



# A counter-cult apologetic inquiry into "Christ in me international"

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## **ABSTRACT**

When the phenomenon of Christ in Me International (CiMI) appeared in South Africa, they received media exposure on multiple platforms. They were blamed by many as the cause for breaking up families and they explicitly rejected biblical doctrines while claiming to be Christians — actually the only true Christians. Their rejection of essential Christian doctrines gave them the label of a cult from a theological and doctrinal perspective. This phenomenon called for a counter-cult apologetic inquiry into CiMI. It was decided that the apologetic approach to CiMI would be both from a theological and doctrinal perspective, and from a sociological and psychological perspective.

Since CiMI has its own unique history and rejected the essential doctrines of Christianity, it was important to document their historical development and systematise their theology and doctrine in order to know where they come from and what it is that they believe. This was also particularly important since one would not want to be guilty of a straw man fallacy when refuting CiMI apologetically.

Although the theological and doctrinal approach to cults is primary, the sociological and psychological aspects of cults are especially meaningful when doing counter-cult apologetics. Consequently, this study engaged with the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults and applied it specifically to CiMI. By following this approach, this study established CiMI as a cult, not only from a theological and doctrinal perspective, but also from a sociological and psychological perspective. This entails that CiMI implements certain so-called control mechanisms to exercise high levels of control over their members and to keep them for as long as possible.

This study also investigated CiMI from a theological and doctrinal perspective, starting with CiMI's hermeneutics. It was extensively shown that CiMI does not implement a consistent hermeneutic when interpreting the Bible and is guilty of twisting the Scriptures. By misusing the Bible's authority for their own ideas, they are following in the footsteps of other cultic groups such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The result of consistent Scripture twisting is doctrine twisting.

Since CiMI rejects the essential doctrines of Christianity, it was necessary to reclaim some of these essential doctrines. An apologetic contrast and reaffirmation of Christian truth therefore accompanied this study. The specific doctrines discussed are the doctrine of revelation and Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the person and work of Jesus Christ. It was

demonstrated why CiMI's doctrines are not according to sound biblical teaching (while it claims to be).

The major contribution of this project lies in the fact that it is the first ever formal academic attempt to critique CiMI as a cult and thereby providing a stepping stone for anyone who is interested in doing counter-cult apologetics with members of CiMI and similar groups.

**Keywords:** Cult(s); Counter-cult inquiry; Apologetics; Christ in Me International (CiMI); Christ in Me Collective (CIMC); South African cults; Sociological characteristics of cults; Psychological characteristics of cults; Scripture twisting; Revelation; Scripture; Trinity; Jesus Christ.

## OPSOMMING

Toe die verskynsel van Christ in Me International (CiMI) in Suid-Afrika na vore gekom het, het hulle op verskeie platforms mediablootstelling gekry. Hulle is deur baie mense beskuldig as die oorsaak van die verbrokkeling van gesinne en hulle het Bybelse leerstellings uitdruklik verwerp terwyl hulle beweer dat hulle Christelik is — trouens, die enigste ware Christene. Hulle verwerping van wesentlike Christelike leerstellings het aan hulle die etiket van 'n kultus vanuit 'n teologiese en leerstellige perspektief gegee. Hierdie verskynsel het 'n teenkultus-apologetiese ondersoek na CiMI genoodsaak. Daar is besluit dat die apologetiese benadering tot CiMI beide vanuit 'n teologiese en leerstellige perspektief sou wees, asook vanuit 'n sosiologiese en sielkundige perspektief.

Aangesien CiMI hul eie unieke geskiedenis het en wesentlike leerstellings van die Christendom verwerp, was dit belangrik om hul historiese ontwikkeling te dokumenteer en hul teologie en leerstellings te sistematiseer om sodoende te weet wat hulle oorsprong is en wat hulle glo. Dit is ook baie belangrik, aangesien 'n mens nie skuldig wil wees aan 'n strooiopop-argument wanneer CiMI apologeties weerlê word nie.

Alhoewel die teologiese en leerstellige benadering tot kultusse primêr is, is die sosiologiese en sielkundige aspek van kultusse veral betekenisvol wanneer daar teenkultus-apologetiek gedoen word. Gevolglik het hierdie studie die sosiologiese en sielkundige eienskappe van kultusse behandel en dit spesifiek op CiMI toegepas. Deur hierdie benadering te volg, het hierdie studie CiMI as 'n kultus bevestig, nie net vanuit 'n teologiese en leerstellige perspektief nie, maar ook vanuit 'n sosiologiese en sielkundige perspektief. Dit behels dat CiMI die sogenaamde beheermeganismes implementeer om hoë vlakke van beheer oor hul lede uit te oefen en lede so lank as moontlik te behou.

Hierdie studie het CiMI ook vanuit 'n teologiese en leerstellige perspektief ondersoek, beginnende met CiMI se hermeneutiek. Daar is breedvoerig getoon dat CiMI nie 'n konsekwente hermeneutiek toepas wanneer hul die Bybel interpreteer nie, en skuldig is aan die verdraaiing van die Skrif. Deur die Bybel se gesag vir hul eie idees te misbruik, volg hulle in die voetspore van ander kultiese groepe soos die Mormone en die Jehovasgetuies. Die resultaat van 'n konsekwente verdraaiing van die Skrif loop ook op die verdraaiing van leerstellings uit.

Aangesien CiMI wesentlike leerstellings van die Christendom verwerp, was dit nodig om sommige van hierdie wesentlike leerstellings te herwin. 'n Apologetiese vergelyking en herbevestiging van die Christelike waarheid het dus hierdie studie vergesel. Die spesifieke leerstellings wat deel uitgemaak het van hierdie bespreking was die openbarings- en Skrifleer,

die leer van die Drie-eenheid en die persoon en die werk van Jesus Christus. Daar is aangetoon waarom CiMI se leerstellings nie volgens die gesonde Bybelse leer is nie (terwyl hul beweer dat dit wel is).

Die grootste bydrae van hierdie projek lê daarin dat dit die eerste formele akademiese poging is om CiMI as 'n kultus te kritiseer en sodoende 'n wegspringplek te bied vir almal wat belangstel om teenkultus-apologetiek te doen met lede van CiMI en soortgelyke groepe.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Kultus(se); Teenkultus ondersoek; Apologetiek; Christ in Me International (CiMI); Christ in Me Collective (CIMC); Suid-Afrikaanse kultusse; Sosiologiese eienskappe van kultusse; Sielkundige eienskappe van kultusse; Skrifverdraaiing; Openbaring; Skrif; Drie-eenheid; Jesus Christus.

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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. Title and keywords

A counter-cult apologetic inquiry into “Christ in Me International”

Keywords: Apologetics; Cult(s); Christ in Me International (CiMI); Christ in Me Collective (CIMC)

## 1.2. A cult: clarifying the concept

Since the term ‘cult’ is a heavily loaded term (Sire, 1980:20), the researcher deems it wise to first clarify the concept before proceeding any further. In this way the reader can understand what is meant by the term ‘cult’ in this study.

One must keep in mind that there is no universally agreed upon definition for a cult, only general characteristics that can be recognised (Geisler & Rhodes, 1997:2). In this sense Rhodes (2001:23, 31) mentions that, on the one hand cults will reflect certain theological and doctrinal<sup>1</sup> characteristics, and on the other hand certain sociological and psychological<sup>2</sup> characteristics. In line with this observation, cults may then be defined in two ways: either from a more theological and doctrinal perspective or from a more sociological and psychological perspective (Hanegraaff, 2009:8-9).

For the purpose of this study, the focus was placed on the theological and doctrinal characteristics and dimensions of cults but, nevertheless, this research also recognised the importance of the sociological and psychological perspectives. Although the theological and doctrinal traits of cults are considered to be primary,<sup>3</sup> Rhodes (2001:21) indeed observes that the sociological and psychological characteristics can also equip one with key insights into the

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<sup>1</sup> The list of these theological and doctrinal characteristics typically includes the following: new revelation from God, denial of the sole authority of the Bible, denial of the Trinity, denial of the full deity of Christ, devaluation of the work of Christ, denial of the personality and the deity of the Holy Spirit, denial of salvation by grace, denial of the priesthood of the believer, redefinition of Christian terms, compartmentalising conflicting facts, the central role of fulfilling prophecy and a tendency to revise the history of the cult (Rhodes, 2001:23-31).

<sup>2</sup> Cults also reflect sociological and psychological characteristics which usually include the following: authoritarian leadership, exclusivism, isolationism, opposition to independent thinking, fear of being ‘disfellowshipped’, and threats of satanic attacks (Rhodes, 2001:31-34). Stoker (1995:9-52) also lists 12 ‘control mechanism’ characteristics of cults where cults attempt to control their members’ thoughts, emotions, language, norms, behaviour, environment and information, membership and their view and experience of history, God, salvation, Bible interpretation and doctrines. Although many of these characteristics may still be theological in nature, they nevertheless have deep sociological and psychological implications for an individual.

<sup>3</sup> In his attempt to define a cult, McConnell (1995:17) mentions that for a Christian the sociological perspective on cults is not enough because the theological perspective focuses on the actual doctrines and practices of cults and compares them to biblical Christianity.

cultic mentality and, accordingly, cannot be left behind entirely. Therefore, a broad clarification from the theological and doctrinal perspective is provided here, which is followed by a sociological and psychological clarification.

### **1.2.1. The theological and doctrinal perspective**

Since this perspective on cults is clearly more religious in nature, it is important to take note of Hassan's (2016:85) observation that religious cults are by far the most prominent and most numerous. According to Sire (1980:20) a religious cult in the Christian context can be defined as follows:

[A]ny religious movement that is organizationally distinct and has doctrines and/or practices that contradict those of the Scriptures as interpreted by traditional Christianity as represented by the major Catholic and Protestant denominations, and as expressed in such statements as the Apostles' Creed.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to take note that the people in a group like this will gather around a person or a person's misinterpretation and misuse of the Bible, as well as new revelations outside of the Bible, which can lead to worldview confusions<sup>5</sup> and which will inevitably differ from other groups that are considered to be normative expressions of the Christian faith. In this sense a cult can be described as an "organized heresy" (Breese, 1989:16). Paradoxically, cults continue to insist that they are entitled to be classified as Christians while they are in fact non-Christian, because essential Christian doctrines, which define Christianity, are rejected by cults in one way or another<sup>6</sup> (Martin, 2003:17-18; Rhodes, 2001:23; Sire, 1980:26). It is important to add the notion that a cult deviates from a "host religion"; in the case of this study, which takes place in a Christian context, the host religion is Christianity (Rhodes, 2001:21).

### **1.2.2. The sociological and psychological perspective**

A cult, according to Langone's (1993:5) definition, can be described as follows:

[A] group or movement that exhibits great or excessive devotion or dedication to a person, idea or thing, uses a thought-reform program to persuade, control, and socialize members, systematically

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<sup>4</sup> The Creed of Nicene, Athanasius, and Chalcedon can also be added to this list because, together with the Apostles' Creed, they summarise the essentials of the historic, orthodox Christian faith.

<sup>5</sup> Sire (1980:26) applies this key term when dealing with the biblical misreading of cults. It refers to a case where someone "fails to interpret the Bible within the intellectual and broadly cultural framework of the Bible itself and uses instead a foreign frame of reference. In other words, rather than seeing a statement of Scripture as a part of the whole biblical scheme of things, the reader or interpreter views it from a different standpoint and thus distorts the Bible, perhaps seriously, sometimes even reversing the meaning."

<sup>6</sup> When Oliphint (2003:59) explains "the faith" as it occurs in Jude 3, he clearly claims that there are certain truths that every Christian must believe in order to be a Christian. This explains why cults, according to a theological and doctrinal definition, are not Christian. They reject and/or twist doctrines that define Christianity.

induces states of psychological dependency in members, exploits members to advance the leadership's goals and causes psychological harm to members, their families, and the community.

The reason why this is an acceptable definition is because it emphasises the way in which cults attempt to have control over its members in nearly all aspects of their lives. Stein (2017:14) explicitly states that the heart of the problem in cults lies in their tight structures and levels of control that they bring to bear over followers. This degree of control is achieved by implementing what is known as 'thought reform' programmes. These so-called control mechanisms, as labelled and developed by Stoker (1995:9-52), are also clearly implied by this clarification of a cult from a sociological and psychological perspective.

### **1.3. Background and problem statement**

#### **1.3.1. Background**

##### **1.3.1.1. The basic apologetic challenge of cults**

In the introduction to their two-volume work titled *Christian Apologetics: Past and present*, Edgar and Oliphint (2009:5) mentions that "world religions and other forms of 'faith', even the vague mix-and-match varieties of spirituality, are becoming far more prominent on the world stage than classical atheism". This statement suggests a growing Christian apologetic trend that needs further attention and it is exactly this notion that prompted the researcher to pursue a study of cults as another form of 'faith' or as a "pseudo-Christian religion" (Gruss, 2002:7). Stein (2017:7) also comments on the prevalence of cults by claiming that "though we may not always be aware of it", these cults "rub up against us in our daily lives more often than we know".

The study of cults is a vast and profoundly serious study. Martin (2003:18) therefore emphasises that there is no place to make fun of adherents of cults in a study such as this, because people who die affiliated with them and do not believe in Christ, as revealed in Scripture, die without the salvation that we have in Christ<sup>7</sup> (Rhodes, 2001:17).

Already in 1962, Van Baalen (1962:390) remarked that "the cults are the unpaid bills of the church". In 1963, Hoekema (1963:1) also added: "Cults have sometimes arisen because the established churches have failed to emphasize certain important aspects of religious life." In 1980, Martin (1980a:8, 11) made it clear that cults will never vanish and can no longer be overlooked by the church since they are at home on every major world mission field and on street corners of every major city of the six continents. He explained further that one of the

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<sup>7</sup> This is why the theological and doctrinal characteristics of cults are regarded as of primary importance.

causes of cultism is “the unfortunate failure of the church to institute and emphasize a definite, systematic plan for cult evangelism and apologetics” (Martin, 1983:22).

Although the failure of the church has a role to play, the growth of cults is rooted in a variety of factors. Martin (2003:20), for instance, says: “Dr Jan Van Baalen is correct when he says that ‘the cults are the unpaid bills of the church’. They are this and more.” Therefore, without solely blaming the church, Geisler and Rhodes (1997:14-15) also list the growth of relativism, selfism, fideism, subjectivism and mysticism as other causes for the growth of cults<sup>8</sup> (Rhodes, 2001:50). Singer (2003:16) also adds to the seriousness of the cultic presence in her statement: “Few, if any, countries in the world are without cults.”

The point of mentioning all these comments and observations is to emphasise the great and real apologetic challenge that cults place before the whole church (Martin, 2003:23, 25). Geisler and Rhodes (1997:1) accordingly encourage Christians to take the cultic threat seriously and learn to defend Christianity in the face of its assault, since this struggle amounts to a struggle between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the cults (Hanegraaff, 2009:14).

### **1.3.1.2. The possible appearance of a new cult**

The basic apologetic challenge of cults confirms the need for further study in this field – even here in South Africa. While doing research, the researcher came across a relatively new group in Gauteng called Christ in Me International (CiMI).<sup>9</sup> One can find all their basic information, including their sermons, on their website<sup>10</sup>. The leader of this groups is Xandré Strydom and he carries the title of the vision leader of CiMI. Other so-called ‘leermeesters’<sup>11</sup> in CiMI, who will also be referred to in this study, are Neels Labuschagne, Thys Kotze, Johan du Plessis, and Jake Odendaal. Under Strydom’s leadership they received attention in the South African media during the period 2016 to 2019 (Strydom, 2016a).

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2016, Swanepoel (2016a) published an article in *Rapport* titled ‘Stigter van kerk sê hy is Christus’.<sup>12</sup> This article mentioned the popularity of CiMI in Pretoria as a

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<sup>8</sup> Rhodes (2001:36-50) explains that troubled families, a reaction against secular humanism, a mystical turn to the East, increase in relativism, emphasis on the self, emphasis on feelings and experience, effective use of media and moral rebellion are all reason for the growing cultic trend that can be observed in the world.

<sup>9</sup> There are times when the ministers of Christ in Me International (CiMI) exclude the term ‘international’ when referring to themselves and only refer to themselves as Christ in Me (CIM). Other times they also refer to themselves with the shorter phrase “Christ us”. During the month of March in 2020, however, they officially changed their name from “Christ in Me International” to “Christ In Me Collective” (CIMC). Unless it is otherwise indicated, CiMI, CIM, CIMC, “Christ In Me Collective” and “Christ us” are therefore a reference to the same group.

<sup>10</sup> CiMI recently launched their new website: <https://cimcollective.org/>

<sup>11</sup> Translation: Master teachers

<sup>12</sup> Translation: Founder of church says he is Christ



charismatic church. The leader, Strydom, was crowned as the king of the church and apparently refers to himself and everybody who has been blessed with the Spirit of God as a Christ. Furthermore, members of the church are encouraged to divorce their marriage partners if their partners do not agree with the message of CiMI.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2016, another article was published in *Rapport* by Jones (2016), titled 'Kultusgeloof soos soetkoek'.<sup>13</sup> This article was an attempt to answer the question why so many people are comfortable in strange religious environments like the one that CiMI provides. A concluding warning in the article was that you are in trouble if all ideas have equal validity for you, especially regarding matters of religion.

On the 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2016, Van Dyk (2016:16-17), after an interview with Strydom, published an article in *Huisgenoot* titled 'Onmin oor "koning" se kerk'.<sup>14</sup> This article focused mostly on the person of Strydom as the leader of CiMI. CiMI was established in 2010 and Strydom claims that every born-again believer is a Christ and that the second coming of Christ is already here since it started with CiMI. Apparently, God will use CiMI here in South Africa to gather people around His Word.

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 2016, Swanepoel (2016b) published yet another article in *Rapport* titled "'Christus" vat vrou'.<sup>15</sup> Here it is pointed out that Strydom, after he divorced his previous wife nearly a year ago, married again. This marriage is seen as a confirmation from God that He will fulfil all His promises to CiMI.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2018, CiMI appeared on the Sunday evening journalism TV programme, *Carte Blanche*.<sup>16</sup> In the intro of that *Carte Blanche* episode, the host, Devi Sankaree Govender,

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<sup>13</sup> Translation: Cult belief lapped up

<sup>14</sup> Translation: Discord over 'king's' church

<sup>15</sup> Translation: 'Christ' takes a wife

<sup>16</sup> On the 'About' page of the *Carte Blanche* (2020) website, the following information is provided: "*Carte Blanche* is the M-Net pay-channel's flagship magazine and actuality programme, broadcasting throughout southern Africa during prime-time viewing on Sunday evenings. The programme, produced by Combined Artistic Productions, has become an institution among South African television audiences since the programme's inception in 1988. The show consistently ranks in the top 10 on M-Net and enjoys a large local viewership every week. *Carte Blanche* has developed a high degree of credibility in South African television journalism and has been awarded more than 230 local and international awards for quality stories that have made a difference. In August 2008, to commemorate 20 years on air, *Carte Blanche* launched the "Making a Difference" Campaign. As the name suggests, *Carte Blanche* covers a variety of subjects and prides itself on the diversity and depth of its stories. Stories range from investigations into abuse of the vulnerable, to the inspiring determination of South African sports personalities, both abled and disabled. *Carte Blanche* is also known to go undercover in tracking and arresting high profile criminals, or takes time out to explore the edges of existence. Ruda Landman and Derek Watts anchored the programme since its first broadcast and enjoy the status of the longest-running anchors on South African television. Sadly, Ruda left the team during 2007." *Carte Blanche* also shares the following points as part of their mission:

introduced the piece on CiMI with these words: “From controlling your finances to dictating your personal life, a Pretoria-based church is in the spotlight.” Interviews with many of the former members of CiMI were conducted during this episode. Some of these members claimed that CiMI was responsible for breaking up marriages and ruining lives. Govender stated that CiMI “stands accused of breaking up families, isolating and prying into the private financial affairs of its members. At the heart of this organization is its self-proclaimed leader who claims he has specifically been chosen by God” and who has been “divinely chosen to interpret the Word of God and bring it to the world”. The researcher was personally present behind the scenes when all the interviews with former members were conducted by the *Carte Blanche* team. Govender also arranged an interview with Strydom. The condition for conducting an interview from CiMI’s side was that they would also be allowed to make a recording of the entire interview and that their PR officer, Jaco Eloff, would also participate in the interview.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 2018, a TV programme called *Openbarings*<sup>17</sup> also addressed the phenomenon of CiMI. The purpose of this programme was to investigate new religious movements in the South African context. The host, Sandra Prinsloo, described Strydom as the modern-day king David and the one who received the Word of God. The panellists who participated in that episode were Clint Archer, Maria Frahm-Arp and Henk Stoker, who is also the promoter of this study.

There is more information to examine in these articles and broadcastings, which will be addressed later on in the study. The fact is that CiMI is attracting public attention and these articles and TV episodes reflect issues to be concerned about. The researcher is aware of the tendency in the public media to exaggerate stories and events, therefore these media sources can never have any final say regarding CiMI.<sup>18</sup> However, it is clear from CiMI’s own sermons that the media are not necessarily exaggerating these issues.<sup>19</sup>

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- “*Carte Blanche* aims at professional investigative journalism with actuality reports and in-depth features of the highest quality.
  - Honesty, courage and objectivity are our ideals.
  - We resist the usual, and challenge convention.
  - We transcend borders and strive to open minds, stimulate debate, nurture understanding and tolerance.
  - All this we do with the conviction that our audience has the right to see it all.”

<sup>17</sup> Translation: Revelations

<sup>18</sup> One must keep in mind that there was a reaction from CiMI’s side on the content of the public media where Strydom delivered a response in the form of audio-visual material.

<sup>19</sup> Consider some quotes from their sermons that confirm some claims from the media:

- “Ek gaan vir jou wys vandag dat Christus is nie Jesus Christus nie. Die Christus-plan van God het begin by Jesus Christus. Ek gaan vandag vir jou wys dat elkeen van julle, as jy weergebore word, is 'n Christus van God, 'n Gesalfde van God” (Strydom, 2016b).
- “Ek het nodig dat jy vandag moet hoor my hart as jou leier, en as jou wingerdstok, en as jou aangestelde Christus-inspraak ... God het net nog een droom gehad, om daardie een droom in

Since the theological and doctrinal aspects in defining and handling a cult are important for apologetics, it is worth pointing out that CiMI's sermons clearly reflect a rejection of the Trinity of God, the deity of Christ and the personhood of the Holy Spirit, which confirms their deviation from and distortion of essential Christian doctrines.<sup>20</sup>

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vervulling te bring het Hy nog net een plan en net een metode wat Hy nou aan ons toevertrou het" (Strydom, 2016b).

- "Mense, CiM is 'n duisend-jaar priesterorde wat nou gebou word sodat die hele kerk beïnvloed word deur 'n nuwe inspraak. Vreemd? Nee ... Of, vreemd, dalk ja. Maar onskriftuurlik? Nee!" (Strydom, 2016b).
- "Omdat jy hierdie woord by geen ander plek op hierdie stadium hoor nie, het jy nodig om laasweek se woord te verstaan. Hoekom ons jou inspraak wil wees ... die plan van God moet nou hier uitkom. Nie *kan* nie, of *kan net nie*, moet hier uitkom! Moet! Moet! Moet! Jy is 'n gevangene. Dit moet hier uitkom. Nou jy kan kies en vir my sê: Nee Xan ek wil nie. Dit is okay dan gaan dit deur die ou langs jou uitkom. Maar dit moet hier uitkom want die kennis is hier!" (Strydom, 2016c).
- "That is why we preach different than the other preachers in this world. Because when you have the revelation that you are a Christ all of a sudden flesh and blood does not tell you any more ... what to preach, but the Father in heaven is sharing with you what to preach and to say ... So, Christ in Me International there is only church in this world now, one God's church. One church that belongs to God and that is you" (Du Plessis, 2016a).
- "When God started to reveal the identity of Christ and of Jesus Christ ... and how all of a sudden in our lives things started to change, especially in our way of thinking. And how our way of thinking was started to be transformed in the renewal of our mind to the way God is starting to think. And as this happened how you will start to move away from certain friends and family and people in the world. Because your way of thinking started to change and their way of thinking stayed the same" (Du Plessis, 2016b).
- "I don't want to be separated from people, but God, through his Word and our way of thinking, He is bringing the separation Himself. Do you guys see this? ... As long as you stick to the gospel that is preached here you are in the plan of God" (Du Plessis, 2016b).

<sup>20</sup> Basic Christian doctrines like the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the distinct personhood of the Holy Spirit can for instance be found in the general Christian confessions, such as the Apostles' Creed, the Creed of Nicene and the Creed of Athanasius. Consider the following quotes from some of CiMI's sermons, which demonstrate their rejection of these basic doctrines:

- "As jy dit nie verstaan nie, gaan jy Jesus Christus preek as God die Seun van die Drie-enige God, en daardie leerstelling is 'n anti-Christus leerstelling" (Labuschagne, 2016a).
- "Een van die grootste drogredes wat jou gaan deurmekaar maak en jou deurmekaar gemaak het en jou beroof het, was omdat jy Jesus as God geglo het, en jy het nooit verstaan jy is ook 'n Godsoort nie ... Ek wil iets verklaar vanmôre, ek wil hê jy moet my mooi verstaan. Ek het dit so eenvoudig as moontlik probeer maak: Nie Jesus of Jesus Christus is God nie!" (Labuschagne, 2016b).
- "Dis absoluut katastrofies om Jesus God te noem!" (Strydom, 2016c).
- "God is holy. God is spirit. God is a Holy Spirit. This is not difficult! No, no, no it's God and it is the Holy Spirit. No! It's God! ... The spirit of God refers to His mental disposition or His mind. But God *is* spirit" (Kotze, 2016a).
- "There is no such thing as God the Spirit. God is spirit, yes! But there is no such thing as God the Spirit. God the Father, God the Spirit and God the Son – There is no such thing!" (Kotze, 2016a).
- "Christ in Me International believes in the one true God our Father ... What is Christ in Me International's stand on the Trinity? Christ in Me International does not believe in the Trinity theology. Amen!" (Kotze, 2016a).
- "We are the first ones in the world to reveal to you who the first son of God was ... Anyone out there, guys, who teaches you that Jesus is God is not teaching you that Jesus is the Christ" (Kotze, 2016b).
- "Listen to this, this will bless you. If a Triune God principle was so important to God, why would He not mention it once in the Bible? Why did something which is not mentioned once in the Bible become a foundational teaching of the Christian faith? ... We do not have a Triune God teaching!"

### 1.3.1.3. Is CiMI a cult?

The question that needs to be answered at this point is: Can CiMI be classified as a cult? When the clarification of a cult, as stated above, is taken into account, CiMI can indeed be classified as a cult from a theological and doctrinal perspective. However, I am not the first one to classify CiMI as a cult, since they already classified themselves as a cult in one of their sermons, in which Strydom (2016e) says: “They call us a cult. I do also ... Yes, we are a cult! ... So, when the next person stops you in Woollies<sup>21</sup> and says: Hey, are you part of that cult? Yes, I am ... Yes, I am.”<sup>22</sup>

This study therefore considers CiMI as a theological cult since it conforms to the theological and doctrinal requirements thereof. As this study progresses, it also shows that CiMI conforms to the sociological and psychological requirements of a cult.

### 1.3.2. Problem statement

There clearly is a relatively new cult in our midst, namely CiMI, which cannot be ignored. When Martin (1980b:14) deals with new cults he states that we must give answers to the foundational doctrines we embrace and that we must give this answer according to the guidelines God has given us in His Word. In 1 Peter 3:15<sup>23</sup> we are commanded to give an answer for the hope that is in us with “gentleness and respect”. In Titus 1:9<sup>24</sup> we are encouraged to stay true to the Word of God and to “refute those who oppose it”. In Jude 1:3<sup>25</sup> we are called to “contend for the faith”

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We do not teach Jesus is God! ... What CiM International teaches is found everywhere in the Bible and is actually something we can read instead of interpret” (Strydom, 2016d).

- “We have renounced it! We have made sure that we refuse to continue in that! We refuse to accept that there is a Trinity! We refuse to accept that Jesus is God! We refuse to accept that we need to worship Jesus!” (Du Plessis, 2016b).
- “Do you guys see that Christ is not God, but Christ is the image of God” (Du Plessis, 2016b).
- “So, in who does God abide in? In those that confess that Jesus is God? No, it is not what it says! That is what religion says! ... God does not abide in those that say that Jesus is God. It is not what it says here in my Bible” (Du Plessis, 2016b).
- “Many of you have been bombarded by religious mindsets, because it is commonly accepted that everyone that is a Christian believes in a Triune God. That was a common faith. And now that we have made it known that we do not believe in that theology we are called many things” (Labuschagne, 2016c).
- “We started to worship Jesus Christ as God and it was never supposed to be that way. That is not what this Bible is all about” (Labuschagne, 2016c).

<sup>21</sup> This is an informal way of referring to the popular retail franchise Woolworths.

<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere Strydom (2018a) contradicts this statement, explaining to his listeners that when one moves away from the traditional ways of doing things you are called a “cult and a sect”. He then goes on to say to them: “But you know, we are not a cult and a sect.”

<sup>23</sup> “But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.”

<sup>24</sup> “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

<sup>25</sup> “Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.”

that was delivered to us, and in 2 Corinthians 10:5<sup>26</sup> we are reminded that we must “demolish arguments” raised up against the true “knowledge of God”. These texts sum up our obligation to practise apologetics.

In the light of the above, staying true to our apologetic obligation, the need to address CiMI ought to be considered as important and urgent. The problem statement of this study can therefore be summarised in the following research question: What does CiMI believe, and how to deal with them from a basic Christian apologetic approach? It is important to note that this study will be the first ever formal study being conducted on CiMI in a counter-cult apologetic manner.

The specific questions that this study asked, include the following:

- 1) What is CiMI’s history of origin?
  - a. When were they established?
  - b. By whom were they established?
  - c. Where are they stationed?
  - d. How do they view their own origin?
- 2) What are the major theological and doctrinal themes in CiMI’s theology?
  - a. How does CiMI view itself as a church?
  - b. What is their view on God’s objective revelation?
  - c. What is their concept of God?
  - d. Who is the person of Jesus Christ in their theology?
  - e. How do they view the works of Jesus Christ?
  - f. What is their view of man?
- 3) Does CiMI conform to the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults?
  - a. What are the role and profile of a typical cult leader?

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<sup>26</sup> “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

- b. What are the role and profile of CiMI's leadership?
  - c. What are the so-called twelve control mechanism characteristics of cults?
  - d. How do these characteristics manifest particularly in CiMI?
- 4) Is CiMI guilty of Scripture twisting in a cultic manner?
- a. What is the grammatical-historical method of interpretation?
  - b. Do they have a consistent hermeneutic of Scripture?
  - c. What are some of the explicit cases where they twist the Scriptures?
  - d. How does CiMI view the authority of the Bible?
- 5) How do we reclaim the essential doctrines of Christianity from CiMI?
- a. Why is their view of God's revelation and Scripture wrong?
  - b. Why is their concept of God wrong?
  - c. Why is their approach to Jesus Christ wrong?

## **1.4. Aim and objectives**

### **1.4.1. Aim**

The aim of this study was to conduct the first ever counter-cult apologetic inquiry into CiMI.

### **1.4.2. Objectives**

The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To trace the origin and history of CiMI and to provide an accurate account of their history of origin. Since CiMI is not as old as other international cults, their historical roots are still shallow.
2. To provide an overview of CiMI's theology and doctrine to answer the question of what they believe. This objective was narrowed down to some of their most important theological themes.

3. To provide an overview of the role and profile of a typical cult leader and to briefly investigate the leadership of CiMI.
4. To provide a thorough explanation of the twelve control mechanisms as sociological and psychological characteristics of cults and show how this manifests in CiMI. This objective will also determine whether CiMI conforms to the requirements of not only being a cult from a theological and doctrinal perspective, but also from a sociological and psychological perspective.
5. To investigate the ways in which CiMI is guilty of twisting the Scriptures. If this aspect of the study is shown successfully, then the logical consequence is also doctrine twisting.
6. To focus intensely on some of the doctrines of CiMI that are important for understanding the question at hand, and to evaluate it in the light of historical, orthodox Christianity. Where it was deemed necessary, reference to other cults was also valuable in this part of the study.

## **1.5. The central theoretical argument**

The central theoretical argument is not only that CiMI is a cult from the theological and doctrinal perspective, but also from the sociological and psychological perspective. Furthermore, that CiMI is guilty of Scripture twisting, which leads to doctrine twisting, and that their theological commitments are unbiblical and therefore false and must be addressed by historic, orthodox Christianity in an apologetic way.

## **1.6. Research methodology**

### **1.6.1. Research design**

This was a literary study where the researcher made use of the relevant literature and audio-visual material. Furthermore, this was also a qualitative study, since there were discussions with some of the previous members of CiMI and other relevant parties, according to the auto-ethnographic research model.

### **1.6.2. Research method**

The auto-ethnographic research method refers to the process of writing with regard to the personal experience of the researcher in certain situations. Since this research was done according to an auto-ethnographic method, the researcher's observance of people in CiMI guided the writing process, which was limited to some of the observations regarding CiMI in

Chapter 3. Names of former CiMI members, with whom personal discussions were held, were kept anonymous.

### **1.6.3. Theological method and departure point**

The researcher associates himself with the words of Martin (2003:18) in his book titled *The kingdom of the cults*:

It has been wisely observed by someone that ‘a man who will not stand for something is quite likely to fall for almost anything’. So I have elected to stand on the ramparts of Biblical Christianity as taught by the apostles, defended by the church Fathers, rediscovered by the Reformers, and embodied in what is sometimes called Reformed Theology.

Therefore, this study was done from the perspective of Reformed theology and hence the entire discussion assumes that Reformed theology, based on the Bible as the infallible and inerrant Word of God, is the most consistent expression of the Christian faith.<sup>27</sup>

As shown above, CiMI clearly rejects fundamental tenets of historical Christianity. Beilby (2011:18-19) explains that Christian apologetics take on the task of defending what orthodox Christians have claimed about God throughout the ages. It deals with core Christian issues which include the affirmation of God as Trinity and the deity of Christ. It comprises those things considered to be the essentials of the faith. He further mentions that “what apologetics defends are the notions that if removed from a system of beliefs would eliminate the sense in which that system could be called Christian”.<sup>28</sup> In light of Beilby’s discussion, this study is an apologetic study in the context of cults, in other words, a counter-cult apologetic study. Whenever there are clear points of similarity between CiMI and other cults, where it was deemed necessary, it was introduced into the study.

Where appropriate, the applicable passages of the Bible were identified. The New King James Version (NKJV) was used, unless otherwise indicated. The reason for using the NKJV of the Bible is because it is the English translation of the Bible that CiMI also uses in their teachings. Exegesis was made of these texts according to the historical-grammatical method.

## **1.7. Ethical considerations**

According to the Risk Levels for Humanities, used by universities in South Africa, the present research should be classified as a ‘low risk level’. Because it is a literary study with auto-

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<sup>27</sup> For a brief summary of Reformed theology one can look at the three forms of unity (The Belgic Confession of faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort) as well as the Westminster Confession of faith.

<sup>28</sup> The principle is that there are certain truths that every Christian must believe in order to be a Christian.



ethnographic research, no harm can be anticipated as a result of the research. The research gathered data from literature and audio-visual sources already available in the public domain, as well as by using the auto-ethnographic research method in the form of discussions with the relevant parties.

## 1.8. Concept clarification

Since the terms 'cult' and 'apologetics' have already been clarified in the discussion thus far, all that needs further clarification is the phrase 'the essentials of the faith', which was used synonymously with 'historic, orthodox Christianity'.

- The essentials of the faith or the historic, orthodox Christian faith: The essential doctrines of Christianity are summarised in the Apostles' Creed, the Creed of Nicene, the Creed of Athanasius and the Creed of Chalcedon. Historically, these documents reflect the theological doctrines of Christianity that are common among all the major branches of Christianity. House and Carle (2003:9) explain that, although there are differences among orthodox Christian believers, "there is unity around the core doctrines that distinguish Christian denominations from heterodox groups and sects". In his critique of Mormonism, White (1997:20-21) also maintains that there are certain essential doctrines that define Christianity and which are logically prior in theological thought to other doctrines. This, however, does not mean that other non-essential doctrines are not important; it is just not 'definitional' towards Christianity. C.S. Lewis (2002:6) called this body of doctrines "mere Christianity". Geisler and Rhodes (2008:7) define the essential doctrines of the historic Christian faith as those that relate to one's salvation in a direct manner. In other words, the essential doctrines of Christianity are those that must be true for salvation to be possible. They further explain that the essential doctrines are also the ones that "are embedded in the great early creeds of Christendom". Ortlund (2020:75) adds that essential doctrines are not just necessary to draw the "fault line" between Christianity and "rival ideology, religion, or worldview", but also to "*defend* the gospel", since "without them the gospel is either vulnerable or incomplete". According to Geisler and Rhodes (2008:8), the following doctrines are considered to be the essentials of the faith and form the content of historic, orthodox Christianity: God's unity, God's Trinity, Christ's deity, Christ's humanity, human depravity, Christ's virgin birth, Christ's sinlessness, Christ's atoning death, Christ's bodily resurrection, the necessity of grace, the necessity of faith, Christ's bodily ascension, Christ's priestly intercession and Christ's bodily second coming.

## **1.9. The chapters of this study**

**Chapter 1: Introduction.** In Chapter 1 the study is contextualised and focused towards CiMI.

**Chapter 2: An overview of CiMI's history and theology.** In this chapter CiMI's history and theology are summarised as accurately as possible in order to make sense of their historical development and theological convictions.

**Chapter 3: Is CiMI a cult according to sociological and psychological standards?** In Chapter 3 the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults are investigated and applied to CiMI to see whether CiMI is a cult from a sociological and psychological perspective.

**Chapter 4: Scripture twisting: Does CiMI misread the Bible?** Chapter 4 investigates the hermeneutics of CiMI to determine whether they are guilty of the phenomenon of Scripture twisting, which will logically lead to doctrine twisting.

**Chapter 5: Doctrine twisting: reclaiming CiMI's distortions of essential Christian doctrines.** In this chapter some of the essential doctrines are critically reclaimed and reaffirmed over and against CiMI's distortions of these doctrines. This includes the doctrine of revelation and Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the person and work of Jesus Christ.

**Chapter 6: Summary and conclusion.** This chapter summarises the study in order to show that the aims and goals of this study have been reached.

## CHAPTER 2: AN OVERVIEW OF CIMI'S HISTORY AND THEOLOGY

### 2.1. Introduction

To understand a cultic group and to engage with them apologetically, it is important to make sure that the historical development and the theological and doctrinal system of the cult under investigation are represented accurately and faithfully.<sup>1</sup> When one sets out to subject a cult to critical analysis on a theological<sup>2</sup> and sociological level, it ought to be a fair representation of the cult in question. Therefore, to avoid for this study to be guilty of a straw man fallacy,<sup>3</sup> the aim of this chapter is to provide an accurate historical overview<sup>4</sup> of “the salient facts connected with the rise of” CiMI (Martin, 2003:18) and a faithful presentation of the “theological structure” (Martin, 2003:24) of CiMI.

This chapter serves as the doorway into the rest of the study. Without it, one will not be able to understand the historical roots of cultic behaviour and how the theological doctrines of CiMI originated – aspects that are necessary for a comprehensive evaluation of this group. If ever one were to ask: ‘Where does CiMI come from and what do they believe?’ the aim of this chapter is to answer it as accurately as possible. Still, it should be noted in the words of Martin (2003:20) that “no singular study, regardless of the time involved and the thoroughness of the investigation, can review all the data and evaluate all the facts necessary to completely understand the origin and development of cultism”. When one speaks strictly quantitatively, this statement also applies to this study.

To meaningfully provide an overview of CiMI's history and theology, the first part focuses on the historical development of CiMI. After the historical analysis has been dealt with, the second part delivers an overview of the theology and doctrines of CiMI. By providing an overview of their history and theology, one will be better prepared and equipped to understand the content which is part of the critical evaluation later in this study. Part of this endeavour includes clarifying key terms and situating CiMI's doctrines within the correct context. The task at hand therefore demands a systematic and structured synthesis of CiMI's history and theology. It should be

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<sup>1</sup> See Ankerberg and Weldon (1991), Geisler and Rhodes (1997), Hoekema (1963), Martin (2003), Rhodes (2001) and Van Baalen (1962), for example.

<sup>2</sup> The hermeneutical analysis of Chapter 4 can be absorbed into the larger theoretical framework of theology.

<sup>3</sup> A so-called straw man fallacy happens when one establishes a position “claiming it is the opponent's position, and then attacking it, when it is not in fact the opponent's position at all” (Geisler & Brooks, 1990:194).

<sup>4</sup> One should keep in mind that CiMI is only a decade old. This means that their historical roots are much shallower than that of more established cults like The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (Mormonism) and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses).

noted that, since this is the first formal study to attempt to analyse and present CiMI's theology and doctrine in a systematic way, there will be repetition in order to clarify and make sense of their teachings.

## **2.2. An overview of CiMI's history**

### **2.2.1. Introduction**

What follows in this section is the historical overview of CiMI, focusing primarily on three aspects. Firstly, the claimed prophecies that anticipated the coming of CiMI as a church. This serves to show that CiMI believes that they have been "called into existence by God" for some or other divine purpose (Hoekema, 1963:385). Secondly, the dream of Strydom which is, according to him, a revelation that he received from God. The purpose of providing some of this information is to show that CiMI is not just any other church but, according to them, the divinely appointed church which is God's mouthpiece in South Africa and the world. This claim ties in closely with the previous point. Lastly, some general remarks with regard to CiMI's historical origin and development are also provided. The data and information for this last point have mainly been gathered from an interview conducted via Zoom with Dawie Spies (2020), and from some of CiMI's own public material.

### **2.2.2. Apparent prophecies anticipating the coming of CiMI**

With regard to CiMI, Strydom (2019d) explains that since the 1700s there have been multiple prophecies by God showing that the last day gospel will come from Africa. More specifically, he claims that "the prophetic word said that it would start in South Africa". During his interview on *Carte Blanche* (2018), he also stated: "All the prophecies said that out of Africa and out of the tip of Africa, South Africa will come the last day gospel. And I really believe that this is part of that." This kind of claim from Strydom was also made earlier in 2017 when he explained that, "God called South Africa to be the start of the day. Since the 1700s, and out of the east of South Africa the sun has started to shine again." Moreover, CiMI also points out that the Christian church, according to God, "took a wrong turn for 2000 years" and has never accomplished anything. It is only since CiMI has arrived as a fulfilment of the prophecies, that they are busy correcting the things that the church has done wrong (Strydom, 2018a; 2016f).

These statements from Strydom give CiMI, at least for those who believe this to be true, a truly divine calling. God anticipated the beginning of CiMI in South Africa as part of His plan to introduce the "last day gospel" into the world. The arrival of CiMI in the "east of South Africa" has been prophesied and finally became true with the start of their church. The exact details of

these prophecies are never discussed in detail by the leadership of CiMI. For now, however, it is sufficient to show that this claim is indeed made by CiMI.<sup>5</sup>

### **2.2.3. Xandré Strydom's dream**

Linking closely with the previous point, as the visionary leader of CiMI, and besides prophecies, Strydom also claims that he had certain dreams from God. In these dreams God revealed things to him which further establish CiMI's ministry as a direct divine institution. In one of his sermons he shares his dream, which he identifies as the dream of how CiMI began.<sup>6</sup> According to Strydom (2016f), this dream helped him to finally grasp the revelation that CiMI is teaching.

He starts to explain that his wife was about six months pregnant with their first girl. In the dream he is part of a rugby team and standing at the back of a long line. At the front of the line there is a tent and each of the rugby players get a turn to go into the tent. Once a player exits the tent, the next one can enter. Everyone who comes out of the tent has a new tattoo on them. So, the first player goes in and comes out with a tattoo of a naked woman. The same happened with the next couple of players who entered the tent. They all came out with a tattoo of a naked woman. After a while, it starts getting demonic with tattoos of dragons. And so, every rugby player that goes into the tent comes out with something worse than the previous one. Finally, when it was the person in front of Strydom's turn to go in, he came out and his whole body was tattooed with the ugliest and worst things one can possibly imagine, and then it was Strydom's turn.

Strydom went into the tent and came out. As he exits the tent, all the other players who have already gone into the tent form a circle around Strydom and start shouting: "Show! Show! Show!" He explains that he smiled at them and when he pulled off his rugby jersey, on his heart were tattooed the words 'Colossians 1:27' which reads "Christ in you, the hope of glory". After this event, God spoke to Strydom telling him: "Whoever owns you determines your value. And because the world owned them, the world marked them by what the world thought they were worth ... But because I own you, I marked you with what you are worth ... [You are] equal in value, different in function."

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<sup>5</sup> Claims like these are in no way unique to CiMI. As Hoekema (1963:385) reminds: "The cult is convinced that it has been called into existence by God for the purpose of filling in some gap in the truth which has been neglected by the ordinary churches." Rhodes (2001:30) also adds to this that cults will see themselves as playing central roles in "the unfolding of God's plan on earth". This indicates that it is a general trait of cults to make such claims.

<sup>6</sup> Strydom (2016f) also adds that he usually shares this dream at weddings that take place between couples in CiMI.

After that, Strydom abruptly awoke from his sleep. God then told him to look at his pregnant wife next to him and apparently told him that a womb can be how fertile, if an equal seed does not fall into it, it means nothing. In the same way, the seed can be how fertile, if it does not meet an equal womb, it also means nothing. This image from God was meant to communicate to Strydom that if mankind is not equal in value to God, it cannot receive God's seed to become Christs and accordingly fulfil God's dream on earth (Strydom, 2016f).

This then is Strydom's (2016f) account of the dream that he had, in which God spoke to him and helped him to grasp the new revelation of CiMI. The establishment of CiMI was therefore not just anticipated via prophecies, but also confirmed via claimed dreams.

#### **2.2.4. The history of CiMI**

Strydom (2018a) suggests that 14 September 2013 was their first month as a ministry. He calls this the "first month of the kingdom". This is also marked as the year when God started to give them "a new word". Although 2013 is officially labelled as the "first month of the kingdom", their historical roots can be traced to a couple of years before that.

In the interviews that the researcher has conducted with different individuals, some of whom were former members of CiMI, and one who was a witness to the start of CiMI, the following information was gathered.

A Christian minister with the name Dawie Spies (2020) started an interdenominational ministry in Pretoria called Time Out Ministries (TOM). This happened before 2010. TOM, under the leadership of Dawie Spies, was an honest and doctrinally sound ministry. Spies describes this ministry as an informal movement in the form of a Christian community group. In this sense it was not a church or in any way meant to replace the church for those who were involved in TOM. In fact, TOM held their gatherings during the week and continually encouraged the people there to attend a local church on weekends. This group experienced a tremendous growth and, after two years, ended up using the facilities of the Dutch Reformed church called *Lux Mundi* since they needed a bigger space for their events. Spies further points out that the main emphasis of TOM was to encourage people to have a living relationship with Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and as one's only Lord and Saviour. Spies therefore separates TOM wholly from the teachings of CiMI.

During the time when TOM flourished, Spies also started another interdenominational ministry called *Manne van die Woord* (MVDW).<sup>7</sup> MVDW is also a Christian community which today has

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<sup>7</sup> Translation: Men of the Word

more than 50 branches across South Africa, and which aims to gather men around the Word of God. It is a place where men pray for one another and help one another to live in a fruitful relationship with Jesus Christ. It is also meant to teach men what their proper place in their families and working environments is as Christians in service of God. Just like TOM, MVDW also grew and flourished as a ministry which, in turn, increased Spies's workload as a Christian minister. He now had the responsibility of maintaining two ministries, and both were flourishing by the grace of God. This situation caused him to consider handing one of the ministries over to someone else, and it is at this point that Xandré Strydom, the current visionary leader of CiMI comes into the picture.

Strydom ended up at one of the weekend retreats of MVDW, and there he converted to Christianity. Spies explains that he saw how Strydom turned his life around and made a serious commitment to God. Strydom mentioned to Spies that he wanted to go into full-time ministry and help Spies with his work. At that stage, Spies told him that he did not have any finances to pay him a salary of any kind for his ministry work, but Strydom insisted that he was willing to wash dishes, carry the speakers for events, and so forth. The point is that Strydom had a servanthood mentality from the start, according to Spies. Spies also testifies that Strydom showed a great deal of interest in the Bible and had a beautiful heart and attitude with which he wanted to serve God.

Spies explains that one thing that made him incredibly happy about Strydom was to see how he spent a great deal of time studying the Bible. Very soon he was able to quote Bible verses when he helped Spies with the ministry work. At some point Thys Kotze, a current minister of CiMI, also became a Christian at one of Spies's ministry events. He had much the same heart and passion for ministry and spent serious time reading the Bible. Together with Strydom, Kotze started to help Spies with much of the ministry work. Strydom and Kotze also started to make use of teaching and preaching opportunities. It was at this point that Spies got remarkably busy with the MVDW ministry and started to think that Strydom and Kotze were two potential candidates to whom he could hand over TOM.

In the momentum of these events, another person, Neels Labuschagne, also a current minister of CiMI, got involved with Spies's ministries. Labuschagne had a questionable background, according to Spies. Labuschagne focused on Strydom and Kotze with their passion for ministry work and leadership. However, early on Spies got suspicious about Labuschagne's influence and the content of his teachings. He compares Labuschagne's teachings to that of rat poison. It is 99% pure, just like rat poison is 99% food. However, there is 1% of deadly poison in there, just like that of the poison in the food for the rats. Labuschagne taught Strydom and Kotze that everything revolves around the kingdom of God, but the essence of the kingdom is not about

Jesus Christ as King, but about themselves. When Spies realised this, he warned them not to put themselves in the same league as that of Jesus Christ, but Spies was already busy investing most of his time in other ministry opportunities and was not that involved anymore.

Spies explains that, without him knowing, Labuschagne managed to have a big influence on Strydom and Kotze, and evidently this influence was bigger than he had thought. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2010 he, with the approval of all the people who were involved at TOM at that stage, handed the ministry over to the leadership of Strydom and Kotze. This included the bank accounts and the music instruments that belonged to TOM at the time. Spies mentions that he felt insulted about the way Strydom came to his house and asked him to sign over the bank accounts. There was an urgency to Strydom that Spies thought was very strange. Despite his strange behaviour, Strydom announced to Spies that he would always remain his spiritual mentor and that TOM would always be sort of a home base for him and his wife.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2010, one day after Spies had handed over the leadership to him, Strydom sent out an email in which he stated that God said to him during that night that he must begin Christ in Me and also that Labuschagne is now his spiritual mentor. Spies states that he never meant for TOM to change into CiMI and that, according to him, he feels as if Strydom subtly stole the ministry from him and his other team members. One former member explains that the leadership under Strydom set out to alienate Spies from the ministry as soon as possible (Anon., 2018b). At this point Spies distanced himself entirely from CiMI and many people also left after Strydom made these announcements. During the period 2011 to 2012, people also came to Spies and told him how concerned they were about what Strydom and the others were teaching at CiMI. Spies explains that it was also during this time that there were many indoctrination opportunities organised by CiMI. He adds that there were a lot of money involved since the beginning and he personally knows of a case where someone sold their farm and gave all that money to CiMI. Swanepoel (2016a) also explains that since 2011 Strydom has used opportunities to teach CiMI's new revelation.

Spies claims that the mastermind behind CiMI seems to have been Labuschagne all along. This is also confirmed by a former member (Anon., 2018b). With his influence he managed to steer the situation in a specific direction. This also links up with Strydom's remark that Labuschagne sent out a message across the country saying: "God was going to take the church out of Egypt and into the promised land. Into the kingdom of God." Since 2013 therefore, according to CiMI, God has started to deliver the church from religion through their ministry. Later on, on 14 September 2013, Labuschagne was also the person who crowned Strydom as the king, and hence the "first month of the kingdom" began for CiMI (Strydom, 2018a). Strydom was crowned as king and many people bowed before Strydom at this event (Anon., 2018c).



## 2.3. An overview of CiMI's theology and doctrine

### 2.3.1. Introduction

What follows in this section is some of the most important theological and doctrinal themes featuring in CiMI's teachings. It is, of course, not an exhaustive overview of absolutely everything CiMI believes on a theological and doctrinal level. The researcher has picked out what he deems to be the core teachings of CiMI and fundamental to a proper understanding of their theology. This section does not evaluate the theology and doctrines of CiMI. A proper evaluative undertaking appears in Chapters 4 and 5.

### 2.3.2. In possession of progressive and exclusive revelation

CiMI repeatedly claims that they are in possession of a 'progressive revelation',<sup>8</sup> and that it is exclusively<sup>9</sup> their revelation that can lead people to spiritual maturity. Any other revelation or message, so the claim goes, will only veil the minds of people (Strydom, 2016c). Du Plessis (2016a) adds that only CiMI has the authority to teach this new revelation. He says, for example, that "the only people" who "can teach what we teach, is us". It is also stated that, "There has never ever, ever, ever, ever, ever been any other place that has manifested and started to build a kingdom in the world ... except us." The reason for this is because CiMI is the only place where the correct revelation from God can be found, according to Strydom (2018a).

Strydom (2016e) explains that ever since CiMI as a church began to preach their so-called 'new report',<sup>10</sup> everyone wanted to fight with them. In fact, he links CiMI and their new teachings so closely with God that anyone who persecutes them is in reality persecuting God<sup>11</sup> (Strydom,

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<sup>8</sup> This should not be confused with the development and progression in revelation between, for example, the Old and New Testaments. The way CiMI uses this phrase rather indicates that God has given them additional information outside of the Bible, which in turn influences the way they interpret the Bible. It is helpful to mention House and Carle's (2003:26-27) observation when they state: "Whenever an element of extrabiblical revelation plays a role in the formation or continuation of a new religious movement, there is almost always one person who rises to a position of unquestioned leadership and receives the new revelations. Often this person claims to be a prophet of God." Strydom does claim that he is the king God has chosen for the people to introduce them to the new revelation of CiMI (*Carte Blanche*, 2018).

<sup>9</sup> To further indicate that CiMI view themselves exclusively as the only true church on earth, one can consider the following statement from Du Plessis (2016a): "Christ in Me International, there is only one church in this world now, one God's church. One church that belongs to God and that is you."

<sup>10</sup> This entails the idea that the teachings of CiMI are new, especially since it is part of a new revelation. It is helpful to remember Van Baalen's (1962:11) statement regarding this claim of cults, which is not unique to CiMI: "There is little that is new under the sun." Of course, Van Baalen is only echoing Ecc. 1:9. It is additionally helpful to consider the notion that any apparent 'new revelation' from God cannot contradict the revelation that God has already given His church in the Bible (House & Carle, 2003:36).

<sup>11</sup> The context in which Strydom (2018a) expressed this idea is when he refers to the question Jesus Christ asked His disciples in Matthew 16:15. The question from Jesus in this passage reads as

2018a). According to him, the message of Christianity has been the same for 2 000 years, but now “the message changed” (Strydom, 2017a). He further says that, “You cannot have faith in something unless you hear it.<sup>12</sup> And it cannot be anything, it must be the Word of God, not the Bible, the Word! Because God’s Word is progressive.” With this statement Strydom implies that the Word of God for His church today is not entirely expressed in the Bible, and that God’s Word, whatever it ends up being, is progressive. This means that God’s revelation through His Word develops and improves over time, and that it is solely given to CiMI. In the interview on *Carte Blanche* (2018), when Strydom was asked to respond to the allegation that CiMI is a cult, he said: “[W]hen we describe and define ourselves not at all do we believe we are a cult. We don’t even believe that we are ... a new movement ... with all my heart I believe that we are the progressive Word of God.”<sup>13</sup> However, on another occasion Strydom (2016e) asserts that, “Yes, we are a cult!”

Labuschagne (2016c) also states that since “revelation is progressive” he will persist to study God’s word and to renew his mind<sup>14</sup>. It was only by doing this in the first place that he finally realised, after being in the ministry for years, that all the things that he used to teach in the church was wrong and inaccurate. The things that he used to teach included doctrines like the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. He then asks what one should do when you realise that all the previous teachings in the church are wrong, stating: “[W]hat do we do then? Protect what we ministered? No! We renew our minds and we start ministering the new revelation of God.” He adds that he came to “new knowledge and understanding of things”, and advises his listeners to avoid reading the Bible with “doctrinal glasses”.<sup>15</sup>

Du Plessis (2016b) claims that God brought something new “to light” in their souls in the year 2014. This ‘something’ was hidden and not understood before, but God showed it to them at the right time<sup>16</sup> and CiMI was given new spiritual truths. In 2014, according to Du Plessis (2016b), “God said arise and shine Christ in Me International, for your light has come.” This means that God’s glory, which is His view, judgement and opinion, has risen upon CiMI. He explains that

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follows: “But who do you say that I am?” Strydom states to his listeners that the answer to this question is “a Son of man is a Christ, a Son of the living God’, and then Jesus says, ‘flesh and blood did not reveal this to you.’ So, when these people persecute us because we teach people that they are Christs ... they are not persecuting flesh and blood, they are persecuting God our Father.” The point to recognise here is that Strydom connects CiMI so closely to God’s will that when someone is ‘fighting’ with them or persecuting them, they are persecuting God.

<sup>12</sup> This is a reference to Rom. 10:17.

<sup>13</sup> In the same interview Strydom also describes CiMI as “the little small organisation with a new progressive Word” (*Carte Blanche*, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> This is a reference to Rom. 12:2.

<sup>15</sup> Labuschagne (2016c) implements this phrase to refer to “unbiblical doctrines” like the Trinity and the deity of Jesus Christ.

<sup>16</sup> The notion that the new revelation was given to CiMI at the ‘right time’ links up with their teaching regarding day 7 and day 3 which will be unpacked at the end of this chapter.

the members of CiMI suddenly received the view, judgement and opinion of God in their way of thinking and, as a result, they “were elevated to light”.<sup>17</sup> He states that “all of a sudden we started to get revelation from 2014”. Those who were ignorant of this new revelation consequently stayed in darkness, according to Du Plessis.

Strydom (2018a) further claims that at CiMI they can “discern the signs of the times”. This means that the ministers of CiMI can read the spiritual signs that God is giving the world. Strydom (2018a) connects the ability to read the signs of the times with the “progressive Word” of God and emphasises that it is spiritual.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, those who are “carnally minded” will not be able to read the signs of the times. In line with this, Strydom tells his listeners that one must be “heavenly minded” and not “earthly minded”. He further claims that “any leader who cannot discern the signs of the times is a hypocrite”, and “earthly minded”. When the “progressive Word” is communicated in a spiritual manner, he claims that you can confidently “put your faith in it” and since CiMI communicates the progressive Word spiritually, one can put one’s faith in CiMI and their teachings. With all these comments, Strydom (2018a) implies that he, as the visionary leader of CiMI, can “discern the signs of the times”. He also sees himself as the only one who can correctly read the “progressive Word” of God since he is “spiritually minded”. The other people in the world “cannot see what God is doing because they are veil minded” (*Carte Blanche*, 2018). In fact, at one stage Strydom told other church leaders in the world to “shup up”, since they are “exposing their spiritual intelligence”, which is way behind that of CiMI (Strydom, 2018a).

To get biblical authority behind this claim, CiMI (2018p) gave a changed exposition of 1 Peter 3:13.<sup>19</sup> According to this group, this verse is not a reference to the traditional understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ, specifically His second coming. According to them, the apostle Peter is speaking of something “that has been a mystery” and that this mystery “has to do with the veil that needs to be removed from our picture (understanding) of Jesus Christ.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> This kind of language is very much in line with the claims of modern New Age thought, but also ancient Gnosticism. Gnosticism holds that the goal of *gnosis* (i.e., ‘salvation’ by knowledge) is for the purpose of freeing oneself from the embodied existence and living as a pure spirit. Thus, salvation is dependent on gaining the correct knowledge, which is usually hidden and/or mysterious and only available to an elite group.

<sup>18</sup> In general, CiMI interprets everything in a ‘spiritual’ sense. One could therefore say that in the theology of CiMI the spiritual has priority over the ‘physical’ or the ‘natural’. It is not always clear as to what the ‘spiritual’ entails according to them, but it develops into major themes in their theological understanding of things and paves the way for a gnostic dualism.

<sup>19</sup> “Therefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

<sup>20</sup> Strydom (2018a) claims: “[W]e are the first ones to minister that Jesus is not God but a Christ, the Son of the living God.” He makes this statement after interpreting Mark 8:27-28. This is the case where Jesus asks His disciples: “But who do you say that I am?” Before Strydom reads the apostle Peter’s answer to Jesus’s question, he says that Peter in this passage is a “picture of Christ in Me International”. The apostle Peter was apparently revealing the message which CiMI is now preaching

This is important because it will bring the salvation of the soul,<sup>21</sup> which will usher in the second coming of Christ.” CiMI claims that they are busy revealing the true revelation about Jesus Christ, which has been hidden from all the other churches until God ‘uncovered’ it and showed it to CiMI. Strydom (2018a) insists that God entrusted this new revelation to them at CiMI since God deemed them to be His friends. Furthermore, according to Strydom, “South Africa needs to get in line with what God is doing” and the only way South Africa can get in line is by believing the revelation given to CiMI (Strydom, 2018a).

CiMI’s view of revelation is therefore a progressive view where God is still revealing new spiritual insights to CiMI through His “progressive Word”, which might or might not contradict prior revelations from God. The visionary leader, Strydom, is divinely chosen to proclaim God’s new revelation to the world and this happens exclusively through the authoritative preaching and teaching of CiMI.

### **2.3.3. Unitarianism: only one God who is one essence and one person**

“In Christ in Me International ... We believe in the one true God – the Father of Jesus Christ our Lord” (CiMI, 2018g). This statement is taken from CiMI’s website regarding their doctrine of God and serves as the next theological doctrine to discuss, namely CiMI’s Unitarianism and their rejection of Trinitarian doctrine.

While the historical, orthodox Christian faith maintains that God is triune or a Trinity,<sup>22</sup> CiMI (2018g) rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and states that it is impossible to “grasp the concept of three-beings-in-one as one God”. As he speaks out against the doctrine of the Trinity, Kotze (2016a) asserts that even the demons do not believe in “three gods”,<sup>23</sup> implying that this is what the doctrine of the Trinity entails. Kotze (2017c) also addresses the use of the word ‘Trinity’ and then aims the following statement at Trinitarians: “You build a whole theology around a concept which is not scriptural. God who says how great He is, how powerful and how almighty He is,

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and therefore CiMI answers Jesus Christ’s question as “You are the Christ”, thereby applying it, not to Jesus Christ, but to every member of CiMI. Whether CiMI are the first ones to teach that Jesus is not God but only a Christ is up for debate. The point to realise, however, is that this “new revelation” of CiMI is mainly with regard to Jesus Christ.

<sup>21</sup> Take note that CiMI seems to use ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ interchangeably, and if they do maintain a difference, it is not at all clear what the difference would be.

<sup>22</sup> Historically the Christian church has maintained that the doctrine of the Trinity, on the grounds of special revelation, entails that God is one essence and three persons. Accordingly, it would be wrong to express the Trinity in any way suggesting that it entails the idea that there are three gods, deities, or beings. When CiMI (2018g) therefore asks the question, “Why do we divide God into three beings or persons when there are so many scriptures stating that God is one?”, it shows that there is not a proper understanding of what the doctrine of the Trinity entails. Labuschagne (2016c) also states that “there are three gods ... God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. That is what they believe, there are three gods.”

<sup>23</sup> This is a reference to James 2:19 which reads as follows: “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”

never refers to Himself as a 'God three in one', ever, ever, ever." Instead of believing in a Trinity, Kotze states that, "Christ in Me International believes in the one true God our Father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of our Lord and brother Jesus Christ. To worship Jesus Christ as God is to proclaim yourself as God."<sup>24</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity is motivated as false since the word 'Trinity' does not appear anywhere in the Bible (CiMI, 2018g). The Trinity is only considered to be a concept that was made up by the church and taught as if it were true (Strydom, 2016c).

According to CiMI (2018g) the doctrine of the Trinity was introduced into the church by way of a majority vote at the Council of Nicaea. It is stated that,

Ever since the Roman Catholic Council of Nicaea accepted a Triune God doctrine, by means of a vote, many Biblical translations and written works have been done from a Triune perspective. However, when we look at the studies and works of many theologians who lived in the years 120-325 AD (before the Council of Nicaea) we clearly see that many of them did not believe in a Trinity doctrine and differed with one another on several aspects. Looking at what Jesus Christ and the Apostles taught in the Bible we cannot find such a doctrine, but rather the opposite (almost on every page of the New Testament).

This claim involves the idea that the church has meddled with Bible translations to accommodate the doctrine of the Trinity and that this doctrine is nowhere to be found in the Bible.

CiMI (2018g) further explains that the doctrine of the Trinity divides God and accordingly causes division in the church: "Today, the church is divided because we divided God,<sup>25</sup> thereby depriving God of power, as in unity lies strength." This point is stated with more detail when CiMI asserts:

Scripture is clear that there is only one God and Father of us all; there also should only be one church, one calling, one Spirit, one faith and one baptism (Eph. 4:4-6). As Christians we seem to think that it is acceptable to differentiate between different church denominations ... It is commonly accepted to look from different angles at the same God, and still hit the mark. By accepting and allowing this, we are dividing God, going up against His most important commandment.

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<sup>24</sup> This claim seems ironic since, as will be demonstrated later, some of CiMI's teachers explicitly refer to themselves and the members of CiMI as "gods". Therefore, even if it were true, for argument's sake, that the worship of Jesus Christ as God proclaims mankind to be their own gods, why would it be wrong according to their own theology if they tell the members of CiMI that they are "gods" in any case? (Kotze, 2017a).

<sup>25</sup> The fact that CiMI asserts that the Christian church has divided God with the doctrine of the Trinity suggests that there is also not a proper understanding of God's simplicity, i.e., that God is not composed of parts, and how this doctrine relates to the Trinity.

In other words, since the doctrine of the Trinity divides God, it also divides the church by accommodating “everyone’s views, judgements, and opinions” instead of the one view, judgement and opinion of the one and only God (Strydom, 2017b).

Strydom (2018c) adds that at CiMI they only minister the “one God faith through Christ Jesus”, and therefore believe in “the only God”. Since the church has always believed in the doctrine of the Trinity, God did not entrust the church with His kingdom. The doctrine of the Trinity is deemed to be a lie that “made God unknown” to people (Strydom, 2016d). According to Strydom (2018c), a “many God faith”, which is what is found in the Trinity, is not worthy of the kingdom of God. But since CiMI embraces a “one God faith”, God now entrusts His kingdom to them and only works through CiMI on this earth. In light of God’s restoration plan, which is discussed below, CiMI also asserts that, as long as the church views Jesus as “God the Son”, the second Person of the Trinity, and not “the Son of God”,<sup>26</sup> it will “prevent God’s dream from coming into fulfilment on the earth”.

CiMI is therefore serious about their position as Unitarians and their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. It is stated very clearly: “Christ in Me International teaches that”, firstly, “God is not a triune God” and, secondly, “that Jesus is not God”<sup>27</sup> (CiMI, 2018g). By way of summary it could be said that CiMI holds that God is one essence *and* one person. Their rejection of the deity of Jesus Christ follows partially as an implication from their rejection of the Trinity.<sup>28</sup> The third and distinct person of the Trinity, namely God the Holy Spirit, is also rejected as an implication of being anti-Trinitarian and being Unitarian instead. Although CiMI does use the phrase “Holy Spirit” in their theology, all that it entails to them is the notion that since God is a holy spiritual being,<sup>29</sup> He is a Holy Spirit. It is expressed by CiMI (2018g) as the idea that God “does not have a Spirit, He is Spirit ... the Holy Spirit”. Elsewhere Strydom (2019d) phrases it in the following way: “Who is the Holy Spirit? God! God is Spirit, God is a Holy Spirit ... the Holy Spirit is not a

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<sup>26</sup> Although it is addressed in section 2.3.4, it is necessary to say at this stage that, according to CiMI, the so-called restoration plan of God heavily depends on God having Sons to represent Him on earth in exactly the same way that Jesus Christ was His Son. Since the Christian church holds that Jesus Christ is the “only begotten Son” of God (John 3:16), and that He is unique in that sense with no equals, it poses a problem for God’s restoration plan and His dream to be fulfilled since there can be no more Sons like Jesus Christ. CiMI (2018g) also addresses this topic by stating the following: “Why is it important not to believe that Jesus is God? For as long as the Church believes that Jesus is God, the Church will be without identity and will continue living as immature children without authority and therefore will remain unable to answer to our Father’s dream – the earth to be filled with His glory.”

<sup>27</sup> CiMI (2018g) explains that all attempts to prove that Jesus is God inevitably “distort the Scriptures and form unmotivated linguistic arguments”.

<sup>28</sup> Bavinck (2004:258) argues that, “Opposition to the dogma of the Trinity comes from outside (Jews and Muslims) and from within Christianity itself. The confession of the Trinity is the heartbeat of the Christian religion. All error is traceable to a departure from this doctrine.” This observation seems to be visible in CiMI as well.

<sup>29</sup> This claim from CiMI can legitimately be made on the grounds of John 4:24: “God is Spirit ...” However, as will be pointed out in Chapter 5, this is not a reference to the Holy Spirit.

thing. It is the Holy Spirit, not just any Spirit. It is God's Spirit." The phrase "Holy Spirit" is therefore in no way used to refer to the Holy Spirit as the distinct third person of the Trinity, but just used as a substitute for God as a spiritual being (Kotze, 2016a).

### **2.3.4. God's restoration plan**

#### **2.3.4.1. Introductory remarks**

A prevalent teaching in the theology of CiMI is the so-called restoration plan of God. In nearly all Strydom's sermons to which the researcher has listened, this restoration plan of God is repeated, and many times his listeners are asked to recite this restoration plan word for word after him.<sup>30</sup>

God's restoration plan is important to CiMI and to a large extent resembles how they view the broad narrative of biblical revelation and God's way of implementing His will and applying it to mankind. It also reflects CiMI's view of God's plan for the redemption of mankind and how He achieves it. Since "God and godliness are nearly invisible on the earth" according to CiMI, the restoration plan of God aims to answer the following questions: "What needs to happen for change to take place on an enormous scale? And when would this happen? When will the Kingdom of God be visible on earth?" (CiMI, 2018b).

Referring to God's restoration plan, Strydom (2018a) says: "We really believe this ... when we believe this, we can't believe anything else." This restoration plan of God is documented with the following three main headings (CiMI, 2018h):

1. God has only one dream.
2. God has only one plan to achieve this dream.
3. God has only one strategy of enforcing this plan to achieve His dream.

It is important to note the repetition of 'one' in the three headings listed above. Strydom (2016d) explains this as follows: "God is not divided, but he will bring division to establish this one dream." Unity and the concept of everything eventually being united under one dream, plan and strategy is central to CiMI and also links up with their emphasis on Unitarianism.<sup>31</sup> This adds

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the researcher listened to his sermon titled 'The 7<sup>th</sup> Day' (Strydom, 2019d).

<sup>31</sup> This is part of the reason why CiMI consistently critiques the existence of different church denominations in the world today. The presence of different denominations reflects the disunity in the church and the point is that God's restoration plan, which is revealed solely to CiMI and is exclusively accomplished by CiMI, will restore this disunity into unity. CiMI (2018b) for example asks: "Why then are there so many opinions on what truth is in the church? So many divisions (denominations) and many heads instead of one? The answer to this question lies in the soul of man. Unfortunately, the spiritual things (from God) are 'filtered' by the soul based on inaccurate knowledge (good and evil) opinion, strongholds and various references and traditions we have acquired through life. The soul,

more religious weight to CiMI's claim to exclusivity,<sup>32</sup> that is, claiming to be the only true church who are following the one dream of God and through whom God is currently working in the world.

What follows is a representation of CiMI's teaching of God's restoration plan according to the three main headings provided above. This will also serve as a broad overview of their theology and doctrine. Many of the finer details will be addressed when discussing some of the other theological and doctrinal themes of CiMI.

#### **2.3.4.2. God has only one dream**

CiMI (2018h) states that the one dream of God is that "He wants to fill the earth with His glory". Strydom (2019d) explains that since heaven already possesses God's glory, He also wants to fill the earth with His glory. Strydom (2019a) maintains that while heaven is an invisible, spiritual kingdom, the earth is a visible, physical realm which must be filled with God's glory in order that He can be represented on earth. God cannot represent Himself on earth since He is not physical but spiritual, and therefore mankind must represent Him. This is why, according to Strydom (2017b), "God needs mankind", and also why God created mankind in His own image and likeness. Without the image and likeness of God in mankind, mankind cannot represent God on earth. Strydom (2017b) further contends that the moment God uttered the words of Genesis 1:26,<sup>33</sup> He lost His right to reign on earth because He gave that right and dominion to mankind. Accordingly, he argues that "God does not rule on this earth. Mankind does." He further emphasises that when "God the King of heaven and earth said those words, God was not allowed to have dominion anymore. Dominion was given to His image and His likeness. I cannot believe that religion<sup>34</sup> teaches mankind that God rules and reigns on this earth."

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therefore, does not 'filter' outward nor reflect the Spirit inside of us accurately or unanimously. When the soul is saved, however, we will all have one view, judgement and opinion – that of God – and the church will be one." This statement suggests that whatever the solution to the many church denominations and opinions is, it has to do with one's soul that filters things, based on inaccurate knowledge. This is a problem that only CiMI's revelation is capable of solving. CiMI (2018i) also adds that, once someone has gained the knowledge of their theology and then leaves, no sacrifice can save them. One reads the following, for example: "If you have received the knowledge, but do not want to accept it, there remains no other sacrifice for you."

<sup>32</sup> According to Geisler and Rhodes (1997:11), the claim of exclusivity is a sociological characteristic of cults. This claim of CiMI, along with others, will become clearer as the study progresses.

<sup>33</sup> "Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

<sup>34</sup> 'Religion' is the term that CiMI's ministers use to describe the other churches in the world. It especially serves as a label for churches who teach the doctrine of the Trinity and the deity of Christ. CiMI is not the first cult to do this. Rutherford (1936:185) of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society also states that the "'religionists' of 'Christendom'" are the ones teaching the doctrine of the Trinity. One will always find the term 'religion' used in a negative sense by CiMI. Consider the following examples:



Building further on this thought, Strydom (2019b) also claims that “we as Christians do not understand the word sovereignty”. After asking his listeners what the word ‘sovereignty’ means, he answers as follows:

It means that God needs to submit to His own rules in the kingdom of heaven. God cannot stand up and feel ‘I want to do this and do that today’ ... God Himself as a King, needs to stand by the rules of the kingdom. Otherwise God is not a God, then He becomes a man who feels like this today and like that tomorrow.

This means that when God uttered the words of Genesis 1:26, a rule was established which prohibits God from ruling this earth.

According to CiMI (2018h), the glory of God with which He wants to fill the earth entails God’s “view, judgement and opinion”. In effect then, God wants to fill the earth with His view, judgement, and opinion. If this takes place, “the earth will be like heaven” (Strydom, 2019d). This can also be stated as the idea that “God wants the whole earth to be filled with His image and His likeness” so that He can be represented on earth by His image-bearers (CiMI, 2018f). The point to remember, however, is that God can only fill the earth with His glory when He is accurately represented on earth by mankind. Elaborating on this dream of God, Strydom (2017a) explains that the sole task of CiMI is to restore everything to the state in which it ought to be, before Adam and mankind fell into sin and failed ever since to represent God accurately on earth. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they lost the image of God in them, and the repercussions of that sin subsequently affected the entire mankind. In other words, Adam’s sin and its consequences were passed on from generation to generation after him. The way Kotze (2016c) phrases this problem is by saying that mankind is not necessarily committing sin but is in a position or state of sin ever since Adam fell into sin.

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- Strydom (2016d) states: “Religion made God so unknown by a Triune God lie.”
  - While denying the doctrine of the Trinity as something that cannot be found in the Bible, Strydom (2016d) asks: “Have you ever read in the Bible of a Triune God? The word ‘Triune’? But we read the things CIM preaches ... We can’t read what religion is teaching ... Why the hell did they preach it?”
  - Strydom (2016d) also mentions that “religion” is like a “disease” that will keep one dependent on it.
  - Du Plessis (2016a) claims to prove that their doctrine regarding a Christ is correct and states that the Bible is “sweeping away all the arguments of religion that we are not Christs”.
  - Du Plessis (2016a) also argues that “religion” is teaching something contrary to the Bible when they teach that “Jesus is God”.
  - Turning to Strydom (2017b) again, he also states: “You know what the problem is with religion and these people that say that Jesus is God?”
  - Strydom (2019d) asserts that, “Religion corrupted us by calling Jesus God.” He also states that the devil is represented by a serpent in Genesis 2 because through that God is showing them how religion will be the devil’s instrument.

Strydom (2019a) further declares: “Because the first man fell into sin and ... was corrupted ... he no longer was able to represent the invisible God correctly which would mean that the visible realm, earth, would no longer look like the invisible realm, heaven.” It is also important to note that once Adam fell into sin, God could no longer call Adam His Son. Consequently, because of Adam’s fall, mankind lost the “image and likeness” of God, and its status as “Sons of God” and found itself in a permanent position of sin (Strydom, 2017b). In another sermon Strydom (2016d) also phrases this in such a way as to indicate that mankind could no longer “share in the attributes of the Father”.

CiMI (2018b) further explains their view and implications of the fall. They maintain that, “due to the fall of Adam and Eve, mankind lost the position of righteousness” and that the mind of man became “corrupt because of a different knowledge to that which God intended him to have”.<sup>35</sup> The position of righteousness referred to here captures the idea that mankind had been in the state as one ought to be, namely a true and mature Son of God, who represented Him accurately. However, because of the fall, mankind then ended up in the state of sin.<sup>36</sup> Today, according to CiMI, “There are two spiritual positions man could find himself in, either the position of sin or that of righteousness.” CiMI claims that they are busy restoring the church to a position of “spiritual righteousness” by filling the earth with God’s glory and in the process accomplishing His dream.

Strydom (2019a) further explains that because of mankind’s fall the current world is not filled with the glory of God. Instead, the spiritual realm outside of CiMI is ruled by the devil, who clothes the thoughts of mankind with his lies and deception. CiMI, however, is busy opening the heavens for God and giving Him more and more authority on earth to clothe the thoughts of mankind with the truths of CiMI’s teachings and to reign on earth through them. Since God is not allowed to rule on earth, Strydom (2017b) explains to his listeners that the “only way God [can rule and reign on this earth] is through you”. At one stage Strydom (2017b) stated that, “If God rules and reigns on this earth with all the murder, and hate, and destruction ... and all the corruption that is there. Why do we want to go to heaven because God rules and reigns there

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<sup>35</sup> CiMI (2018b) offers the explanation that man was only supposed to have “knowledge of life”. But when man gained “knowledge of good and evil”, sin entered the world. These are references to the “tree of life” and the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” in Genesis 2:9. Part of CiMI’s purpose is to restore everything to the state in which it ought to be, which to a large extent includes the notion of giving people the correct knowledge with regard to Jesus Christ and the true identity of mankind. Since mankind fell into sin as a result of gaining the wrong knowledge, everything can be restored to the state as things ought to be by gaining the right knowledge again. This notion takes one back to the issue of Gnosticism.

<sup>36</sup> CiMI (2018b) explains that sin literally means “to miss the mark”, and in this sense missing the mark entails not being an image bearer and a Son of God who can accurately represent God on earth. Therefore, when one is in a state of sin, according to CiMI, the dream of God is compromised because the earth cannot be filled with God’s glory.

as well?” This also suggests that God is not currently ruling earth and can only rule earth through His image bearers and His Sons who are in the state in which they ought to be.

Filling the earth with God’s view, judgement and opinion entails the one dream of God. Because Adam fell into sin, he lost the ability to accurately represent the invisible God visibly on earth and therefore could not fill the earth with God’s glory. Since he represented mankind when he fell into sin, the entire human race after him could also not represent God on earth and consequently fill the earth with God’s glory. This fall is articulated as a fall from righteousness, i.e., the state in which one ought to be, into a state of sin, which was the consequence of gaining knowledge of the world, which God did not intend mankind to have. Through Adam’s fall, mankind also lost God’s image and the status of being God’s Sons. This explains why a restoration plan is needed in the first place. But, through CiMI’s ministry, God is busy accomplishing His dream by aligning all the different views, judgements and opinions of mankind with His one view, judgment and opinion. In this sense, Strydom (2017b) comments that “we need all to move to that one view, judgement, and opinion, because we got a job to do and God needs us. God needs us to do our job and represent Him accurately. Not with our views, judgements, and opinions, but with His.” To do this, God has only one plan.

