you understand these things?” (*sunekate tauta panta?*). They answer: “Yes!” (*legousin auto, Nai*). They acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God (Mt 14:28-33).⁹³ The experience then changes. Peter walks on the water with Jesus. Fear sets in. He sinks. The disciples are described as being of “little faith”. This observation repeats itself in the next subdivision. Peter confesses that Jesus is the Son of the living God. He is praised in a beatitude and is called the rock of the *ekklēsia*. The experience then changes. He becomes afraid of the way of the cross. The “rock” is called a “stumbling block” (*skandalon*). Once again, the same observation of the pattern, “belief – disbelief”, is replicated. In Mt 17:17 it is described precisely as such: *apistos kai diestrammenē* (= “unfaithful and distorted”). This experience changes in the episode dealing with the payment of temple tax. This experience even transcends the two preceding ones. Peter’s consciousness anticipates that of Jesus and together with Jesus they expose the loveless and exploiting temple cult.⁹⁴ At the height of the climax, Peter – like Jesus – is called “son of God”.⁹⁵ W.D. Davis &

⁹² David E. Garland, David E. *The Intention of Matthew 23* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 38.

⁹³ Timothy Wiarda, Peter in the Gospels: Pattern, Personality and Relationship, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*, 2. Reihe, 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 91-3.

⁹⁴ See Hugh Montefiore, “Jesus and the Temple Tax,” *New Testament Studies* 11 (1964-5), 62-3; David Daube, “Responsibilities of Master and Disciples in the Gospels,” *New Testament Studies* 19 (1972-73): 13; David Daube, “The Temple Tax,” in *Appeasement or Resistance and Other Essays on New Testament Judaism*, ed. David Daube (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 39-58; cf. Marius Heemstra, *The Fiscus Judaicus and the Parting of the Ways* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 189.

⁹⁵ Cf. Wiarda, Peter in the Gospels, 94.

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D.C. Allison⁹⁶ describe this remarkable Matthean *Sondergut* with a phrase such as “Jesus and his disciples are, as members of Israel, sons of God”. This story about voluntary payment of temple tax implies a rejection of the temple cult.⁹⁷ This narrative is a prescience of the cleansing of the temple (Mt 21:12-17).

The experience of having little faith, again, is an “alteration of phenomenal and noumenal religious property,” which follows the last pre-passion announcement (Mt 20:17-19; 20:20-25) and culminates in the passion of Jesus (Mt 26:8, 14-16, 40-41, 43, 56-57, 69-75). Jeannine Brown puts it as follows:

For Matthew, the “little faith” of the disciples is an insufficient trust that Jesus’ authority extends to the provision of their own safety and care (8:26; 14:32; 6:30; 16:8), as well as to their role as Jesus’ ministry helpers (17:20; cf. the delegation of authority to them at 10:1). Their “little faith” is evidenced by anxiety for daily needs (6:30); fear and timidity (8:26); hesitation (14:31); and inadequate understanding (16:8). They still exhibit this “little faith” after the resurrection, when they both hesitate and worship in response to the risen Christ.⁹⁸

This doubt in the risen Jesus is again encountered as a last observation about the disciples (Mt 28:17): *idontes auton proskunesan, hoi de edistasan* = seeing him they worshipped him, but also doubted. This *alternation* between “faithful recognition” (*proskunesan* = “bending of the knees” as metaphor for “worshipping” Jesus as the Son of God) and “doubt” (*editstasan*) is a repetition and flashback to the *verba sentiendi* on “worship”, “little faith” and “doubt” in the narrative about the stormy sea (Mt 14:31-33). The final outcome (Mt 28:17): *terrified people of little faith!*

Epilogue

If William James’s radical pragmatics helped me to experience disbelief as little faith, and little faith as fear, then I experience what Cornel du Toit implied in a radical-empirical way when he compared Steve Biko’s statements about fear with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s statements about fear:

⁹⁶ William D. Davis and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, Volume II: Introduction and Commentary on Matthew 8-18*, Latest impression (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 745.

⁹⁷ Davis and Allison, *Matthew 8-18*, 746.

⁹⁸ Jeannine K. Brown, *The Disciples in Narrative Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 119.

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Passivity is one of the response patterns of fear. Passivity can be a response, but in the apartheid context it was a non-response. Indeed, it was what the oppressors expected. Black passivity was not an outward response but an inward reaction in the form of self-contempt and self-mistrust. Biko wanted to change that.⁹⁹

As expressed in the endings added to Mark's Gospel, the reliability of the gospel and the integrity of the messenger of the gospel are in question. We ourselves become the stumbling block if we do not overcome our fear of marginalisation and change our little faith and disbelief into an alternate state of religious consciousness and property. Our relevance in a postapartheid context is echoed in the words of Cornel du Toit:¹⁰⁰ "We still have a long way to go!"

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⁹⁹ Cornel du Toit, "Black Consciousness as an Expression of Radical Responsibility: Biko as African Bonhoeffer," in *The Legacy of Stephen Bantu Biko: Theological Challenges*, ed. Cornel du Toit (Pretoria: Research Institute for Theology and Religion, University of South Africa, 2008), 218.

¹⁰⁰ Du Toit, "Biko as African Bonhoeffer," 234.

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