


Text as mediator: Mazamisa's *Dialectica Reconciliae* as a heuristic device for 1 Samuel 28

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Although his work 'has never been well received or known by his generation', this article concurs with Hombana's sentiment that Welile Llewelyn Mazamisa 'should be counted as one of the fathers of reconciliation in the course of New Testament interpretation'. Based on this understanding, the article foregrounds the philosophical hermeneutical approach of *Dialectica Reconciliae* in biblical hermeneutics propounded by Mazamisa. Specifically, it proposes *Dialectica Reconciliae* as a heuristic device for biblical interpretation. Following Mazamisa's *Dialectica Reconciliae*, the article discourages 'rigid and exclusivist' hermeneutics that lead to 'alienating one-sidedness'. It introduces the concept of a 'text as a mediator'. To clarify the concept of the 'text as a mediator', the article employs a building as a metaphor. To demonstrate the mediating role of the text, 1 Samuel 28 is used as a case study. It evidences how 1 Samuel 28 leaves 'gaps', namely missing details or ambiguities, that require the reader to infer meaning. The article asserts that in inferring meaning from these 'gaps', interpreters draw from their ontological and epistemological presuppositions.

Contribution: This discussion departs from the premise that 'an author cannot possibly incorporate every detail from the real world into the text, for the text would become unmanageable'. For this reason, there are gaps of silence within the text'. Readers are required to fill these gaps in 'by drawing from their own repertoires'. Thus, this discussion identifies the gaps in the text and shows how they allow different perspectives to focus on various points in the text to justify their standpoints. Bae and Van der Merwe, on one side, and Kiboko and Mulaudzi, on the other, are brought together in a debate to exemplify how readers, drawing from their own repertoires, justify their own perspectives by focusing on different aspects of the text.

Keywords: *Dialectica Reconciliae*; exegesis; hermeneutics; Mazamisa; text as mediator.

Introduction

Inspired by Mphumezi Hombana's writings on Llewelyn Welile Mazamisa's philosophical hermeneutical approach, this article aims to acknowledge Mazamisa's contribution to biblical scholarship. Two things shape the course to be followed by the discussion about to ensue. The first is that Mazamisa, through his philosophical hermeneutical approach, *Dialectica Reconciliae*, committed himself to fostering reconciliation amid perceptible animosity among contending groups in biblical hermeneutics. The second one is the considerable amount of friction discernible in the history of the interpretation of 1 Samuel 28. These two factors motivate this article to suspend the activities of the contenders for a while and focus on the bone of contention itself, namely the text. Surprisingly, a deep contemplation of the text yielded a refreshing understanding of the text. It casts the text as mediating among readers from different backgrounds. To explain this understanding, a metaphor of a building is employed, as will be demonstrated in this article. To start the discussion, a brief outline of the two contending interpretations of 1 Samuel 28 will be provided. A description of Mazamisa's *Dialectica Reconciliae* will follow. The metaphor of the building will be unpacked. The metaphor will then be applied to 1 Samuel 28 with Mazamisa's philosophical acumen utilised as a heuristic device. Concluding remarks will bring the discussion to an end.

Different interpretations of 1 Samuel 28

Smelik (1977:161), in describing the reception history of 1 Samuel 28, notes that 'this pericope gave expounders of every age much trouble'. Building on Smelik's observation, it is evident that, even before 800 AD, many 'gaps' that need to be filled by the readers have been noticed already,

Note: The manuscript is a contribution to the themed collection titled 'Honouring Prof Welile Mazamisa: The Reader, the Text, and Two Horizons', under the expert guidance of guest editors Dr Mphumezi Hombana, Mr Otto Makalima, Prof. Dion Forster and Dr Mzukisi Faleni.

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and questions have been asked. For example, the question of whether Samuel was raised by the necromancer or whether Scripture suggests an alternative understanding had already been widely debated (Smelik 1977:161). Interestingly, this question and many other questions continue to spark debate even today. In the section titled '1 Samuel 28 as a mediator', other interpretations of 1 Samuel 28 will be presented. However, because this article is written from an African context, a comparison between Choon Sup Bae and P.J. Van der Merwe, on the one hand, and Kabamba J Kiboko and Nkhumiseni Mulaudzi, on the other hand, has fruitful implications for a discourse of this nature in Africa because the former is anchored in western epistemology, while the latter is in African epistemology.