#### **2.3.4.3. God has only one plan to achieve this dream**

The one plan that God has to achieve His one dream is that “He has chosen mankind to be ‘in Christ’” which is the second Adam specie, or as Strydom (2018b) phrases it, “a godly specie” (CiMI, 2018h). CiMI (2018h) uses the word ‘specie’ here with the explanation that, “The newly coined word ‘specie’ (derived from ‘species’) is used to emphasize the fact that there can be only one kind or sort (no variation).”<sup>37</sup> One must remember that Adam fell into sin, and as a representative of mankind, the whole Adam specie is now part of that fallen, sinful state. Strydom (2019d) further explains the meaning by asserting that everyone was first an Adam, or part of the Adam specie, but now everyone who are “born from above” or “born again” becomes<sup>38</sup> a Christ<sup>39</sup> by virtue of being anointed with the Spirit of God. In this sense, God has

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<sup>37</sup> Note the emphasis on ‘one’ here again. There is only one specie with which God is working in the world, and that is the Christ specie. Therefore, if one wants to be part of what God is doing in the world, you must be reborn into the Christ specie by embracing CiMI’s new revelation (Strydom, 2016d).

<sup>38</sup> It should be noted that this transformation of becoming a Christ is expressed in a vague manner. It is not always clear how one should understand it. Most of the time, however, it sounds as if this transformation happens on an ontological and epistemological level for the individual going through it. In other words, the way in which transformation into a Christ takes place happens ontologically in the sense that a person *becomes* a Christ, whatever that may entail, and epistemologically in the sense that one comes to the realisation that one is a Christ after being born again. This explanation is also valid for the transformation into a godkind, which is discussed below.

<sup>39</sup> There might be a parallel between this teaching of CiMI and the idea of reaching ‘Christ consciousness’ by realising one’s own inherent deity, which can be found in broader New Thought and New Age

chosen mankind out of “Adam and into Christ” (Strydom, 2018a). This rebirth happens when one has the correct knowledge and understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ and believes that CiMI’s new revelation regarding Jesus Christ is true.<sup>40</sup>

The way in which God was able to make this move from the fallen Adam specie to the new Christ specie possible, was by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ who was the very first Christ.<sup>41</sup> According to Strydom (2018b), the cross of Jesus Christ was like a sort of ‘pass over’<sup>42</sup> or ‘cross over’<sup>43</sup> in which a person moved out of Adam and into Christ. People who are born again and are anointed with the Spirit of God therefore ‘pass over’ from the Adam specie, into the Christ specie. In line with this, Strydom (2019d) explains to his listeners that Jesus Christ paid a dear price on the cross and now “you are no longer a fallen Adam specie, you are reborn as a Christ specie, and Jesus Christ was the first of many brethren”. The notion that Jesus Christ is the first Christ or the “first of many brethren” is often explained in a way to indicate that Jesus Christ as the first Christ was the seed, and all the members of CiMI who are reborn as Christ are the harvest of that seed. This explains why Strydom (2016d) says:

[E]verything in the Bible is actually about a harvest. Not just one person.<sup>44</sup> So, everything in the Bible is based on Christ. Everything in the Bible is centred around Christ, and everything in the Bible is a revelation about Christ. So, when you read something about Jesus Christ, the first Christ, it says something about you as a specie. Please make that note because it is very important.<sup>45</sup>

Strydom (2019a) adds:

Because of the act Jesus paid on the cross mankind moved from an old mankind into a new one. Why? Because God wanted to restore a being whose job, whose only job is to be a physical representative ... a visible representative of the invisible God and His glory so that this earth can change from a world that does not look like God, into the kingdom of heaven which looks like the realm of God ... Earth needs to look like heaven. Mankind needs to look like God.

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circles. In this context ‘Christ’ is only an impersonal, abstract principle to be reached or achieved. This is yet another link with Gnosticism.

<sup>40</sup> As will be seen later, the cross of Jesus Christ is viewed very differently by CiMI when compared to historical, orthodox Christianity. The ‘correct’ knowledge and understanding of the cross of Jesus Christ is used here to refer to the way CiMI views and understands the cross of Jesus Christ.

<sup>41</sup> Jesus Christ is only considered to be the first of many Christs to follow. CiMI (2018e) for example claims that Jesus Christ was “the first of a new specie ... he is the origin of the specie, the alpha of the specie”. It is also stated in the sense of referring to Jesus Christ as the seed of the Christ specie, while CiMI is the harvest of that seed, which includes many Christs (Strydom, 2016d).

<sup>42</sup> CiMI is playing with theologically loaded terms in this context. With the use of “pass over” to indicate that one who is born again passes over from the Adam specie to the Christ specie, CiMI is in some sense attempting to link this kind of teaching with the Passover feast of the Israelites.

<sup>43</sup> This is, again, a wordplay referring to Jesus’s crucifixion. The cross of Jesus Christ allows one to “cross over” from the old Adam specie to the new Christ specie.

<sup>44</sup> This “one person” in this context is a reference to the person of Jesus Christ.

<sup>45</sup> This is a particularly important point to understand because this is what allows CiMI to read themselves into many passages of the Bible. Since CiMI holds to a position where everything that was true of Jesus Christ is also true of them, it allows them to apply certain features, solely belonging to Jesus Christ, to themselves as Christs.

Strydom (2017b) also explains the idea that Jesus was only the first Christ by using one of the phrases Jesus Christ used to refer to Himself in the New Testament: “alpha and omega”.<sup>46</sup> He suggests that Jesus is the “alpha and omega” because “He was the alpha of the new specie, and the omega of the old one”. In other words, He was the first Christ specie and the last Adam specie. Strydom, however, adds that since Jesus Christ was also the Immanuel, which means “God with us”;<sup>47</sup> the rest of the Christ specie can now also be Immanuel. He says, for example:

[I]f the alpha is Immanuel, then the specie can also be Immanuel. And the Creator can finally start to express Himself through the way He created mankind in the beginning ... We all need to become Immanuel, ‘God with us’, so that God can start to express Himself in this earth. That is what it is all about ... It is not about anything else.

Consequently, when one becomes a Christ after being born again, one also becomes an Immanuel.

The principle to identify here is that everything that is true of Jesus Christ is also true of someone who is born again.<sup>48</sup> This is what the cross of Jesus Christ accomplished and made possible in CiMI’s theological structure. In this sense, since Jesus Christ as the first Christ was Immanuel, the rest of mankind who are born from above is also Immanuel. Strydom (2018a) very explicitly teaches this principle to his listeners: “Everything that is true of the first one of the specie is also true about you.” In one of his other sermons he also explains it to his listeners as follows:

Because Jesus Christ is the first of a specie, everything that is true of Him, is true of you as well, because you are now a Christ, a second Adam. This means that when God put everything under Jesus Christ’s feet, He also puts everything under your feet as a Christ (Strydom, 2016d).

It is also worth noting that being a Christ is a precondition for being a Son of God. In other words, you cannot be a Son of God without also being a Christ by virtue of being born again into the Christ specie (Strydom, 2018a). Kotze (2017b) explains this notion by comparing being “a Christ” and being “a Son of God” to a hand and a glove, indicating that they go together: “You cannot be a Son of God if you are not Christ; you cannot be a Christ if you are not a Son of God.”

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<sup>46</sup> See Rev. 1:8; 1:11; 21:6 and 23:13.

<sup>47</sup> See Matt. 1:23.

<sup>48</sup> This is an important feature to recognise about CiMI. In their theology, they apply everything that is true of Jesus Christ to themselves. This explains why they so easily manage to read themselves into certain biblical passages. It also adds to the idea that they diminish the person and work of Jesus Christ by lowering His status to a mere man, but at the same time lifting their own status up to His, by using sheer rhetoric. This sounds counterproductive, but the rhetoric behind this seems to work on a psychological level.

According to CiMI's teaching, God's plan to achieve His dream thus introduces the idea that there are two species. These are the first Adam specie and the second Adam specie, also known as the Christ specie. The Adam specie is typically associated with the old and fallen mankind, who still possesses a corrupt nature with an emphasis on flesh and sin, while the Christ specie is associated with the new mankind, being reborn and able to be a spiritual being and to see the spiritual realm and plan of God. Because the man Adam, as a representative of mankind, fell into sin, the whole subsequent race of mankind was also corrupted by virtue of being of the Adam specie. Therefore, mankind must be placed into a new specie, namely the Christ specie. This is the only way God can be represented again because a Christ is the image of God and a Son of God. The way mankind is placed into the Christ specie is through the sacrifice of the first Christ on the cross. This first Christ was Jesus Christ, and the reason why Jesus is only the first Christ is because through his sacrifice, mankind, after being born again, can now also become Christs. In the words of CiMI (2018e):

As Jesus was anointed with the Spirit of God and was made a Christ, so also every born-again Child of God is anointed with the Spirit of God, making each an anointed, a Christ. This is what the cross of Jesus Christ made possible. It made it possible for us to pass over from a one Adam specie to a second Adam specie.

Strydom (2017b) summarily notes that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross served as a means to "move us from a fallen state so that we can be born again". He continues by asking:

Now, my question is: 'What are you called when you are born again?' A Christ! An anointed! You are a spiritual being now; you are able to become a representative of God again in His image and His likeness. You can be called a Son of God again. Man, that is so incredible!

Being a Christ therefore makes one a true Son of God with His image and likeness, and the ability to accurately represent God on earth. It is as Kotze (2017c) explains: "[The Christ specie] is God's hope that each and every person that has been reborn from above will one day have the same view, judgement, and opinion as God to represent Him fully." For God to enforce His plan and to achieve His dream, He has only one strategy.

#### **2.3.4.4. God has only one strategy for enforcing His plan to achieve His dream**

The one strategy that God uses to enforce His plan in order to achieve His dream is "the gospel of the glory of Christ ... who<sup>49</sup> is the image of God" (CiMI, 2018h). Strydom (2019d) explains that part of this strategy entails that a person must be washed with the gospel of the glory of Christ. Glory in this context is defined as the "view, judgement and opinion" in this case of the Christ

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<sup>49</sup> It is not always clear whether a 'Christ' in the theology of CiMI should be addressed with personal or impersonal pronouns. The researcher came to the conclusion that once the Christ specie is inside of someone who is born from above, it receives a personal pronoun, but when one just talks about the Christ specie in general it is an impersonal pronoun.

specie. Again, according to Strydom (2019d), Christ is the new spiritual specie of mankind, entailing that Christ is the “the offspring of God” and “the image of God”. On another occasion Strydom (2018a) phrases this slightly differently by saying that it is “the gospel of the view, the judgement, and opinion of a Christ who is the image of God”. In this sense, only when one becomes a Christ by being anointed with the Spirit of God and being born again into the Christ specie, will one’s view, judgement and opinion align with God’s view, judgement and opinion.

Strydom continues to explain that when you realise and understand that you are a Christ, the glory will have an impact on you and affect you to, in turn, preach a gospel of the glory of Christ.<sup>50</sup> On one occasion, Strydom (2017a) for example tells the members of CiMI that they are “listening to the Christ man” inside of him and not his old Adam man. It is his Christ man who is preaching and teaching them regarding the new revelation of Jesus Christ. Therefore, according to Strydom (2018a), at CiMI “we do not teach you you’re Adam, we teach you you’re Christ”. He also states that “first we must teach you this mind. What mind? That you are a Christ” (*Openbarings*, 2018). The moment God anoints you with His Spirit and He dwells inside of you He changes “your mind into a righteous mind”, which allows you to lay down other views, judgements and opinions and to view the world with the “mind of Christ” (Strydom, 2019d). After being born again, the Christ specie inside of one is one’s “spiritual man”,<sup>51</sup> who can be the glory of God and who restores the image of God. Consequently, one will be able to fill the earth with God’s glory since it aligns one with God’s view, judgement and opinion (Strydom, 2016d).

In other words, God’s strategy for implementing His plan to achieve His dream is by revealing<sup>52</sup> the gospel of the glory of Christ to CiMI and appointing them, i.e., CiMI, to preach and teach this gospel of the glory of Christ. One could say that CiMI is therefore teaching its members the view, judgement and opinion of the Christ specie, who is inside of them, as deduced from the

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<sup>50</sup> This is what happened to Xandré Strydom. Once he became a Christ, he started preaching the gospel of the glory of Christ.

<sup>51</sup> When one is a Christ, one is mainly a spiritual being and therefore more spiritually focused and, in some way, able to look past the flesh at the spiritual side of things. As will be seen, this teaching paves the way for a matter-spirit anthropological and metaphysical dualism (gnostic dualism) in the theological thinking of CiMI. To an extent it has already been observed in labelling heaven the spiritual and invisible kingdom of God, and earth as the physical and visible realm. This will become clearer at different points in this chapter.

<sup>52</sup> For some of the background information with regard to the revelation that CiMI is referring to here, the following statement from CiMI (2018p) may be helpful regarding their view of the act of revealing something: “The word ‘revelation’ is the Greek word *apokalupsis* which means a disclosure of truth concerning things before unknown, making naked. Please note, a ‘truth’ concerning things ‘before unknown’. There is a revelation of Jesus Christ that was hidden that needs to be uncovered. The root word of *apokalupsis* is *apokaluptō* which means to uncover, lay open what has been veiled. Again, take note of the word ‘to uncover’ that which ‘has been veiled’. The root word is a combination of two words, which means to separate the veil.” In this sense CiMI believes that God’s strategy is to reveal new information regarding Jesus Christ via CiMI. It is CiMI who is washing people with the gospel of the glory of Christ to align people’s views, judgements and opinions with God’s view, judgement and opinion.

supplementary revelations of Strydom. Christ as such is therefore not considered to be a person as in orthodox, historical Christianity, but rather an impersonal specie that dwells inside of someone who is born again or born from above. Jesus Christ was only the first one to be born from above, which only made Him the first Christ. One could say that in CiMI's theology 'Christ' is not a *who*, but a *what* (Strydom, 2018a). The rebirth that turns one into a Christ is achieved when you gain the right knowledge and understanding of CiMI's revelation regarding Jesus Christ. The correct knowledge and understanding will cause a person to believe that the work of the first Christ on the cross made the shift possible for mankind from the old Adam specie to the new Christ specie. Being a Christ restores one to the status of a "Son of God", which in turn enables one to be "Immanuel and allows God to be God again" (Strydom, 2017b).

In turn, Labuschagne (2016c) remarks that one becomes a Christ "with a knowledge of a Son of God". Hence, in some sense one's intellectual assent to the idea that one is a Christ and a Son of God seems to be what activates one's view, judgement and opinion to align with God's view, judgement and opinion when being born again. Consequently, the correct knowledge and understanding about the event on the cross and what it made possible is what ultimately accomplishes God's dream. The work of Jesus Christ on the cross only made it possible for a person to be a Christ, but the individual must still grasp, understand and embrace it as a belief for the truth of it to be effective in his/her life as a Christ. This explains why CiMI (2018e) states that "we are born again if we believe in the work of the cross, to mature our mind as a Spiritual specie<sup>53</sup> to salvation", and that "our spiritual righteousness needs to manifest through the *mind* of man. Every reborn Christian is predestined to manifest the Spirit man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him (Col 3:10<sup>54</sup>, Eph 4:22-24<sup>55</sup>). This is renewal in the Spirit of the mind."

#### **2.3.4.5. Summary and conclusion of CiMI's restoration plan**

For the sake of clarity, it will be helpful to summarise the restoration plan of God, which was spelled out above as it is reflected in the theology of CiMI. Much of what is mentioned here has already been discussed above. The task at this point is to summarise the main principles of God's restoration plan into a more systematic and logical order.

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<sup>53</sup> It is important to note this reference to the Christ specie as a 'Spiritual specie'. This is also why the Christ specie stands in contrast to the first Adam specie. While the Adam specie represents one's fallen nature and flesh, the Christ specie is spiritual. This accounts for certain comments that will be made later concerning the view that the spiritual is inherently good, while matter is inherently evil, according to CiMI.

<sup>54</sup> "... and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him."

<sup>55</sup> "... that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness."



God created mankind in His image and likeness. However, the moment God proclaimed that He would create man in this way and additionally gave him the command to have dominion over the earth, God lost His ability to rule the earth. He handed it over to mankind and remained ruler only in His invisible realm, heaven. This left mankind in charge of the visible realm, earth. By virtue of being image bearers of God, they would be able to visibly represent the invisible God on earth and thus fill the earth with God's glory, namely His view, judgement and opinion. In short, earth then accurately represented heaven, and mankind accurately represented God.

After God had created Adam and Eve in His image and likeness, they, as representatives of mankind, fell into sin. This is viewed to be a tremendous loss for Adam and Eve, but subsequently also for the whole of mankind. Because of Adam's fall, mankind lost the image of God, the status as Sons of God, the ability to represent God, the willingness to rule on earth and, according to Strydom (2016d), the Spirit of God consequently left mankind. This can be described as a fall from righteousness, i.e. the state in which one ought to be, into a state of sin.

When mankind fell into sin, it separated mankind from the spiritual realm and the capacity to be spiritual beings. It introduced a veil between the natural and the spiritual, and because of this veil the church started to formulate different views, judgements and opinions about God. Therefore, God initiated a restoration plan – He wants to restore everything in the way things ought to be. He wants mankind to be spiritual beings again, with the capacity to see His plan and His will, and to accurately represent Him. CiMI (2018h) summarises this by stating that, ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, “everything God did was done with the express purpose of implementing a recovery plan to return mankind to that which Adam and Eve lost – God and His creation in harmony, on earth (not in Heaven)”.

The challenge in this restoration plan is that because of Adam's fall into sin, mankind seems to be bound to the same fallen nature. It should be noted that CiMI believes that this fallen nature is passed on genetically. If Cain and Abel had been born before Adam and Eve fell into sin, “they would have been the image and the likeness of God. They would have had the ability to be Sons of God ... and they would be able to represent God accurately. But they could not because Adam and Eve fell. The glory left them, they died spiritually”<sup>56</sup> (Strydom, 2017b). Nevertheless, since Adam and Eve fell into sin before giving birth to children, the whole of mankind consequently shares the same fallen nature.

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<sup>56</sup> This explains why the new Christ specie is spiritual. When Adam and Eve fell into sin, they died spiritually and also caused the first Adam specie to die spiritually. This subsequently caused the whole of mankind to also die spiritually. Therefore, since mankind must be made spiritually alive again, the new Christ specie must be spiritual.

Another way of putting this in CiMI's own vocabulary is to say that mankind is trapped in the corrupt and fallen Adam specie and therefore cannot represent God and fill the earth with His glory. The only way to solve this problem is for God to 'plant' mankind into a new specie. This new specie is the Christ specie, and the first human being to be planted into the new Christ specie is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the last Adam and the first Christ. It was not enough for God to merely choose mankind and move it out of the Adam specie and into the Christ specie. The first Christ, Jesus Christ, had to sacrifice Himself on the cross so that mankind could 'pass over' from the Adam specie into the Christ specie. In this way Jesus Christ was also part of God's recovery plan. CiMI maintains that when Jesus Christ was crucified, God was paying the price to reconcile mankind with Himself. Everything Jesus Christ did was aimed at restoring the earth to its original state and also to restore mankind to God's image and likeness, which was totally lost when Adam and Eve fell into sin.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, the rest of mankind can also become Christs now.<sup>57</sup> When a person is 'born from above' or 'born again', as a result of understanding and believing in Jesus Christ's work on the cross, one becomes a Christ. This explains why Jesus Christ was only the first Christ. Jesus Christ was the seed of the Christ specie and the members of CiMI, that is to say the people who understand this message and are born again, are the harvest. Hence, they are also referred to as Christs.<sup>58</sup> Being a Christ, that is, being born into the new Christ specie, restores everything that mankind lost when Adam fell into sin. Mankind can now again be image bearers of God, mankind can again rule the earth, mankind can again represent God on earth, and mankind again legitimately receives its status as Sons of God. The more Sons God has on earth, the more He is filling the earth with His glory. Strydom (2017b) therefore states: "God needs more Sons. Because if God can have more sons, he becomes more Immanuel – God with us ... The visible Son who is in the bosom of the Father can reveal the invisible Father<sup>59</sup> ... The visible earth needs to become a kingdom so that it can represent the invisible realm."

This message of redemption, however, is not known in the whole world yet. Hence, through the teachings of CiMI, God is restoring the fallen state of the world to a new state. Through CiMI's ministry, God is raising up many Sons who can work in His kingdom and reveal the invisible

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<sup>57</sup> A valid question to ask CiMI is why the apostles never used the title 'Christ' to refer to themselves? Nowhere does one see the apostles introduce themselves as 'Paul Christ' or 'John Christ'. They are usually introduced as the apostles *of* Christ (see 1 Cor. 1:1, for example).

<sup>58</sup> In CiMI, members are typically referred to as being 'Christs'. Strydom sometimes refers to himself as "Xandré Christ Strydom" (Strydom, 2017a). Du Plessis (2016a) states that God came to him through a man called "Xandré Christ" and in the end it is through Xandré Christ Strydom that God "revealed the truth" of their teachings to the world.

<sup>59</sup> This is a reference to John 1:18, which is here applied to the members of CiMI who are Christs, and therefore Sons of God.

Father. In this sense the earth is a 'work in progress' moving to a point where the earth can reflect heaven. Accordingly, CiMI is the start of this plan and "other workers now need to continue from where Jesus left the 'site' (earth – a work in progress), so to speak, because only a Son can reflect what God is busy with and the project needs to be finished" (CiMI, 2018h).

The only workers on this project of restoration are the true Sons of God who only do what they know God is busy with. Being a Christ is a precondition for being a Son of God, and therefore also a precondition for being part of God's restoration plan to bring about God's kingdom. This notion is critical to the restoration plan, especially in light of Strydom's claim that,

[W]e need both God as Lord and we need Christs to change the kingdoms of this world into the kingdoms of our God. God cannot do it by Himself ... God will not do it by Himself. For 6 000 years God did not do it by Himself. Why? Because God gave mankind the order to have dominion. So, an Adam needs to rule and reign. But God cannot put His hope on an old Adam ... a new Adam needs to reign.

Moreover, it is evident that God can only reign if mankind is on its post, meaning that mankind is open to being restored to the image and likeness of God by gaining the correct knowledge of Jesus Christ. However, through the work of religion, Satan is trying to stop God's children from becoming mature Sons of God, and therefore Christs (Strydom, 2017a).

Strydom (2017b) helps one to tie some of the loose ends by stating that "heaven needs earth to represent it". However, no one can see heaven since it is an invisible realm where God rules as an invisible, spiritual being. He continues by saying:

You know what the problem is with religion and these people that say that Jesus is God? John the beloved one [who] put his head on the breast of Jesus, that one is also the one that said 'we touched him, we saw him' ... It is the same person who said, 'No one has seen God at any time ... the only one that has seen God is the beloved Son'.<sup>60</sup> So, God needs more Sons. Because if God can have more Sons, He becomes more Immanuel – God with us ... The visible Son who is in the bosom of the Father can reveal the invisible Father ... The visible earth needs to become a kingdom so that it can represent the invisible realm.

Strydom is applying John 1:18 to the members of CiMI. Since Jesus Christ was not God but, as the first Christ and Son of God, was able to accurately represent God, the members, as Sons of God, should also represent Him on earth to manifest His kingdom.

The climax of CiMI's (2018h) biblical narrative provided here is captured in the one dream of God, which states that "God is filling the earth with His glory". They also add that "although random Christian principles may sound justifiable standing alone (the Trinity doctrine, for

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<sup>60</sup> This is a reference to John 1:18, which reads as follows: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*."

instance) they do not work together to give the answer of: God is filling the earth with His glory.” To do this He needs mankind to accurately represent Him, and mankind can only accurately represent Him if they are Christs who bear the image of God, have the willingness to reign on earth, and possess the status as Sons of God. All these features are made possible through the event of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion. Jesus Christ’s crucifixion serves as the mechanism by which mankind, after being born again, can be planted into the Christ specie, which in turn makes man capable of achieving God’s dream on earth by accurately representing God and in this way filling the earth with His glory. This explains why Strydom (2019d) says that mere children cannot change things. “We need Christs to change things.” In due course “God will fill the earth with His glory, by filling it with Christs” (Strydom, 2018a).

To be sure, this restoration plan of God may still come across as vague in some respects. However, the subsequent discussions on the theology and doctrine of CiMI will assist in better understanding some of the finer details.

### **2.3.5. Christology: Jesus versus Jesus Christ**

#### **2.3.5.1. Introductory remarks**

In many ways it is CiMI’s view regarding the person of Jesus Christ<sup>61</sup> that draws a great deal of attention and causes some confusion. Consequently, the next theological doctrine of CiMI concerns their Christology. Ultimately CiMI introduces the notion that there is a difference between Jesus and Jesus Christ. This difference is an essential component of their comprehensive theological system. In fact, Strydom (2016d) asserts to his listeners at CiMI that “understanding the difference between Jesus and Jesus Christ is the foundational cornerstone of how you will be built as a church”.

The discussion to follow investigates the theological significance of events like the birth, baptism, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as understood by CiMI. However, since CiMI ultimately makes a distinction between Jesus and Jesus Christ, it is first necessary to answer the question: What is a Christ, according to the teachings of CiMI? Only after this question is properly answered can the study proceed to the major events in the life of Jesus and their theological significance, according to CiMI. Although some aspects of CiMI’s view with regard to the ‘Christ’ has already been introduced, more can still be said. To be sure, CiMI’s teaching of what a Christ is will in many ways cause one to revisit God’s restoration plan, as contemplated above.

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<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that CiMI denies neither the historicity of Jesus Christ, nor the teaching that Jesus Christ had a physical body with flesh and bones, at least before His resurrection from the dead (Kotze, 2017c).

### 2.3.5.2. What is a Christ and other additional detail?

Kotze (2017c) explains that CiMI preaches the “Christ in you” according to the Word that God entrusted to their visionary leader, Xandré Strydom. He further explains that this is exactly why their ministry’s name is ‘Christ in Me International’. The name ‘Christ in me’ is clearly derived from this part of their theology and doctrine, and is taken from Colossians 1:27.<sup>62</sup> Kotze (2017c) further claims that the message of CiMI is the same message as that of Christianity,<sup>63</sup> it just has “a greater revelation” by virtue of proclaiming the “Christ in you”. All these statements beg the question: What is a Christ?

It has already been established that a Christ in CiMI’s theology refers to a “spiritual specie”, more specifically, the “second Adam specie” or the new “godly specie” that God created because Adam fell into sin (Strydom, 2019a). Once Adam fell into sin, mankind in its entirety was subsequently bound to the first Adam specie, which is carnal, fallen and corrupt. This explains why God created the second Adam specie, or the Christ specie, with the goal of turning man from the Adam specie into the Christ specie. When a person is born from above as a result of believing in the cross of Jesus Christ, one is born into the Christ specie; hence you are rightfully called a Christ. Strydom (2019d) strikingly explains that, in the end, there is only two teachings in the world. You either have a Christ teaching, which teaches you that “you are a Christ and you are washed with the gospel of the Christ”, or you “are washed with religion” and are therefore embracing the antichrist theology. Kotze (2017c) adds to this notion by stating that it is “the antichrist” who wants to “prevent you from becoming a Christ”. According to him, the other churches in the world will “preach anything” and do anything to prevent one “from becoming a Christ. Even if it means we have to say that Jesus is God.”<sup>64</sup>

CiMI’s view stating that the Christ is a specie is therefore considered to be the only true Christ teaching, while religion teaches an antichrist teaching since religion does not recognise Christ to be a specie and applies the title of ‘Christ’ solely to Jesus Christ. Kotze (2017b) asserts that,

I promise you if anybody speaks against us, he is not from God ... If anybody speaks against us, he is not from God. We are of God, he who knows God, hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us ... We are preaching truth. We do not wonder; we do not guess. We know what we aim for.

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<sup>62</sup> “To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” When Kotze (2017c) expositis this verse he explains that if Jesus Christ was physically resurrected and the ‘Christ in you’ refers solely to the person Jesus Christ, how can a physical person with flesh and bones be in you? According to him, the ‘Christ in you’ must therefore refer to something other than the person Jesus Christ and so can only be a reference to the Christ specie that is in you.

<sup>63</sup> Here one can view the irony of cults. In one way or another CiMI still wants to be associated with Christianity as a host religion. Yet, CiMI rejects some of the cardinal doctrines of Christianity that define the Christian religion. The question is: How can a group still be called ‘Christian’ in any meaningful sense, if that which defines Christianity is no longer upheld? (see Martin, 2003:17-18).

<sup>64</sup> This is another implicit denial of Jesus’s deity and is associated with the antichrist doctrine.

Their status as being “of God” is also solely attributed to the members of CiMI and anyone who challenges the teaching that the Christ is some sort of impersonal spiritual specie dwelling inside of the true believers is “not from God”.

In one of the statements on their website, CiMI (2018e) unpacks some of the background regarding their view of ‘Christ’ as follows:

Growing up, we were taught that Christ was the ‘surname’ of Jesus. We were also taught that Christ had the same meaning as God and therefore is God. Christ is not God and Christ is also not the surname of Jesus, but rather an explanation of what Jesus was. While Christ can be used as a noun, it is mostly used in the Bible as an adjective that describes a noun. Hence, Jesus (noun) who is a Christ (adjective).

‘Christ’ is therefore not considered to be a title that solely belongs to Jesus, but only explains what Jesus was, namely a Christ. Furthermore, it is once again made clear from this statement that Jesus does not have a divine nature – he was a mere human and nothing more.<sup>65</sup>

CiMI (2018e) goes further: “When we look at the meaning of the word ‘Christ’ in the original text that the Bible was written in, we see that it means ‘anointed’.” In English, we have two words for anointed while the Greek text has only one word, *christos*, and in Hebrew it is the word *māshîyach*. The argument that CiMI unpacks here is basically suggesting that since the word ‘Christ’ is only a literal translation from the original Greek, meaning ‘anointed’, anyone who is an ‘anointed’, is also then a Christ. Kotze (2017c) explains it this way: “When you anoint someone, what is he then called? An anointed. Did you know that that word ‘anointed’ in the Greek is the word ‘Christ’? So, if someone was [anointed], he became a Christ. If you were not [anointed] you are not a Christ.” A ‘Christ’, according to CiMI, is therefore not referring to a specific person like Jesus Christ, but rather an impersonal spiritual specie that rises and dwells inside of mankind by virtue of being anointed with the Spirit of God and consequently being born again. Accordingly, Strydom (2018a) explains that it is inaccurate to ask the question: “Who is Christ?” One should instead ask “What is Christ?” He then states that “we see in Galatians 3:16<sup>66</sup> that the seed of Abraham was a Christ”.

The separation between Jesus and Jesus Christ in the theology of CiMI is also motivated by a very particular interpretation of the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. Strydom (2019c) explains that “when we say the word ‘Christ’, I am referring to the second mankind specie. The one that

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<sup>65</sup> According to Strydom (2018a), the fact that Jesus Christ made mistakes proves this point as well. One of Jesus Christ’s mistakes often cited by the ministers at CiMI is His prayer in the garden of Gethsemane where He “prayed against the plan of God”. It is also stated on the grounds of Heb. 5:9 that Jesus had to reach ‘perfection’. All of this indicates that Jesus Christ could not have been God but only a mere man.

<sup>66</sup> “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds’ as of many, but as of one, ‘And to your Seed’, who is Christ.”

is born from God. Do you believe that you are born again?” He turns to Matthew 1 and then proceeds to comment on Jesus’s genealogy. He states that, “All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations.” The calculation in this text only adds up when Jesus is counted as one generation and Christ is counted as another. This, according to Strydom (2019c), indicates that the Christ is its own generation of a specie and should be separated from Jesus. This explains why CiMI (2018g) also refers to Jesus as the one who is “flesh and blood” and born “from the womb of the Virgin Mary, the forty-first generation” (according to the genealogical register of Matthew 1). Later, however, when referring to Jesus Christ, after His anointing, CiMI insists that he is “known as Jesus Christ, the forty-second generation” (according to the genealogical register of Matthew 1) (see Strydom, 2019a).

Since it is possible for someone to become a Christ in the same way Jesus was a Christ, another question to answer is how this happens. To phrase it differently, since according to CiMI God “only works with the Christ specie now” (Strydom, 2017a), how does one become an anointed and therefore a Christ?<sup>67</sup> It has already been mentioned several times that once a person is reborn, or born from above, that person becomes a Christ by virtue of being born into the Christ specie and anointed with the Spirit of God. Strydom (2019a) summarily explains this teaching to his listeners as follows: “When you are born again you are no longer a first Adam ... you are a second Adam now. What do you call a second Adam? A Christ! An anointed! A born from God.” CiMI (2018e) also explains:

As Jesus was anointed with the Spirit of God and was made a Christ, so also every born-again Child of God is anointed with the Spirit of God, making each an anointed, a Christ. This is what the cross of Jesus Christ made possible. It made it possible for us to pass over from a one Adam specie to a second Adam specie.

This then explains how one becomes a Christ. Being reborn or born from above therefore serves as the means by which one becomes a Christ, and this is made possible through the cross of the first Christ, who was Jesus Christ. It is important to remember, in the light of previous discussions, that when one becomes a Christ, one also becomes a true Son of God<sup>68</sup> who carries the image of God once again.

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<sup>67</sup> CiMI (2018e) explains: “We need to understand that Christ is ... a *specie*, it is a kind. Therefore, a *Christ specie* is an anointed specie.”

<sup>68</sup> Strydom (2016d) asserts that, “First, you are born a son of man, and because you believe in the cross you die as a son of man and you become a Son of God.”

It is crucial to remember that once one becomes a Christ one is also considered to be a spiritual being.<sup>69</sup> The Christ inside of you is often called your 'spiritual man' who can fill the earth with the glory of God (Strydom, 2016d). Strydom (2019a) explains that God represents the invisible spiritual realm "which means that you can't see it unless you are spiritual, or a spiritual being, or a celestial being". This suggests that if one is not a Christ, one cannot see the realm of God and His plan of restoration. Kotze (2017c) also asks his listeners: "Who is in you?" He answers by saying that, "God and the Christ man, that specie. The one born from God." According to him if you are a Christ you are born from God and not of this world anymore. He also states:

He who is in you, is greater than he who is in the world. Man, your inner man is much greater than your natural man. Your Christ man is much greater than your Adam man. And ... you who are born from above much greater than those who are of the world.

Being a Christ therefore includes the notion that one's identity is primarily a spiritual being inside one's own body. This is also described in a way as to indicate that you are two persons, a fleshly or carnal person, and a spiritual person. In line with this belief, it is also stated that one therefore has a 'natural body', and a 'spiritual body'.<sup>70</sup> Strydom (2016d) also tells the members of CiMI that "inside of you is a Christ and inside of the Christ there is the kingdom of God", indicating that only a Christ can manifest the kingdom of God and be part of God's restoration plan. As a Christ who is born from God, one's 'inner man', 'spiritual man' or 'Christ man' is much stronger than one's 'natural man', 'fleshly man' or 'carnal man'. Kotze (2017b) also explains to his listeners at CiMI who, according to their gospel, are Christs, that in some spiritual sense "we are in labour pains, continually giving birth to Christ, but not in the carnal man, in the spiritual". This links with the statement from one of CiMI's (2018e) documents which states that, "In the seed lies the potential to bring forth more of the same kind and type as the seed, the same specie."

The consequence of not being a Christ, and therefore still in the first Adam specie, means that one does not have salvation. When one is still in the old or first Adam specie, one is also typically labelled as still being 'carnal'.<sup>71</sup> In this context such a person is viewed as someone who does not have the correct "revelation knowledge" (CiMI, 2018e). Kotze (2017b) elaborates by claiming that "if you are not [a] Christ, you are carnal ... and if carnal, then you are not a Son of God ... If you are carnal you are not a child of God." He also adds that, "If you do not believe that you are a Christ, you deny God as your Father. And if you do not believe you are a Christ,

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<sup>69</sup> This is another reference to CiMI's matter-spirit dualistic explanation of things where the physical matter, including one's body, is viewed to be evil, while the spiritual is good and godly. More details on this stance of CiMI will follow later, and is also referred to as Gnostic dualism.

<sup>70</sup> More attention will be given to this notion in the discussion on the anthropology of CiMI (section 2.3.6.).

<sup>71</sup> Other labels such as "earthly minded", "fleshly", "veil minded" and "veiled" are also often used to describe someone's condition who is not in the Christ specie.



then you are denying your Sonship.” According to him, since “God is spirit”, His children must also be primarily spiritual who are merely manifested in the carnal or fleshly nature. He further says:

If you are not Christ, if you are not born from above, if you are not anointed with the Spirit of God, [it] means that you did not become one with Him ... If you have not received the Spirit of God to become one with Him, you are not a Christ ... then you are carnal ... Then you need to be saved. You need salvation ... If carnal, you are from the earth, and if Christ, you are from above. 1 Corinthians 15:47<sup>72</sup>... says ‘the first man was of the earth made of dust; the second man is the Lord from heaven’.

This statement from Kotze shows that only the members of CiMI are Christs and consequently spiritual beings, who are superior to all other Christian and non-Christian people. If one does not believe in the revelation given to CiMI, one is in need of salvation.<sup>73</sup>

At this point it is also important to introduce CiMI’s view of the first and the second coming of Christ. This view of theirs has been assumed throughout the entire discussion thus far and can now be formally introduced. Because of CiMI’s understanding of what a Christ is, their view of the first and second coming of Christ should not be confused with the first and second coming of the person of Jesus Christ, as traditionally held by orthodox Christianity.<sup>74</sup> It is rather a reference to the first and second coming of the Christ specie, which adds some nuances to the discussion.

According to CiMI (2018p), the first coming of Christ started, as will be explained later, at the baptism of Jesus. The work of the first coming of the Christ specie was fulfilled on the cross when Jesus Christ, as the first Christ, was sacrificed, which made it possible for someone to move out of the position of sin and become a Christ by virtue of being reborn into the spiritual Christ specie. CiMI (2018p) states, for example, that “the first coming of Christ was for the redemption from the position of sin in the spirit”. One could say the second coming of Christ is what happens when one is born again, as a result of gaining and believing the knowledge of CiMI’s revelation. It is summarised in the following way:

The second coming of Christ will be for the salvation of the soul (that which would manifest the glory of God). This salvation would appear to mankind and teach or instruct us to deny ungodliness

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<sup>72</sup> “The first man *was* of the earth, *made* of dust; the second Man *is* the Lord from heaven.”

<sup>73</sup> Strydom (2018a) also states at one point: “If you do not become a Christ, the Son of the living God ... your soul is lost ... you don’t have the ability to have the view, judgement and opinion of God.”

<sup>74</sup> CiMI (2018p) rejects the orthodox view of Jesus Christ’s second coming with the following words: “We had this picture in our minds that one day Jesus Christ would come on a cloud and that this would be the second coming of Christ, (even though it is not what the Bible teaches us). As long as we have this natural mental picture of the second coming, not only do we not understand it, but it is passing us by, just as the first coming passed the people by in the time of Jesus Christ.” Strydom (2018a) also states that the church has “the wrong interpretation and expectation of the second coming of Christ”.

(carnal mind) and to manifest the righteousness, which characterises and epitomises our Spirit man (created according to God) (CiMI, 2018b).

The second coming of Christ is therefore meant to deny one's 'carnal mind' and represent one's 'Spirit man' as a Christ. While Jesus Christ started the first coming and accomplished its purpose on the cross, Xandré Strydom started the second coming of Christ with the founding of CiMI and the teaching of their new revelation (Strydom, 2018a). This also explains why Strydom (2016d) tells the members of CiMI that they have been part of the second coming of Christ.

In other words, the purpose of Christ's first coming was accomplished on the cross and was meant to make it possible for man to become a Christ and therefore an image bearer of God. This is seen to be the switch from the position of sin into righteousness. The second coming of Christ is the new revelation given to CiMI, which causes one to "think exactly like God" with the result that there is no more "division" in the church since everyone will have the one view, judgement and opinion of God. The second coming of Christ happens when one is reborn by gaining and believing the "revelation knowledge of the difference between Jesus (flesh) and Jesus Christ (spirit)".<sup>75</sup> This knowledge allows one to look differently at the cross of Jesus Christ and see the true meaning of it (CiMI, 2018p). In this sense the second coming of Christ gives one the lens through which to interpret the first coming of Christ, as stipulated in the Bible. This is why Strydom (2018a) tells his listeners that at CiMI it is preached that Christ is inside of you "but to show you who you are as a Christ, we show you Jesus Christ".<sup>76</sup> In other words, one must first understand the second coming of Christ and CiMI's role in it, to look back to the first coming of Christ and then understand one's own status as a Christ.

With the question of 'what a Christ is' answered, and additional important details provided, it is fitting to move on to the birth of Jesus. Take note that the implications and consequences of being a Christ will constantly be revisited during the rest of the overview on CiMI's theology and doctrine.

### **2.3.5.3. The virgin birth and humanity of Jesus**

The virgin birth of Jesus is not rejected by CiMI. In fact, CiMI (2018m) states the following:

The person who was born in Bethlehem was a natural 'Adam', one without sin. Even though he was supernaturally created by God, he was still a natural 'Adam', the son of Mary and Joseph. Jesus was born of a natural mother; God created a sinless, natural seed which he put in the womb of Mary. Jesus was born as a baby just like you and me. The only difference was that Jesus was

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<sup>75</sup> This statement is another strong link with Gnostic tendencies.

<sup>76</sup> Strydom (2018a) is not referring here to the traditional, orthodox theological stance towards Jesus Christ. He is rather suggesting that CiMI's gospel teaches one the true meaning and revelation regarding Jesus Christ.

sinless just like the first Adam. He did not carry the corrupt seed of the fallen Adam.<sup>77</sup> Jesus, the baby, was not the Son of God. He was the Son of Mary and Joseph (although Joseph was not the biological father).

The birth of Jesus is explicitly viewed to be a 'supernatural' event because he was born of the virgin Mary (Strydom, 2017b). Moreover, it should be noted that Jesus was not (yet) the Son of God at His birth. Although Jesus was supernaturally born, He was still a normal, 'natural' man of flesh and bones. It is also clear that Jesus is viewed to be sinless, just like Adam was created without sin (Strydom, 2019d). There is therefore a strong link between Adam and Jesus in the view of CiMI.<sup>78</sup> While Adam was supernaturally created, Jesus was born supernaturally, and both were without sin. In this sense Jesus is somewhat unique in the theology of CiMI. However, the birth of Jesus is not celebrated to signal the event of the incarnation in the historical, orthodox Christian sense.<sup>79</sup> In other words, the birth of Jesus is not considered to be an event where God took on a human nature in Jesus Christ.<sup>80</sup>

In one of their statements, CiMI (2018m) makes it clear that,

God was not born in the form of a baby ... Then who exactly was born in Bethlehem, you may ask? We need to understand that God is Spirit (John 4:24<sup>81</sup>). God is not flesh. He cannot be flesh. Therefore, the statement that God was born in the form of a baby is not true. Also, flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50<sup>82</sup>). The person who was born in Bethlehem was born of flesh. This is not what our God is. He is neither flesh nor blood. He is Spirit.

In turn, Strydom (2017c) builds on this thought by linking the idea of an incarnation, i.e., God taking on flesh, with God becoming sin. He asserts that,

To say that God can become flesh is absolute blasphemy. God is not flesh ... For God to become sin is absolute blasphemy ... Man, religion lies to people and calls it truth, and then what happens? We remain divided. We cannot become united ... We cannot become the same kind. It is especially

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<sup>77</sup> This is true because of the virgin birth. It was previously pointed out that CiMI holds to a genetic progression (which is not necessarily wrong) of the fallen nature in mankind. In other words, after Adam and Eve fell into sin, all of subsequent mankind is also corrupt and fallen on the grounds of genetic ties with Adam and Eve. A virgin birth breaks this tie with the fallen and corrupt Adam specie and makes it possible for Jesus to eventually become the first Christ.

<sup>78</sup> To be sure, this link between Adam and Jesus is not unique to CiMI. Orthodox Christianity also maintains such a link, but with different nuances than CiMI.

<sup>79</sup> It is important to note that CiMI also uses the word 'incarnation' in their theology but not in the traditional orthodox sense.

<sup>80</sup> By now this is no surprise since the rejection of Jesus Christ's deity by CiMI has been pointed out before. After reading John 10:33, Kotze (2017a) asks: "I just want to know where did Jesus ever make himself God? Where did He ever say 'I am God come to me! I am God the Son come to me!' Never! Never! ... Never God the Son." This is also then an implicit rejection of Jesus Christ's pre-existence as the second person of the Trinity. The researcher is not sure what their stance would be regarding the pre-existence of the Christ specie as such.

<sup>81</sup> "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

<sup>82</sup> "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption."

important who ministers to you. It does not matter who the person is, it matters what word he brings. That word changes us.

The metaphysical presupposition of a matter-spirit or Gnostic dualism,<sup>83</sup> which will be addressed later, features heavily here, and clearly serves as a motivation for rejecting the birth of Jesus Christ as an incarnation event. The concept of ‘flesh’ or ‘being carnal’ equals sin or being sinful.<sup>84</sup> This also explains why the old Adam specie is associated with flesh, carnality, sin and also evil, while the new Adam specie, i.e., the Christ specie, is associated with things that are spiritual and good. God therefore cannot take on a human nature, which implies flesh and bones, since flesh and bones are evil and cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Moreover, Strydom also mentions that for God to become flesh is too easy, and if God did that, there would be nothing significant about such an act.<sup>85</sup>

Strydom’s (2017d) comments on John 1:14<sup>86</sup> also show that CiMI rejects the notion that the birth of Jesus was the incarnation of the *Logos*<sup>87</sup> (the Word). For the orthodox Christian church, one of the central biblical witnesses to the doctrine of the incarnation has always been John 1:14. However, Strydom (2017d) maintains that “the Word” in this context is the one true God who created through His spoken word. He explains it as follows:

Through the Word of God, the world was made ... Look to the Word, when the Word is restored, the Logos, the earth will start to be created again. The new one. And that is what we restored, the Logos, the Word. We restored God! Because the Word is God ... The Logos is God.

Here, John 1:14 is taken to mean that God becomes flesh in anyone who is born again; consequently, that specific person becomes a Christ. The point to realise, however, is that God did not take on a human nature, according to CiMI.

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<sup>83</sup> Geisler (1999:206) explains it as follows: “In metaphysics dualism is the belief that there are two coeternal principles in conflict with each other, such as matter and form (or spirit) or of good and evil.” The theological explanations of CiMI suggest that there is a conflict between matter and spirit. However, it does not seem as if they hold to the eternity of matter. But this explanation from Geisler only serves to introduce the notion of dualism, which is also visible in the theology of CiMI.

<sup>84</sup> This idea links up again with the way CiMI uses 1 Cor. 15:50, which states that “flesh and bones cannot inherit the kingdom of God”, to argue that God cannot ‘become’ flesh. This also ties in with the matter-spirit dualism that CiMI introduces.

<sup>85</sup> The larger context in which Strydom (2017b) expresses the apparent insignificance of an incarnation is the following: “There is no work in that.” He further asks, “who looked after heaven when God became flesh? To whom did the flesh Jesus Christ pray? To himself? We lose our minds! Because we were brought up that way just like Muslim people are brought up that way.” When Kotze (2017c) reflects on the birth of Jesus, he states that there is something that really bothers him about religion representing the mainstream orthodox Christian belief. He says: “You know what, what I am going to say to you right now, if you do not believe in that thing, then you are a heretic. What they believe is, Mary gave birth to God. Now, if you do not believe this, you are a heretic.”

<sup>86</sup> “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

<sup>87</sup> The *Logos* is the Greek word taken from John 1:1 which is traditionally taken to refer to the second person of the Trinity who took on a human nature (John 1:14).

With regard to Jesus Christ and in the light of John 1:14, CiMI (2018g) also states that the “indwelling of God’s Spirit in Jesus Christ is the incarnation of the Word/Logos of God. This is where the Word/Logos of God, since Adam, became flesh again.” One can recognise the vocabulary of John 1:1-3 and 14 in this statement. However, CiMI claims that “the Word is God and it lived in Jesus Christ first”. In this sense CiMI incorporates the word ‘incarnation’ into their own theological system to mean that it merely signals an event where a person is anointed with the Spirit of God and reborn as a Christ, of which Jesus Christ was the very first one.<sup>88</sup> An incarnation is then also not a single event that happened at the birth of Jesus, but happens every time someone is reborn and becomes a Christ. This explains why CiMI also states that the “word ‘logos’ is the same Word that we are born again from”.

Going further, Kotze (2017c) mentions that he will never be able to believe “that the all-powerful, all-knowing God ... self-existing God ... became a little baby”.<sup>89</sup> He also states that if “according to religion this baby was indeed God, and he does not need man,<sup>90</sup> who changed his nappies? Who gave Him milk?”<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, any teaching suggesting that Jesus is God is considered to be “antichrist”. Kotze (2017b), for example, says that the church will teach you that Jesus “is divine”, that “He is a deity”, that “He is God who became a man”. But, according to him, this “is the antichrist!” He adds that if one believes that Jesus Christ is God, you are distorting the gospel<sup>92</sup> and you do not “have the Word”, “the correct mindset” or “the Spirit which is from God”. You are only standing in the way of someone “to be Christ”. Strydom (2017a) also insists that, “If I tell you God became flesh, that is absolute blasphemy.<sup>93</sup> Think about it. It is against the nature of how God made everything.”

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<sup>88</sup> When Kotze (2017c) reflects on John 1:1-14 he also states that, “It is a manifestation and people start to see it. And then ... you will say ‘whoa, the word became flesh and dwelt in me and I beheld His glory, the same glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. I saw it in me’.” This suggests that the reference of John 1:14 signals the event when someone is reborn and becomes a Christ by virtue of the Word becoming flesh inside of him/her.

<sup>89</sup> One must keep in mind that Jesus Christ, the second person of the triune God, did not ‘become’ a human in the sense of the divine going through a transformation process which results in a human. The correct technical phrase would be that He took on a human nature. Since His divine nature is His nature *by nature*, He added to Himself a human nature. These two natures are united hypostatically in the person of Jesus Christ and in a broader context is referred to as “Conciliar Christology” (Pawl, 2016:19).

<sup>90</sup> The implication hidden in this statement is that God once again ‘needs’ man in some sense.

<sup>91</sup> It is important to note that these comments in no way refute the deity of Jesus Christ. At most it only affirms the human nature of Jesus, nothing more.

<sup>92</sup> On the grounds of Rom. 1:22-23, Kotze (2016a) addresses the church who worships Jesus as God and states that Jesus is a creature. He says, for example, that “these people who worship Jesus as God is just as bad as people who worship frogs and cows and goats. It is the same thing!” He also asks this question later: “Was Jesus created?” His answer is that “[Jesus] is the creature”.

<sup>93</sup> The reason why this is blasphemy, according to Strydom, once again links up with the matter-spirit or Gnostic dualism. For God to take on flesh is considered to be evil and blasphemous since flesh is assumed to be of no use in the kingdom of God. One must be a spiritual being, i.e., a Christ.

As Strydom (2019d) turns to Acts 10:36-37,<sup>94</sup> he asks: “What event does one celebrate, Bethlehem or Galilee?” The event in Bethlehem refers to the birth of Jesus, while the event in Galilee refers to the baptism of Jesus. According to Strydom, Bethlehem is not worth celebrating, since “all the prophetic words concerning Jesus’s life came into fulfilment when he was born again. He had to be the first one who is born from above to become the very first son of God, a Christ man.” This introduces an important point. The theology of CiMI dictates that the baptism of Jesus is one of the major highlights of Jesus’s life, since that event turned Jesus into a true Son of God and therefore also a Christ. Strydom (2017b) explains that while “religion teach [*sic*] us ... that God became flesh”, the Bible “says that God is not a Father of flesh. So, Jesus was not the son of God, Jesus Christ was the son of God. The one that was born from God, not the one that was born from Mary.” These statements indicate that the birth of Jesus is not as significant as Christians may think.<sup>95</sup> The big event in the life of Jesus, and consequently worth celebrating, is His baptism because that is where he was born again.

#### **2.3.5.4. The baptism of Jesus Christ**

It has been mentioned repeatedly that, once one is born again, one becomes an anointed or a Christ. In the theology of CiMI, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan<sup>96</sup> River signalled His anointing and made Him a Christ. He went from Jesus to Jesus Christ during that event and it is here that the distinction between Jesus and Jesus Christ is formally introduced.<sup>97</sup> CiMI (2018g) begins to explain that,

Jesus, the son of man, at the age of thirty was anointed by God at his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on him and stayed on (in) him. (Acts 10: 36-38<sup>98</sup>). Here Jesus became the first, and in

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<sup>94</sup> “The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached ...”

<sup>95</sup> At Christmas Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus as the greatest gift God has given to His creation, because it signals the incarnation of the only begotten Son of God, Jesus Christ.

<sup>96</sup> This claim is formally stated in one of CiMI’s (2018m) documents, where they remark that, “For Jesus to become the Son of God he had to be born of God, born of the Spirit, born from Heaven. This birth did not happen in Bethlehem, but at the Jordan River as Scripture teaches us. Jesus, the natural man, was baptised in the Jordan River where he was born of God (born from above/Heaven) and became Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus, the natural man, was the son of Mary and Joseph while Jesus Christ, the Spirit man, was the Son of God. It was at the Jordan River where he received the Spirit of God ... Jesus was not born Lord and Christ; he was *made* both Lord and Christ. When? The moment he was born from above at the Jordan River and he received God’s Spirit was the moment when he was born of God and was made Lord and Christ. He was no longer the child of Mary and Joseph, but the Son of God.”

<sup>97</sup> As has already been pointed out, this distinction between Jesus and Jesus Christ is what paves the way for the matter-spirit dualism in CiMI’s anthropology and their overall theology. One should also not underestimate how strict this distinction is in their theology.

<sup>98</sup> “The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

that time, the only Son of God on the earth ... A Son of God is someone whose spirit, like Jesus's spirit, becomes one with God's Spirit, whom God anoints, who is made a Christ by God. No one without the Spirit of God can be a Son of God.<sup>99</sup>

The anointing of Jesus at His baptism is accompanied with the Spirit of God which made Jesus the very first Christ (CiMI, 2018n).

CiMI (2018e) explains the theological significance of Jesus's baptism in the following way:

The base word of Christ is the act of anointing. To become a Christ, you need to be anointed. This is exactly what happened at the baptism of Jesus. God anointed Jesus with His Spirit making him a Christ (anointed). This is important to understand because, even though Jesus had a supernatural virgin birth and although he was born without sin, he was still a man born of dust, born from flesh (1 Cor 15:40-49<sup>100</sup>) and he had to become Spirit by being born again from heaven (1 Cor 15:40-49). His supernatural birth did not make him God, just as Adam's supernatural creation did not make him God. Again, therefore we say that Luke 2:11<sup>101</sup> was a prophecy as we can clearly see that Jesus, although without sin, only became a Christ at his baptism. He was made a Christ, not born a Christ.<sup>102</sup> Before the baptism it was Jesus of Nazareth, after the baptism, it was Jesus Christ.

This statement serves as a good summary of Jesus's baptism and the theological significance it carries for CiMI. Some of the aspects of this statement will now be further addressed.

It is important to notice that Jesus is described as a man "born from flesh". Before His baptism Jesus is also described as a "natural man" which should be contrasted with Jesus Christ after His baptism as a "Spiritual man" (CiMI, 2018m). For thirty years Jesus was a mere carpenter who had "no part in the kingdom of God" until his baptism (Strydom, 2016d). CiMI therefore insists on the idea that Jesus was born from flesh (Mary) and in flesh with a physical body. Accordingly, since "God is Spirit and Jesus is flesh" (CiMI, 2018g), He has to "become Spirit by

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<sup>99</sup> Note how the idea of being a Son of God, being a Christ and being anointed with the Spirit of God is linked in some sense and begins to sound like synonyms in CiMI's theology. One can also add an image bearer to this list.

<sup>100</sup> "There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being'. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man."

<sup>101</sup> "For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

<sup>102</sup> This position is gathered from Acts 2:36, which reads: "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

being born from heaven". This is accomplished when "God's Spirit becomes one with His Spirit" and Jesus then "becomes Jesus Christ" or "anointed Jesus" at His baptism<sup>103</sup> (Strydom, 2019d).

CiMI (2018m) expands on this thought by indicating that Jesus was "a natural man, made (born) of dust". Hence, Jesus was born of flesh while the one "who was born from Heaven is the Lord". In this sense "the fleshly man Jesus was not Lord. Jesus Christ who was born from Heaven was the Lord, the Son of God." Jesus Christ was therefore made "Lord by God when he became a second man, a Spiritual man, born from Heaven". His baptism, in other words, changed Him from the natural to the spiritual. This should not be understood to mean that he suddenly lost his physical body, but rather that, by virtue of the Christ specie inside of Him as a result of being born again, His "spiritual man" inside of Him or the Christ in Him came alive and now has absolute priority over His flesh.<sup>104</sup>

Going further, Kotze (2017c) states on the grounds of Acts 2:36<sup>105</sup> that God made Jesus both Lord and Christ and that He was "not born Lord and Christ" (CiMI, 2018m). This happened as God anointed Him with His Holy Spirit and power. This anointing from God cannot be forged or faked in any way, according to CiMI (2018e), since it exclusively comes from God.<sup>106</sup> It is also expressed in the following way: "A Christ is anointed by God with God (Spirit)" (CiMI, 2018e). Strydom (2019d) asserts that "Jesus became the first Christ, the first second specie at the baptism waters. At the Jordan River." Strydom also refers to Jesus as "the prototype of a specie".<sup>107</sup> In this sense Jesus was the very first one to be born twice. He was born literally from

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<sup>103</sup> Since the angels in Luke 2:11 explicitly refer to Jesus as "Christ the Lord" when He is born, CiMI (2018e) interprets this passage as a prophecy to be fulfilled at the baptism of Jesus. They document the following, for example: "In Luke 2:11 we read of a prophecy where, at his birth, Jesus is referred to as a Lord and a Christ. Why do we say this was only a prophecy? Because, when we understand what a Christ is, we will understand that this was a prophecy over Jesus' life. Acts 2:36 says that Jesus was made both Lord and Christ. He was made this, not born this." It should be noted, however, that there is no indication in the passage of Luke 2:11 that would warrant a prophetic interpretation.

<sup>104</sup> This is also evident from the following statement: "We're not denying Jesus. We're denying the flesh of Jesus! We're eating it up – flesh and blood! Because flesh and blood ... cannot inherit the kingdom of God. So, please write this down, Christ is not flesh and blood. A Christ is not flesh and blood. A Christ is raised on the last day. How do you become a Christ? You have to eat the flesh and blood. You have to eat it! ... eat away Jesus..." (Strydom, 2018a).

<sup>105</sup> "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ."

<sup>106</sup> In one of his other sermons, Strydom (2017a) contends that those "who do not believe" will only come to faith when "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ ... that the light of the gospel of the glory of the seed, the specie, who is the image of God should shine on them".

<sup>107</sup> The context in which Strydom (2019d) said this was much the same as the context of this current discussion. The full quote reads as follows: "And when Jesus Christ came out of the baptism waters, Jesus was the very first person who was born twice. Why is this important to understand? Because Jesus is the prototype of a specie. So, Jesus had to be a son of man for thirty years, because you are a son of man. And then Jesus was born from the heavenly Jerusalem, the womb above. He became the very first one ... And we see this when God's spirit becomes one with His spirit. So, Jesus ... becomes Jesus Christ, anointed Jesus ... He was not anointed before he was born from



Mary, but then He was also born spiritually from above at His baptism when He was anointed.<sup>108</sup> According to Kotze (2017b), even though Jesus was born miraculously, and without sin, “he had to be reborn”. He also revisits their stance on the divine nature of Jesus by saying that if one confesses that Jesus is God,<sup>109</sup> “you are not confessing Jesus Christ to have come in the flesh”. He was a normal man, nothing more, but at His baptism he was “born from above”.

Kotze (2017b) applies this teaching to his listeners at CiMI by stating that, just like Jesus was born from above at His baptism and made a Lord and a Christ, they are also born from above and made Lords and Christs.<sup>110</sup> CiMI (2018e) states this application to its members even more clearly:

We will bear the image of the kind that is born from above, just as Jesus Christ who was the first thereof. Jesus was born from Mary, of dust, whereas Jesus Christ was born from above at the baptism as the heavenly man. This example also applies to each one of us, we will bear the same image as the heavenly man when we are born from the same seed. We will be a Christ, the harvest of the first seed (Jesus Christ) ... This is the destiny of every ambassador of Heaven, born from the Seed of God. Each Seed of God is a Christ specie, a Christ kind. Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, was the first anointed one. We have to carry the same anointing; otherwise, we will be an illegitimate part of the people of God.<sup>111</sup>

In the light of Acts 10:36-37,<sup>112</sup> Strydom (2019d) addresses this theme from a slightly different angle. He says that the word which God sent to the world was His only begotten son.<sup>113</sup> The

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above ... Jesus only became the prophetic word when he was born from above ... What do you celebrate, Bethlehem or Galilee? What do you celebrate when you celebrate the birth of Jesus?”

<sup>108</sup> Kotze (2017b) for example claims that, “Jesus Christ was born from above. Jesus was born from earth, from Mary.” Strydom (2019d) also offers the same explanation when he asserts, “Jesus was born Jesus, and then he was born again as Jesus Christ.” He then applies this principle to himself saying, “Xandré Strydom is born son of man ... Xandré Christ is born from God the Father in heaven.”

<sup>109</sup> Kotze (2017b) considers people who confess that Jesus is God to be deceivers. He states: “For many deceivers has gone out. Many ... This is what the church world is about today, Jesus is God. Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, in a mere human nature. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” For Kotze the belief that Jesus is God does not include the notion that Jesus Christ has a human and a divine nature. He must be either human or divine, which places one before a false dilemma.

<sup>110</sup> CiMI (2018e) also uses 2 Cor. 1:21-22 to state the following: “Paul continues by saying that we will bear the same image as Jesus Christ did because when we are born again, we are also born of God (born from Heaven) and anointed with the Spirit of God (2 Cor 1:21-22).” These verses read as follows: “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us *is* God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.”

<sup>111</sup> It is important to note another claim to exclusivity in this quoted passage. CiMI is the only group with the true gospel which entails that they must carry the same anointing as Jesus Christ which, according to their doctrine, makes them Christs as well. All other positions on this matter are considered to make one “an illegitimate part of the people of God”.

<sup>112</sup> “The word which *God* sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached.”

<sup>113</sup> This is a reference to John 3:16.

question he raises, however, is whether God sent His Son into the world as a baby, or whether He only sent His son once Jesus was born again from above.<sup>114</sup> He claims that,

God did not send baby Jesus. Baby Jesus was born by a supernatural birth. Yes, but what came out of Mary was a son of man, like Adam, the first Adam without sin. But the moment Jesus was born from above, he became the beloved Son ... And God says, I send you into the world. Did God send a carpenter into the world? No. God sent a Son.

Elsewhere, CiMI (2018m) also explains that the only way Jesus could become the Son of God was if He was “born of God, born of the Spirit, born from heaven”. This is exactly what happened to Jesus at the Jordan River and there, after receiving the Spirit of God, He became “Jesus Christ, the Son of God”. Since being a Christ makes one a spiritual being and a true Son of God, it explains why CiMI (2018e) asserts that Jesus Christ as “the Spirit man, was the Son of God”.

Strydom (2019d) further insists that John the Baptist was not called to testify about the coming of Jesus. Rather, he was called to testify to “the specie that would come”, namely the “Christ”. He states: “When there is a coming of Christ ... it is about God that comes.” In this sense John the Baptist prepared the way for God himself to anoint Jesus with His Spirit in order for Him to become a Christ (Strydom, 2017b). He argues that, although John the Baptist knew Jesus, since Jesus was his cousin, he did not know that Jesus would “be the first one in whom God would again be Immanuel”.

The moment Jesus was born again at His baptism and He became the first Christ, He also started with His miracles. Strydom (2019d) explains that His signs, wonders and miracles started at His baptism and there He also started to “mature in stature”.<sup>115</sup> The baptism of Jesus in this sense also signals the beginning of Jesus Christ’s ministry. He was now able to perform miracles since God was with Him. Therefore, the anointing of Jesus includes the notion that He was furnished “with the necessary powers” for His ministry (CiMI, 2018e). It was also after His baptism that Jesus Christ “started to reveal the Father in his actions and in his conduct” (CiMI, 2018g).

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<sup>114</sup> Elsewhere CiMI (2018m) phrases this question as follows: “When did Jesus become the Son of God if it did not happen at his birth in Bethlehem?”

<sup>115</sup> Strydom (2016d) also establishes the contrast between Jesus and Jesus Christ by way of His miracles. He says that before the baptism there were “no signs, no wonders, no miracles. There were no parables. Jesus was born of a woman, Mary. But Jesus was also the first one, the first second Adam who was born from Jerusalem above at his baptism waters. At the Jordan River. And after what happened at Galilee, we read in the Bible how signs, wonders and miracles suddenly started to happen, because Jesus Christ had to be the first of who you would become after the cross. First you are born a son of man, and because you believe in the cross you die as a son of man and you become a son of God.”

It is clear then that the baptism of Jesus is a highlight in the theology of CiMI. It signals the moment when Jesus was born from above and became Jesus Christ. It is at that moment that He became a Son of God and received the image of God to represent God accurately on earth. For thirty years He lived on earth as a mere carpenter, nothing more. But when he was anointed with God's Spirit at His baptism and became the first Christ, He became a true Son of God and He received the Spirit of God. This turned Him into a spiritual being who is only manifested in the flesh. Alongside His 'natural' or physical body, it also gave Him a 'spiritual body'. In this sense there is a parallel between the rebirth of Jesus and that of CiMI's members. In the same way Jesus became Jesus Christ and a Son of God at His baptism, someone who gains the knowledge of CiMI's gospel and embraces it also becomes a Christ and a Son of God. Therefore, Jesus Christ was only the first one of many. CiMI (2018g) for example explains that,

Jesus Christ was the first Son of God – the first of many Sons of God, brothers of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29) in whom the Word of God would also become flesh ... These are the revealed Sons of God (Rom 8:19) on whom creation eagerly awaits... Sons who are born from the bosom of the Father, who accurately declare and reveal Him over all the earth, those in whom the Word/Logos of God become [sic] flesh.<sup>116</sup>

Furthermore, the baptism of Jesus also marks the beginning of the first coming of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the first person to be reborn and planted into the Christ specie. This will be addressed thoroughly when discussing the crucifixion of Jesus Christ in identifying the work of the first coming of Christ.

### **2.3.5.5. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ**

When it comes to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, CiMI affirms it as a historic event and an event where Jesus Christ without any doubt died on the cross. In other words, Jesus Christ was executed by way of crucifixion and did not physically survive His execution. The theological significance of this event for CiMI, however, is different from how historical, orthodox Christianity has always viewed it.<sup>117</sup> CiMI (2018i) claims that the church is missing "the purpose of the cross".

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<sup>116</sup> This is an incarnation in the theology of CiMI. The event of one's rebirth where one is born again from above by being anointed with God's Spirit translates into an incarnation where the Word of God becomes flesh inside of an individual. As shown earlier, an 'incarnation' in the historical, orthodox sense is different from CiMI's view on it.

<sup>117</sup> In brief, one could say that historical, orthodox Christianity has always viewed Jesus Christ's crucifixion to be a substitutionary atonement where Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God bore God's wrath on sin and consequently paid the penalty of sin. In this sense it was an atoning death and, as a precondition for the death of Jesus to be able to save mankind from the wrath of God, Jesus had to be both fully human and fully divine. As Geisler and Rhodes (2008:54) reminds: "As God he could reach to God, and as man he could reach to man."

Like many other of their theological doctrines, CiMI disregards the physical part of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and prioritises some sort of spiritual significance behind it.<sup>118</sup> Strydom (2018a), for example, says: "The cross moved us from the natural to the spiritual."<sup>119</sup> He also explains it to the members of CiMI as follows:

[T]he flesh of Jesus died so that your flesh can die. Jesus Christ, the first Christ passed over. That one is incorruptible, it cannot die. You were bought with that blood, the spiritual blood, not the flesh blood. The flesh blood had to become sin. There is a spiritual blood born of God (Strydom, 2016d).

This suggests that there is nothing significant to the physical body and blood of Jesus Christ. His body merely became sin and had to be done away with by God. All that is left is the spiritual meaning behind the cross, which focuses entirely on the spiritual reality that the cross of Jesus Christ somehow made possible for mankind.

It has been emphasised repeatedly throughout the discussion that the cross of Jesus Christ made it possible for one to become a Christ and therefore a spiritual being, and a true Son of God. According to Strydom (2018a), because of the cross, one's spirit can come alive and reconnect with the spiritual realm again. The cross also made it possible for God to dwell inside of mankind to fill the earth with His glory. Ever since the fall of mankind into sin, man was not spiritual anymore. In fact, after the fall man died spiritually. The position of sin introduced the veil between 'spiritual heaven' and 'natural earth'. This veil is explained to be the flesh of Jesus which must be removed (CiMI, 2018p). Sin therefore stopped man from being a spiritual being and only sealed the fate of mankind to the fleshly and sinful Adam specie (Strydom, 2019d).

Strydom (2016d) claims that Jesus Christ took His body with flesh and bones to the cross to exchange between two species. At one point he also explains it as follows: "The Christ Jesus took His flesh to the cross. Jesus did not want to die. It was Christ Jesus that was obedient to God's voice." This indicates that after Jesus Christ's baptism, he was primarily a spiritual being by virtue of being a Christ. Although the fleshly part of Jesus Christ was still part of His being, it was not worthy of God's kingdom since He wants spiritual beings, i.e., Christs and Sons in His kingdom. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, one could say, established the possibility for mankind to move out of the carnal and fleshly Adam specie, and into the new spiritual Christ specie. Take note, however, that the cross of Jesus Christ does not actualise this 'cross over' for mankind; it only makes it possible for mankind to go through this process of becoming Christs<sup>120</sup> (CiMI, 2018e). In a sense therefore, "the cross destructed [Jesus Christ's] flesh" in order that the flesh of those who are reborn and anointed with God's Spirit can also be destructed. When

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<sup>118</sup> This is also the case with their view on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

<sup>119</sup> Strydom (2017b) further states: "At the cross ... everything changed from natural to spiritual."

<sup>120</sup> CiMI (2018e) states: "This is what the cross of Jesus Christ made possible. It made it possible for us to pass over from a one Adam specie to a second Adam specie."

referring to the destruction of Jesus Christ's flesh, Strydom (2019d) explains to his listeners that "whatever is true about Him is true about you". In line with this, Strydom (2017b) explains that it is "the flesh of Jesus that paid the price for Adam or flesh". Strydom is here linking the Adam specie very directly with one's own flesh. He also notes: "Jesus Christ made an end to Adam by offering the flesh for sin." To be in the Adam specie therefore entails that one is fleshly and/or carnal.

According to Strydom, this is why Jesus Christ cried out on the cross: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"<sup>121</sup> Apparently, the moment Jesus Christ uttered those words, "God had forsaken the flesh ... at that point, God in the manifestation of the cross was forsaking the flesh Adam."<sup>122</sup> When Jesus Christ went to the cross his earthly body, his flesh, became sin, and when one died, then all died." This could only be achieved by someone who is already a Son of God and a Christ.<sup>123</sup> Since Jesus Christ was the only Son of God and Christ at that time, only He could make the exchange between the two species. Strydom (2017b) asks his listeners at CiMI: "Let me tell you something, the cross made us spiritual beings; why are we still thinking carnally? ... Why is Jesus Christ about Jesus?" According to Strydom, the flesh of Jesus Christ was destroyed on the cross and in this sense Jesus (the fleshly one) should be forgotten. It is all about the spiritual Jesus Christ now because, as Strydom (2019d) claims, "Jesus is taken away. Now, the Lord is the Spirit-one." Since "whatever is true about Him, is true about you", your own flesh, after being born again, is also destructed through the cross of Jesus Christ.<sup>124</sup>

The cross of Jesus Christ has torn the veil between the spiritual and the natural (physical) realm. Strydom (2019d) in this regard asserts that Jesus Christ "destructed with his body's destruction the veil". This means that once the physical body of Jesus Christ died on the cross, it destroyed the veil between the spiritual realm and the physical realm. It paved the way for mankind's spirit to be reunited with the spiritual realm and with God's Spirit again. This explains why Strydom (2016d) teaches as follows:

[W]hen Christ Jesus in the body of Jesus hung on the tree, on the cross, and God said 'it is done' and that very moment it split and Christ Jesus went into Sheol, into the realm of the dead, to conquer death. Jesus hung on the cross ... Jesus was no longer a part of Christ. Do you understand what I am saying? So, they took that body and threw it into a grave.

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<sup>121</sup> This is a reference to Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34.

<sup>122</sup> This is another indication that one's body with flesh and bones is connected to sin and evil. God has forsaken the flesh of mankind and is not interested in redeeming that as well. In fact, as Strydom (2017a) asserts, "We're no longer flesh ... [the flesh] is not God's offspring, the Spirit is God's offspring."

<sup>123</sup> Strydom (2016d) states: "God could not pay with the flesh of Jesus, He had to pay with a Son of God."

<sup>124</sup> In their attempt to biblically justify this view, CiMI employs 2 Cor. 5:14 to argue that since Jesus died physically on the cross, all those who are born from above also died physically.

CiMI (2018b) continues by stating: “Through his blood, we received the redemption or salvation from sin. This means we have been spiritually purified of the position of sin and have been dedicated to God spiritually.” The fall from righteousness into sin is reversed through the cross of Jesus Christ. Because of the cross it is possible for one to cross over from the Adam specie into the Christ specie (Strydom, 2018b). Jesus Christ, as the second Adam specie, died, and so when one is born again one is no longer part of the first Adam specie because “if one died then all died” (Strydom, 2019a).

For CiMI the whole purpose behind the cross “was that we can grow into intimacy between us, the creation, and the Creator who created it so that the creation can function how the Creator created it” (Strydom, 2019d). A precondition for this intimacy to be established is for one to become a Son of God and a precondition for being a Son of God is to be a Christ, i.e., a spiritual being carrying the image of God. One could therefore say that the cross of Jesus Christ established the possibility for intimacy with God in His creation and for restoring it to the state in which it ought to be. Since this purpose is achieved through Sons of God, CiMI (2018j) explains that “by now you should understand that God wants to bring many Sons to glory.<sup>125</sup> This was made possible by sacrificing one Son so that many Sons could rise from the dead.”<sup>126</sup>

However, it is important to note that for CiMI the work accomplished through the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the purpose of the first coming of the Christ specie. CiMI (2018p) summarises this as follows: “We are all acquainted with the first coming of Christ. It was a natural coming whereby the Word, which is God, became flesh in Jesus Christ<sup>127</sup> and we received redemption because of the work on the cross. Our Spirits were saved.” The work of Jesus Christ on the cross was the work of the first coming of Christ and was meant to save the ‘Spirits’ of mankind. Therefore, “the moment you believe in what Jesus Christ did for you on the cross you die! And you are born again” as a Christ. Moreover, this work of the first coming of Christ is, in the words of Strydom (2019d), “a completed” and “a finished work”. This means that nothing can be added to it. Kotze (2017c) also expresses this belief in the following way: “Do I believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ enough? Definitely!” Although this sounds as if it is in line with historical, orthodox Christianity,<sup>128</sup> there is a subtle difference to be recognised. The work of Jesus Christ is only enough for what it was supposed to accomplish, which was the

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<sup>125</sup> This is a reference to Heb. 2:10.

<sup>126</sup> This reference to ‘rising from the dead’ should not be taken as a literal, bodily resurrection, but rather as a reference to the Christ specie that rises inside of a person. This issue will be discussed in Chapter 5 when addressing CiMI’s view on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

<sup>127</sup> Although this statement sounds theologically correct, in the light of previous discussions it is clear that CiMI does not affirm the incarnation of Jesus Christ as God who took upon Himself a human nature.

<sup>128</sup> The historical Christian faith maintains that one is only saved through grace, by faith, apart from works. In this sense no one can contribute to their own salvation, it is solely accomplished by God the Father who sent His Son as a substitutionary atonement, and whose work is applied in the lives of believers by God the Holy Spirit.

establishment of the possibility for one to move from Adam into Christ. Kotze, for example, explains that the work of Jesus Christ on the cross took him from the position of sin to the position of righteousness.<sup>129</sup> For that purpose, the work of Jesus Christ is enough, but Kotze adds that “that is not enough. Because in vain you are the condition acceptable to God, but you do not do the things that is acceptable to God.”

For CiMI the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the event that enabled mankind to pass over from the Adam specie to the Christ specie. For God to accomplish His dream of filling the earth with His glory, He needs Sons. But since mankind at that time was still stuck in the old Adam specie, He had to sacrifice His only Son and Christ, namely, Jesus Christ. The flesh and bone body of Jesus Christ died on the cross and was done away with. Seeing that whatever is true of the first Christ, is also true of all subsequent Christs, and since the body of Jesus Christ was ‘destroyed’ on the cross, the physical bodies of those who are born again as Christs in CiMI are also destroyed. The cross of Jesus Christ therefore established a spiritual reality for those who are born again. Their spirits are now made alive again and can reconnect with God to be His Sons on earth and therefore His image bearers. Jesus, the fleshly part of Jesus Christ, was no longer part of Jesus Christ after His crucifixion. His flesh and bones were buried in the grave and finally separated from Jesus Christ, the spirit man.

#### **2.3.5.6. The resurrection of Jesus**

When contemplating the resurrection of Jesus Christ, Strydom (2017a) remarks that when one claims that the physical body of Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, one “raises up sin again”. This comment is in line with CiMI’s matter-spirit dualism which comes from Gnosticism. Since the physical body of Jesus Christ is still part of the old Adam specie, it should be discarded as something that is useless and still in a position of sin. According to Strydom, (2016d) the fact that the flesh of Jesus Christ was a sin offering means that it “cannot be raised to life ... the flesh was taken away, it is done!” He further claims that if “you have the revelation that you are the Christ, and you understand it, then you can also understand that the body of Jesus had to go and Jesus Christ had to be resurrected<sup>130</sup> ... As long as flesh is alive Satan is alive. Flesh returns to dust ... we can lay Jesus down in the dust.” Kotze (2017c) also remarks that it is totally wrong when the church teaches people that the body with which Jesus was

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<sup>129</sup> Kotze (2017c), for example, states that “we give full glory to the finished work of Jesus Christ”. He further claims that the only people who are diminishing the work of Jesus Christ are those who do not believe that His work made you the same as the first Christ.

<sup>130</sup> This statement from Strydom makes it obvious that one must have knowledge of CiMI’s new revelation with regard to Jesus Christ and understand it in order to understand that the physical body of Jesus Christ had to be done away with. In this sense, understanding their gospel, especially that one can be a Christ, is a precondition for understanding why the physical body of Jesus Christ had to be done away with.

resurrected was “the natural or physical body”. Although these statements clearly imply that CiMI rejects the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, they still uphold the notion of some sort of spiritual resurrection.<sup>131</sup>

After reading 1 Corinthians 15:44,<sup>132</sup> Kotze (2017c) remarks that it explicitly states that “there is a natural body and there is a spiritual body”, again indicating that Jesus Christ was not raised in a natural or physical body with flesh and bones. Instead of a physical body, Strydom (2016d) insists that “the spiritual body of Jesus Christ conquered death and was resurrected, and that the spiritual body is the one that saves us”. Elsewhere Strydom (2019d) also explains to his listeners that when Jesus Christ “was raised to life, it was a glorified one, the one that was on the inside. The tent was consumed.” With “tent” Strydom is referring to the flesh and bones of Jesus Christ’s physical body. The body of Jesus Christ was therefore not physically raised from the dead. All that was raised, was the spiritual one “on the inside”.<sup>133</sup> Hence, while a “son of man goes back to dust ... a Son of God has a heavenly body.” In this sense the “heavenly body”, or “spiritual body”, is recognised to be a body, but not a body with flesh and bones. The consequence is that Jesus Christ was not raised in the same physical body that died at His crucifixion (Strydom, 2018a).

Furthermore, Strydom (2016d) explains that

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and the heavenly body can express itself in many shapes and forms. It was not the flesh Jesus who was raised to life, otherwise his disciples would have recognised Him. They recognised the voice and the one that was on the inside, the spiritual Jesus Christ. Hence, Jesus Christ expressed himself through the heavenly body and not the fleshly body anymore.

Take note here that, after the crucifixion, it is claimed that Jesus Christ’s disciples did not recognise Him anymore because He only had a spiritual body, which looked different. Strydom (2016d) also says that one must understand that Jesus was two persons. He was a Jesus and a Jesus Christ, in the same way everyone in CiMI is also two persons, for example there is a Xandré and a Xandré Christ. Since “one was raised to life ... all was raised to life” (Strydom,

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<sup>131</sup> It is interesting that Strydom (2017a) blames religion for the apparent stolen body of Jesus Christ. He claims that, “In fact, religion was so dodgy, that if you go and look at Matthew 28, they bribed the soldiers after Jesus Christ was raised to life to tell the people that His body was stolen. Why? Because through Jesus they can still veil the people and through that Satan, the god of this world, religion, is blinding God’s children to be raised to mature Sons of God. Do you understand what I am saying? Raising up the veil, raising up Jesus will raise up sin.” To be sure, this explanation from Strydom is vague and the exact meaning of it is uncertain.

<sup>132</sup> “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

<sup>133</sup> This is referring to the Christ man inside of Jesus that came alive at His baptism and turned Him into a spiritual being.



2016d), which explains how CiMI manages to apply the spiritual resurrection to people who are born again.

Strydom (2019d) further asks his listeners at CiMI: “When Jesus Christ died on the cross and gave up his flesh, what happened with the body of Jesus? Where was it for three days?” He answers his own question saying that it was in the tomb. The flesh of Jesus was “broken down” and “beaten”. He then asks another question:

Do you know what happened with Jesus Christ, the Spiritual one? He went into death itself and conquered death. Because a Son of God cannot die ... you cannot die!<sup>134</sup> ... And when Jesus Christ was raised to life, it was a glorified one, the one that was on the inside. The tent was consumed. It is exactly what will happen with your tent ... [Your body] is corruptible. When you are born of the seed it is an incorruptible seed (Strydom, 2019d).

The physical body of Jesus Christ was therefore consumed like any other buried body; however, the “spiritual body”, the “heavenly body”, the “glorified body” of Jesus Christ, “the one that was on the inside”, i.e., the Christ in Him, was raised after conquering death.<sup>135</sup> According to Strydom (2017a), this is the “gospel”, the “message”, the “truth” and the “revelation” that must be preached today. He therefore claims that all he is doing is attempting to point the church towards the correct Jesus Christ, since the “one that the church is raising to life is not ... a Lord and a Christ. That is not the Messiah, the Saviour.”<sup>136</sup>

Strydom (2019d) further insists that the problem with the church is that the “sin offering” is kept alive. According to him, “the church crucifies Jesus and then raise his body back to life.” Apparently, the church does this because the people believe that “the physical Jesus is Christ”. In other words, since the church believes in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, the veil between the natural (physical) and spiritual is still present in the church. Strydom therefore states that “if the people ... ‘Jesus’ your gospel and do not ‘Jesus Christ’ the gospel, it is veiled”. This is CiMI’s way of saying that wherever the church still believes in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the flesh is still alive and the veil between the natural and the spiritual is still there, darkening the minds of people. Strydom (2018a) further critiques the church by saying:

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<sup>134</sup> This implies that someone who is born again from above and becomes a Christ cannot die spiritually. One can still die physically. If it is meant in the latter sense, it would be contrary to the rest of this statement from Strydom (2019d).

<sup>135</sup> It is not clear how death was conquered in the theological explanation of CiMI. If there was no physical resurrection from the dead, in what sense was death really conquered?

<sup>136</sup> The full context in which Strydom (2018a) made this statement reads as follows: “Please understand that Jesus is not Jesus Christ, you are not letting go of your Lord and Saviour. I am just trying to explain to you who is the right one. Because the one that the church is raising to life is not ... a Lord and a Christ. That is not the Messiah, the Saviour ... Now that we can lay down sin, we can become the second specie, mindful of the things of God and not of man. If you are mindful of the things of man, the Satan can play with you.”

Two thousand years of ministering Jesus the flesh one as Christ ... it did not bring the church anywhere. Forty-three thousand different opinions because we keep flesh alive. The flesh needs to die, because that flesh became the sin offering and ... an offering cannot be raised to life, it has to be done with. So, the Spiritual one was raised to life, Jesus Christ, the Son of God ... Now that we see him, we are changed into that image from glory to glory. Because we are that specie now. But, when you look in the mirror you still see your tent, a corruptible body which gets older and older.

Since the church believes in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, there are 43 000 different denominations with their own views, judgments and opinions. Instead of keeping the “flesh alive”, the flesh of Jesus Christ must be forgotten, which is also the only way someone can become a Christ (Strydom, 2018a). If one focuses on the flesh of Jesus Christ by believing in His bodily resurrection, the veil blinds one. Referring to the body of Jesus Christ after His resurrection, Kotze (2017c) states that according to “religion, it is a fleshly state”, which should be removed from one’s theology. Strydom (2017b) asserts that you must understand “the difference between Jesus and Jesus Christ” to have the correct view of the resurrection. One must therefore grasp that “Jesus was not raised to life; Jesus Christ was raised to life”. Hence, the one that was raised to life was the one that was born from above “at the Jordan River, the Spiritual man” (Strydom, 2019d) and since God is not “the Father of flesh”, He would never raise up a physical body with flesh and bones. Considering the teaching that the cross made it possible for people to be spiritual beings again, Strydom (2017b) asks the question: “Why is Jesus Christ about Jesus?”, indicating that the church outside of CiMI is still “thinking carnally”.

By way of summary it will be helpful to examine Kotze’s (2017c) exposition of 1 Corinthians 15:35-38.<sup>137</sup> He begins by saying that there is “a natural body and a spiritual body”. He explains that “the grain of wheat”, which was the natural body of Jesus, had to “fall in the ground and die”. At this point he introduces the term *monogenes* in his exposition. This term is the same term that is used in John 1:14<sup>138</sup> and 18,<sup>139</sup> which is translated as “only begotten”. It is especially used to signal the point that Jesus Christ is the only one of His kind; He is utterly unique in His relationship to the Father, and therefore the “only begotten” of the Father. However, Kotze states that if the grain, i.e., the natural body of Jesus Christ, “does not die it will always be *monos*”.<sup>140</sup> In other words, if the physical body of Jesus with flesh and bones does not die and be done away with, He will remain the ‘only’ one of a kind. But now, since God has given us “One

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<sup>137</sup> “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other *grain*. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.”

<sup>138</sup> “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

<sup>139</sup> “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.”

<sup>140</sup> This is the Greek word for ‘one’.

little seed, a grain of wheat”, which is Jesus Christ as the first of the Christ specie, “it has to fall into the ground and die” in order that the seed can produce “a harvest” of many Christs. In this sense Kotze explains that “the *monogeneses*, that single of its kind ... multiplied”. But in order for the Christ seed to multiply, it had to die and be done away with. Kotze concludes his exposition as follows: “It was put into the ground to die, and then? What? ... It multiplied ... there will be millions like that ... So, the purpose of the single of its kind, the *monogenes*, was to generate more Sons of the same kind.”

The key issue to realise here is that in order for God to have more Sons in His kingdom, to have more spiritual Christs like Jesus Christ, the physical body of Jesus Christ had to die and be destructed, without being physically resurrected again. If the flesh of Jesus Christ is done away with, a spiritual harvest of Christs can rise in the people who are born again from above. If one believes in a physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, one’s worldview is still veiled with the flesh of Jesus and will not arrive at the truth of CiMI’s gospel. One needs the “revelation knowledge of the difference between Jesus (flesh) and Jesus Christ (spirit)” to understand that one can become a Christ, a spiritual being, and a Son of God. Together with this ‘revelation knowledge’, one will also realise that the flesh and bones of Jesus must be forgotten since it is in the grave and cannot be resurrected.

### **2.3.6. The nature of mankind: equal in value to God and created as a spirit being**

#### **2.3.6.1. Introduction**

Another theological theme of CiMI, which is worthy of discussion, is in the area of anthropology. CiMI teaches that man is equal in value to God, but different in function. One can say that this teaching, according to CiMI, is how God views mankind. As will become clear, this also links up in an important way with the abovementioned restoration plan of God. In addition to this belief, CiMI (2018b) teaches that “God created mankind as a spirit being with a soul (mind), contained in a fleshly (carnal) body.” It appears therefore that CiMI introduces a matter-spirit or Gnostic dualism where man is primarily a spiritual being who is only “contained” in a body.<sup>141</sup> Both teachings with regard to the anthropology of CiMI will be dealt with separately, although there are major correspondences. In the summary and conclusion of this section the researcher will attempt to combine these two features of CiMI’s anthropology.

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<sup>141</sup> Geisler (2004:62) defines this kind of matter-spirit dualism, or what he calls anthropological dualism, as follows: “Anthropological dualism, springing from Plato, is the view affirming that soul and body are of two different substances—a human being is a soul and merely has a body.” This notion is clearly visible in the way CiMI (2018b) phrases their anthropology, which according to Geisler, can be traced back to Plato. In modern forms of the New Age movement, there is also an overemphasis on the spiritual and supernatural side of things, but this happens “at the expense of matter” (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009:133).

## 2.3.6.2. Man: equal in value to God

### a) Preliminary remarks

According to CiMI, when Adam fell into sin, more than just God's image, mankind's status as Sons of God, and man's ability to accurately represent God on earth was lost. When Adam fell into sin, it "made mankind less than God"<sup>142</sup> and "lost the ability to share in the attributes of the Father" (Strydom, 2016d). In this sense God's restoration plan restores mankind's equality with God, which is included in all the other aspects already mentioned and discussed.

Strydom (2016d) claims that all of the 41 000 to 43 000<sup>143</sup> different denominations in the world agree about one thing, and that is "how great God is". However, they all disagree about another thing, and that is "how great man is, and that man has the value of God". Strydom tells his listeners: "God made you equal to Him. You are His seed." He adds that, whenever man is preached to be less than a "godkind in value", it is not in line with the true gospel or the kingdom of God. According to Strydom (2016d), God cannot expect man to represent Him if man does not believe he is equal in value to God. In other words, one's own value and status of equality with God was also lost when Adam fell into sin. Furthermore, being equal in value to God is a precondition for representing God on earth.

The cross of Jesus Christ changed this situation. Jesus Christ's crucifixion made it possible for mankind to be equal with God again and accordingly, after being born again, to represent God accurately (Strydom, 2019a). Since man is in the image and likeness of God, one becomes a "godkind" when one is born again and anointed with the Spirit of God, which is the true gospel according to Strydom (2016d). Smit (2016) also states that the definition of perfect and true love, according to God, is that man must come to realise that "as [God] is, so are you. You must come to realise that you are equal in value with God, you just differ in function. This is the most important principle that we must come to learn as a church."

Apparently, this teaching was revealed to Strydom in one of his dreams in which God spoke to him saying, "I am equal in value to you ... We are equal in value but different in function" (Strydom, 2016d). Strydom (2016d) contends that mankind "is the most important possession

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<sup>142</sup> This happened ontologically and epistemologically in the sense that mankind did not just lose epistemological access to its status as a godkind, but also lost the ontological reality of being a godkind, whatever that may include. There is therefore a parallel between being a Christ and a godkind in this sense.

<sup>143</sup> Building further on his critique against the notion of many church denominations, Strydom (2019d) also claims that it is due to the devil's infiltration of the church across the world and due to establishing doctrines like the Trinity and deity of Christ. Strydom (2017b) for example asserts that "religion lied to us ... Why was the devil's masterplan to make Jesus God? Because then he denies you your godliness." This statement from Strydom also suggests that when one becomes a Christ, one becomes godly, whatever that may entail for CiMI.

God would ever possess” and adds that, if one does not understand the true value of mankind, one will never understand God. He contrasts this with what religion is teaching. While religion teaches that mankind is less than God and that God is in a different class of being, CiMI teaches that mankind is equal to God because God never made man “less than Himself” (Strydom, 2016d).

### **b) Mankind as the “godkind”**

In many sermons of CiMI’s teachers, they allude to man as being a “godkind”, in agreement with the abovementioned assertions of Strydom (2016d). The term “godkind” is applied to mankind and used by CiMI to express man’s equality with God. Kotze (2016a) for example claims: “God never became a man, but ... God generated man to become a godkind.” The basic idea is that God created mankind in such a way that He can change man “into Himself” and that “a man can carry the fulness of God” (Strydom, 2019d). At one point, Strydom (2019a) states:

[I]n the beginning God created Himself<sup>144</sup> and man, so that God can represent the invisible spiritual realm, which means that you can’t see it unless you are spiritual, or a spiritual being,<sup>145</sup> or a celestial being. And God created man in His image according to His likeness for a specific reason, because mankind represents the invisible God, visibly in this realm.

As noted earlier, CiMI believes that man cannot represent God if man is not ultimately equal in value to God and hence a ‘godkind’. It is also proclaimed that one is a ‘godkind’ by virtue of being created in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, according to CiMI, when mankind fell into sin and lost the image of God, mankind also became less than God in value.

Strydom (2019b) tells his listeners: “You are a God in your heart ... Why? Because you were created by God.” In addition, he also states that “you are a supernatural being” (Strydom, 2016d), and that they, as God’s representatives in CiMI, are “Gods for God”. While all other creatures were created through the spoken word of God, God created man with His own hands in an extremely specific way, which gives man this kind of capacity. When God says, “let us make man”, it means that man carries the fullness of God, in the sense that “everything that is true about God, God put into one mankind” (Strydom, 2016d). Strydom (2016d) therefore states that “God views [mankind] as God”. While God is the God of heaven, mankind is the gods of earth. While God is the King of heaven, mankind is the kings of earth.

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<sup>144</sup> To state that God created Himself is an absurd statement since for God to create Himself He must have existed prior to creating Himself. If he existed prior to creating Himself, He could not have created Himself. The researcher guesses that what Strydom rather meant was that God created Himself in mankind in the sense of maybe duplicating Himself. This seems to be more congruent with their overall theology on this matter.

<sup>145</sup> Take note that one must be a spiritual being to see the kingdom of God. As already established, if one is a Christ one is a spiritual being, and therefore one must be a Christ to see God’s kingdom.

Labuschagne (2018) phrases this as a case where the “very essence of God was deposited to man” and therefore man is “the godkind”. When man is restored to this status, so Labuschagne’s reasoning goes, he can sustain the creation of God, which in turn is necessary to sustain the creature, “so that the creature can sustain the Creator”. Man, in realising his equality with God and becoming a godkind, is therefore necessary to sustain God as the Creator.<sup>146</sup> Strydom (2018b) adds that when man makes himself less than God, “God is never truly represented ... If we make God greater than us, we actually lift mankind up, and mankind becomes his own God<sup>147</sup>... But when we start to understand the cross made us equal in value to God ... we can speak on behalf of God, accurately.” Therefore, being a godkind is a precondition for representing God and speaking on behalf of God, and the cross of Jesus Christ is the mechanism that made it possible for mankind to be turned back into a godkind.<sup>148</sup>

Strydom (2016d) further explains that since mankind was created in the ‘image’ and the ‘likeness’ of God, mankind will look like God. He for example claims that “when you have someone’s image and likeness, you look like them”.<sup>149</sup> Appearance is not all that mankind has in common with God, since Strydom (2016d) also says that “if you have someone’s likeness, you can do what they can do”. This makes mankind “a supernatural being” and, according to Strydom (2016d), “mankind has the ability to create ... because mankind is a godly creature”. It is also claimed by Strydom (2018a) that “we are one hundred percent man, and one hundred percent God”.<sup>150</sup>

Since God breathed His spirit into man,<sup>151</sup> he is “the godkind, the Christkind” and “the fulness of God” (Strydom, 2019b). Strydom (2018a) also claims that the message of CiMI will “regenerate mankind into gods – the image and likeness of God”. In turn, Kotze (2017c) asserts that if you have the mind of a Christ, you will understand that you are equal to God. This connects the idea

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<sup>146</sup> This notion of Labuschagne (2018) is another reason why God ‘needs’ mankind in CiMI’s theology and why God is to an extent dependent upon man for His own sustenance.

<sup>147</sup> For obvious reasons, this statement of Strydom is not well thought through. It is not at all clear why a proper distinction between mankind as creatures and God as Creator, and hence infinitely greater than man, will lead to man becoming his own God. It seems rather obvious that when one does not maintain a proper creature/Creator distinction, man will view himself as his own deity.

<sup>148</sup> Once again, it is important to point out that it seems as if this transformation into a ‘godkind’ happens both on an ontological and epistemological level. One ontologically becomes a godkind when one is born again, and one’s status as a godkind is also epistemologically realised when one is born again.

<sup>149</sup> It is not at all clear whether CiMI believes God to have physical body parts like man has. While CiMI explicitly believes God to be a spiritual being, implementing the idea that “mankind will look like God”, is not helpful, unless this is just a way of saying that man will be spirit like God is spirit. Since heaven, where God rules, is considered to be an invisible realm, it seems fitting to assume that the latter is being meant by Strydom in this case.

<sup>150</sup> This statement comes remarkably close to how the historical, orthodox Christian church talks about the person of Jesus Christ. At the Council of Chalcedon in 451, Jesus Christ was announced to be fully human and fully divine by virtue of the two natures, divine and human, being hypostatically united in one person.

<sup>151</sup> This is a reference to Genesis 2:7.

of man as a godkind with man as being a Christ, by virtue of being planted into the Christ specie. In other words, to be a Christ in the theology of CiMI, is at the same time to be a godkind by virtue of being created in the image and the likeness of God and receiving the Spirit of God. It is almost as if the two terms are used as synonyms. Since the Christ “is the image of God” (CiMI, 2018h), and one is a godkind since one is created in the image of God; being a Christ makes one a godkind. This happens once one is anointed with the Spirit of God and born from above by gaining the proper knowledge of the revelation of CiMI, and believes in it.

This doctrine is also linked up with the restoration plan of God. God’s dream at creation was to fill the earth with a godkind called Adam, and by filling the earth with the Adam specie He is filling the earth with Himself. Applying the principle described above, Strydom (2016d) says: “Adam was the seed, the kind, the sort, the specie, the image and the likeness of God. Thus, God created man after His own kind ... You are a godkind. You are the seed of God. You are gods, says the Bible.” This caused man to be in the right standing with God and apparently mankind was not just part of God’s dream, but man is the only reason behind God’s dream. According to Strydom (2016d), this explains why, when man fell, man was the only thing God paid for. When “mankind makes a wrong decision, God rolls up His sleeves and God goes, and God pays the price through Jesus Christ for mankind”.

The reason why man is so valuable to God is because mankind is equal in value to Him. Strydom (2016d) asserts that without this understanding of mankind, one cannot understand God. He further adds that, without a proper understanding of mankind’s value, one is not allowed to speak of Jesus Christ or “in the name of the Lord”. Since mankind is so valuable to God, He made the restoration plan “in the form of the cross” and paid for mankind. He further says: “I want you guys to understand this. You are more important than Jesus Christ. You are the exact same value as Jesus Christ, because God had to pay with Jesus Christ. Not as God, because you are not a God.<sup>152</sup> God had to pay with the exact same exchange rate in value.” If Jesus was the answer to the problems of the world, then God would have kept him, but because mankind as a godkind is the answer to the world, God was willing to exchange Jesus Christ for mankind by making it possible for mankind to become the godkind again.

Strydom (2016d) subsequently asks the question:

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<sup>152</sup> This statement by Strydom (2016d) is very confusing in the light of previous comments by CiMI’s teachers, including Strydom’s own comments. If man is a ‘godkind’ and if members of CiMI are explicitly told that they are ‘gods’, why the denial of this proposition here? It seems as if Strydom grants his listeners the proposition that “you are gods” with the one hand, but then takes it away again with the other.

How great must mankind be to God that God would go so far to pay the dearest price for him? ... God was willing to give up His Son. The only one who could accurately represent Him. Was God crazy? No, he wasn't. God had a long-term vision because he wanted to bring many sons to glory.

He explains that if one thinks that one is not equal to Jesus Christ, but lesser than Him, then it is blasphemy against Jesus Christ. In line with this explanation, Kotze (2017c) also states:

This is my message today to tell you, that exactly that which the monogenes was, the single of its kind, he has now duplicated inside each and every single one of you. And this is what we bring to you each and every day, the Word of God, to become flesh inside of you, so that you will live it.

### **c) Appealing to Scripture for mankind as being the “godkind”**

One of the ways CiMI attempts to ground this teaching in Scripture is to refer to Genesis 1:24-27.<sup>153</sup> Here one reads that everything brings forth after its own kind and that God created mankind in His image and likeness. Strydom (2019b) asserts that the notion that everything brings forth according to its own kind is one of the most powerful things in the whole first chapter of Genesis. He uses a couple of examples to clarify exactly what this means. He starts by explaining that eagles as animals bring forth eagles. Dolphins bring forth dolphins. Lions bring forth lions, and in the same way God brings forth gods.

Strydom (2019b) further says that this is also the task of mankind on earth. Mankind must regenerate “the godkind on this earth. Mankind was not created out of mankind. Mankind was created out of Godkind ... So, mankind is the seed of God ... we as a people has [*sic*] the ability and the responsibility of progenerating God.” According to Strydom (2016d), mankind must look after the specie of the godkind inside of man. Just like an eagle can protect and safeguard the existence of its species, so mankind must protect and safeguard the ‘specie’ of the ‘godkind’, which is a Christ. This way “God wanted mankind to bring forth the existence of God on the earth, not man” (Strydom, 2016d).

CiMI (2018e) also elaborates on this teaching by introducing Galatians 3:16.<sup>154</sup> This is further unpacked by asserting the following:

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<sup>153</sup> “Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to its kind’; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it* was good. Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

<sup>154</sup> “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, ‘And to seeds’, as of many, but as of one, ‘*And to your Seed*’, who is Christ.”



The 'seed of promise' is Christ. But Paul is quoting the promise made to Abraham and when we go look at that promise we can see that this is one kind, but many individuals of the same kind – as many as the stars ... In the seed lies the potential to bring forth more of the same kind and type as the seed, the same specie ... Jesus Christ died as a seed, as a kind, so that the seed will bring forth a harvest according to the same kind, the Christ kind, the Christ specie. We are born again if we believe in the work of the cross, to mature our mind as a Spiritual specie to salvation.

The atonement of Jesus Christ on the cross is clearly not viewed as a substitutionary atonement, but rather as an initiation of a process which allows mankind to also be Christs, and to continue to bring forth the Christkind, and hence the godkind on earth. This concept is also explained by Strydom (2016d) when he says that the seed of God, which is the Christ specie, must be invested into the womb, which is mankind, to give birth to God's image on earth.

This line of reasoning, based on Genesis 1:24-27, is also followed by Labuschagne (2019) when he adds that even God refers to mankind as being 'gods' in John 10:34-39.<sup>155</sup> Kotze (2017a), commenting on the same passage in the Gospel of John, confirms this belief of CiMI when he says:

If God said you are gods, then it is so. Then no one can take it away. The gifts of God are irrevocable. So, God can never say 'No, you are not a god anymore.' He said you are gods. If He called them gods to whom the word of God came, so those are the ones. Not everyone is gods. Those who received the Word of God and who are born from above, those are the gods.

It is clear from Kotze's statement that this applies exclusively to CiMI, since they are the only ones who apparently received the Word of God and are born from above. Being a 'godkind' is therefore only a reality for members of CiMI because of the Gospel of the glory of Christ being solely revealed to them and since they are the only church who truly and utterly understands these teachings.

On another occasion, Kotze (2017b) also argued that religion is "funny" since the faith community of religion believe they are sons of God, but not like God in any sense, not to mention being Christs. Supposedly this affirmation makes no sense to Kotze and he states:

[M]e as a human being, I can only create human beings. God as God can only create gods ... That is why God gave the ability to create man, to man, because God can only create gods. But when

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<sup>155</sup> "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, "You are gods?"' If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, "You are blaspheming," because I said, "I am the Son of God"? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father *is* in Me, and I in Him.' Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand."

you were reborn, you were created a god.<sup>156</sup> How can you be anything other than your Father? ... You know the funny thing is, when God created in Genesis 1, it says He created everything according to its kind ... And then He created Adam according to His image and likeness. But then Adam fell. But Adam now had the ability to create man. If Adam did not fall, he would have had the ability to create the godkind. And that is what the godkind specie now does, we create the godkind specie ... We are in labour pains, continually giving birth to Christ. But not in the carnal man, in the spiritual.

This also links with a statement in one of CiMI's (2018e) documents: "In the seed lies the potential to bring forth more of the same kind and type as the seed, the same specie." This lengthy quote from Kotze is crucial because it indicates that only if one is reborn, by gaining knowledge of and embracing the views of CiMI, can one also participate in this creation of the godkind. The implication is that people outside of CiMI are not viewed as the godkind, and therefore also not as Christs.

### **2.3.6.3. CiMI's anthropological (and metaphysical) dualism**

As indicated above, CiMI (2018b) teaches that man was created by God as a "spiritual being with a soul (mind)". As a spiritual being with a soul, man is only "contained" in a physical body with flesh and bones. It is important to realise that this separation between matter and spirit not only applies to the anthropology of CiMI, i.e., one's spirit and body, but to an extent flows forth from their metaphysics and, as already indicated, also drives their Christology.<sup>157</sup> As already established, CiMI maintains that there is an invisible, spiritual realm called heaven, where God reigns, and that there is a visible, physical realm called earth, where mankind reigns<sup>158</sup> (Strydom, 2019a). Ever since mankind fell into sin and lost the image of God, mankind "died spiritually" (Strydom, 2017b). The result was that mankind could not represent God visibly and accurately on earth anymore since mankind was no longer image bearers and Sons of God. This compromised God's dream of filling the earth with His glory through mankind, who are supposed to make "the Spiritual kingdom" of God visible on earth (CiMI, 2018o). In other words, when mankind fell into sin, it separated mankind from the spiritual realm of God. It also distorted

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<sup>156</sup> This way of phrasing the teaching that one becomes a godkind once one is born again, emphasises that it is an ontological transition, according to CiMI.

<sup>157</sup> This was clearly observed in their separation between Jesus and Jesus Christ.

<sup>158</sup> To be sure, historical, orthodox Christianity maintains the reality of the spiritual domain and the physical world. The difference is though that there is no dualistic separation between the two to such an extent that God is not in control of the 'physical realm' or that His interfering in the physical realm, especially by way of an incarnation, is deemed to be blasphemy (Strydom, 2017a). In fact, in Romans 1:20-21 Paul states the following: "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened." This verse indicates that the supernatural, in this case the invisible attributes of God, is communicated through the natural world of which God is the Author.

man's capacity to be spiritual beings<sup>159</sup> who can see the spiritual kingdom of God and be God's Sons and God's image bearers<sup>160</sup> (Strydom, 2019a).

Part of the problem, according to CiMI, is that the fall of man from righteousness into a position of sin introduced a veil between the "natural earth" and the "spiritual heaven". Because of this veil the church started to formulate different views, judgements and opinions about God. Strydom (2019d) asks his listeners at CiMI why they think the leaders of CiMI "love this gospel so much". He answers that "because it empowers you to become the image of God again. It takes away the veil. What is the veil? The flesh.<sup>161</sup> [This gospel] takes away the flesh,<sup>162</sup> and the more the flesh is removed, the more we preach to you that Jesus died once and for all."<sup>163</sup> According to Strydom, one's flesh functions like a veil because of sin and needs to be removed for one to be born again.<sup>164</sup> Strydom (2017b) also explains that "God cannot come to mankind because of the veil. Flesh ... keeps God from being Immanuel." CiMI (2018p) explains that the veil is stopping one from having the correct understanding and knowledge, i.e., CiMI's understanding of Jesus Christ. They assert for example that "the veil ... needs to be removed from our picture (understanding) of Jesus Christ. This is important because it will bring the salvation of the soul ... When we understand this, we not only have unveiled faces, but we are being transformed into the same image as Jesus Christ was."

It has already been established by now that part of God's restoration plan was to remove Jesus from the first fallen, spiritually dead Adam specie and anoint Him "to be the first of a new specie", i.e., the Christ specie, or the "Spiritual specie" (CiMI, 2018e). Accordingly, Jesus was

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<sup>159</sup> One must remember that a precondition for being a 'spiritual being' is to be a Christ.

<sup>160</sup> Strydom (2019a) asserts that "God can represent the invisible spiritual realm, which means that you can't see it unless you are spiritual, or a spiritual being". Since one is only a spiritual being when one becomes a Christ, bearing the image of God and being a true Son of God, one can only see God's kingdom and be busy with His restoration plan when one is a Christ. One only becomes a Christ after being reborn because of understanding and embracing CiMI's revelation regarding Jesus Christ.

<sup>161</sup> CiMI grounds this idea in Heb. 10:19-20.

<sup>162</sup> The expression that the gospel preached by CiMI "takes away the flesh" is quite vague. What is clear enough though is that the spiritual side of things, and the notion of becoming a spiritual being, has priority over the natural or physical side of things in their theological explanations of salvation.

<sup>163</sup> This is not meant as a substitutionary atonement for sins, but rather that the death of Jesus Christ and the destruction of His physical body is applied to "all" who are reborn.

<sup>164</sup> Take note that according to Strydom (2019d), this veil is still present in the church at large and therefore people will not come to the right understanding of Jesus Christ. He further states that while "the veil is still present we will have blinded minds, that is why the church has 43 000 different denominations, because they keep the veil alive. They cannot discern between the one that died and the one that was resurrected." People in the church are still blinded by their flesh (veil). There is also already a hint in this statement from Strydom indicating that Jesus Christ did not physically rise from the dead, but only spiritually, and as long as one believes that He did physically rise from the dead one is keeping the flesh (veil) alive. Moreover, he also suggests the solution to getting rid of the veil: "Now, if you turn away from Jesus and you turn to Jesus Christ, the veil is taken away. Jesus is taken away. Now, the Lord is the Spirit-one." This is his way of saying that one must focus on the spiritual Jesus Christ and not the fleshly Jesus who is still part of the first Adam specie.

the first Christ after He was anointed with the Spirit of God and born from above. The reason why the second specie must be a “Spiritual specie” is because after the fall mankind, as part of the first Adam specie, died spiritually. Therefore, since mankind must be made alive spiritually again, the new Christ specie must be spiritual (Strydom, 2017b). As the first Christ, Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself on the cross, which made it possible for mankind to pass over from the fallen Adam specie into the Christ specie. Therefore, it is through the act of Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross that “our Spirits were saved”, according to CiMI (2018p).

Strydom (2019d) explains to his listeners at CiMI why the cross of Jesus Christ was able to restore them as spiritual beings. He asserts that the flesh of Jesus Christ was “destroyed” on the cross, which also killed their flesh. Strydom, for example, points out:

Now if you understand that the second man Jesus Christ, the first Christ, is a Lord of Heaven, and you believe that the cross destroyed his flesh to kill your flesh<sup>165</sup> ... then you will also believe that you are a Lord, a King. That you are the offspring of God ... [that] you are a Christ kind. So, whatever is true about Him is true about you!

On another occasion, Strydom (2018a) also claims: “We’re not denying Jesus. We are denying the flesh of Jesus ... Because flesh and blood ... cannot inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>166</sup> So, please write this down, ‘a Christ is not flesh and blood’.”<sup>167</sup> Moreover, Strydom (2019d) also maintains that the veil is still alive in the church today because the flesh of Jesus is constantly raised back to life<sup>168</sup> while “the flesh of Jesus needs to die”.<sup>169</sup> According to Strydom (2019d), the flesh of Jesus was not resurrected. He contends that, instead: “What was resurrected was the Son of God, the one that was born from above ... at the Jordan River, the Spiritual man.” This also leads CiMI to reject the bodily resurrection of the saints. Strydom sketches the scenario as follows:

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<sup>165</sup> On the grounds of 2 Cor. 5:14, which reads as follows: “For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died”, CiMI argues that the death of the flesh of Jesus Christ on the cross also marked the death of the flesh of CiMI’s members. Because of the work on the cross, which “destroyed” the flesh of Jesus Christ, the flesh of those who are born from above is also destroyed and they are spiritually made alive again.

<sup>166</sup> Strydom (2019d) explains it as follows: “Flesh and blood cannot partake in the kingdom of God. Jesus had first to become a son of God, a Christ being to partake in the kingdom of God.”

<sup>167</sup> This point is also motivated by CiMI’s exposition of Matthew 16:15. Strydom (2018a) takes one back to the question Jesus Christ asked His disciples in Matthew 16:15 which reads as follows: “But who do you say that I am?” The answer Strydom gives is: “You say a Son of man is a Christ a Son of the living God, and then Jesus says ‘flesh and blood did not reveal this to you’. So, when these people persecute us because we teach people that they are Christs ... they are not persecuting flesh and blood, they are persecuting God our Father.” Strydom also argues that the revelation of the Christ specie does not come from “flesh and blood”. It is a spiritual specie and therefore comes from a spiritual revelation.

<sup>168</sup> This is Strydom’s way of saying that the Church still believes in the physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ.

<sup>169</sup> The flesh of Jesus Christ is Jesus. CiMI (2018p) asserts that the veil “is Jesus, the fleshly part of Jesus Christ”.

Exactly what would happen with your flesh if the end would come? You would be transformed into the Spirit man. If the veil is removed ... [if] flesh is removed ... we can start to become the image of God.<sup>170</sup> Because listen to me, your flesh, the old Adam, is not the image of God. The spiritual Adam is the image of God.<sup>171</sup>

These statements suggest that 'flesh and bones' as representatives of anything that is matter or physical is not worthy of the spiritual kingdom of God. It also leads to a rejection of the resurrection of one's body since it is of no use for the spiritual kingdom of God. Therefore, because of the cross anyone who is born from above becomes a Christ and a godkind, bears the image of God, and becomes a true Son of God. Wherever there "is a Son, God can go into him and represent Himself through mankind again ... This is why Jesus Christ paid ... so that God can again come and dwell in us" (Strydom, 2017b).

Strydom (2017a) provides an important piece of information with regard to one's "spirit man" on the inside. It has already been mentioned earlier that the way the disciples of Jesus recognised Him was by of His voice, but apparently, they also recognised His inner Christ man. He states:

Suddenly they saw a different person, but his voice sounded the same. Because they never knew Jesus the carpenter, they new Jesus Christ, the one born from above, as He spoke through the body of Jesus. Just like you are listening to Xandr  Christ, my spiritual man. Most of you never knew Xandr  ... You don't know Xandr , you are listening to the Christ man ... Just like when you go and look in the mirror you don't see your Christ man, you look into your Adam man. But inside of you there is a spiritual being, there is a Christ man.

CiMI (2018g) summarises the transition as follows:

The moment when God's Spirit becomes one with your spirit, is the moment when you are born again, and God becomes your Father and you become a Son of God because of His Spirit that is now joined with yours. As Jesus Christ was born of God, so every reborn Child of God is also born of God.

This explains why Strydom (2016d) says that the Christ specie inside of one is one's "Spiritual man" who can be the glory of God and consequently fill the earth with God's glory since one's 'spiritual man' aligns one with God's view, judgement and opinion. This is, so the claim goes,

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<sup>170</sup> It seems strange that Strydom (2019d) here introduces the word 'become' since elsewhere it is stated that once one becomes a Christ one is the image of God. Yet, here it comes across as if one becomes the image of God when one dies.

<sup>171</sup> These statements clearly support the idea that there is a big priority placed on one's spiritual being over one's flesh and bones. Strydom (2016d) also explains this notion as follows: "If I take a gun and I shoot you in the head and you die, and your tent dies, what will be standing there will be your glorified body, your spiritual man. The Christ Adam. The Christ specie. The anointed specie. This is very difficult for people to understand when we speak of people as a Christ. I don't understand why? Do you know why? Because religion corrupted us to think that Jesus was God ... Jesus gave himself ... over into the ability and power of God that He acted on behalf of God as God's image and likeness and we started calling him God when Jesus is not God."

what CiMI is busy with on earth. CiMI is not interested in one's flesh or the physical world; the only thing that matters is to "make the Spiritual kingdom visible" by becoming a spiritual being by virtue of being a Christ (CiMI, 2018o). CiMI (2018o) therefore emphasises:

Sons manifest God! There are many Christian children that need to become Sons; it is a big world we live in with a lot of places where Sons need to make decisions. God needs many Sons to make Him visible over the whole earth – in every household, school, business and government. Church, wake up and look at what Jesus preached about. The Kingdom! Take up your birth right and grow up to become mature Sons and manifest the spiritual Kingdom. We at Christ in Me International teach you just that. You are also a Son of God!

According to Strydom (2019d), at CiMI they are just following the law in the Bible which confirms that the "natural comes first, and then the spiritual". That is why Jesus was a natural man for 30 years and then God restored His spiritual man at His baptism. This is exactly how it works with people who are reborn after being anointed with the Spirit of God. They are natural first, and then they become spiritual.

#### **2.3.6.4. Summary and conclusion of CiMI's doctrine of man**

To conclude the anthropology of CiMI, it will be helpful to summarise their view in a more systematic and synthesised manner.

CiMI teaches that man is in fact equal in value to God and created primarily as a spiritual being who is only contained in a body with flesh and bones. Apparently, the other churches in the world do not understand just "how great man is, and that man has the value of God" (Strydom, 2016d). According to CiMI, the teaching that man is equal in value to God is essential to the gospel, and whenever man is proclaimed to be less than God, it is a deviation from the true gospel that God has given to CiMI. The reason why this is essential is because mankind cannot represent God on earth if man is not equal to God in value, and a spiritual being. This idea is also expressed as mankind being a 'godkind'. Phrases like "God made you equal with Him", "you are a God in your heart", "you are one hundred percent God and one hundred percent man", "you carry the very essence of God", "God views man as God" and "you possess the fullness of God" are often used to support this teaching. The idea that mankind was uniquely created by God, i.e., created in the image and likeness of God, accounts for the fact that mankind is a 'godkind'. It is the task of mankind to rule and reign over the physical realm and accurately and visibly represent God and His kingdom on earth. On the other hand, God as Spirit rules and reigns over the spiritual, invisible realm.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, the image of God in man and hence man's status as a godkind was lost. Mankind also died spiritually and man was no longer a spiritual being. Ever

since the fall, man could no longer accurately and visibly represent the invisible God on earth. The reason for this is because equality with God, and therefore being a spiritual godkind, is a precondition for representing God on earth. In other words, one cannot represent God if one is not a spiritual godkind. Furthermore, since mankind was no longer a spiritual being, due to the fall of man into sin, it introduced a veil between the natural and spiritual realms. The veil is the flesh and bones of mankind, more specifically the flesh of Jesus, which must be removed. The way to remove the veil is to turn away from the flesh of Jesus and focus primarily on the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Since God's dream, which is to fill the earth with His glory, was compromised when mankind could no longer represent Him on earth, He created the new spiritual Christ specie to move mankind from the old and corrupted Adam specie into the new Christ specie. After one is born again, one is planted into the Christ specie, which turns one into a godkind and a spiritual being again. This process is made possible through the cross of the very first Christ, Jesus Christ. Since the flesh of Jesus Christ was 'destroyed' on the cross, it also 'destroyed' the flesh of those who are born again in CiMI. This explains the teaching that one must turn away from Jesus's flesh and embrace the notion that Jesus Christ is the spiritual man who destroyed His own flesh. When Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, it was not a physical body with flesh and bones that was raised. Rather, it is the spirit man, or the Christ man of Jesus Christ who was raised. There is therefore no physical, bodily resurrection in the theology of CiMI, since the flesh is only a veil that keeps God from anointing one with His Spirit and from one becoming a Christ. Moreover, flesh and bones cannot inherit the spiritual kingdom of God and is therefore of no use to God and His kingdom.

In the end, it is through the act of being born again that one can be a godkind, and fully realise one's status as a godkind and a spiritual being again. In short, when one becomes a Christ, one automatically becomes a godkind, a spiritual being, and a Son of God who can work in His spiritual kingdom again and represent Him accurately.<sup>172</sup> One's rebirth is made possible through the cross of Jesus Christ, but now one must look past the veil and gain the correct understanding of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>172</sup> Kotze (2017c) uses a dialogue with a 'religious person' as an example to explain this teaching of CiMI to his listeners. He starts off by saying that when a religious person answers 'yes' to the question of whether he/she is a 'son of God', he would tell them that if you are a son of God, "you are a Christ". He explains that the religious person would then typically reject that conclusion. He goes further stating that he would ask religious people the same question again: "Do you believe you are a son of God?" When they respond "Yes, I am a son of God", he would tell them that if you are a son of God, "you are like God". The religious person would also reject that conclusion. This indicates that being a 'son of God' in the theological teaching of CiMI includes being a Christ and a godkind since you are like God. Kotze, however, dismisses the answers of the religious person by saying to his listeners: "I told you religion is funny. It is very funny."

To substantiate the teaching of mankind's equality with God, the teachers of CiMI appeal to Genesis 1:24-27 and John 10:34-39. It is argued from Genesis 1:24-27 that since God created everything according to its seed, and since everything brings forth according to its seed, He created mankind according to His own seed so that mankind can bring forth the godkind. Considering John 10:34-39, it is suggested that since Jesus Christ called mankind 'gods', mankind is undoubtedly gods on earth. However, this is clearly taught to only be true of members of CiMI. In other words, only people who belong to CiMI, embrace their teachings and accept their 'revelation' are gods, Christs and spiritual beings.

One more important point to mention is regarding the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. The reason why God had to pay for mankind with Jesus Christ is because mankind is the exact same value as Jesus Christ. To use their vocabulary, mankind is the equal "exchange rate" as Jesus Christ. God had to pay with His Son to bring more Sons into His service, who can represent Him on earth. As it is stated: "You [as a Son of God] have the full solution and ability to make God and His Kingdom visible"<sup>173</sup> (CiMI, 2018o). As stated before, only Sons of God can work in God's kingdom. But a Son of God in the theology of CiMI is a Christ, a godkind, and a spiritual being, which explains why CiMI (2018o) reminds its members, "Please keep in mind that you are ... a spirit."

### **2.3.7. Day 3 and day 7: CiMI's calendar**

CiMI's claim to exclusivity might lead one to ask: Why is the content of their revelation only disclosed to CiMI at this point in history and why hasn't God revealed it to His church earlier? To answer these questions, CiMI introduces the idea that the reason for this is because we are currently living in day 7 and day 3. Day 7 and day 3 refer to the millennium in which we are living right now. As one may notice, day 7 is a reference to the Sabbath, and day 3 to the resurrection day of Jesus Christ. Before explaining the exact meaning of day 7 and day 3, the point to realise behind day 7 and day 3 is that God is acting according to His timeline and He has chosen Xandré Strydom to receive His revelation and to gather a "day 7 and day 3 people", who are the members of CiMI (Strydom, 2018a). The "day 7 and day 3 people" is therefore a reference to the "harvest" that would come forth from Jesus Christ, the seed. Strydom (2017a) accordingly explains to the members of CiMI:

[Jesus Christ] was the seed and you guys are the harvest. But the harvest would only come on the third day, the resurrection day. So, it is so very important for us to understand that Jesus was the first of us. We are now the first of a harvest, of a specie.

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<sup>173</sup> CiMI (2018o) explains that, "The kingdom, just like God, is spiritual. It is made visible: however, it is always spiritual by nature."



He adds that 2.2 billion Christians around the world do not yet know who they really are.

The biblical starting point for the day 7 and day 3 teaching of CiMI is situated in 2 Peter 3:8 where one reads the following: “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day *is* as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” When Strydom (2018a) comments on this verse he claims that the apostle Peter has given us the “equation” to work with when it comes to God’s timing. He states that “if you want to come to the day of the Lord you have to count in thousands”. Elsewhere he also asserts, in the light of this verse, that “God’s calendar works according to a thousand-year cycles”. In the spiritual realm God works with days, but in the physical realm it translates into thousand-year cycles. Apparently, this is a great mystery since, according to Strydom (2019d),

Hidden inside this revelation is the way how God functions, how the kingdom in heaven functions because that is the calendar God uses and how this earth will function over the next thousand years. As the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christs.

The way Strydom (2019d) explains day 7 is to start with the creation of the world in Genesis, roughly 6 000 years ago. Since it is currently the year 2020, it means that we are already two decades into the seventh thousandth year since the creation of the world. Therefore, when one brings 2 Peter 3:8 into the explanation, it means that we are currently in the seventh day, according to God and His spiritual realm. Because one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like one day to God, Strydom (2019d) counts each thousand years since creation as one day. Furthermore, he interprets the fact that we are already 20 years into the seventh thousandth year, meaning that we are therefore in day 7.

Regarding day 3, Strydom (2019d) follows the same method as spelled out above, except he only starts counting from the crucifixion of Jesus, which happened roughly 2 000 years ago. Consequently, he ends up with the explanation that we are currently in day 3. According to Strydom (2017a), if one does not understand this calendar, “nothing will make sense to you”. He also mentions, after explaining this calendar to his listeners, that because of the teaching of day 7 and day 3 “you have an obligation”, which is to build the kingdom of God and fill the earth with His glory. He furthermore explains that the Bible is all about the Christ specie, which has now been revealed “because it is the correct day”.

Now that we are in day 7 and day 3, Strydom (2018a) explains that God is “looking for ... the 7<sup>th</sup> day and the 3<sup>rd</sup> day people. He is looking for people who are being resurrected as the new specie.” In this day Adam “is no longer the specie that God works with. God now works with the Christ specie”, which is “revealed in day 7 and day 3” (Strydom, 2017a). In some way this explains why God has revealed this new revelation to CiMI only now at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to God’s spiritual calendar, it is day 7 and day 3, which is why God called

Xandré Strydom to preach this gospel and gather people who believe in it. Strydom (2017a) explains this calling from God when he says: “I have to raise a people for God who will comply to a 7<sup>th</sup> day and 3<sup>rd</sup> day people.” He refers to the members of CiMI as “a resurrection specie and a kingdom people” and states that if you want to be busy with the things that God is busy with in this time, you have to comply with the day 7 and day 3 gospel, which is revealed by God in and through CiMI.

Expanding on this teaching, Strydom (2019d) also claims that the church has been asleep for 2 000 years. The first 2 000 years after the cross of Jesus Christ, religion ruled the day and “preached the flesh of Jesus”. However, on the third day “a new being is risen” and with this new revelation of the gospel of the glory of the Christ specie, the church can finally rise to its true identity in the Christ specie. Therefore, on the third day “a people were raised to life who also call themselves ... anointed ... which makes you a Christ”. Strydom mentions that the manifestations of day 7 and day 3 “are happening in our country because this country was called to lead the last day gospel ... God called South Africa to be the start of the day.” In the light of 2 Peter 3:8, Strydom (2018a) also claims that “Peter gave us only one revelation, the day of the Lord ... Listen to me, anyone out there that does not minister the day of the Lord, [which is] the Christ specie ... Anything else is a cunningly devised fable.”

One could therefore say that the reason why CiMI received this revelation in this time here in South Africa is because we are currently in the correct day, according to God’s calendar. We are in day 7 and day 3. This marks the resurrection day for the Christ specie to rise up in man and start filling the earth with God’s glory. God specifically chose Xandré Strydom to form CiMI and for CiMI to be the channel through which He will reveal the “last day gospel” of the Christ specie. In day 7 and day 3 everything is focused on the spiritual side of things and, through CiMI’s revelation, people can become Christs and therefore spiritual beings. The only way to be part of what God is busy with now is to embrace the gospel of CiMI and through it to become a Christ. Any other gospel that does not rely on God’s calendar and the Christ specie is considered to be nothing more than fables and myths.

## **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter set out to provide an overview of CiMI’s history and theology. This is a much-needed aspect of this study to prevent it from being guilty of a straw man fallacy. This chapter did not aim to address absolutely everything CiMI believes, but only addressed those theological themes which are deemed essential to their theology and doctrine. It should be noted that this study was also not able to critique everything that was introduced in this chapter.

The critique in the following chapters mainly focuses on CiMI's view of revelation and Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and their anthropology.

The first part addressed the history of CiMI. It was pointed out that CiMI makes certain claims with regard to prophecies anticipating their origin. Apparently, these prophecies started during the 1700s and stated that the "last day gospel" of God will start in South Africa. CiMI is the fulfilment of these prophecies, which confirms their divine calling as a church. Moreover, it is also clear that Strydom claims to have received dreams from God regarding the new gospel revelation that God has given them. In the dream God revealed to Strydom that he is indeed a Christ and therefore equal with God in value. This dream that Strydom received has bearing upon CiMI's apparent divine calling. Both the dreams and the prophecies anticipated the inevitable coming of CiMI as a divine establishment.

The data that were gathered with regard to the historical origins of CiMI leave one with many more questions, but it does make the point that CiMI has questionable origins, as Strydom, Kotze and Labuschagne started CiMI and later crowned Strydom as king of the people. Since CiMI is only a decade old, their historical roots are still shallow and, depending on their survival as a cult, will have many more developments, which can be expected in the future.

After the history of CiMI was provided, their theology and doctrine were also addressed. This section furnished an overview of their doctrine of revelation, doctrine of God, their so-called restoration plan, Christology and anthropology. CiMI claims to have a new revelation revealed exclusively to them by God. This revelation is nowhere else to be found and only CiMI has the authority to preach and teach it. While all the other churches in the world are spiritually blind and immature, CiMI is in a unique position to read the progressive Word of God and to read the signs of the times. They are chosen by God for a divine task to unite the church under the leadership of Strydom and this means that they are the only church with whom God is working and consequently the only mouthpiece of God on earth.

An important theme that underlies the theology of CiMI is their matter-spirit or Gnostic dualism. This entails that everything that is physical and natural, especially one's body, is not a priority and in extreme cases is marked as sinful and evil, while everything that is invisible, especially one's spirit, is pure and godly. This commitment of CiMI plays an important role in their theology.

CiMI holds that the doctrine of the Trinity is false since it is but a human invention without any biblical justification. Instead of a Triune God, CiMI believes in the only true God who is one essence and one person, i.e., Unitarianism. Jesus Christ is not God, and the Holy Spirit is not a distinct person but only a reference to the Spirit of the Unitarian God. All that the doctrine of the

Trinity ever brought the church is division, since it somehow divides God and gives everyone the right to have his/her own view, judgement and opinion. The doctrine of the Trinity does not only divide the essence of God, but it also introduces three gods. Moreover, since the word 'Trinity' is nowhere to be found in the Bible, CiMI views it as a false doctrine.

This Unitarian God of CiMI revealed His so-called restoration plan to CiMI, which is the way He accomplishes His will and makes salvation possible for mankind. After mankind fell into sin, they lost the image of God and could not fill the earth with God's glory anymore. Therefore, God establishes His restoration plan to restore everything to the state in which it ought to be. The sole instrument for this plan is CiMI. The three points of this restoration plan is that God has only one dream, He has only one plan to achieve this dream, and He has only one strategy of enforcing His plan to achieve His dream. The only people who can participate in this restoration plan of God are those who are born from above and who are therefore Christs. For CiMI, the concepts a Christ, a Son of God, an image bearer of God and a godkind are to a large extent used synonymously. The main point, however, is that the moment one is born from above and anointed with the Spirit of God, one becomes a Christ, which means that one's spiritual man on the inside – the Christ in you– is alive.

CiMI maintains that the historical person Jesus Christ is only the first Christ. He was born from the virgin Mary and for thirty years of His life He was a mere man. At His baptism He was finally anointed with God's Spirit and in that moment, He became a Christ. This is why there is a difference between Jesus, as a natural man, and Jesus Christ as a spiritual man. Jesus Christ had to sacrifice Himself on the cross to make it possible for more people to become Christs after Him. One must understand that the title 'Christ' is not a reference to a 'who' but to a 'what'. The Christ is referring to a spiritual specie, which dwells inside of man once you are born from above, the same way that Jesus was born from above. This happens when one accepts the teachings of CiMI and understand the truth of their gospel. CiMI also maintains that Jesus Christ was not physically raised from the dead, but only spiritually.

The way CiMI views mankind was also discussed. They proclaim that man is a godkind. The moment one is born again and becomes a Christ, one also becomes a godkind by virtue of receiving God's image again. In many instances CiMI's teachers refer to themselves and the members of CiMI as gods. It is also stated that man is primarily a spiritual being who merely has a body with flesh and bones. The argument is such that, since God is spirit, and mankind is created in the image of God, only man's spirit is created in the image of God. Man's body is not created in God's image. In fact, one's body of flesh and blood must be disregarded while one's spirit should be embraced.

The following chapter begins with the evaluation of CiMI on a sociological and psychological level. This aspect of cults is deemed necessary since it provides counter-cult apologetic studies with additional insights into the finer mechanics of cults.

## CHAPTER 3: IS CIMI A CULT ACCORDING TO SOCIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL STANDARDS?

### 3.1. Introduction

While the previous chapter provided an overview of the history and theology of CiMI, this chapter is an investigation of the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults. It has already been noted in section 1.2. of Chapter 1 that the term 'cult' is a heavily loaded term with theological, doctrinal, sociological and psychological dimensions and characteristics. It has also already been pointed out in Chapter 1 that CiMI explicitly conforms to the theological and doctrinal characteristics of a cult, which will be examined in greater detail later in this study. At this point, however, it is necessary to consider whether CiMI reflects some of the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults.<sup>1</sup>

Many scholars on cults see it as more appropriate not to define cults in a theological or doctrinal sense, which drills down to the core beliefs and ideas of a cult, but rather to focus on what happens in a cult, i.e., in terms of sociology and psychology. Singer (2003:15), for example, claims that for anyone to understand cults, one must examine the structure and the practice of a cult, without also studying its beliefs. Hassan (2016:182) remarks that he operates primarily in the realm of psychology when it comes to cults, and not theology or ideology. He also adds this comment: "I look at what a group does rather than what it believes (or purports to believe). I analyse how an organization and its members communicate (or fail to communicate), rather than whether its principles or ... interpretation of the Bible is the right one." Tobias and Lalich (1994:5) also adopt this approach to cults when they make the following remark: "From our perspective, a group or relationship earns the label 'cult' or 'cultic' on the basis of its methods and behaviors, not on the basis of its beliefs." To mention one more example, Abgrall (2000:15) considers it an essential requirement that the cultic phenomenon must be defined within a

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<sup>1</sup> In section 2 of Chapter 1, the working definition of a cult from a sociological and psychological perspective was provided. For the purpose of accessibility, the working definition is repeated as follows: a religious cult is a "group or movement that exhibits great or excessive devotion or dedication to a person, idea or thing, uses a thought-reform program to persuade, control, and socialize members, systematically induces states of psychological dependency in members, exploits members to advance the leadership's goals and causes psychological harm to members, their families, and the community" (Langone, 1993:5). Although the description of a cult by Abgrall (2000:19) is not the working definition, it remains helpful in this regard. He efficiently explains that a cult "is a closed group, based on mental manipulation, organized around a master (guru) and an ideology. It aims to establish a qualitative difference between the initiates of the structure and non-initiates, and its objective, overt or covert, is the enrichment of the group or of a part of the group. It is established and developed by the exploitation of those who are manipulated, by those who do the manipulating. Its effect on the individual is likely to entail physical and psych disorders, which may or may not be reversible."

framework that excludes any religion, and by implication theology and doctrine, as a frame of reference. In other words, according to these scholars, the primary focus must be placed on the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults by analysing “their structures and modes of operation” (Abgrall, 2000:15) and the “levels of control they exert over followers” (Stein, 2017:14), without accommodating the theological and doctrinal ideologies that also characterise a cult.

There are also scholars who approach cults from a theological and doctrinal framework and who seem to adopt a different view. According to this view, the sociological and psychological dimensions of cults are considered to be extremely important, with a legitimate part to play in any research project on cults. However, this view further entails that cults cannot effectively be attended to at the cost of the theological and doctrinal characteristics, or vice versa for that matter. McConnell (1995:17) for instance states that, although the Christian can learn meaningful things of cults from sociology, it will never be enough since it is only descriptive and not comparative and evaluative as well. After engaging with the sociological and psychological side of cults and implying that it is extremely valuable, Enroth (1987:20) adds that for the Christian “the concept of cult must also<sup>2</sup> include another crucial dimension – the theological”.

In his comprehensive study on cults, Stoker (1995:9), as a theologian, also highlights the importance of the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults as he makes enough room in his study to investigate the psychological grip that cults exercise over their members. He further acknowledges that even the practical implementation of the sociological and psychological abuses in cults rests to a certain extent on theological and doctrinal foundations.

Martin (2003:47), a well-known theologian and apologist, also emphasises the importance of psychology when it comes to cults. He explains that it is indeed his hope that any researcher of cults will obtain deeper insight and appreciation for the psychological structure of cultism when examining and analysing the facets of cults’ behavioural arrangements and patterns. Nonetheless, according to him, Christendom is not just ill-prepared for psychological deviations and abuses, but for theological deviations as well. Notice therefore that, after Martin (2003:39-40) unpacks certain psychological aspects of cults, he inevitably seems to find himself firmly established in the theoretical framework of theology and doctrine as he explains:

[It] would be possible to point out many other instances of psychological aberration in the belief systems of the major cults, but it is apparent that we are confronted with those whom the apostle Paul described as victims of the master psychologist and propagandist of the ages, described by our Lord as “the prince of this world” and by the apostle Paul as “the god of this world”, the one

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<sup>2</sup> Enroth’s (1987:20) use of the word ‘also’ implies that he indeed does value the psychological and sociological insights into cults, but among these insights, theology is indispensable.

who by sheer force of his antagonism to the truth of divine revelation in the person of Jesus Christ has psychologically “blinded the minds” of those who believe not the Gospel, “lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Corinthians 4:4<sup>3</sup>).

Accordingly, Rhodes (2001:20-21) is correct as he shows a deep and insightful understanding in his observation regarding the theological, doctrinal, sociological and psychological dimensions of cults:

While I believe we gain some very important insights on the cultic mentality from sociology ... my long experience in dealing with cultists has convinced me that it is more accurate to define a cult from a theological perspective. As one cult observer put it, “Sociological, psychological, and journalistic observations sometimes show us the human dynamics that frequently result from a cult belief system, but they are not sufficient Christian foundations for determining a group’s status as a cult.” Therefore, I believe the best policy is to define a cult theologically, but we can then gain some key insights into the cultic mentality from sociology and psychology.

Even in his consideration that theology and doctrine are superior to sociology and psychology, he realises that focusing exclusively on the theological and doctrinal traits of cults will leave him poorer in his approach to cults. As a result, Rhodes (2001:20-21) clearly acknowledges that sociology and psychology will give the researcher the capacity to gain certain insights into the finer mechanics of cults, but not at the cost of theology and doctrine.

In agreement with some of the abovementioned scholars, the researcher deems the theological and doctrinal characteristics of cults to be of primary importance,<sup>4</sup> since people who are dying as members of cults “are going into eternity believing in a *counterfeit Jesus* who preaches a *counterfeit gospel*, and hence they are in possession of a *counterfeit salvation* (which is no salvation at all). The eternal consequences of the cult problem are ultimately far worse than the temporal ones” (Rhodes, 2001:17). However, it is precisely because theologians, who primarily operate from a theological and doctrinal framework, acknowledge the rich contribution to the study of cults from sociology and psychology, that this chapter will be solely devoted to the sociological and psychological dimensions of cults, to see how it applies to CiMI in particular.

In order to present the sociological and psychological traits of cults in a meaningful way, the researcher decided to implement the phrase ‘control mechanisms’ as it was identified and

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<sup>3</sup> “whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”

<sup>4</sup> It is the researcher’s estimation that the exclusion of the theological and doctrinal distinctives, as being the primary point of departure for any cult, impoverishes the scholar’s ability to analyse a cult. One must remember that although some cult leaders are well aware of the techniques and methods to manipulate and coerce people and therefore intentionally employ them, others have defaulted to the implementation of these techniques and methods by way of an authority which they believe has been conferred upon them on the basis of a theological and doctrinal idea.



expanded by Stoker (1995:9-52). To fully understand and define these control mechanisms within the proper context, it is important to further contemplate and discuss the general mechanics of cults within the theoretical framework of sociology and psychology.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, what follows is a brief exploration into the mechanics of cults and cult leaders with the overarching purpose to show, in the words of Stein (2017:13), “that it is a particular form of leadership and the social and belief structures that flow from it that set up the conditions in which followers can be manipulated into certain types of ... cultic behaviors”. This chapter will then be concluded with a detailed look at the different control mechanisms. Throughout this chapter there will also be a detailed investigation of CiMI to see whether this group do indeed display the traits of a cult in a sociological and psychological sense. The main sources from which the data with regard to CiMI were gathered include their sermons, informal discussions and interviews with former members of CiMI, and informal discussions with parents whose children are members of CiMI.

### **3.2. The general mechanics of cults**

Control mechanisms,<sup>6</sup> within the context of cults, refer to the different areas and components of a person’s life and social environment that the leaders and/or leadership of cults attempt to control (Hassan, 2016:114-115). Furthermore, control mechanisms are implemented in cults to achieve the phenomenon known as group cohesiveness, which is defined and explained by Galanter (1989:17) as follows:

[It is] the result of all the forces acting on members to keep them socially engaged in, and psychologically dependent on the group. When cohesiveness is strong, participants work to retain the commitment of their fellow members, protect them from threat, and ensure the safety of shared resources. With weak cohesiveness, there is less concern over the group’s potential dissolution or the loss of its distinctive identity, and joint action is less likely.

This phenomenon of group cohesiveness seems to corroborate Langone’s (1993:5) definition of a cult from a sociological perspective, in which he points out that one of the goals of a cult is to instigate a state of psychological dependence slowly but surely in its members to make sure that they stay involved in the group. Hassan (2016:109, 39) also acknowledges this concept of psychological dependence in the individual members of a cult when he explains that the intrinsic nature of a system that seeks to lessen the ability of any individual to make independent decisions,<sup>7</sup> in the end “encourages dependence and conformity, and discourages autonomy and

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<sup>5</sup> By the researcher’s own admission, it is difficult to keep theology entirely separate from this discussion.

<sup>6</sup> The control mechanisms are examined in much more depth later. For now, the proper context must first be provided for the presentation of the control mechanisms to be meaningful.

<sup>7</sup> Hassan (2016:191) also remarks that the “lack of independent decision-making abilities” is one of the most obvious signs that a person might be in a cult.

individuality". According to Hassan (2016:93, 191), this type of dependence is distinctive on all levels of cult membership, except at the top where the leader, with his demands of obedience and subservience, is located.

There is also a unique contribution from Tobias and Lalich (1994:6, 11) that addresses the phenomenon of dependence in the lives of cult members by implementing the term 'thralldom'. The word 'thrall' is an archaic term for a person who is in moral and mental servitude to something or someone which, in turn, causes the person to be in a state of utter absorption by a totalitarian system; thus, the person is 'enthralled' by the cult. The important implication of this so-called 'thralldom' is that it is directly linked to a form of unhealthy 'bondage' which destroys the independence of the individual on a social and psychological level and in turn creates a strong group cohesiveness among members (Galanter, 1989:17).

Abgrall (2000:10-11, 18) attempts to explain this notion of group cohesiveness and dependence in cults a little further by claiming that it is twofold. On the one hand, the dependence is ideological, where the members are subjected to the ideas of the cult and its leader, and on the other hand it is sociological, where the cult becomes a "protective refuge" and a "substitute family" for the members to unify them while at the same time cutting them off from the larger society (Hoekema, 1963:408). On the point of ideological dependence in cults, it is worth pointing out that cults usually claim to have a monopoly on truth, where the doctrinal or ideological truth claims of the leader function as the "master map for reality" (Hassan, 2016:132). This explains why Lifton (2019:1) suggests that cult leaders are not only after the minds of their members, but in a sense concerned "with the ownership of reality itself". Stein (2017:18) expands on this notion as follows:

This single truth, the sacred word, is the word of the leader, or sometimes, that of a deity to whom the leader is the only one to have a direct line. All knowledge comes from the leader. While the leader may change their mind as new 'insights' appear, followers may never do so, although they must ever be on the alert to jump to the leader's sudden ideological shifts.

An established cultic environment will effectively have built into it "the capacity to suppress members' deviation from its implicit or explicit goals" (Galanter, 1989:107). Therefore, Abgrall (2000:132) argues that the gradual structuring of a cult will necessarily include a drastic change in the areas of autonomy and dependence. This remodelling is progressively applied as it moves an individual from "the state of total autonomy to a state that is wholly agentic, or controlled". It is clear that once a member develops a dependence on the organisation, the person is turned into an effective and committed agent in service of the group and ultimately falls prey to the leader's need to control his followers (Singer, 2003:62; Stein, 2017:108).

In other words, the whole purpose of implementing so-called control mechanisms is to keep the cult members in bondage by making sure they are dependent on and engaged in the group on more than just one level. Singer (2003:7), for example, includes that members must be dependent on the cult for all of their major life decisions. It is therefore necessary, as Stein (2017:17) suggests, that the “emotional and physical energies of the group members must be fully engaged in order to keep them from external relationships and influences”. This ensures that the group cohesiveness is strong, which produces followers with high levels of loyalty and obedience (Stein, 2017:23-24). This also fortifies the reality that the leader and/or leadership of the cult can exert a firm grip of control over their followers and furthermore “deceive, manipulate, and exploit their members and hope to keep them for as long as possible” (Singer, 2003:4). The ideal here is to create a lack of differentiation between the individual cult member and the group (Abgrall, 2000:79).

At this point, one must take note that the control mechanisms of cults are not implemented in a vacuum. The process during which the leaders and/or leadership of cults implement these so-called control mechanisms to achieve ideological, psychological and sociological dependency in the lives of the cult members does not happen overnight (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:67-68). Instead, it is a process<sup>8</sup> where “the leader slowly takes you through a series of events that on the surface look like one agenda, while on another level, the real agenda is to get you, the recruit or member, to obey and to give up your autonomy, your past affiliations, and your belief systems” (Singer, 2003:62, 64-65). Abgrall (2000:11) also remarks that in order to make someone dependent, the correct sociological structure must be established where the focus is “to dissolve the individual into the group”. The changes in the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours of a person who is exposed to this lasting process is noteworthy, since it is usually not in harmony with the person’s pre-existing characteristics (Stein, 2017:20).

This process, with all its finer details, goes by different names. Abgrall (2000:19, 111-112, 125), for example, talks about “mental manipulation” and “coercive persuasion”. Singer (2003:4) uses the phrase “thought-reform”, while Hassan (2016:80) prefers to label this process “mind control”. Tobias and Lalich (1994:35) use both “thought-reform” and “mind control”. And lastly, Stein (2017:19) applies the term “brainwashing”.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, however, all these different terms and phrases fundamentally describe variants of the same elemental process, which is summarised

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<sup>8</sup> Singer (2003:62) uses the analogy of gaining weight to help explain the nature of this process. She describes it as follows: “It can be likened to gaining weight, a few ounces, a half pound, a pound at a time. Before long, without even noticing the initial changes - we are confronted with a new physique. So, too, with brainwashing.”

<sup>9</sup> Hassan (2016:111) seems to be uncomfortable with the term ‘brainwashing’, since he links it directly with physical torture which, according to him, does not typically happen in a cult. The researcher is inclined to agree with Hassan on this point.

by Stein (2017:19) as “the alternation of love and fear within an isolating environment resulting in a dissociated, loyal and deployable follower<sup>10</sup> who can now be instructed to act in the interests of the leader rather in his or her own survival interests”. This process is clearly implemented to help establish the most suitable context in which commitment to the group can be evoked and control mechanisms can be implemented in the most effective way possible (Galanter, 1989:90; Tobias & Lalich, 1994:68).

It is important to remember that these processes rarely involve forced restraint or physical oppression, but rather takes on the form of a subtle and powerful psychological attack by undermining the individual’s “basic consciousness, reality awareness, beliefs and worldview, emotional control, and defense mechanisms” (Singer, 2003:60). This kind of process applies the best methods of persuasion, communication and marketing and is used to create dissonance in people and then use this lack of inner harmony to control them (Abgrall, 2000:11; Hassan, 2016:116). Singer (2003:81-82) elaborates as she explains that what “makes the recent programs so effective in producing attitudinal and behavioural change is that persuasive techniques have been taken to a new level of sophistication. And through their new method of attacking the self, cults and other groups using thought-reform processes are pushing people to the brink of madness”. Although a thought-reform process is hard to identify, it clearly delivers results and all of this ideally takes place without the direct awareness of the individual member who is being recruited, nudged gradually from reality to illusion, and in the end turned into a committed member one step at a time (Abgrall, 2000:112; Singer, 2003:52, 64-65, 73, 77, 124). “Reality comes less important to certain groups than the preservation of their ties” (Galanter, 1989:20).

One of the popular misconceptions about cults is that the people who fall prey to them are the so-called “losers, loners, outcasts, and people who don’t fit in” (Hassan, 2016:39), an observation also made by Singer (2003:16) and Stein (2017:2). People seem to think that they are not vulnerable to this kind of persuasion that happens in cult recruitment. Singer (2003:15, 16) sets the record straight as she explains that neither your education, social class, nor your age can protect you against such a misplaced sense of immunity against cults, which she refers to as the “not me” myth. Most people at some point in their lives are unprotected against cults, and the fact is that “most cult recruits are normal people with ordinary backgrounds – and many are highly intelligent” (Hassan, 2016:39).

In light of the notion that cults basically attempt to secure influence over individuals by inducing dependence in them through implementing control mechanism within a process, it is clear that

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<sup>10</sup> According to Abgrall (2000:10) a “follower” in a cult is someone who “weds himself to the doctrines of the group, is effectively submissive to the guru and gradually cuts himself from the rest of the world”.

'control' as such is a major theme when it comes to cults (Ross, 2014:1). If one considers for a moment how many times one is confronted with the word 'control' in counter-cult literature, one quickly realises this fact. Hence the term 'control mechanisms' provides one with the necessary explanatory power and framework to make sense of the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults.

Stoker and De Bruyn (1995:561), for example, point out that cults, especially religious cults, will actively set out to "control both the earthly and eternal lives of its members". Lifton (2019:1) describes cults as "sealed-off communities where reality can be dispensed and controlled". Abgrall (2000:10) remarks that the person entering a cult is no longer free to act on the basis of his own free will, but that he "is involved in an ever-spiralling dependence on the organization, which controls him completely". Hassan (2016:82) states that the big difference between a normal and healthy group and a cult is that cults are guilty of "subjecting its members to systematic control ... to keep them dependent and obedient". Stein (2017:2) affirms that cults "take control over people's lives to such an extreme extent that life itself ceases to belong to followers". When explaining the purpose of her book, Chrnalogar (1997:8) emphasises that she wants to show her readers the "inner workings of abusive and controlling groups to show ... how they control members". Singer (2003:10) writes that cults are usually totalistic and all-encompassing "in controlling their members' behavior". Lastly, Ross (2014:122) helps to undoubtedly establish the theme of control when he says: "The most salient single feature of most destructive cults is that an absolute, authoritarian leader essentially defines and controls [the followers]."

According to Stoker (1995:9-52), the different control mechanisms, with all its finer components, include control over membership, thoughts, emotions, behaviour, norms, language, information, environment and history. The last couple of control mechanisms have a strong religious flavour. These control mechanisms are 'control' over God, control over salvation, control over the interpretation of an authority and control over doctrine.

Although the specific control mechanisms that entail control over salvation, 'control' over God, control over the interpretation of Scripture and control over doctrine, clearly have a place in the theoretical framework of religion in general, and specifically in theology,<sup>11</sup> there are undoubtedly psychological and sociological aspects that come with it. Smith (2017:92-93), a well-known sociologist of religion, mentions that under certain social circumstances the religious sphere of life can generate levels of "intensity, depth, and persistence in people's motivations,

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Singer (2003:31) mentions that new religious cults especially arise in communities where the mainstream religions fail to sufficiently address the religious needs of the people. This point serves to address the Christian church as a whole.

commitments, and endurance not often seen in non-religious life". This is because of the unique content of beliefs and practices that characterises religion's social construction. Furthermore, one of the most obvious ways that religion influences people and institutions is by the official proclamation of specific teachings and doctrines that the religious practitioner must follow. It is also the case that members of a religious community are regularly swayed by the effects of the social network that the community establishes (Smith, 2017:100, 128). Lifton (1998:419) also contributes to this factor by stating that emotionally loaded beliefs regarding humanity and its relation to the natural or supernatural world, i.e., the religious, may be taken into a totalistic direction. On this point it is worth echoing Hassan's (2016:48-49, 85) observation as he argues that religious cults are the most well-known and the most numerous around the world. This is certainly not surprising since it has been established in the philosophy of religion that humanity as a whole has "been incurably religious", and therefore it is a common observation that mankind shares an "unshakeable religious heritage"<sup>12</sup> (Geisler & Corduan, 2003:26). It is clear that religion, being a universal phenomenon and inherently part of humanity, can also be a strong psychological and sociological driving force in the life of the individual. It is as Smith (2017:127) says: "Religion's capacities to provide leverage for social control are many."

Before these control mechanisms are unpacked in more detail, however, it is important to identify the prominent role of the cult leader as a precondition for the control mechanisms to function properly within the thought-reform process. As Abgrall (2000:53) reminds us: "Manipulation fundamentally depends on fraud. How well it is done depends on the personality and cunning of the guru."<sup>13</sup> The role and the profile of cult leaders logically precede the different control mechanisms and will therefore be treated as a first and necessary component before discussing the control mechanisms. Tobias and Lalich (1994:68) remark, for example, that the "power and hold of cults depend on the particular environment shaped by the thought-reform program and control mechanisms, all of which are usually conceptualized and put in place by the leader". Consequently, one can view the cult leader as the control mechanism initiator and therefore, if one wants to enhance one's perspective on the finer mechanics of cults, especially from a sociological and psychological perspective, one must pay close attention to the profile and role of cult leaders in general (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:64).

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<sup>12</sup> In the Christian understanding of things this observation finds its foundation in Genesis 1:27 where the idea is established that God created man in His image and, as His image bearers, they will always have what Calvin (2011:43) calls an "awareness of divinity" by natural instinct.

<sup>13</sup> Abgrall (2000:53) explains that the term 'guru' was taken from an ancient Sanskrit document in which it meant 'worthy'. Although it is not a term that most cult scholars use to refer to cult leaders, Abgrall still applies it in a modern context to mean the "charismatic leader of a cult".

### **3.3. The role and profile of a cult leader**

#### **3.3.1. Introductory remarks**

Hassan (2016:83) mentions that all through history “groups of enthusiasts have sprung up around charismatic leaders of every possible description”. Cult leaders are clearly not a new phenomenon and therefore one should not be surprised by their prevalent appearance in the history books. What is fascinating, however, is the way in which cult leaders position themselves in a specific role to gather and control a following, and also the typical personality traits that these cult leaders exhibit. Hassan (2016:183) also adds that the leader and/or leadership of any particular cult is always a good starting place for information gathering and assessment, which is confirmed by Tobias and Lalich (1994:64).

Singer (2003:7) establishes the central position of the cult leader, and the power structure that he implements between the leadership and the followers, as one of the factors that definitionally makes a cult, a cult. Lifton (2019:4) also emphasises the role of the leader by reserving the label ‘cult’ for groups where there is a shift from the worship of ideas, to the worship of one centralised charismatic guru. The guru actively implements a thought-reform process that will, in turn, frequently stress a merger of some kind with the guru. When the leader of a group creates an isolating relationship with his followers, which welcomes no other ‘truths’ except his own, he is in effect seeking to own reality itself and is therefore entering into the realm of typical cultic behaviour (Lifton, 2019:11). Tobias and Lalich (1994:65) even reduce the whole purpose of a cult to the notion that the members are only there to serve “the emotional, financial, sexual, and power needs of the leader”. Lifton (2019:2) explains that cults will usually turn inward to follow a “sacralized omniscient guru whose extreme version of reality dominates the minds of individual followers”. To emphasise the prominent and indispensable position of the leader even further, Stein (2017:3, 14, 15) refers to the leader of any cult as the engine that drives the whole system by attempting to control the interior and exterior worlds of his followers.

Hassan (2016:39) mentions that the ideology of cult leaders usually trumps the basic respect for the individual follower, since the leader is the one with the “only and final ruling on all matters” In her description of cult leaders, Singer (2003:8) also points out:

[They are] self-appointed, persuasive persons who claim to have a special mission in life or to have special knowledge ... Cult leaders tend to be determined and domineering and are often described as charismatic. These leaders need to have enough personal drive, charm, or other pulling power to attract, control, and manage their flocks ... Cult leaders center veneration on themselves.

This opinion is shared by Singer (2003:9, 30) and Tobias and Lalich (1994:39). It is important to note that some cult leaders began their group with an honest vision that they thought was worth

pursuing, but, in the words of Abgrall (2000:55), “slid into a pathological view of reality” or started to “consciously use the awareness thus gained for a lucrative purpose”.

In the light of these comments, it is fitting to accept the notion that it is around the leader and his/her personality, vision and ideology that a cult develops, grows and matures (Abgrall, 2000:75; Stein, 2017:108). The next step at this point is to examine the role of the leader in the power structure that he establishes in the cult (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:65, 68).

### **3.3.2. The role of the leader in the power structure of a cult**

Because of the significant role of the cult leader, it is typical for a cult to have an authoritarian structure, where there is one person at the top of the cult’s structure who is regarded as the supreme authority and who makes all the final decisions. Although the leader is thought of as the supreme authority, in many cases he may entrust power to a few subordinates with the goal to make sure that his ideals and rules are adhered to by the members (Abgrall, 2000:76; Galanter, 1989:7; Singer, 2003:8-9). Stein (2017:108) reminds us that it is the leader who establishes this structure, or in some cases inherits it from the previous leader.<sup>14</sup> But, irrespective of how the leader steps into this position, whether he creates it through his position of power or receives it from his predecessor, this phenomenon in cults results in something that is commonly referred to as authoritarianism, which “involves the acceptance of an authority figure who exercises excessive control over cult members. As prophet or founder, this leader’s word is considered ultimate and final” (Rhodes, 2001:31).

Hassan (2016:117, 185) also confirms this kind of authoritarian power structure by shedding some valuable light on the leader and his followers. He asserts that the organisational flow of power is structured like a pyramid with the leader occupying the pinnacle point. Although there is a ‘board of directors’<sup>15</sup>, they are typically controlled by the strings of the leader and are thus wholly compliant. This structure is established all the way down to the ordinary members and it “allows for no checks and balances. The leader has absolute control.” It is as Singer (Hassan, 2016:xxviii) says: “Cults by their very structure and nature are not democratic, do not promote freedom of speech and freedom of expression, and are the antithesis of structures in which full human growth can develop.” This was also observed by Ross (2014:122-123). Singer (2003:115) further elaborates that, within this hierarchical system, the ordinary member is not allowed to approach other members with questions, doubts or hesitations of any kind. To be exact, they may only consult the appointed leadership with these issues. This arrangement

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<sup>14</sup> A good example of this is David Miscavige who succeeded L. Ron Hubbard as the leader of The Church of Scientology (Stein, 2017:114).

<sup>15</sup> The so-called ‘board of directors’ rarely serves as an accountability structure to the leader, but only as enforcers of whatever the leader ultimately wants.



isolates them from other cult members who might also have questions or doubts and it leaves them with the impression that everyone else accepts everything that is happening.

To further elaborate on this totalistic structure that the cult leader establishes, Stein (2017:116) introduces another perspective. On the one hand, as mentioned above, one can view this structure as a pyramid with the leader at the top of the hierarchy and, as “resources flow up to the leader, orders and ideology flow down to the followers” (Stein, 2017:123). On the other hand, one can also take a ‘bird’s-eye view’ to see the pyramid structure from above. This view will change the structure from a pyramid to a structure of concentric onion-like layers where the leader occupies the centre (Stein, 2017:116). Stein (2017:116) attempts to explain this perspective on the structure as follows: “[T]he deeper you go towards the center of the system, the more distant from reality you become as you enter the ‘fiction’ of the closed and secretive totalitarian world.” Within the onion-layered structure, each layer has the responsibility of both connecting to the following layer that lies more to the outside, and at the same time each layer must protect the layer that lies to the inside from the truth of the outside world.

Abgrall (2000:78), in turn, introduces yet another perspective on the structure of a cult, which is in essence closely associated with the onion-like structure. He compares the cultic structure to that of a bicycle wheel with the leader as the centre and the followers as the rim. In this analogy it is clear that everything spins around the leader in the centre and he is now portrayed as the one fixed point in the group. Communication goes from the centre to the periphery and back again. This structure does not differ in any meaningful way from the onion-like structure explained by Stein (2017:116).

This totalistic structure is essential for the cult leader to maintain his control over the members since it advances the “hierarchization of knowledge, power and benefit”. The higher a member manages to climb the hierarchy, the more his/her feelings of pride, membership, dependence and general benefits will increase; however, the lower a member is, the more coercion there will be (Abgrall, 2000:76-77). Stein (2017:16) explains that this structure will facilitate a couple of things for the leader. It will for example ensure that the leader’s leadership as the single point of dominance is preserved, it will facilitate the isolation of members in the cult to serve the process of subtle persuasion, and it will also provide controlled access to and from the outside world.

In a totalistic structure, such as the one described here, cult members are pressed so tightly together that they form part of an undifferentiated group of people, without any real connections among themselves. The well-regulated milieu of the structure is closed, centralised, isolated and nearly all behaviour can be rewarded or punished (Hassan, 2016:117; Stein, 2017:122-123). It is effective in allowing “extensive exploitation from above (by the guru and leading disciples) –

whether economic, sexual, or psychological – of the idealism of ordinary followers from below” (Lifton, 2019:4-5). It is an “authoritarian structure that permits no feedback and refuses to be modified except by leadership approval or executive order” (Singer, 2003:68). It is further characterised by secrecy and deception, where certain information is deliberately withheld from members, who are apparently not yet deemed ready for it since they are not high enough on the hierarchy or, translated differently, close enough to the centre. Many cults therefore operate on a “need to know” principle (Hassan, 2016:118-119; Stein, 2017:53). In a system that functions with attributes like this, the absolute ideology “which flows down the steep pyramid from the leader to the membership, is the sheep’s clothing that both disguises and justifies the sharp teeth sunk into the follower’s neck” (Stein, 2017:123). It would seem that cult leaders indeed have no end to their unreasonably excessive behaviour and capacity to abuse members (Singer, 2003:6).