Bae and Van der Merwe (2008:1311) also ask: 'Did anything or anyone actually appear to Saul?'. They then present an array of perspectives ranging from total denial that Samuel was summoned by the woman of Endor to acceptance that, yes, Samuel appeared. However, this discussion is interested in their own stance on the matter. Taking exegetical analysis into consideration, they find it difficult not to agree that Samuel did appear. Bae and Van der Merwe (2008), therefore, argue that:

There are numerous instances in the Bible which indicate that it is impossible for the dead to communicate with the living. The incident with Saul and the woman of Endor is an exception, and the ultimate interpretation must be logical and aligned with the Scriptures as a whole. (p. 1314)

According to them: 'The fact that Samuel appeared to Saul should be seen as an exceptional manifestation of God's power in which God chose to rouse Samuel for His divine purpose' (Bae & Van der Merwe 2008:1314). However, they raise what they view as a concern, saying: 'Nevertheless, it is important to note that this text has been used to substantiate African exegesis' (Bae & Van der Merwe 2008:1314). They continue '... some scholars consider the deceased Samuel as an ancestor in this text' (Bae & Van der Merwe 2008:1314). For this reason, Bae and Van der Merwe emphasise that the fact that Samuel appeared is an exception that God allowed to serve His purposes as God. Otherwise, as the Bible clearly warns against divination, 'those who dabble in necromancy or spiritism commit what is considered to be spiritual prostitution' (Bae & Van der Merwe 2008:1321). Of even more interest is that Bae and Van der Merwe (2008) differentiate between what they call 'the Christian view and that of ancestor worship' (p. 1315) and call 1 Samuel 28 'the source of dogmatic controversy' (p. 1321).

Kiboko and Mulaudzi offer a different perspective. Unlike Bae and Van der Merwe, who view 1 Samuel 28 as 'the source of dogmatic controversy', Kiboko (2010:45) views 1 Samuel 28 as representing 'the Hebrew Bible's conflicted response to divination', what she calls 'the inner-biblical conflict'. Continuing, she says: 'In some passages, divination is highly regarded' (e.g. Ex 28:30; Lv 8:8; Nm 27:21). In these instances, the practice of divination stands as one of the legitimate and integral means of seeking divine guidance. In others, it is

abhorrent (e.g. Dt 18:10–11). Its practice can bring terrible consequences upon the practitioner (e.g. Lv 20:6, 27) (Kiboko 2010:45–46). Interestingly, while Bae and Van der Merwe talk of Christianity, Kiboko (2010) takes a different approach, referring to 'western Christian attitudes' (p. 204) and the 'African Christian Church' (p. 35). Kiboko (2010) argues that:

... [D]ivination is to Africa like breath is to living beings. Divination sustains life and keeps the equilibrium needed for the wholeness of the community. This is why it is so difficult to deal with negative western [sic] Christian attitudes towards divination. To remove divination from the African way of life is to destroy its essence, the source of knowledge, authority, and power. (p. 204)

Building on this perspective, Mulaudzi introduces another layer to the discussion, highlighting the distinctions within African Christianity itself. He notes:

In African Christianity, there are two different kinds of Christians ... the protestant churches and the African Initiated Churches (AIC). The idea behind starting the AICs included the intention to indigenise Christianity and interpret and apply Christianity in a way that Africans can understand. (Mulaudzi 2013:81)