In summary then, the cult leader places himself/herself in a position that maximises control and power over everyone in the group. The pyramid structure and onion-layered formation that the leader manages to establish serve as leverage to maintain this control and power, without interference or interruption from inside or outside the cult. With the role of the leader in the power structure of cults clearly established, one must eventually arrive at the typical profile of a cult leader by asking the question: What kind of personality is capable of establishing a totalistic system and positioning himself/herself in such a way as to take control over people’s lives? It is to this question that the researcher will now turn.

### **3.3.3. The profile of a cult leader**

Tobias and Lalich (1994:67) express the unique and winsome personality of a typical cult leader as follows: “In general, charismatic personalities are known for their inescapable magnetism, their winning style, the self-assurance with which they promote something – a cause, a belief, a product. A charismatic person who offers hope of new beginnings often attracts attention and a following.” Most cult leaders believe wholeheartedly in their own ascendancy, dominance, megalomania and supremacy, even if this belief is against all evidence (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:71). This produces a sense of confidence and certainty which are highly desirable feelings (Hassan, 2016:184). As Singer (2003:29) reflects on the presence and appeal of cult leaders in society, she points out that “when segments of society cannot see where they fit in, what the rules are, or what the socially agreed-upon answers to life’s big questions are, then, like a dormant disease, the ever-present potential cult leaders take hold and lure followers to their causes”.

The most important thing that Tobias and Lalich (1994:65) emphasise when talking about cult leaders is 'power'. Hassan (2016:185) also mentions that cult leaders acquire power above all else and that a need for power can in time become a terrible addiction. Accordingly, the cult leader must, by definition, have an authoritarian personality. Stein (2017:15, 109) also suggests that authoritarianism is one of the qualities that is indispensable for a cult leader as it leads to strong feelings of "fear, terror or threat" in the lives of the members. The traditional aspects of an authoritarian personality typically include the following, as it is listed by Tobias and Lalich (1994:65-66):

- a)** the tendency towards a hierarchy
- b)** the drive for power
- c)** hostility, hatred, prejudice
- d)** superficial judgements of people and events
- e)** a one-sided scale of values favouring the one in power
- f)** interpreting kindness as weakness
- g)** the tendency to use people and see others as inferior
- h)** a sadistic-masochistic tendency
- i)** incapability of being ultimately satisfied
- j)** paranoia.

Although authoritarianism is important, Stein (2017:15, 109) reminds us that it is not enough to explain the way in which these cult leaders ensnare and control their followers. This cannot be achieved without another crucial quality, charisma. This is why cult leaders are sometimes described as having 'charismatic' personalities (Singer, 2003:8; Tobias & Lalich, 1994:67). One must remember that charisma as a personality trait is not necessarily a bad thing. Leaders such as Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi had charisma. What all of these leaders lacked, however, was authoritarianism. The moment when charisma and authoritarianism are combined in an individual it "can result in a highly controlling totalist leader who wields an all-encompassing worldview to form a closed and isolating organization" (Stein, 2017:110). Charisma fused with authoritarianism therefore provides the cult leader with the psychological means to fulfil his need to control others (Stein, 2017:108). When this happens, charisma, as a powerful and inspiring characteristic, is used in a self-serving and damaging way (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:68).

With charisma, Stein (2017:15) means that there is something about the leader that make the members "love, worship and idealize" him. It causes feelings and thoughts of deep reverence and adoration towards an idealised figure in the minds of the people who are attracted to him, which is the reason why charismatic powers are often imputed to some of these leaders

(Galanter, 1989:7). It gives the leader a superb ability to charm, persuade and potentially seduce others (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:71). The feature of charisma is the most needed by the leader during the time of cult formation and recruitment since it “takes a strong-willed and persuasive leader to convince people of a new belief, then gather the newly converted around him as devoted followers” (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:68). This clearly emphasises the two aspects of the appeal of charisma, as Stein (2017:109) explains it. On the one hand there is an initial luring that pulls the person into the charismatic sphere of influence. On the other hand, charisma will also help to keep the member in the cult for as long as possible.

Authoritarianism and charisma are furthermore clearly reflected in the structure, ideology, process and outcomes of the cult. Stein (2017:110) strikingly explains the vicious effect that these two qualities of the leader have on the life of a newly recruited member:

[T]he simultaneous “running from” and the “running to” a source of threat – are represented by the two elements of authoritarianism and charisma, or terror and love. On the one hand is the fear that these leaders arouse in followers (“running from”), and on the other is the haven of safety that they create – the “love” that they offer (“running to”) – while removing any alternate, competing safe havens from the reach of the follower.

This “running from” and “running to” dynamic in the lives of cult members is also known as disorganised attachment (Stein, 2017:26-28).

According to Stein (2017:29-30), attachment theory in psychology can provide one with the best tools to understand what is going on in the heart and mind of the individual member when confronted with a leader who possesses charisma and who is authoritarian. Attachment theory implies that every single individual is in one way or another emotionally and cognitively attached to the people with whom they spend most of their time. This attachment to others functions as a ‘source of protection’, which becomes most evident during experiences of fear or uncertainty. Therefore, everybody who is a target of the cult start out with a variety of attachment-related dispositions and the contention is that the cultic system “acts upon followers and, regardless of their original attachment status, attempt to change that status, to what is known as disorganized attachment. Further, the system aims to remove the follower’s prior attachment figures and replace them with the leader or group as the new – and disorganized – attachment relationship”<sup>16</sup> (Stein, 2017:28). In this way, the cult leader and/or the cult itself becomes for the follower, not only a threat, but also a fort of protection, which in turn causes the follower to develop a disorganised attachment to the cult (Stein, 2017:71). Galanter (1989:93) explains this phenomenon very effectively as follows:

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<sup>16</sup> Stein (2017:17) also refers to the relationships that members might have with other people outside of the group as “escape hatch” relationships, which must be limited as far as possible by the structure and operations of the cult.

The group acts like a psychological pincer, promoting distress while at the same time providing relief. This is evidenced in an ironic sequence of events. The group promotes behavioral norms that may expose a member to potential distress. Then ... the member comes to feel that the relief of this distress depends on fidelity to the group. This in turn makes the member more responsive to the demands of the group and its leadership.

One can see then that the traits of charisma and authoritarianism in a cult leader form a deadly combination with the capacity to cause 'love' and 'fear' in members. Consequently, this leads to disorganised attachments where members, in love, run towards the cult for protection, but also in fear run away from the cult as a threat. This sequence continues since such a member most probably does not have any other refuge at this point but the cult itself, or the cult might have managed to gain leverage on the person, which prevents him/her from leaving. This binds the member to the cult in an unhealthy manner, which also makes the member more dependent on the cult itself.

Although cult leaders are not necessarily psychopaths, they may display all or some of the personality and behavioural characteristics of one (Hassan, 2016:185; Ross, 2014:125; Tobias & Lalich, 1994:72). It is indeed their psychological instability that makes some of them dangerous (Hassan, 2016:184). Besides the powerful combination of authoritarianism and charisma, Tobias and Lalich (1994:72-79) present a list of fifteen characteristics to serve as a tool to label and expose cult leaders. It is worth looking at this comprehensive list that further encapsulates and unpacks the profile of a cult leader.<sup>17</sup>

### **3.3.3.1. Glibness/superficial charm**

Cult leaders are to a large extent very persuasive. They can use language in an extremely creative way to lure, puzzle, charm and sway people for their own cause and get them to make deeper commitments towards the group (Singer, 2003:116). As mentioned earlier, they operate with a high level of self-confidence, which they use to attract others into their sphere of influence, and, if necessary, they have the will and the means to "destroy their critics verbally or disarm them emotionally" (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:72-73). In the end cult leaders are able to persuade people into believing that they, with their special talents, gifts and knowledge, have the solution to every problem there is in life, and their goal is not just basic obedience but "mass loyalty" (Singer, 2003:7, 25; Stein, 2017:110).

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<sup>17</sup> Take note that cult leaders do not necessarily have to reflect all the characteristics on this list to qualify in being a cult leader, neither do all cult leaders automatically possess all of these traits. This list functions more as a guideline to assist one in identifying the profile of a cult leader.

### **3.3.3.2. Manipulative and conning**

For typical cult leaders, or as Singer (2003:4) labels them, “masterful manipulators”, most of their behaviours are aimed to improve their own interests as much as possible. This happens at the cost of the interests of and respect for individual cult members since they “are manipulated and coerced to think, feel, and behave in a single ‘right way’” (Hassan, 2016:39). In this regard Stein (2017:113) mentions that cult leaders are unable to reflect on the state of their own minds, yet they possess the ability to understand the mental states of others, especially as far as it helps them to manipulate their followers. One way in which leaders manipulate their followers is also by constantly creating feelings of guilt in members (Abgrall, 2000:91). Abgrall (2000:68) explains that the speeches of a cult leader will have a subtle balance between “dubious reasoning” and a “proof, of supposedly irrefutable cogency, of his theories”. In the end it is as Singer (2003:25) says: “If cult leaders can’t give you ‘proof’, they can manipulate you into believing.” This manipulation is remarkably successful when so-called emotional terrorism is achieved. Emotional terrorism describes the successful manipulation attempt from the leader when he manages to make an ally of his intended target (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:73).

### **3.3.3.3. Grandiose sense of self**

There is a real sense of entitlement that cult leaders enjoy. They are convinced that they have a right to everything they desire, including to be the centre of attention. It is also common for cult leaders to rewrite their past to give themselves a spectacular biography full of achievements, degrees and extraordinary experiences (Abgrall, 2000:59-65; Singer, 2003:180-181). In the end, the main goal of the biography of the cult leader is “to glorify his person as a figure of truth and justice in a fight against malefic powers” (Abgrall, 2000:68). As a result, some of these cult leaders believe in their own excellence and greatness. Following this characteristic of grandiosity, most cult leaders are narcissists and usually surround themselves with people who will neither disagree with them nor challenge them in any way. In turn, this setup only further promotes their narcissism (Hassan, 2016:184-185). Another aspect that contributes to this phenomenon is that some cult leaders claim to have ancient, hidden or new revelational knowledge of some kind, which gives them a supposedly special and unique calling or mission in life (Abgrall, 2000:53; Singer, 2003:8, 30). Interestingly, Tobias and Lalich (1994:73) explain that a leader’s grandiosity may, in the end, be a defence mechanism that is raised against feelings of their own loneliness and meaninglessness. As this sense of grandiosity increases, Stein (2017:15) still reminds us that there is nothing “a totalist leader likes less than to be left”.

#### **3.3.3.4. Pathological lying**

Cult leaders are not consistent in telling the truth about either minor or major issues. Consequently, it is common for cult leaders to sometimes lie for no obvious reason (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:73-74). Stein (2017:54) further remarks that few would join a group willingly if that group's goal is to eventually end up controlling people's lives. Consequently, propaganda is a valuable tool in cults, which "belies the oppression of life within the group" to present the group as safe and satisfactory. For the leader to maintain control over his followers, he must divorce them from truth and make it difficult for them to further distinguish between truth and lies (Abgrall, 2000:66). Another aspect of the leader's lying is the development of a complex belief system about their abilities and their lives. This often takes the form of "exaggerated biographical claims" where the leader rewrites his past to be interesting and "greater than reality", as already mentioned (Abgrall, 2000:58-59; Hassan, 2016:184-185; Stein, 2017:108). Tobias and Lalich (1994:74) also add that cult leaders are plagiarists with no unique or authentic ideas; yet, in spite of this they can still vigorously present their ideas and views to their followers. It seems that for cult leaders "objective truth does not exist. The only 'truth' is whatever will best achieve the outcome that meets their needs" (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:74). Konnikova (2016:309) also makes a valid point in this regard by stating that cults seem to rely on a certain basis of truth and reality. The big difference between cults and more healthy, balanced groups, however, is how such truths are consequently used, since people will continue to follow the leader if the truth is manipulated well enough.

#### **3.3.3.5. Lack of remorse, shame or guilt**

The ethic that cult leaders follow works on the principle of "the end justifies the means" (Hassan, 2016:82, 186; Tobias & Lalich, 1994:74). All their actions are justified since they are the ultimate authority on all matters. Commenting on the manipulative aspect of the cult leader, Singer (2003:150) says that there "is no end to the ways a person can learn to manipulate others, especially if that person has no conscience, feels no guilt over living off the labors and money of others, and is determined to lead". For the leader, the individual members of a cult are nothing more than objects to be used and abused for his own needs (Stein, 2017:108, 112).

#### **3.3.3.6. Shallow emotions**

Ironically, things like peace, joy and love, which are typically promised in cults, are out of reach of the leader. If the leader of a group is not authentic, then the things that he promises might also not be authentic. Cult leaders usually show a lack of real emotions, and if they do, it is only skin-deep and probably feigned (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:74-75). Tobias and Lalich (1994:75) indeed sketch a dark picture of cult leaders as they attempt to describe their lack of emotion:

“They are bystanders to the emotional life of others, perhaps envious and scornful of feelings they cannot have or understand ... He can witness or order acts of utter brutality without experiencing a shred of emotion.” In light of these remarks, it is fitting to repeat the idea that because of the shallow emotions of the typical cult leader, there is no end to their “unconscionable behaviors” and their “capacity to abuse their followers” (Singer, 2003:6).

#### **3.3.3.7. Incapacity for love**

The biggest distortedness that is often found in cult leaders is that they struggle to give or receive real love. Stein (2017:15-16, 113) explains that cult leaders sometimes experience an intense worry that they will be deserted by their followers. This causes them to hold people very close to them and to exert a solid position of control over them. At the start of a follower’s membership, it seems as though love is unconditional, but in the long run the follower learns that love inside the group depends on performance. In the end, followers find it very difficult to leave a cult since there is nothing a cult leader likes less. The question posed by Hassan (2016:192) is: if there is a relationship of real love and respect between the follower and the leader, why is the follower being controlled so tightly, and why does he have freedom to join the group but not to leave the group? The point is that cult leaders have a need to be loved by their followers but distrust the love that is offered to them. This is also why they sometimes test the love and obedience of their followers, and yet, as Tobias and Lalich (1994:75) points out, the “guru’s love is never tested; it must be accepted at face value”.

#### **3.3.3.8. Need for stimulation**

Cult leaders are unpredictable in their conduct and nobody knows exactly how they will behave next. They exhibit a need for stimulation on several levels (emotional, financial or sexual), where they can exercise their power and dominance. This may also take the form of unexpected outbursts during which they verbally abuse their followers (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:65, 76).

#### **3.3.3.9. Callousness/lack of empathy**

Although cult leaders have charisma and are effective when it comes to sizing people up, they never really connect on a personal level with their followers. Instead, they use all their social advantages to pursue power and control. Accordingly, they take advantage of individuals and are unable to empathise with the feelings of their targets (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:76). Any attempt from the leader’s side to understand the minds of his followers is not because of empathy for them, but only as a result of his desire to reduce their will and to gain control over them (Hassan, 2016:83; Stein, 2017:113).



### **3.3.3.10. Poor behavioural controls/impulsive nature**

Cult leaders sometimes struggle to control their behaviour, and therefore they regularly act out. This may involve poor behavioural control of a sexual, aggressive or even criminal nature and it usually happens to the embarrassment of their followers. This unstable behaviour is usually kept secret and is “known only to a few disciples. The others only see perfection” (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:77). It can often be the case that this impulsive nature of the leader, instead of being seen for what it is, is turned into a divinely inspired behaviour, which further separates the leader from his followers (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:76-77). In some cases, the poor behaviour of leaders is fuelled by their own “abandonment anxiety”, which causes them to fear their own isolation and, in turn, motivates them to draw people to them (Stein, 2017:113).

### **3.3.3.11. Early behaviour problems/juvenile delinquency**

When the personal history of cult leaders is studied, it is often discovered that they had behavioural difficulties from an early stage in their lives. Specifically, issues with regard to keeping friends, stealing and cruelty to others can sometimes be identified from a young age (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:77). In this sense most cult leaders will have questionable backgrounds (Hassan, 2016:185).

### **3.3.3.12. Irresponsible/unreliable**

Cult leaders typically reject their responsibility towards others. They are not troubled by the repercussions of their actions and they do not care who might get physically, emotionally or spiritually abused under their leadership. Galanter (1989:106) states it very clearly that members of a cult are forced to participate in activities against their will and are sometimes subjected to abuses of various kinds. This hardly reflects a responsible leadership. Furthermore, cult leaders rarely accept any culpability for their own actions. Instead, they would rather shift the blame to someone else and let them take the fall in the form of a public confession or “hot seat” denunciation. This guilt and fear, in turn, will enhance obedience among the followers (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:77).

### **3.3.3.13. Promiscuous sexual behaviour/infidelity**

Sexual abuse by cult leaders is another thing that happens frequently in cults. Tobias and Lalich (1994:77) explain that “promiscuity, child sexual abuse, polygamy, rape, and sexual acting out of all sorts” are activities that you may find in many cults. Tobias and Lalich further state that there are usually also strict sexual control in the form of “enforced celibacy, arranged marriages, forced breakups and divorces, removal of children from their parents, forced abortions or

mandated births". It may often be the case that the sexual behaviour of the leader is a deep secret, kept within the inner circle of the cult or, in other cases, any sexual involvement with the cult leader is turned into the "acquisition of a privileged status" in order to motivate members to fulfil the sexual needs of the leader (Abgrall, 2000:92, 198). The fact remains that since sexual contact from the leader's side is never truly in a context relating to or involving the consent of the follower, it is likely to have damaging effects on the follower (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:77-78).

#### **3.3.3.14. Lack of realistic life plan/parasitic lifestyle**

Cult leaders lack a realistic view of life and reality. In most religious cults the leader claims to have some sort of special mission and that the cult is busy making history as they carry out this mission. Nevertheless, this "utopian nature" of the group just becomes the leader's leverage to justify his irrational conduct. Tobias and Lalich (1994:78) claim that the leader's awareness of his entitlement is often perceived in the striking contrast between his luxurious lifestyle and the lifestyle of his followers. As cult leaders apply their superficial charm and manipulative expertise, they manage to persuade their followers to support the cult with donations in the form of their income and even their assets, such as property. Another aspect of this character trait involves the notion that cult leaders only care about their own health while they are insensitive towards the suffering of others. Some cult leaders will sketch a situation where "the illness that they *don't* get are due to their own powers, while the ones they *do* get are caused by their 'compassion' in taking on their disciples' karma or solving the group's problems" (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:79).

#### **3.3.3.15. Criminal or entrepreneurial versatility**

The existence of the cult depends on the leadership's willingness to adapt to the context in which they find themselves. In this way, cult leaders are able to change their image and that of the group to avoid "prosecution and litigation, to increase income, and to recruit followers who have the skills and connections that the leaders lack" (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:79).

### **3.3.4. Conclusion of the role and profile of cult leaders**

Cult leadership is not a phenomenon unique to our modern times. History testifies to their consistent presence in the world. The cult leader plays a central role in the establishment and development of a cult. Some scholars have made the role of the cult leader one of the key definitional features of a cult. In this sense a cult is defined according to the role of the leader and the structure that he/she creates. Since cult leaders aim to control the reality of their followers, their leadership seeks to be all-encompassing and, in turn, centred on themselves and their own needs. Many of them are self-appointed, while others inherited their leadership from the previous leader. It should be noted that not all cult leaders started out as cult leaders

per definition. Some of them pursued a vision that was honest and worthwhile, but over time turned from that vision and slid into their own fictional reality or started to wilfully abuse their leadership for their own gain.

One of the important factors of cult leadership is the structure which is established and facilitated. The best way to think of this structure is to compare it to a pyramid. The top is where the authoritarian leader is positioned and from there his/her authority flows down through the ranks straight to the bottom. This way the leader has the final authority and power in the cult. The leader will have a leadership who functions under his authority, not as accountability mechanisms, but as obedient agents who will praise the leader's leadership and make sure that his/her goals are achieved. This is by definition authoritarianism, which resembles a strict hierarchical system. Another way to think of this authoritarian structure is like an onion. An onion has a centre with different layers encircling the centre. The leader is situated at the centre with his/her leadership directly surrounding him/her. In this way the ranks go outwards to the last layer of the onion. It does not matter in which way one looks at it, whether as a pyramid with authority flowing down from the top to the bottom, or as an onion with the authority flowing from the centre outwards, it illustrates the same authoritarian flow of power, originating with the leader. These structures are established to maintain the leader's control over his/her followers, to facilitate the isolation of the followers, and to control the access of the followers to the outside world. This kind of leadership is never allowed to receive any critical feedback and is often characterised by deception and secrecy.

Furthermore, cult leaders usually have winsome personalities. Power is what drives them and this is why they are authoritarian. Alongside their authoritarianism, they are also charismatic. This is a powerful combination since their charisma will cause people to love them and to like being part of their group, while authoritarianism will cause people to also fear them and know their place in the cult. These two characteristics, authoritarianism and charisma, allow the leader to gain more control and power of his/her followers. This combination is what causes disorganised attachment in the lives of the members. They are constantly caught between a 'running to', and a 'running from' dynamic, motivated by love and fear. Because the leader has charisma his/her followers love him/her, and because the leader possesses authority, the members will fear him/her. Since a member usually does not have any other place to run to, this disorganised attachment will continue.

One can also say that cult leaders usually have superficial charm, they are manipulative, narcissistic, pathological liars, they lack shame and guilt, they have shallow emotions, they are incapable of loving someone, that they have a need for stimulation, a lack of empathy and poor

behavioural controls; in many cases they have shown early behavioural problems, they are unreliable, they show infidelity, they lack a realistic life plan and show entrepreneurial versatility.

Since the theoretical basis for the general mechanics of cults and the leadership of cults has been spelled out, some remarks regarding the leadership of CiMI are now in order.

### **3.3.5. Investigating the leadership of CiMI**

CiMI has also structured their group like a pyramid with a centralised leadership. Xandré Strydom, who is identified as the “vision leader” of CiMI, dwells at the top of their ‘pyramid’, or in the centre of their ‘onion’ with his so-called ‘*leermeesters*’, who are serving him and his leadership. Strydom (2017a) claims to be appointed by God with a unique role to fulfil in this world. He, for example, states: “There is only one truth. There is only one dream, one plan, and one way. God commanded me to lead the people of covenant and the true Israel into the promised land, a new heaven and a new earth.” Strydom is here claiming exclusivity to CiMI. He is the only true prophet of God; he is revealing the “one truth” and showing people the “one dream” and “one plan” of God and leading them on the “one way” to God.

In one of CiMI’s (2018I) documents, Strydom is described as the divinely appointed *and* anointed king. The exact description which is provided goes as follows:

God’s eyes searched the earth to and fro and found a heart after His own heart, and in a supernatural moment, God appointed Xandré Strydom as the ‘David’ for this hour. This word was confirmed by the same signs that appointed Jesus Christ as a ‘David’. In function, Xandré Strydom is the King for this hour who will build the temple of God; he will represent the heart of God and will shepherd His people. He will make them one nation again and make sure they enter the Promised Land and destroy all the giants that hinder them. Is Xandré Strydom a reincarnated David or Jesus Christ? Most certainly not! He is a normal man like you and me, but he is the one God chose to sit on the spiritual throne of David for this hour. When Xandré’s time is over, someone else will sit on the throne of David, and another, and another, until the whole earth is filled with the glory of God and He hands over the Kingdom to God the Father.

This description includes many theologically loaded concepts and links Strydom’s leadership with God’s plan for this world. The eyes of God “searched the earth” and found Strydom to be the only leader fit for the task He has for him. This serves as a mechanism that separates Strydom from his followers by placing all his words and behaviours in a context where it is divinely directed and leading to salvation.

Strydom is clearly considered to be a king whose leadership is directly established by God Himself. It has been confirmed by Strydom and some of the previous members of CiMI that, at the ceremony where Labuschagne crowned Strydom as king of CiMI, people also bowed to him

as their king (Anon., 2018a; Anon., 2018c; *Carte Blanche*, 2018; *Openbarings*, 2018). He is in biblical terms considered to be a ‘type-David king’. CiMI (2018l) also explains that Jesus Christ cannot be the king of the church, since a king’s task is to unite the church and the church is “more divided than ever”. Referring to the other church leaders in the world, CiMI (2018l) states:

Church leaders want to convince you that Jesus is the current or reigning King, because then they can hide behind the lie to rule and reign as ‘kings’ in their own churches. Jesus was an active/reigning King during the time he was on earth and he represented God accurately as God instructed him. Because Jesus cannot speak for himself today (not an active/reigning King), the church leaders pretend to speak on behalf of Jesus and, lo and behold, the Church keeps on getting divided.

CiMI is therefore promoting Strydom as the king and leader of the church, while at the same time pronouncing all other church leaders as illegitimate. Strydom as the leader is appointed to unite the church. That is his special task which God gave him. At one point, Strydom (2019d) contrasts him and his leadership with that of other churches by saying, “These guys who stand behind the pulpits ... are not appointed. I don’t know who appointed them.” He further claims that the reason why he knows that the other church leaders are not appointed by God, is because of the supposedly false words that they preach from their pulpits.

Although the leaders of other churches want to help, according to Strydom (2016d), they cannot because they are not “mature in their stature”. These comments of Strydom imply that he and his leadership are indeed appointed and entrusted by God Himself to bring the last day gospel to the world and are therefore also superior to the teachers of other churches. This is clearly an elitist claim to make. Labuschagne (2016c), considered by many of the former members of CiMI to be the second person in charge of CiMI, calls himself a “son of Xandré, the God-appointed<sup>18</sup> leader of this day and this hour”. Labuschagne goes so far as to state: “Here in Christ in Me International we become one with Xandré. You are baptised into him ... into the word that he brings to us.” Once again one finds the use of theological language being applied to Strydom’s divinely appointed leadership. This idea of becoming “one with Xandré” is not defined in any detail by Labuschagne, but it shows that CiMI’s members must be committed and loyal to Strydom and his leadership.

Kotze (2017a) also submits to the leadership of Strydom with these words after one of his sermons:

The son of man has come! ... Today I say to you, the second coming of Christ is here. Today I say to you, there is a king ... And today I want to exalt and give honour to Xandré for what you have

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<sup>18</sup> Labuschagne (2016c) points out that he will follow the “appointed man of God” which for now is Xandré, but apparently there will be many appointed men in the future that will preach the same message as Xandré, whom he, Labuschagne, will also gladly follow when God appoints them.

done. That you have laid down your life for these people ... for God's dream. To open our eyes ... Today I want to proclaim: "Hosanna ... Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"<sup>19</sup>

In one of his other sermons, Kotze (2017b) also states, "God raised up the man, Xandré, and gave him His name, His word and glory. This is the same name, the same Word, and the same glory that was given to Jesus. All who come to him, to Xandré, will receive this name, this Word, and this glory. Amen." In turn, Du Plessis (2016a) also emphasises the leadership of Strydom. He mentions that God approached him through "Xandré Christ", who then made him part of CiMI. All these statements establish a deep religious origin and meaning to Strydom's leadership. He is a kind of Messiah to these people.

In the *Carte Blanche* (2018) television episode a short clip from one of Strydom's sermons was played, in which he said: "People get angry, they say, 'Who do you think you are? You want to be a king over the people!'" Strydom then responds to these claims by saying:

No, no, no, sir, that is your desire hidden in your heart. That is why God didn't choose you. I am not a king over the people, I am a king for the people. I am a king for God's kingdom, and I want God's specie, the Christ specie to be safe and to be raised to Sons.

Strydom further comments on the people outside of CiMI, saying that "we see things differently from what they see ... They can't look past the flesh of Xandré ... they cannot see what God is doing because they are veil minded." Here one can observe once again that Strydom, with his leadership, is establishing a kind of elitism since only CiMI can understand the spiritual things concerning God in the world. All other people who are not in CiMI is "veil minded". Strydom, as the leader, is therefore setting himself up as a leader who will take the members of CiMI to new religious heights that the world has never seen before. Strydom is in this sense clearly viewed as the leader of God's people, who is leading them to salvation and building God's kingdom on earth. During the interview that Govender had with Strydom, Govender pulled out a piece of paper with one of CiMI's own slides printed on the paper. She handed it to Strydom and asked him to read it out loud. This is what he read: "The Lord appointed His day 7 Lord, Xandré Christ as our shepherd, therefore we shall not want"<sup>20</sup> (*Carte Blanche*, 2018).

It is also worth mentioning that in the televised *Openbarings* episode (*Openbarings*, 2018), Clint Archer explicitly labelled Strydom as "delusional". He added that it is not an uncharitable assessment of Strydom. Either all Strydom's and CiMI's claims are true, in which case they need to present persuasive evidence, or Strydom and CiMI are lying, which will then be wicked

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<sup>19</sup> This is a reference to Matthew 21:9, which has great theological significance. This passage reads as follows: "Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: 'Hosanna to the Son of David! 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest!'"

<sup>20</sup> This is a reference to Psalm 23:1, which reads as follows: "The Lord *is* my Shepherd; I shall not want."

and narcissistic, or else Strydom is a delusional leader. He remarked that he thought the last option fits Strydom the best.

Strydom has a loyal leadership behind him. The researcher had confrontations with some of the ministers of CiMI at his house, where there was an international speaker who presented a lecture on the topic of cults in general. Some of CiMI's leaders and ministers showed up for this event. They brought their lawyer and recorded the whole lecture, apparently to see if they could find something which could be legally pursued. The leadership of Strydom clearly serve as an insulating barrier to Strydom as the cult leader. The following observations can be made:

- The leadership manage to spare Strydom from any kind of critical cross examination. Strydom is therefore rarely required to defend himself in public or against his critics, and in so doing can avoid the potential risk of being found wanting or losing face in front of his followers and the broader public.
- Critical to his profile is the task of maintaining, in the minds of his followers, a high opinion of his character and wisdom. Therefore, his leadership team presents him in public affairs.
- The leader, Strydom, can dispatch his team as his eyes and ears to keep tabs of his followers and relevant events, ensuring that followers are compliant and that any kind of dissention is dealt with, without himself having to be involved in the process, and potentially ruining his profile.

Former members confirm the strict hierarchy in CiMI. The final 'yes' or 'no' must always come from Strydom, who is considered to be the closest example of God on earth. One former member mentioned that if Strydom tells her today that she must colour her hair red, she will do it tomorrow, or if he told her to marry someone else, she would do it as well. This is the kind of authority he has in CiMI. The leadership that operates directly beneath him in the hierarchical structure also has derivative authority in the group (Anon., 2018a; Anon., 2018c). Moreover, former members also observed the combination of authoritarianism and charisma in Strydom and his leadership. One member explained how Strydom made him feel exceptionally good about himself and complimented him when they first met. This confirms his charisma (Anon., 2018c). In the same way Labuschagne is described as a very likeable person who can charm people. However, when one of the former members began to ask questions, Labuschagne started to shout at her to manipulate and cause fear (Anon., 2018a). In the same way Strydom is described in such a way that he might be very charismatic in public; however, behind the scenes, at their meetings for example, he loses his temper when things cannot be the way he wants it to be. Former members also testify to the fact that Strydom is an extremely gifted

communicator who can grab the attention of everyone in the room and keep their attention for two to three hours (Anon., 2018c).

At one point Strydom called in an entire family for a discussion because they questioned the leadership of CiMI. The former member reported that Strydom shouted at them and verbally abused them. He also asked them who they thought they were to question the leadership and him as the king. The former member explains how this episode caused her to doubt whether the leadership was really appointed by God. She wondered, because of the leadership's inconsistencies, whether God would appoint people who lied to her. This was a traumatic experience to her since she was taught for three years that Strydom is the closest possible example of God. She was also taught that she could not love God if she did not love His appointed leadership. Eventually she compared the character of Jesus in the Bible with the character of these leaders and realised that they did not face up to Jesus's leadership. This was the beginning of a process which caused her to leave CiMI (Anon., 2018a).

Since the important role of the cult leader, as the control mechanism initiator, has now been established and Strydom, together with his leadership, has been addressed within this context, it is fitting to move on to a detailed discussion of the so-called control mechanisms. As stated above, control mechanisms<sup>21</sup> refer to the different areas and components of a person's life and social environment that the leader and/or leadership of cults attempt to control in order to keep them for as long as possible (see Hassan, 2016:114-115). Stoker (1995:440) indicated that, by examining new cults according to the control mechanisms, one would contribute to the field of the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults. The researcher accordingly established a broad theoretical basis regarding the control mechanisms and aims to provide examples from CiMI after each the control mechanism has been discussed. Take note that a group does not have to be guilty of every control mechanism to be identified as a cult from a sociological and psychological perspective. In this sense CiMI might not manifest all the control mechanisms to the same extent, but that many of them are present will be demonstrated.

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<sup>21</sup> One must think of the different control mechanisms as different links in a chain. Although they are separate links in one sense, they do overlap with one another on certain points, and, at the end of the day the strength of these control mechanisms lies in its total effect on an individual when applied and implemented together. It is as Lifton (1989:419) phrases the idea: "In combination they create an atmosphere which may temporarily energize or exhilarate, but which at the same time poses the gravest of human threats."



## **3.4. The control mechanisms of cults**

### **3.4.1. Control over membership**

#### **3.4.1.1. Introduction**

Although it has already been established that cults create a certain dependence on the group in the lives of its members, and that this happens step-by-step during a thought-reform programme, it is still necessary now to take a closer look at the concept of recruitment and membership of cults. Singer (2003:11) aptly narrows the purpose of a cult down to two important factors,<sup>22</sup> one of them being “the recruitment of new members”. Singer (2003:107) further adds: “Cults recruit everywhere. They hold lectures, seminars, retreats, revivals, and meetings of all sorts, and they go door to door.” It is clear that active and opportunistic recruitment is an integral part of cults.

Hassan (2016:100) makes an interesting remark about the notion of recruitment in cults, stating that “for the most part, people don’t join cults. Cults recruit people”, a notion also confirmed by Tobias and Lalich (1994:6). Even though this comment might be an exaggeration, it still highlights the great ‘missionary’ efforts of all cults to recruit members for their cause, and it also makes one question the recruitment tactics that they implement (Singer, 2003:23). Singer (2003:21-22, 109) explains that each cult has its own method of attracting new prospective members for recruitment. Some cults have specific training manuals for recruiters to study and apply during exercises where they practise how to approach the potential next member in a conversation. Thus, recruiters are usually well trained to be able to “size-up each newcomer, and package and sell the cult in whatever way is likely to succeed” (Hassan, 2016:87). One must also remember though that recruitment does not take place out of nowhere. It is a process that is pressed on people by the other people in the cult (Hassan, 2016:101).

It is crucial at this point to repeat the notion that the people who do end up joining cults are not “stupid, weird, crazy, or neurotic” (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:28). Instead, as Stein (2017:59) points out, “recruitment is primarily the result of situational vulnerabilities not personality vulnerabilities”. In this sense, if the time, event, place and persons involved are right, any given group with any given belief system would have been able to recruit the individual (Galanter, 1989:53). Although not all who are approached by cult recruiters end up joining the cult, and not all who join the cult stays in the cult forever, the fact is that enough people do join cults that it is

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<sup>22</sup> The other important factor regarding the purpose of cults that Singer (2003:11) mentions is “fund-raising”.

worth investigating the control they attempt to exert over the membership of the group (Hassan, 2016:187; Singer, 2003:5, 61).

#### **3.4.1.2. Making the first contact**

Abgrall (2000:98) remarks that it is usually the cult who initiate the first “contact with a target”. In this sense cult members for the most part do not pursue the group in any way but are approached by the recruiters of the cult as potential new members (Singer, 2003:106). For the recruiter, the potential targets are usually the people in the immediate locality, which would include family and friends (Stein, 2017:47). But, beyond that, people are also a target if they give the “impression of having time on their hands, and few relationships” (Abgrall, 2000:98). Hassan (2016:100) adds other possible ways in which people are approached by cults. It might for example just be a stranger who befriends the potential recruit, or it might be through social media like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Stein (2017:48) also confirms the notion that cults make use of the Internet for initial contact with a potential recruit. She acknowledges, however, that the Internet can only take the recruitment process so far. It might establish the initial introduction, but it will not replace the effect of a person-to-person dialogue, which remains irreplaceable in recruitment.

Most people approached by cults are those who are going through a time of instability and vulnerability in their lives. This may include high levels of stress due to an event like a divorce, moving to a new city and new environment, problems at work, and so on. The reason for this is because people in this kind of setting lower their rational defence mechanisms and are more susceptible to deception (Abgrall, 2000:106-107; Hassan, 2016:100-101; Singer, 2003:20, 107). According to Singer (2003:107), cults also target “friendly, obedient, altruistic, and malleable persons because such individuals are easy to persuade and manage”. Besides these aspects of recruitment, cults also attempt to find intelligent, talented and successful people who will, in turn, be assets for the cult and in a strong position to recruit future new members (Hassan, 2016:87). The other side of this coin involves the idea that cults usually avoid the recruitment of people who might be unproductive or a burden to the group like someone with “physical disabilities or severe emotional problems” (Hassan, 2016:102; Stein, 2017:22).

Stein (2017:47) draws attention to the point that, despite how the first contact is initially made with a target, what is more important is the way in which recruitment is managed. Therefore, the rest of the discussion will focus on the crucial factors that are part of the recruitment process.

### 3.4.1.3. Recruitment

When Abgrall (2000:97) explains the initial phase in recruitment, he labels it “the seduction phase” and mentions that this phase is the precursor to the start of indoctrination. He explains rather thoroughly as follows:

To seduce is, above all, to be pleasing, but also means distorting the truth. All the work of the cults aims at proposing a brilliant Utopia instead of the drabness of daily existence. The recruiter-seducer sets the scene of the cult illusion; he serves as a conjurer to attract potential followers; he offers simple answers to complex questions; he charms the interlocutor, creating the illusion of an emotional exchange; he constantly exploits the register of emotions, omitting any reference to logic; he opposes the morbidity of reality with the prospect of an idyllic love, that which reigns within his community (Abgrall, 2000:97).

Hassan (2016:187) also latches on to the idea of the distortion of the truth by claiming that the basic tenet of recruitment is characterised by deception. Tobias and Lalich (1994:41) further confirm this by stating, “The hallmark of a cult is its use of deception in the recruitment process and throughout membership.” Additionally, Singer (2003:113) compares this distorting tendency during cult recruitment to a jack-in-the-box. At first it looks like a pretty and attractive container, but when one opens it, it surprises one with a scary pop-out figure. In the same way “surprising and frightening things pop out over the course of membership in a cult. What you first see is not what’s inside” (Singer, 2003:113).

It seems then that the key ingredient when it comes to recruitment is for the recruiter to be pleasing and to appear nonthreatening to the potential recruit. The idea is that the recruit must feel comfortable, safe and that he can resonate with the recruiter, who seems like a nice person and “who is showing such personal care and interest” in him (Singer, 2003:110; Tobias & Lalich, 1994:32). This comfortable atmosphere might cause the recruit to disclose information to the recruiter and at some stage the recruiter is in a position to show that he has something to offer to the recruit by putting forth an invitation to some sort of event (Hassan, 2016:188; Singer, 2003:110). The recruiter must attempt to get as much information as possible out of the prospective recruit in order to make manipulation down the line easier, while on the other hand revealing as few things as possible about himself or the group since “the rule of thumb is, ‘Tell the new member only what they are ready to accept’” (Hassan, 2016:101, 128, 187-188).

Tobias and Lalich (1994:41) formulate this dynamic in recruitment as follows: “The prospective devotee is wooed with the promise of reward, be it personal fulfilment, special knowledge, spiritual growth, political satisfaction, religious salvation, lifelong companionship, riches, power – whatever is most dear to that person at the time. This connection to a person’s innermost desire is the recruitment ‘hook’.” It is clear then that the recruiter will play to the desires and needs of

the person at the time by offering “instant, simplistic, and focused solutions to life’s problems” (Singer, 2003:17, 109), which is how the recruiter manages to present the cult in a way that is most likely to be successful<sup>23</sup> (Konnikova, 2016:5; Singer, 2003:50). Singer (2003:9) mentions that former cult members explained to her that the recruiter was even able to not just convince them they needed what was offered, but also that they had the time to join them for events and meetings. It is worth mentioning that “the most powerful persuasion is exerted by other cult members” (Hassan, 2016:129). This observation was also made by Galanter (1989:62), referring to a setting where the potential recruit is completely surrounded by cult members who are dedicated to the organisation and who are convinced that they know what is best for the recruit. In a setting like this, group psychology also comes into play to help accelerate the recruitment process. Sooner or later the potential member will exhaust his/her defence mechanisms to “reduce the dissonance between the standards of his former life and the new one proposed to him”, and eventually he/she will accept, without criticism, the leader and the ideology of the group (Abgrall, 2000:119-120).

Stoker (1995:49) finally points out that the potential recruit will have a disadvantage from the beginning in the conversation since he is not aware of the hidden agenda that is driven by the recruiter. Any positive action towards the cult taken by the potential recruit is probably not a result of rational reflection but rather “he or she makes an emotionally based acquiescence to complex, powerful, and organized persuasion tactics” (Singer, 2003:116). With all the deception involved in this process, a hidden agenda on the recruiter’s side should not be surprising since the recruiter “limits his actions to the expression of sympathy and pseudo-transparency to avoid revealing his real plan. Only one thing matters: to attract and beguile, to the greatest possible extent” (Abgrall, 2000:102). Singer (2003:105) finally warns that, to a certain extent, everyone is vulnerable to cult recruitment.

#### **3.4.1.4. Maintenance of membership**

Singer (2003:112, 116) calls upon her experience as a scholar on cults and refers to many former cult members who have sometimes reflected on what they call “that first fatal step”. She explains that as these former cult members “look back, they realize, for a combination of reasons, their first step of acquiescing to an invitation or a request was the start of weeks, months, or years in a cult”. Once initial contact is made and the potential new member is starting to show interest and eventually starts to attend the events, the recruit is entering what

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<sup>23</sup> In her book on the psychology behind the conman and why people fall for their schemes, Konnikova (2016:5) suggests that the genius of these conmen is that they are able to figure out exactly what it is one wants, and then, how they can “present themselves as the perfect vehicle for delivering on that desire”. It seems then that cult recruiters, to a large extent, will fit the criteria of a conman. Singer (2003:50) also makes this connection between a cult leader and recruiter, and con artists.

Abgrall (2000:104) calls the “fascination phase”. Fascination is the driving force that “tips the scales” in the enrolment process. This usually happens when the recruit is more and more convinced that the right thing to do is to officially join the cult. When this happens, there must be some way in which the cult maintains this membership for as long as possible.<sup>24</sup>

Stein (2017:49) proposes two key elements for the maintenance of membership, which have already been referred to in one way or another. First, the cult must position itself as the only shelter of safety and, secondly, the new member must be isolated from previous relationships. The way to achieve this would involve a schedule loaded with cult activities in order to subvert or sabotage the member’s relationship with family or friends (Hassan, 2016:189). Stein (2017:52) refers to this as the “monopolizing of the recruit’s time”, which results in a subtle isolation of the person. These activities will include events like camps, retreats, workshops, seminars and social events, which in many cases are so time-consuming for the new member that it leads to sleep deprivation and overwork (Hassan, 2016:190; Stein, 2017:52). Members are sometimes only allowed to spend time with family and friends as long as the family remains potential future members to recruit for the cult. However, the moment family and friends start to express their discomfort and concern with the group, the new member will be ordered to “disconnect” with them, since they are then perceived as the enemy and as potential “escape hatch” relationships for the member (Hassan, 2016:189; Stein 2017:17). In the light of these observations, one can expect a continuous encouragement to spend more time with the group and less time with people outside of the group (Galanter, 1989:114; Stein, 2017:52).

Singer (2003:114) contributes to this aspect of membership in a salient way by explaining: “When cut off from social support, social background, families, familiar surroundings, friends, jobs, schoolmates, and classes and brought into new environs with a new ambiance, few can resist the pull to fit in.” There is therefore no reason to underestimate the tremendous ability of cults to recruit people from any background for their organisation.

Stein (2017:122) also mentions a factor to keep in mind when thinking about the maintenance of membership. She explains that sometimes cults will go through a lot of effort to make it seem like all the elements of society are present within the cult itself. She calls this phenomenon “the duplication of societal functions”. This refers to schools, medical services, legal advice and therapy, for example. Accordingly, the cult might set up its own school and medical clinic to make it seem like a normal functioning community. In this way members who are part of the cult might feel that they have everything they need inside the cult and the “more the group can contain all ‘societal’ functions within it, the less members have reason to associate with the

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<sup>24</sup> To a large extent all the control mechanisms also contribute to the maintenance of membership.

outside world". One can also always expect cults to sketch the surrounding society as a dangerous and aggressive environment that is indifferent to the "most intimate concerns of the potential recruit" (Abgrall, 2000:101).

#### **3.4.1.5. No freedom to leave**

With the strict maintenance of membership, people might have had the freedom to join the group, but once they are there, they do not have the freedom to leave, and any attempt from the cult to make it sound as if this is not the case is nothing else than "a delusion created by the cult itself" (Hassan, 2016:43; Singer, 2003:116). On the contrary, Singer (2003:72-73) sets the record straight as she explains:

Cult leaders tell their followers, 'You have chosen to be here. No one has told you to come here. No one has influenced you,' when in fact the followers are in a situation they can't leave owing to social pressure and their fear. Thus, they come to believe that they are actually choosing this life ... Cults thrive on this myth of voluntarism, insisting time and against that no member is being held against his or her will.

Similar remarks are also made by Tobias and Lalich (1994:6). Hassan (2016:192) states that "there is no 'legitimate' reason for a person to ever leave the group". Sometimes the leadership will tell the members that the only reason people usually leave is because of "weakness, insanity, temptation, brainwashing (by deprogrammers), pride, sin, and so on. Members are thoroughly indoctrinated with the belief that if they ever do leave, terrible consequences will befall them, their family and/or humanity" (Hassan, 2016:146-147).

Stoker (1995:51) reminds one that it is exceedingly difficult for a cult member to leave the group. As we have seen, members are deceptively pressured to join a cult and they end up losing their ties with family and friends. They become dependent on the cult on more than just one level of their personhood and they have been "propagandized and socialized to accept the life conditions of the group" (Singer, 2003:24-25). They are fused into the group to such an extent that the "life of the group becomes the life of each one, and the goal of each member merges with the goal of all" (Abgrall, 2000:90). It is no wonder then that the act of leaving the group is one of the hardest things for a member to do, psychologically and socially. Accordingly, everything the cult implements to maintain membership is aimed at minimising the possibility of the member ever leaving the group.

#### **3.4.1.6. The control over membership in CiMI**

When it comes to CiMI's method of recruitment, it is mainly done through weekend retreats. Many of the former members will speak about these retreats and how it serves as an important platform of recruitment for the group (Anon., 2018b). It is on the weekend retreats where

potential recruits are introduced to some of the theological teachings of CiMI in the form of lectures, which are long and full of repetition. Members of CiMI are motivated to invite their family and friends to these camps. One person tells of how his daughter invited him on a camp of CiMI. He could recall an instance where the leadership was very intimidating with one of the persons who objected to their teachings and interpretations of the Bible. He explained how he realised at that moment that it is better to stay quiet. He was never recruited by CiMI, but confirms that the weekend retreats are meant for that purpose. They have different weekend retreats for men and women. On these retreats CiMI also sends everyone home with a set of DVDs that explains their teachings in more detail. One of the former members was recruited by watching the DVDs, which she borrowed from a family member who had attended one of these retreats (Anon., 2018a). Another former member also claims that on these weekend retreats the leadership identifies persons who might be potential recruits. What may seem like a normal Christian weekend retreat is therefore an opportunity to recruit and convince people to embrace their doctrine (Anon., 2018b).

In this regard Labuschagne (2018) also discourages older or more senior members of CiMI to bring new members to their midweek gatherings, since there will be content that they will not understand. Instead, he encourages them to get their friends and new members on a CiMI weekend retreat. Labuschagne (2018) says that the best thing is to get them to their Sunday services or their retreats “where we get to their minds”. The goal, according to him, is to ultimately get them into “the mind of God and the language of the Kingdom”. He further explains that when the members of CiMI meet people who have questions about CiMI, they have to “make an appointment” with one of the teachers to learn “of the language of the Kingdom and the ways of the Kingdom”. He ends this discussion by mockingly asking the question: “So, is Xandré brainwashing us? Oh yes! Thank God he is! With a water bottle of the Word, everyday!” The leadership of CiMI opens these weekend retreats by making it clear to the attendees that they are going to shake their foundations and that everything they thought they knew about God is wrong. CiMI will teach them the truth (Anon., 2018a). Another former member explained that on the weekend retreats people were usually recruited once they had bought into the idea that the church has been wrong all these years (Anon., 2018c).

Strydom (2016d) mentions in one of his sermons to the members of CiMI that “many people are mad at CIM because you no longer sit with your earthly family around ‘braais’.<sup>25</sup> But the Bible says you should not ... the Bible says it is not allowed. How will they ever move over to the plan of God if we still sit with them and fellowship with them?” Strydom (2016d) then reads a

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<sup>25</sup> This is the Afrikaans way of talking about a barbeque.

passage from the Bible<sup>26</sup> which emphasises the contrasts between believers and unbelievers, and he then communicates the idea that members of CiMI are better off when they are separated from non-believers. To make his comments practical, he explains that when someone outside of CiMI invites members from CiMI for a barbeque, they must go and share the gospel with them, but “if they do not convert, move! Find a new family!” Strydom clearly encourages the members of CiMI not to spend time with family members who disagree with them. As long as family and friends are still possible targets for recruitment, they must go to social events with them, but if they do not want to convert to CiMI, they have to move and “find a new family”. In the same manner, Kotze (2017a) also tells his listeners that if someone does not want to listen to CiMI, you must cut them off. In one of their posts, CiMI (2018k) contends that it is “God’s Word that divides people”. This is stated to suggest that families who were separated because of CiMI, were actually obedient to God’s Word.

This seems to corroborate the testimony of Hesmari Louw during her interview on the *Carte Blanche* (2018) television episode. She is not a former member of CiMI, but her mother and three siblings were all members of CiMI at the time. When Louw raised some of her concerns about CiMI to her family, they were instructed by the leadership of CiMI to break contact with her. She explained that she had received WhatsApp messages from her family members in which “they all just copied and pasted the same message and said we understand that you believe differently from us and we respect that. We want you to also respect us, but we cannot go on like this we have to go our separate ways.” After Louw had had no contact with her family for six months, CiMI sent one of their ministers to her. She stated that “he did tell me that [the WhatsApp messages] was an instruction from them to protect us from fighting too much”. She also said,

I miss my family so much; I miss each and every one of them. I miss my brother and I miss my two sisters, and I miss my mom ... Because I don’t have a relationship with them anymore. They don’t know what is going on in my life and I don’t know what is going on in theirs.

This is clearly an example where members of CiMI are instructed to cut their ties with their family who disagree with them. The leadership of CiMI wants to limit the contact their members have with other influences and therefore instructs them to “find a new family”.

CiMI (2018a) produced a document titled *Does Christ in Me International break up families and marriages?* This was precisely because the *Carte Blanche* episode accused them of breaking up families. Many of the former members with whom the researcher has talked went through a divorce shortly after they left CiMI. This usually happens because one of the marriage partners ends up leaving CiMI, but the other one remains in CiMI. The one who remains in CiMI is then

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<sup>26</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:11-18.



encouraged to file for a divorce. CiMI, however, explains that it is not they who are breaking up families and causing divorces, “It is God’s Word that brings separation!” They explain it as follows:

Unfortunately, life demands our time as well, but as time allows it and where we can spare it we choose to sit at God’s feet. There we enjoy fellowship with God and each other. We do not follow western religious culture. We do not follow the ‘balanced’ lifestyle where people go to church on a Sunday, but also pursue their own dreams and desires. We follow the Heavenly lifestyle. For us, God and His dream is our beginning and our end. We cannot pursue our own dreams in Heaven, so why would we waste time doing so on earth? ... If you see it differently, you are welcome to do so. But your anger is misplaced if you call us destructive or accuse us of breaking up families and marriages because your loved ones would rather spend their time on earth reflecting heaven, alongside people with the same passion and desire (CiMI, 2018a).

CiMI is thus only covering their trail with religious language, which enables them to use the Bible as a cover to encourage people to divorce their partners if one of them leaves CiMI, or to spend less time with family and friends who are not members of CiMI.

One person who got divorced when he did not want to join CiMI also reports how his ex-wife does not have time to look after the children anymore. A large portion of her time is now being poured into the activities of CiMI. CiMI has many different activities in the course of a normal week, which includes long hours of *Woord Skool*.<sup>27</sup> These lectures take place on Saturdays and are exclusively for senior members of CiMI, after they have been invited by the leadership to attend these more advanced lectures. Since CiMI also gains leverage over people by having access to their assets, it becomes extremely difficult for them to leave CiMI (Anon., 2018c).

In summary, one could say that many cults will endeavour to control the members of the group as far as possible. CiMI is no exception. This control mechanism over their members will already kick into motion from the first point of contact during recruitment, to the maintenance of membership by implementing certain techniques and rules, and in the end not giving anyone any freedom to leave the group. Since cults depend on devoted members, the leadership will make sure that there are devoted members who are not just unwilling, but also unable to leave. CiMI uses weekend retreats as a platform for recruitment, and they also gain leverage on members to keep them from leaving. Members are also afraid of losing their marriage partners if they are thinking of leaving CiMI. Besides weekend retreats, their Sunday services are also designed in such a way as to serve as a recruitment platform.

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<sup>27</sup> Translation: Word School.

## 3.4.2. Control over thoughts

### 3.4.2.1. Introduction

In George Orwell's book *1984* (2008:<sup>28</sup>4, 21, 30), there is a constant reference to the so-called "Thought Police". The Thought Police monitored the thoughts of the citizens in this novel, since it was deemed possible to commit crimes against the government in your thoughts. The task of the Thought Police was not to identify and catch people who *act* against the law, but to identify and catch people who commit a "thoughtcrime". This kind of crime entailed a thought that in one way or another opposed the ideology of the ruling party in the novel. Thoughtcrime was one of the worst crimes that one could possibly commit, as it is stated: "Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death" (Orwell, 2008:30). Although this is just a work of fiction, it is still based on the reality of rigid thought control patterns that happened within many totalitarian systems in the past, and it is still something that one can identify in many cults today.

Referring to cults, Hassan (2016:100) states that "they want your mind". In passing, Singer (2003:82) describes cults very vividly as "snatchers of the minds ... of our children, our friends, our relatives, our loved ones". Singer (2003:75, 117) also mentions that the manipulation of minds in cults is a central practice aimed to make someone dependent on the group for cues about "right thinking" and "right conduct" (Singer, 2003:75). Since Stein was once a member of a cult herself, she explains how deep the roots of cults and their belief systems grow in the lives of the members by explaining that cultic systems "penetrate our brains, the places in us that usually work to help us solve the problems of survival. They detach our higher-order cognitive thinking from our sensory perception and emotions and leave us, thus, helpless to understand which way to turn to avoid danger" (Stein, 2017:7). It is significant that Stein (2017:9) titles the first chapter of her book "The overthrow of the rulers of the mind", and Abgrall (2000:15) explains that the crucial ingredient for successful coercion in cults is "mind control". One must remember that the attack on critical thinking from the cult's side already begins early in the recruitment process (Stein, 2017:56). Thus, the following control mechanism will focus on the mind, but more specifically the control over the thoughts of members.

It is notable, when referring to the control over thoughts, to point out how members from a specific cult will usually think and process things, events or information in a similar way. To confirm this phenomenon, Stoker (1995:10) calls upon his experience from working with cult members and states that one will recognise this when a member from a particular cult is confronted with evidence that opposes the ideas, doctrines or history of the cult at any point. Their response is usually the same in the sense that they are not interested in any rational

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<sup>28</sup> First published in 1949.

evaluation of the facts and it almost seems as if the cult itself interprets the facts for the cultist (Galanter, 1989:31; Martin, 2003:36). It is therefore not without reason that Abgrall (2000:122) draws attention to the fact that the “intellect represents the only barricade to the cult’s ideology”. The question that these observations raise is whether the leadership of cults attempts to gain control over the thoughts of their followers by training them to think about and interpret reality in a very strict and rigid way and in exactly the way the leader dictates. This question will now be addressed to investigate whether and how the leadership of cults gain control over people by “mentally hijacking normal thought processes” (Hassan, 2016:23).

### **3.4.2.2. Thought-stopping techniques**

According to Hassan (2016:121), the most effective and direct way to gain control over the thoughts of a person is by teaching him so-called thought-stopping techniques. A thought-stopping technique refers to the ability of the individual member to keep his mind ‘centred’ on the supposed truthfulness of the group by manipulating his own thought processes (Hassan, 2016:119). This same kind of phenomenon is also explained by Abgrall (2000:83) as the “ability to reduce cognitive dissonance”, which gives the individual members the ability to “recalibrate” their thoughts when a confrontation with reality shows the group to be mistaken about something. This ability is usually described by the cult as a very good thing since it will apparently help the member to grow, be more productive and always stay “true and pure” (Hassan, 2016:121).

Thought-stopping techniques are especially useful for life in the cult when a cult member is confronted with critical or negative data about the cult itself. When this happens, the cult member is trained to shut out any critical or negative information that challenges the cult’s version of reality. It is as Abgrall (2000:80) explains: “Everything that is a part of the cult ideology or inside the cult is positive, constructive and dynamic. All that is external to the cult is negative, destructive and lethal.” This notion becomes the basis on which all thoughts, facts and actions within the cult are qualified and expressed towards the outside world. A response of this kind eventually becomes mechanical in nature since the cult member is programmed to do this “at the first sign of doubt, anxiety or uncertainty” (Hassan, 2016:121).

The effect of thought-stopping techniques causes the member to lose the ability to critically test reality. Singer (2003:118) appositely puts this effect into words:

Reflective, critical, evaluative thought, especially that critical of the cult, becomes aversive and avoided. The member will appear as you or I do, and will function well in ordinary tasks, but the cult lectures and procedures tend to gradually induce members to experience anxiety whenever they critically evaluate the cult. Soon they are conditioned to avoid critical thinking, especially about the cult, because doing so becomes associated with pangs of anxiety and guilt.

At this point the member will only welcome positive thoughts and come to apparently sound and true conclusions about his participation in the specific cult (Abgrall, 2000:79; Hassan, 2016:121-122). As Stein (2017:80) explains it with regard to cult members: with no “cognitive escape hatch, they cling on both to the group as an island of (seeming) logicity in their sea of confusion”.

### **3.4.2.3. Closed-mindedness and compartmental thinking**

Martin (2003:36) mentions that “the belief systems of the cults are characterized by closed-mindedness”. What he means is that even though the individual cult member seems interested in a rational evaluation of facts, it is usually not the case. When thought-stopping techniques are put in place some information will automatically be blocked by the cultist, without giving any amount of thought to it. This kind of closed-mindedness is partly due to a rigid and totalistic ideology where everyone must embrace one single set of beliefs, which allows no other “affiliations and no other interpretations” (Stein, 2017:18). Accordingly, if there is only one absolute truth allowed on every single matter, then “no conversation is needed” about anything, which also puts an end to any meaningful dialogue that is supposed to have a crucial role in any given community (Stein, 2017:68). Instead of healthy dialogue, any tendency towards criticism and analysis is crushed as soon as possible (Abgrall, 2000:117).

Singer (2003:68) expands on this topic by sharing some insights in her claim that closed-mindedness is also the consequence of a closed system of logic where the focus is only on “a single truth”, as corroborated by Stein (2017:19). In a closed system of logic “you are not allowed to question or doubt a tenet or rule or to call attention to factual information that suggests some internal contradiction within the belief system or a contradiction with what you’ve been told ... In cultic groups the individual member is always wrong, and the system is always right.” Accordingly, cults put forth an “all-or-nothing point of view” (Singer, 2003:10, 71) where rational thoughts and logical consistency is not a criterion that cult members are able or allowed to apply to their own group, although they are willing to apply it to other groups (Stoker, 1995:12). This closed-mindedness then results in what is known as compartmental thinking, where the ideology or belief system of the cult is placed in a nearly impenetrable compartment in the mind of the member. This phenomenon, in turn, creates an echo chamber in the cult.

### **3.4.2.4. The role of repetition**

Another phenomenon that cults usually exploit with the goal of making someone’s mind used to the group’s ideology and to extinguish any form of critical thinking on the member’s side, is repetition. As Hassan (2016:127) explains:

Repetition, monotony, rhythm: these are the lulling, hypnotic cadences in which the formal indoctrination is generally delivered. Material is repeated over and over and over. If the lectures are sophisticated, they vary their talks somewhat in an attempt to hold interest, but the message remains pretty much the same. During the changing phase, all this repetition focuses on certain central themes.

The role and impact of repetition on the thoughts of the cultist should therefore not be underestimated. It is by way of constant repetition that someone starts believing in the cause and ideology of the group, the authority of the leader, and the exclusive truth that is only possessed by the cult itself. It is as Hassan (2016:127) states: “Recruits are told, ‘Your old self is what’s keeping you from fully experiencing the new truth. Your old concepts are what drag you down. Your rational mind is holding you back from fantastic progress. Surrender. Let go. Have faith.’”

Singer (2003:118) adds that recruits are sometimes, without their direct awareness, put into brief trancelike states. She explains that someone can get a person to concentrate only on one imaginary scene and then, by the repetition of subtle suggestions, persuade the person to believe in things they will not usually believe in under normal circumstances (Abgrall, 2000:174-175). This happens because the repetition of subtle suggestions causes critical thinking to collapse and a form of fideism to take over.

Besides repetition, it is also the case that certain topics, which might give rise to critical questions asked by members, will also be avoided in discussions within the group. Stein (2017:146) briefly refers to this as “approved and non-approved topics of discussion”.

#### **3.4.2.5. A new frame of reference**

In the end the cult gives the member a totally new frame of reference through which everything in life is filtered and thought about. According to Singer (2003:62), this is exactly what the tactics of a thought-reform process attempt to accomplish, by radically changing the person’s worldview to accept the cult’s version of reality. Primarily “the cult confronts you with a new, unanimously (group-) approved worldview” (Singer, 2003:65-66). Any information in the form of criticism towards the group will now be coloured through this new frame of reference as an attack on either the leader, the group or the doctrine, at which time an intellectual defence barrier will go up. Hassan (2016:99, 121) mentions that the victims of mind control or thought-reform processes usually do not have any frame of reference for the experience itself, and the consequence is that they “often accept the frame of reference given to them by the group”. He further explains that this new frame of reference will have the capacity to confirm for the cult

member the truthfulness of the group, paradoxically because of criticism, since criticism in this new frame of reference is what establishes the truth of the cult's ideology.

Once the cult member accepts this version of reality, the cult can “exert significant control over the individual, ultimately controlling a person’s mental activities, even while she or he is physically away from the group” (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:32). Therefore, it is because of thought control that “factual information that challenges the cult worldview does not register properly” (Hassan, 2016:121). Following these observations, it is evident that in the face of enough pressure, members lose their ability to think on their own and end up submitting to the “demand for commitment and obedience” (Stein, 2017:20). Hassan makes a similar observation (2016:39).

#### **3.4.2.6. Control over thoughts in CiMI**

The researcher had conversations with ministers from CiMI at his house on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February in 2018. The researcher presented two of the CiMI ministers with exegetical proof for the bodily resurrection of Jesus, since they rejected it. They kept denying the evidence that the researcher laid before them and, without a counter argument, kept affirming only a spiritual resurrection of Jesus. Stoker, the supervisor of this study, has also been in conversation with Labuschagne, during which he experienced the same closed-mindedness. Former members explain how they, without paying attention to the content, dismissed the *Carte Blanche* episode on television as uninformed. They did the same with the criticism on CiMI by Rudolph Boshoff, the assistant supervisor of this study. This shows how the new frame of reference filters the evidence that is presented to them. Some of the former members of CiMI explained how they literally became nauseous, even after leaving CiMI, when someone told them that Jesus Christ is God. This is because the claim that Jesus Christ is God had repeatedly been dismissed by CiMI. Other former members furthermore explained how they could not read the Bible without interpreting it the way CiMI taught them to interpret it, even after leaving CiMI. Another former member also added that she would never go back to CiMI, since she was scared that Strydom might manage to persuade her to join the group again. She acknowledged that Strydom had so much influence over her that she, even after going through bad experiences in the group, could repeatedly be persuaded by him. Another former member explained that CiMI teaches their members how they must react against criticism against them and that they immediately need to close themselves off from it (Anon., 2018b).

One could say that Kotze (2017a) is attempting to lower the critical thinking abilities of his listeners by encouraging them to “become like little children”. Hassan (2016:98-99) explicitly warns against this tactic of cults by asserting:

It is not accidental that many destructive cults tell their members to “become like little children,” mimicking Christianity: “You must be as one of these to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.” Adults can easily be age-regressed to a time when they had little or no critical faculties. As children, we were helpless and dependent on our parents as the ultimate authority figures.

When Kotze (2017a) reads further from Matthew 18:1-11<sup>29</sup> he explains it as follows:

Jesus is not saying to them to become a child. He is saying to become as little children ... You have to be like children because the children are vulnerable, and they are open to be taught. You teach a child. A full-grown person will argue ... a child has to be trained up and raised up.

These comments can be interpreted as an attempt to control the thoughts of the members of CiMI, since Kotze is encouraging them to be open to their teachings and let go of their critical thinking. He further tells his listeners that they must just have a childlike attitude when they say to God, “Lord, I just want to sit at your feet.” To have this kind of mindset “is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven”, according to Kotze (2017a). This is a way of using the Bible as a religious book to manipulate people into accepting without testing and to make it sound as if the Bible is commanding one to be open to the teachings of CiMI and not to think about the matter critically.

Labuschagne (2018) is also guilty of attempting to repress the critical thinking of CiMI members. After one of his sermons he starts to deliver a testimony and says the following:

Sometimes acting on the Word of God may still feel ... that you are losing your mind. That I am no longer having control. Now that is where you need to get. Where God takes control! Where God’s mind becomes your mind. Now in order to get to that place you need to give control away to God, and you need to lose your mind to God.

A statement like this might sound like a pious statement to most religious people, but it is a way of controlling the thoughts of the members and to prevent them from thinking critically for themselves. It is also worth echoing Labuschagne’s (2018) remark from earlier in which he acknowledged that CiMI wants people to attend their weekend retreats where CiMI can “get to their minds”.

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<sup>29</sup> “At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, and said, “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever receives one little child like this in My name receives Me. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes! “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.” “Take heed that do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.”

When it comes to the issue of repetition, Strydom (2016g) frequently asks his listeners to repeat the restoration plan of God. The reason he gives for this repetition is because “repetition is the mother of all revelations”. This gives the leadership of CiMI an excuse to ask their members to repeat many things concerning their teachings and other features. Former members state that the repetition is unusually frequent and that the weekend retreats are also characterised by repetition. Members are also expected to make many notes and write down the doctrines of CiMI in their Bibles. These notes must then be consulted when members read their Bibles on their own, away from the group. This keeps members from thinking independently. Moreover, members of CiMI are not allowed to be influenced by or listen to any other church leader in this world. Members may only listen to CiMI’s teachings. Moreover, CiMI’s sermons and lecturing sessions are extremely long. The leadership does not like people who think for themselves because they make it difficult for the leaders to control their thoughts (Anon., 2018a).

Typical of a cult, it is also the case at CiMI that their ideology, which flows forth from the leadership, is presented as the only truth. No other church or group of any kind has the truth, only CiMI does. Strydom (2017a) states, for example: “There is only one truth ... God commanded me to lead the people of covenant and the true Israel into the promised land, a new heaven and a new earth.” This establishes an ideological dependence and is part of the “all-or-nothing worldview” which cults inculcate in their members. On the point of ideological dependence in cults, it is worth pointing out that cults usually claim to have a monopoly on truth where the doctrinal truths of the leader function as the “master map for reality” (Hassan, 2016:132). Stein (2017:18) expands on this notion as follows:

This single truth, the sacred word, is the word of the leader, or sometimes, that of a deity to whom the leader is the only one to have a direct line. All knowledge comes from the leader. While the leader may change their mind as new “insights” appear, followers may never do so, although they must ever be on the alert to jump to the leader’s sudden ideological shifts.

Like many other cults, CiMI controls the thoughts of their members and wants to make sure that their critical thinking capacities are disabled. If critical faculties are lowered, it is easier for the leadership to make members dependent on the group on more than just one level, and to persuade them of the validity of CiMI’s cause. This is an important step in the direction of making a person loyal to CiMI. The fact that former members cannot read the Bible without CiMI’s theological frame of reference is an indication that CiMI does indeed give their members a frame of reference, unique to CiMI, to control their thoughts. Labuschagne (2016c), for example, mentions to his listeners that they should not read the Bible with “doctrinal glasses”, but what he fails to mention is that CiMI will only replace their current “glasses” with its own unique pair of “glasses”, which is CiMI’s new frame of reference. All evidence placed in front of them will be interpreted through this new mental framework.



### **3.4.3. Control over emotions**

#### **3.4.3.1. Introduction**

When Singer (2003:180-181) comments on cult leaders and the way they deceive, she also mentions that they systematically manipulate people emotionally in order to produce changes in their attitudes and behaviour. This is confirmed by Hassan (2016:82) and Galanter (1989:65). Singer (2003:60) adds that the programme to which a new member is subjected is designed to diminish their own “emotional control” in order to destabilise them. Hassan (2016:122, 124) also recognises the important role of emotions when attempting to control another person. He explains that “emotional control attempts to manipulate and narrow the range of a person’s feelings” and adds the inevitable consequence: “If a person’s emotions are successfully brought under the group’s control, their thoughts and behavior will follow.”

Without any doubt the control over emotions, or what Stoker (1995:17) briefly refers to as “emotional molesting”, plays a major role in cults. When the leadership of a cult can manipulate the emotions of a member, they can manipulate that person’s behaviour. Zimbardo and Andersen (1993:113) make an important comment in this regard: “The most potent persuasive appeals have their wallop by reaching beyond reason to emotions, beyond awareness to unspoken desires and fears, beyond trivial attitudes to basic concerns about self-integrity and survival.” According to them, the biggest assault from cults probably happens on an emotional level. Tobias and Lalich (1993:2) also point out that people who manage to leave cults will often describe their experience as being on an “emotional roller coaster”. Even in controlling the interpersonal relationships of the member, emotions are involved. The leadership of a cult might for example “tell members whom they can marry, and control the entire relationship, including their sex lives”, and by doing this “the group is exercising emotional control” (Hassan, 2016:123). Because of these remarks, the researcher investigated the different ways in which this is done by cults and discusses it in the following paragraphs.

#### **3.4.3.2. Unconditional love and friendship**

The first few weeks or months in a cult are typically characterised as the “honeymoon phase” (Hassan, 2016:102; Tobias & Lalich, 1993:41). During this time new members experience tremendous love and friendship. In the words of Hassan (2016:102): “They are made to feel very special as they embark on a new life with the group.” Therefore, in this sense the initial stage of membership provides an environment for the new member where he can feel unique and loved and assured of the support of the cult community, who claims to care for him (Abgrall, 2000:118).

This phenomenon is also described by Singer (2003:114-115) as “love bombing”, which entails an overwhelming offer of instant friendship and unconditional love. It is a “coordinated effort, usually under the direction of leadership, that involves long-term members’ flooding recruits and newer members with flattery, verbal seduction, affectionate but usually nonsexual touching, and lots of attention to their every remark” (Singer, 2003:114-115). Abgrall (2000:118) refers to this as the “captivation phase” and explains that the goal of this phase lies in “drowning the subject with reassuring emotional ties that give him a feeling of belonging”. This is all good and well but, as Singer (2003:114-115) points out, this “is a deceptive ploy” in order to lure and keep someone. The new member therefore has yet to experience what his involvement in the cult will really be like as time goes by (Hassan, 2016:102).

The effect of this love bombing phenomenon can have negative consequences for the family and friends of the cult member. The reason for this is because usually family and friends tend to react in an aggressive and angry way towards the cult, which gives the member more reason to stay involved in the cult since he is welcomed and loved there, while his own family and friends seem angry and aggressive towards him (Stoker, 1995:20). One must remember though that this integration into the group is not primarily based on rationality but on emotional dynamics, which are exploited by the cult (Abgrall, 2000:118).

An effective way to grasp something of the atmosphere of this “love bombing” method is to read the words of Jeannie Mills (as quoted by Martin, 1993:73), who managed to escape the People’s Temple cult who, under the leadership of Jim Jones, committed mass suicide in 1978. Jeannie Mills said the following:

When you meet the friendliest people you have ever known, who introduce you to the most loving group of people you have ever encountered, and you find the leader to be the most inspired, caring, compassionate and understanding person you have ever met, and then you learn that the cause of the group is something you dared hope could be accomplished, and all of this sound too good to be true – it probably is too good to be true! Don’t give up your education, your hopes and ambitions to follow a rainbow.

As alluded to earlier, this unconditional love and friendship is not a lasting phenomenon in the group. As time goes by all this attention and flattery gradually turns away from a particular member towards the latest new recruit, and so he/she learns that the love and friendship is not so unconditional after all. Although most members continue to believe that the cult possesses the ultimate level of love on earth, a member experientially learns that he must work hard and perform well for any rewards and attention later on (Hassan, 2016:143-144; Stoker, 1995:21). Hassan (2016:102) therefore remarks:

Life in a destructive cult is, for the most part, a life of sacrifice, pain and fear. People involved full-time in a destructive cult know what it is like to live under totalitarianism, but can't objectively see what is happening to them. They live in a fantasy world created by the group.

On top of this, once a particular member does leave the cult, "the 'love' formerly directed to them turns into anger, hatred and ridicule" (Hassan, 2016:144).

### **3.4.3.3. The use of fear**

A feeling of fear is one of the most effective tools the leader and/or leadership of cults have at their disposal to enhance control and manipulation (Hassan, 2016:96, 124). Hassan (2016:144) even mentions that "in every destructive cult I have encountered, fear is a major motivator. Each group has its devil lurking around the corner, waiting for members so it can tempt and seduce them, to kill them or drive them insane." Fear is cleverly used on two levels in the life of the member. First, the member is told to fear everyone and everything outside of the cult because there are many enemies who are supposedly persecuting the group. Secondly, the member must also fear the leaders inside the cult, especially when it comes to the possibility of punishment when the member did not perform well in one way or another (Hassan, 2016:122). In many cults the biggest mistake anyone can make is to criticise the group and the leader; one is told that to "criticize is to risk being separated from the family" (Abgrall, 2000:89). Hassan (2016:124, 144) further explains that cult members usually reach a point where they feel they will never be able to have any sense of happiness, security or fulfilment outside of the cult. In this way the cult feeds on members' fear of meaninglessness, which will apparently befall them if they ever leave the cult.

Tobias and Lalich (1994:43) contribute meaningfully by explaining that the induction of certain phobias through messages helps to introduce this deep sense of fear, a notion that is also confirmed by Hassan (2016:124). The examples that they use to illustrate this include messages like "You will go crazy or die if you leave the group", "You will be ruined and never find a way to survive", "You are doomed to failure or terrible accidents if you do not obey" or "If you leave this church, you are leaving God". Through these messages, a fear of people outside of the cult is enhanced, which in turn functions as a crucial form of boundary control to keep members attached to the group (Galanter, 1989:114). This way members live within the "narrow corridor of fear, guilt and shame" (Hassan, 2016:144).

Besides the use of "love bombing" and fear in the general phobia sense, it is of absolute importance at this point to briefly reflect on the effect that the combination of love and fear can have on an individual inside a cult (Stein, 2017:16, 19).

### **3.4.3.4. Emotional confusion due to the alternation of love and fear**

Stein (2017:26-40) introduces one to the concept of disorganised attachment in the field of psychology and applies it in a very effective way to life in cults. This concept has already been discussed as it relates to the characteristics of charisma and authoritarianism in the leader, but there is more to be said, especially in the context of love and fear. As explained earlier, attachment theory refers to the idea that every single individual is in one way or another emotionally and cognitively attached to the people with whom they spend most of their time. These attachments are usually with family and friends and it functions as a “source of protection”, which becomes most evident during experiences of fear or uncertainty in the life of the individual. In this sense, everybody in life has some sort of attachment disposition (Stein, 2017:29-30).

Stein (2017:28) explains that, for the cult to gain control over its members, it must “rewire attachment behavior and utterly reconfigure followers’ attachments”. Therefore, once prior attachments in the form of relationships with family and friends have successfully been emotionally and cognitively replaced with relationships inside the group itself, and the member has begun to embrace these new attachment relationships as his only “safe haven” and “source of protection” in life, the path to disorganised attachment is well on its way (Stein, 2017:19, 29-30, 40).

With the combined introduction of love and fear in a situation like this, the member will experience a dramatic dissociation of thinking and feeling. On the one hand the cult is now the member’s place of love, safety and stability in an emotional sense, but on the other hand the cult itself also becomes a source of fear and terror. This then causes a disorganised attachment to the group with the result of an immense emotional confusion and cognitive collapse, which is precisely why this is such a strong way to guarantee control over someone. Also keep in mind that this is based on the manipulation of the emotions of love and fear in the individual (Stein, 2017:21-22, 32, 34).

Stein (2017:38) further explains the twofold effect of disorganised attachment as follows:

In the emotional realm, the person ceases to struggle and the movement TO the source of fear dominates, creating a trauma bond. And in the cognitive realm the dissociated freezing impairs higher brain activity preventing normal complex processing of both the social world in which the dissociation is occurring, as well as the cognitive processing of the person’s internal world.

The creation of this disorganised bond with the group prevents the member to think rationally about the possible danger inside the group, but it also viciously entraps the member in the rigid

presence of the only remaining attachment that he has, which, as it turns out, is also the cause of fear and threat (Stein, 2017:19, 35).

It is clear then that “contrary to public perception, the key experience of membership in a totalist group is one of isolation, not community or comradeship” (Stein, 2017:21). Stein (20017:28) perceives this notion of the manipulation of love and fear to produce disorganised attachment as a key in understanding and predicting the features of a cult. She explains that once one understands this phenomenon one “can then make sense of why the system is deceptive, why it isolates people from their loved ones and controls close relationships, and why its ideology is often impenetrable, contradictory, fictitious and, in most cases, fairly insane”.

#### **3.4.3.5. Guilt, loyalty and devotion**

Closely linked with the feeling of fear, is the feeling of guilt, which is also an essential instrument “to keep people under control” (Hassan, 2016:122). Stoker (1995:19) observes that it is usually the case that when one feels guilty towards someone else, one also feels as if one owes that other person something in return. If this is the case, then the feeling of guilt can be manipulated in order to make a member feel that he owes something to the group or organisation.

There are different aspects to which this can apply. Singer (2003:119) claims that one way in which guilt can be increased is by labelling all former connections with people as evil. Since people outside of the cult are the enemy, any failure on the member’s side to break ties with them is considered to be a weakness or a sin (Lifton, 1998:424-425). This can then bring about a feeling of guilt about past and current connections with people outside of the group. Abgrall (2000:89) also adds that since any thoughts of leaving or criticising the group is a sin, members are made to feel guilty about any entertainment of such thoughts. These messages inject more and more guilt into the conscience of the member to the extent that “just as the initial love bombing awakened feelings of warmth, acceptance, and worthiness, now the group condemnation leave recruits full of self-doubt, guilt, and anxiety. Through this kind of manipulation, they are convinced that they can be saved only if they stay with the group” (Singer, 2003:119). Stein (2017:176) states that even after a member has left the cult, feelings of guilt may continue for a long time.

Hassan (2016:122) also contributes by explaining that members “are conditioned to always take the blame” so that they can respond in an appreciative way towards any of their shortcomings that are pointed out by the leadership. This way the leadership is also positioned in such a way that they are able to find fault in members even when they have done nothing wrong. Public confession of sin is also a way to make sure that someone feels guilty. The catch, however, is that “once someone has publicly confessed rarely is their old sin truly forgiven or forgotten. The

minute they get out of line, it will be hauled out and used to manipulate them into obeying” (Hassan, 2016:123). The main thrust of the use of guilt is summarised by Lifton (1998:425) as follows: “[T]here is no emotional bondage greater than that of the man or woman whose entire guilt potential – neurotic or existential – has become the property of ideological totalists.” The abuse of guilt can have powerful effects on people. Tobias and Lalich (1994:65) support the powerful effects of guilt on people by noting that many former members still feel immensely guilty, even after leaving the cult. Some of them will still perceive the leader as ‘all-good’, and godlike.

It is furthermore also important to remember that in many cults loyalty and devotion are deemed to be “the most highly respected emotions of all” (Hassan, 2016:123). This would include the suppression of negative emotions towards the group while aiming all negativity towards outsiders. Only signs and expressions of positivity and eagerness are allowed to be expressed towards the group itself to make sure that only the apparent best side of the group is revealed (Hassan, 2016:87). If the cult manages to inject feelings of loyalty and devotion into its members, they will never criticise the leader, but rather criticise themselves and protect the leader. This will, in turn, enforce the authority of the leadership and create loyal and devoted members.

#### **3.4.3.6. A sense of belonging and security**

It has been alluded to earlier that most people who are approached by cults are those who may be experiencing “a vulnerable time of stress in their lives” (Hassan, 2016:100). This will typically include moving to a new home, taking a new job, going through financial instability or losing a loved one. Events and experiences like these tend to threaten the emotional security and sense of belonging in the life of an individual, which throws them into a personal crisis. Since cults usually offer “an improved state of mind, and expanded state of being, and a moral, spiritual, or political state of righteous certainty” (Singer, 2003:20), people who are depressed and in need of an uplifted emotional state, are sometimes more susceptible to cults. In these cases, joining a cult will serve a “pseudo-therapeutic” role for the person experiencing a time of personal crisis (Abgrall, 2000:106-107).

O’Donohue (1998:164) aptly claims: “Each one of us wants to belong. No-one wants to live a life that is cut off or isolated.” He further explains that a cult will capture this longing of the individual in a threatening trap and utilise the individual’s natural tendency concerning belonging and the spiritual. Stein (2017:203) also underlines this notion by claiming that everyone has a need to belong to a group and “to have a place in a social context”. This is one of the reasons why cults seem so attractive, because they “present a way of belonging which offers

consolation, certainty and purpose". Although it is certainly the case that beliefs held in common do bind people together and give them a sense of belonging and purpose, it is important to note though that this is only how it appears on the surface and that any sense of belonging in cults usually has ill intent (Galanter, 1989:37). Hassan (2016:48-49) reminds us that cults do not really deliver on their promises of a better life and fulfilled dreams. The matter is indeed very different inside the cult since all the cult's promises are usually just pathways to psychological enslavement. The members are kept prisoners while manipulated into feeling that they are actually free. In this way the rise of the cult also testifies to the dreadful loneliness of postmodern culture and therefore should provoke one to consider the "crisis of belonging in our society and religions" (O'Donohue, 1998:163-164).

Abgrall (2000:178) also contributes richly by stating that to enhance the sense of belonging and membership, cults will usually give every individual member a precise role to fulfil. This way each individual cult member will feel like he/she is needed and plays a valuable part in the group. Furthermore, he explains that the participation in certain rituals within the group will also give each "participant the feeling of belonging to something supra-human, divine and cosmic". The goal of rituals as such is to "bind the group together" (Abgrall, 2000:178).

#### **3.4.3.7. Control over emotions in CiMI**

It has been confirmed by former CiMI members that CiMI's weekend retreats are characterised by 'love bombing' (Anon., 2018a). New recruits are also treated with great care and love and given a new sense of purpose. One of the former members mentioned how she thought that at CiMI they were busy making history and that she was given a sense of belonging and purpose she had never felt before. Many of the former members also testified to the love that they received in CiMI and how caring the leadership was. They will still commend CiMI for their ability to give people the feeling of being part of something bigger than themselves, which is something they do not experience in all other churches (Anon., 2018a).

However, one former member remarked that at CiMI everything and everyone seems happy and fulfilled, but when one looks behind the screens all is not well (Anon., 2018c). He mentioned that he was aware of a woman he knew who wanted to leave CiMI, but she knew she was going to risk her marriage and therefore she did not leave. This confirms the presence of fear among members, but also that the 'love bombing' eventually comes to an end.

Du Plessis (2016a) attempts to establish the contrast between CiMI and other churches, but also to induce fear of a so-called "hell mentality" that reigns in people who are not part of CiMI. He for example states: "We are not preaching against people in any church, we are preaching against teachings that are being taught in certain places." He further says that these teachings

are not acceptable to God since it “will keep you in a hell mentality, and your soul will never be set free from Hades ... and if your soul is not set free from Hades ... then you will never see the resurrection of Christ”. Strydom (2018a) does something similar in one of his sermons. He refers to Matthew 13:24-30<sup>30</sup> and compares the people who left CiMI to the tares that will be bound and thrown into the fire to burn. He said: “These people that went out of CIM, they are tares. They are gathered up; they are thrown out into the fire.”

This kind of message has the potential to increase the level of fear in members on two levels. They will never want to leave the group and also be part of a “hell mentality” and they will separate themselves more and more from people outside the cult, since they do not want to spend time with people who have a “hell mentality” either. Strydom (2016c) maintains that once someone starts to doubt their teachings, it is the work of Satan who ‘smuggles with their thoughts’. One former member mentioned that the consequence everyone fears in CiMI is to be thrown out of the church when they are not obedient. Since CiMI is the only place where God’s truth is preached and His kingdom can be found, nobody wants to be thrown out. Former members explained how the fear of not being part of God’s plan kept them in CiMI (Anon., 2018a; Anon., 2018b).

After leaving CiMI, one former member stated that the leadership sent her an email with the words of Hebrews 6:4-8. This passage reads as follows:

For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it, and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God; but if it bears thorns and briers, *it is* rejected and near to being cursed, whose end *is* to be burned.

The words of this passage are meant as a threat, signifying the consequences of the act of leaving CiMI. The former member further mentioned that, at the beginning of her membership, she was embraced with great care, but when she started to challenge the leadership she was emotionally abused and manipulated. The leadership made an example of her and some of the

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<sup>30</sup> Another parable He put forth to them, saying: “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”



other former members confirmed how she was bullied by CiMI. Another former member explained that she could not leave because they taught her if she would ever leave her soul would be lost (Anon., 2018a).

In CiMI there are also the typical cultic claims that the outside world and family members of those inside the cult are persecuting them. Labuschagne (2016c), for example, says:

I know that there is persecution, I know, I feel it on my own flesh and I understand it. People, if we are persecuted for the truth, let us be persecuted ... because if we would stand for the truth then many will follow. I am grateful this morning, I am really grateful that I can call myself number one, a son of God, and number two, a son of Xandré, the God-appointed leader of this day and this hour.

This, once again, confirms the leadership position of Strydom, but also brings further division between CiMI and the outside world because of persecution. Strydom (2017a) also tells his listeners that people are mocking them because they are trying to build a kingdom. Strydom responds to this mocking from the world by saying “seriously, why aren’t you helping us? Can you believe it?”

Persecution also makes members feel as if they are the targets of the world and must persevere as God’s church in the face of these challenges. In this sense it creates unity and purpose in the minds of these members. CiMI (2018c) also states that when people persecute them, they are also “persecuting the ... same freedom that Mr. Nelson Mandela and those who struggled with him, fought for”. They further refer to freedom of religion which justifies their existence. It is important to note that just because every person has freedom of religion it does not mean that every religion is “equally true or equally healthy or equally beneficial for people” (Rhodes, 2001:14).

At another time Strydom (2018a) also acts as if the world outside of CiMI are in fact persecuting CiMI. He refers to an event where the researcher was personally present in Potchefstroom, saying:

I heard again how at Potchefstroom yesterday they had a gathering ... an anti-cult gathering to stand by people who are caught up in cults. And I saw on Facebook all the people who previously were a part of CiMI now joining them and people who gathered last week Friday at a private gathering. Maybe even some of the people who are sitting here ... today, against CiMI ... it is at times of persecution where we count the cost of what we are doing and what we are busy with ... So, trust me this morning when I say with a clear conscience that if you choose this journey with us, you will suffer persecution and you will suffer tribulation and condemnation, but you will change the earth into the kingdom of God.

The event that Strydom calls “an anti-cult gathering” was a cult-caring conference for former cult members. The researcher travelled from Pretoria to Potchefstroom with former CiMI members

to attend this conference. Here the former members of CiMI and from many other cults had the opportunity to testify to their experiences while they were still involved in the specific cult. It was striking how many of their experiences were similar, independent from the specific cult of which they had been members. Moreover, one former member of CiMI testified at the cult-caring conference how, when she started to challenge CiMI's ideological beliefs, she was emotionally and verbally abused and when she eventually had a stroke, Strydom came to her house and manipulated her and verbally abused her again (Anon., 2018a). When she left CiMI she had to divorce her husband who did not want to leave the church. Her husband is now remarried with someone in CiMI. This marriage was arranged by the leadership.

That CiMI controls the emotions of their members is clear. Some of the former members still carry the emotional scars left on them because of their experiences in CiMI. Many of them were separated from their marriage partners and needed help and support once they left the group (Anon., 2018a). The current members of CiMI are also instructed not to talk to former members anymore since they turned their backs on God. CiMI successfully utilises people's need to belong somewhere, encourages them to break ties with family and friends, and then induces fear to isolate them from other churches and other influences. Once they can cut their members off from their families, they have no other place to go and are stuck in the group. Some of the testimonies of former members confirm that at the beginning everyone loved them, but once they started to ask questions they were emotionally abused and made examples of. Some of them were not assisted by the cult members anymore and lost the only support structure that they had in CiMI.

#### **3.4.4. Control over behaviour and norms**

##### **3.4.4.1. Introduction**

It would seem that there is a very close link between thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Hassan (2016:117, 122, 124) ventures to explain the relationship between these three components. At one point he says that "when thought is controlled, feelings and behaviors are usually controlled as well" (Hassan, 2016:122). But then he also says, "If a person's emotions are successfully brought under the group's control, their thoughts and behavior will follow" (Hassan, 2016:124). Lastly, he also states: "A cult's leader cannot command someone's inner thoughts, but they know that if they command behavior, hearts and minds will follow" (Hassan, 2016:117). Although it is beyond the scope of this study to analyse the exact relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviour, it is important to realise that there is indeed a very close relationship between them. Since thinking and feeling have already been discussed, the goal

now is to contemplate how and in what ways people's attitudes and behaviour are radically altered through "the manipulation of psychological and social factors" (Singer, 2003:54).

Singer (2003:10) mentions in passing: "Cults tend to be totalistic, or all-encompassing, in controlling their members' behavior." Galanter (1989:91) also delineates the aspect of control over behaviour by stating that a member, besides "acquiring a cohesiveness toward the group and belief in its creed", will also adopt the prescribed behaviour of the group. In accordance with this statement, it is certainly the case that cults demand a change in the behaviour and lifestyle of their members, especially in the light of Galanter's (1989:58) comment that "behavioral change is certainly a test of true commitment". Stoker (1995:14) also confirms this statement by claiming that when one works with cult members, the presence of behavioural control in them becomes very clear. For the average person certain behaviours of cultists seem very strange, while it is not experienced or perceived as strange by the cult members because it was adopted in association with a system of cultic beliefs and a specific social network (Galanter, 1989:59-60).

Tobias and Lalich (1994:34) observe that the effect of cult conversion can be clearly perceived in the cult member's life, especially by family and friends. This radical effect surfaces strongly in their behaviour, to such an extent that they start behaving "in a manner quite different from, if not entirely opposite of, their lifelong patterns" (Stein, 2017:21). This change may include things like leaving school, changing jobs, abandoning old friends, interests and hobbies, and also avoiding family. It is understandable that these kinds of behavioural changes alarm people "as they watch a family member or friend become totally consumed by cult life" (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:47).

This phenomenon should not be too surprising since the absorption of the individual into the group entails that the member loses his own freedom of action with the implication that his behaviour is also controlled by the leadership as far as possible, and will depend on the acceptance or rejection of the standards of the group (Abgrall, 2000:132, 137). One of the main aims of a thought-reform programme is to eventually attain the desired behavioural changes in the member (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:39). Stein (2017:54) also comments on the phenomenon of behavioural control by adding that cult members are pressured into embracing "new and often dangerous or damaging ideas and behaviors".

The great discrepancies in a person's behaviour before joining the cult and the behaviour reflected while in the cult cause family and friends to wonder how these shifts in behaviour can take place and how it is induced upon cult members (Singer, 2003:57). Hassan (2016:113)

points out that many studies have been done in the past to illustrate the astounding force of “behavior modification techniques”, which should not be underestimated.

Furthermore, since the leader and/or leadership of cults have the last say on all matters, they will also decide what is morally right and what is wrong (Stoker, 1995:31). Stein (2017:82, 116) explains that to maintain membership the leadership will institutionalise certain “rules, rituals and norms”. Ethics do not disappear in a cult; ethics change according to the cult’s frame of reference and tend to be implemented as a double set of ethics by, for example, demanding honesty between the members and the leadership, while encouraging deception between the members and the outside world (Abgrall, 2000:134; Singer, 2003:9). Singer (2003:9) also explains that when a group adopts an approach that entails an “ends justify the means” principle, it allows the group to develop and form their own “brand of morality, outside normal social bounds”. This is confirmed by Hassan (2016:186). Compliance to these rules and norms will not just determine a shallow form of obedience or disobedience, but rather what “it is to be ... a good group member, pure, righteous, on the side of the poor, of Jesus, of Allah, of the True Race or of whatever the cause may be” (Stein, 2017:82). Accordingly, the norms that are set in place in the group form part of the “all-or-nothing belief system” (2003:71) which, in turn, will also affect the behaviour of the members. In this sense there is also a strong link between the norms in a group and the behaviour of its members.

#### **3.4.4.2. The concept of imitation and the influence of leaders**

The important role of leaders has already been dealt with. The focus of this particular discussion revolves around the influence of the leader and/or leadership specifically when it comes to attempts at controlling the behaviour and norms of members. Within the hierarchical system of cults, the ‘lieutenants’ operating just below the leader are there to help the leader reach his goals. Singer (2003:81-82) states that the “second-level helpers”, besides fulfilling their roles in recruitment and convincing members to stay in the cult, also model approved behaviour and ensure that “the behavior the leader wants” is being perpetuated.

Galanter (1989:91) explains that, over the course of the recruitment and induction process, members learn to conform their own behaviours with the appropriate standards of conduct within the group. The way in which members are taught to do this is by modelling, mirroring or imitating older cult members. Hassan (2016:143) unpacks this dynamic when he explains that a new member will typically be paired with an older and more experienced cult member, who “serves as a model for the new member to imitate ... The newcomer is urged to be this other person. Mid-level leaders are themselves urged to act like their superiors. The cult leader at the top is, of course, the ultimate model.” This is one of the reasons why cult members might come

across as strange to an outsider, since the outsider is seeing a glimpse of the personality of the cult leader carried down through several levels of modelling (Hassan, 2016:143). In many Bible-based cults, this phenomenon may be referred to as “shepherding or discipling”. In Christianity discipling is not supposed to be a harmful thing, but the process of discipleship can become abusive, especially when “sin is expanded to mean almost anything that the leaders don’t like” (Chrnalogar, 1997:12).

Stein (2017:65-66) refers to this dynamic as a “buddy system” or a “chaperoning system”. The function of this system, on the one hand, is to make sure that the newcomer is never alone and independent in some way, but rather always accompanied by a more experienced, devoted and older member. On the other hand, it “monitors the follower’s behavior and provides a model and guidance about the new group norms the follower is to observe”.

Abgrall (2000:113-114, 136) also contributes to the concept of imitation. He effectively explains how the imitation of older or higher members can remove the feeling of uncertainty and substitute it with a sense of urgency around a goal to achieve and a calling to fulfil. He further says that the whole idea of modelling the behaviour of others in the group can function as “a true psychological make-over, typical of the behaviorist techniques, that gradually creates a new personality better adapted to cult dynamics”. Abgrall (2000:136) also mentions that the imitation of others in the cult, or the imitation of the leader takes on an inescapable nature with a phase of observation to see how others do things, followed by a phase of performance where the new member must do things himself under the watchful eye of the leadership. An interesting way to think about this is by comparing the concept of imitation to that of road signs. The symbol on the sign conveys information which, in turn, demands a certain type of behaviour. The behaviour in this context is “the result of training which concerns the intellect (learning the code) and imitation (learning the behavior)”. The process of imitation finds its climax in contagion, where a certain type of behaviour spreads like a disease and becomes the behaviour of everyone in the specific group (Abgrall, 2000:137).

One last point to emphasise is that one must remember the effect that a leader with ultimate authority can have on the behaviour of his followers. It has thoroughly been established that cult leaders usually possess an authoritarian personality, exercising high levels of control (Singer, 2003:9; Stein, 2017:109-110). This results in members who are expected to obey every command of the leader, which will inevitably involve behaviour and norms (Hassan, 2016:142-143; Stoker, 1995:14). The leadership wants to remove any old patterns of behaviour as quickly as possible and members quickly learn how to suppress these old patterns while the “vacuum left is then filled with the group’s way of thinking and doing” (Singer, 2003:66-67). In many cases members must ask permission from the leadership to do almost anything, especially

when the outside world might be involved in their endeavours, since cults will always see themselves in constant competition with the outside world (Abgrall, 2000:156). A rigid rule like this ensures the necessary restraints on members' behaviour (Singer, 2003:116).

#### **3.4.4.3. A system of rewards and punishment**

Hassan (2016:117) observes that, when a strict and well-regulated authoritarian structure is in place, it creates an environment in which all behaviours can be either rewarded or punished. Once a system of rewards and punishments starts to be manipulated, it will not just promote the ideology and belief system of the group, but it will also actively encourage group-approved behaviour. Singer (2003:67-68) describes this situation as follows:

You are rewarded for proper performance with social and sometimes material reinforcement; if slow to learn or noncompliant, you are threatened with shunning, banning, and punishment which includes loss of esteem from others, loss of privileges, loss of status, and inner anxiety and guilt ... Approval comes from having your behaviors and thought patterns conforms to the models put forth by the group.

When people are kept off balance in a system like this, by being complimented and praised the one minute but dismissed and verbally trampled the next, it will lead to a deeper sense of dependency and helplessness. Hassan (2016:117, 123) warns that such double bind behaviour is an expected feature of life in cults. Any failure to behave the way the leadership wants one to behave will result in accusations of impurity, selfishness, or a lack of devotion. In some cults there are even competitions arranged between the followers to inspire them or to shame them, with the goal of being more productive (Hassan, 2016:143; Lifton, 1998:424).

Galanter (1989:88-89) contributes to the discussion about the system of reward and punishment by applying it to the extent of the involvement of a member in cult activity. In this sense a group member is rewarded for closeness to the group and punished for any form of alienation. This way every "minor episode of reward and punishment, on moving closer to the group or further away, functions as an operant learning experience<sup>31</sup> that conditions subsequent involvement". A member exposed to a system like this for long enough, without any interference, will learn to conform to the behaviour that is expected of him in the group and will also realise that obedience to the cult's norms for behaviour is necessary for maintaining his own well-being (Galanter, 1989:92).

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<sup>31</sup> Galanter (1989:88-89) compares this process to the conditioning of an animal. When an animal is rewarded each time that it behaves in a particular way, and punished when it acts in a contrary way, the behaviour that gets rewarded will eventually become the standard way of behaving for the animal.

#### **3.4.4.4. Confession sessions**

Singer (2003:76) points out that people generally tend to align their behaviour with public commitments in front of other people. This is why many cults will include some form of public session where the member is expected to make some sort of public confession of loyalty and commitment towards the group. Once this is performed by the member his “subsequent behavior generally supports and reinforces the stated commitment”. The practice of public confessions, combined with “keeping files containing evidence of crimes effectively turns individuals into slaves of the unit” (Abgrall, 2000:154). Hassan (2016:130) also adds that sessions of sharing have the potential to foster a stronger sense of community and group cohesiveness, which will in turn lead to conformity in behaviour. The reason for this is because “the group vigorously reinforce certain behaviors by effusive praise and acknowledgement, while punishing non-group ideas and behaviors with icy silence”. Another important point regarding these confession sessions is that the data gathered about an individual during these sessions can also be used “to better understand and control the subject, and also to effectively blackmail rebellious subjects” (Abgrall, 2000:157). Eventually, such a confession session organised by cult leadership only “becomes a means of exploiting, rather than offering solace for ... vulnerabilities” (Lifton, 1998:425). Lifton (1998:425) does indeed warn one against the immorality of private ownership of someone’s mind, including their imagination and memory that flow from it, which is a result of confession sessions. In light of these insights, one can better grasp the influence of public confession sessions on the individual.

#### **3.4.4.5. The suppression of identity**

One of the biggest problems faced by people who have managed to leave a cult, is the disturbance of their own personality. The reason for this is because they have been living in an environment where they were taught to suppress their own authentic personality and adopt a personality that is forced upon them by the cult (Hassan, 2016:108; Singer, 2003:66; Stein, 2017:169). While healthy and balanced groups will regard someone as a full member of the group without asking him to lose his identity,<sup>32</sup> cults will operate according to the observation of Hassan (2016:140) when he states: “Since mind control depends on creating a new identity within the individual, cult doctrine always requires that a person distrust their authentic self.” This observation is corroborated by Abgrall (2000:115) and Hassan (2016:42). Singer (2003:78-79) also adds: “It is the cult environment that produces and keeps in place the cult identity.” She also refers to this new identity as the “pseudo-personality” or a “superimposed identity”. This is why Hassan (2016:132) explicitly warns about the potential presence of “two identities” in a cult

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<sup>32</sup> Tobias and Lalich (1994:37) note that the motto in cults is “Alter the self or perish.”

member. He explains that the one minute “the person is speaking cultic jargon with a hostile or elitist know-it-all attitude. Then, without warning, they seem to become their old self, with their old attitudes and mannerisms. Just as suddenly, they flip back to the cult identity.” Abgrall (2000:146) also notes that once the core of a person’s personality is occupied by the convictions of the cult, the person won’t be able to deal with the situation logically and eventually lose his/her authentic personality. Consequently, one can see that the goal is to change a person at his/her core (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:38).

This new cult identity is sometimes also affirmed in front of the whole group in the form of a ceremony or confession (Abgrall, 2000:120, 153). Singer (2003:77) explains that certain words may be used to refer to cult members in order to enforce their new identity, which is rooted and dictated by the group. These would include words like ‘transformed’, ‘reborn’, ‘enlightened’ or ‘empowered’.

Another way the new identity is strengthened is by giving members new names and by changing their clothing, hairstyle and basically those personal features that might remind them of their past (Abgrall, 2000:197; Hassan, 2016:131). Abgrall (2000:153) also mentions that one of the functions of changing a person’s name is to break the symbolic bond with the member’s biological family. Stein (2017:66-67) explains that this is sometimes referred to as “isolation from the self”, which indicates that this is all just part of the larger isolation process that happens within the cult. The priority is to divorce the prior identity of the person from their dealings with the group. It is clear then that exposure to thought-reform techniques results in profound personality and behavioural changes (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:39-40).

With a new personal identity and the suppression of the old one, there is also a new set of behaviours, thoughts and emotions (Hassan, 2016:108, 127). Thus, by the suppression of the authentic identity, there is also a subtle attempt to control the behaviour of members. As dark as this picture might seem, Hassan (2016:133) does mention that any attempt to completely eradicate the person’s authentic identity will never be totally successful. Hence, although ordinary people’s social identity can be heavily influenced and changed, it is never irreversible (Singer, 2003:78).

#### **3.4.4.6. An elite mentality and sense of community**

It is not surprising that the leadership of cults will create an elite mentality among members in order to establish a deep sense of community with loyal and hard-working followers and also to be able to present the cult to a potential recruit as a group with devoted members who are busy with a virtuous task (Abgrall, 2000:117; Singer, 2003:9). Hassan (2016:141) vividly explains this aspect of cults as the feeling of being “part of an elite corps of humankind”. Abgrall (2000:156)



adds that cults view themselves as exclusive owners of the truth. He further elaborates by mentioning:

This feeling of being special, of participating in the most important acts in human history, with a vanguard of committed believers, is strong emotional glue that keeps people sacrificing and working hard. As a community, cult members feel they have been chosen – by God, history, fate or some other supernatural force – to lead humanity out of darkness into a new age of enlightenment.

In turn, Singer (2003:74) describes this mentality by pointing out that cults refer to themselves as the “governors of enlightenment”. This kind of elite mentality, also referred to as “the us-versus-them mentality” (Singer, 2003:74), is aimed at the relationship the group has with the outside world. It establishes a strong sense of community in which behaviour can be better controlled by the requirement to act as a group. Singer (2003:9, 74) further says that non-members of the group, who are not part of the chosen elite, are seen as lesser than human or lesser beings, whose existence is dispensable. Lifton comes to the same conclusion (1998:433-434). This mentality also gives cult members, as the superiors in society, the license to manipulate non-members and thus act against the healthy conscience that they have brought into the group with them (Singer, 2003:74).

To enforce this elite mentality and unity among cult members, people eat together, work together, share a compound together and have many group meetings where they also dress the same in some cases. In this kind of setting any form of individualism is fiercely discouraged (Hassan, 2016:116-117). Another feature that also strengthens this kind of elite mentality, or us-versus-them mentality in a cult, is when cult members really believe that they are the group who possess the truth and are being persecuted by non-believers, outsiders, enemies or unenlightened people (Abgrall, 2000:147).

The way that this elite mentality connects with behaviour is also by realising the massive responsibility that comes with elitism. Members in cults therefore carry a heavy burden. They are told that if they do not perform well and behave in accordance with the mission of the organisation, they are failing humanity in some way. Accordingly, cult members often feel the highest level of responsibility they have ever felt, and with a strong group cohesiveness, their behaviour will follow the high level of responsibility (Galanter, 1989:17, 91; Hassan, 2016:142). The establishment of an elite mentality and a deep sense of community will, in turn, also create more dependence on the group. Once a member bases his whole existence on being in the cult, the act of leaving the cult will feel like joining “nothingness” (Singer, 2003:74).

#### **3.4.4.7. Everything is black or white**

Stoker (1995:31) appositely remarks that, according to the interests and the ideas of the cult, the whole world and all the moral issues of the world will usually be divided into black and white categories, with little or no room for personal decision-making. Hassan (2016:186) does indeed warn against groups “with any belief system that is simplistic and makes all or nothing categorizations – good/bad; black/white; us versus them”.

Since the cult, with its closed system of logic, has a “monopoly on truth”, their ideology and doctrine will not allow any group outside of the cult to be recognised as valid in any sense. Linked with their elite mentality, most cults assume that they are right and everyone and everything outside of the cult is, in the words of Singer (2003:71), “wrong, evil, unenlightened, and so forth”. Lifton (1998:423) also claims that the world, as experienced by the individual in a cult, will be sharply divided into pure and impure, absolutely good or absolutely evil. In this situation, the pure and the good are those ideas that are proclaimed by the cult and its leaders. This way reality is reduced into “two basic poles: black versus white; good versus evil; spiritual versus physical world; us versus them” (Hassan, 2016:140-141). As a result, there will be no room for differences in interpretation since, as Singer (2003:71) notes:

[T]here is only one way to think, respond, or act in any given situation. There is no in between, and members are expected to judge themselves and others by this all-or-nothing standard. Anything can be done in the name of this purity; it is the justification for the group’s internal moral and ethical code.

These rigid categories of black and white will usually include everything with absolutely no place for any deviations (Hassan, 2016:186; Stein, 2017:128).

Lifton (1998:423) pertinently states that the underlying philosophical assumption in this strict division of all thoughts and actions into black and white, pure and impure categories, is that purity is attainable and that anything done to anyone, according to this standard of this purity, is absolutely moral. Accordingly, the cult provides the morals and demands for true purity.

#### **3.4.4.8. Do’s and don’ts, righteous and sinful**

It is typical for cults to have a whole list of do’s and don’ts, which every single member must incorporate into their values and norms. Whenever there is a matter where the ideology of the cult or its doctrines do not provide a clear direction for the member to guide him, the standing rule usually is to ask the leader (Hassan, 2016:140-141; Stoker, 1995:32). These lists of do’s and don’ts will not only include ideology-related issues, like what to believe and what to think; it will typically also include everyday things of life, like the amount of sleep you may have, where

you may work, what to wear, spending time with family, when and what to eat, when to bathe and so on (Hassan, 2016:116; Singer, 2003:10). Chrnalogar (1997:11) mentions a couple of rules that will typically be on this kind of to-do list of cults. She for example lists the following rules:

- The member must make considerable time for the leadership of the group.
- The member must call them regularly.
- The member must meet with them often.
- The member must confess his/her sins to them in order to be transparent to them in all areas of life.
- The member must trust them with intimate secrets.
- The member must discuss even his/her non-moral decisions with them.
- The member must trust the advice given to him/her and obey them in every area of his/her life.

Abgrall (2000:150-151) also mentions that in some cults it is illegal to disobey the “stated rules of hygiene” and also adds that it is not strange for cults to “enact sexual codes of conduct”. Arranged marriages within the cult, or what Abgrall (2000:178) calls “intra-cult marriages”, will also create certain behaviour patterns and “underscore the couple’s subservience to the cult and allow the cult to intrude into marital life”. It is indeed as Singer (2003:10) notes that cults require members to undergo major lifestyle changes, which are all-encompassing and totalistic.

In many cults, especially religious ones, being disobedient to the long list of ‘do’s and don’ts’ will also be labelled sinful and thus the list becomes the criteria for being righteous if you obey, or sinful if you are disobedient (Chrnalogar, 1997:11). This notion of using religious language will also add an additional emotional burden of fear.

#### **3.4.4.9. Control over behaviour and norms in CiMI**

It is worth noting that in several of Strydom’s (2019a) sermons he would repeat how “blessed” and “privileged” the people are to be part of CiMI. He also adds to this: “I believe with all my heart this morning that you are the first fruit of something God is busy with in a thousand years.” At another opportunity Strydom (2019d) tells the members of CiMI: “Can I just tell you something. Isn’t it a privilege to be part of the gospel of Christ? ... If we would only be able to comprehend and understand the power and magnitude of what we hold in our hands when we speak ... listen to me! ... on behalf of God.” One last example is when Strydom (2017a) asks his members: “I am telling you seriously! Do you have any idea how blessed a people you are? ... If you could just trust me now and follow.” These kinds of constant messages serve to enforce the

elite mentality in the members of CiMI. This also explains why one of the former members thought that they were busy making history in and through the ministry of CiMI. To maintain membership, Strydom (2019d) categorises all the other churches of the world under the term “religion” and labels “religion” as the “instrument” through which the devil does his work in the world. Strydom (2019d) also refers to religious leaders as snakes and thus links them to the devil. These are loaded religious terms which serve his purpose of keeping the members from the outside world. This automatically gives all the other Christian churches the status of ‘enemy’. This is part of creating the ‘us-versus-them’ mentality which, in turn, can influence people’s behaviour.

Labuschagne (2018) introduces an elite mentality in the members of CiMI when he says that everyone was once stuck in confusion when they were part of “religion”, implying that since his listeners are now part of CiMI, they are finally exposed to “the truth”. He for example says: “We’ve all been [in religion], we all repented from it. This plan is now in its fifth year. So, we all come from that, even me ... We all come from ... that place where we were all so confused.” Strydom (2019c) also adds to this notion by claiming that they were all “brainwashed” by other churches, but in CiMI they are finally exposed to the truth. On another occasion Strydom (Kotze,<sup>33</sup> 2017c) states that people are being “brainwashed by religion”, which sets CiMI up against other churches as the only place where there is no brainwashing. He further tells his listeners that one’s children will be safe at CiMI since they are being raised in a “habitation of the kingdom” where they are matured in the kingdom of God. In turn, Kotze (2017c) suggests that at CiMI there is no “indoctrination” while that is part of normal procedure in other churches. This comment from Kotze implies that other churches are guilty of “indoctrination” while CiMI does not do that. This also establishes the ‘us-versus-them’ mentality and a deep sense of community and unity since they are the only community in the world who grasps the truth.

Strydom (2019d) further enhances an ‘us versus them mentality’ in the members of CiMI by establishing two extreme poles in his teachings. According to him, one is either teaching Christ, or one is teaching the antichrist. A precondition for discerning between these two teachings is that one must “look according to the spirit” (Strydom, 2019d), whatever that may mean according to Strydom. He explains that people will either teach you that you are “a Christ and you are washed with the gospel of Christ, the new specie who you are, or you are washed with religion and you are antichrist ... So, what religion does, is they specialise in anti-christing the Christ.” Strydom (2017b) also states that while religion has divided the name of God, CiMI is uniting God’s name again. This adds to their elite mentality in a religious sense.

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<sup>33</sup> Strydom spoke after the sermon of Kotze had been delivered. Hence, although Strydom is speaking, it is still cited as Kotze’s sermon.

According to Kotze (2017b), CiMI finds its origin in God Himself and anyone who opposes them is not from God. He goes further to say that “we are preaching truth”. Kotze (2017c) also establishes a sense of urgency among the members of CiMI stating that they must do inquiry right now and sit down with their counsellors. This is because the world is entering “dangerous times” now. Urgency, in turn, leads to behavioural changes.

Next to nursing an ‘us versus them mentality’ in members, Strydom (2019d) also introduces the notion that one can only discern and understand things by looking at it spiritually, which is, in most cases, by looking at things the way the particular cult looks at things. At one point, Strydom (2019d) claims that all the other churches are still blinded in their minds by a veil that exists between the spiritual heaven and the natural earth, which is also the reason for the 43 000 denominations existing in the world today. Therefore, all the other churches are still unenlightened and, according to Strydom (2019d), one’s mind will only be unveiled if one believes what he is preaching and in effect believes that one is a Christ. Through establishing such a striking difference between CiMI and the rest of the world, he also establishes the uniqueness of CiMI. In this sense CiMI is claiming a secret teaching, which is only available for them at CiMI since their minds are unveiled. Singer (2003:29) reminds one that most cults will “preach the contents of a supposedly ‘secret’ learning, which the leaders assert can only be revealed to those who join them”. A former member remarked that CiMI had a culture where everything they teach is correct, and anything that goes against them is false. He stated that if you do not fall in line with them, you fall out. This is a ‘black-and-white’ mentality.

When it comes to the imitation of leaders, Kotze (2017a) makes this statement regarding the leadership of CiMI:

We are not here to make friends; we are here to raise sons. If you don’t like the way the ‘leermeesters’ or your elders speak to you ... he is not your friend. He is your instructor, he has a purpose, he wants to raise you up to be a son. What is more important? To sit and drink tea and miss the goal, or to work hard and achieve the goal?

It is clear that Kotze (2017a) is establishing the leadership of CiMI as higher in rank and worth imitating as “instructors”. Former members emphasise the strict hierarchy in the leadership of CiMI and how each member of CiMI is given a more senior person in CiMI to whom they must report and to whom they must go with all their questions (Anon., 2018a). In turn, this more senior member must take the questions of the members to someone who is higher up the ladder than he is. This is why former members said that it sometimes takes quite long to receive an answer from the leadership in CiMI, since everything must go through the highest leaders in CiMI. It was also reported by a former member that Strydom once said to her that she is not like him yet and that she must still become like him (Anon., 2018a).

At CiMI they have weekly '*Inspraak*<sup>34</sup> sessions where the members attend a session with an appointed leader who functions as their counsellor. During the televised *Carte Blanche* (2018) episode, one of the interviews was with a former member, Drienie De Beer. She stated that CiMI is a cult and that "they are very destructive". She confirmed that if you are a member of CiMI you have to go for certain sessions with members of CiMI's leadership. These sessions are called '*Inspraak*' and it basically entails that you must share all your plans and dreams with the leadership of CiMI. She explained that you must share your most intimate, personal, marital and financial affairs with the leaders. You must tell them "everything that went on in your life, your thoughts, what food you give your children ... everything". The leadership would then proceed to tell you "how to manage your children, how to manage your marriage". She also stated that she had been publicly humiliated by the leadership of CiMI at one of the *Inspraak* sessions. This led to an embarrassing scene, as she reported: "[Strydom] started driving devils out of me ... it was very embarrassing." Apparently, this took place in a glass cubicle inside CiMI's buildings where everybody could see what was going on.

Another former member who also appeared on the *Carte Blanche* (2018) episode explained it as follows in his interview:

When you want to buy a house for instance, or you want to buy a car, or date someone ... you have to go and do everything through [CiMI's leadership] ... If they say 'yes' then it is a 'yes'. Then you can go and buy a house, date someone or start a business. You have to do everything through them. If they say 'yes', it is 'yes' and if they say 'no', it is 'no'.

This notion of '*Inspraak*' is thus used by the leadership to gain complete control over the members of CiMI, especially their behaviour.

In one of CiMI's (2018d) documents titled *How to make choices in life*, they state:

If you want to be a good steward that God can trust with His whole kingdom then you only move when you have a word from God, when you have His permission – not Christ in Me International's permission ... No-one needs permission, but we do need confirmation. Why? Because, when you move on a word from God, you eliminate wrong choices, and secondly, you learn how to hear the voice of God accurately. By making choices on your own accord, you are in fact proclaiming that God is not the owner of your life.

This is their way of explaining how one should make decisions. Notice, however, that they explicitly state that one does not need their permission at CiMI, but only God's permission. They then continue to add that you do need confirmation, not permission. This begs the question: Who gives the confirmation? In a lengthy explanation they confirm that only the appointed leadership can give the confirmation:

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<sup>34</sup> This word can literally be translated as 'In speech', but a loose translation is 'council'.

When we believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ we are saved, but that does not mean that we are already where we are supposed to be. We are still “children” that need to grow up to full maturity. Nothing changed in your natural state, only in our Spiritual state. Although the fullness of the inheritance is ours from that moment on, we are not yet mature enough to rule and reign over our inheritance. When we are saved, we do not have the mind of Christ yet, it is a process where we need to grow to the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:13).<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Paul teaches us this principle in Galatians 4:1-2.<sup>36</sup> While we are still growing to maturity to the fullness of Christ, we are put under the authority of guardians and stewards on behalf of God, until the time appointed by His when we reach the fullness of the mind of Christ. The guardians and stewards have already grown to perfection (Heb. 5:9),<sup>37</sup> they have already grown to the fullness of the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16)<sup>38</sup> and have been appointed by God to rule over the inheritance. They are therefore able to accurately confirm the word of God for us.

Although the CiMI leaders say that their permission is not needed, they still maintain that their confirmation is needed since they are appointed by God. This is only a subtle way to avoid an explicit way of taking control of people’s lives, but still manage to implicitly do it anyway. Although CiMI therefore claims that their leadership’s permission is not needed, it is still needed implicitly since only they are authorised to give confirmation whether a member’s choice is really in line with God’s will or not. What CiMI gives with the one hand, they take away with the other hand again. These *Inspreek* sessions are motivated by the leadership’s claim that they are superior and more mature in the faith, while the members are still little children who need to grow in the faith. However, this is only a way to control someone’s life down to the last detail (Anon., 2018a; Anon., 2018c).

It should be mentioned that divorces did not only occur between people outside the group when one person in the marriage left CiMI, but also inside the group itself. Former members confirm that Strydom received a word from God giving him permission to divorce his wife to marry someone else. Some of the other ministers also divorced their wives to marry other women in CiMI. This was phrased in such a way as to indicate that it was part of God’s plan. Strydom’s own divorce and remarriage was labelled as a sign from God that He will fulfil the promises He made to CiMI (Swanepoel, 2016:10).

One former member explained how his wife left CiMI for four months and how she turned back into the woman he always knew before she joined CiMI. This indicates that her husband noticed

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<sup>35</sup> “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

<sup>36</sup> “Now I say *that* the heir, as long as he is a child, does not differ at all from a slave, though he is master of all, but is under guardians and stewards until the time appointed by the father.”

<sup>37</sup> “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”

<sup>38</sup> “For ‘*who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?*’ But we have the mind of Christ.”

the change in her personality. She went back to CiMI after the four months and he then commented that, after one Sunday that she attended a CiMI gathering, she changed again. One day, after she had started attending meetings at CiMI again, he used her phone to send himself a video from her phone. He saw a WhatsApp discussion between his wife and a minister of CiMI to whom she reported for her *Inspreek* sessions. He saw in the message that the minister from CiMI was telling her that her husband was keeping her away from CiMI. He tried to save his marriage by taking his wife to a marriage counsellor. When CiMI found out about this they told his wife that she was not allowed to visit counsellors outside of CiMI. They eventually got divorced, and soon after that she married someone who was a member of CiMI (Anon., 2018c). He also remarked that the leadership of CiMI wanted him to wear different clothes than his farming clothes when he was still involved and, in this sense, it felt as if they wanted to change his personality. This confirms the suppression of an individual's identity.

One more point that is worth mentioning is that one former member (Anon., 2018a) indicated how being invited to the so-called '*Woord Skool*' is such a privilege and that one must show one's loyalty to be invited by the leadership. This is clearly the use of a reward or some privileged position to motivate members to be more loyal and in this way control their behaviour. The former member explained that it was her dream to be invited to *Woord Skool*. This confirms a system of rewards since members have a goal that motivates them to be loyal members, namely an invitation to *Woord Skool*. This will give them a higher status in CiMI and will give them a sense of accomplishment.

CiMI controls the behaviour and norms of their members. They manage to establish a deep 'us-versus-them' mentality together with a strong elitist foundation. This produces loyal followers in CiMI who feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves and as if they belong nowhere else. Moreover, CiMI's leadership wants to have control over the smallest details of their members' lives by instituting weekly counselling sessions for all their members. This way they can control the day-to-day choices of their members and establish the proper norms that they have to abide by. This is an example of how members must imitate their appointed leaders. Former members explain that they were not allowed to get counselling from anyone else but CiMI's leadership. One former member was told that she was not allowed to speak to her sister or mother about the *Inspreek* sessions she had at CiMI, and when she did, she was rebuked (Anon., 2018a). Another member also reported how the members were not allowed to gather without the attendance of someone who is part of the larger leadership in general. The leadership establishes the norms and when a decision must be made, they make the decision with a claim to direct divine authority, even if it means to let people divorce and remarry, which supposedly is in accordance with God's plan.



### **3.4.5. Control over language**

#### **3.4.5.1. Introduction**

Language is an integral part of being human. It is a central tool which is needed for people to function properly, express their thoughts and communicate with fellow human beings (Van Rooy, 2017:3, 5). This central position of language to human experience is rightly confirmed by Stoker (1995:28) as he explains that language helps us to think, speak, access information, gather data and express feelings and emotions. This is also confirmed by Lifton (1998:429). O'Donohue (1998:178-179) describes language as one of "the most fascinating presences in the world". He notes that it is utterly unique to humans and that one's words can become the mirrors of reality, a point also made by Van Rooy (2017:3). But then O'Donohue (1998) also suggests that language is immensely powerful, which implies that it can accomplish many things if it is used in a certain way. Bolinger (1980:68) emphasises that words do not have any magical power with which curses can be uttered, but that the power of words lies hidden beneath the surface until the correct circumstances arise in which this latent power of words can manifest itself. "Language is not a neutral instrument. It is a thousand ways biased" (Bolinger, 1980:68).

If language can indeed be used as a powerful weapon to influence the memory and perception of the individual, the phenomenon of control over language should be expected in cults (Bolinger, 1980:121). Stein (2017:128) confirms this point by mentioning that the ideology of a cult and the language it uses for the delivery of that ideology are essential for the cult leader and/or leadership to control their followers. Abgrall (2000:115) also stresses that since cults use the traditional tools of propaganda, they will inevitably distort the language and make "use of specific words intended to mask the truth or to create a stronger impact". Martin (2003:28) also adds that any student of cultism must be ready to "scale the language barrier of terminology". By this he means that cult members will typically have their own unique terminology which they usually know thoroughly and are able to use effectively.

Accordingly, when language is controlled in a certain way and in a certain context, it will increase the amount of control one has over the people who live and function in that specific context. In the following section the researcher addresses the attempts of the leadership of cults to control the language of the group and investigates the ways in which this might take place.

#### **3.4.5.2. Loading the language**

Lifton (1989:429) contributes to the role of language in totalitarian systems and cults in a unique way. He labels the phenomenon of the attempt of a cult's leadership to control the language as "loading the language". He explains this state of affairs as a context in which "the most far-

reaching and complex of human problems are compressed into brief, highly reductive, definitive-sounding phrases, easily memorized and easily expressed". This label of Lifton has become so central to the control mechanism of language in cults, that it was echoed by many subsequent scholars. Tobias and Lalich (1994:36-37), Singer (2003:70-71) and Ross (2014:156) incorporated and used the concept of "loading the language" in their work on cults. Hassan (2003:120) talks about "loaded language" as an unavoidable phenomenon in cults and Stein (2017:147) also maintains that "loaded language is the language used to deliver the fictions of total ideology" as it manifests itself in cults.

Lifton (1998:429) further notes that the language in a rigid and controlled system, like one would find in cults, is characterised by a "thought-terminating cliché". What he means is that the leadership of a group can implement their own group jargon that has the capacity to verbally restrain their followers and keep them from articulating anything that lies outside the limits of what the leadership decides is acceptable. In this way the specific jargon of the group becomes "the start and finish of any ideological analysis", and in effect terminates any critical thinking on the side of the followers (Lifton, 1998:429; Stein, 2017:147). Lifton (1998:430) powerfully explains this dynamic as follows: "For an individual person, the effect of the language of ideological totalism can be summed up in one word: constriction. He is, so to speak, linguistically deprived." The principle is that when language is constricted and controlled, the person also becomes restricted (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:36-37). It would seem then that it is through loaded language that the single supposed ideological truth of the group is framed, delivered and imposed (Stein, 2017:148).

### **3.4.5.3. New vocabulary, new content and the use of buzzwords**

Martin (2003:27) observes that the modern age in which we find ourselves has established an environment for the rise of a new vocabulary. He says: "The revolutions in culture that have taken place in the vocabularies of technology, psychology, medicine, and politics have not left untouched the religions of the world in general and the theology of Christianity in particular." Following this observation, it is clear that cults will develop their own language with a new and unique vocabulary and expressions (Hassan, 2016:120).

According to Hassan (2016:119, 120, 125) the incorporation of a new language, or what Abgrall (2000:87) calls a "neo-language", which is also part of the new identity given to the member in a cult, will help to centre the minds of the members. Control over language, combined with the apparent possession of a single and exclusive truth within the cult, will therefore create the rigidly controlled channels through which communication and thinking can take place for cult members (Stein, 2017:137, 148). Singer (2003:70) summarises it as follows: "As members

continue to formulate their ideas in the group's jargon, this language serves the purpose of constricting members' thinking and shutting down critical thinking abilities." Abgrall (2000:148) makes a similar point in this regard.

What is interesting for Singer (2003:56) in this context is that "Orwell was perhaps the first to note that language, not physical force, is key to manipulating minds". Turning again to Orwell's (2008:312-313) *1984*, it becomes clear that the idea of "Newspeak" can be helpful here. Although it originated in a fictional setting, "Newspeak" was a way of showing, in the words of Singer (2003:56), that language is indeed "key to manipulating minds". "Newspeak" refers to the "invention of new words" and also to the act of "eliminating undesirable words and by stripping such words as remained of unorthodox meanings, and so far as possible of all secondary meanings whatever" (Orwell, 2008:312-313). Newspeak is therefore not just the development of a new vocabulary, but also manipulation on a semantic level in already existing words.

Regarding the idea of semantic manipulation of words, Stoker (1995:29) continues by claiming that another method used by cults is to pour new meanings and content into already existing words. This is part of their deception in order to not necessarily sound new to someone, but still mean something different from what the person might think. In this sense cults manufacture "neologisms or give ordinary words new meanings" (Abgrall, 2000:148). Abgrall (2000:148) continues by stating that cults will "employ an esoteric language whose purpose is to warp the meaning of words into nonsense and to strengthen the closed character of the cult by making the language accessible only to its members". He also shares a valuable insight when he affirms that language is crucial to any culture. For meaningful exchange to happen in a group or community, there must be a standard definition for words and expressions. Accordingly, the ongoing revision of words and their definitions "allows a cultural rebuilding to take place" inside the cult (Abgrall, 2000:148-149).

Singer (2003:114-115) explains the impact that the use of a new vocabulary or so-called "cult jargon" can have on a newcomer. Once the newcomer is surrounded by other members who express themselves linguistically in the cult jargon, he will start to "feel out of sorts, a bit alienated, and undereducated by cult standards". In order to find some sort of connection to the rest of the group and to understand what they are saying, the newcomer must also adopt the language of the cult. For this reason, they think they must study harder to understand the truth as it is expressed in this new language or "cult jargon" (Hassan, 2016:120; Singer, 2003:114-115). Eventually the cult jargon will become second nature to the new member, just like it is with all the other members. The effect of this is that "talking to outsiders becomes energy-consuming and awkward" and soon enough "members find it most comfortable to talk only among themselves in the new vocabulary" (Singer, 2003:70). In this sense the cult's language and new

vocabulary “put up an invisible wall between believers and outsiders. The language helps to make members feel special, and separates them from the general public” (Hassan, 2016:120). This separation from the general public also latches on to the idea of a “language barrier” between the cultist and the person who might be engaging with him in a conversation, as alluded to by Martin (2003:33) and discussed in section 3.4.5.1.

It is also important to pay attention to the use of buzzwords as it may be used by cults. Singer (2003:50-51) asserts that “ideas come and go. But the skillful word merchants know how to push people’s buttons, how to get a responsive chord resonating in a listener. Thus the buzzwords also change across time.” With the goal of attracting more people, cults have shown to be very effective when it comes to using the right buzzwords at the right time in the culture in which they find themselves. It would seem that their adaptive use of language is the way they modernise and stay influential. Because of this feature that is present in many cults, Singer’s (2003:51) warning remains very fitting:

[J]ust as some sailors in Greek myth were lured to shipwreck by the Siren's song, so some were saved when Odysseus stopped up their ears. We must constantly watch for the new buzzwords that might be used to entice the unsuspecting. We must know when the words that make us yearn to follow someone are a Siren's song.

#### **3.4.5.4. Control over language in CiMI**

Strydom (2019d) states that at CiMI they are not “indoctrinated by the definitions of words”. Instead, he claims that at CiMI “we can lay down our weight of what words mean”. Strydom (2016d) contends that in CiMI they have the correct definitions of the words in the Bible according to the Greek and the Hebrew. He says:

Once we change our old ways of thinking to these certain Greek words and Hebrew words, and the moment you read a word, then suddenly that Hebrew and that Greek definition pops up into your head; we will all, when we read the Bible, read it in one view, one judgement, and one opinion. And we will be the glory of God.

These are all ways in which language is being controlled which, in turn, also controls one’s thoughts. Since CiMI is a religious cult, they have redefined many religious terms as well. The most important term that they redefined is the title “Christ”. It has a whole new meaning in their theology (Anon., 2018a).

Odendaal (2019) comments that “sometimes we use language and we don’t actually realize what is a language”. He continues by saying that God reveals things to them by way of revelation. Once God reveals something, the person to whom it is revealed must go and teach people what God revealed in a language. The people who are taught must listen to this person

since only then can that word take effect in their lives. This is Odendaal's way of explaining the role of language in CiMI.

Odendaal (2019) further says that when one wants to establish a community in unity, it is important "to establish a language where a word has a meaning and we understand what the weight of that word is ... because if we throw a different weight around that word, it dilutes the word". According to him, one creates "a culture through language" and language creates identity. He explains it as follows:

God has a language ... God has a way of speaking. We have to learn a way of listening for God to communicate. God is not going to change the way He speaks. God only speaks one language ... God speaks truth. That is God's language. God can use any language to say what He wants in truth. So, when we want to learn what God is saying we sit with God and He reveals certain things to us... In this community He has revealed certain truths to a certain person. That person has come, he has shared those truths with us. We sit in teachings, we sit in *Woord Skool*, and we sit in midweek congregations and we listen, and we take in that Word ... When we say God has a language, then if we are born from God then we must know that there is a ... native tongue, there is a mother tongue because we are born from God.

Odendaal is attempting to establish the theoretical basis for the idea that all the members of CiMI must adopt the language that they speak at CiMI. According to him, this language will unite them and give them an identity as a community. He is also claiming exclusivity with this language, saying that God revealed truth to them and that they must now adopt the language of truth.

Odendaal (2019) adds that sometimes "we are not into one language of what is being bestowed on us". With this he communicates the notion that sometimes the members of CiMI are still not united in the one language. He further explains:

God encodes His language. That is why for many years we had to speak in tongues, and it had to be interpreted. Now, we can actually just speak ... Why did God had to encode this thing? He did not want His message, His Word to be counterfeited so that any guy with a YouTube channel, a cheap camera from a small town can make video clips and just spew a bunch of nonsense. God's Word is very precious. He is not just going to throw it out there to anybody ... Anybody with an interpretation or a little bit of knowledge of where what is in Greek.

He ends by saying that God looks at someone's heart and then says that He will give "this guy" something. He will give him His precious Word. Odendaal is not only claiming one language, but also exclusivity of truth and that God is only revealing things through them on this earth. When Odendaal is referring to someone with a YouTube channel and a cheap camera, he is referring to Rudolph Boshoff, who has released videos on CiMI in the past where he critiqued their views.

But Boshoff's critiques do not mean anything, according to Odendaal, since God only revealed things to Strydom by looking at his heart.

It is confirmed by former members that CiMI "plays around" with biblical words and redefine these words (Anon., 2018a; Anon., 2018b). This is also a way in which the leadership impresses people since they sound very scholarly in how they talk about certain biblical words and their meanings in the original languages of Greek and Hebrew. This makes people feel that they are really learning something about the Bible at CiMI. It also makes people feel intellectually inferior to the leadership, which causes them to stop thinking critically about the teachings of the leaders. As a religious cult, CiMI is clearly redefining terms and working with the theory that they need to be united in one language. CiMI, in some sense, implements "Newspeak" in order to lower the critical thinking abilities of their members and unite them in their one language of "truth". Certain theological themes such as the deity of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity are also stripped of any meaning and truth in CiMI. What one therefore observes in CiMI is that the theoretical basis for controlling language is clearly established.

### **3.4.6. Control over information and environment**

#### **3.4.6.1. Introduction**

The information to which one has access and the environment in which one finds oneself, play a major role in the way we think and behave. Hassan (2016:117), for example, reminds us that "without accurate up-to-date information, we can easily be manipulated and controlled". This explains why cult leaders want to control the flow of information from the top down, and also find means to gather and control the flow of information from the bottom up again (Abgrall, 2000:76; Tobias & Lalich, 1994:39). Singer (2003:64-65) also mentions that part of the agenda to create an atmosphere where thought-reform programmes can flourish will involve the aim to control the social and/or physical environment of cult members. Tobias and Lalich (1994:44) also confirm this mechanism as they emphasise that influence over the information and environment of an individual is a forceful technique used to enhance control and exploitation.

Lifton's (1998:420-421) idea of "milieu control" points to more or less the same feature of control over information and the physical and/or social environment of a person. He explains it as follows:

[Through] this milieu control the totalist environment seeks to establish domain over not only the individual's communication with the outside (all that he sees and hears, reads and writes, experiences, and expresses), but also – in its penetration of his inner life – over what we may speak of as his communication with himself ... Many things happen psychologically to one exposed to milieu control ... He is deprived of the combination of external information and inner reflection

which anyone requires to test the realities of his environment and to maintain a measure of identity separate from it.

Consequently, milieu control entails control over the way someone views and interprets the information that they receive and the environment they are confronted with from outside of themselves, and how they communicate with it and communicate it to others. But the goal here is also to control the way they would view and interpret their own thoughts and their communication with themselves. In this way milieu control clearly stands in the way of any striving towards “new information, independent judgement, and self-expression”.

One must realise that, to a certain extent, information functions as the fuel that one needs in order to make thoughtful decisions. It is as Hassan (2016:117) puts it: “Deny a person the information they require to make sound judgments and they will become incapable of doing so.” Stoker (1995:26) therefore mentions that people stay in cults because they do not always have access to crucial information, and the information that they do have access to, is judged according to the criteria and framework that the cult gives them.

According to the researcher, what Hassan (2016:116) calls “behavioral control” can be better categorised under the current control mechanism of ‘control over the environment’ of the individual. Hassan (2016:116), describes this as “the regulation of an individual’s physical reality”. This would typically entail the “control of their environmental” he says, and he mentions as examples things such as “where they live, what clothes they wear, what food they eat, how much sleep they get, and what jobs, rituals and other actions they perform”. These things can be placed under the physical environment of members, but there is also their social environment to manipulate and control (Singer, 2003:64-65). Under the category of the social environment one can mention what Singer (2003:10) describes as an isolation tactic, where the member is encouraged to leave previous relationships and affiliations. She refers to this as one of the most common “mechanisms of control and enforced dependency”. Tobias and Lalich (1994:43) elaborate on this isolation tactic as they unpack it further as follows: “Threats of excommunication, shunning, and abandonment by the group become powerful forces of control once members become fully dependent on the group and alienated from their former support network. If a person is completely estranged from the rest of the world, staying put appears the only option.” This underlines the major role social ties play in a person’s life, and if those social ties are manipulated by other parties in order to control the person, it can be really effective (Abgrall, 2000:121). With regard to this point, Abgrall (2000:120-121) saliently adds that a new member will be “drowned in a multitude of obligations that abolish his personal space”. Accordingly, the environment in which cult members typically find themselves and which is

purposefully designed this way, is deprived of any previous influential social ties and any private time for themselves to make further influence on these members easier (Hassan, 2016:182).

It is clear then that cults will typically attempt to control the information that is allowed to circulate in the group, and also create an environment where there is as much isolation as possible, and as little exposure to other potential influences as possible (Stoker, 1995:26).

### **3.4.6.2. How cults control the information and environment**

The way in which cults attempt to control the information and environment of a person is already observable during recruitment. Stein (2017:56-57), for example, describes the different ways in which people process information that they might be confronted with at a particular time. The central route of information processing involves a scenario where a person has enough time and the ability to think and evaluate a problem or question carefully. The peripheral route of information processing, on the other hand, “involves being persuaded by cues and rules of thumb that are logically unrelated to the actual content of a persuasion message – they are ‘peripheral’ cues, focusing on surface attributes of the message or messenger”. During cult recruitment the recruiter’s goal is to move the potential recruit into a position where the central route of information processing is avoided and where everything must operate primarily according to the peripheral route. The recruiter will typically push this agenda with a sense of urgency by using phrases like “One-time offer! Sign up now!” This technique is to be expected of groups such as cults “that wish to persuade potential recruits of their benign intent, and need to hide their internal practices and beliefs, rely on recruiting people by making use of the peripheral route of persuasion to begin to derail critical thinking” (Stein, 2017:57).

It is also the case that information is sometimes ‘compartmentalised’ in order to keep cult members from seeing the whole picture of what is going on in the group and/or the outside world. Hassan (2016:118) mentions that cult members will typically feel that they know exactly what is going on in the whole organisation and that outsiders are uninformed about the group. But, in his experience with counselling ex-members, he found that they frequently know less than most other people. Hassan (2016:118-119) also explains that cults will “control information by having many levels of ‘truth’. Cult ideologies often have ‘outsider’ doctrines and ‘insider’ doctrines.” The information for outsiders will be dull material that are meant for the public and the latest recruits, while the insider doctrines are information that is revealed to members on a gradual basis. As the person gets more and more involved and progresses higher and higher up the ladder, the inner doctrines will be revealed. Hassan (2016:118-119) describes the creation of this kind of situation as follows:

[W]here truth is multileveled, cult directors make it nearly impossible for a member to make definitive, objective assessments. If they have problems, they are told that they are not mature or



advanced enough to know the whole truth yet. But they are assured that all will become clear shortly. If they work hard, they'll earn the right to understand the higher levels of truth.

Another way in which this control mechanism is implemented is by granting “minimal access to non-cult newspapers, magazines, TV, radio and online information” (Hassan, 2016:118). Even telephone calls are limited or completely prohibited in some cases (Singer, 2003:116). When cult members do read material, it will primarily be what Hassan (2016:118) refers to as “cult-generated propaganda or material that has been censored to keep members focused”. This way members are only exposed to information that is carefully sorted and approved by the cult and therefore safe for reading (Abgrall, 2000:185; Singer, 2003:70). It is also crucial that current members do not make any contact with ex-members and critics of the specific group. In other words, the people “who could provide the most outside – that is, real – information are to be completely shunned” (Hassan, 2016:118). If one were to contrast this level of control with Hassan’s (2016:49) remarks that “people want to be free. They want to read what they want to read, and they want to form their own opinions. They want honesty and do not like being lied to or exploited. They want trustworthy leaders who are responsible and accountable. They want love and respect”, it is clear that control over information is a dangerous control mechanism. Ultimately the “obligation to consume certain products, leads the individual to place the cult’s considerations before his own needs” (Abgrall, 2000:185).

When it comes to the physical environment of members, Singer (2003:65) makes the following noteworthy claim:

Cults don’t need to have you move into a commune, farm, headquarters, or ashram and live within the cult environment twenty-four hours a day in order to have control over you. They can control you just as effectively by having you go to work every day with instructions that when not working ... you must do continuous mind-occupying chanting or some other cult-related activity.

Besides homework such as the abovementioned, the cult will make sure that the schedule of a member is tightly filled with activities like “playing games, attending lectures, group singing, doing collective work, studying basic texts, joining picket lines, going on fund-raising drives, or completing various assigned tasks, such as writing a personal autobiography for examination by the group” (Singer, 2003:115). Galanter (1989:116) made a similar observation. These activities will keep them so busy that they don’t have any time to think critically about what the group is busy doing to them. In this way, the control over where someone lives is not always the primary aim; rather, having control over their time, even if they are physically away from the group, can make a massive difference (Abgrall, 2000:185; Singer, 2003:65).

In some cases, cults will also implement food and sleep deprivation in order to “weaken resistance because of vitamin or protein deficiency”, and also to disturb a person’s psychic

balance (Abgrall, 2000:187). The deprivation of sleep will give the cult a strong grip, not just on the intellectual abilities of the member, but also on the personality of the member (Abgrall, 2000:188). Another weapon used to penetrate the mental defence of a person is compulsory labour, which, in combination with sleep deprivation and malnutrition, will lead to exhaustion (Abgrall, 2000:189). Singer (2003:139) also points out this feature when she explains that “changes in diet and in sleep and stress levels, body manipulations, and relaxation-induced anxiety – are experiences that are known to produce certain physiological and psychological effects”.

Singer (2003:69-70) also picked up on Lifton’s use of “milieu control” and uses the same phrase. She explains that in many groups a “no gossip” or “no nattering” law prevails that does not allow anyone inside the group to express their reservations and suspicions to anyone else about what is going on in the group (Singer, 2003:65-66). This kind of law is sometimes justified by saying that “gossip will tear apart the fabric of the group or destroy the unity, when in reality the rule is a mechanism to keep members from communicating anything other than positive endorsements”. With these kinds of rules in place the communication among members can be regulated.

Singer (2003:69-70) further notes that milieu control will entail the tactic of encouraging as little as possible contact with friends and relatives outside the cult. Therefore, in many cults one will find that the member is expected to make a “literal transfer of family loyalty” (Hassan, 2016:131). The member must now consider the group as his only true family and break many or all social ties with other family members. Stein (2017:21) gives a meaningful summary of this situation:

The follower is isolated from the outside world; he or she is isolated from an authentic relationship to others within the group – allowed only to communicate within the narrow confines of the group speak and rigid rules of behavior; and, due to the dissociation that is created, the follower is also isolated from his or her own ability to think clearly about the situation.”

Any contact with former ties is lost or at least discouraged, and without even noticing it, members begin to change gradually (Galanter, 1989:116; Singer, 2003:116). In turn, Abgrall (2000:16) observes that one of the big differences between a healthy church and a cult is that churches would typically “aspire to be an integral part of society, even to be a dominant element”, while cults would rather encourage as much separation as possible from the larger community.

One last important factor to mention here is the control that the leader and/or leadership attempts to exert over the resources of members, most importantly money (Tobias & Lalich, 1994:39). Hassan (2016:100) mentions in passing that cults will take over your mind, but “they’ll

take your money too, along the way". It is common for cult members, when fully absorbed into and committed to the group, to donate large sums of their own money and assets to the group. In many instances people give everything that they own and in exchange "they are promised care and meaning for the rest of their lives. This transaction leaves the person dependent on the group for everything: food, clothing, shelter and health care" (Hassan, 2016:103). A similar observation was made by Singer (2003:93). This practice not only enriches the cult, but it also "freezes the person in the new belief system, since it would be too painful to admit that this was a foolish mistake", and it makes financial survival in the world outside the cult impossible for the member, leaving him/her further trapped (Hassan, 2016:131). One must not entertain the idea that members do this freely; it is rather the persuasiveness of the leaders that is a massive contributing factor to keep in mind (Singer, 2003:93). Huge amounts of pressure are exerted on members to take this step of turning over money and possessions (Hassan, 2016:131).

### **3.4.6.3. Control over information and environment in CiMI**

Kotze (2017a) encourages members from CiMI to "cut off" previous ties in their social environment if people from their former relationships are not willing to accept the teachings of CiMI. He reads from Matthew 18:8-11<sup>39</sup> and tells the members of CiMI that "if your wife, or your husband, or your child, or your mother, or your boss, or your leaders causes you to stumble, cut it off!" He proceeds to answer the question why there are divorces in CiMI by saying that "because people are cutting off!" In other words, Kotze (2017a) is encouraging the members of CiMI to get rid of previous ties that are not associated or cooperating with CiMI. He furthermore states that the only difference between divorces happening in other churches and divorces taking place in CiMI is that "our people do it for the kingdom ... The only difference is our reasons are kingdom driven." The testimony of Louw in her interview on *Carte Blanche* (2018) also serves as an example of this phenomenon in CiMI. Another former member explained that CiMI managed to drive a wedge between him and his family, without him even knowing it at first. He said that he came to a point where he was prepared to write off his whole family because they did not believe what CiMI teaches (Anon., 2018c). Another former member recalls how the leadership told one of his friends that, since his girlfriend was not in CiMI, he had to leave her. This caused that particular member to eventually leave CiMI. They did the same with another member and his fiancé (Anon., 2018c).

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<sup>39</sup> "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire." "Take heed that do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."

Kotze (2017a) explains it rather thoroughly with these words:

If someone may cause you to stumble cut it off man! What is easier? ... To cut off your hand or to divorce? What is easier? To pluck out your eye or to say to your parents: "Well, then I am sorry, I cannot sit around the same table anymore." You tell me what is easier. If your hand or foot causes you to sin, to miss the mark, to not believe ... cut it off and cast it away from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the everlasting fire. Oh my gosh! Rather sit here with a sore heart, feel like you have lost something ... You know people walk away and say "You know I believe in this word, but I am just not willing to give up my husband, my wife, my parents, my children or whatever. So, Christ in Me International is just not for me right now. I want to keep both my hands." And then there are people sitting here ... they are disabled because they have cut off so many things.

This is how CiMI controls the environment of its members. CiMI is isolating its members from previous friendships and familial ties. Former members also indicate that involvement in CiMI is time-consuming. They have events and weekend retreats and members are for the most part expected to attend these opportunities. One person whose wife is in CiMI also stated that her priorities changed, and she has no more time for their children. In this sense there is a lot of pressure on the members of CiMI. Since CiMI view themselves as God's "elect" many of the members are willing to make as much time as possible for CiMI.

In the *Carte Blanche* (2018) episode there was another interview with someone whose face was not visible and whose identity was kept anonymous under the name of Timothy. He stated the following in the interview:

They want to tell you where to do what with your finances, how much money you have to give them a month, where can you invest, how much do you own on your house, how much is outstanding on your vehicles, who is your brokers, life insurance ... all aspects they want.

He added that "there is definitely something very wrong here". Timothy also shared the template of the budget that CiMI wants you to complete, which is comprehensive. Govender states that "it lists everything from toiletries to credit card, and policies. Interestingly, the first two entries under expenses are listed as 'CIM Debit order 1' and 'CIM Debit order 2'." This also indicates to what extent CiMI wants to control the resources of their members. One former member explained how the leadership motivated him to sell the machines that he used for his agricultural business and donate the money to CiMI. This made him very suspicious (Anon., 2018c).

During the *Carte Blanche* (2018) episode an interview was also conducted with Strydom. CiMI's conditions for the interview were that they could film it, and that their PR, Jaco Eloff could also participate in the interview with Strydom. Under these conditions Govender arranged this interview. During the interview Strydom admitted that CiMI members bowed down in front of him and called him king, but said that he does not ask them to do this. Govender also confronted

Strydom and Eloff with the allegation that CiMI breaks up families and asked them to respond. Strydom stated that this “is not at all true ... we are not the ones persecuting the world. We are the little small organisation with a new progressive word from God that is being persecuted. And when people can't adopt to this faith, they ... point finger and say 'you do this and you do that'.” Strydom also denied forcing members to make decisions in life. He explained that “we can't make people's decisions for them. We counsel them on what we would do, but we don't make their decisions for them. People are free to make their own decisions.” Before ending the interview, Govender showed Eloff an email that she had from 2013, written by Eloff himself. She provided the background to this email stating that “it talks about R120 000 provision money that was invested in Xandr e's father's business. You said that you were very concerned that it was not controlled, it was unregulated, and it is too high risk. What happened there?” Eloff responded by saying that “at that moment I was not very much involved in the management and I saw the figures and I then questioned the board on the figures.” Govender then asked whether Xandr e gave church money to his father's business, upon which Eloff explained that he could not elaborate on all of that information. When Govender asked him “Why not?”, he responded by saying, “because that was sorted out ... from my understanding it did not happen.” She then turned to Strydom and asked him whether it was true or not. He replied: “We invest our money ... yes, it is true.” After the interview CiMI sent a message to the *Carte Blanche* team asking that the following statement must be displayed in the episode: “Xandr e, on behalf of the NPC made a loan to his father's company. The loan was repaid in full. Since then the organization has implemented policies and procedures to prevent the mistakes made by us in 2013.”

One former member testified to the notion that many people have signed their businesses over to CiMI and have arranged that their monthly salary goes directly to CiMI, who then pays the people what they need. He also sketched the scenario that people end up in a situation where they cannot leave CiMI because CIM owns all their assets (Anon., 2018c). Another former member wanted to know what kind of manipulation they had to create if they could convince people that they are obedient to God if they give their monthly salary to CiMI (Anon., 2018b). It also came up in discussions with former members that CiMI implemented a pyramid scheme. One former member lost R25 000 to the pyramid scheme and never saw any of it again. Another former member had to borrow R29 000 to buy into the pyramid scheme and also never saw any of that money again. A woman, whose husband joined CiMI, explained how her husband signed over their farm to CiMI and left none of it to his family. They were divorced soon after he joined CiMI, even though both of them said they still loved each other. The point is that the members of CiMI are expected to bring all their resources to CiMI's leadership, who is supposedly representing God on earth (Anon., 2018a).

The concept of 'outsider' and 'insider' doctrines is also present in CiMI's structure. Former members have confirmed that the so-called '*Woord Skool*' on Saturdays is not open to anyone. The leadership of CiMI invites people to the *Woord Skool* and even within the *Woord Skool* there are ranks (Anon., 2018b). On CiMI's app they have developed passwords so that you can only access the material which is in accordance with your rank. CiMI is therefore characterised by secrecy. It is worth repeating Labuschagne's (2018) remark that members should not invite potential recruits to the midweek gatherings since there will be content preached there that they will not understand. They must get the people to their weekend retreats or their Sunday services.

It is clear that CiMI controls the information and environment of their followers. They encourage their members to lose their families and friends if they do not agree with CiMI's ideas and their activities are also time-consuming. The most important feature which falls into this category is CiMI's control over the resources of their members which, in turn, makes it very hard for them to leave CiMI since they know that they will leave only with the clothes on their backs. All their resources are controlled by CiMI. Access to certain information is also forbidden. One is not allowed to listen to the preaching of any other church leaders, and one is also not allowed to read other theological or spiritual books, for example (Anon., 2018b). Members are only allowed to read the notes of CiMI. In fact, CiMI encourages their members to read the Bible on every opportunity that they have, but not without their notes, which they write down in their Bibles at CiMI's teachings (Anon., 2018a).

### **3.4.7. Control over history**

#### **3.4.7.1. Introduction**

Stoker (1995:34) explains that when a group claims some sort of divine authority or the status of a chosen elite, they must be able to somehow support this claim from history. The concept of history, whether it is one's own personal history, or the history of a specific group in which one is affiliated, provides a sense of perspective and belonging for the individual. Abgrall (2000:113) elaborates by explaining that cult members are usually expected to "believe in the history that is told to him and to consent to any actions that derive from there". To do this they will typically attempt to control both the history of the group as an organisation and the personal history of the individual cult members.

To a large extent, this specific feature applies primarily to religious cults. A cult that would for example claim to be the one and only true Christian church on earth today, must somehow be able to trace its roots back to the very first church in the times of the New Testament. Stoker (1995:34) points out that the problem with this attempt usually is that the particular cult is unable

to name any significant person between the time of the New Testament and the centuries after that, who embraced and/or taught exactly the same teachings as the cult in question does. Many cults would then claim that there was in fact no true and proper church since the times of the New Testament and that they are the so-called “restoration” of the one and only true church of God on earth (Rhodes, 2001:67; Stoker, 1995:34).

In this sense cults will rewrite the history of the group and make it sound as if they are the only legitimate church on earth. Hoekema (1963:374-375) sets the record straight when he says the following:

We may, for example, observe that there is in all cults *an abrupt break with historic Christianity, and with its confessions*. Because the cult believes that the entire Christian church has become apostate and that God has given to the members of the cult new light on saving truth, it has severed itself from the church and has become completely independent of it. Church history for the cults is therefore a very easy subject; nothing of real significance happened to the church from the time of Christ to the time when the founder of the cult began the organization of what is now hailed as the only true group of God’s people.

#### **3.4.7.2. The personal history of cult members**

Singer (2003:62) points out that one of the tactics of a thought-reform programme will be to get a person to “drastically reinterpret his or her life’s history”. Hassan (2016:146) remarks that an interesting dynamic in cults is the attempt to change a person’s relationship with his past, present and future. He unpacks this dynamic by stating:

Cult members tend to look back at their previous life with a distorted memory that colors everything dark. Even the most positive memories are skewed toward the bad. The cult member's sense of the present is manipulated, too. They feel a great sense of urgency about the tasks at hand ... To a cult member, the future is a time when they will be rewarded, once the great change has finally come.

Accordingly, cult members are implicitly urged to alter their accounts of their own personal history by either rewriting it or avoiding it. By changing their own history, they are also taught to interpret reality through the framework of the cult. Singer (2003:73) concludes that the “rewriting of personal history more often than not becomes a re-creating, so that you learn to fit yourself into the group’s interpretation of life”. This is also noted by Lifton (1998:431).

The goal of this dynamic is to distort the memory of the individual by minimising the good things in their past and maximising their sins and failures prior to joining the group. Singer (2003:72), in turn, sees this phenomenon in cults as part of the goal of the confession sessions referred to earlier. She explains that through the “confession process and by instruction in the group’s teachings, members learn that everything about their former lives, including friends, family, and

non-members, is wrong and to be avoided". Abgrall (2000:129) elaborates by explaining that once a person breaks away from his past, he also breaks away from his former self in a certain sense, which results in a loss of the person's "usual systems of reference". Cult members must realise that the worst thing for them is to act like their old self independent from the group, and the best thing for them is "to act like their new cult self" (Hassan, 2016:130). Already during recruitment, one must feel as if one is switching a painful history with a bright future (Abgrall, 2000:119-120). If a person's past life is denigrated in this way, the idea of leaving the group or to return to former relationships will seem illogical and will eventually be avoided since it is perceived as wrong (Singer, 2003:72, 124).

#### **3.4.7.3. The role of prophecies**

At this point it is important to also acknowledge the role of prophecies. Hassan (2016:146) explains that in many cults the leader will claim to have a unique knowledge of the future and, accordingly, will be able to make prophecies. In this scenario the leader will know how to "paint visions of future heaven and hell that will move members in the direction he desires. If a group has a timetable for the apocalypse, it will likely be two to five years away – far enough not to be discredited any time soon, but near enough to carry emotional punch." Lifton (2019:5) also refers to this idea as he mentions that "much of the fuel of the cultist engine is provided by a strong emotional commitment to apocalyptic world purification. At the forefront of such all-encompassing purification is a survivor remnant consisting mainly of members of the particular group ... making the apocalyptic claim." Galanter (1989:99) elaborates by reducing the primary task of most cults to the preparation of the messianic end that the cult envisions. Usually these prophecies would disappear and lose prominence as the predicted date approaches. Stoker (1995:35) mentions that when the prophecy eventually turns out to be false, the cult would typically edit the original prophecy to make it seem as if what was initially meant was something entirely different and thus, in a sense, they would exert control over history.

#### **3.4.7.4. Control over history in CiMI**

With regard to CiMI, Strydom (2019d) claims that since the 1700s there have been multiple prophecies by God showing that the last day gospel will come from Africa. More specifically, "the prophetic word said that it would start in South Africa". South Africa was therefore called to lead the last day gospel, according to the visionary leader of CiMI. Furthermore, Strydom (2016d) bases the origin of CiMI's name on a dream that he had in which God apparently spoke to him and revealed to him the name 'Christ in Me International', which is now considered to be the only true church of God on earth (Du Plessis, 2016d).



Labuschagne (2016c) also attempts to establish CiMI as the true church of God by claiming that the Christian church, since the death of Jesus Christ “more than 2000 years ago” never succeeded in filling the earth with the glory of God. He says the following, for example:

The question we need to ask ourselves is: since the first coming of Christ more than 2000 years ago, did the church succeed in filling the earth with the glory, the one view, judgement, and opinion, of God? Did the righteousness of God increase on the earth during the past 2000 years, or did lawlessness and unrighteousness increase? ... Has the earth been filled with more mature sons who rule and reigned the earth, revealing the glory of God, or is the church still as little children who are blown into confusion by every wind of doctrine? ... The answer is a simple “no!” The church did not succeed.

With these statements he implies that with the establishment of CiMI in 2013, the church finally started to fill the earth with God’s glory and that nothing significant has happened in the whole of the history of the Christian church up to 2013. Strydom (2018b) echoes the same sentiment as Labuschagne when he says that the church went in a wrong direction the last 2000 years. Later he also uses the analogy of night-time. He claims that “it was night-time for 2000 years” but now the day has dawned since CiMI has been operating in the world.

Strydom (2018a) attempts to control the personal history of the members of CiMI when he states that “we all came out of religion” and therefore “we must be changed from earthly to spiritual”. He further insists, “Many of you were the disciples of Pharisees and Sadducees. It is the truth; we all came out of religion ... But to change you from people who discerns [sic] naturally to discerning spiritually, Jesus needs to rebuke ... Can you see what I am saying?” This establishes the idea that all the members of CiMI were earthly before they joined CiMI but became spiritual after they joined CiMI. There is a big contrast between the personal history of CiMI’s members before joining and after joining. The researcher had coffee with a current member of CiMI, and he also explained that before joining CiMI he was “church hopping” and could never find a spiritual home. However, since he joined CiMI his life has turned around. One former member also remarked that the narrative repeated by CiMI is the contrast between religion and CiMI. All the things that are wrong in a member’s life are due to religion, and everything that is right is due to CiMI (Anon., 2018a). CiMI also makes it seem as if they can answer all one’s questions (Anon., 2018c).

CiMI is therefore controlling their history as a church and the personal history of their members. CiMI traces its origins directly back to God’s purposes, and the individual members testify to the contrast between their lives prior to joining CiMI and after joining CiMI. The former members described how they truly saw their lives fulfilled in CiMI.

### **3.4.8. 'Control'<sup>40</sup> over God**

#### **3.4.8.1. Introduction**

As indicated in section 3.2, human beings are considered to be highly religious (Geisler & Corduan, 2003:26). Renfrew and Morley (cited by Smith, 2017:1), for example, say: "Religious practices have been a part of *homo sapiens* life since the beginning of discernable [*sic*] history. No human society has existed that did not include some religion." Religion as such has always given rise to advanced levels of vigour, profoundness and determination in the commitments and motivations of people (Smith, 2017:92-93). Berger (1967:51) also points out that there is indeed a strong link between "religion and social solidarity".

Given these observations, it is not surprising to discover that religion plays an important psychological and sociological role in the life of an individual and can consequently be used to sway people in a specific desired direction. Accordingly, the following three control mechanisms discussed will have a strong religious focus in order to investigate how certain features of religion can be manipulated in order to control people. In a religious context, the use of the word 'God' or the claim of divinity, for example, will typically demand attention and may have a tremendous psychological and sociological force behind it. Thus, to make it easier for the leader and/or leadership of a cult to exert control over their members, divine and godlike authority is often attributed to the leader and/or the organisation (Abgrall, 2000:166; Stoker, 1995:36). Hassan (2016:184) mentions that many cult leaders "genuinely believe they are God, or the Messiah, or have gained enlightenment". A similar observation was also made by Tobias and Lalich (1994:67). Abgrall (2000:53, 123) describes the leader as the wise person who can supposedly lead people to "divine revelation" and, given the authority placed upon him, act as some sort of "miracle worker". In turn, Galanter (1989:3) mentions that "transcendent power" is often imputed on the leader. Claims to this kind of authority can give the leader the advantage and license he needs in his attempt to control his followers (Stoker, 1995:37). In effect, leaders can use this kind of authority to "trick their followers into believing in something, then prevent them from testing and disproving that mythology or belief system" (Tobias & Lalich (1994:67).