This is in line with what he said earlier that 'Many Africans justify their ancestral consultation by referring to 1 Samuel 28:3–25' (Mulaudzi 2013:12). What Bae and Van der Merwe view as a red flag, namely, to use the biblical text to substantiate African exegesis, Mulaudzi views as a necessity. This distinction further underscores the cultural and theological tensions reflected in interpretations of 1 Samuel 28. At this point, it is essential to note the divergent perspectives on 1 Samuel 28. Bae and Van der Merwe (2008:1314) view the text as 'the source of dogmatic controversy', emphasising that its 'ultimate interpretation must be logical and aligned with the Scriptures as a whole'. In contrast, Kiboko highlights the challenges posed by 'negative western Christian attitudes towards divination', while Mulaudzi argues that 1 Samuel 28 provides justification for Africans' consultation of ancestors. This contrast reflects a clear polarisation of hermeneutical methods, bringing to mind Mazamisa's (1987:65) critique of the undue polarisation of interpretive approaches through exclusivistic and dogmatic orientations. Such polarisation invites an exploration of Mazamisa's philosophical hermeneutical approach in *Dialectica Reconciliae*. This exploration is presented in the section titled 'Mazamisa's *Dialectica Reconciliae*'.

Mazamisa's *Dialectica Reconciliae*

Dialectica Reconciliae is not a new method distinct from what existed when it emerged. As Hombana (2024:8) concurs, Mazamisa 'never claimed that this method originated with him, but he learned and adopted it as the tool to unlock the New Testament ...' Among other things, *Dialectica Reconciliae* was inspired by the reader-response theories' emphasis on the reader of the text rather than the author, moving 'away from the merely historically oriented ... interpretation'. However, Mazamisa (1987:173) cautions 'that the reader must not overshadow the text'. *Dialectica Reconciliae* was also

inspired by the role of the theory of reception, which explained the distinction between the codes of the author and the receiver. Mazamisa advises that 'to illuminate the fundamental difference between the way the author and the reader understand the words' could 'only happen when the text is respected, and when the context of the reader is respected as well' (Mazamisa 1987:174). This approach evinces the mediating spirit of Mazamisa to biblical interpretation.

Dialectica Reconciliae's distinguishing factor, however, is that it was framed by the South African hermeneutical landscape, which was characterised by dichotomous and antithetical readings of the Bible. Hombana (2024:4) expresses this sentiment as follows: 'In South Africa, Mazamisa had lived through the practical day-to-day struggles of the conflicting trajectories of theological interpretation in South Africa'. Itumeleng Mosala depicts the atmosphere of the time when he bemoaned 'the thoroughly Western and white outlook of' the then-dominant theology. He contended that it 'helped to reproduce the basic inequalities of an apartheid society'. As a result, 'black Christian activists emphasized the need for a black theology of liberation' (Mosala 1989:1). Mosala counts one of the tasks of a black theology of liberation as 'the critical function of exposing the imposition of the cultural forms of the dominant classes on the oppressed' (Mosala 1989:1–2). In this statement, epistemological contestation becomes apparent. From this scenario emerged an array of dichotomies – Black versus White, orality versus literacy, exegesis versus hermeneutics, among others. Though distinct in surface expression, these tensions shared a common undercurrent of racio-onto-epistemological contestations – contestations in which the Bible was not only invoked but served as a central hermeneutical terrain.

It is against this backdrop that the thrust of *Dialectica Reconciliae* is mediation – a movement towards interpretive reconciliation across divided epistemic horizons. In *Dialectica Reconciliae*, reconciliation does not mean to erase difference but to dignify its existence – a dialogical humility that allows divergent readings to coexist through principled dialogical engagement. In response to the dichotomy between orality and literacy, Mazamisa (1991:72) asserts that 'orality and textuality are complementary; they are a *Dialectica Reconciliae*'. This claim counters what he calls 'the tyranny of the written word' (Mazamisa 1991:70), advocating a reconciliatory framework in which oral and textual epistemologies cohere without hierarchy.

Dialectica Reconciliae resists what Mazamisa describes as 'alienating one-sidedness' (Mazamisa 1987:156–157), emphasising dialogical balance and epistemic inclusivity – without demanding uniformity of thought. Alienating one-sidedness refers to a condition in which one mode of knowing, interpreting or expressing truth is elevated as the exclusive or normative standard, thereby silencing or marginalising others. Divergent views need not necessarily converge; rather, they may agree to disagree within an ethic of mutual

recognition. Concerning the dichotomy of exegesis versus hermeneutics, Mazamisa (1987:157) remarks: 'Exegesis without hermeneutics, or vice versa, leads to alienating one-sidedness'. Despite the emergence of *Dialectica Reconciliae* as a counterbalance, the persistence of alienating one-sidedness remains undisturbed – entrenched as though untroubled by the very reconciliatory impulse that sought its undoing. The comparison of Bae and Van der Merwe, on the one hand, and Kiboko and Mulaudzi, on the other hand, witnesses to this.¹ Based on this observation, this article employs the metaphor of a building to express the same old truth that remains unheeded, as explained in the section 'The metaphor of the building'.

The metaphor of the building

One may argue that if the concept of *Dialectica Reconciliae* is well explained, the metaphor of the building is not necessary. However, despite interpretive advances by scholars such as Hans-Georg Gadamer, who sought to illuminate the dynamic interplay between meaning and understanding, alienating one-sidedness endured, immune to dialogical appeal and ontological generosity. The emergence of *Dialectica Reconciliae* confronted this persistent imbalance head-on, attending to the same fractures with renewed reconciliatory intent. Yet, decades later, alienating one-sidedness remains entrenched, seemingly untroubled by the very impulse designed to unsettle it. The metaphor of a building, therefore, serves not as an ornamental flourish but as a rhetorical re-inscription – an attempt to communicate an enduring truth differently, given that prior conceptual articulations have failed to elicit epistemic responsiveness. The image of a grand building with multiple entrances, welcoming visitors from diverse backgrounds – Africans, Americans, Asians and Europeans, is fascinating. In the same way, a biblical text draws readers from various cultural and linguistic traditions, inviting them into its world. This building has numerous doors, allowing visitors to enter and exit at their convenience. Similarly, the text allows readers to approach it from different perspectives, engaging with its themes in distinct ways. Once inside, the visitors converse in their native languages, just as interpreters engage with a text in different languages, each enriching its understanding. The text, like the building, accommodates these linguistic diversities. Visitors analyse the building through the lens of their own cultures, interpreting its design based on their experiences. Likewise, readers approach a text with their cultural backgrounds shaping their interpretations. The building offers an inclusive space where meaning is constructed, and the biblical text functions similarly – it remains open to multiple interpretations, welcoming diverse hermeneutical perspectives. Each visitor perceives the building differently, noticing unique details and drawing varied conclusions. Similarly, readers bring their personal and cultural contexts into their engagement with the text, influencing how they discern its themes and nuances. Like a building with different floors and dimensions, the text contains layers of meaning, waiting to be explored from

¹Bae and van der Merwe's approach is within predominantly Western hermeneutical frames, while Kiboko and Mulaudzi foreground African ethical praxis.

multiple vantage points. Despite the dynamic interaction between the building and its visitors – or the text and its readers – the structure itself remains unchanged. It serves as a stable yet inclusive space that fosters diverse perspectives and insights. By welcoming all, the text mediates among its readers, preventing ethnocentric tensions from leading to interpretive exclusivism or conflict. Having explained the metaphor of the building as mediating between different visitors, depicting a biblical text that mediates between different perspectives, the idea is now being applied to 1 Samuel 28.

1 Samuel 28 as a mediator

Now that the use of the metaphor of a building has been justified, the discussion proceeds to demonstrate how readers fill the gaps discernible in texts to construct understanding for themselves. According to Randolph W Tate (2008:196), authors ‘cannot possibly incorporate every detail from the real world into the text, for the text would become unmanageable’. For this reason, authors are selective when they produce texts. As a result, some details are omitted. This means there will be gaps of silence in the text. Readers, therefore, are required to ‘fill’ the gaps in ‘by drawing from their own repertoires’ (Tate 2008:196). Against this background, this discussion will not focus on establishing the semantic clarity of the verses that will be examined. Instead, it will investigate how readers construct theological, ethical and cosmological understandings around a given narrative juncture. It is also important to highlight that the meanings of all the verses that will be chosen are universally acknowledged, and they contain no exegetical complexities. All translations give the same semantic meaning, thus demanding less exegetical engagement. The translation that will be used is the English Standard Version (ESV). The hermeneutical focus is not on semantic meaning (what the author intended) but on *understanding* (how the reader applies the meaning to their reality).