#### **3.4.8.2. God's organisation**

Martin (2003:38) states that the "history of cultism generally begins with an authoritarian pronouncement on the part of the founder or founders". This authoritarian pronouncement is

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<sup>40</sup> Since God is a transcendent being who is sovereign over all, it is utterly impossible for a human being to control God. Therefore, the use of the word 'control' in this context is only meant to point out an abuse of who God really is and not to state that the leader and/or leadership of cults can actually control a being called God.

then institutionalised into a complete ideological and dogmatic system, which requires utter faith in the “supernatural authority of those who received the initial revelation and whose writings and pronouncements are alleged to have transmitted it”. In this sense nothing short of Godly authority is given to the leader and/or leadership of the cult. Stein (2017:132-133) mentions that the ideology of the cult will serve to raise the leader both to “god-like omnipotence and to the symbolic position of parent to the group”. Stoker (1995:36) further maintains that the leadership will see the group as the only organisation that belongs to God. In other words, the particular group is seen and experienced as the only organisation that God is using to fulfil His divine purpose on earth. Ironically, it will sound as if God is in control of the organisation; meanwhile the word ‘God’ is only invoked to make miraculous claims and to manipulate. Certain apparent coincidences in the lives of the members will also be exploited and sketched as “divine happenings to bolster faith in the group ideology and convince recruits that a meeting or simple happenstance was a predestined event” (Singer, 2003:117). In essence, this control mechanism of ‘control’ over God is only a futile attempt to ‘control’ God and to abuse the word ‘God’ for selfish ends.

To a certain extent this control mechanism of ‘control’ over the divine also features in what Lifton (1998:422) calls “mystical manipulation”. What Lifton means with this phrase is that the leadership will create a certain mystique around themselves, which includes a sense of higher purpose given to the cult by the divine. The leader is then perceived as the one who is chosen by God to carry out the “mystical imperative”. Any thought or action against the higher, divine purpose of the leader, and by extension the group, will be considered to be “stimulated by a lower purpose, to be backward, selfish and petty in the face of the great, overriding mission” (Lifton, 1998:422). Abgrall (2000:140) adds to this phenomenon by noticing that in many cases the leader will declare his divine character and assign superhuman powers to himself. God is thus ‘manipulated’ to serve as a stamp of approval on everything the organisation plans and accomplishes (Stoker, 1995:36). In essence, the leader “becomes the ultimate bastion against the evil of defilement, the central figure in the world-purifying apocalyptic narrative. That narrative is considered the only certainty in an otherwise unknowable future. That is, the guru becomes the sacred agent of a divine plan for all-encompassing purification” (Lifton, 2019:7).

#### **3.4.8.3. God’s mouthpiece**

Stoker (1995:37) rightly claims that one of the most important characteristics of religious cults is the claim to be the exclusive mouthpiece and channel of communication in this world. To be a member of the group, one must view the leader and/or leadership as the only people who are accurately proclaiming the true will of God on earth, since the leader is the only one with a direct line to the deity (Stein, 2017:19, 132). Hassan (2016:186) also mentions in passing that the will

of God can be used to “manipulate and control people”. When leaders profess to have this level of authority, they are able to make changes in the doctrines of the cult whenever they want because they are speaking on behalf of God himself. Abgrall (2000:133) gives a powerful summary of this effect: “Invested with a superhuman knowledge and power by the cult, he generates, by his very presence, by his writings or his word, a powerful presumption in favor of the correctness of the action undertaken – which opens the door to every transgression.”

As noted by Tobias and Lalich (1994:71), it is hard to determine whether a cult leader’s belief in his/her own “magical powers, omnipotence, and connection to God (or whatever higher power of belief system they are espousing) is delusional or simply part of the con”. The researcher has been asked this question countless times, but without a deeper psychological investigation into the personality of the particular leader, it remains hard to tell.

#### **3.4.8.4. ‘Control’ over God in CiMI**

Strydom (2018b) claims that God gave CiMI the sign to authenticate them over and against all the other churches that mock them. He practically sets himself and, by implication CiMI, up as the only legitimate mouthpiece of God. Strydom (2019a) also claims:

I believe with all my heart that if God was a man, he would preach this sermon, this morning on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2019, to the whole of South Africa. This is how important this message is ... I believe that if God was able to put on the TVs ... God would broadcast this sermon, this morning to the whole of South Africa. Not to America. This sermon is not for the whole Africa. It’s not for the whole world. This sermon today is for South Africa ... So that South Africa can discern the sign of our time.

He further says that there will be no greater prophetic message than this one. Strydom is God’s exclusive mouthpiece of God in this world.

Du Plessis (2016a), one of the teachers (*leermeesters*) at CiMI, also claims that CiMI is “unique” among churches in the world. He adds that since CiMI understands the revelation that they are Christs, they also preach what God tells them. Du Plessis (2016a), for example, explains that given the revelation that they have, “flesh and blood does not tell you anymore ... what to preach. But the Father in heaven is sharing with you what to preach and to say.” He establishes CiMI as the only church with a direct channel to God when he concludes this point by saying: “So, Christ In Me International, there is only one church in this world now, one God’s church. One church that belongs to God, and that is you.”

Typical of cults is the claim to be God’s mouthpiece on earth, and CiMI is no exception in this regard. This claim has strong sociological and psychological consequences in the lives of CiMI’s members. It also enhances the elite mentality since they are God’s truth on earth and are

making sure that God's plan is fulfilled. All the other churches are wrong and need correction. When one former member (Anon., 2018a), while she was still part of CiMI, did research on cults in general, she realised that CiMI is a cult since there were so many features that overlapped with what she read during her research. However, she explained that since CiMI indoctrinated her that they are the sole kingdom of God and the only place where God is speaking on earth, she struggled to believe that they were a cult. In this sense, the leadership of CiMI is controlling God *for* their members.

### **3.4.9. Control over salvation**

#### **3.4.9.1. Introduction**

Since the leader and/or leadership of cults claim divine authority, as discussed earlier, it is common for the leadership of cults to also claim to control the salvation of their members. When a person can convince others that he has the final rule over their eternal destination, this person will be able to manipulate his followers on many other levels as well (Stoker, 1995:38). Salvation in a psychological and sociological context, however, should not exclusively be applied to ultimate salvation in the sense of spending eternity (after death) in a place called 'heaven' or 'hell'. Salvation can also have immediate effects for people. This is one of the reasons why Smith (2017:14) chose to replace salvation with the word "deliverance", which can be applied in a temporal, as well as in an eternal sense.

According to Smith (2017:22), people sometimes engage in religion and everything that comes with it, in the hope of receiving blessings and deliverance from certain troubles and crises in life.

#### **3.4.9.2. Salvation through membership**

It is a common trait of cults to claim that ultimate salvation can only be achieved if you are a member of the specific cult. Rhodes (2001:32) states that "the cult views itself as the single means of salvation; to leave the group is to endanger one's soul". This phenomenon should be expected as a logical consequence of claiming to be the only group possessing the truth, which is directly communicated to the leader by God (Hassan, 2016:132; Stein, 2017:18). Furthermore, according to Stein (2017:132), it would seem that a total commitment within the group to the dogma of the group will also function as a precondition for salvation. Stein (2017:132) explains in passing: "To be saved, one must accept the dogma whole hog: hook, line and sinker."

Singer (2003:30) introduces the idea that with membership comes special knowledge and that this knowledge is what is needed for temporary and eternal deliverance and salvation. Cult

leaders will usually claim access to a certain ancient, special or new knowledge, which simultaneously strengthens the aura around them and gives them the ability to claim a special mission or calling in life. They will then also promise their followers access to this special knowledge as they are expected “to step into the elite compound, community, or sphere of the leader. To do so usually means leaving behind family and friends and forsaking most of the ordinary world.” This knowledge and all the other supposed benefits clearly come at a high price, but followers are told that they will gain access to this knowledge, which grants them enlightenment of some sort and ultimately salvation, if they follow “the narrowly prescribed pathways of a particular group, master, guru, or trainer” (Singer, 2003:20). Similarly, this idea is also reported by Hassan (2016: XXVII) and further discussed by Singer (2003:30, 125).

#### **3.4.9.3. Salvation through works**

When one momentarily considers this concept from a theological point of view, Geisler and Rhodes (2008:121) strongly affirm that “God’s unmerited favor, or grace, is at the heart of the Christian plan of salvation”. That people can only be saved by grace, through faith, has always been a cardinal doctrine of orthodox Christianity. Nearly all cults, however, deny that salvation comes by God’s grace alone (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:125). Although this is a strong theological doctrine, which is discussed in much more detail later in the current study, there are significant points to mention here.

Stoker (1995:39) explains that the individual cult member will feel more and more accepted by God, or some sort of transcendent reality, if he performs well and is obedient to the will of the leader, who is supposedly representing and communicating the will of God. A large part of this performance is often the amount of time the member spends to evangelise and recruit new members (Stoker, 1995:40).

Given this situation, one can understand the strong psychological motivation that fuels the performance of a cult member. If one’s performance plays a role in one’s deliverance, and one’s deliverance depends on the will of the leader, then one would want to perform as good as possible and practically be a slave to the leadership of the cult. Stein (2017:134) emphasises this point when she notes that all members of the group “have the promise of being saved or transformed if sufficiently compliant to the dictates of the leader”.

#### **3.4.9.4. Salvation through the confession of sins**

Besides functioning as a strong force to manipulate behaviour, Lifton (1998:425-426) observes that confessions in a totalistic environment has other special uses as well. He describes these uses of confessions thoroughly:

It is first a vehicle for the kind of personal purification..., a means of maintaining a perpetual inner emptying or psychological purge of impurity; this purging milieu enhances the totalist's hold upon existential guilt. Second, it is an act of symbolic self-surrender, the expression of the merging of individual and environment. Third, it is a means of maintaining an ethos of total exposure – a policy of making public (or at least known to the Organization) everything possible about the life experience, thoughts, and passions of each individual, and especially those elements which might be regarded as derogatory.

Confessions, in this context can also have a symbolic meaning of salvation in the sense of purging the individual of all apparent uncleanness and presenting her/himself exposed before the group. Something that is already alluded to earlier is the idea that confessions will give the person an “orgiastic sense of ‘oneness’, of the most intense intimacy with fellow confessors” (Lifton, 1998:425-426).

#### **3.4.9.5. Control over salvation in CiMI**

CiMI claims to play a major role in salvation as well. It has already been established that CiMI promotes themselves as the only true church and therefore also the only church where salvation is available. In this sense CiMI controls the salvation of people, or at least attempts to control it. The '*Inspraak*' sessions serve this purpose since it is part of growing in the faith and maturing, without which one will not be able to mature in one's faith (Anon., 2018a). This explains why members view the attendance of the '*Inspraak*' sessions as a high priority. Former members also reported how they made a covenant to be part of CiMI. This entails a commitment to CiMI which, according to CiMI, may not be broken and is also, given that CiMI is the only true church, connected to one's salvation.

CiMI (2018p) states that their new revelation and progressive Word of God “has to do with the veil that needs to be removed from our picture (understanding) of Jesus Christ. This is important because it will bring the salvation of the soul, which will usher in the second coming of Christ.” Here they explicitly connect their revelation to the “salvation of the soul”. By claiming authority over the destination of people, especially the people of CiMI, they are able, in a religious sense, to control other aspects of the members' lives as well.

#### **3.4.10. Control over the interpretation of an authority and doctrines**

##### **3.4.10.1. Introduction**

According to Stoker (1995:45), it is obvious that cults must exercise control over their specific ideological doctrines since people need to be taught what to believe and on what these specific doctrinal beliefs are based. Tobias and Lalich (1994:38) explain that the goal of a thought-

reform programme is to initiate a deep change in someone in order to get that person to believe in a specific ideology and doctrine, or, in the words of Hassan (2016:119), to “internalize the group doctrine”. Lifton (1998:430) refers to the concept of the “primacy of doctrine over person”, which carries across the idea that cults will typically demand the reshaping of a person’s character. This reshaping will not occur according to the specific personality traits of that person, but rather according to the “rigid contours of the doctrinal mold” (Lifton, 1998:431). This explains why Stein (2017:128) asserts that one must not assume the interest of a member by his mouthing of the cult dogma. Rather, one must assume that the member was brought to these beliefs “by a process of coercion and manipulation, not as a result of independent rational or spiritual discernment”.

It has been thoroughly established through the course of this chapter that the ideological doctrines of cults will be all-encompassing and totalistic in its worldview, focusing on a single truth only available to, possessed by and communicated by the leader of the group (Singer, 2003:10; Stein, 2017:18). Lifton (1998:427) describes this concept as an “aura of sacredness” surrounding the essential dogma of the cult, which is perceived as the “ultimate moral vision for the ordering of human existence”. Stein (2017:18) confirms that the ideology and doctrines of the group are determined by the leader who has the authority to change it when necessary<sup>41</sup> and through whom the doctrine becomes the “master map of reality” (Hassan, 2016:132). Stein also notes that the all-encompassing nature and single point of origin of the doctrine “mirrors the closed, steeply hierarchical structure of the group” (Stein, 2017:18, 132). Furthermore, the ideological doctrine of the group is meant to not only filter the incoming information of the individual member, but also to dictate the way in which information is thought about by the members. In the end the doctrine “claims to answer all questions to all problems and situations. Members need not think for themselves because the doctrine does the thinking for them” (Hassan, 2016:120). In this sense a strict form of fideism is also introduced as part of the doctrine.

Cult members will inevitably be introduced to these ideological doctrines of the cult. Galanter (1989:6), for example, mentions that in some religious cults new converts will be introduced to the group’s ideology and doctrines after they have officially affiliated themselves with the group. In other cases, one may find, as indicated earlier, so-called “outsider” doctrines, meant for the public and low-ranking members, and “insider” doctrines, meant only for a selected elite within the group (Hassan, 2016:118-119). Stein (2017:146) sketches a scenario where the ideological

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<sup>41</sup> Hassan (2016:186) incidentally mentions that a healthy and legitimate group will not change their ideological doctrines to deceive society. According to Singer (2003:11), these changes may happen on a yearly basis and depends on “the outside pressures, local leadership, and the fancies of the leader”.



doctrines become more and more “fictionalized” the closer one is to the centre of the cult structure. In other words, the closer to the centre of the cult, or translated differently, the closer to the leader and the inner circle of the group, the more secrets will be revealed. Take note, however, that this, in return, will only mean a greater distance from reality. In the light of this remark, it is fitting that Lifton (2019) gives his book on cults the title *Losing reality*.

One must also keep in mind that, as a precondition for exercising control over doctrine, there must also be control over the interpretation of an authority. Many cults, especially religious cults, will embrace a certain authority that serves as the basis for their beliefs. Hassan (2016:186) describes this phenomenon in the context of cults who embrace the Bible as such an authority. He claims that many cults have leaders “who appear to hold God and the Bible above themselves as higher authorities; yet their interpretations of the Bible and God’s will are used to manipulate and control people”. In turn, Stein (2017:132) elaborates by adding that whatever the authority might be, whether it is the Bible, the Quran or even *Das Kapital*, the leader’s interpretation will always be the only correct interpretation on the table and must therefore be viewed as the “only true, sacred, holy, correct, developmental, effective, proletarian or transformative” one. All other stories and interpretations are coloured as being evil with no right to exist (Stein, 2017:202). In the light of these remarks, it is fitting for Martin (2003:17-18) to state that cults do not just gather around the leader, but also his misinterpretation of a specific authoritative source.

#### **3.4.10.2. Incontestable doctrines**

An important feature of the doctrine and ideology of cults is that it is utterly incontestable. Hassan (2016:121-122) notes, for example, that since “the doctrine is perfect and the leader is perfect, any problem that crops up is assumed to be the fault of the individual member” (also see Hassan, 2016:144). According to Lifton (1998:427), the sacredness of the dogma in cults is especially evident in the explicit or implicit forbidding of any questioning thereof. No conversation regarding the truthfulness of the doctrine is allowed, only the blind acceptance of the doctrine is demanded. As Singer (2003:67-68) notes, members must “merely acquiesce, affirm, and act as if you do understand and accept the new philosophy or content”.

Hassan (2016:140) offers a probing diagnosis of this situation regarding the doctrine of a cult. He elaborates on his claim that, in a context where thought-reform processes are being implemented, there is no way to view the doctrinal and ideological beliefs of the cult as a “mere theory, or a way to interpret or seek reality. The doctrine is reality ... Therefore all thinking, desires and action – except of course those prescribed by the cult – do not really exist.” In this sense it is clear that the cult leader, who is expounding the doctrine, is claiming ownership over

reality itself (Lifton, 2019:7). Hassan further explains that, since the doctrine must only be accepted and not understood, it will be propounded as the “one and only truth – and that it encompasses everything”. He concludes his diagnosis by stating:

The doctrine becomes the ‘master program’ for all their thoughts, feelings and actions. Since it is the “Truth”, perfect and absolute, any flaw in it is viewed as a reflection of the believer's own imperfection. They are taught that they must follow the prescribed formula, even if they don't really understand it. At the same time, the cult member is told that they should work harder and have more faith, so they will come to understand the truth more clearly (Hassan, 2016:140).

### **3.4.10.3. Scientific doctrines**

Cults will often claim that their doctrines are logically indisputable and absolutely precise according to scientific standards (Hassan, 2016:120; Lifton, 1998:427; Singer, 2003:73). According to Singer (2003:73), this will enable the leader to claim a universality to his doctrine and ideas, and any resistance against the doctrine will then not only be labelled as immoral, but also as irrational, illogical and unscientific. This notion will in turn provide certainty and comfort for the members knowing that their ideology passes all the tests of logic and science. In some instances, it will also quiet the search for knowledge found in some members and enhance the authority of the leadership, who is supposedly part of the “rich and respected heritage of natural science” (Lifton, 1998:427). Ironically, the claim of being scientific will also be the very thing that stops members from “engaging in the receptive search for truth that characterizes the genuinely scientific approach” (Lifton, 1998:428). Stoker (1995:46) comes to the same conclusion.

### **3.4.10.4. Control over the interpretation of an authority and doctrine in CiMI**

The result of an absolute and exclusive truth in cults is that it usually leads to ideological doctrines that cannot be contested in any way and which are all-encompassing. Former members of CiMI confirm that, since only the leaders have access to God, only they can interpret the Bible and dictate true doctrine (Anon., 2018a). According to one former member, during the years he spent in CiMI, the Bible was always forced to make space for CiMI's doctrines (Anon., 2018b). When it comes to their theology, the leadership's views are incontestable and considered to be the only sacred ideology. Members of CiMI are therefore expected to ‘internalise’ the doctrines of CiMI and know it by heart. The doctrines of CiMI play a big part in the control over members' thoughts by forming the new frame of reference through which everything is interpreted in the lives of the members. Labuschagne (2018), who for example states that CiMI wants to get to the minds of people with their doctrine, confirms this.

When Strydom (*Openbarings*, 2018) states that he wants to “safeguard” the Christ specie of God, he is connecting the doctrine of CiMI to his task as the leader. One can add the contrast

that CiMI perceives between their doctrine and that of 'religion'. According to them, CiMI presents pure doctrine while 'religion' teaches false doctrines full of lies. 'Religion' has no right to exist and to teach, according to CiMI. As with the previous control mechanism, this one will also be addressed in the following chapters.

### **3.5. Final biblical and theological remarks**

Although this chapter was devoted to the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults, it is deemed necessary to bring the discussion back to the theoretical framework of biblical theology. It remains remarkable how some of the categories that were addressed in the discussion above also feature in the passages of the Bible when the authors refer to false prophets, false teachers, and heresy in general. Some examples will briefly be considered here.

In Matthew 24:4-5 Jesus tells His disciples that they have to "take heed that no one deceives" them. He states that "many will come in My name saying, 'I am the Christ'". France (2007:902) comments on this verse saying that there will be people "claiming the role and title which properly belong to Jesus". While this is what CiMI's leadership does (as will also be shown to be the case in following chapters), rather notice the use of the word "deceive" in this passage. Liddell (1996:643) explains that this word means "to lead astray". In Matthew 24:11 and 24 Jesus also says that "many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" and that "false Christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive".<sup>42</sup> The theme of deception is prominent in this passage. It is the researcher's contention that CiMI is guilty of this kind of deception, and in order to do it effectively, CiMI needs to implement control mechanisms.

One can also consider Romans 16:17-18 where the apostle Paul states the following:

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

Notice how Paul refers to "smooth words and flattering speech" that are used to deceive the people. This clearly links up with the charisma of CiMI's leadership and also the deception, which is being introduced again. Moo (1996:931) explains that these people will "take advantage" of simple people through "subtle machinations". There are clearly sociological and psychological features visible in this kind of language. Paul also warns the Ephesians not to be deceived by "empty words" (Ephesians 5:6).

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<sup>42</sup> In contrast to the false Christs of whom people try to convince you, the pericope ends with the assurance that when Christ comes again, everyone will know it.

In Colossians 2:4 Paul writes the following: “Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words.” The deception happens by a kind of craftiness and persuasion that is empty. Wright (1986:99) emphasises, in light of this passage, “the importance of clear and straight *thinking*”. This explains why cults, such as CiMI, want to reduce one’s critical thinking abilities to fall for their “persuasive words”. The theme of deception is evidently vividly addressed in the New Testament. This deception takes place by people who speak “perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves” (Acts 20:30).

It stands to argue, in the light of some of these themes which are observable in the New Testament, that the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults have been part of heresy for a long time. This is not to say that every cult who theologically deviates will necessarily implement all the control mechanism unpacked above. It does, however, serve as evidence that deception by using control mechanisms, especially control over membership, thoughts, language, information and environment, behaviour, doctrine and God, is already visible in the description of deception in the Bible.

### **3.6. Summary and conclusion**

This chapter focused mainly on the sociological and psychological dimensions of a cult with the goal of showing that CiMI is not just a cult according to theological and doctrinal standards, but also according to the sociological and psychological traits of cultism. In order to understand the proper place of the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults, it was argued that the best way to understand a cult is to primarily evaluate the theological and doctrinal side of cults. In other words, theology and doctrine are primary and therefore indispensable. On the other hand, the point was emphatically made that the theological and doctrinal characteristics of cults, although primary, should not be dealt with at the cost of the sociological and psychological aspects thereof, since the sociological and psychological dimensions will provide one with valuable insights into the finer mechanics and dynamics of cults and have a proper place in any investigative study of cults. This provides the reason why an entire chapter was devoted to contemplating and discussing the sociological and psychological traits of cults.

The researcher progressed in this investigation by firstly providing insights into the general mechanics of cults within the theoretical framework of sociology and psychology. This content was necessary to set the stage for a deeper and more meaningful exploration of the so-called control mechanisms later on. It was furthermore established that the leaders and/or leadership of cults have a very specific agenda to achieve group cohesiveness and to achieve, in a sense, “ownership of reality itself”. In order for the cult to be in a position to control the reality of the cult member, and thus control the person and his/her environment, the cult must make the member

dependent on the group on multiple levels and isolate the member from other influences outside of the cult. This will ensure that the member will find it hard to ever leave the group and will additionally be turned, slowly but surely, into a devoted and loyal follower. All of this is achieved during a so-called thought-reform process. The theme of control was also developed as a major motif in cults and therefore the phrase “control mechanisms” is a fitting way to think about the sociological and psychological dimensions of cults. It was important to establish the notion that religious cults are by far the most numerous, but that the sphere of religion is not excluded from sociology and psychology. Instead, religion can produce far greater commitment and force in a sociological and psychological sense than aspects of non-religious life. Therefore, although the focus is placed on sociology and psychology in cults, religion still plays a major role.

After the general mechanics of cults were unpacked, attention was given to the role and the profile of a typical cult leader. Without the cult leader in place and acting in a specific way, no one is there to implement the control mechanisms during a thought-reform process in the first place. The leader is therefore indispensable to the existence of a cult and many scholars add the leader as a component which definitionally makes a cult, a cult. The leader, as the supreme authority, will usually set up a pyramid-like power structure in order to be able to control the individual cult members and their environment from his/her seat of power at the top. In many cases the leader will appoint a group of people to function as his/her ‘board of directors’, who will make sure that the leader’s commands are carried out and will enforce his/her rule as leader. The personal profile of a cult leader will include authoritarianism in order to function as a strong-minded and strong-willed person, who can exhibit a strong drive for power. On the other hand, the leader will also possess charisma, which is especially needed to gather a following who will fall in love with the leader and idealise him/her. When charisma and authoritarianism are combined in a leader, he/she becomes a totalistic leader who is dangerous. Besides these two traits, one can also expect the leader to have superficial charm, to be manipulative and conning, narcissistic, a pathological liar, have a lack of remorse, shame and guilt, shallow emotions, the incapacity for love, the need for stimulation, a lack of empathy, poor behaviour control, early behaviour problems, be irresponsible, show promiscuous sexual behaviour, show a lack of a realistic life plan, and to have entrepreneurial versatility.

Once the role and profile of a cult leader were established, it was necessary to investigate the leadership of CiMI in particular. This investigation established the fact that CiMI, under the leadership of their so-called “vision leader” Xandré Strydom, does indeed conform to many of the features typical of cult leadership. CiMI also established a strict hierarchy in the form of a pyramid. Strydom is at the top with a ‘board of directors’ working under his leadership. Strydom has the final authority and hence the final say on all matters regarding the group. He is not just any leader; he is the divinely appointed king of CiMI to whom people have bowed in the past.

This gives him a sense of divine authority, which separates him from his members as superior, with a godly task to accomplish. Former members have confirmed that Strydom, together with his leaders, all possess the traits of charisma and authoritarianism. This combination explains why Strydom and his leaders are on the one hand described as very likeable people; but on the other hand, there are instances when they shout at the members and verbally abuse them. CiMI's leadership therefore exhibits many of the features that were unpacked in the theoretical discussion regarding cult leaders. This means that CiMI displays many cultic traits in their leadership structure and profile.

The chapter concluded with an analysis of the control mechanisms of cults. The strength of these control mechanisms, which are implemented during a thought-reform programme, lies in the effect it has in its entirety. Each control mechanism functions as a link in a chain which, when implemented together and simultaneously, binds the cult members with a suffocating grip to keep them there for as long as possible. Each control mechanism was analysed in detail and afterwards also applied to CiMI, in particular, to further drive the point home that CiMI does indeed possess many traits of a cult from a sociological and psychological perspective. These different control mechanisms, with all their finer components, include control over membership, thoughts, emotions, behaviour, norms, language, information, environment and history. The last couple of control mechanisms have a strong religious flavour to them, which nonetheless enhance sociological and psychological control. These are 'control' over God, control over salvation, control over the interpretation of an authority and control over doctrine.

The conclusion that the researcher makes at the end of this discussion is that CiMI is indeed not only a cult from a theological and doctrinal perspective, but also from a sociological and psychological perspective. Many of the former members did not hesitate to call CiMI a cult and to affirm the existence of control mechanisms. Since CiMI implements all the control mechanisms and reflects the same leadership traits as discussed above, this conclusion is warranted. The researcher also ended the chapter with a brief look at passages in the New Testament, which corroborate the findings regarding sociological and psychological deception.

The following chapter turns to the more theological and doctrinal dimension of cults by looking into the concept of Scripture twisting. In a certain way, this chapter is a deeper investigation into the control that the leader and/or leadership of a cult attempt to exert over the interpretation of an authority, in this case the Bible.

## CHAPTER 4: SCRIPTURE TWISTING: DOES CIMI MISREAD THE BIBLE?

### 4.1. Introduction

As it was argued in the previous chapter, it is impossible to ignore what cults believe on a theological and doctrinal level. Although the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults, as seen in Chapter 3, are very helpful with many valuable insights to offer to the endeavour of counter-cult apologetics, this alone does not provide enough for a thorough apologetic handling of cults (Enroth, 1987:20; McConnel, 1995:17; Rhodes, 2001:20-21). Therefore, while Chapter 3 dealt with the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults and also showed how CiMI can legitimately be classified as a cult from the perspective of sociology and psychology, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 step into the primary domain of the theological and the doctrinal dimension of cults. In Chapter 1 it has already been noted that CiMI is a cult according to the theological and doctrinal definition thereof;<sup>1</sup> it is, however, necessary at this point to assess this area in much more depth and detail.<sup>2</sup>

Since the doctrines of many religious cults are based on an authoritative source, claimed to be divine revelation, it is crucial to investigate how cults arrive at their doctrines as they interpret their specific source of authority, in the case of this study, the Bible. Through the centuries of the Christian church, the Bible has always been believed to be divinely inspired and therefore uniquely authoritative.<sup>3</sup> Augustine (1887b:180; 1887c:201) writes that God inspired “Scripture which is called canonical, which has paramount authority” and that “Scripture has a sacredness peculiar to itself”. Consequently, all the essential doctrines of historical, orthodox Christianity are arrived at by interpreting the Bible in a specific way and drawing theological conclusions from these interpretations. This, in turn, also allows one to base these doctrines consistently on the Bible as its source, after following sound and good principles of interpretation. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:195) phrase this point quite clearly: “All the essential doctrines expressed in the Bible and in the early creeds are dependent on another doctrine – the historical-grammatical

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<sup>1</sup> For accessibility purposes the working definition for this study of a cult from a theological and doctrinal perspective is provided here again. According to this definition, which is considered to be primary, a “cult is simply any religious movement that is organizationally distinct and has doctrines and/or practices that contradict those of the Scriptures as interpreted by traditional Christianity as represented by the major Catholic and Protestant denominations, and as expressed in such statements as the Apostle’s creed” (Sire, 1980:20). As indicated earlier in this study, alongside the Apostle’s Creed, one can also add to this list the Creed of Nicene, the Creed of Athanasius and the Chalcedonian Creed. Also, although the definition from Breese (1989:16) is not the working definition, his description of a cult as an “organized heresy” remains insightful.

<sup>2</sup> The theological and doctrinal assessment continues in the following chapter.

<sup>3</sup> The attributes of Scripture will be unpacked in greater detail in Chapter 5.

method of interpretation.”<sup>4</sup> This point also introduces the slight distinction between the goals of Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Where Chapter 5 endeavours to evaluate the specific theological and doctrinal beliefs held by CiMI as a result of their interpretation of the Bible, Chapter 4 focuses more on the way that cults in general, and CiMI in particular, interpret the Bible, in order to arrive at their theological and doctrinal beliefs in the first place (Sire, 1980:14). In other words, Chapter 4 investigates the hermeneutics<sup>5</sup> and exegesis<sup>6</sup> of cults, specifically that of CiMI.

It is noticeable that Martin (2003:17-18) mentions the idea that a cult not only gathers around a person who is the leader, but also around the leader’s “misinterpretation of the Bible” (Martin, 1980b:16). This comment with regard to cults assumes that there is some sort of misinterpretation or misreading of the Bible by cults as they arrive at their specific doctrines. Therefore, the issue at hand in this chapter is not so much to evaluate CiMI’s essential doctrines as such, but to investigate the possibility that CiMI, together with other more established cults, is indeed guilty of what Sire (1980:11) calls a “methodology of misreading”.

In 2 Peter 3:15-16 one is also confronted with the idea of the Scriptures being twisted.<sup>7</sup> We read the following in this passage from the apostle Peter:

And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Although the apostle Peter acknowledges that there are difficult things to make sense of in the apostle Paul’s letters, he also mentions that there are “ignorant” and “unstable” people who twist the letters of Paul, as well as the other Scriptures.

Dauids (2006:304) explains that the “ignorant” person in this context does not refer to a ‘stupid’ person, but rather to an “uninstructed” person. He elaborates by saying that “ignorant” combined with “unstable” sketches the picture of someone who might be highly intelligent and

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<sup>4</sup> According to Howe (2003a:2-3), this method entails that the Bible is interpreted in the light of the original languages, historical/cultural setting, literary genre, the universal and particular principles of communication and understanding and, finally, the preunderstanding and presuppositions of the interpreter. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:195) also refer to this method as the “literal” method. They explain, however, that this method does not mean that everything in the Bible is “true literary”, but rather “literary true”.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Hermeneutics’ is the term that is used to refer to “the study of the principles of interpretation” (Howe, 2015:2), a definition corroborated by Kaiser and Silva (2007:17) and Osborne (2006:21).

<sup>6</sup> ‘Exegesis’ is the term that refers to any act of interpretation or explanation (Hays & Holladay, 2007:1; Howe, 2003a:2)

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that the researcher will not arrive at an accurate application of this passage without following the correct principles of interpretation in the first place. Any application and conclusion drawn from 2 Peter 3:15-16 by the researcher accordingly follows certain principles of interpretation, which are outlined below.



educated but lacks insight into the narrative of Scripture and the major concepts of the New Testament. This kind of person is uninstructed and therefore “unstable”. It seems, however, as if people who are “ignorant” and “unstable” are not the main matter for the apostle Peter in this passage. He is more interested in what these “ignorant” and “unstable” people are doing. The main issue for the apostle Peter is therefore that these people are twisting the letters of the apostle Paul, together with the “other Scriptures”, which in turn results in “their own destruction”.

According to Davids (2006:305), the term ‘twist’ can have two meanings. Firstly, it can refer to ‘torture’ or ‘torment’, and secondly, it can also refer to the distortion of something so that a false meaning results from that distortion. In this sense it is as Kistemaker and Hendriksen (1987:346) says: “Together they twist the meaning of Scripture so that the truth of God’s revelation is turned into a lie. As torturers make a victim on the rack say the opposite of the truth, so the false teachers place Scripture on the rack and distort its message.” This act of twisting the Scriptures is for the apostle Peter not something to be taken lightly, since these people will, in the words of Calvin (2010:425), “rush headlong into ruin” as they meet their “own destruction”.

One last factor to point out in this text is that the apostle Peter seems to aim this point at people in leadership positions who are guilty of actively twisting the Scriptures (Davids, 2006:305-306). This factor seems to corroborate Martin’s (2003:17-18) comment that cults gather around the leader and his/her misinterpretation or, translated differently, twisting of the Bible.

With the theological and doctrinal features of cults being primary, and biblical interpretation being so immensely important, this is a major point of disagreement with Hassan (2016:182) who remarks that he is not interested in whether a cult’s interpretation of the Bible is the correct one or not, but only in how a group behaves and communicates. If a wrong interpretation of the Bible can lead one to one’s “own destruction”, one must not neglect to investigate the hermeneutics and exegesis of cults. Therefore, this entire chapter will be devoted to this task.

In the light of these comments, one can understand why House and Carle (2003:13) emphasise the indispensable role of hermeneutics in the Christian’s life. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:195) go further by labelling the correct way of interpreting the Bible as an “interpretation essential”. Notice though that Christianity does not teach that one must believe in the historical-grammatical interpretation method of the Bible to be saved. The point is rather that one will not be able to consistently reach the essential doctrines of historical, orthodox Christianity without consistently following sound and good principles for understanding the Bible. With the correct method of interpretation, the essential doctrines of Christianity, or what Lewis (2002:6) calls “mere Christianity”, can be properly and consistently arrived at. Vanhoozer (2005:93) makes a

salient point in this regard when he says, “Christian theology ... succeeds or fails in direct proportion to its ability to render true interpretations of the word of God written.”

This, however, does not take away the fact that there are “difficulties in Scripture – passages which are obscure, references which are unclear, doctrines which to equally serious and committed Christians seem problematic” (Sire, 1980:13). The point is rather,<sup>8</sup> as Sire (1980:13) thoroughly explains:

[F]or the central core of the Christian faith ... the biblical evidence is overwhelming. The deity of Christ, the triune nature of God, the creation of the world by God, the sinfulness of all humanity, salvation by God’s grace through faith, the resurrection of the dead – these and many other such matters are clearly taught in Scripture.<sup>9</sup> Yet, all of these have been challenged by one cult or another, and sometimes these challenges have been based – so the cult may claim – on the Bible itself.

In order to present the principles of interpretation clearly and to attempt to expose the methodologies of misreading and misinterpretation on the part of cults, especially CiMI, the researcher will start by giving an overview of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation of the Bible. This way one will be able to better contrast the sound way of Biblical interpretation, with the ways that cults interpret the Bible. After the historical-grammatical method has been laid out, the researcher will explain the nineteen methods of misreading distinguished by Sire (1980:155-160) to illustrate how CiMI deviates from the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. Each of the methods of misreading will be applied to CiMI individually. After that follows a section discussing some of the most prominent Scripture twisting instances by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS), also known by its colloquial name as Mormons, and by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, also known as the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society. This is done in order to show that the only way that these cults can reject some of the essential doctrines of historical, orthodox Christianity and still “claim Scripture for their own” is, in the words of Sire (1980:12), “by violating the principles of sound literary interpretation”. If this can be established, the logical consequence would be that CiMI is also guilty of doctrine twisting.

In one of his sermons, Strydom (2019d) claims that CiMI is not “handling the Word of God deceitfully”. This chapter puts Strydom’s claim to the test to see whether it is indeed the case or not.

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<sup>8</sup> This point does not take away the possibility of arriving at objectivity in biblical interpretation. It only acknowledges the difficulties one may face when interpreting the Bible. Furthermore, it claims that although there are doctrines about which even Christians disagree, the Bible is still clear with regard to the cardinal and essential doctrines of historical, orthodox Christianity.

<sup>9</sup> This is a vivid reference to the clarity of Scripture, which is addressed in Chapter 5.

## **4.2. An overview of the historical-grammatical interpretation method of the Bible**

### **4.2.1. Introductory remarks**

Howe (2003a:1-2) notes that questions surrounding the interpretation of the Bible have been discussed by the church for the last 2000 years. He further states: “Interpreting the Bible is of special concern to Christians, and among those who are diligent students of the Bible the problem of conflicting interpretations is a fact of deep concern” (Howe, 2015:1). Muller (1996:645) also underlines the importance of hermeneutics by saying that of all the issues in theology, it is the most pressing issue because it is the most foundational. In turn, Vanhoozer (2005:93) calls biblical interpretation “the soul of theology”. Against this backdrop one might hear, in the words of Fee and Stuart (2014:21): “Every so often we meet someone who says with great feeling, ‘You don’t have to interpret the Bible; just read it and do what it says.’” Although this might seem like a positive sentiment, it is flawed in the sense that nobody escapes the act of interpretation; it is inevitable (Fee & Stuart, 2014:22; Sire, 1980:75). Accordingly, it is not as simple as Strydom (2016d), the visionary leader of CiMI, would have us believe when he says that what “CIM International teaches is found everywhere in the Bible and is actually something we can read instead of interpret”. It is rather as Fee and Stuart (2014:22) and Hendricks and Hendricks (2007:202) point out that every reader of the Bible is automatically also an interpreter of the Bible. In other words, a reading of the text is an interpretation of the text as well.<sup>10</sup>

The question then is not whether one needs to interpret the Bible, but by which principles one should interpret the Bible (Howe, 2015:2; Kaiser & Silva, 2007:16-17). Hodge (1872:187) explains that since every man has the right to read the Scriptures, he must have certain rules in place for guidance. He adds: “These rules are not arbitrary. They are not imposed by human authority. They have no binding force which does not flow from their own intrinsic truth and propriety. They are few and simple.” Howe (2015:2) accordingly comments that “theologians and philosophers through the centuries have studied the practice of interpretation and endeavored to establish principles that would lead the interpreter to the meaning of the text”. What follows is a brief overview of the well-established principles of biblical interpretation as listed by Howe (2003a:3). These principles are all features of the historical-grammatical interpretation method.

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<sup>10</sup> In this context Turretin (1992:153) notes: “To ascertain the true sense of the Scriptures, interpretation is needed.”

#### **4.2.2. The original languages of the Bible**

It is important to realise that the Old and New Testaments of the Bible were originally written in the languages of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek (Fee & Stuart, 2014:43). Although one does not have to be a scholar in the original languages of the Bible to study the Bible, it is still sometimes necessary “to understand how to do some basic study in the biblical languages” (Howe, 2003a:3).

Howe (2003a:3) uses a helpful analogy to demonstrate the importance of the original languages when reading and studying the Bible. He compares the study of the Bible to watching a football game on a black-and-white TV screen. Even though there is no colour on the screen, one is still able to follow the plays and know who ends up winning the game. But what if there is a crucial play somewhere during the game, and without colour it is difficult for one to tell exactly where the player’s knee ends and where the turf begins and where the ball lies. The grey colour doesn’t allow one to see the distinction between the player’s knee, the turf and the ball. This makes it difficult for one to know exactly what happened during the crucial play. Suppose that one can watch the replay of the same crucial play in colour, and suddenly one can differentiate between the player’s knee, the turf and the ball. This allows one to tell what happened during this crucial play and to make a call accordingly. So, although one can watch and follow the main events of a football game on a black-and-white TV screen, it is still difficult to make a call on the close plays. Just like this, Howe (2003a:3) explains that “even though you can read the Bible in the English translation, and you can understand the main points, and you know the message of salvation, without some basic knowledge of the original languages, it is very difficult to call the close ones”. In this sense, the suggestion is not that someone without any knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek is at risk of missing the essential truths of Scripture, but “it would be a great mistake to deny the importance of paying attention to the original languages” (Kaiser & Silva, 2007:51). This is confirmed by Hendricks and Hendricks (2007:30) as well.

One aspect of studying the original languages will be in the form of word studies. Osborne (2006:82) labels the aspect of word studies in the original languages one of the most popular features during exegesis. This does not only entail looking up the meaning of a word in a dictionary, but also “understanding how a word fits into its immediate context and how an author used a word throughout his writings” (Howe, 2003a:3). Hays and Holladay (2007:79) mention that although word studies can be illuminating, it can also be misleading and should therefore be done carefully and responsibly.

Howe (2003a:4) also notes that grammar and syntax is another important part of studying the original languages since words are arranged in meaningful combinations in the specific

language, a point also made by Hays and Holladay (2007:81). While grammar is concerned with the rules that dictate the correct use of a language, syntax refers to the arrangement of words in sentences. In the end it is the grammatical links between words in sentences that the author uses to communicate meaning (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:196; Howe, 2003a:4). Fee and Stuart (2014:51) underline this concept as they explain that each language has its own rules and structures that govern the way words link with one another in sentences. Eventually the “sense of a passage emerges from the grammatical structure wherein all parts of speech – including nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles, prepositions, and the like – are placed in a proper form from which only a certain meaning can be derived” (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:196).

#### **4.2.3. The historical and cultural setting of the Bible**

Another important principle of interpretation is to recognise and understand the role of the historical and/or cultural background behind the events in the Bible. Osborne (2007:158) describes the historical and cultural setting within which the different passages of the Bible originated as “an indispensable tool for uncovering the meaning of that passage”. The historical origin and background of the specific biblical books has always been part of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, since the ancient historical-cultural situation needs to be taken seriously (Duvall & Hays, 2005:99; Longman III, 1987:110). Klein *et al.* (2017:312) assert that Bible passages, in the light of its historical and cultural settings, also reflect a way of life which is different from that of modern-day readers of the Bible. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:196) also note in this regard that the sentences of the Bible must be interpreted in their historical context, and “should not be taken out of the space-time, cultural context in which they were uttered”. Maintaining this principle will protect the reader from making his/her own historical and cultural setting the norm for understanding the passage.

Kaiser and Silva (2007:117) further explain that more than any other religious book, the Bible maintains reality and verifiability since it is anchored in certain historical and cultural contexts. Consequently, the text of the Bible is filled with all kinds of cultural, geographical and historical references. Howe (2003a:5) adds that the “events in the Bible were real historical circumstances experienced by real historical persons who lived and communicated in their own cultural framework. Their language, their mode of communication, their understanding of the world around them, their manners and customs were all, to some degree, products of their culture.” In this sense, the cultural, geographical, topographical and political features of a specific book in the Bible will be helpful (Fee & Stuart, 2014:30).

#### 4.2.4. The context, literary genres, and authors of the Bible

According to Howe (2003a:6), the most important principle when studying the Bible is to understand a particular passage in its context. Klein *et al.* (2017:294) consider consistency with the context of any passage to be the first test for the interpretation of that specific passage. By properly applying this principle many reading errors can be prevented. Fee and Stuart (2014:31) refer to this as the literary context of a passage. However, it entails more than just reading a couple of verses before and a couple of verses after the passage one is attempting to interpret. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:196) explain it as follows:

Every sentence in Scripture should be understood in the context of its paragraph, and every paragraph in the context of its whole book. And each book of the Bible should be understood in the context of the whole Bible. So, meaning is discovered by context – from the immediate to the broader context.

Howe (2003a:6) further mentions that the context also includes “understanding the literary genre of a passage – the kind of literature it is. The Bible contains different kinds of literature – stories, letters, proverbs, poems, and prophecy to name a few – and we must be aware of the different ways each of these communicates.” It is clear then that the Bible contains many different categories or types of literature, which also need to be considered when interpreting the Bible (Duvall & Hays, 2005:120). Hays and Holladay (2007:104) note that the genre will help one to ask the right interpretive questions. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:196) add that one must pursue the literal meaning of the text, as opposed to a nonliteral or allegorical sense of it. By identifying a genre, it will be easier to follow the literal meaning, which entails “the normal, everyday, common understanding of the terms in the Bible” (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:196).

One last factor to emphasise is the notion that the meaning of the text is given to it by the author and should not be attributed to it by the reader (Geisler, 2002:173). In this sense it is the “reader’s obligation to discover the meaning that the author determined” (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:196). One must accordingly come to terms with and interpret the words of the authors (Hendricks & Hendricks, 2007:261). Klein *et al.* (2017:264) also stress the role of the author as follows: “We believe God intended the Bible to function not as a mirror reflecting the readers and their meanings, but as a window into the worlds and meanings of the authors and the texts they produced.” However, to discover the meaning that the author established, one must not look at the author’s purpose for writing the specific passage. As Geisler (2002:173) says: “Meaning is found in what the author has affirmed, not in why he affirmed it. Purpose does not determine meaning. One can know what the author said without knowing why he said it.” This, however, does not mean that the purpose of the author has no part to play in the interpretation of a text.

#### 4.2.5. Comparing Scripture with Scripture

The principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture has long been a valid principle to implement when interpreting the Bible. This principle has also been called the ‘analogy of faith’. Muller (2017:25) explains that this principle involves the idea that one can use “clear and unambiguous *loci* ... as the basis for interpreting unclear or ambiguous texts”. In other words, there is a harmony of “fundamental doctrine” throughout Scripture and therefore the passages that are unclear must be interpreted in the light of passages that are clear and plain (Terry, 1890:449). This principle is based on the assumption that Scripture contains no contradictions of any kind. Greidanus (1988:112) argues that this principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture can assist to establish the redemptive historical meaning of passages by going beyond the immediate purpose of a passage. In turn, Howe (2006) explains: “When a particular passage is unclear to us, we can and should go to other passages that address the same topic more clearly in order to help us understand the unclear passage.” Howe nevertheless reminds that “not every Scripture is interpreted by another Scripture”.

#### 4.2.6. The preunderstanding and presuppositions of the interpreter

This aspect of the historical-grammatical interpretation of the Bible endeavours to answer the question of how people can reach contradictory conclusions when interpreting the Bible, and in such cases, whether there is a correct, true and objective interpretation of the text. In other words, whether it is possible for one to “pull the actual truth out of a text and not just develop an arbitrary, fanciful, or incorrect interpretation” (Duvall & Hays, 2005:19). This issue is not just relevant to Christians differing with each other about certain peripheral doctrines, but especially to cults who differ with Christians on the cardinal and essential doctrines of Christianity.<sup>11</sup>

Take for example Kotze’s (2017c) comments, as a teacher of CiMI. When teaching on John 1:1,<sup>12</sup> he says that if Jesus is indeed the *logos* or the “word”, then they as a church have a problem since they are not serving God. This implies that the *logos* or “word” that the apostle John writes about in this passage cannot refer to Jesus, according to the teaching of CiMI. Kotze also concludes that the whole thesis of Jesus being the *logos* or the “word” in John 1:1 is “chucked out of the window” with the argument that he provides as he interprets John 1:1. By contrast, when one turns to Geisler and Rhodes (2008:50-51) expounding the essential doctrines of Christianity and referring to John 1:1, they clearly interpret, on the basis of John

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<sup>11</sup> It is worth pointing out again that from a theological viewpoint a cult deviates from cardinal and essential Christian doctrines, and yet still insists to be classified as ‘Christian’ (Martin, 2003:17-18).

<sup>12</sup> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

1:14-18, the “word” or *logos* in this passage as referring to Jesus. They even replace “word” with “Jesus”. This way the last phrase in John 1:1 reads “the Word [Jesus] was God”.

It is clear that both parties above embrace different interpretations of the same verse. As deliberated by Howe (2015:1-2), how can one know whose interpretation is the correct one, and are there legitimate reasons for claiming a correct or true interpretation of the Bible, and dismiss another interpretation as incorrect or false, for that matter? In Kaiser and Silva’s (2007:289) explanation of the goal of “historical exegesis”<sup>13</sup> they mention that the purpose of hermeneutics is to reach objectivity as to “prevent injecting into the text any meaning other than the strictly historical one”. Geisler (2002:160) also says something to the same effect, explaining that the possibility of objective biblical interpretation is a precondition for sound theology. In other words, if it is not possible to reach an objectively true interpretation of the Bible, sound and consistent theology would be impossible.

Part of the reason why two people can sometimes look at the same passage and come to two different interpretations is due to the differences in their preunderstanding and presuppositions or their respective worldviews. Klein *et al.* (2017:210), for example, claim that any interpretation is done with a “set of underlying assumptions”. Howe (2003b:1-2) elaborates as follows:

The words ‘preunderstanding’ and ‘presuppositions’ refer to the point of view, the perspective, the background, and the assumptions of the reader ... People come from various cultures, and because cultures often differ, people often differ about what they think is important and how they understand the world and life. The way a person thinks about the world, along with his or her values and tastes, helps form that person’s perspective. This kind of perspective has been called a ‘worldview’, which is simply the way a person views the world.

Accordingly, a person’s preunderstanding and presuppositions or a person’s worldview includes certain things one understands before studying the Bible. This includes metaphysical commitments as well.

The result of having a worldview is that people bring their own preunderstanding and presuppositions to the Bible when reading it. The danger that this dynamic introduces is that people approach a text with a specific and fixed “theological agenda already formulated” before even struggling with the passage (Duvall & Hays, 2005:89, 384). Kaiser and Silva (2007:28, 306, 307) also mention that people assuredly interpret the text of the Bible through the framework of certain theological presuppositions and sometimes force a fact to fit these

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<sup>13</sup> Although Kaiser and Silva (2007:289) explain the purpose of what they call “historical exegesis” in this way, they as authors do not agree with it, since, in the very next sentence they state that “such objectivity does not exist”. The researcher is therefore using their sentence in service of his own agenda.



presuppositions, resulting in a distortion of the text. The following notion of Klein *et al.* (2017:45) is also worth mentioning: “All interpreters bring their own presuppositions and agendas, and these affect the ways they understand as well as the conclusions they draw.”

To further explain the crucial place of one’s preunderstanding and presuppositions, Howe (2003b:2) uses a helpful analogy, comparing it to a pair of glasses. Imagine someone who carries a unique pair of glasses and he sees absolutely everything through these glasses. Now, imagine further that these glasses have a red tint to it which causes everything to appear red to this person. Hence, everything in reality is interpreted as having a red colour, and this redness might be completely normal for this particular person. It might be so normal that any attempt to persuade him/her that reality is not red, seems to be ineffectual. This person is so entrenched in the view that everything is red, that he/she is unable to “conceive of another kind of world” (Howe, 2003b:2). This accurately expresses the effects of one’s preunderstanding and presuppositions, not just on the act of interpretation, but also on the way one views reality.

Long (1994:390) also notes the important role of one’s view of reality when he says, “If interpreters approaching a given text disagree fundamentally on how they view reality, they will likely also disagree on how to interpret the text, or at least on whether the text, once interpreted, is to be accepted as trustworthy and authoritative.” Klein *et al.* (2017:226) also comment on this aspect explaining that even though someone has his/her own worldview, with presuppositions and preunderstandings, the person’s worldview as such does not determine the meaning of the text. “It may color how they interpret that text. We believe that the textual meaning is fixed (the text means what it meant); but readers bring more or less baggage to their pursuit of that meaning.”

In effect then, one’s worldview, with its preunderstanding and presuppositions, functions like these glasses. Things with which one is confronted, whether one thinks about it, reads about it, or learns about it, are filtered and interpreted through one’s preunderstanding of things. According to Klein *et al.* (2017:210), anybody who states that he/she does not have a worldview and studies the “Bible objectively and inductively is either deceived or naïve”. Such a preunderstanding, says Howe (2003b:2), “includes all that we believe, know, feel, and assume to be true. It includes our education, training, disposition, language, culture, history, and everything that makes us what we are.” The term ‘presuppositions’ has also been used to explain this aspect of life. Presuppositions are things that one supposes to be true and which form the basis of other beliefs that one holds. All these things form one’s preunderstanding and

assumptions and can have a far-reaching effect on one's interpretation of the Bible<sup>14</sup> (Howe, 2003b:2, 3; Klein *et al.*, 2017:226; Osborne, 2006:45).

To deal with one's preunderstanding and presuppositions – one's worldview – it is important to become aware of what it entails and take that into account when studying the text (Howe, 2003b:3; Osborne, 2006:517). Once there is an awareness of a certain worldview, there must also be a submission of this worldview, with its preunderstanding and presuppositions, to the text of the Bible in order to be “modified and reshaped by the text” (Osborne, 2006:517). This is confirmed by Longman III (1996:120). Duval and Hays (2005:94) explain that this act of submission will involve placing one's preunderstanding and presuppositions under the conditions of the text rather than over it in order to “study the evidence” (Osborne, 2006:407), instead of predetermining one's conclusions. Long (1994:375) also appositely explains this effect as follows: “Awareness of one's presuppositions and predispositions is, of course, also the first step toward avoiding special pleading and the distortion of evidence.” Howe (2003b:4) summarily asserts that the reason to be aware of the preunderstanding and presuppositions that govern one's thoughts is to be able to submit it to “the truth of the Bible”. Accordingly, although one's preunderstanding and presuppositions are inevitable, not all of them are immutable<sup>15</sup> and not absolutely everything is filtered through them by virtue of a “transcendental presupposition”, which is addressed below (Howe, 2015:136 & footnote 18).

It is crucial at this point to note, however, that just because everyone has his/her own preunderstanding and presuppositions in the form of a worldview, through which the text of the Bible is interpreted, it does not preclude someone from arriving at an objectively true understanding of the Bible.<sup>16</sup> Klein *et al.* (2017:242) ask the question: “Can we ever interpret the Bible in an objective fashion, or do we simply detect in its pages only what we want or are predisposed to see?” Howe (2003b:2) answers this question by stating:

Since everyone views the world from some point of view, the argument is often made that no one can have a neutral or totally objective perspective. At first sight this seems to be correct, but there is a fatal flaw in this reasoning. When someone claims that no one can be objective, that person is actually assuming that his or her claim is true for everyone. A claim that is true for everyone,

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<sup>14</sup> A clear example of this regarding CiMI is their metaphysical commitment to a Gnostic or matter-spirit dualism. This has already been observed in Chapter 2 and it is important to keep this commitment of theirs at the back of one's mind, since in some cases it does affect their interpretations of Scripture.

<sup>15</sup> An example of presuppositions, which is immutable and undeniable, is the laws of logic. Howe (2015:210), for example, mentions that the law of noncontradiction, the law of identity, and the law of excluded middle is properly called “transcendental presuppositions”. In this sense one's hermeneutic must also be tethered to the laws of logic. The laws of logic, as a tool for discovering truth, can assist one in changing other mutable presuppositions.

<sup>16</sup> Howe (2003a; 2003b; 2015) is, as far as the researcher could discover, unique among hermeneutical scholars in making a case for objectivity in biblical interpretation. This is why the researcher relies heavily on him for many aspects regarding objectivity and the interpretation of the Bible.

however, is an objective claim. What this person is really saying, therefore, is: “It is objectively true that no one can be objective.” The statement contradicts itself and therefore is false. On the other hand, if it is true that no one can be totally objective, then the person making this claim is not being totally objective. If the claim is not totally objective, then it doesn’t apply to everyone, and we don’t need to pay any attention to it.

To be sure, Klein *et al.* (2017:242) also address this issue by asserting that the question concerning attaining objectivity in biblical interpretation hinges on the following:

[The] validity of our presuppositions that the Bible communicates a message that can be discovered by critical methods and that this message is worth the effort to find it ... Thus, though we inevitably bring preunderstandings to the texts we seek to interpret, this does not mean that we cannot discover the meaning the text intends to impart.

The important thing to grasp is that if one cannot have an objectively true interpretation of the Bible, then the problem of conflicting interpretations seems meaningless. Conflicting interpretations is therefore only a problem for interpreters as long as there is a right interpretation of the text and a real possibility of attaining that interpretation (Howe, 2015:3). The gravity of this point is especially emphasised when Howe (2015:2-3) explains it as follows:

If there is a Word from God that is communicated in and through the Bible, then the fact that there are conflicting interpretations of what the Bible means creates a problem of knowing what God said. But if there is no correct interpretation of the Bible, then there is no specific word from God that must be discovered in the biblical text. The explanation of conflicting interpretations, then, becomes simply the fact that different people prefer to understand the Bible differently, and since there is no right interpretation, conflicting interpretations are equally reasonable.

It is clear then that in principle objectivity is not only possible when interpreting the Bible, but also unavoidable. In fact, without objectivity communication is impossible since one would not be able to tell what was communicated or whether one’s preunderstanding and presuppositions distorted the message. Duvall and Hays (2005:95) are therefore incorrect in their acknowledgement that “total objectivity is impossible for any reader of any text” (Duvall & Hays, 2005:94). Kaiser and Silva (2007:276, 289) also make this mistake when they mention that “total objectivity<sup>17</sup> on the part of the interpreter ... does not exist” and “objectivity that earlier scholars had aimed for does not exist”.

To be sure, the researcher is aware that CiMI is not relativistic when it comes to the interpretation of the Bible, since they present their interpretations, and their conclusions drawn from it, as objectively true. The point is that, in principle, it is possible to have an objective worldview about reality and consequently an objectively true interpretation of the Bible, despite

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<sup>17</sup> Kaiser and Silva (2007:109) define “objectivity” as a “fair presentation”, which, according to the researcher is not a helpful definition.

one's preunderstanding and presuppositions. To use Howe's analogy of a pair of glasses, objectivity would entail that the glasses one wears must not be tinted by a colour, but must rather help one to focus on reality in order to see it as it really is. The glasses in this case are therefore not tinted, but more down the line of focus lenses.<sup>18</sup> The possibility of an objective worldview, and therefore objectivity in biblical interpretation gives one a good starting point from which to oppose and correct contradictory interpretations where necessary (Howe, 2003b:3).

#### **4.2.7. The universal and particular principles of communication and understanding**

One final principle to point out in the historical-grammatical method of interpreting the Bible is the universal principles of communication. The reason why these universal principles of communication are part of this discussion is because it helps the interpreter to solve another apparent problem. Osborne (2006:467) introduces this problem as follows: "The problem of interpretation begins and ends with the presence of the reader. How does the reader get back to the perspective and message of an ancient text?" Klein *et al.* (2017:54) also introduce this problem by referring to the distance that the interpreter has between himself/herself and the "worlds of ancient texts" as a challenge to interpreting the Bible. They refer to the distance that there is in time, culture, geography and language.

Although studying the historical and cultural backgrounds of ancient cultures and investigating the original languages of the text can be of tremendous help in the act of interpretation, Howe (2003b:4) also maintains that there are aspects of people's preunderstanding and assumptions that are universal, despite factors such as culture, worldview and beliefs. If this is indeed the case, then it must also be the case "that aspects of the preunderstanding of the authors of the biblical books are universal", which in turn offers a link between the interpreter of today and the ancient text. The interpreter must therefore, among other things, identify the universal aspects present in the biblical text.

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<sup>18</sup> This also assumes that not everything one encounters in the world, including the biblical text, is filtered through one's worldview with preunderstandings and presuppositions. If it were the case that absolutely everything is filtered through one's worldview, then one would not be able to change a certain preunderstanding and presupposition that might be wrong. In other words, one's preunderstanding and presuppositions can only be submitted to Scripture and changed by the conclusions drawn from Scripture if the conclusions are not a result of one's interpretation, filtered through one's preunderstanding and presuppositions. Howe (2015:155) explains that "someone's understanding of the message is an understanding of the message as they interpret it through the framework of their preunderstanding. If, then, they are understanding the message of the Bible through the framework of their preunderstanding, which includes their prior commitments, then ultimately it is their own prior commitments that are the means of correcting their prior commitments." The presentation of exegetical evidence to someone who arrives at a different conclusion from oneself would lose its value if people did not have any access to objective reality and if it were only filtered through a worldview.

Communication is unavoidably governed by universal principles and since some of these principles are universal, it is by definition always the same for all people despite factors such as language, cultural and ethnic differences. If one understands these principles, one can study the Bible with the awareness that the discovery of the correct meaning of the text is indeed possible (Howe, 2003b:4).

The universality of truth is one of these inescapable universal principles. Truth is always the same for everyone, and it is not based on a particular point of view. It is rather as Howe (2003b:4) describes it:

If a statement is true, it is true whether it fits your point of view or not. Someone once said to me, "There's no such thing as truth." I responded, "Is that true?" It made no difference what this person's point of view was. Even when he tried to deny truth, he could not help but claim that his denial was true. The fact is, there is absolute truth, and this truth does no change just because someone doesn't like it or agree with it, and it does no change depending on one's worldview.

This notion should give one comfort, since the fact that there is absolute truth makes it possible for one to read the Bible and find absolute truth in one's interpretation thereof. An important aspect of absolute truth is the law of noncontradiction. This law states that a "statement cannot be both true and false in the same sense" (Howe, 2003b:5). While Strydom (2016d), for example, studies the Bible and comes to the conclusion that in CiMI they "do not teach Jesus is God", Geisler and Rhodes (1997:160) study the same Bible and say, "the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is God". According to the law of noncontradiction, Jesus cannot both be God and not be God at the same time and in the same sense. Howe (2003b:5) therefore mentions, "When two claims contradict<sup>19</sup> one another, one must be true, and the other must be false. When people want to communicate, they must do so on the basis of the universality of truth, or communication is not possible."

This leads one directly to the role of logic. While people have different preunderstandings and presuppositions, which form one's worldview, there is what Howe (2015:210) calls a "transcendental presupposition" which is logic. The laws of logic "transcend all world views and all perspectives, are unavoidable, and are necessarily the same for everyone" (Howe, 2015:210). While other presuppositions might be mutable, as alluded to earlier, this "transcendental presupposition" is immutable and gives one the necessary ground to challenge other interpretations.

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<sup>19</sup> Take note that there is a difference between contradictory claims and contrary claims. When it comes to two contrary claims regarding a matter, if one of them is true, the other one is false, but both of the contrary claims can also be false. Contradictory claims, on the other hand, entail that if one of them is true, the other is automatically false.

Another universal principle mentioned by Howe (2003b:5) is the unity of human nature, meaning that human nature is always the same for all people, and therefore all human species have “the same species-specific properties”. One of these species-specific properties is the human mind, only being subject to variations in “degree and not in kind”. Human nature is therefore the same for everyone, regardless of cultural diversity among humans.

These principles serve to demonstrate the following, in the words of Howe (2003b:5):

The principles of the unity of human nature and the universality of truth, however, demonstrate that there was not a “Hebrew” mind or a “Greek” mind or an “ancient” mind so that truth among those cultures at that period of time was somehow different than truth today. Humanity is one race with one kind of mind, and therefore the truth of the relation between God and humans is the same for us today as for the men and women of the Bible. The differences, then, between those ancient cultures and our modern culture are not in the nature of humanity or of truth, but rather in the social and cultural expressions of the same truths.

The universality of truth and the unity of human nature serve as preconditions for making it possible to discover truth in the Bible that can change the way people think and live (Howe, 2003b:5-6).

#### **4.2.8. Final remarks**

Since the historical-grammatical method for the interpretation of the Bible has now been discussed, and through it, a basis for objectivity in biblical interpretation has been given, it is time to focus on the ways in which cults misinterpret and misread the Bible. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:206-207) note that one must not be surprised when cults end up denying essential doctrines of Christianity, since they “consistently fail in the area of hermeneutics”. Once the historical-grammatical method of interpretation is abandoned in part or as a whole, one cannot consistently embrace the essential doctrines of historical Christianity. According to Howe (2003b:6), good principles of interpretation, as outlined above, can uncover “the universal truths” that form us “into the image of Christ”.

### **4.3. The ways in which CiMI and other cults misread the Scriptures**

#### **4.3.1. Introduction**

When describing the way cults treat the Bible, Geisler and Rhodes (1997:18) aptly claims that “the cults are notorious Scripture-twisters. When dealing with cults, one must keep in mind that they are always built not upon what the Bible teaches but upon what the founders or leaders of the respective cults say the Bible teaches.” In the same fashion, Morrey (1996:34) also warns about what he calls the “typical cultic hermeneutic”. He explains that this hermeneutic is based

on the leader and/or leadership's "private pipeline to God". In this sense cult leaders claim that their interpretations come directly from God. Morrey notes, however, "We demand to be shown the chapter and the verse, the grammar and the syntax, the context and the culture of a passage. Anything less than this is not a valid hermeneutic."

What consequently follows is a detailed discussion of the different ways in which cults twist the Scriptures and in one way or another violate the principles of sound interpretation. This is therefore not a list of false doctrines drawn from these different misreadings, but rather "a list of the errors made in the process of interpreting the Scripture" (Sire, 1980:14). This discussion starts by following the layout provided by Sire (1980:31-144) and applies each category of misreading to CiMI in particular. This is followed by some of the most prominent cases of Scripture twisting, as found in more established groups like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses. This way one will be able to see that CiMI is indeed following in the footsteps of other cults when it comes to the interpretation of the Bible.

Take note that this part of the discussion will rely heavily on Sire's (1980:31-144) work for the theoretical basis of the different methods of misreading. While Sire has applied the different methods of misreading to different cults and did not find an example by one cult for each method of misreading, the researcher attempted, as far as possible, to find multiple examples for every method of misreading, exclusively by CiMI. As far as the researcher knows, Sire's work has neither been formally introduced in this regard nor exhaustively used to expose the Scripture twisting of cults by applying it across the board to one cult.

#### **4.3.2. The text of Scripture**

This first body of misreadings is regarding the text of Scripture. Sire (1980:31) points out that "if we are to understand the Bible – or any work of literature – we must have an accurate text". It is one thing to have a text of which the original language is one's own language. It is another thing when the original language of a text is not one's native language. In this case help is inevitably needed. On the one hand you can learn the specific language in which the original text is written; on the other hand, you can find a good and accurate translation of the specific text that is available in your own native language. Sire (1980:31) notes that one can also "secure a few commentaries by scholars who have studied the original and can help us over the difficulties, if any, in the translation". The point is that a reliable text and/or an accurate translation is important for the prevention of error when you want to interpret the specific text. There are two possible ways in which cults can be guilty of misreading in this area: either by presenting an inaccurate quotation or by twisting the translation of a passage to better fit their theology.

#### 4.3.2.1. Misreading no. 1: Inaccurate quotation

Cults often provide an inaccurate quotation from the Bible. Sire (1980:155) expands on this notion by saying: “A biblical text is referred to but is either not quoted in the way the text appears in any standard translation or is wrongly attributed.” This stands as a warning that when one is confronted by someone who quotes the Bible in support of a specific idea or doctrine, one must make sure that the Bible is quoted accurately and see whether the Bible is actually stating what the person says it does (Sire, 1980:33). Many errors can emerge from an inaccurate quotation.

##### a) Examples of misreading no.1 by CiMI

###### Case 1:

Strydom (2018a) claims that the Bible is clear about the fact that the members of CiMI are Christs.<sup>20</sup> This teaching of CiMI entails that any person who is born from above, believes the larger body of teachings of CiMI, and joins CiMI, is part of the Christ specie as a result of being anointed with the Spirit of God, and is therefore a Christ. To justify this teaching, Strydom refers to the confession of the apostle Peter, which can be found in Matthew 16:16,<sup>21</sup> Mark 8:29,<sup>22</sup> or Luke 9:20.<sup>23</sup> Notice that in every account of the apostle Peter’s confession he calls Jesus “the Christ”, with the definite article in front of “Christ”. Strydom (2018a), echoes this confession from the apostle Peter by saying:

Who do you ... you ... say that the Son of man is? And you say, “a son of man is a Christ, a son of the living God”. And then Jesus says, “Flesh and blood did not reveal this to you.” So, when these people persecute us because we teach people that they are Christs, sons of the living God, they are not persecuting flesh and blood. They are persecuting God our Father. Because the time has come where people would... see themselves ... as sons of God! Sons of the living God. I love it when God puts that little word in there “living”. Isn’t it true? Because when we are Christs, sons of the living God, God can start to live. God can start to express himself.

In Strydom’s (2018a) version of Peter’s confession there is not a definite article in front of “Christ” but an indefinite article. In his commentary on the gospel of Luke, Stein (1992:108-109) suggests that the term “Christ functions here primarily as an identifying name. Although ‘Christ’ is actually a title (Acts 5:42;<sup>24</sup> cf. also Acts 17:3<sup>25</sup>), this verse reveals that the title was so closely

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<sup>20</sup> Notice the plural form.

<sup>21</sup> “Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’”

<sup>22</sup> “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said to Him, ‘You are the Christ.’”

<sup>23</sup> “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered and said, ‘The Christ of God.’”

<sup>24</sup> “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.”



identified with Jesus of Nazareth that it soon became part of his name – Jesus Christ.” Morris (1988:102) also explains with regard to the term ‘Christ’, that it is the Greek word for ‘Anointed one’, and that ‘Messiah’ is the transliteration of the Hebrew term with a similar meaning. He further says, “Anointing was for special service like that of a priest or a king. But the Jews expected that one day God would send a very special deliverer. He would be not simply ‘an’ anointed, but ‘the’ anointed, the Messiah. It is this one whom the angel announces.”

Consequently, when Strydom (2018a) changes the definite article in the apostle Peter’s confession to an indefinite article, he is guilty of using an inaccurate quotation in the service of CiMI’s theology. It would also seem as if he is claiming his interpretation to basically be God’s interpretation when he states the following: “They are persecuting God our Father. Because the time has come where people would ... see themselves ... as sons of God! Sons of the living God. I love it when God puts that little word in there ‘living’.” The point is, however, that Jesus was not merely ‘a’ Christ, but ‘*the*’ Christ who is also the only One legitimately carrying this title.

### **Case 2:**

Another example of an inaccurate quotation is found when Strydom (2018b) is teaching from Matthew 16:13-17.<sup>25</sup> This is the well-known account in the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus asks His disciples, “Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?”

Strydom (2018b) rephrases this quote and states that Jesus is actually asking the disciples, “‘Who do people say my flesh is?’ He wasn’t even talking about His spiritual being. He was asking them. The right question to ask is, ‘Who do people say my flesh is?’ You see because His flesh came to take away flesh.” This change in the quotation is based on the separation in CiMI’s theology between the fleshly or natural Jesus, and the spiritual Jesus Christ, as seen in Chapter 2. However, the point in this context is that Strydom (2018b) rephrases the quotation of the passage according to the teachings of CiMI. There is no indication in the text itself to introduce such a quotation of this passage or to suggest that Jesus is somehow referring to His flesh when asking this question. Therefore, this can be labelled as an inaccurate quotation of the passage in question, for the purpose of changing what Jesus said from a question Jesus

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<sup>25</sup> “explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and *saying*, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’”

<sup>26</sup> “When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, ‘Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?’ So they said, ‘Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter answered and said, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven.’”

asked pertaining to His true identity, to the notion that He was somehow only referring to His flesh.

#### **4.3.2.2. Misreading no. 2: Twisted translation**

Without an accurate text, one is “bound to be misled” (Sire, 1980:34) in one’s pursuit to discover the true meaning of the Bible. To address this point, cults have furnished their own translations of the Bible. To motivate this act of providing a translation, cults may claim that all current translations are supposedly inaccurate with regard to important issues. Sire (1980:34) adds by explaining that no current translation is entirely beyond improvement, and that many scholars through the centuries of church history have worked to provide their generation with a reliable translation of the Hebrew and Greek texts. The point of these scholarly attempts is to provide the most accurate texts possible. However, Sire (1980:34) contrasts this point with the idea that the translations provided by cults are more motivated to give “a biblical basis for cultic doctrine than to render the best texts accurately”. In this way the preconceived teachings of the cult are the mould to which the text is adjusted in the retranslation process (Sire, 1980:155). Howe (2010:28) explains in this regard that a “translation involved the world view of the translator, and it is grounded in the translator’s theological and philosophical commitments”. The responsible reader will accordingly test cultic translations to find out whether they are accurate or only making space for preconceived theological and philosophical commitments (Sire, 1980:38).

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 2 by CiMI**

Although CiMI does not add additional Scripture to the Bible like the LDS Church, and also has not yet produced their own translation of the Bible like the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* of the Jehovah’s Witnesses, they may still be guilty of this misreading. CiMI provides alternative translations, insert additional words, and replace certain words in an unwarranted manner.

##### **Case 1:**

As an example of a twisted translation, one can mention the instance where Strydom (2016d) refers to Hebrews 2:9-11. This passage reads as follows:

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren.

CiMI teaches that one must separate Jesus from Jesus Christ and that the word 'Christ' is a title that one receives when one is "born from above". Jesus was just an everyday man who still had part in the "first Adam", but he became the "second Adam" when he was born from above and then received the title 'Christ', which is seen as a specie or a seed that turns one into the "godkind" again. In order to receive this title and be part of the Christ specie, one must therefore be born from above and, in that process, one will also take one's leave from the first Adam which is the "flesh Adam". The goal is to be part of the second Adam, which is the "spiritual Adam" or the "Christ specie" (Strydom, 2016d).

In the context of this teaching, Strydom (2016d) explains that "everywhere that you see 'death' in the Bible you can also put 'Adam', because Adam is death". In this way he reads the passage in Hebrews 2:9-11 and replaces the word 'death' everywhere with 'Adam' in an attempt to illustrate his point. This replacement of 'death' with 'Adam', however, is not a legitimate thing to do without providing any evidence that might warrant such a replacement of words, which meddles with the translation of the verse. Moreover, if Strydom were to do this consistently throughout the whole Bible, it would lead to absurdities in other instances. If one were to replace the word 'death' with 'Adam' in Judges 16:30, for example, the passage would read as follows: "Then Samson said, 'Let me die with the Philistines!' And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his [Adam] were more than he had killed in his life." Or 1 Samuel 15:35 would read as follows: "And Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his [Adam]." It is not at all clear how these interpretations would make sense. Strydom goes further and also replaces the word 'sanctified' with the plural 'Christs'. This is another unwarranted replacement that ends up twisting the translation of the text according to Strydom's theology to support the notion that members of CiMI are also Christs.

## **Case 2:**

Du Plessis (2016a) exposes his poor knowledge of the original languages when he makes some comments on 1 Corinthians 15:22-23,<sup>27</sup> and in the process twists the translation of the text in order for it to fit the theology of CiMI. After reading verse 22 he begins to explain:

As in those that are in the first Adam everything is dead. That is what it says. It says that everything that is still in the first Adam is dead. For as in ... the first Adam all died, even so in Christ all shall be made alive, the second Adam. So, in the first Adam everything is dead. Do you guys see this? So, everything in the first Adam is dead. So, if you are still in the flesh of Jesus ... you are dead... spiritually dead. But those that are in Christ, the second Adam, the new specie ... the Christ specie.

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<sup>27</sup> "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits afterwards those who are Christ's at His coming."

Everything that is ... in that state shall be made alive. But each one in his own order. Listen now, “Christ the first-fruits, after those who are Christ’s at his coming.” Now I know in your Bible stands “after those who are Christ’s”, meaning you belong to someone. It is not what it says, because the Greek word for that Christ that they put an “s” on is still just Christ, the anointed. So, it says first of all, this is the order how it is going to happen. First of all, “But each one in his own order: Jesus Christ the first-fruits, afterwards those who are also Christ at his coming.”

Notice how Du Plessis (2016a) changes the translation from “Christ’s” to “Christ” to teach that each individual person becomes a ‘Christ’ when he/she is born from above. This teaching also implies that everyone in CiMI is viewed as a Christ. Since the theology of CiMI holds that everyone can become a Christ, it is advantageous for Du Plessis (2016a) to twist the translation of the text to open that possibility. If one were to investigate the Greek of this passage it quickly becomes clear that ‘Christ’ is in the genitive form, indicating that people belong to Christ. In other words, the people who are referred to in this passage do not bear the title Christ, but rather are Christ’s possessions. The translation as “Christ’s” is therefore correct.

### **Case 3:**

Another example of a twisted translation is when Strydom (2016e) rejects the translation of John 3:16, which reads as follows: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” According to Strydom, this is the verse that religion uses as their cornerstone. He explains it as follows:

[T]he word “only begotten” should not stand in the Bible. The word there in the Greek is *monogenes*, and *monogenes* is made up of two words: “forsaken” and “begotten”. So, God had one forsaken begotten Son. Jesus had to give up His flesh so that He could reveal the Christ-one on the third day ... For God so loved the world that He sent His forsaken begotten Son so that all who believe in Him will also forsake their flesh and will be begotten as Christs.

Strydom (2016e) clearly twists this translation. To add the word ‘forsaken’ is completely unwarranted since it has nothing to do with the word ‘only begotten’. The Greek word *monogenes* (*μονογενής*) emphasises the greatness of God’s gift to the world. It is translated as “only-begotten”, “one of a kind” or the “Unique one”, which indicates that God the Father gave His “best, His unique and beloved Son” (Carson, 1991:204; Liddell, 1996:518). Hendriksen and Kistemaker (1953:140) suggest that the gift of the “only begotten Son” signals the climax of God’s love. Why Strydom (2016e) would introduce this twisted translation is another question to address, but that he twists the translation in this case, by adding the word ‘forsaken’ into the meaning of the word ‘*monogenes*’ to better fit his theology, is evident.

#### **4.3.2.3. Concluding remarks**

Sire (1980:38) warns that if a cultist questions the available Bible translations today,<sup>28</sup> it is better to “look twice to see what is being claimed”. From the examples provided in this section, it is evident that cultic translations and other ways of meddling with the translation of a passage must be tested to discover whether it is an accurate translation of the text. CiMI is not only guilty of presenting an inaccurate quotation as the correct one in their teachings, but also of twisting the translation of the Bible to accommodate their theological presuppositions and preunderstandings. As will be shown in section 4.3.9., CiMI is only following in the footsteps of the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses with these methods of misreading.

#### **4.3.3. Scripture as rhetoric**

As noted by Sire (1980:41), the Bible has long functioned as a book that insists upon attention. He explains, for example, that “if you can employ it in the service of your own cause, you can gain for your cause a certain credibility – even where the Bible is not accepted as the sole authority on matters of faith and life”. This is supported by the fact that the phrase “the Bible says” still functions for many people as the ultimate authority (Sire, 1980:23).

##### **4.3.3.1. Misreading no. 3: The biblical hook**

This misreading refers to a situation where Scripture is used mainly for rhetorical purposes. One way in which this might happen is when the Bible is quoted at the beginning of an argument that ends up supporting a cultic doctrine. In this manner the Bible is only used as “a hook to grasp the attention of readers or listeners. ‘The Bible says’ gets the attention, but what follows the quotation might be far from traditional Christian teaching and far from the intention of the Bible itself” (Sire, 1980:41-42). This practice causes the Bible to be reduced to a device used to manipulate and support cultic doctrines that would usually appear questionable but are now cloaked under a reference to Scripture (Sire, 1980:156). This misreading is not exclusive to cults, since some Christian preachers are also guilty of using the Bible the same way. The preacher might want to communicate something to the congregation, so the preacher finds the first verse or two that sound as if it is supporting his idea and bases his “preconceived message” (Sire, 1980:42) upon those verses, without looking at its original context.

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<sup>28</sup> To be sure, not all new translations are misleading.

## **a) Examples of misreading no. 3 by CiMI**

### **Case 1:**

An example of this technique is when Strydom (2016d) emphasises some of CiMI's teachings over against the teachings of other churches that hold to the doctrine of the Trinity. In his own words he says, "We don't have a triune God teaching, we do not teach Jesus is God, and we have started to build a kingdom." He then asserts that "what CIM International teaches is found everywhere in the Bible and is actually something we can read instead of interpret". When in support of a view, one uses a phrase that explicitly claims that this particular view is "found everywhere in the Bible," (Strydom, 2016d) it certainly has some rhetorical weight behind it. Right after Strydom (2016d) rejects two cardinal doctrines of the historical Christian faith, he claims that what he is teaching at CiMI is everywhere in the Bible and, furthermore, that his teachings are so clear and precise that they entirely surpass the act of interpretation. This claim from Strydom (2016d) is nothing more than a biblical hook implemented to get the attention and favour of his listeners.

### **Case 2:**

Labuschagne (2016c) is also guilty of this method when he says, in an attempt to disprove the doctrine of the Trinity, that just by "looking at what Jesus and the apostles taught us in the Bible, we do not find such a doctrine, but rather the opposite, almost on every page of the New Testament". He levels this statement against the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of his sermon in order to gain a rhetorical advantage. The claim that the opposite of the doctrine of the Trinity is rather the case and clear on almost "every page of the New Testament", is not yet an argument in support of such a claim, only a rhetorical biblical hook to attract attention and to induce CiMI's members to gain trust in his teachings.

### **Case 3:**

Kotze (2017c) is also guilty of implementing a biblical hook as rhetoric when he teaches at CiMI. He starts off by providing a lengthy argument which states that the phrase "In the beginning" in John 1:1<sup>29</sup> is not a reference to the beginning of Genesis 1:1<sup>30</sup> at the time of creation, but rather the beginning of Jesus's public ministry, which started in Galilee, according to Acts 10:37.<sup>31</sup> To support this claim, he insists that "if you can't answer Scripture with Scripture, then it is open to interpretation for anyone. But if you can back Scripture with Scripture" then, according to Kotze

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<sup>29</sup> "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

<sup>30</sup> "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

<sup>31</sup> "... that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached."