Another factor that needs clarity is the issue of presuppositions. According to Tate (2008:221), ‘presuppositions are axiomatic, *a priori*, unconscious assumptions’. It might be helpful to unpack this sentence by Tate. Firstly, presuppositions are axiomatic. Something axiomatic is self-evident or accepted as true without requiring proof. Presuppositions function this way because they form the unquestioned foundation of a person’s reasoning. Secondly, they are *a priori*. This is a philosophical term meaning before experience. *A priori* knowledge or assumptions exist independently of empirical observation or lived experience. Presuppositions fall into this category because they often precede analytical or interpretative processes. Thirdly, they are unconscious assumptions. These are beliefs or understandings that operate beneath the surface of awareness. People generally do not actively think about their presuppositions; these suppositions simply function as underlying frameworks for interpretation. Bringing the three ideas together, Tate’s definition highlights how presuppositions are deeply embedded within thought processes, guiding

interpretation even before conscious analysis begins. This suffices to proceed to the biblical text.

1 Samuel 28 spans from verse 3 to verse 25. However, rather than engaging with every verse in detail, the focus will be on selected verses to demonstrate the metaphor of the building. The first verse is verse 3. It starts by saying וַשְׁמוּאֵל מָתָה. All translations share one semantic meaning: that Samuel had died. Different readers read this phrase having different ontological and epistemological presuppositions. According to Gire (2014):

[C]ertain cultural traditions view death as a transition to other forms of existence; others propose a continuous interaction between the dead and the living; some cultures conceive a circular pattern of multiple deaths and rebirths; and yet others view death as the final end, with nothing occurring after death. (p. 2)

This diversity of presuppositions reminds of the metaphor of the building mentioned earlier, which welcomes visitors from diverse backgrounds – Africans, Americans, Asians and Europeans with their different cultural presuppositions. Among the presuppositions Gire outlines, the one that proposes ‘a continuous interaction between the dead and the living’ and the one that ‘views death as the final end, with nothing occurring after death’ are selected (Gire 2014:2). Bae and Van der Merwe (2008:1321) unambiguously state that ‘the Bible makes it clear that once a person has died it is impossible for him or her to return to communicate with the living’. Kiboko (2010), on the other hand, argues:

Modern westerns [*sic*], it seems to me, fear the departed. Death is now considered to be a failure of modern science and a separation from life ... In so doing, we deny our connection to all that is. From an African perspective, we deceive ourselves and this denial does not help us ... We have used biblical law to argue that the dead are dead and must remain so ... But from an African perspective, this monologue is not real and the denial at its core does not help us. (pp. 378–379)

These two perspectives are selected to investigate how these presuppositions are sustained throughout the reading of this text. With Tate’s assertion that presuppositions often precede analytical or interpretative processes, verse 3 is examined further. Verse 3 continues to say: וַשְׁאוּל הָסִיר הָאֲבֹת וְאֶת־הַיִּדְּעָנִים מֵהָאָרֶץ. Again, the semantic meaning of this verse is universally acknowledged as saying that Saul expelled the mediums and the necromancers from the land. This statement is likely to evoke differing emotions based on the readers’ presuppositions. For those who believe in divination, this may be perceived as a loss – a moment of suppression. Their cultural belief is challenged. Conversely, for those opposed to divination, this event is likely seen as a positive development, aligning with their perspective on spiritual authority. Their cultural belief is affirmed.

However, in verse 7, Saul himself seeks out a necromancer to inquire. Like verse 3, this verse elicits contrasting emotional responses. Now, for the believers in divination, Saul’s action represents vindication – a return to what was previously

forbidden. On the other hand, for non-believers in divination, it marks a troubling contradiction, potentially undermining Saul's prior stance. A look at two comments on this contradiction might be enlightening. Bae (2007:132), who is antagonistic to divination, states: 'Previously, Saul had acted morally by expelling mediums and wizards from the land, but ironically at this point he regresses and seeks a medium's counsel'. There is a sense of disappointment in the last part of Bae's remark. Kiboko (2010), on the other hand, as a supporter of divination, says:

If, as many assert, Saul has exiled or killed all those who can divine through spirits of the departed or knowing spirits, why can his servants name this woman and her location so quickly? (p. 341)

Referencing Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, she states:

[T]he existence of expelled diviners is an 'an open secret that reached right into court circles' ... It is apparent that Saul's efforts have either been half-hearted or less than effective ... Saul was at times in need of diviners and expected his servants to be ready to bring the right one to him on a moment's notice. (Kiboko 2010:341)

Kiboko is in pain to undermine the report of the expulsion of diviners. These responses can be attributed to nothing but the presuppositions of these readers. These two verses, taken together, provide both affirmation and dissonance for each category of readers. They offer distinct focal points for both presupposed perspectives according to their interpretive lenses. Like a building with numerous doors, allowing visitors to enter and exit through convenient doors, these two verses provide a place for both perspectives. In this manner, both perspectives find a place for themselves in the text.

Bill T. Arnold explains the contradiction witnessed here. Arnold (2004:200) notes that the final literary form of 1 Samuel 28 contains more gaps than usual, even by the standards of ancient Hebrew narrative. In biblical literature, gaps refer to missing details or ambiguities that require the reader to infer meaning. The ambiguity Arnold refers to is reflected in the remark by Bae (2007:132) when he says Saul acted 'morally' when he chased diviners out of the land, but ironically, when he sought counsel from a diviner he chased away. According to Arnold, the text contains stylistic elements that make interpretation challenging, such as shifts in tone, ambiguity and layered meaning. Arnold (2004:200) argues that, while such gaps are a common feature in Hebrew storytelling, this passage appears to have an unusually high number of them, making interpretation even more complex. Because of these gaps, scholars and readers must engage in deeper analysis, filling in missing details based on context, tradition and theological perspectives. This contributes to the ongoing debate about the nature of Saul's encounter with the necromancer and the appearance of Samuel's spirit. In the beginning, this article indicates that already before 800 AD, questions were raised about this text and debated widely, as is still happening today. The text refuses to affirm

one perspective; the gaps allow different approaches with varying presuppositions, leading to diverse understandings.

The next verse to examine is verse 8. A clause in verse 8 states as follows: ויבאו אל-האשה לילה. Like the previous verses, the semantic meaning of this sentence is straightforward. It is translated as: 'And they came to the woman by night'. No translation says Saul came by day to the necromancer. The text itself does not give the reason why Saul arrived by night at the woman of Endor. None of the translations provides a reason for Saul's choice of the night for his visit. Arnold (2004) suggests that:

Saul's visit at night may have been a simple military necessity, but nighttime may also have been the approved time for such séances, the darkness of night being the appropriate time to communicate with those who live in darkness. (p. 201)

Saul may have chosen to visit the medium at night for strategic reasons, possibly to avoid detection by his officials or enemies. Nighttime here is treated as incidental rather than symbolically charged. Alternatively, nighttime could have had a ritualistic or thematic function. Arnold also acknowledges that nighttime might be the conventional time for séances, reinforcing the idea that darkness is thematically linked to the realm of the dead. This interpretation suggests the text intentionally aligns the setting with spiritual themes, rather than just logistical concerns. This gap, namely, the absence of a definitive explanation within the text, means that both perspectives remain viable, allowing different interpretive traditions to engage with the passage in their particular ways. Like a building that welcomes different people, this text allows different interpretive traditions to engage with it in their own ways. Rather than dictating a singular reading, it provides space for multiple perspectives to coexist. The narrative does not resolve this ambiguity but rather leaves it open, inviting discussion on whether Saul's actions were practical or spiritually significant. This gap in the text, the ambiguity surrounding Saul's nighttime visit, creates an open space for interpretation, making the text function as a mediator between competing perspectives.