(2017c), the “beginning” as referenced in John 1:1, refers to a point in time after the baptism of Jesus, as one reads in Acts 10:37. Later he also adds the following: “I can give an account of ‘the Word’ and I can answer Scripture with Scripture.”

It must be noted at this point that the principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture is a valid principle to implement when reading the Bible (Sire, 1980:58-59). However, it can still be abused, as Howe (2008:9) points out. He explains this potential abuse as follows:

The abuse of this practice arises from a tendency either to overlook or ignore an underlying issue – generally speaking, Scripture must be interpreted, and that includes any Scripture passage to which an interpreter appeals in his effort to support his interpretation of another Scripture passage. In other words, to claim that one is interpreting Scripture with Scripture often simply means that the interpreter has interpreted one Scripture passage in one way and is using his interpretation of that passage to support or clarify his understanding of another Scripture so as to interpret it in a comparable way. But, if an interpreter’s interpretation of a given passage is questionable, his appeal to other passages does not serve to support his interpretation of the passage in question, because his interpretation of those other passages may be equally questionable.

The point that Howe (2008:9-10) makes is that to implement this method of interpretation, although valid, is still an interpretive process of which the conclusions can be refuted in one way or another. He continues to elaborate on the abuse of comparing Scripture with Scripture and explains the dubious way in which it can be used. For example, when someone claims that in comparing Scripture with Scripture you somehow escape the act of interpretation and is immediately granted “the hermeneutic high-ground in the debate”. According to Howe (2008:9-10), using the principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture cannot automatically turn one’s interpretation into the correct interpretation, which is beyond dispute. By just “saying ‘this is Scripture interpreting Scripture’ does not prove or guarantee the truth of the outcome. That is just rhetoric.”

In the light of Howe’s (2008:9-10) thorough insights, it is clear that when Kotze (2017c) says, “You know, if you can’t answer Scripture with Scripture, then it is open to interpretation for anyone”, he is rhetorically abusing the principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture. On the one hand he is saying it to sound as if his conclusions drawn from his interpretations are in fact just a pure reading of the text and not an interpretation. On the other hand he is using it as rhetoric to set up his position as the only position that can answer Scripture with Scripture. Meanwhile the interpretation that “the beginning”, as referred to in John 1:1, is in fact referring to the same beginning one reads about in Genesis 1:1 can also answer Scripture with Scripture, without necessarily abusing the principle. White (1998:49) reminds one: “Just as Genesis introduces God’s work of creation, so John 1:1 introduces God’s work of redeeming that people,

and that work has been going on just as long as creation itself.” Kotze is therefore guilty of using the biblical hook.

#### **4.3.3.2. Concluding remarks**

The biblical hook, as indicated above, is a valuable instrument in the hands of cults to lure people into deception. In Acts 17:11 one reads about the apostle Paul and Silas in Berea. Once they arrived there, they went to the Jewish synagogue to tell people about the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Jews in Berea, one reads, searched “the Scripture daily to find out whether these things were so”. Kistemaker and Hendriksen (1990:621) observe that the Bereans “open the Scriptures” with “ready minds ... to see whether the teachings of Paul and Silas accord with God’s written word”. A biblical hook would not have worked on the Bereans since they listened to Paul and Silas with ready minds and tested their teachings. When anyone makes a claim that “the Bible says”, one must be ready to investigate it further and to test that claim. CiMI is guilty of using this kind of rhetoric to give weight to their arguments for the propagation of their beliefs. This is an abuse of the claims the Bible is really making and should be pointed out for what it is.

#### **4.3.4. Scripture as literature**

Although it is an obvious point to make, it remains important in this discussion to remember that the Bible is literature, meaning that the authors of the different books of the Bible used normal literary forms to write the Bible. Sire (1980:51) confirms this point by saying, “God chose to reveal himself to us by speaking through his prophets in ordinary language.” He further mentions, “The rules for understanding the Bible are therefore essentially the same as the rules for understanding Homer, Aeschylus, Dante, Milton, Dickens and Conrad.” The different texts must be read in the same way the author wrote them. In other words, if the author wrote a letter, one must read it as a letter. If the author wrote poetry, one must read it as poetry. If it is Jesus telling a parable, then one must read it as a parable. Mindful of this, Sire (1980:51) notes that “a host of errors can be avoided simply by realizing the kind of literature each portion of the Bible actually is”. What follows is an exploration of different reading errors that emerge from failing to take the literary character of the Scriptures into account.

##### **4.3.4.1. Misreading no. 4: Ignoring the immediate context**

According to Sire (1980:52), a failure to account for the immediate context of the verse or passage under investigation, is one of the simplest errors one can make. This happens when a passage is quoted, but removed and isolated from its immediate context, which in many cases contributes greatly to the meaning of the text (Sire, 1980:156). In this sense, any reading of a



passage that contradicts the meaning of the specific passage in its immediate context cannot function as the right interpretation (Sire, 1980:57).

### a) Examples of misreading no. 4 by CiMI

#### Case 1:

Kotze (2017a) ignores the immediate context of the book of Daniel Chapter 7, and provides inadequate evidence, if any evidence at all, for some of his claims with regard to Daniel 7:13-14<sup>32</sup> and also verse 27.<sup>33</sup> After reading verse 13-14, he mentions that verse 27 is the explanation of the prophet Daniel's visions that he described in verse 13-14, specifically with regard to the title of "the Son of Man". Kotze (2017a) suggests:

When the Bible refers to a Son of Man, it is not speaking of a person.<sup>34</sup> It is speaking of a specie ... the sent one. Because that is why it says in the vision, he saw one like the Son of man. So, there is one that stands for the whole specie. One like the Son of Man ... and then when he says the vision is explained, the kingdoms are given to the people. Who are these people? The Son of Man! Are you understanding this? So, the Son of Man is the people.

Kotze (2017a) is interpreting these verses in the book of Daniel in a manner that fits within the larger framework of CiMI's theology. The theology of CiMI entails that the Christ is not a 'who', but rather a 'what', referring to a Christ specie that rises within anyone who is born from above, anointed with God's Spirit, and who understands and embraces CiMI's teachings. Consequently Kotze (2017a) is implementing the phrase "the Son of Man" in service of CiMI's theology to refer to a specie that dwells in "the people", rather than it being a reference to one person. According to him, the idea in verse 27 that the "kingdom and dominion ... Shall be given to the people" communicates this truth. The question is, however, whether his interpretation has enough evidence to support it and whether it is consistent with the broader context of Daniel 7.

Although the phrase "the Son of man"<sup>35</sup> is also used to refer to the prophet Ezekiel, a case can be made that this title has a unique application here in Daniel 7:13-14. One must remember that Daniel 7:13-14 is situated within the framework of a broader context and forms part of a vision

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<sup>32</sup> "I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed."

<sup>33</sup> "Then the kingdom and dominion, And the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, And all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

<sup>34</sup> An important question that is not answered by Kotze (2017a) is: If the Son of Man is not a person but an impersonal specie, why does the passage still use personal pronouns when referring to the kingdom and dominion of the Son of Man?

<sup>35</sup> Since this discussion focuses on the title of 'the Son of Man', it is not repeated in Chapter 5.

that already begins earlier in verses 1-2, where one reads: “In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts. Daniel spoke, saying, ‘I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea.’” These opening verses provide an historical context to this chapter, but also introduce the reader to a vision that the prophet Daniel had while he was on his bed.

Boice (2003:83) observes that the book of Daniel maintains a certain theme throughout the entire book. He mentions that at the beginning we read the following:

Nebuchadnezzar took the holy articles from the temple of God in Jerusalem and carried them back to Babylon, where he laid them up in the temple of his god. It was a way of declaring that, in Nebuchadnezzar’s judgment, the gods of Babylon were superior to and more powerful than the Jewish God, Jehovah. But were they? It seemed so. Jerusalem had fallen to Nebuchadnezzar’s armies. However, the entire development of the book shows that God’s answer to the question is that God is still in control of history – although the kingdom of Babylon had triumphed for a time.

The result of Nebuchadnezzar’s triumph is that his kingdom would eventually fall to the forces of the Medes and the Persians under king Darius. Consequently, the kingdom of Darius would fall to the forces of the Greeks under the command of Alexander the Great, and later the kingdom of the Greeks would fall to the Romans. The rise and fall of these kingdoms and dominions are what is portrayed in the form of four beasts in the beginning of Daniel’s vision in Daniel 7 (Boice, 2003:83). Goldingay (1989:169) confirms that the beasts in Daniel’s vision “clearly enough portray the rise and fall of worldly kingdoms” and, during this juggling of power, God is still in control of history.

According to Duguid (2008:115), the centre of Daniel’s vision starts in verse 9<sup>36</sup> where one is introduced to the heavenly court, and where thrones are being set up for judgement. The central throne in the vision is occupied by “The Ancient of Days”, who is God Himself and who is clearly presented as “a judge who has the wisdom to sort out right from wrong, the purity to choose the right, and the power to enforce his judgements” (Duguid, 2008:115). The vision also introduces the agents of God in the heavenly court who are described as “thousand thousands” and “ten thousand times ten thousand”. These agents of God are standing before His throne, ministering to Him and when the judgement begins, they are the ones who slay the last beast and strip the other beasts of their authority and power.

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<sup>36</sup> “I watched till thrones were put in place, And the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, And the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, Its wheels a burning fire.”

In turn, Boice (2003:83) continues to explicate the vision in Daniel 7 by claiming that “only at the end of that long history, which God was controlling, would there come an eternal kingdom that, like a rock, would destroy the other kingdoms, grow to be a great mountain, and fill the earth”. Against the backdrop of earthly kingdoms and dominions rising and falling away under the watchful eye of “the Ancient of Days” on His throne, in verse 13-14 the prophet Daniel introduces a figure whose kingdom will be everlasting. The question then is: Who is this figure to whom the title “the Son of Man” is given? Goldingay (1989:168) says that the phrase in the original Hebrew can be translated as “a humanlike figure”. Therefore, whoever this figure is, he clearly has a human nature and is, in this way, distinct from the beasts already mentioned earlier in the vision (Need, 2008:6). Furthermore, he is not just given everlasting authority and dominion, but he also “receives the worship of all peoples, nations, and languages” (Duguid, 2008:117). Need (2008:6) points out that, although this figure is a man, his setting in the heavenly court makes him a special man and therefore the title “indicates royal rank!” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:442). The question then rather becomes, in the words of Boice (2003:83): How can “any mere human kingdom, however blessed by God, take on these eternal characteristics?”

The most reasonable answer to this question would be that “the Son of Man” in Daniel 7 is not a mere human being, and “His kingdom is no mere human kingdom. On the contrary, this figure receives the worship of all peoples, nations, and languages, while only God is allowed to be worshipped. One can conclude therefore that the one who is ‘like the son of man’ is also God; he is the God-man” (Boice, 2003:83). Duguid (2008:117) observes that, although the prophet Daniel had limitations in the way this vision should be understood, when this passage is taken in the context of the entire Bible, “we have the benefit of the hindsight of the prophecy’s fulfilment”. When the New Testament, especially the gospels, are also pulled into this discussion, it becomes clear that of all the titles<sup>37</sup> given to Jesus, “the Son of Man”, which He took over from the prophet Daniel, is the only title He used for Himself (Boice, 2003:84). The title of “the Son of Man” was a perfect title for Jesus Christ, involving His humanity and, through the context of Daniel 7, linking it with “the unparalleled glory of God himself” (Duguid, 2008:117).

A clear example is seen in Matthew 26:64.<sup>38</sup> This verse is Jesus’s answer to Caiaphas at his trial when he asked Jesus whether He is “Christ, the Son of God”. Although his question only involved the title “the Son of God”, Jesus’s answer also made a clear reference to Daniel 7:13-14 by claiming to not just be “the Son of God” but also “the Son of Man sitting at the right hand

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<sup>37</sup> Boice (2003:84) explains that there are many titles used to refer to Jesus in the New Testament. Some of these titles include “Lord”, “Christ (Messiah)”, “the Alpha and Omega” and the “Good Shepherd”.

<sup>38</sup> “Jesus said to him, ‘It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven”. Boice (2003:85) explains that the Jewish rulers understood this claim of Jesus perfectly since Caiaphas accused Him of blasphemy directly after His answer and He was condemned to death (verse 65<sup>39</sup> and onwards). Another example is John 3:13,<sup>40</sup> which also indicates that Jesus used the title “the Son of Man” to teach his disciples about His pre-existence. In this verse Jesus makes the statement that “the Son of Man” came down from heaven and will ascend back into heaven again. Boice (2003:86) mentions that the disciples of Jesus “would have recognized this statement as a reference to Daniel. They would have perceived Jesus to be teaching that he was the same figure seen by the prophet so many years before”.

To identify “the Son of Man” with “the people” later in verse 27, as Kotze (2017a) does, seems to be a major illegitimate jump, especially without providing any evidence to support such an interpretive move. Duguid (2008:117) concludes that the Son of Man “cannot merely be an angel or personified representative of Israel. This son of man is given an everlasting and indestructible dominion, a sovereignty that belongs to God himself.” Taken within its proper context, and also within the broader context of the whole Bible, Kotze (2017a) is clearly ignoring the immediate context of Daniel 7, while not providing any evidence to support his conclusions drawn from this passage. This is a clear misreading by this *‘leermeester’*. The context of this chapter and the evidence indicate that “the Son of Man” is none other than Jesus Christ.

### **Case 2:**

Strydom (2017a) gives one a couple of reasons to suspect him of ignoring the immediate context when he is dealing with the book of Acts, Chapter 17. He begins to read Acts 17:22-23 which reads as follows: “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown God.’” However, this is not how Strydom (2017a) reads these verses. Instead, this is what he says about verse 22-23:

Then Paul, or Xandré, or the *Leermeesters*, you can put any name there now, stood in the midst of South Africa and said, “Men of Athens, men of South Africa, men of the world, I perceive that in all things you are very religious. For as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown God.” Now let me tell you something, God is unknown because Jesus is God.

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<sup>39</sup> “Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, ‘He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy!’”

<sup>40</sup> “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”

The fact that Strydom (2017a) says “you can put any name there now” in the place of the apostle Paul’s name, without giving any reason to do this, is already to ignore the immediate context of this passage. Furthermore, to conclude that “God is unknown because Jesus is God” is not just to be guilty of overspecification with regard to this passage, but again not keeping track with the immediate context of Acts 17.

Acts 17 provides the reader with historical information about Paul’s life when he was in the city of Athens, waiting for Silas and Timothy. After speaking to the people in the marketplace, he was invited to address the Areopagus, which was a council of men with the authority to interfere in some of the public affairs in Athens (Barrett, 2004b:832). Furthermore, the apostle Paul’s reference to the altar with an inscription “to an unknown God” did not refer to some apparent state of God in the church, as Strydom (2017a) is trying to say. Paul did not attempt to say to the Athenians that God is unknown to them because of some other belief that they held, like believing in the deity of Jesus,<sup>41</sup> for example. Paul was rather using this phrase as a way of drawing attention to his message and as a way of contrasting the true God of Christianity with the false gods of the Athenian pagans. Marshall (1980:302) states that Paul seized this inscription as an opportunity to introduce the Athenians to “his own proclamation of the unknown God”. This was his way of creatively making a case for the one true God. Strydom (2017a) loses track of the context in this passage by taking the phrase “to an unknown God” completely out of its context and jumping to the idea or conclusion that God is supposedly unknown if Jesus is also believed to be God.

Strydom’s (2017a) exposition of Acts 17 goes further. After reading verse 23-24, he states: “He dwells in Christ. His temple! All the Christs, that is God’s temple!” Strydom (2017a) is suggesting that God’s temple is the so-called ‘Christ specie’ that arises in everyone who believes that he/she is born from above and therefore is a Christ. In other words, God dwells in the people who are members of CiMI since they are the people who, after being born again, become Christs. This is a strange reading of verse 23-24, where one reads the following: “Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands.” In these verses Paul is not trying to point out who or what the temple exactly is where God wants to dwell. He is rather contrasting the idols of the Athenians with the one true God of Christianity. While the Athenian gods lived in their own temples built for them by people, the God of Christianity, as Creator and Lord, “clearly does not live in a temple made by human hands” (Marshall, 1980:303).

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<sup>41</sup> To be sure, the Athenians in this context did not believe in the deity of Jesus. The researcher only introduces the example of Jesus’s deity here since it is the example that Strydom (2017a) used to make his point.

Strydom (2017a) goes further yet. He reads verse 29<sup>42</sup> and then makes the following claim: “God wants to entrust His Divine Nature to His temples”, arching back to his previous remark on verse 23-24. In other words, God wants to entrust His divine nature to the Christs. Strydom (2017a) seems to ignore the context once again. Barret (2004b:849) summarises Paul’s argument in verse 29 as follows: “If human nature is what we know it to be, and if we who have human nature are God’s children, the divine nature will be of no lower order. We deny our own proper being if we identify our progenitor with material objects.” In this context then, the apostle is saying that God does not dwell in a manmade temple of some kind, and that His divine nature is not in the same class as any material object found on the face of the earth. He is in an entirely different class altogether. This is all uttered by Paul to contrast the one true God with the false gods of the Athenians. Strydom (2017a), however, divorces these verses from their immediate contexts and ends up applying them in support of their theology that God dwells in His Christ specie because He entrusts His “Divine Nature” to His Christ specie only.

### **Case 3:**

Strydom (2018c) provides another example of ignoring the immediate context of John 5:17-18.<sup>43</sup> This passage is preceded by the instance where Jesus healed a paralytic on the Sabbath. According to the Jewish law, any work of any kind is forbidden on the Sabbath, and therefore the Jews wanted to kill Jesus after healing a man on the Sabbath. Jesus’s answer to these Jews gave them more reason to seek His death, since He claimed that God is His Father, which to the Jews was a claim of equality with God. To the Jews Jesus was “making Himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

Strydom (2018c) takes this portion of Scripture and says,

And also, this plan is making God your Father, not Jesus Christ ... For 6000 years we did not think we were equal in value to God. But do you think you are equal in value with God? Yes! But different in function. When did that start to happen? For the last six years.<sup>44</sup> Can you see the consequences that this Gospel, this faith produces? Because how will you ever represent someone in the earth if you do not believe you are equal in value to Him to be able to do it. It will not happen, it is impossible.

For some reason Strydom (2018c) manages to apply Jesus’s claim to deity to everyone in CiMI in the sense that they are equal in value to God. However, to do this is not just to provide

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<sup>42</sup> “Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”

<sup>43</sup> “But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.’ Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.”

<sup>44</sup> This is a reference to the timespan since CiMI began to preach their theology and doctrine.

inadequate evidence, but also to ignore the context of John 5. The context clearly suggests that this is a conversation between Jesus and the Jews, and one must remember that it “was [Jesus’s] claim of being equal with God that nailed Christ to the cross” (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1953:196). The Jews immediately knew that with the phrase “My Father”, Jesus claimed deity “in the highest possible sense of that term” (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1953:196). Michaels (2010:305) observes that this claim of deity by Jesus should come as no surprise since “the reader of the Gospel has known from the start that ‘God’ (*Theos*) is exactly what Jesus is (see 1:1,<sup>45</sup> 18<sup>46</sup>), so that to hear it from Jesus’ own lips (implicitly) and from his opponents (explicitly) comes as no surprise, but as confirmation.” Hence, the context of the whole gospel according to John is making the case for the deity of Jesus. Furthermore, there is no indication in the immediate or the broader context to suggest that mere people, or according to Strydom (2018c) the members of CiMI, are equal in value to God. Kruse (2003:153) astutely states that, according to Jewish monotheism, it is “utterly reprehensible” to claim equality with God, “but in Jesus’ case this was not so, because he was God (1:1)”. This makes Strydom (2018c) guilty of ignoring the immediate context of John 5 to introduce his own ideas. Jesus is claiming deity for Himself in the sense of being equal with God. He is not claiming it for the church or a chosen people who are, by virtue of being born again and anointed with God’s Spirit, Christs.

It is also worth noticing the false dilemma<sup>47</sup> that Strydom (2018c) introduces here. He claims that humanity cannot represent God if there is no equality in value between humanity and God. Therefore, either humanity is equal with God and can then represent Him accurately, or humanity is not equal with God and cannot represent Him at all. In the light of the discussion above, it seems as if there are other options on the table besides these two.

#### **4.3.4.2. Misreading no. 5: Collapsing contexts**

It is possible to collapse the context of a text when two or more texts, which do not associate with one another in any way, are treated as if they are somehow connected or seen as commentaries on one another (Sire, 1980:156). This fallacy is somewhat complicated since it is the misuse of a “perfectly good principle of reading: to compare Scripture with Scripture” (Sire, 1980:58-59). A responsible reader of the Bible will make use of every possible text that has bearing on the specific subject he/she is investigating and compare them with one another. However, it can happen that one throws texts together that do not belong together, which in turn

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<sup>45</sup> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

<sup>46</sup> “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared *Him*.”

<sup>47</sup> Geisler and Brooks (1990:190) summarise this fallacy as a situation where “two options are presented as exclusive while other alternatives are available”.

only results in confusion. One must rather first investigate the immediate context of a particular text, before looking at its broader context and how it might compare with other passages in the Bible. If two texts do indeed touch upon the same subject in a similar manner, they may be placed together in support of a specific doctrine, while still bearing their original contexts in mind (Sire, 1980:61-62).

### **a) Examples of misreading no. 5 by CiMI**

#### **Case 1:**

Kotze (2017a) is guilty of collapsing the contexts of Acts 10:36-38<sup>48</sup> and John 1:1-2.<sup>49</sup> He starts off by reading the passage from Acts 10:36-38 and emphasises the idea that “the word” in this passage “began from Galilee”. In other words, in this testimony from the apostle Peter, he is making it clear that the ministry of “the word” through Jesus Christ began in Galilee after Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. Kotze (2017a) then jumps to John 1:1-2 saying, “Just so that you know, John 1 says, ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.’ This carries over from verse 36 of Acts 10.” He further explains that when one reads the phrase “In the beginning was the Word” in John 1:1-2, it is referring to the ministry of the word in Acts 10:36-37 that “began from Galilee”. Consequently, after reading John 1:1-2 he says that “that word, which was preached, began from Galilee. Not from creation!” The “beginning” to which John refers in John 1:1 is therefore the beginning of the ministry of the word in Galilee, taken from Acts 10:36-37.

A careful reading of both these passages, in their own contexts, gives one enough ground to challenge the clarification by Kotze (2017a) provided above. Regarding Acts 10:36-37, Hendriksen and Kistemaker (1990:394) plainly state that “Jesus began his work in Galilee”. Barret (2004a:522) explains that the specific event described in this passage “began in Galilee”. In turn, Marshall (1980:204) mentions that it is characteristic of Luke’s gospel to emphasise that the ministry of Jesus “extended to the whole of Judea including both Galilee and also the area in the south around Jerusalem”. This is clearly a mere reference to the geographical order of places where Jesus’s public ministry began on earth. However, to link this notion of beginning with the “beginning” in John 1:1-2 is totally unwarranted. Michaels (2010:46), for example, emphasises: “John’s ‘beginning’ (*archē*) is the earliest of all, for the vocabulary of John’s

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<sup>48</sup> “The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ – He is Lord of all – that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.”

<sup>49</sup> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”



preamble is decisively shaped by the opening verses of Genesis ... at the outset attention is drawn to the beginning of all beginnings, the story of creation in Genesis.” Carson (1991:114) also states that John 1:1-2 reminds “any reader of the Old Testament of the opening verses of the Bible”. He further explains that it entails the beginning of all things, including the universe. The apostle John is therefore not focusing on the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus, but to show his readers “that the starting point of the gospel can be traced farther back than that, before the beginning of the entire universe”. This is not an unwarranted conclusion since John 1:3<sup>50</sup> as the immediate context is a direct reference to the act of creation.

To treat Acts 10:36-38 and John 1:1-2 as if they are connected in some sense and consequently commenting on each other, is unwarranted. The most obvious reason Kotze (2017a) is manipulating John 1:1-2 in this manner is to avoid the strong case for the pre-existence, and thus the deity of Jesus Christ, in the prologue of John’s gospel. But whatever the motivation may be, the contexts do not allow for such a reading of these two passages. Hence, Kotze (2017a) is guilty of collapsing the contexts of these two passages.<sup>51</sup>

### **Case 2:**

When it comes to 1 Corinthians 15:50<sup>52</sup> and John 6:53-54,<sup>53</sup> Strydom (2018a) is guilty of collapsing the contexts of these passages. After reading 1 Corinthians 15:50, and emphasising the words that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”, he turns to John 6:53.

At this point it is necessary to understand the background with regard to the teachings of CiMI in this context. As indicated in Chapter 2, CiMI drastically separates Jesus from Jesus Christ, claiming that when Jesus was born again, he became the first Christ. In turn, this separation is based on a prior separation between the physical or natural and the spiritual, according to Strydom (2018a). The natural body with flesh and bones is therefore perceived as evil or sinful, while the spiritual body<sup>54</sup> is what we are supposed to pursue in some sense. At one point everyone in CiMI was merely a natural man, but when you are born again from above you become “a Christ” and therefore a spiritual man (Strydom, 2018a).

After reading from John 6:53-54, Strydom (2018a) posits the following:

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<sup>50</sup> “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

<sup>51</sup> Take note that Kotze (2017c) follows a similar argument in another sermon titled ‘In the beginning was the Word’.

<sup>52</sup> “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.”

<sup>53</sup> “Then Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.’”

<sup>54</sup> It is not at all clear what a spiritual body would look like since a body assumes materiality.

[T]he Church is raising the flesh and blood. They have no life in them. There is death in the Church! Although they are singing of God, and His work of love and life on the cross ... there is death, because they are not eating the flesh, they are not devouring Jesus and drinking the blood.

What Strydom (2018a) means is that the Church is not in some sense getting rid of the flesh of Jesus to arrive at the spiritual side, namely, Jesus as a Christ. Strydom (2018a) further argues: “It says, ‘whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day’. So, now we know it’s the last day, because we are eating the flesh and blood. Can you see it?”<sup>55</sup> There is some significance to “eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus”. For CiMI it is to forget the flesh of Jesus, and focus on the spiritual, on Jesus Christ. He adds, “So when you have a revelation that you are the Christ and you understand it, then you can also have the understanding that the body of Jesus had to go, and Jesus Christ had to be resurrected.”<sup>56</sup>

Strydom (2018a) continues:

Don’t think for one second, we are against Jesus. We are with Him, because He is with God! People saying we’re denying Jesus. We’re not denying Jesus. We’re denying the flesh of Jesus! We’re eating it up – flesh and blood! Because flesh and blood ... cannot inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>57</sup> So ... please write this down, Christ is not flesh and blood. A Christ is not flesh and blood. A Christ is raised on the last day. How do you become a Christ? You have to eat the flesh and blood. You have to eat it! ... eat away Jesus.

This emphasises the drastic separation between Jesus as flesh, and Jesus Christ as spiritual.

To be sure, there is an extent of uncertainty as to the finer details of what Strydom (2018a) is attempting to communicate. It would seem that his argument is based on a principle that he gets from 1 Corinthians 15:50. The principle that he identifies states that “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”. For Strydom (2018a) this is evidence that there must be a drastic separation between the natural and the spiritual. This for him also dictates a drastic separation between Jesus, the natural one, and Jesus Christ, the spiritual one. He for example says that “you have to let Jesus go” and “we regard Jesus no longer according to the flesh ... so now it becomes a spiritual thing ... We now believe in a Christ specie.” In this case Strydom (2018a) is referring to the natural Jesus that must be let go, since He “was not born a Christ”, but became

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<sup>55</sup> On a side note, Strydom (2018a) is confused about what this verse really says regarding the last day. According to him, it is now the last day since they are eating the flesh of Jesus and drinking His blood, while Jesus is merely saying whoever eats His flesh and drinks His blood will be raised on the last day. He does not say that it is the last day whenever someone eats His flesh and drinks His blood; whatever that may mean is irrelevant to this point.

<sup>56</sup> Take note that resurrection in CiMI’s theology does not refer to a physical resurrection of Jesus, but only a spiritual resurrection.

<sup>57</sup> This refers back to 1 Corinthians 15:50.

a Christ at a later stage in His life. Strydom (2018a) then supports this principle with Jesus's words in John 6:53, which state that one must eat the flesh of Jesus and drink His blood. In other words, one must deny the flesh and blood of Jesus, because flesh and blood cannot inherit God's kingdom. You must also deny your own flesh and blood, and arrive at the spiritual Jesus as a Christ and also realise that when you are born from above, you are also a Christ on the inside, a spiritual man.

The point is that Strydom (2018a) uses these two passages as if the one supports or comments on the other. This, however, is not the case. What the apostle Paul communicates in 1 Corinthians 15:50 is the idea that a mortal, corruptible body that has not been resurrected and transformed into a glorified body, cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. In his commentary on 1 Corinthians, Barnett (2000:296) summarises Paul's teaching here as the idea that "flesh and blood ... cannot un-transformed inherit the Kingdom of God. The 'body' that belonged to this age must be 'changed' prior to its entry into the coming age" (1 Cor. 15:51-53). The apostle Paul is therefore not using the phrase 'flesh and blood' to degrade our physical bodies, but rather as a way of pointing at the contrast between a glorified body and a frail, mortal body, which has yet to be transformed by God into a glorified body. The context therefore suggests that this phrase should not be taken literally, because if one should understand it literally, it would have the following implication:

Paul would be saying that no human [with flesh and blood] inherits the kingdom. But this is not the case, for believers have the promise that they are heirs and co-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).<sup>58</sup> Paul is saying that the mortal body in its existing state cannot enter God's presence. Only at the transformation, when God fulfils his promise to all the saints, will the redeemed inherit the kingdom of God (Kistemaker & Hendriksen, 1993:581).

To furthermore avoid any misunderstanding, Barnett (2000:296) explains that any argument aimed to avoid the resurrection as being a resurrection of a physical body will not succeed. He says,

On this premise they conclude that neither Christ's resurrection in the past nor ours in the future is a bodily resurrection. But in no way is Paul saying this. On the contrary, 'flesh and blood' describes human mortality which is dust-like and 'perishable'. The resurrected body is a true body but it is *transformed* 'flesh and blood', an 'imperishable' body.

To summarise this point, one could say that Paul is merely referring to mortal bodies, which are not yet transformed into glorified bodies. Nevertheless, the glorified body will be the same body of flesh and blood, with the only difference that it is an immortal, transformed, glorified body.

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<sup>58</sup> "... and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together."

The phrase 'flesh and blood' is therefore not used to identify one's body as something that must be rejected or not prioritised in any way.

Turning to John 6:53-54, Strydom's (2018a) interpretation also holds no water. Jesus does not say in this passage that we must deny His physical flesh and blood to somehow get to the spiritual side of things. He also does not encourage this act on the basis of the supposed principle that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. Hendriksen and Kistemaker (1953:242) note that Jesus does not refer to the physical eating and drinking of His flesh and blood. Rather, Jesus uses metaphorical language to establish the necessity of believing in Him and having intimate fellowship with Him as Lord and Saviour (Kruse, 2003:175). The parallel between verse 40<sup>59</sup> and verse 54 has also been noted by Carson (1991:279) in this explanation:

The only substantial difference is that one speaks of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking Jesus' blood, while the other, in precisely the same conceptual location, speaks of looking to the Son and believing in him. The conclusion is obvious: the former is the metaphorical way of referring to the latter. Indeed, we have seen that this link is supported by the structure of the entire discourse.

While 1 Corinthians 15:50 merely says that a corruptible and mortal body, a body of "flesh and blood" must first be transformed by God into a glorified body to inherit the Kingdom, John 6:53-54 is Jesus's way of metaphorically saying that one must believe in Him and have fellowship with Him. Strydom (2018a) is therefore collapsing the contexts of these two verses in his argument.

### **Case 3:**

Another example of collapsing the contexts is Odendaal's (2019) interpretation of John 3:5-6<sup>60</sup> and 1 Corinthians 3:1-3.<sup>61</sup> In his sermon, he emphasises the importance of being united in one language at CiMI. He explains that just like one is born in a home and learns a language in that home, the same way the members of CiMI "must have a native language" if they are born of God (Odendaal, 2019). He starts by turning to John 3:5-6. After reading this passage, he makes the following remarks:

Language that we learn in our house, that is a carnal language. It is a fleshly language. That is how we speak to each other. God speaks spirit.<sup>62</sup> He speaks truth in spirit. So, if we are born from water and Spirit. Water we know is exactly the same, or can also be interpreted as the Word of God ...

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<sup>59</sup> "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

<sup>60</sup> "Jesus answered, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.'"

<sup>61</sup> "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal."

<sup>62</sup> Note how the matter-spirit dualism comes through in Odendaal's explanation in this instance as well.

Now the Word of God, we know how God feels about His Word. It is incredibly important. So, we are born out of that Word. That Word is the thing that cleanses us. That is the thing that purifies us. That is the water ... And then Spirit. Now, Spirit is the holy mindset of God ... It's God mind. So, we are born from water, the Word, and God's mind. When we start speaking in this new language, we are uttering the reasonings and the mind of God. That is what we are doing.

According to Odendaal (2019), being born again "of water and Spirit" involves a new language that in some spiritual sense aligns one with God's "holy mindset". After making this point, he then turns to 1 Corinthians 3. He explains that in this passage the apostle Paul "is trying to speak to somebody". He clarifies that what Paul is "encoding" and sending to the people to whom he is speaking in Corinth, and what they are "decoding", are two different things. So, nothing makes any sense to the Corinthians, and the apostle Paul does not get his message across successfully. Before moving on from this point, Odendaal (2019) reminds his listeners that "we are born from water and Spirit. His Word, and His Spirit, the mind of God. Alright?" He then wants his listeners to look deeper at the word 'speak', as it appears in 1 Corinthians 3:1. He elaborates on this word by giving some of its meanings: "a tongue, or the faculty of speech. To utter articulate sounds. To talk. To utter. To tell. To use words in order to declare one's mind and declare one's thoughts." He adds that "this is what Paul is struggling with now because he cannot speak to these people". The reason why Paul cannot speak to the Corinthians is, according to Odendaal, because while Paul is speaking God's spiritual language, the Corinthians are speaking a carnal language. He goes on to explain it in these words:

God is a language. When we are born again, we are born into this new house. We learn a language; it is spiritual language. But sometimes our thinking takes us carnally. Now, I say something here, you take it, you encode [it] carnally ... So, now [Paul] is saying that when I speak to you, you have to listen to me with the spiritual mind. The thinking of God, that is how you can understand my language otherwise I can speak till I am blue in the face and we are not going to get anywhere else.

Later Odendaal (2019) also adds that while everyone in CiMI understands one another's language, the people outside cannot make sense of what they are saying, since the people outside of CiMI decode CiMI's language in a carnal manner.

When one considers John 3:5-6, it is evident that the context is the well-known discussion between Nicodemus and Jesus. Nicodemus, a Jewish ruler and teacher, comes to Jesus and tells Him that He is indeed a teacher who came from God. Jesus responds to Nicodemus by telling him that "unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). To Nicodemus this response is strange since he is wondering how he can enter his mother's womb a second time and be born again. This time Jesus responds by saying that "unless one is born from water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God".

Carson (1991:194) emphasises three important points to note when it comes to being born again “of water and the Spirit”. First, it is crucial to note that the phrase “born of water and the Spirit” is a supplement of “born again”, as it appears in Jesus’s answer in verse 3. Accordingly, only one birth is in view in this context. Second, the preposition ‘of’ regulates both ‘water’ and ‘Spirit’, which indicates that they are a conceptual unit in this text. Third, since Jesus admonished Nicodemus for not knowing these things in the light of him being a Jewish teacher of Israel, the Old Testament should also have a say in the meaning of this passage.

After investigating the Old Testament context, Carson (1991:196) summarises it as follows:

In short, born of water and spirit (the article and the capital ‘S’ in the NIV should be dropped: the focus is on the impartation of God’s nature as ‘spirit’ [cf. 4:24], not on the Holy Spirit as such) signals a new begetting, a new birth that cleanses and renews, the eschatological cleansing and renewal promised by the Old Testament prophets. True, the prophets tended to focus on the corporate results, the restoration of the nation; but they also anticipated a transformation of individual ‘hearts’—no longer hearts of stone but hearts that hunger to do God’s will. It appears that individual regeneration is presupposed. Apparently Nicodemus had not thought of the Old Testament passages this way. If he was like some other Pharisees, he was too confident of the quality of his own obedience to think he needed much repentance (cf. Lk. 7:30), let alone to have his whole life cleansed and his heart transformed, to be born again.

For Odendaal to bring the concept of a ‘new language’ into this passage appears to be out of line with the context of this passage. As Carson (1991:194-195) indicates, John 3:5 deals with the theme of individual regeneration, or the teaching of being ‘born again’. Odendaal’s (2019) attempts to load ‘water’ and ‘Spirit’ with alternative meanings, without providing enough evidence for this move, is unwarranted. Furthermore, to introduce the idea of a ‘new language’ after being born again in the house of God is nowhere identifiable in the immediate context of John 3. Accordingly, to use John 3:5 to shed light on 1 Corinthians 3:1 is to collapse the contexts of these two passages, as can be seen below.

When one turns to 1 Corinthians 3:1, it becomes evident that Paul is rebuking his readers. The whole letter of 1 Corinthians is an occasional letter from the apostle Paul to deal with many of the church’s struggles and problems, which explains why rebuking is necessary (Carson & Moo, 2005:415). In this passage Paul recalls his ministry work among the Corinthians, which had begun five years earlier. It is with regret that he remembers the spiritual immaturity of the Corinthians at that time. Barnett (2000:50) explains that,

[In spite of Paul’s] one and a half years with them they were not ready for solid teaching about the faith. He must limit their spiritual diet to milk, to simple and basic teaching which they were not ready to leave behind. Like many then and since, they are ‘milk Christians’, not ‘meat Christians’. Paul uses an interesting word for these ‘babyish’ Corinthians. He calls them *sarkinoi*, ‘men and

women of *flesh*' (verse 1). To be sure, they are Christian believers; they are not *psychikoi*, people who belong to this present age and not the next, who are not at all Christians. But neither are they like him, *pneumatikoi*, 'men and women of the *Spirit*', those whom earlier he called 'the mature' (2:6).<sup>63</sup> Because they are 'fleshly' (immature) and not 'spiritual' (mature) he is 'still' not able to feed them with solid food (verse 2).

The apostle Paul's inability to communicate with the Corinthians had nothing to do with a "new language" that one must learn when one is "born again". The context suggests that the apostle Paul was accommodating the spiritual immaturity of the believers in Corinth. This is not a reference to language failing to be understood correctly because the receiver of the message was not spiritually in tune with the language and still too carnally inclined. Language does not have anything to do with this issue. It is rather a teaching and a rebuke from the apostle Paul to call believers to spiritual maturity. In the light of these insights it is clear that Odendaal (2019) is guilty of collapsing the contexts of these two passages.

#### **4.3.4.3. Misreading no. 6: Overspecification**

According to Sire (1980:62), this fallacy of misreading results from being overcurious. He explains it as follows:

As human beings we tend to be curious – sometimes overcurious, longing to know what we do not know, to go a step beyond the ordinary person in insight and knowledge. In science this curiosity leads to new hypotheses, new experiments – sometimes down blind alleys and sometimes to new knowledge. In business it leads to speculation and hence sometimes to financial success and sometimes to bankruptcy. In religion it leads to study, to speculative theology and sometimes to new spiritual insight and sometimes to answers to our questions beyond what can yet be truly known through Scripture.

To put it briefly, this misreading refers to a scenario when a more detailed or specific inference than is warranted is made from a biblical text (Sire, 1980:157).

This misreading is not just characteristic of cults but presents a constant challenge to Christians as well. One must therefore avoid the desire to force the Bible to say what one wants it to say. This only leads to readings of texts that are, on the one hand, not possible at all or, on the other hand, too specific for the particular text. Sire (1980:64) describes the antidote to this fallacy when he says,

In reading and interpreting Scripture we should strive to draw from any given text only so much as is specified by that text taken in context and from any given set of texts only so much as they

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<sup>63</sup> "However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing."

specify when see first in their immediate contexts and then in the larger framework of scriptural thought.

### **a) Examples of misreading no. 6 by CiMI**

#### **Case 1:**

The first example is when Strydom (2016d) interprets Hebrews 2:11<sup>64</sup> by saying the following: “For both He, Jesus Christ, who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified, or Christs, are all of one, God the Father, for which reason He, Jesus Christ, is not ashamed to call them brethren.” When one compares his words with the actual verse in the NKJV, it is clear that Strydom (2016d) added a couple of phrases of his own to the text, without any explanation or clarification why. He added the phrase “or Christs” after “sanctified” in order to make room for the notion that the people of CiMI are Christs. Furthermore, he added “God the Father” as a referent of the word “one” in order that the “all of one” in this verse is a reference to “God the Father”. He also legitimately adds “Jesus Christ” twice. After reading this verse, he then asks the people of CiMI, “Do you see this? Can you read it? Have you ever read in the Bible of a triune God? The word ‘triune’? But we read the things CIM preaches ... We can’t read what religion is teaching ... Why the hell did they preach it?” It would seem then that Strydom (2016d) uses the word “one” in this verse as a reference to the unity of God and as a way of contrasting his Unitarian view of God with the Trinitarian view of God.

In this instance Strydom (2016d) is therefore guilty of overspecification by attempting to use this verse to dismiss the doctrine of a triune God. Hebrews 2:11 does not refer to the doctrine of the Trinity in any sense. When the author wrote, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one”, he was not expressing the unity of God in His being, which would in any case not be inconsistent with the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather “the common origin of both sanctifier and sanctified, i.e. God himself” (Guthrie, 1983:94). The common familial relationship between the sanctifier and those who are sanctified is therefore rooted in the “gracious determination of God” (Lane, 1991:58). Any attempt by Strydom (2016d) to apply this verse to the doctrine of the Trinity is therefore not just to ignore the immediate context of the passage, but also to add a specific inference that the text does not allow.

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<sup>64</sup> “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren”



## Case 2:

Another example of overspecification is found when Strydom (2016d) is referring to Acts 17:22-23.<sup>65</sup> Before he starts to read this text, he mentions that this “is what is happening in South Africa”, implying that Acts 17:22-23 describes the condition of the churches in South Africa. Strydom (2016d) starts his exposition by encouraging the members of CiMI to listen to him. While referring to the inscription that the Athenians had in front of one of their objects of worship, which reads “To the unknown God”, he says, “If there are three gods,<sup>66</sup> then God is unknown. Then you do not know Him. You know of Him, but you do not know Him ... Religion made God so unknown by a triune God lie.” Strydom’s (2016d) preconceived denial of the doctrine of the Trinity makes him guilty of overspecification on the one hand and causes him to build a straw man<sup>67</sup> of the doctrine of the Trinity on the other hand.

The apostle Paul clearly did not aim to communicate a message that nullifies the doctrine of the Trinity to the Athenians in this context. Marshall (1980:302) explains that the apostle is rather drawing the attention of the Athenians to “the true God who was ultimately responsible for the phenomena which they attributed to an unknown god”. Furthermore, Barret (2004b:838-839) warns one not to load Paul’s words too heavily with theological significance, since “it must be understood as a preacher’s ad hoc way of introducing his theme”. To jump from “the unknown god” in Acts 17:23 to a dismissal of the doctrine of the Trinity, is to add way too much detail to the specific text and thus giving it unwarranted theological significance, not to mention Strydom’s (2016d) ignorance towards the rich context of Acts 17:16-34.

## Case 3:

Kotze (2017a) is guilty of overspecification when it comes to John 10:31-39.<sup>68</sup> This passage tells one about a conversation that took place between Jesus and the Jews. In verse 31 it is clearly

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<sup>65</sup> “Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, ‘Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: To the unknown God. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.’”

<sup>66</sup> This is Strydom’s way of referring to the doctrine of the Trinity in this instance.

<sup>67</sup> A straw man is a logical fallacy which, according to Geisler (1990:194), is the fallacy of “establishing a position, claiming it is the opponent’s position, and then attacking it, when it is not in fact the opponent’s position at all.” In this sense, to refer to the doctrine of the Trinity as entailing the view that there are “three gods” (Strydom, 2016d) is a misrepresentation of the Trinity itself.

<sup>68</sup> “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works have I shown you from my Father. For which of those works do you stone me?’ The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make yourself God.’ Jesus answered them, ‘Is it not written in your law, “I said, ‘You are gods’?” If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, “I am the Son of God”? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do,

stated that the Jews were interested in stoning Jesus because of His claim in verse 30 which reads: "I and My Father are one." Carson (1991:395) explains that this statement of Jesus entails "some kind of metaphysical unity" between the Father and Jesus which is exactly the reason why the Jews wanted to stone Jesus. According to the Jews, Jesus "was claiming equality or oneness with God" (Carson, 1991:395). Archer (1982:373) goes one step further by stating that the audience of Jesus "rightly understood Him as asserting His deity in terms suggestive of the Trinity". This claim to deity by Jesus is confirmed by the words of the Jews when they provide the reason why they wanted to stone Jesus: "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a man, make yourself God!"

After reading this passage, Kotze (2017a) begins his exposition by asking the question, "I just want to know where did Jesus ever make himself God? Where did He ever say 'I am God, come to Me ... I am God the Son, come to Me'? Never! Never!" In other words, Kotze (2017a) claims that although the Jews thought Jesus was claiming oneness or equality with God, or at least making some sort of statement in which He claims His own deity, they were mistaken since He apparently never made such a claim. Although this comment from Kotze (2017a) makes him guilty of saying that Jesus never claimed to be God, but without citing a proof-text, and hence also providing inadequate evidence for his position, this particular statement by him is not the issue at hand for the moment.

In his exposition of this passage, Kotze (2017a) further refers to verse 34-35, asserting the following:

So, if God said "You are gods", then it is so. Then no one can take it away. The gifts of God are irrevocable. So, God can never say "No, you are not a god anymore." He said, "You are gods." If he called them gods to whom the word of God came ... so those are the ones – not everyone is gods! Those who receive the word of God and are born from above, those are the gods.

What Kotze (2017a) argues is that the people of CiMI are gods, since they are the only ones who are born from above as a Christ specie,<sup>69</sup> and they are also the only ones who received the Word of God. To put it plainly, Kotze (2017a) claims deity for all teachers and members of CiMI. Everyone who accepts the idea that he/she becomes a Christ when he/she is born from above is also a god.

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though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in Him.' Therefore they sought again to seize Him, but He escaped out of their hand."

<sup>69</sup> A question to ask about this teaching is whether former members of CiMI who left the church and also abandoned their teachings, can still be considered as "gods".

Like many proponents of the New Age spirituality<sup>70</sup> and the Word of Faith movement,<sup>71</sup> there seems to be a similar kind of claim to deity by Kotze (2017a) on behalf of CiMI. While there will be finer differences between CiMI, the New Age spirituality, and the Word of Faith movement in their view of the divinity of man,<sup>72</sup> this passage in John 10 remains a very popular piece of Scripture to use to that effect. To arrive at a conclusion where mankind is exalted to the status of deity from this passage, however, is to be guilty of overspecification, since “such an interpretation is contrary to the overall context” (Geisler & Rhodes, 1997:177).

It is worth mentioning that this is a popular teaching of CiMI, and Kotze is not the only minister of CiMI who teaches this. CiMI, in general, maintains that being in the image of God gives man “the value of God” by virtue of being a “godkind” (Strydom, 2016d). In other words, man, as the image of God, is a godkind and therefore equal in value to God. Strydom (2016d), for example, explains that “God made you equal with Him”. Labuschagne (2018) expresses this teaching in a way that suggests that the “very essence of God was deposited to man” and therefore man is “the godkind”. In turn, Kotze (2016a) explains that “God never became a man, but ... God generated man to become a godkind”. Strydom (2016d) also states that “God views [mankind] as god” and that the members of CiMI as mankind is “a supernatural being” who, as representatives of God, are “gods for God”.

When reading John 10:31-39, there are a couple of things to pay attention to before arriving at a definitive conclusion. If the proper context of this passage is not accounted for, it can be easy to overspecify this text, and draw unwarranted conclusions from it:

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<sup>70</sup> Take for example the following statement from Byrne (2006:164), a New Age spiritualist: “You are God in physical body. You are Spirit in the flesh. You are Eternal life expressing itself as You. You are a cosmic being. You are all power. You are all wisdom. You are all intelligence. You are perfection. You are magnificence. You are the creator, and you are creating the creation of You on this planet.”

<sup>71</sup> Word of Faith teachers have developed what is called a “little gods doctrine” (Hanegraaff, 2009:129-130). Meyer (2010), a Word of Faith teacher, phrases this doctrine as follows: “If you as a human being have a baby, you call it a humankind. If cattle have another cattle, they call it cattle-kind. I mean, what’s God supposed to call us? Doesn’t the Bible say we’re created in His image? Now, you understand, I’m not saying you are God with a capital ‘G’ ... The Bible says right here, John 10:34...” In the same manner Dollar (2014) explains that “God submits Himself to this principle that everything produces after its own kind ... If everything produces after its own kind, we now see God producing man ... If horses get together, they produce what? Horses! ... If the Godhead gets together and say ‘let us make man’, then what are they producing? ... They’re producing gods ... You are gods because you came from God and you are gods, you’re not just human. The only human part about you is this physical body that you live in.”

<sup>72</sup> CiMI seems to claim godhood only for themselves since they are the only ones who are born from above as the Christ specie. It is not always so clear what this status as “gods” entails within CiMI. The New Age spirituality adopts a form of occult metaphysics where the divinity of man is largely arrived at through a pantheistic and panentheistic presupposition. Everything in reality is permeated by an impersonal divine principle and every single human being is in some way part of that principle and therefore divine. The Word of Faith movement does not believe in an impersonal divine principle, but rather in the idea that all humans are in some way little gods living on earth (Hanegraaff, 2009:134-135).

- It is important to note that Jesus is speaking to Jewish monotheists who believe that there is only one God and He is the Creator of the universe. One must be careful therefore not to take this passage “out of this monotheistic context” (Geisler & Rhodes, 1997:177). This explains why the Jews to whom Jesus is speaking here, understood Jesus’s words “I and My Father are one” to be blasphemy. They are certainly correct in affirming that there is only one true God, but to them Jesus is only a man and nothing more. Consequently, when Jesus claims to be one in essence with the Father, it is unthinkable and blasphemous to them since He is trying to make others believe that He is God (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1953:128).
- Take notice that verse 34, which contains Jesus’s words “Is it not written in your law, ‘I said, ‘You are gods’?” is in fact a direct quote from Psalm 82:6-7. There one reads: “I said, ‘You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High. But you shall die like men, And fall like one of the princes.” In this psalm from Asaph, he is writing about God-appointed judges and administrators who are representing God in some capacity. Geisler and Rhodes (1997:178) explains that these “judges were ‘gods’ in the sense that they stood in God’s place, judging even life and death matters”. These judges were certainly not called gods because they shared the same essence as God. Furthermore, it is evident that these judges performed their duties poorly and unjustly since their condemnation is announced in these verses from Psalm 82. Even though they were called “gods”, the psalm that Jesus cites also states that they will “die like men”. Archer (1982:373-374) rephrases what the psalmist actually tried to communicate as follows: “Although you have the status of membership in the family of God, and although you have been called after His name, nevertheless because of your unfaithfulness to sacred duty you will die like other men and will fall ruin like one of the princes of the unsaved world.”
- Since these judges are certainly not called “gods” because they literally are divine beings, one plausible exposition is to explain Asaph’s words to the judges as that of irony. Geisler and Rhodes (1997:178) state that the irony lies in the title of “gods” that is given to these judges and administrators, and yet they will die like men since that is what they truly are. Accordingly, “when Jesus alluded to this psalm in John 10, He was saying that what the Israelite judges were called in irony and in judgement, He is in reality. Jesus was giving a defense for his own deity, not for the deification of man” (Geisler & Rhodes, 1997:178). The word “gods” in Psalm 82:6 is clearly not meant to be taken literally.
- The points made thus far are further confirmed by the following important observation. When Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6, He introduces the quote with the following rhetorical question: “Is it not written in your law ...?” (John 10:34). After this question Jesus

proceeds to quote Psalm 82:6. Note, however, that the Psalms were not written in the Old Testament law. Howe (2006) therefore explains that when one studies Psalm 82 carefully it takes one back to the book of Exodus, which is part of the Old Testament law. According to him, there are two passages in Exodus where the judges of Israel are referred to as “gods”. The first one is in Exodus 21:6<sup>73</sup> where the word “*Elohim*” is translated as “judges”. This is also the case in Exodus 22:8-9.<sup>74</sup> The judges “stood in the place of God to execute His justice” (Howe, 2006). If one were to go further back, one can also observe the same principle in Exodus 7:1 concerning Moses. God told Moses, “I have made you as God to Pharaoh.” Moses will be God’s representative to Pharaoh and will therefore make judgements over Egypt and Pharaoh on behalf of God. There is in this sense a difference between representing deity and being deity. However, the problem comes in when, as alluded to already, these judges perform their responsibilities in an unjust and poor manner, as Psalm 82 expresses it. Through the course of John’s gospel, Jesus has already accused the leaders of Israel that they judge “according to appearance” (John 7:24) and “according to the flesh” (John 8:15). In the light of these observations, and Jesus’s use of the title “Son of God”, Howe (2006) summarises the conclusion as follows:

The Jews understood the title *Son of God*, however, to designate deity (other clear passages about the Son of God also confirm this); to claim this title was to claim to be God, which is why they accused Jesus of blasphemy. Jesus’ response to their accusation was *not* that He was claiming merely to be a representative of God like the judges, which isn’t blasphemous, but that His works demonstrated that He really was the *Son of God* or *God*. This explains why the Jews wanted to seize Jesus even after hearing His response; they correctly understood Him, but they still refused to believe that He was the Son of God.

- Another key aspect, which is central to the understanding of this passage, is to note that Jesus uses the quote from Psalm 82:6 as an *a fortiori* argument<sup>75</sup> to affirm His own unique status as God’s Son. In other words, Jesus reasoned that if these human judges and administrators can be called “gods”, why can’t the “Son of God” also be called “God”? (Archer, 1982:374; Geisler & Rhodes, 1997:178). Howe (2006) argues as follows:

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<sup>73</sup> “then his master shall bring him to the judges.”

<sup>74</sup> “If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges *to see* whether he has put his hand into his neighbor’s goods. ‘For any kind of trespass, *whether it concerns* an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, *or* for any kind of lost thing which *another* claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; *and* whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor.’”

<sup>75</sup> According to Kreeft (2014:335), an *a fortiori* argument “reasons that if something is true in one case, it is probably true in a second, similar case in which the reason for it being true is even stronger”. In this case Jesus is arguing that if it is possible for judges and administrators to be called “gods” then how much more is it possible for the ‘Son of God’ to be called ‘God’?”

Jesus said that since the judges of old who only *received* the Word of God were called gods because they were the representatives of God, it is proper and right that He who *is* the Word of God should be recognized as the *Son of God* because He is the very presence of God. If it was fitting to call the judges of Israel *gods* because of the work they were appointed by God to do, then it is even more fitting to call Jesus the *Son of God* because of the works that He was set apart and sent by God to do. Jesus took upon Himself the designation *Son of God* because He did the very works of God ... The works of Jesus are key. By them the Pharisees should have recognized Jesus to be the Son of God; instead, they judged Him to be a blasphemer (Howe, 2006).

Carson (1991:397) also shares some insight into the argument of Jesus in this passage. He explains it by saying:

[If] there are others whom God (the author of Scripture) can address as 'god' and 'sons of the Most High' (i.e. sons of God), on what biblical basis should anyone object when Jesus says, I am God's Son? The argument gains extra force when it is remembered that Jesus is the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world.

When all the abovementioned points are taken into account, it becomes clear that this passage does not support Kotze's (2017a) position that all members of CiMI who are born from above are suddenly gods. If it were the case that Jesus is teaching that all members of CiMI are gods, how would Kotze (2017a) be able to account for the following challenges heading his way?

- On another occasion, Jesus seems to be teaching that there is only one true God (Mark 12:29).<sup>76</sup> Was He confused when He taught this?
- The Bible would seem to contradict itself since in some instances the idea that there is only one true God is expressed very distinctly (Isaiah 43:10),<sup>77</sup> while it would consequently be expressed otherwise in other instances.
- It seems that one condition for being God is to be all-powerful. If one is not all-powerful, one cannot be God who, by definition, has all the power. One would be a being who is subordinate. Yet, in Revelation 1:8 Jesus is described as "the Almighty".
- Won't a teaching such as this validate the serpent's seductive words to Eve when he said to her that "you will be like God"? (Genesis 3:5).
- And finally, if the word "gods" in John 10 is to be taken literally, why not take other sayings of Jesus literally as well? For example, when He called the Pharisees "serpents"

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<sup>76</sup> "Jesus answered him, 'The first of all the commandments is: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.'" This is the first commandment."

<sup>77</sup> "'You are My witnesses', says the Lord, 'And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.'"

and a “brood of vipers” in Matthew 23:33.<sup>78</sup>

Kotze (2017a) allows this passage to say far too much, and if the passage is communicating anything at all in its proper context, it is pointing very vividly to the deity of Jesus Christ, and His deity alone. CiMI’s teaching regarding them being a “godkind” is therefore foreign to the biblical data. Since CiMI in some sense believes that God alone must be worshipped and obeyed, the best way to describe this part of CiMI’s theology is henotheistic. Hanegraaff (2009:406) defines henotheism as “the belief that ascribes supreme power and devotes worship solely to one god without denying the existence of other gods”. To be sure, CiMI, as far as the researcher could establish, in no way defines what it means for a man to be a “godkind”.

#### **4.3.4.4. Misreading no. 7: Word play**

The following misreading has to do with the study of specific words. When doing word studies in the Bible it is important to work from the original languages of Hebrew and Greek. Word studies will typically include looking at “the etymology (word origin), definitions, use of the word in various biblical texts and so forth” (Sire, 1980:65), as well as how it was used at that time. The problem comes in, however, when a “word or phrase from a biblical translation is examined and interpreted as if the revelation had been given in that language” (Sire, 1980:157). Sire (1980:65-66) explains that this mistake can easily be avoided by not surrendering to any urge to play on a word in the English version of the Bible, for example. One should rather use the necessary tools in the form of dictionaries and theological dictionaries to investigate the word in its original language.

According to the researcher’s estimation, this type of misreading is very rare in CiMI, since the researcher was not able to find one example of this misreading in the sermons by CiMI’s ministers. This, of course, does not mean that CiMI is not guilty of Scripture twisting. The overwhelming evidence in the other categories is still enough to show that CiMI is indeed misreading the Bible. The most that the researcher can do is to refer to CiMI’s use of the words ‘cross over’ and ‘pass over’. Strydom (2017b) states that the reason behind the cross was that one can “cross over” from the fallen Adam specie to the Christ specie. He also says that the cross “passed us over”; in short, through the cross we went through a “pass over”. In this case Strydom is playing with theological words. What he means is that through the cross of Jesus Christ, more people who are born again can “cross over” or “Pass over” from the Adam specie to the Christ specie.

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<sup>78</sup> “Serpents, brood of Vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?”

#### **4.3.4.5. Misreading no. 8: The literal or figurative fallacy**

Readers of the Bible must understand the way language is being used in a specific passage. A word like 'water' may be used in a literal sense or in a figurative sense. The question is, does it mean that just because 'water' is being used figuratively in one passage, it is automatically also used in a figurative sense throughout the entire Bible, or vice versa? (Sire, 1980:66). The crux of this misreading then is that literal language is either mistaken for figurative language or figurative language is mistaken for literal language (Sire, 1980:157). Sire (1980:67-68) suggests, "It is, in fact, the constant temptation of readers who somehow believe there must be more to the Bible than meets the eye of steady reason. Hidden in the literal is the figurative, the real, the spiritual meaning, and we must find the key." He further explains that cults are "filled" with these "keys" to unlock the supposed spiritual or real meaning of a text behind the meaning taken at face value.

Traditional Bible scholars, instead of mistaking a literal for a figurative meaning of a text, will rather follow the passage to see where it suggests "that words or narratives are being used symbolically" (Sire, 1980:68), and then follow that suggestion. Where the passage in the Bible might not have such a suggestion, it is better to stay with the plain and straightforward meaning of the text. Also remember that a symbolic or figurative interpretation of a text will never contradict a biblical teaching or doctrine which is arrived at from a text that is clearly "intended to be taken in their plain ordinary sense" (Sire, 1980:68).

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 8 by CiMI**

###### **Case 1:**

An example of literal language fallaciously taken to be figurative language, is when Strydom (2016d) preaches from Matthew 16:13-17.<sup>79</sup> He spends some time unpacking the meaning of Simon Peter's answer to the question of Jesus in this passage, according to the framework of CiMI. But then Strydom (2016d) jumps to Matthew 16:21, which reads: "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem." He then asks the members of CiMI whether the city of Pretoria in South Africa is now the spiritual Jerusalem. Strydom (2016d) answers, "Yes! It is the main city ... The big city of God, now in the Spirit." This figurative or spiritual interpretation of Jerusalem is nowhere backed up by any good reasons. Strydom

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<sup>79</sup> "When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"



(2016d) only uses this interpretation to indicate that the establishment of CiMI in Pretoria is somehow the figurative or spiritual fulfilment of Jesus Christ going to Jerusalem.

### **Case 2:**

Another example is when Strydom (2016d) is reading from 1 Corinthians 5:9-11.<sup>80</sup> After reading verse 9, in which the apostle Paul said: “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people”, Strydom concludes that “this is not only a physical thing. It is a spiritual thing as well. You are not allowed to have other seed in your womb!” Strydom (2016d) further explains that the members of CiMI are not allowed to spend too much time with people from other churches who do not hold to the same beliefs as they do, since they will then violate the apostle Paul’s teaching in this passage and be guilty of “spiritual” adultery and other immoral deeds.

When one takes into account the entire context of this letter of Paul, it is clear that he wrote this portion in his letter to correct a misunderstanding by the believers in Corinth. When one investigates the cultural background of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, it becomes clear that “old Corinth had such a notorious reputation that ‘to Corinthianize’ could mean ‘to fornicate’, and ‘Corinthian girl’ was a way of referring to a whore” (Carson & Moo, 2005:420). In the light of this reputation of Corinth, one can understand why the apostle Paul would warn against sexual immorality and other immoral acts. However, when the apostle Paul warned the Corinthians against these immoral deeds, his directions were “misunderstood or misrepresented, as though he meant that they must have no contact with this world’s evil people. This was not at all his meaning” (Morris, 1985:92). Kistemaker & Hendriksen (1993:168) came to the same conclusion. Hence, besides ignoring the broader and immediate context of 1 Corinthians 5:9-11, Strydom (2016d) also spiritualises and reads literal language figuratively without any warrant for such a reading in the text, especially when it comes to sexual immorality and the Corinthians.

### **Case 3:**

While Du Plessis (2016a) is busy preaching from Matthew 16:22-23,<sup>81</sup> he is also guilty of providing a spiritual interpretation of a literal passage. In the previous verse, verse 21,<sup>82</sup> one

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<sup>80</sup> “I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.”

<sup>81</sup> “Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You Lord; this shall not happen to you!’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’”

reads that Jesus began to inform His disciples of certain events surrounding His suffering, death and resurrection. The apostle Peter finds it difficult to square these events with what he thinks is God's purpose. France (1985:263) describes Peter's state as follows: "Peter is horrified both by the unorthodox character of Jesus' notion of Messiahship and by its unacceptable implications for the fate of his master (and his own?)." Jesus then turns to the apostle Peter and rebukes him to the extent that "Peter himself is cast in Satan's role as the tempter". Blomberg (1992:259) describes the situation by reminding one that "Jesus is not accusing Peter of literal demon possession, but he is dramatically indicating that the perspective Peter represents, however unwittingly, is the same as Satan's. Peter therefore is no longer acting like the foundation block of the church but like a 'stumbling block'."

Du Plessis (2016a) applies this situation and dialogue between Jesus Christ and the apostle Peter to God and the Christian church in the world today, which he calls "the first appointed church". Just like Jesus turned to Peter before rebuking him, God is now turning to the church in the world. Du Plessis (2016a) explains this situation by stating that "in the spiritual realm this is what is actually happening now. God is turning ... to His first appointed church. Those that were supposed to preach the gospel for the last 2000 years, and did not do so, and He is saying this to them: 'Get behind me Satan!'" He further defines Satan as "one who opposes another in his purpose". He proceeds to ask whether "the church out there is opposing God in His purpose". Du Plessis (2016a) thus gives a literal dialogue between two figures in history some sort of spiritual meaning for the church today, which only serves to contrast CiMI with all the other churches in the world. To be sure, the words of Jesus to the apostle Peter certainly have spiritual significance, but not in the sense that the words of Jesus to the apostle Peter is basically God's words to the church today. There is still a context to account for, which Du Plessis fails to do.

#### **4.3.4.6. Misreading no. 9: Speculative readings of predictive prophecy**

According to Sire (1980:70),

[There is] nothing in Scripture more difficult to treat with certainty than the interpretation of predictive prophecy, especially those prophecies in both the Old and New Testaments which were not fulfilled by the time of the New Testament era and interpreted as such by New Testament authors. Yet it is just such prophecy that is emphasized by many of the cults who base their authority at least partially on the Bible.

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<sup>82</sup> "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."

In this sense predictive prophecy is too quickly explained by the sudden occurrence of very specific events, even though other scholars of the Bible find these interpretations very suspicious (Sire, 1980:157).

### a) Examples of misreading no. 9 by CiMI

#### Case 1:

Kotze (2017c) provides his listeners with a speculative reading of a predictive prophecy when he expositis Isaiah 9:1-7.<sup>83</sup> He says that when one considers the prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-7, it has no bearing on the birth of Jesus: “So, if we are looking at the prophetic word of Isaiah 9, then we are definitely not speaking about the birth of Jesus. Okay! Definitely not!”

He further stipulates what this prophecy is referring to: “This prophecy of Isaiah 9, when it speaks of ‘a Child is born ... a Son is given’, did not come into fulfilment with the birth of Jesus. It came into fulfilment ... when Jesus was anointed with the Spirit of God and He became the Christ.” Kotze (2017c) adds that in the light of Acts 2:36,<sup>84</sup> Jesus “was made the Lord and Christ. He was not born Lord and Christ. Although the prophecy said, and although they inquired where the Christ is to be born, Christ cannot be born, because the ‘Son is given’. That’s what the prophecy said.”

In the context of the whole Bible, this is a very difficult statement of Kotze (2017c) to defend. Oswalt (1986:244) explains that for the Israelites this prophecy referred to their deliverance from oppression through “the coming of a person”. The language in this prophecy does not refer to a mere human king. Instead, it “is clearly an eschatological figure, the Messiah” (Oswalt, 1986:245). Motyer (1996:101-102) states that “the Hebrew emphasis rests not on to us but on the coming one. Child (*ye/ed*) relates him to his ancestry; son expresses his maleness and dignity in the royal line. He is born as from human parentage and given as from God.” There is no reason to interpret the phrase “a Child is born” as being anything other than the birth of a

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<sup>83</sup> “Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, As when at first He lightly esteemed The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, And afterward more heavily oppressed her, By the way of sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walked in darkness Have seen a great light; Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, Upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation And increased its joy; They rejoice before You According to the joy of harvest, As men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For you have broken the yoke of his burden And the staff of his shoulder, The rod of his oppressor, As in the day of Midian. For every warrior’s sandal from the noisy battle, And garments rolled in blood, Will be used for burning and fuel of fire. For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

<sup>84</sup> “Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

child who is the coming Messiah. Young (1965:329) justly confirms that the deliverance brought about by God “is not something vague but something to be brought about by a birth in history upon this earth at a definite time and at a definite place”. The phrase a “Son is given” is also in accordance with the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Oswalt (1986:245) unpacks this prophecy further by explaining that this messianic figure, given His titles (“Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace”), will be God, but given His birth, will also be human. In short, He will be “human and divine”, which already provides the terms suggestive of the incarnation (Oswalt, 1986:245). Earlier in the book Isaiah, in Chapter 7:14,<sup>85</sup> this child is also named “Immanuel”. In the context of the whole Bible, especially considering the New Testament, in the fulfilment of the “Immanuel” prophecy, the child is named Jesus (Matthew 1:21).<sup>86</sup> Moreover, Isaiah 9:7<sup>87</sup> stipulates that the Messiah’s reign, that is the reign of the child, will have no end, which is also confirmed in Luke 1:33, stating with regard to Jesus: “He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

It seems as if Kotze (2017c) acknowledges that in light of the prophecy, it is more obvious to understand it as the birth of Jesus, who is born the Lord and Christ. He says that Jesus was not born the Christ, but made the Christ at His baptism and that “although the prophecy said, and although they inquired where the Christ is to be born, Christ cannot be born, because the ‘Son is given’. That’s what the prophecy said.” The only comment left to make is that Kotze (2017c) and CiMI’s redefinition of Christ as being a Christ specie, a ‘what’ and not a ‘who’, is making it very difficult, if not impossible, for them to interpret the Bible in a consistent manner. It explains why Kotze (2017c) provides such a speculative prediction of fulfilled prophecy. It is difficult to deny that Isaiah 9:1-7 is a prophecy of the birth of Jesus Christ.

## Case 2:

Kotze (2018) provides another example where a prophecy is given a speculative explanation by CiMI. This speculative reading is based on Jeremiah 23:1-6.<sup>88</sup> After reading this passage he

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<sup>85</sup> “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.”

<sup>86</sup> “And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

<sup>87</sup> “Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

<sup>88</sup> “Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the Lord. Therefore thus says the Lord God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: ‘You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings’, says the Lord. ‘But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up

starts by saying, “There will not be a branch if there is no root ... Jesus is the root.” This is specifically a reference to verse 5, which reads as follows: “‘Behold, the days are coming’, says the Lord, ‘That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.’”

Later Kotze (2018) clarifies his point by explaining that Jesus is die foundation from where one must build. He is the root in the sense that He laid a foundation, but nobody sees the foundation or the root of a plant. One only sees the branch that comes forth from the root, or the building that rests on the foundation. Therefore, according to him, every person must now be part of a branch. He claims for, example:

I have to be part of the branch, because the branch comes from the root. Now, depending on the branch, will determine the fruit ... If your leader or your branch believes he is a sinner and ... each week confesses and says to you “we’re all sinners, and we just have to live a nice life so that maybe we can make it to heaven one day”, then you will believe that you are a sinner and you will grow up to be a sinner and you will bear the fruit of sin. If your branch is a Christ, and believes he is a Christ, then you will be a Christ.

In other words, the branch in his interpretation is the leader, by whom one is taught, and his teachings will determine one’s fruit. However, he contrasts Strydom as a leader who teaches you that you are a Christ, to other leaders who teach you that you are a sinner. According to him, the proper leader and teacher whose teachings one submits to, must include the teaching of the Christ specie.

Kotze (2018) further claims that God is extremely specific in this text, which is why God said,

I will send, I will raise to David a branch of righteousness. So, the branch again will believe and understand and have the knowledge of true righteousness and holiness of what a Christ is as a specie. And that branch will start to bear fruit, and eventually the branch will take over the whole tree ... we are not talking about the root, we have established the root is Jesus ... There is no Scripture that says, “Jesus is a branch”, never!

In the light of these comments, it becomes evident that “the branch” in this passage is not a reference to Jesus, according to Kotze (2018).

The question is, who is “the branch” referring to then, if not to Jesus? In a lengthy explanation, Kotze (2018) answers this question as follows as he unpacks verse 5:

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shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking’, says the Lord. ‘Behold, *the* days are coming’, says the Lord, ‘That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A King shall reign and prosper, And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, And Israel will dwell safely; Now this *is* His name by which He will be called: The Lord our righteousness.’”

So, what did Jesus Christ come and pay for? What did He come and do? Right, let me speak it in Christ in Me International terms. There was a start of a specie ... If you are the only lone survivor of a specie, your sole purpose will be to ensure the existence of the specie. And then also, you will start to create a habitat for that specie to survive in. So, what Jesus Christ did as the first of a specie, the Christ specie, the second Adam specie, the born from above specie, he ensured the existence of the specie ... He had to start to think differently because the specie that I am doing this for, they will need a place to survive, or live in, or have their habitation in, which is what? The kingdom of God! ... So, Jesus came and paid for the specie and He paid for the habitation ... in other words, He worked a work to ensure that you and I as the Christ specie can be that specie and know how to build the habitation. This is exactly what is happening now and therefore, the branch will be the king. Now, there is no other branch that is declared as a king as far as we know ... we have to think about this practically. If Jesus is this branch that is spoken of here, then it means in the days of Jesus, Judah would have been saved.

Kotze (2018) continues to explain that if Jesus is the branch referred to in this passage, the prophecy would have been only half-fulfilled. By now it is clear, according to him, that “the branch” is referring to a king whom God raised up, and whoever this king is, it is not Jesus. Before providing the final answer, Kotze (2018) makes himself guilty of an esoteric interpretation, by establishing the reason why they at CiMI can understand this prophecy properly and why the rest of the world’s church leaders cannot interpret it correctly. According to him, it is because they “can interpret the heavenly language now”. He adds, “we have the hieroglyphics. We have the Israelites’ journey. We have the leaders. We have the patriarchs ... So that we can understand how God works, how He speaks, what He does, What His plan is, and what His strategy is.”

This is the explanation why, according to Kotze (2018), this prophecy in Jeremiah 23 is fulfilled in the leadership of Xandré Strydom, the visionary leader of CiMI. He explains to his listeners that, “you are born from Xandré in Christ Jesus. You come from the branch, which comes from the root. The root is underground, the branch is visible. The branch will ensure that the tree bear fruit.” He continues to elaborate by saying:

[Xandré is the] one after God’s own heart. One raised up for David, a branch. And this branch will be king, and this king will sit on a throne. This is the prophetic word. And he will reign in righteousness. You know, many prophets ... have read these Scriptures for years. Waiting for the time to come. Longing for it. And when it comes, we reject it. Like the first coming of Christ many people for a long time have been waiting for the Saviour to come, the Messiah, the Christ. And when He came, they rejected Him. Why? Well, first of all, He didn’t come as they expected it. It was not in their frame of mind. But because people do not know the ways of God ... Why is Xandré called the branch? Why not any other person, why not another church? Why is he the one? ... Because of the equal in value, different in function revelation. Because of the Jesus and Jesus Christ revelation ... If the root is the first coming of Christ, then the branch is the second coming.

“The branch” in this prophecy is then, according to Kotze, a prophecy about Strydom and the beginning of CiMI under his leadership.

This interpretation of Jeremiah 23:1-6, especially verse 5, by far surpasses the acceptable limits of interpreting prophetic texts. Harrison (1973:122) labels this prophecy a “messianic prophecy”, which contains hope for the future. He explains that the term “branch” is used in this passage to identify royalty, who in this case is the messianic king. Harrison (1973:122) finally explains that Jeremiah is here proclaiming “that God will raise up a Davidic king whose name will indicate his true character, an expectation fulfilled in Christ, the Son of David. Unlike the successors of Josiah he will pursue a wise policy (AV ‘prosper’), enshrining the covenantal ideals and governing the people in justice and equity (cf. 2 Sam. 8:15).”

“The branch” is a reference to none other than the coming of the messianic king, Jesus Christ. When the New Testament declares a prophecy fulfilled, it is better not to look for another apparent fulfilment. And in the case where a prophecy is not yet fulfilled, all attempts to claim its fulfilment must be measured against the broader context of the Bible. For Kotze (2018) to reinterpret Bible passages that point to the Messiah and claim that their small group, CiMI, under the leadership of Xandré Strydom as “the branch”, is the second coming of Christ and the fulfilment of the prophecy in Jeremiah 23:5, seems typically cultic, highly speculative, and worth disregarding.

#### **4.3.4.7. Concluding remarks**

Sire (1980:68) reminds one that it is always best to stay with the plain and straightforward meaning of a text. He continues by saying that “it is not true that you can prove anything from the Bible – not if you recognize its character as literature. As literature the Bible is subject to the guard of immediate and larger contexts and of genre.” To ignore the context of a passage, to collapse the contexts of more than one passage, and to overspecify a passage, as we have seen, is to violate the principles of healthy interpretation. One must strive to be as consistent as possible with the text itself and find the true meaning in the text. Likewise, the figurative and literal fallacy, together with the speculative reading of predictive prophecy, should be avoided. As will become clear, it seems as if CiMI is not different from the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses when it comes to some of these misreadings. CiMI is allowing their theological agenda to have the last say in what a passage truly means. CiMI ignores the immediate contexts of passages, they collapse the contexts of passages, they overspecify the meaning, they interpret literal passages figuratively and vice versa, and they offer speculative readings of predictive prophecies.

### **4.3.5. Scripture as evidence**

Sire (1980:75) introduces the next body of misreadings by rightly stating that the “Bible does not come to us automatically bearing its own interpretation. It does not impress its meaning immediately on each reader’s mind such that all of us receive the same message. Good Bible reading requires good thinking.” Accordingly, it is clear that many misinterpretations when reading the Bible arise because of unsound thinking, in other words, errors in logic. The following couple of misreadings therefore focus on mistakes made in inductive reasoning. Inductive logic refers to reasoning that starts with specific facts, data and evidences, and ends with general conclusions (Sire, 1980:76). When one turns to Scripture, one is also confronted with specific data, information and evidences from which general conclusions can be drawn to reach truth.

#### **4.3.5.1. Misreading no. 10: Saying but not citing**

Anyone who wishes to make a certain case from data and information must first start by using the data as evidence. When someone, for example, says that the Bible is full of instances where it contradicts itself, he/she must be able to prove that claim with the relevant data and information. The point is that a proponent of a certain position must be able to provide data in favour of that position. Jesus, for example, did not only tell His disciples what He was busy doing; He also showed them. According to Sire (1980:77), cults do not follow this principle, since they “proclaim that there is evidence” for their particular views and doctrines, “but they don’t show us”. Someone who consequently claims that the Bible says, “such and such but does not cite the specific text”, is guilty of this specific misreading and many times the fact that they do not provide the necessary citations from Scripture also indicates that there “may be no such text at all” (Sire, 1980:158).

In the light of this misreading, someone claiming that the Bible teaches a specific doctrine, whether orthodox or eccentric, must firstly be able to provide the relevant passage(s) in Scripture, and secondly be able to demonstrate why these passages, taken in their context, are relevant to the specific doctrine at hand (Sire, 1980:80).

#### **a) Examples of misreading no. 10 by CiMI**

##### **Case 1:**

A brief example of this type of misreading is when Strydom (2016d) compares CiMI with the other churches in the world, which he calls “religion”. He says that religion is like a disease that keeps one inferior and dependent upon it. To further illustrate the supposed deception from



religion's side, he adds to this that one will never be able to mature into the kingdom of God if one is 'in religion', that is, in another church besides CiMI. Religion, according to Strydom (2016d), will not be able to answer one's questions that may be relevant, and will rather just answer all questions with a phrase like "when it comes to God you won't know everything". Strydom (2016d) responds to this kind of answer from religion's side by saying, "But the Bible says when the Spirit of truth comes, He will lead you in all truth." Strydom (2016d) does not give a reference to which passage he is referring, but instead just uses the phrase to refute any claim that suggests that one will never know absolutely everything about God. He is therefore only saying, but not citing the passage in question.

To be sure, he is referring to John 16:13.<sup>89</sup> But even if he had referenced the passage, it would still have been taken out of its immediate context because "all truth" in this context does not convey the idea that one will have exhaustive knowledge of God, or unlimited access to all the truth there is to know about God when the Holy Spirit comes. Kruse (2003:327) sets the record straight by saying:

The Spirit would guide Jesus' disciples 'into all truth'. This is not to be interpreted absolutely as if the Counsellor will teach them all that can be known, but rather that he will interpret to them afterwards the truth about the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus. His role is to testify to Jesus.

This case of saying but not citing is also an example of overspecification and ignoring the immediate context once again.

## **Case 2:**

Another example of this mistake is when Labuschagne (2016c) explains why the church in the world is wrong to worship Jesus as God. He mentions with regard to Jesus:

[E]ventually He came ... and then because He says "I am the way",<sup>90</sup> everybody started to worship 'the way' and never got to the destination ... we started to worship the way ... we started to worship Jesus Christ as God, and it was never supposed to be that way. That is not what this Bible is all about!

He continues to explain that "as long as the church believes that Jesus is, or was God, the church will be without identity and will continue living as immature children, without authority" and will apparently be "unable to answer to the Father's dream".

First take note that Labuschagne (2016c) employs a biblical hook by claiming that the Bible is not about worshipping Jesus as God. This way he is rhetorically attempting to get the Bible's

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<sup>89</sup> "However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth..."