Another identified gap is in verse 12. Verse 12b states as follows: ותרא האשה את-שמואל ותזעק בקול גדול. As previously, all translations agree on the semantic meaning of this verse. The ESV translates as follows: When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. Arnold (2004:201) is curious about why the woman cried out at Samuel's appearance. Arnold observes that the woman's reaction to Samuel's appearance in 1 Samuel 28:12 is unexplained within the narrative, forcing readers to infer meaning. Several interpretive possibilities emerge. Klein (2008) says:

No ritual is recounted. Perhaps, as Beuken suggests, Samuel beats the woman at her own game by coming up as a prophet of the living God before she could conjure up a dead ghost. (p. 271)

Klein's statement that 'No ritual is recounted' suggests that the text does not explicitly describe the mechanics of the necromantic process. There is no detailed account of the woman

performing a ritual to summon Samuel. This confirms Tate's (2008:196) assertion that an author 'cannot possibly incorporate every detail from the real world into the text'. This omission creates a gap in the narrative, leaving readers to infer whether Samuel's appearance was the result of the woman's actions or a divine intervention beyond her control. Klein's statement suggests that the woman may have been startled because she was not expecting Samuel to appear. Klein's reference to Beuken's interpretation adds another layer: Samuel beats the woman at her own game. This suggests that Samuel's appearance occurs independently of the woman's ritual – Samuel emerges as a prophet of the living God before the woman can summon a spirit through necromancy. This reading implies that the séance was ineffective, and Samuel's presence was an act of divine will rather than a product of the woman's ritual. This reading sustains the presupposition that views death as the final end, with nothing occurring after death. Further sustaining this perspective, Bae and Van der Merwe (2008) refer to several scholars who bolster this perspective:

... Eaton (1995:112) and Klein (1983:269) contended that the spirit of Samuel was clearly not familiar to the woman because she cried out with a loud voice as soon as she recognised the deceased Samuel. In other words, she was afraid of an apparition which she had not anticipated (Keil 1956:262). Pigott (1998:438) argues that the situation was not in her control. Whether or not the woman recognised Saul after the appearance of Samuel is not clear. (p. 1312)

The same people quoted by Klein, as well as Bae and Van der Merwe to support their presupposition against divination, are quoted by Fischer to bolster the presupposition for divination. Fischer (2001) says:

Some commentators assume that the woman had not expected what she saw. She is surprised (Beuken 1978:10) or shocked (Eaton 1995:112) because the situation is beyond her control (Pigott 1998:438). According to Klein (1983), Samuel 'had come up as a prophet of the living God before she could conjure up a dead ghost' (Klein 1983:271), but these views fail. The woman is not frightened because of 'an apparition she did not anticipate' (Keil 1956:262) but because she recognises Saul, 'the persecutor-king himself' (Fokkelman 1986:606). She had not expected him and is afraid that he has trapped her and will consequently expel or kill her (28:3, 12) (Brueggemann 1990:193). She is frightened for her own life. (p. 32)

In the framework of *Dialectica Reconciliae*, this gap, including the previous ones, acts as another mediating space, allowing theological and cultural dialogue rather than enforcing one definitive interpretation. Different traditions may emphasise one explanation over another, but the text does not resolve the ambiguity, allowing room for interpretive reconciliation rather than rigid doctrinal conclusions.

Interestingly, the ambiguity surrounding the woman's cry in 1 Samuel 28:12 naturally leads to an even more theologically charged question: Does necromancy work? If Samuel truly appears because of the woman's ritual, it affirms the efficacy of necromantic practices. Supporters of necromancy might argue that this moment affirms the reality of communication with the dead, challenging strict prohibitions against divination in biblical law (e.g. Dt 18:10–12). Alternatively, if

Samuel's appearance is not because of the woman's ritual but instead a divine intervention, then the text undermines necromancy's legitimacy. This interpretation reinforces theological positions that view Saul's consultation as misguided or his experience as an anomaly orchestrated by God rather than the medium. This theological gap enables *Dialectica Reconciliae* because there is no definitive resolution; the text *mediates* between these two perspectives rather than forcing an exclusive conclusion. Mazamisa's approach commends such a tension, suggesting that it resists *alienating one-sidedness* by holding space for both possibilities, allowing theological discourse to unfold rather than being prematurely closed. At this juncture, it is important to note that, despite representing contrasting views, both opponents and supporters of divination agree on the semantic meaning of the verses examined. An illustrative instance is when Bae and Van der Merwe, constrained by exegesis, opt to designate 1 Samuel 28 a dogmatic controversy rather than striving to alter its semantic meaning regarding Samuel's appearance. According to *Dialectica Reconciliae*, engaging in exegesis honours the integrity of the biblical text while attending to diverse understandings affirms the dignity and agency of its readers. Each act performs justice in its epistemic domain: one to the text and the other to the reading community. *Dialectica Reconciliae* sustains this dual commitment by embracing interpretive plurality not as conflict, but as convergence: a reconciliatory posture that values textual precision and relational inclusivity without demanding uniformity of thought. For emphasis to counter confusion, it might be helpful to repeat that, in *Dialectica Reconciliae*, reconciliation does not mean to erase difference but to dignify its existence – a dialogical humility that allows divergent readings to coexist through principled dialogical engagement.

Conclusion

Taking into consideration what has transpired from the foregoing discussion, a few remarks follow. 1 Samuel 28, like a building that is accessible to all interested visitors, is accessible alike to both anti-divination and pro-divination perspectives interested in exploring it. However, some of the language exhibited by both Bae and Van der Merwe, on the one hand, and Kiboko and Mulaudzi, on the other hand, evinces some polarisation. For example, Bae and Van der Merwe, concerned about divination, accuse 1 Samuel 28 of being a source of dogmatic controversy and contend that it needs to be logicised and aligned with the Scriptures as a whole. Apparently, this is prompted by the fact that 'this text has been used to substantiate African exegesis'. Contrarily, Kiboko bemoans the difficulty of dealing with 'negative western Christian attitudes towards divination'. Mulaudzi (2013:82) asserts that 'the protestant churches sometimes regard the AIC members as non-Christians'. According to Mazamisa's expression, this polarisation is undue and is generated by exclusive and dogmatic interpretive attitudes. The text itself is not implicated in this polarisation. The text provides a welcoming space for all its readers. 1 Samuel 28 specifically, with its numerous gaps which are more than customary for an ancient Hebrew narrative, is even more welcoming. In other words, the text is strongly anchored in *Dialectica Reconciliae*. Like a grand

building with multiple entrances, it draws readers from various cultural and linguistic traditions, inviting them into its world. Like a building with different floors and dimensions, it contains layers of meaning, waiting to be explored from multiple vantage points. By this outlook, this text prevents the very alienating one-sidedness that is sometimes perceptible in the sphere of Bible reading. By *Dialectica Reconciliae*, the article seeks to help Bible readers recognise that their interpretations emerge from their specific contexts rather than from an authoritative position over the biblical message. This perspective encourages a posture of engagement rather than finality, fostering dialogue, reflection and reconciliation within diverse interpretive communities.

Dialectica Reconciliae becomes even more essential when considering the depth of readership diversity in (South) Africa, which is greater than often anticipated. Mazamisa distinguishes between two types of readers: the 'participating' reader (can read), who engages directly with the written text, and the 'listening' reader (cannot read), who primarily experiences the text through oral transmission. The latter, often the largest constituency, is deeply shaped by oral tradition, navigating meaning through collective discourse rather than individual literacy. In this dynamic interpretive space, biblical 'gapping' acts as a bridge, not only between written and oral traditions but also between differing theological and cultural perspectives. The text, functioning as a mediator, fosters reconciliation across these diverse readerships, ensuring inclusion rather than alienation. Furthermore, while the 'participating' and 'listening' reader may belong to the same social group and share foundational presuppositions, their modes of engagement with texts introduce subtle yet meaningful distinctions. The 'participating' reader, through direct access to written discourse, interacts with broader intellectual frameworks and evolving theological debates that remain less accessible to the 'listening' reader, who relies on oral tradition for interpretation. This divergence nurtures nuanced shifts in presuppositions, shaping both individual and communal understandings of meaning. In this dynamic space, *Dialectica Reconciliae* plays a crucial mediating role, bridging interpretive disparities and ensuring that engagement with texts remains fluid, inclusive and open to reconciliation rather than rigid stratification. *Dialectica Reconciliae* has a crucial role to play in biblical reading and interpretation.

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