<sup>90</sup> This is a reference to John 14:6.

authority behind his claims. Second, and more prominent, is the fact that he is saying that the church is not supposed to worship Jesus as God, but not citing any passages in support of such a claim. Therefore, Labuschagne (2016c) is guilty of saying but not citing the specific passages in support of his claim. He is quick to mention that the Bible is not about worshipping Jesus as God and in the process dismissing an essential doctrine of Christianity, but nowhere provides scriptural evidence in support of the contrary claim he is attempting to make – that the church ought not to worship Jesus as God. If the Bible is so clear about this teaching, how should one interpret Luke 24:52, for example, where it explicitly states that Jesus’s disciples “worshipped Him” just prior to His ascension to heaven?

### **Case 3:**

When Strydom (2018a) deals with Genesis 32:27-28,<sup>91</sup> he makes certain claims, and then attempts to apply his claims from Genesis 32 directly to Christ. The passage in Genesis 32:27-28 is about the event where Jacob wrestled with the Lord, and afterwards the Lord changed his name from ‘Jacob’ to ‘Israel’. Although it is not relevant to this discussion, it should be noted that it is a common practice in the Bible to change people’s names in order to emphasise a certain meaning and significance in the life of the person whose name is changed. Abram’s name was changed to Abraham and Sarai’s name was changed to Sarah (Wenham, 1994:296). In this sense, Jacob’s old name “recalled his past underhand dealings” while his new name “recalled this incident in which he wrestled with God and prevailed” (Wenham, 1994:297).

When Strydom (2018a) comments on the event in Genesis 32:27-28, he starts by stating:

He takes a name which he gave to a person, and He gives it to a nation. I hope you are catching what I am saying? ... When at the beginning there was only one person who was called Israel, but now God calls a whole nation Israel. It is the same with Christ! Jesus Christ was the first Israelite. The true one, the pure one in the spirit. Now, God gives a whole nation Christ, and Israel.

What Strydom (2018a) is attempting to prove is that the title ‘Christ’ is now the legitimate title or name for all the members of CiMI. Just like God changed Jacob’s name to Israel and Israel became the name of the whole nation, the same way Jesus was given the title Christ, which is now the name of the whole Christ specie or nation.

Although Strydom (2018a) cites the passage from the Old Testament, he never cites another passage where his claim with regard to the name or title ‘Christ’ can also be supported. Therefore, he is guilty of saying but not citing. To make the claim that the name ‘Christ’ now belongs to an entire nation, referring to the members of CiMI, needs more evidence. To use the

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<sup>91</sup> “So He said to him, ‘what is your name?’ He said, ‘Jacob.’ And He said, ‘Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed.’”

event where Jacob's name was changed to Israel and then apply it directly to the title Christ is also an overspecification of this Old Testament passage.

#### **4.3.5.2. Misreading no. 11: Selective citing**

The notion of using the Scripture as evidence is also misused with regard to Scripture when only a part of the relevant passages is cited (Sire, 1980:80). Sire (1980:80) correctly observes, "You can 'prove' almost anything from the Bible if you are allowed to select verses or portions of verses as if they told the whole story." Therefore, an argument from Scripture cannot be supported by only a limited number of passages, especially when "the total teaching of Scripture on that subject would lead to a conclusion different from that of the writer" (Sire, 1980:158).

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 11 by CiMI**

###### **Case 1:**

Du Plessis (2016a) provides an example of this misreading when he refers to Matthew 16:13-17.<sup>92</sup> In this passage Jesus asked His disciples, "But who do you say that I am?" and the apostle Peter answered Jesus by saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." After reflecting on Peter's answer to Jesus, Du Plessis (2016a) says the following: "I mean this verse is sweeping away all the arguments of religion that we are not Christs. Just this one verse." According to this teaching of CiMI, a born-again Christian is a Christ since he/she is part of the so-called Christ specie, turning 'Christ' into a title that does not solely belong to Jesus Christ. After concluding from this specific passage that the members of CiMI are all Christs, Du Plessis (2016a) also says, "It's plain and simple! This is not difficult! So, who of you sitting here today is a son of God? ... you are a Christ."

Although Du Plessis (2016a) is guilty of an obvious fallacy by claiming that his interpretation is "plain and simple" and "not difficult", as if it is the obvious interpretation of the text, he is also guilty of selective citing. To quote one verse referring to a specific person, Jesus Christ, and then say that it means that every CiMI member 2000 years later is a Christ and, moreover, to state that this one verse refutes all the arguments of the historical, orthodox Christian faith that confesses Jesus as the Christ, makes no sense. The apostle Peter's answer to the question of Jesus Christ in this passage is considered to be the great confession of the apostle Peter.

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<sup>92</sup> "When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, 'Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?' So they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'"

France (1985:254), for example, says that “Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah forms the climax to the long section of the Gospel.” Blomberg (1992:251) also adds to this point that it is here in Matthew 16:15-16 that “anyone in Jesus’ audiences has unambiguously acknowledged him as the ‘Christ’.” The point is that Du Plessis will have to cite other passages to justify his position, and better explain the passage cited to show how it supports his position in this case, since it is perfectly compatible with historical, orthodox Christianity, according to which Jesus is confessed as the only Christ.

### **Case 2:**

Another example is also found when Du Plessis (2016a) is teaching from 1 John 4:15, which reads as follows: “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” He continues with his exposition by asking the members of CiMI: In whom does God abide, according to this passage? To test his audience, he answers his question by saying that God abides “in those that confess Jesus is God”. After a pause he corrects his own answer:

No! That is not what it says! That is what religion says. The Bible says that those that say that Jesus, He is a son, a Christ of God ... God abides in them. God does not abide in those that say that Jesus is God. It is not what it says here in my Bible.

Take note of the rhetorical biblical hook that he uses to establish more credibility for his teaching when he contrasts what the Bible supposedly says with what ‘religion’ is saying.

The point in this case is that Du Plessis (2016a) only cites this one passage to argue against the deity of Jesus. According to him, God does not abide in those who believe that Jesus is God. Ironically, the Bible also does not say that God abides in those that say that Jesus is “a son of God”, but rather “*the* Son of God”. In the light of verse 14,<sup>93</sup> it is also clear that the Son is sent forth by the Father as “Savior of the world”. Boice (2004:118) explains that the apostle John, in the context of the whole letter, “emphasizes that God the Father sent the eternal Son to be the Savior and that the historical Jesus is that eternal Son”. The point is that the “eternal Son” has come in the flesh, as verses 1-3 state:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.

In this regard verse 15, in its proper context, is actually supporting the deity of Jesus, especially if the correct meaning of the title “Son of God” is also considered. Moreover, in his attempt to disprove the deity of Jesus, Du Plessis (2016a) only cites this one passage while there are

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<sup>93</sup> “And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world.”

other passages in the Bible that affirm the deity of Jesus, as already referred to in sections 4.3.4.1. and 4.3.4.3., for example, as well as in section 4.3.5.3. below, and in Chapter 5. Furthermore, if Jesus is the second Person of the divine Trinity, and therefore God who took up flesh, then it would follow that God abides in them who confess Jesus as their “Lord” and “God” (John 20:28).

### **Case 3:**

Kotze (2017c) insists upon the idea that Jesus Christ was not “the anointed One” at his birth. He claims, for example, that as the wise men from the East followed the star to Bethlehem in search of Jesus at his birth,

He was not yet even anointed at that stage. But He would be called the anointed One, He would even be called Immanuel, which is ‘God with us’. Because wherever He would walk, people would know that God was with us. Does that mean He is God? This is a good question because this is Scripture that people use to say that Jesus is God.

It becomes clear that Kotze (2017c) is focusing in on the deity of Jesus and Him being the anointed One. He furthermore explains,

Jesus was anointed with the Spirit of God and He became the Christ. Now, if you do not understand what I say when I say “He became the Christ.” When you look at Acts 2:36, it says: “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” He was made the Lord and Christ. He was not born Lord and Christ.

According to Kotze (2017c), as a teacher of CiMI, the idea concerning Jesus then is that He became ‘a Christ’ at His baptism and was not born the Christ. Kotze (2017c) cites Acts 2:36<sup>94</sup> as a proof-text for this claim. This attempt, however, is clearly a case of selective citing since he is only citing one verse while there are other verses in the New Testament that bring one to an understanding different from Kotze’s (2017c) idea. Consider the following verses, for example:

- Matthew 2:3-4: “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.”
- Luke 2:11-12: “For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.”
- Luke 2:25-28: “And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon,

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<sup>94</sup> “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

and this man was just and devout, waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. So he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when the parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, he took Him up in his arms and blessed God."

All of these verses refer to events that preceded the baptism and the resurrection of Jesus and cannot be taken as prophecies regarding Jesus's life since there are no indications in the immediate contexts of these passages to interpret them as prophecies. In Matthew 2:3-4 King Herod and the chief priests and scribes understood the prophecy as "the Christ" being born. In Luke 2:11-12 the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds in the field on the day of Jesus's birth and announced to them that the child Jesus "who is Christ the Lord" was born on that day, thus calling Jesus "Christ" on the day of His birth already. In Luke 2:25-28 Jesus was taken to the temple to be circumcised eight days after His birth. The Holy Spirit then revealed to a man named Simeon that he would not die before he had seen "the Lord's Christ". Simeon then met the child Jesus at His circumcision, indicating that the Person of the Holy Spirit regarded the child Jesus as "the Lord's Christ" at the moment Simeon saw the child Jesus.

Kotze (2017c) is therefore not paying any attention to other explicit verses and, besides selectively citing one verse to support his claim, also ignores the immediate context of Acts 2:36, as well as other potential explanations of this specific passage within its context.

The proper context of Acts 2:36 would rather indicate that God made Jesus "both Lord and Christ" through His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven (Barret, 2004a:151). In Acts 2:32-33 one reads: "This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear." The baptism of Jesus is therefore not the event that the apostle Peter had in mind when referring to the notion that God made Jesus "both Lord and Christ", but rather His resurrection. Barret (2004a:151) offers the explanation that the resurrection and ascension of Jesus serve as confirmation of Jesus's eternal Lordship and Messiahship. In turn, Stein (1992:108) also offers this explanation:

Although the realization of the authority of the titles 'Christ' and 'Lord' would await the resurrection (Acts 2:36), Jesus at his birth was already both Christ and Lord, for the one born to Mary in Bethlehem is the same person who is raised in glory and given the authority to be Lord and Christ.

Bird (2017:28-29) also endorses this idea of Acts 2:36 by saying that "Jesus is more properly known and recognized as Lord and Messiah upon his resurrection rather than transformed into a divine figure by means of resurrection", or by His baptism, for that matter. He concludes that

Acts 2:36 indicates an epistemological shift regarding Jesus, and not an ontological shift. In summary then, although Jesus was the Lord and Christ from His birth, His resurrection and subsequent ascension “proved that nothing less could be the truth; and at the same time, returning from death, he appeared as Messiah in the role of a supernatural κύριος” (Barret, 2004a:152).

#### **4.3.5.3. Misreading no. 12: Inadequate evidence**

Sire (1980:82) acknowledges that there are some parts of the Bible which are unclear and difficult to make sense of. He also mentions that there are times when “we have considered all the evidence seemingly in Scripture there is not enough to satisfy our curiosity or to draw solid conclusions. The Scripture does not answer every question we bring to it, though only by asking and seeking are we likely to discover just what questions can’t be answered” (Sire, 1980:82-83). The mistake is that the inadequacy of the data found in the Bible does not keep people from speculating about certain things and drawing hasty conclusions from too little evidence (Sire, 1980:83, 158).

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 12 by CiMI**

###### **Case 1:**

Labuschagne (2016c) claims that Jesus is not God since God only refers to Jesus as “His beloved Son” in the Bible and “never as God or as a co-God”.<sup>95</sup> He further argues,

Jesus also never introduced Himself to us as God or God the Son. Jesus always referred to God as His Father. If by any chance it might have been true that Jesus is God one would believe that God or Jesus Himself would have introduced themselves to us that way. This is not the case. To try to prove that Jesus is God one needs to drastically distort the Scriptures and to form unmotivated linguistic arguments ... Why would God withhold such a great and important truth from us if indeed it would have been the case? God is not what you think He is, He is what He says He is ... You need to renew your mind according to what He says; God will not renew Himself according to what you say.

Labuschagne (2016c) is certainly correct when he says that “God is not what you think He is”, but He is rather “what He says He is”. White (1989:18) expresses the same kind of sentiment in the sense that one must love God as “He has revealed Himself, rather than loving an image ... created of Him” in one’s mind. The issue in this case, however, is not with this sentiment, but with the way Labuschagne (2016c) neglects to provide any scriptural evidence in support of his

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<sup>95</sup> To be sure, this is not what the doctrine of Christ’s deity, or the doctrine of the Trinity is claiming. This idea of Jesus being a ‘co-God’ is closer to the theology of the Jehovah’s Witnesses than of Christianity.

claim that Jesus is not God and that any attempt to try to prove it is futile. Evidence to the contrary of Labuschagne's (2016c) claim can indeed be found in the Bible.

One brief argument that Jesus is God can be found in Mark 2:5-11.<sup>96</sup> In this instance Jesus does not assume any titles of deity, but rather claims equality with God by claiming to be able to forgive sins. You can only forgive something that was done against *you*. Sin can be done against a specific person, but it is always against God. True forgiveness is only from God. Geisler (2013a:376, 379) explains it as follows:

Jesus's claim to be able to forgive sins, the scribe's understanding of that claim, and Jesus's healing of the man are all evidence of his authority, and make it clear that Jesus was claiming a power that God alone possessed (cf. Jer. 31:34)<sup>97</sup> ... By claiming the ability to forgive sins (cf. John 8:1-11), Jesus was claiming to be God.

Another example presented by Labuschagne (2016c) is when he makes the claim that "it has never been in the minds of the apostles that Jesus Christ is God. They always referred to God being the Father of Jesus Christ." For Labuschagne (2016c) the passages in Romans 15:5-6,<sup>98</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:2,<sup>99</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:31,<sup>100</sup> Ephesians 1:3,<sup>101</sup> Colossians 1:3<sup>102</sup> and 1 Peter 1:3<sup>103</sup> are enough to prove this point for CiMI. The researcher certainly grants the point that God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ, since Trinitarians also believe that. However, by proving the point that God the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ, does not automatically disprove the notion that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh, and the second person of the Trinity. In this attempt to disprove the deity of Jesus, all the abovementioned passages are listed as if they accomplish that goal, together with a claim that the deity of Jesus Christ "has never been in the minds of the apostles" (Labuschagne, 2016c). However, it simply does not follow from that premise. Labuschagne (2016c) fails to mention certain passages that are typically used to prove that

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<sup>96</sup> "When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.' And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, 'Why does this Man speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' But immediately, when Jesus perceived in His spirit that they reasoned thus within themselves, He said to them, 'Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Arise, take up your bed and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins' – He said to the paralytic, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.' Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God saying, 'We never saw anything like this!'"

<sup>97</sup> "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

<sup>98</sup> "Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus, that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

<sup>99</sup> "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

<sup>100</sup> "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

<sup>101</sup> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

<sup>102</sup> "We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

<sup>103</sup> "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."



Jesus fully has the divine essence with God the Father, as God the Son. Consider the following examples:

- In John 20:26-29<sup>104</sup> Thomas explicitly calls Jesus Christ, “My Lord and my God!” and Jesus emphasises that it is correct and has to be believed even by those who have not seen Him.
- In Romans 9:5<sup>105</sup> the apostle Paul claims that Jesus Christ is the “eternally blessed God”.
- In Titus 2:11-14<sup>106</sup> Paul the apostle also states that Jesus Christ is “our great God and Savior”.
- In 1 John 5:20<sup>107</sup> the apostle John refers to Jesus Christ as the “true God and eternal life”.

Labuschagne’s (2016c) claim that “if by any chance it might have been true that Jesus is God one would believe that God or Jesus Himself would have introduced themselves to us that way. This is not the case”, is also not correct. In Hebrews 1:8<sup>108</sup> the Father calls the Son “God” and in Revelation 1:8<sup>109</sup> Jesus calls Himself “Almighty God” (cf. with Rev. 1:17-18<sup>110</sup> and Rev. 22:13<sup>111</sup>).

Labuschagne (2016c) not only cites a limited number of selective passages to motivate his point, which is to disprove the teaching that Jesus is God, but he also cites passages that have no bearing on the point he is trying to disprove in the first place. Consequently, the evidence

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<sup>104</sup> “And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them, Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’”

<sup>105</sup> “I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.”

<sup>106</sup> “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.”

<sup>107</sup> “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

<sup>108</sup> “But to the Son *He says: ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.’*”

<sup>109</sup> “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End*’, says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

<sup>110</sup> “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. <sup>18</sup>I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.’”

<sup>111</sup> “I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last.*”

that he does provide is inadequate to arrive at his conclusion. It also becomes clear that the apostles Paul, John and Thomas accepted Jesus Christ as God. Some of these explicit passages will be addressed in Chapter 5.

### **Case 2:**

In his reference to Acts 2:36,<sup>112</sup> Strydom (2018a) does not provide nearly enough evidence for some of his claims. According to him, this passage separates the name “Jesus” from “Lord” and “Christ” which indicates that Jesus became “a Lord and a Christ” at some point in time. He further suggests that this is also what happens to someone who is born from above – he/she is made “a Lord and a Christ”. He comments on this verse as follows:

If you take away ‘Lord’ and ‘Christ’, what is the name that stands there? Jesus. So, Jesus was the first one who became Lord and Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>113</sup> Every one of us that is born again, God makes a Lord and a Christ. So, you can put your name there. He is the Father of the Christ specie.

Later in the same sermon Strydom (2018a) returns to this passage again and says: “We celebrate the fact that through Jesus Christ God also made us both Lords and Christs. Were we born that way? No! Is your flesh that?<sup>114</sup> No! You were appointed, you were ordained that. You were born again into it from above.”

Neither the context of Acts 2, nor the context of the whole New Testament allows such a reading of this passage. Acts 2:36 is part of the apostle Peter’s sermon, and when one considers the context, it is clear that no other name but the name of Jesus should be applied to “both Lord and Christ”. The proper context of verse 36 seems to indicate that Peter is addressing the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. In verse 29<sup>115</sup> he mentions David as being “both dead and buried”. In other words, David died and stayed dead. But then in verse 30-33<sup>116</sup> he emphasises Jesus Christ as the one who died but was raised from the dead and ascended to heaven where He sits at the right hand of the Father. Jesus did not go through some ontological change since He was made “both Lord and Christ”. No, the point that the

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<sup>112</sup> “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

<sup>113</sup> This is a reference to Ephesians 1:3.

<sup>114</sup> This can again be observed as a matter-spirit dualistic tendency.

<sup>115</sup> “Men, and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.”

<sup>116</sup> “Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear”.

apostle Peter is actually making is that Jesus's life, death, resurrection and ascension confirmed His pre-existing and eternal status as "both Lord and Christ". Kistemaker and Hendriksen (1990:102) say: "When Peter states that God made Jesus Lord and Christ, he does not convey the interpretation that God exalted Jesus after his death on the cross. To the contrary, the New Testament alludes to Jesus' exaltation even before he suffered on Calvary's cross." If anything, these events only contributed to an epistemological shift with regard to the status of Jesus.

Strydom (2018a) needs to provide more evidence for his claim that God also makes the people in CiMI, who are born again, both Lords and Christs. From the context, it seems to be difficult to apply these titles to someone else than Jesus. He is the only One who died and was resurrected again by the might of His own power, and also ascended into heaven after His resurrection to sit at the right hand of the Father. Thus, Strydom (2018a) is guilty of providing inadequate evidence and not keeping track with the proper context when he is dealing with Acts 2:36.

### **Case 3:**

Labuschagne (2018) neglects to provide adequate evidence for his conclusion regarding the resurrection of Jesus. He begins by pointing to the account in John 2:19-21<sup>117</sup> where Jesus says to his disciples and other bystanders to destroy the temple and that He will rebuild it in three days. The Jews then answer Jesus by saying, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and You will raise it up in three days?" They missed the point, however, since Jesus was not speaking of the temple in Jerusalem, but rather of the temple of His body. This serves as an introduction to the rest of his exposition.

As he goes further, Labuschagne (2018) claims,

Now, we understand today that the body that was resurrected on the third day ... was not the same body that was buried. Okay, let me just explain that again ... When Jesus Christ was resurrected on the third day, you remember that His disciples locked themselves in ... And they hid themselves and they did not expect, although Jesus said it to them, they did not expect Him to be resurrected. If they did expect Him, they would've had a welcoming party for Him prepared, and had a joyous moment of fellowship when He would appear. That is not what happened. It was not the case. When all of a sudden, He appeared in their midst, they were like, "It's a ghost!"

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<sup>117</sup> "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

At this point Labuschagne (2018) is referring to the account in Luke 24:36-39<sup>118</sup> where Jesus appeared to His disciples after He had risen from the dead. When this happened, the disciples were terrified and scared. Labuschagne (2018) continues by answering the question why the disciples of Jesus reacted in this way: "Because He was not flesh and blood. And all of a sudden, in their midst and He didn't come in the way they expected Him after His resurrection."

Accordingly, Labuschagne (2018) claims that the body in which Jesus was resurrected was not the same body as the one that was buried. According to him, it was a spiritual body, without flesh and bones, that was resurrected. However, since Luke 24:39 clearly communicates the idea that Jesus invited His disciples to look at His hands and feet, and to touch Him in order for them to see that He was not a ghost, Labuschagne (2018) introduces the following reason to maintain his view that Jesus's body was only spiritual. According to him, "God supernaturally needed to work in Jesus's body that He could express the holes in His hands and in His side and let them touch Him, and so forth. So, then they realised, it's Him, it is not a ghost." Although the body of Jesus is only a spiritual body, according to Labuschagne (2018), God caused the wounds of Jesus to appear on a real physical body in that moment, thereby to accommodate the disciples and allow them to recognise Jesus. In this sense it was a supernatural intervention from God in that instance to only make it seem as if Jesus had a physical body, while He actually only had a spiritual body.

To further make his point, Labuschagne (2018) also turns to an event that happened earlier in the gospel of Luke, Chapter 24, but also after Jesus's resurrection. The event is where Jesus walks and eats with the two travellers from Emmaus. Labuschagne (2018) continues with his exposition by explaining it as follows:

Later on, Jesus was walking with the Emmaus dwellers. He even ate with them. Now come on! Holes in the hands, eating with them, not noticing the holes in the hands? It doesn't make sense. So, where's the holes now? So, He is expressing Himself in a different way ... So, what I am trying to say is that it was a supernatural body. It was not the same. It was not flesh and blood.

The point here is that if Jesus had the same physical body as the one that was buried after His crucifixion, these two travellers with whom He ate would have seen the holes in Jesus's hands, but they did not recognise Him.

Labuschagne (2018) is not applying a consistent hermeneutic and in fact contradicts what is stated in the passages to which he refers. His presupposition that the body of Jesus after His

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<sup>118</sup> "Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you.' But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.'"

resurrection is apparently a different body from the one that was buried does not allow him to read what Jesus Himself and Scripture say in John 2 and Luke 24.

He is correct in the sense that the disciples did not expect Jesus to be resurrected, which explains their fearful reaction when Jesus appeared in their midst. But he is not correct when he introduces the idea that God “supernaturally” worked in that moment in order for Jesus to have wounds to show and a physical body to touch, since Jesus’s body was actually only spiritual and needed God’s intervention<sup>119</sup> in such a manner to accommodate the disciples. There are no indications in the text to introduce this idea. The plain reading of the text would rather point to the fact that it is Jesus Christ who appeared to them in bodily form, which is exactly the same body as the one that was crucified and buried. The words of Jesus “it is I Myself” also indicates that the “risen Christ is the same person as Jesus of Nazareth” (Stein, 1992:617). Instead of causing more confusion regarding the nature of Jesus’s body, Hendriksen and Kistemaker (1978:1074) clarify it as follows: “With marvelous condescension he ‘showed them his hands and his feet’ probably with the twofold purpose of proving to them: (a) ‘I am not a ghost,’ and (b) ‘I am indeed your Lord and Savior.’” The passage states that Jesus “ate in their presence” (verse 43). One could therefore say that there is nothing in the text to suggest that God had to supernaturally intervene in that moment or that Jesus had a spiritual body and not a physical body. One wonders whether Labuschagne would introduce the same explanation for John 20:27<sup>120</sup> where Thomas touched the wounds of Jesus Christ after Jesus’s resurrection. It is also worth pointing out, as Stoker (1995:336) mentions, that later in Luke 24:46-48<sup>121</sup> Jesus declares the disciples to be witnesses of His resurrected body, and not of a vague spiritual body.

When Labuschagne (2018) turns to the account of Jesus walking and eating with the travellers from Emmaus, he actually misses the idea he illegitimately introduces into the account when Jesus appeared to his disciples. If Labuschagne (2018) were paying attention to the immediate context of Luke 24:13-32,<sup>122</sup> he would have recognised the strange words in verse 16 where one

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<sup>119</sup> Take note that this critique is not against the idea that God can intervene. It is rather against introducing the idea of God’s intervention when the passage explicitly provides a better explanation.

<sup>120</sup> “Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’”

<sup>121</sup> “Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things.’”

<sup>122</sup> “Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, ‘What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?’ Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, ‘Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?’ And He said to them, ‘What things?’ So they said to Him, ‘The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be

reads that “their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him”. Instead of introducing in this passage the principle of God’s supernatural way of operating, as he does with the previous passage, Labuschagne (2018) is of the opinion that in this case Jesus is expressing Himself in a different way. What he means is that the body Jesus has here is, again, not the same body that was buried and not a physical body, but spiritual, without “flesh and blood”. In the light of verse 16, Labuschagne’s (2018) attempt to justify his view lacks the necessary evidence. Stein (1992:610) sets the record straight as he explains that the “passive ‘were kept from recognizing’ is a divine passive, i.e., God kept them from recognizing Jesus. This lack of recognition allowed Jesus to teach the necessity of his death and resurrection and to show how this was the fulfillment of Scripture (Luke 24:25–27).” While the other passage does not permit this kind of explanation, this passage is open to it because the passage itself explicitly dictates this kind of interpretation, since the dwellers from Emmaus were restrained from seeing Jesus for who He really is. The intervention by God did not pertain to the body of Jesus, as Labuschagne assumes in his explanation of the previous passage, but rather in restraining the Emmaus dwellers from seeing who Jesus really was. This means that those who knew Jesus before His death and resurrection would have been able to recognise Him if their eyes were not withheld from doing so. Moreover, in verse 31 one reads that their “eyes were opened and they recognized Him”.

Since Labuschagne (2018) does not provide enough evidence, and in the light of the fact that the evidence is clearly against him, his conclusion regarding the post-resurrection body of Jesus is false. Additionally, besides inadequate evidence, he is also guilty of ignoring alternative explanations and ignoring the immediate context, while going directly against what Jesus Himself says and what Scripture explains.

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condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those *who were* with us went to the tomb and found *it* just as the women had said; but Him they did not see.’ Then He said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?’ And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, ‘Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent.’ And He went in to stay with them. Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. And they said to one another, ‘Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?’”

#### **4.3.5.4. Concluding remarks**

This category of misreadings illustrated how the scriptural evidence that is brought to the fore in favour of a specific position can be totally absent, selectively presented, or inadequate and therefore unpersuasive (Sire, 1980:88). As shown, CiMI is once again guilty in this regard. Their theological position is unable to muster the necessary evidence from the Bible to support it. Sire (1980:88) presents the antidote to this issue by explaining that these arguments must be examined carefully and with meticulous inquiry. Questions regarding the specific chapters and verses must be addressed, and one must make sure that all the relevant data is adequately presented.

#### **4.3.6. Reasoning from Scripture**

Reading the Bible involves more than drawing correct generalisations from Biblical data. There is another side of good reasoning that also plays a role in the interpretation of the Bible (Sire, 1980:89). Sire (1980:89), for example, states, “Understanding Scripture, seeing each text in its context and getting an overall view of the scheme of ideas into which each text fits, involves more than simply bringing all the evidence out into the open.” The idea is that when one puts the different passages of the Bible together and understands their relationships with one another, then one is beginning to think “systematically about Scripture” (Sire, 1980:89). In this context it is also possible to fall into errors of deductive logic. Deductive logic is reasoning that begins with general principles and argues in the direction of more specific ideas and applications.

##### **4.3.6.1. Misreading no. 13: Confused definition**

Sire (1980:90) mentions that for any deductive argument to move soundly, each term in the argument must be clarified and defined. This is a straightforward point to make, but essential biblical doctrines can be distorted or rejected because of biblical terms being misunderstood (Sire, 1980:158). Even Odendaal (2019), a teacher of CiMI, agrees with this observation when he confirms that definitions are important to the message one is teaching. He adds that CiMI “cannot allow different interpretations to stop what God is doing”. According to him, religion is redefining words, which leads to wrong interpretations.

## a) Examples of misreading no. 13 by CiMI

### Case 1:

A clear example of this misreading is found when Du Plessis (2016a) loads the word 'resurrection', as it appears in 1 Peter 1:3-5<sup>123</sup>, with a new meaning. Du Plessis (2016a) claims that God is giving everyone at CiMI a new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He then says that the word 'resurrection', according to the Greek, means "a moral recovery of spiritual truth". He further explains that "it has got nothing to do with Jesus's physical flesh being raised from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a recovery, a moral recovery of spiritual truth in you as a mankind." Furthermore, Du Plessis (2016a) explains that if one does not receive this resurrection, or "this moral recovery of spiritual truth with regard to Jesus Christ" (Du Plessis, 2016a), one will still be "spiritually dead". He goes further still by saying,

For 2000 years the church has been preaching something. My question is, if [the preaching of the church] gave us spiritual life, why didn't we see the kingdom of God manifest in this world? Why haven't we seen that the glory, the view, the judgement and the opinion of God manifested in this world already? Because that moral recovery of spiritual truth regarding the resurrection of Jesus Christ has not come to them yet. And that is the problem that we have in the world today ... So, do you guys see that Peter is writing here about moral recovery of spiritual truth?

Although Du Plessis (2016a) does not provide adequate evidence for his redefinition of the word 'resurrection' as a "moral recovery of spiritual truth", he encourages members of CiMI to look up the word in the Greek. However, when one turns to Liddell's (1996:62) Greek-English Lexicon, the meaning of the Greek word for 'resurrection' (*ἀνάστασις*) is "a rising again". In turn, Louw and Nida (1996:261) place this word under the semantic domain of "physiological processes and states". They also add that it entails "to come back to life after having once died".

Kistemaker and Hendriksen (1987:41-42) mention that the apostle Peter referred to the resurrection of Jesus twice in his first letter. They also point out that Peter, as one of the apostles, was familiar with the idea that Jesus Christ was physically resurrected from the dead. When the eleven apostles had to replace the traitor of Jesus, Judas Iscariot, the following happened:

Peter, as spokesman, declared that this person had to be a follower of Jesus from the day of his baptism to the time of his ascension, and that he had to be a witness of Jesus' resurrection (Acts

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<sup>123</sup> "Blessed be the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."



1:22).<sup>124</sup> As an eyewitness to the resurrection of Jesus, Peter proclaimed this truth in his sermon to the multitude gathered in Jerusalem on Pentecost (Acts 2:31).<sup>125</sup> When he preached to the crowd at Solomon's porch, he said that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 3:15;<sup>126</sup> compare 4:2,<sup>127</sup> 33<sup>128</sup>). And last, when Peter spoke in the home of Cornelius at Caesarea, he taught the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 10:40).<sup>129</sup> Peter testified to this truth throughout his ministry of preaching and writing (Kistemaker & Hendriksen, 1987:41-42).

By redefining the word 'resurrection', Du Plessis (2016a) is distorting the theological significance of Christ's bodily resurrection as a basis, not just for one's own glorified body at Jesus Christ's second coming, but also as the basis for a "new spiritual life" (Grudem, 1988:61) here and now. The point is therefore that Du Plessis (2016a) is confused about the definition of a word which is crucial to the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Since CiMI rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus, it is not surprising that they would redefine the word 'resurrection' to better fit their position.

### **Case 2:**

Labuschagne (2018) is confusing a definition in his claims with regard to Genesis 1:26-27<sup>130</sup> and Genesis 2:7.<sup>131</sup> He starts off to make the point that God is Spirit. He correctly establishes this principle from John 4:24 which reads that "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth". Labuschagne (2018) then talks about the creation account at the beginning of Genesis. God created the world in five days and on the sixth day He created a human being. Labuschagne (2018) makes the following lengthy statement:

And then God breathed into man, and man became the image and the likeness of God. God did not create flesh and blood in the image of God, for God is no image. God is a Spirit. God is not physics ... God is not a physical body, so your physical body, was not made in the image and the likeness of God. It has got nothing to do with your physical body. We all differ, so who is looking like God? But God is Spirit, and when God has breathed in man, God created man in His image and in His likeness, and according to the spirit-man we became the image and likeness of God ...

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<sup>124</sup> "... beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection."

<sup>125</sup> "... he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption."

<sup>126</sup> "... and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses."

<sup>127</sup> "... being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead."

<sup>128</sup> "And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all."

<sup>129</sup> "Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly."

<sup>130</sup> "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

<sup>131</sup> "And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

The artist here, or the Creator here is God. And if God says, 'I will make my own image and my own likeness,' it means that God will make His image and His likeness. So, God made an exact replica of Himself ... The knowledge of God was then deposited into man. The being, the very essence of God was deposited into man.

Labuschagne (2018) is first of all claiming that the physical body of man is not created in the image and likeness of God, but only the spirit inside of man, or what he calls the "spirit-man". This is motivated by the notion that man only became a living being after "the breath of life" was blown into the nostrils of man by God. Secondly, he is claiming that part of being created in the image and likeness of God involves being the "exact replica" of God with the "very essence of God" given to man. Labuschagne (2018) also adds that since everything brings forth "according to its kind" (Genesis 1:24-25),<sup>132</sup> when God made man, He brought forth according to His own kind, which is why mankind is a 'godkind' or, as he puts it, a "replica" of God.

Besides this being an overspecification of Genesis 1:26-27 since Labuschagne (2018) allows this passage to say much more than it actually does, by saying that man has the "very essence of God", he is also showing confusion about the definition and meaning of "the image and likeness of God." For him it means to be the "exact replica" of God. A reading such as this would suggest that all humans (or at least the members of CiMI) are gods, possessing the "very essence of God". He also takes this to apply exclusively to one's spirit and not one's physical body with flesh and bones.

This exposition of Labuschagne also arches back to CiMI's teaching regarding the people of CiMI being a 'godkind'. It was mentioned earlier that this is a kind of henotheism which is visible in CiMI's theology. While it was earlier taught from John 10, at this point it is arrived at from Genesis 1, specifically man being created in the "image and likeness" of God. This is again a general teaching in CiMI. Strydom (2016d) also explains that since man is created in the image of God, it gives man "the value of God" and therefore makes man a "godkind". According to Strydom (2016d), God's words "let us make man" entail that man possesses the fullness of God and that "everything that is true about God, God put into one mankind" (Strydom, 2016d).

Being a "godkind" in the theology of CiMI is also linked with being a Christ. If one is a Christ by virtue of being anointed into the Christ specie, one is also a godkind. Elsewhere the Christ specie is described as "the image of God" (CiMI, 2018h), which means that when one is a Christ one has the image of God, and since being the image of God makes one a godkind, when one

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<sup>132</sup> "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, *each* according to its kind'; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that *it was good*."

is a Christ, one is a godkind. This explains why Strydom (2018a) insists that the message of CiMI will “regenerate mankind into gods – the image and likeness of God”.

On this point, as indicated earlier, it is important to note that CiMI shows similarities with the “little gods doctrine” of the modern Word of Faith movement (Hanegraaff, 2009:132-133). Meyer (2007), for example, states, “If you as a human being have a baby, you call it a humankind. If cattle have another cattle, they call it a cattle-kind. I mean, what’s God supposed to call us? Doesn’t the Bible say we’re created in His image?” In the same manner Dollar (2014) says,

God submits Himself to this principle that everything produces after its own kind...If everything produces after its own kind, we now see God producing man ... If horses get together, they produce what? Horses! ... If the Godhead gets together and say “let us make man”, then what are they producing? ... They’re producing gods ... You are gods because you came from God and you are gods, you’re not just human. The only human part about you is this physical body that you live in.

These comments sound remarkably similar to CiMI’s teaching of man being a “godkind”. It is especially similar to the way in which Strydom (2019b) and Labuschagne (2018) also emphasise this principle in Genesis 1 that everything produces after its own kind. In the same way as Meyer and Dollar mention cattle and horses, Strydom mentions eagles and dolphins, which bring forth after its own kind. He then concludes that mankind was produced by God since God brings forth after His own kind. In this regard “God made an exact replica of Himself” (Labuschagne, 2018).

The issue at hand is therefore to provide the correct definition of what it means to be created in the “image” and “likeness” of God. Suffice to say first that whatever else the idea of being created in the “image” and “likeness” of God may mean, it certainly does not mean to be an exact copy of God or possessing God’s own essence. It has been pointed out by Old Testament Hebrew scholars that there is no room for this kind of reading. In the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Hamilton (1999:192) explains “the relationship between *ṣelem* (‘image’, q.v.) and *dēmût* (‘likeness’)”. He mentions that this is the only place in the entire Old Testament that these two words appear in connection with each other. The following suggestion is then made: “The more important word of the two is ‘image’ but to avoid the implication that man is a precise copy of God, albeit in miniature, the less specific and more abstract *dēmût* was added. *dēmût* then defines and limits the meaning of *ṣelem*.” This case is also then a good example of where a word study of the original languages can be helpful in an attempt to interpret the meaning of these words in the passage, and to avoid confusion about the meaning of the words in question. The meaning of being created in the “image and likeness” of God can therefore not be taken to mean an “exact replica” of God, since the word “image” is limited by the word “likeness”.

Since the word “likeness” only refers to a resemblance of some kind and not in any way to identity, Labuschagne (2018) needs more evidence to make his case compelling; he rather seems to confuse the meaning of words in this instance. Hanegraaff (2009:139-140) gives the following reasons why the evidence points in the opposite direction instead:

- The Scriptures affirm that God is not a man, but rather in a whole other class (Num. 23:19;<sup>133</sup> 1 Sam. 15:29<sup>134</sup> and Hos. 11:9<sup>135</sup>).
- There cannot be an exact duplicate of God, if God says that “there is none like Me in all the earth” (Exodus 9:14).
- Even though man is created in the “image” and “likeness” of God, man still clearly does not possess the infinite attributes of God. Man is a limited being.

Man, as the “image” and “likeness” of God therefore does not take anything away from the difference between man and God (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:319). Such a rendering would be inconsistent with the Bible as a whole. Hanegraaff (2009:140) effectively summarises the correct explanation of the theological significance of being created in the “image” and the “likeness” of God as follows:

Far from being a reproduction of God, humanity is more correctly portrayed as a reflection of God. That humans are created in God’s image simply means that they share, in a finite and imperfect way, the communicable attributes of God. Among such attributes are personality, spirituality (John 4:24),<sup>136</sup> rationality, including knowledge and wisdom (Colossians 3:10),<sup>137</sup> and morality, including goodness, holiness, righteousness, love, justice, and mercy (Ephesians 4:24ff).

Bavinck (2004:561) also adopts this explanation when he asserts, “All that is in God—his spiritual essence, his virtues and perfections, his immanent self-distinctions, his self-communication and self-revelation in creation—finds its admittedly finite and limited analogy and likeness in humanity.”

It is also not clear why Labuschagne (2018) would only apply the “image” and “likeness” of God to the spirit of man and not to his body as well. Genesis 2:7 still includes the notion that God formed man from “the dust of the ground”, which was part of the one act where God said, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). Van Genderen and Velema (2008:324) therefore affirm that there is no contradiction between Genesis 1:27 and 2:7. The latter verse is only an elaboration of the former. The “breath of life” is therefore just as

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<sup>133</sup> “God *is* not a man ...”

<sup>134</sup> “For He *is* not a man ...”

<sup>135</sup> “For I *am* God, and not man ...”

<sup>136</sup> “God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

<sup>137</sup> “... and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.”

characteristic of man as the fact that he was “taken from dust”. This can be summarised as follows: “the uniqueness of man is that he is dust and at the same time through the *nephesh*<sup>138</sup> a living being” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:324). Being human, and therefore the image and likeness of God, includes both body and spirit in its entirety<sup>139</sup> (Bavinck, 2004:555, 561). This is another product of CiMI’s Gnostic dualism where the body and the spirit are standing in opposition to one another.<sup>140</sup> Labuschagne (2018) seems to treat the spirit and body as two different parts of mankind, which is, in the context of Genesis 1:27 and 2:7, a result of ignorance towards the immediate context and also a presentation of inadequate evidence.

Bavinck (2004:559) observes in this regard:

Man has a “spirit” (*pneuma*), but that “spirit” is psychically organized and must, by virtue of its nature, inhabit a body. It is of the essence of humanity to be corporeal and sentient. Hence, man’s body is first (if not temporally, then logically) formed from the dust of the earth and then the breath of life is breathed into him.

This is therefore an appeal to the order of Genesis 2:7. Bavinck further explains that one’s body is not a “prison” of some kind, but rather “a marvelous piece of art from the hand of God Almighty, and just as constitutive for the essence of humanity as the soul”.

In this sense there is an essential and intimate unity between body and soul as the image and likeness of God. It is described in a way as to suggest that the unity of body and soul is so intimate that “one nature, one person, one self is the subject of both and of all their activities. It is always the same soul that peers through the eyes, thinks through the brain, grasps with the hands, and walks with the feet” (Bavinck, 2004:559). This, however, is not to ignore the distinction between body and soul, since it is recognised as two dimensions of a unity. CiMI therefore confuses ‘dimensions’ with ‘parts’ and interprets body and soul as opposites (Geisler, 2004:63). Geisler (2004:66-67) makes the following points from Scripture to establish the unity of the body and the soul of man:

- As already demonstrated, Genesis 2:7 teaches a unity of body and soul in man.
- Since God forbids murder in Genesis 9:6, which reads as follows: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, By man his blood shall be shed; For in the image of God He made man”, it seems as if the body of flesh and blood, as part of being created in God’s image, has worth and dignity in the eyes of God. This passage also assumes that one’s body is part of God’s image, and that the image of God in man was not entirely lost after the fall.

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<sup>138</sup> This is the Hebrew word for ‘breath’.

<sup>139</sup> It is important to point out that the words ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ are here used interchangeably since passages such as Matthew 10:28, 1 Corinthians 7:34, and James 2:26 use it as such.

<sup>140</sup> Strydom (2017a) also asserts: “We’re no longer flesh ... [the flesh] is not God’s offspring, the Spirit is God’s offspring.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:1-4<sup>141</sup> also indicates that a soul is incomplete without a body. Kistemaker and Hendriksen (1997:174-175) also comment on this portion of Scripture explaining:

The verb *to clothe over* connotes that resurrection transforms the body and adds to it. That is, when the earthly body is destroyed (v. 1), the soul enters a state of being unclothed. But our desire is to see the resurrection of our bodies covered with everlasting glory and immortality ... At death, our physical body descends into the grave, because the body cannot be held in bondage. It will come forth renewed and glorified through Christ at his coming; he triumphs over the power of death and the grave. Conversely, those believers who are alive at Christ's return are instantly transformed and do not experience death and the grave.

This means that there is indeed an incompleteness if the soul is without the body. There is a longing for the completeness of soul and body in the apostle Paul since one's soul is "naked" without the body. But the hope is that the body will be resurrected.

- Linking closely with the previous point, one could say that the bodily resurrection of all human beings, whether they are saved or not, would not make any sense if the soul without the body is not in an incomplete state. In John 5:25-30<sup>142</sup> Jesus explains that those who have done good will come forth from the grave "to the resurrection of the life", while the evildoers will come forth from the grave "to the resurrection of condemnation". This means that all people will be resurrected one day and the judgement of Jesus will commence when the soul and body are united again.

The only conclusion one can come to when the context of the Scriptures is taken into account in its entirety is that of Bavinck (2004:561):

In the teaching of Scripture God and the world, spirit and matter, are not opposites. There is nothing despicable or sinful in matter. The visible world is as much a beautiful and lush revelation of God as the spiritual. He displays his virtues as much in the former as in the latter. All creatures are embodiments of divine thoughts, and all of them display the footsteps or vestiges of God. But all these vestiges, distributed side by side in the spiritual as well as the material world, are recapitulated in man and so organically connected and highly enhanced that they clearly constitute

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<sup>141</sup> "For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in *this* tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing *is* God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee."

<sup>142</sup> "Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."

the image and likeness of God. The whole world raises itself upward, culminates and completes itself, and achieves its unity, its goal, and its crown in humanity.

Labuschagne (2018) is therefore guilty of multiple misreadings in this regard, including inadequate evidence, ignoring the immediate context, and confused definitions.

### **Case 3:**

Another example of a confused definition is Strydom's (2019c) use of the word 'Christ'. At one point he asks a question, inquiring why the church finds it so difficult to understand that Jesus Christ was the first Christ. He explains that "when we say the word 'Christ', I am referring to the second mankind specie. The one that is born from God. Do you believe that you are born again?" This comment of Strydom (2019c) already indicates that he views 'Christ' as an impersonal kind of specie and that anyone who is born from above becomes a Christ in the inside. Christ is therefore not a 'who', but a 'what'. Following this explanation, Strydom (2019c) views Jesus Christ as the first member of this Christ specie who "paved the way" for the rest of CiMI to enter or "cross over" into the Christ specie. He also emphasises that Jesus was not born a Christ but was made a Christ by God, or in the words of Strydom (2019c), He was "Christed"<sup>143</sup> by God.

He turns to the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1. In verse 17 it is explained that "all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations, from David until the captivity in Babylon are fourteen generations, and from the captivity in Babylon until the Christ are fourteen generations." This genealogy is brought to bear on this discussion since Strydom (2019c) counts Jesus as one generation and Christ as another generation, which amounts to a total of fourteen generations between the captivity in Babylon and Christ. This, according to Strydom (2019c) indicates that the Christ is its own generation of a specie.

Later Strydom (2019c) also makes mention of the way the world dates events that happened prior to the historical figure, Jesus Christ. In this regard B.C. is commonly used to refer to the time "before Christ". Strydom (2019c) explains that this idea refers to "before Christ, not before Jesus". This also implies a separation between Jesus and Jesus Christ. The so-called "flesh Jesus" was only a carpenter for 30 years. But when Jesus went into the Jordan River to be baptised, a being from heaven became one with Jesus and in that moment, he became a Christ. Strydom (2019c) claims that this is as "clear as daylight" and that "the Scripture is full of it". Jesus had to be born from above to become a Christ. Strydom (2019c) moreover contends that B.C. refers to an "era before Christ as a specie was revealed", which moved into A.D., "the

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<sup>143</sup> This is the word 'Christ' turned into a verb.

‘in Christ’ era” (Strydom, 2019c). When talking about himself, he explains that “trust me when I say this, this one on the inside [referring to his inner spiritual Christ man] is the ... brother of a Christ. Why? Because I am also one ... I am going to live like a Christ. I have been moved from B.C.; I have passed over through the lamb. I am now an A.D.”

Strydom (2019c) furthermore claims the following:

If you believe in the cross, something happens to you ... you change from Adam to Christ. I cannot understand why this is so difficult to understand. As ek vir jou sê jy is 'n gesalfde. Dis die Afrikaanse woord vir ‘Christus’. Do you know that Christ is the Greek word *Christos*? As ek vir jou sê in Engels, “you are an anointed man and woman of God”, I am saying that you are a Christ ... Why is this so difficult to understand?

Strydom (2019c) is here explaining that since the word “Christ” means “anointed”, it is a title that any born again person in CiMI has. In short, they are Christs by virtue of being in the Christ specie.

Strydom (2019c), and per implication CiMI, seemingly gives a unique position to Jesus, but only as the first of the Christ specie. And once one believes this about Jesus and is born again from above, then one becomes a new person. Strydom (2019c), for example, says, “I become a new man. What is this new man called? Christ. Anointed. God’s offspring. Galatians 3:16 says that ‘Christ is the seed of God.’ God does not say many. He says one seed, Christ! One seed!” He elaborates to say that one man cannot change the world, only a specie can do it. Strydom (2019c) also explains that the work of this Christ specie is to reconcile the world with God again, just like Jesus Christ, the first Christ also did. This idea comes from 2 Corinthians 5:17-19.<sup>144</sup>

To interpret the word ‘Christ’ as an impersonal specie, and to teach that once one is born again from above, one also becomes part of the Christ specie and can then be called a Christ, is inconsistent with biblical data.

Without introducing a whole theology of the word ‘Christ’, since Chapter 5 will handle it in more detail, it is sufficient to state here that Louw and Nida (1996:542, 831), in their Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, attributes “Christ” to Jesus as “a proper name” for Him. They further explain that some languages attempt to “represent the significance of the terms *Χριστός* and *Μεσσίας* by translating ‘God’s appointed one’ or ‘God’s specially chosen one’ or ‘the expected one’ in the sense of one to whom everyone was looking for help and deliverance”.

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<sup>144</sup> “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things *are* of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”



This title was never meant to be referred to as an impersonal specie that God created. It is a title of Jesus as the Messiah.

Concerning the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1, it is well established by scholars that the genealogy is a 'selective' genealogy, which is in fact unbalanced. France (2007:30) states,

[T]he first group has fourteen names if both Abraham and David are included, the second has fourteen if David is not included again, but after Jehoiachin there are only twelve names down to Joseph, so that even with the addition of Mary's son there are only thirteen generations in the third group unless Jehoiachin, unlike David, is counted twice.

This observation indicates that this genealogy is somewhat puzzle-like. Yet, the aim of this genealogy is certainly not an attempt to separate Jesus from Christ in any sense.

Its aim is clear enough: to locate Jesus within the story of God's people, as its intended climax, and to do it with a special focus on the Davidic monarchy as the proper context for a theological understanding of the role of the person whom Matthew, more than the other gospel writers, will delight to refer to not only as 'Messiah' but also more specifically as 'Son of David' (France, 2007:30).

It is therefore not a totally warranted exegetical move to separate Jesus from Christ on the grounds of this genealogy. Moreover, even if "Jesus" and "Christ" could have been separated, why interpret all the names in the genealogy as individual persons, including Jesus, but not Christ? Jesus is an individual but Christ is not an individual person, but rather a specie of some kind, according to Strydom. A confused definition of the title 'Christ' is therefore causing Strydom (2019c) to interpret a genealogy in an unwarranted way, because after the genealogy, in verse 18, one reads the following: "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit." This indicates that Jesus Christ was born a Christ and, that the genealogy serves to place the birth of Jesus Christ in the royal Davidic line.

Likewise, if one were to look at Galatians 3:16, the seed "who is Christ" is a reference to a person and not an impersonal specie. This verse reads as follows: "Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." Strydom (2019c) is correct to interpret the seed, which is sometimes also a "collective noun" (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1968:135), used as singular, because this is what Paul explicitly indicates in this passage. However, it is not a reference to one specie, but to one person. Hendriksen and Kistemaker (1968:135) comment that,

[Paul] knew that Abraham's seed would be as the stars in multitude. However, in keeping with the point which he is driving home, namely, that God promised salvation not to Abraham's physical descendants but to true believers, to them *all* (whether Jew or Gentile) and to them *alone*, he is

saying that this great blessing is concentrated in *one* person, namely, Christ. It is in him, in him *alone*, that all these multitudes of believing Jews and Gentiles are blessed.

In this sense many peoples are blessed in and through the salvific works of one person.

There are two other passages that will also contribute to an understanding of Paul's point in this regard. The first one is the so-called "protoevangelium" in Genesis 3:15 where one reads the first "glimmer of the gospel" (Kidner, 1967:75): "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel." In this passage two persons are in mind. Aalders (cited by Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1968:136) clarifies this verse as follows:

There is more here than merely this, that man will gain the victory over the serpent ... In that serpent a definite personality is being addressed ... And if the enemy whose discomfiture is here announced must be a definite personality, then would it even be possible that the One who conquers him could be other than also a definite personality? Even the contrast *head* and *heel* suggests that the struggle will finally be fought between two contestants. Also the Hebrew demonstrative pronoun [*that one* or *he*] strongly suggests that the conqueror is to be regarded as one person ... But in the end the figure of the Mediator stands in the foreground, and this so much so that in the words in which the final struggle is described there is definite mention of only one person, who is indicated by this seed of the woman. The real struggle is won by no one else than by our Lord Jesus Christ.

This indicates that "the seed" of the woman, although it does not preclude a collective interpretation, is still about much more than only a collective, it is a person.

In Revelation 12:1-6<sup>145</sup> one also reads about the conflict between "two personal antagonists: Christ and Satan". From this struggle the One who conquers Satan is Jesus Christ (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1968:137). This verse is an echo of Genesis 3:15 and together these two verses, especially Genesis 3:15, can be used to comment on Galatians 3:16 by virtue of identifying "the seed" with the person of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul is therefore saying that all the promises that God made to Abraham were ultimately fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ who is the true seed. Since He is the one who conquered Satan and accomplished salvation, salvation is only

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<sup>145</sup> "Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars. Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth. And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born. She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days."

found in Him. Paul says in verse 17<sup>146</sup> that not even the law can “annul” the promise fulfilled in Jesus the Christ. If this verse were rather suggesting that “Christ” as “the seed” was a specie, one would think it would be clearly stipulated. This is then another place where a confused definition causes Strydom (2019c) to produce a wrong interpretation.

#### **4.3.6.2. Misreading no. 14: Ignoring alternative explanations**

The same way in which one can work selectively with evidence from Scripture to justify one’s own preconceived ideas, one can also ignore alternative explanations for that evidence (Sire, 1980:96). Sire (1980:158) explains this misreading as follows: “A specific interpretation is given to a biblical text or set of texts which could well be, and often have been, interpreted in quite a different fashion, but these alternatives are not considered.” Consequently, if one were to reach a specific conclusion from Scripture that might not fit the flow and pattern of other texts in the Bible, it is worth investigating commentaries by scholars and “if you find other explanations for the text, you would do well to weigh all the evidence and all the explanations before adopting one as true or even more likely to be true than the others” (Sire, 1980:98-99).

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 14 by CiMI**

###### **Case 1:**

Labuschagne (2016c) is guilty of ignoring other explanations of Matthew 28:18-20. This passage reads as follows:

And Jesus came and spoke to them saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” Amen.

After he reads verse 19, he says the following: “Now, take note, it does not say ‘make disciples in our name’. It says, ‘Make disciples in ... no one’s name.’” Labuschagne (2016c) continues to explain that what this verse says is to “make disciples and baptise them in the name of ...” He repeats this part to emphasise that the word “name” is correctly in the singular form and not the plural. He further says,

It does not say in *our* name ... That is not what it says. It does not refer to a plural name ... our name. It also does not say make disciples in the name of the Father, and in the name of the Son, and in the name of the Holy Spirit, referring to three gods. Furthermore, it also does not say, “Baptise them into the *names*, plural, of God the Father, and of God the Son, and of God the Spirit.” That is not in that Scripture. The Scripture says “Go therefore and make disciples of all

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<sup>146</sup> “And this I say, *that* the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect.”

nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. I will show you later that ... that name of the Father, and the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Spirit ... is one name for there is one God.

According to Labuschagne (2016c), this passage can in no way then bring one to the doctrine of the Trinity. He suggests that although it might refer to three persons or beings, it never suggests that these three persons or beings are one.

Besides ignoring the immediate context in the sense that only a couple of verses earlier, in Matthew 28:16-17,<sup>147</sup> Jesus is accepting worship from his disciples and therefore implicitly claiming deity; Labuschagne (2016c) is also ignoring alternative explanations of this passage. Hendriksen and Kistemaker (1973:1000-1001) explain this passage as follows:

The baptizing must be into the name – note the singular: one name; hence one God – of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. A name ... represents the one who bears it. “Being baptized into the name of” therefore means “being brought into vital relationship with” that One, viewed as he has revealed himself.

They continue to add to this that a person who confesses the triune God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to be the one Object of his/her faith, hope and love, is adopted into the family of God. France (1985:420) contributes to this line of reasoning when he explains the sacrament of baptism as follows:

It is a commitment to (in the name is literally ‘into the name’, implying entrance into an allegiance) the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (all three of whom, interestingly, were involved in the event of Jesus’ own baptism ...). Jesus thus takes his place along with his Father and the Spirit as the object of worship and of the disciple’s commitment. The experience of God in these three Persons is the essential basis of discipleship. At the same time the singular noun name (not ‘names’) underlines the unity of the three Persons.

Geisler and Rhodes (1997:130) also adopt this explanation. They explain rather thoroughly:

A grammatical analysis of Matthew 28:19 is highly revealing. The verse says: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (NASB, emphasis added). The word name in Matthew 28:19 is singular in the Greek, indicating that there is one God. But there are three persons within the Godhead, each with a definite article (in the Greek language, firmly indicating distinctness) – the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The verse does not say “in the names [plural] of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,” nor does it say “in the name of the Father, the name of the Son, and the name of the Holy Spirit.” Nor does it say “in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (omitting the definite articles). It says “in the name [singular, asserting the oneness of God] of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (each

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<sup>147</sup> “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshipped Him; but some doubted.” (NKJV).

distinct from the others as persons). This verse very clearly demonstrates the doctrine of the Trinity.

In one of his sermons, Keller (2011) also explains on the grounds of the singular form of the “name”:

The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have the same name, which means there are three persons in one nature, three persons in a single being ... every time we baptize someone, we baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, never the names, and it's a way of saying God is triune.

It would seem then that the singular form of the word ‘name’ in this passage is not kicking against the doctrine of the Trinity, but rather supporting it. However, Labuschagne (2016c) never mentions this explanation of Matthew 28:19 as an alternative to his own or provides reasons why this explanation is unwarranted according to him.

### **Case 2:**

Another case where a teacher of CiMI is guilty of ignoring other alternative explanations is when Kotze (2017a) comments on John 10:31-33.<sup>148</sup> This is one of the instances where the Jews wanted to stone Jesus for blasphemy. In this particular case the Jews stated that the reason they wanted to stone Him was because He, who was a mere man, claimed that He was equal with God. After reading this passage, he asks the following: “I just want to know where did Jesus ever make Himself God? Where did He ever say, ‘I am God, come to Me! I am God the Son, come to Me!’ Never! Never! In actual fact ... He did not proclaim it about Himself.” Kotze (2017a) asks this question and makes this statement to claim that Jesus Christ never claimed to be God in any sense and therefore He cannot be God.

First, one can observe that this is Kotze’s way of ignoring the immediate context since the Jews understood Jesus’s claim earlier in verse 30 to be a claim of deity. Jesus said, “I and My Father are one.” Morey (1996:327) explains that in this case “the Jews rightly understood that He was saying that He and the Father were one in nature and essence”. Accordingly, Jesus was claiming deity. Second, Kotze (2017a) assumes that for Jesus to be God, He must explicitly make a claim towards that effect. Yet, Jesus can claim His deity in other ways, although as pointed out, His claim in this context is nonetheless somewhat explicit. One can point to John

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<sup>148</sup> “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from my Father. For which of those do you stone Me?’ The Jews answered Him saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.’”

8:56-59<sup>149</sup>, for example. Jesus explicitly claims to be eternal, which is an attribute that only belongs to God. In verse 58 of Chapter 8 Jesus answers the Jews by saying, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I AM.” One might expect Jesus to use the imperfect “I was”, but Jesus uses the present instead to claim that He has always been there, even before Abraham came to be (Michaels, 2010:533). In the light of John 8:56-59, Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:97) also explain that most Biblical scholars “understand Jesus to be affirming that his existence antecedent that of Abraham was the eternal pre-existence of deity.”

Furthermore, when Jesus uses the phrase “I am” He is also claiming equality with God. Geisler and Rhodes (1997:173-174) motivate this as follows:

I Am is the name God revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14-15. The name conveys the idea of eternal self-existence. Yahweh never came into being at a point in time, for he has always existed. To know Yahweh is to know the eternal one. It is therefore understandable that when Jesus made the claim to be I Am, the Jews immediately picked up stones with the intention of killing Jesus, for they recognized he was implicitly identifying himself as Yahweh.

In this instance Kotze (2017a) is guilty of ignoring alternative explanations for the deity of Jesus. It is clearly possible to claim deity in other ways than solely with explicit claims. At the same time Kotze (2017a) is also providing inadequate evidence to disprove Jesus’s claims to be God in the flesh.

### **Case 3:**

Strydom (2017b) contends that the problem with people who believe that Jesus is God in the flesh is that they are ignoring the Bible. He asks his listeners, “You know what the problem is with religion and these people that say that Jesus is God?” Strydom (2017b) then answers the question by referring to the beloved apostle John and asserts:

John the beloved one ... is the one that said, “We touched him, we saw him, we felt him, he spoke to us.” This is the same person that says that “No one has seen God at any time.” The very same one that put his head on the chest of Jesus, is the very same one that says no one has seen God at any time, God is Spirit.

According to Strydom (2017b), the fact that the apostle John saw Jesus and said that no one has ever seen God, disqualifies the possibility of Jesus being God who took up flesh.

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<sup>149</sup> “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad. Then the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’”

In his explanation, Strydom (2017b) is referring to John 1:18,<sup>150</sup> 1 John 4:12,<sup>151</sup> and 1 John 1:1-3,<sup>152</sup> which communicate the notion that “no one has seen God at any time” and, because the apostles have seen and touched Jesus, therefore He cannot be God. One can follow Strydom’s (2017b) argument in this context and at face value this does seem like a legitimate objection to raise, but Strydom (2017b) never considers the alternative explanation that has been on the table for centuries.

The principle that the apostle John lays down is classically Jewish, with the purpose of reminding us of the experience of Moses when God told him in Exodus 33:20 “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live” (Michaels, 2010:91-93). Moses was not allowed to see God. It also reminds one of many other instances in the Old Testament where prophets who were confronted with God felt as if they were about to die. The prophet Isaiah, for example, cried, “Woe is me, for I am undone!” (Isaiah 6:5). According to Carson (1991:135), the “vision of the Lord seated on his throne that Isaiah saw was so vivid and terrifying, so close to the ‘real thing’, even though it was but a hem of the Lord’s garment that filled the temple”. Carson (1991:134) observes that this idea remains “the consistent Old Testament assumption ... that God cannot be seen, or, more precisely, that for a sinful human being to see him would bring death”. Although this is the case for sinful humans, John gives us an exception to this principle in the remainder of John 1:18, which seems to escape Strydom’s (2017b) attention. According to Carson (1991:134) and Harris (2008:82), the translation of John 1:18 that has the strongest claim to originality is more in line with the English Standard Version (ESV), which reads as follows: “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.”

Therefore, the exception to this Jewish principle is that “the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known”. Michaels (2010:92) unpacks the rest of this verse by insisting:

The terminology makes it clear that “the One and Only” is himself God, as surely as “the Word was God” at the beginning (v. 1).<sup>153</sup> His place “right beside the Father” (literally, “in the Father’s bosom”) echoes the assertion at the outset that the Word was “with God” (v. 1; compare “with the Father,” 1

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<sup>150</sup> “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.”

<sup>151</sup> “No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.”

<sup>152</sup> “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life – the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us – that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

<sup>153</sup> This refers to John 1:1.

Jn 1:2),<sup>154</sup> and it would be easy to infer that this is a glimpse of the postresurrection Jesus, corresponding to the pre-existent Jesus of the Gospel's opening verses.

This means that the exception involves the notion that God the Son, incarnated in the person of Jesus, made God the Father known. This is a nuanced exception to the rule that Jesus, although He is a man, is more than just a man and can therefore make the Father known.

Carson (1991:134-135) agrees with the abovementioned explanation and adds that in the light of John 1:14,<sup>155</sup> "this word-made-flesh, himself God, is nevertheless differentiable from God, and as such is intimate with God; as man, as God's incarnate Self-expression, he has made God known." This explanation also paves the way for John 6:46<sup>156</sup> and 14:9<sup>157</sup> where Jesus Christ is the one in whose face God the Father is revealed. All of these comments add up to the conclusion that "'in the bosom of the Father' is parallel to 'with God': 'the unique one, [himself] God,' is parallel to 'was God'; and to say that this unique and beloved Person has made God known is to say that he is 'the Word', God's Self-expression" (Carson, 1991:135).

Although this explanation is full of finer detail and comments, it is still a legitimate explanation that answers Strydom's (2017b) objection, is consistent with biblical data, and is therefore a legitimate explanation. Strydom (2017b), however, ignores this explanation and never considers the evidence in favour of it.

#### **4.3.6.3. Misreading no. 15: The obvious fallacy**

The main point of this fallacy is when an interpreter of the Bible arrives at a conclusion with great ease and act as if his/her interpretation is the only obvious one with regard to a certain text (Sire, 1980:99). Sire (1980:99) says that the "impression the interpreter wants to give is that the case is closed. His view is the obvious one", even when other honest scholars of the Bible are uncertain and disagree with one another over the meaning of the text. Sire (1980:100, 159) also warns one to keep one's eyes open for elusive words and phrases "that often mask poor or inadequate reasoning: obviously, clearly, certainly, undoubtedly, no one can reasonably doubt, all reasonable people hold that, any intelligent person can see and a host of others."

Sire (1980:100) further explains that this fallacy also takes place when someone develops a sequence of linked, and uncommon possible readings of a passage and then concludes that, since these strange interpretations assist one another in some way, they must be true. In this

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<sup>154</sup> "the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us."

<sup>155</sup> "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

<sup>156</sup> "Not that anyone has seen the Father, except He who is from God; He has seen the Father."

<sup>157</sup> "He who has seen Me has seen the Father"



way a sequence of speculations is woven together to reach a stance that “appears to be an integrated world view” (Sire, 1980:100). Sire (1980:100) corrects this notion by saying that “an interpretation which requires a number of possible meanings to be the actual ones is far less certain than any one of the possible readings taken alone”.

#### a) Examples of misreading no. 15 by CiMI

##### Case 1:

A potential example of this particular misreading can be seen in Strydom’s (2016d) remark that the reason why Jesus Christ is also called the alpha and the omega, according to certain passages in the book of Revelation, is because, in the words of Strydom (2016d): “Do you see why Jesus Christ is the ... alpha and omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last? He is the first Christ and the last Adam. He is the alpha of Christ and the omega of Adam.”

The more obvious exposition of this phrase in the book of Revelation is that Jesus Christ is simply before all things and will outlast all things (Morris, 1987:56). Rhodes (1992:172) explains that to claim to be “the alpha and the omega” to a Hebrew mind of the time would be to claim totality or entirety, and is an affirmation by Jesus Christ to be the “all-powerful one of eternity past and eternity future”. According to Kistemaker and Hendriksen (2001:87), Jesus is the alpha and the omega since “Christ is eternal and can say that he is the first and the last, the originator and the one who completes the work of creation and redemption.” In spite of this obvious exposition by other scholars, Strydom (2016d) seems to ignore these alternative explanations and rather introduces the concept of Jesus being the first Christ and the last Adam as the explanation for Jesus Christ as the alpha and the omega. He ends his exposition by asking his audience whether this interpretation is easy and consequently answers his own question with the words “it is very easy!”, making his interpretation seem like the obvious one. Strydom is therefore guilty of an obvious fallacy.

Moreover, one can also quote the following passages to compare the different interpretations:

- Isaiah 41:4: “Who has performed and done *it*, Calling the generations from the beginning? ‘I, the Lord, am the first; And with the last I *am* He.’”
- Isaiah 44:6: “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last.’”
- Isaiah 48:12: “Listen to Me, O Jacob, And Israel, My called: I *am* He, I *am* the First, I *am* also the Last.”
- Revelation 1:8: “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End,’ says the Lord, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’”

- Revelation 1:17: “And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, ‘Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last.’”
- Revelation 2:8: “And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write, ‘These things says the First and the Last, who was dead, and came to life.’”

### Case 2:

Kotze (2017c) provides an example of the obvious fallacy when attempting to make sense of John 1:1-2.<sup>158</sup> He starts with a long argument in which he comes to the conclusion that “the beginning”, as referred to in John 1:1, is not the same beginning one reads about in Genesis 1:1, but rather the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry in Galilee (Acts 10:37).<sup>159</sup> He also claims that “the Word” in John 1:1 is not a reference to Jesus Christ. At some point, after his explanation he says: “So, this is not a hard thing to understand. I do not understand why people will make this out to be Jesus.”

Kotze (2017c) downplays the other position with regard to the interpretation of John 1:1. His remark brings across the idea that his interpretation of John 1:1-2 is the easy and obvious one, while the other interpretation, which reads “the Word” as a reference to Jesus Christ, is the hard interpretation to follow. Kotze (2017c) is therefore not just guilty of the obvious fallacy, he is also collapsing the contexts of John 1:1-2 and Acts 10:37. While he is compelled to turn to other passages to make his case, the case that “the Word” is a reference to Jesus can be made from within the same chapter of John 1. It seems as if the position that Kotze (2017c) dismisses remains the one that is the plain reading of the text, in its proper context.

### Case 3:

Another example of this misreading is also evident in Strydom’s (2018a) comments on 1 Corinthians 15:20-23.<sup>160</sup> In their theology, as seen in Chapter 2, CiMI introduces a dualistic separation between the spiritual and the natural and/or the earthly and the heavenly. This also entails, on the grounds of 1 Corinthians 15:20-23, that absolutely everyone is first a natural man, and when you are reborn from above, according to CiMI’s theology, you become a Christ, and consequently a spiritual man.

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<sup>158</sup> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God.”

<sup>159</sup> “... that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached.”

<sup>160</sup> “But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ’s at His coming.”

Strydom (2018a), for example, states: “There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” He then adds that “the moment you were born again, a natural body was sown, a spiritual body was ... birthed”. Strydom (2018a) also emphasises that since the spiritual is invisible, “you can’t see your ... Christ”. Once one is born from above, one becomes a “Christ man” and is then part of the enlightened Christ specie. In this process, however, the natural is always first and the spiritual comes second. This order of things is described as “a law” because “God can’t make a spiritual first” (Strydom, 2018a). To illustrate this order, Strydom (2018a) points to Jesus’s life. For thirty years, Jesus was only a natural man who had to be born from above to become a Christ. Strydom (2018a) then introduces a strange reference to the tribe of Levi and Judah by arguing,

[I]f the natural Jesus was the Christ, that baby. If that baby that was born, was already the Christ, God had to put him in Levi. God could not put him in Judah, because ... the Levites were the priestly order. So, the natural Jesus cannot be the Christ, He had to be born from above ... If God made the flesh Christ as a baby, and did not put him in Levi, which He didn’t, then God would be a liar and against His law.

The idea, according to Strydom (2018a), is therefore that the priestly order of Levi in the Old Testament represents the heavenly priests, while the tribe of Judah represents the earthly priests. Furthermore, given the order of natural or earthly first, and the spiritual or heavenly second, Jesus could not be placed in the tribe of Levi, but had to be placed in the tribe of Judah. Since the order of the natural coming first and the spiritual happening second, is a law of some kind, Jesus had to be placed in the natural or earthly tribe (Judah) first and be born from above to become a Christ and hence a spiritual man.

Strydom (2018a) concludes this clarification of 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 by stating that it “proves to us there is a Jesus and a Jesus Christ. However, the spiritual is not first. He was not first a Christ; he was first just Jesus and afterwards the spiritual.” In other words, the dualistic distinction between the natural and the spiritual also results in making a dualistic distinction between Jesus (the natural) and Jesus Christ (the spiritual).

This interpretation by Strydom is not at all clear and it is in many ways difficult to follow what exactly he is trying to communicate. But up till this point, it seems as if Strydom (2018a) was unpacking a certain theological position that is arrived at by looking at 1 Corinthians 15:20-23. The following conclusions by Strydom (2018a) call for further investigation. After his abovementioned exposition, he says the following:

Why did Paul take time to write this in the Bible, if Jesus was a god, or God? He takes a lot of time to show us that there is a natural and a spiritual man. A man! A man!<sup>161</sup> And as we have born the image of the man of dust, Adam, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man! Hierdie is so freakin' duidelik soos daglig!<sup>162</sup>

Strydom (2018a) is clearly suggesting that his interpretation is the only obvious interpretation on the table. The idea that there is a dualistic distinction between the natural and the spiritual that leads to a distinction between Jesus and Jesus Christ is, according to him, as clear as daylight and therefore, incontestable. It sounds as if, according to him, the case concerning 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 is settled and no other interpretation can be valid. Consequently, besides ignoring the immediate context of 1 Corinthians 15 and ignoring alternative explanations, Strydom (2018a) is guilty of the obvious fallacy. To be sure, more attention will be given to 1 Corinthians 15 in Chapter 5.

#### **4.3.6.4. Misreading no. 16: Virtue by association**

Sire (1980:101) explains the idea behind this misreading by saying that if one is able to find a way to associate one's own particular view with "Jesus, the Bible, the apostles, the patriarchs – any of the good guys of the Judeo-Christian tradition – you have enhanced the credibility of your argument". This misreading may occur in three different way. Firstly, a cult can associate their teachings with certain figures accepted as authoritative by traditional Christianity. Secondly, cults can liken their writings to the Bible. Thirdly, writings by cults sometimes imitate the style of the Bible to such an extent that it sounds like the Bible (Sire, 1980:159). Consequently, Sire (1980:104) correctly states: "Naming names, summoning great witnesses, sounding like the Bible, proclaiming universality for your eccentric view – all these carry no logical weight unless what is said about them turns out on other grounds to be true. So, we must be wary of any such attempt to authenticate eccentric religious doctrine."

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 16 by CiMI**

###### **Case 1:**

At one point, Strydom (2016d) refers to Romans 10:17<sup>163</sup> and tells the people of CiMI: "You are but the product ... of the word you heard ... Remember guys, all of us ... we also came out of the teachings of a triune God and Jesus as God. So, we studied the Scriptures, and we say 'No! It is not the truth.' We are like Martin Luther." Notice that Strydom (2016d) links CiMI to the

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<sup>161</sup> It is worth repeating the notion that an emphasis on the human nature of Jesus does not refute His divine nature but only confirms His human nature.

<sup>162</sup> Translation: "This is as freaking clear as daylight."

<sup>163</sup> "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

famous reformer, Martin Luther. In Protestant circles of Christianity, Martin Luther is a theological figure who, to a large extent, paved the way for the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation and subsequent theological developments. He wrote his ninety-five theses and “became a hero overnight” (Lane, 2006:156). By associating CiMI with a figure like Martin Luther, who is an authoritative figure for traditional Christianity, Strydom (2016d) is guilty of attempting to gain virtue by association.

### **Case 2:**

Another example of virtue by association is when Strydom (2018a) associates CiMI’s teachings directly with Jesus. Because Strydom (2018a) explicitly denies the deity of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity, which historical, orthodox Christianity has always held as an essential of the faith, he might anticipate certain people’s reactions to the explicit denial of the Trinity and Jesus’s deity. Therefore, he says the following: “Don’t think for one second we are against Jesus. We are with Him, because He is with God!” He establishes CiMI’s supposed association with Jesus, who in turn is associated with God, which makes them associated with God. In fact, he bases their motivation for being on Jesus’s side on the idea that Jesus, as understood by them, is on God’s side. In one of his other sermons, Strydom (2018c) also claims that “we are ... believing the exact same thing that Jesus believed in”.

### **Case 3:**

Strydom (2018a) claims that God was announcing the coming of the covenant through Angus Buchan. He asserts in this sense that Angus Buchan was proclaiming the coming of CiMI in South Africa. Angus Buchan is viewed by many South Africans as a great spiritual leader and minister, addressing many important issues. However, although there might be certain issues with some of Angus Buchan’s ideas, he is definitely not proclaiming heresy at his events. For Strydom to link the coming of CiMI to Angus Buchan will work in his favour as he attempts to find virtue among South Africans by linking CiMI with Angus Buchan.

#### **4.3.6.5. Concluding remarks**

CiMI is shown to be guilty of using confused definitions, ignoring alternative and more adequate explanations, committing obvious fallacies, and seeking virtue for their views by associating themselves with Martin Luther, Jesus and Angus Buchan. These misreadings can be avoided and also pointed out to be fallacious if one were to conduct detailed investigations of these interpretations.

### 4.3.7. The authority of the Bible

The concept of *sola Scriptura* (the Bible alone) expresses the notion that for Christians the Bible is the final authority on all matters regarding life and thought, and contains the knowledge to make one wise unto salvation (Sire, 1980:105). Luther (cited by Sproul, 1993:126-127) summarised the role of the Bible very effectively in his famous words at the Diet of Worms:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason – I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other – my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against my conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen.

Sire (1980:106) identifies three touchstones in these words of Luther. First of all, it is clear that Scripture alone has authority. Secondly, one needs to use “plain reason” to interpret Scripture. Notice though that just because reason is needed to interpret Scripture, it is not therefore a higher authority than Scripture. Reason is the God-given tool one uses, not to judge what the Bible is able to say, but to find out what the Bible does say. Reason therefore does not decide what is true in the Bible but discerns the biblical truths and consequently submits to it. Thirdly, the conscience has an important role to play. As an individual one must not go against what one sincerely understands the Bible means. With these three touchstones in place, one must hold churches and other groups accountable so that if they want to “hold a certain doctrine or engage in a certain practice they must rely solely on Scripture for their authority” (Sire, 1980:107).

In this regard, Hoekema (1963:378) explains that cults will always face “a kind of dilemma with respect to the question of authority”. Cults still want to be associated with Christianity and will still claim to be Christian, while rejecting essential doctrines of Christianity. This means that the Bible will still be appealed to for a justification of their claims. The dilemma lies in the fact that “in order to justify their peculiar doctrines they must either correct Scripture, reinterpret Scripture, or add other sources of authority to Scripture. Their attitude toward Scripture is therefore always an ambivalent one: a mixture of apparent subjection to its authority and of arbitrary manipulation of its teachings.” This summarises the dilemma for CiMI as well. As shown thus far, they do engage with biblical data in an attempt to justify their theology and doctrine. However, in their handling of the Bible they implicitly reject the Bible. Keller (1992) summarises this well: “Cults always come along and say, ‘Yes, we believe the Bible, but we have the key to the Bible written by our founder.’ They add to the Scripture.”

The authority of Scripture is relevant as background for the next body of misreadings. Sire (1980:107) summarises this body as “the development of esoteric interpretation, the esoteric

addenda or alternatives to the Bible and the occult and the cultic challenges to the authority of Scripture”.

#### **4.3.7.1. Misreading no. 17: Esoteric interpretation**

The esoteric interpretation of the Bible usually presents itself as the only way through which one can understand the true and spiritual meaning of the text (Sire, 1980:107). Apparently, the esoteric traditions claim a long history that stretches back to the “Essenes (a Jewish sect that preserved the Dead Sea Scrolls), the Gnostics of the New Testament era and even to Jesus himself”. The issue here, however, is not history, but an attempt to understand this tradition and to identify the errors that come with it. The claim of esoteric interpretations would be that the Bible, together with many other religious and nonreligious texts, possesses some sort of secret and concealed meaning underneath the surface. This hidden meaning can only be spiritually discerned and accessed (Sire, 1980:107). Geisler (2002:174) also explains this stance towards the Bible, where the meaning is sought beyond the text or beneath the text. However, this comes with a warning:

The meaning is not found beyond the text (in God’s mind), beneath the text (in the mystic’s mind), or behind the text (in the author’s unexpressed intention); it is found in the text (in the author’s expressed meaning). For instance, the beauty of a sculpture is not found behind, beneath, or beyond the sculpture. Rather, it is expressed in the sculpture (Geisler, 2002:174).

In the same way, Fee and Stuart (2014:22) state the following:

Interpretation that aims at, or thrives on, uniqueness can usually be attributed to pride (an attempt to ‘outclever’ the rest of the world), a false understanding of spirituality (wherein the Bible is full of deeply buried truths waiting to be mined by the spiritually sensitive person with special insight), or vested interests (the need to support a theological bias, especially in dealing with texts that seem to go against that bias). Unique interpretations are usually wrong. This is not to say that the correct understanding of a passage may not often seem unique to someone who hears it for the first time. But it is to say that uniqueness is *not* the aim of our task. The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the ‘plain meaning of the text’.

In this case the Bible does not really mean what it says plainly. Sire (1980:108) further comments, “Unless one has the special insight given only to the few, the elite, one will remain forever on the outside.” In other words, only those who are initiated into a specific group can discover the meaning of the Bible, and the “interpreter declares the significance of biblical passages without giving much if any explanation for his or her interpretation” (Sire, 1980:159-160). This misreading therefore undermines the ability of ordinary people with ordinary intelligences to read and properly understand the Bible (Sire, 1980:115). It is rather as Sire

(1980:109) claims that Scripture is “understood through a person’s intellectual capacity, an aspect of the image of God each person bears”.

### **a) Examples of misreading no. 17 by CiMI**

#### **Case 1:**

Strydom (2016d), for example, adopts this approach to the Bible when he claims,

A person who believes he is still a sinner is not allowed to read the Bible. His mind is corrupted, and he will read it with a mindset of unworthiness ... Every church in the world that does not teach the people that they are equal in value to God is not allowed to read the Bible. The people who understand the worth of mankind must go and read the Bible for them.

Although this claim is not an explicit example of an esoteric interpretation of a specific passage, it is still a statement that expresses this kind of stance of CiMI towards the Bible. In effect, Strydom (2016d) immediately disqualifies all other churches from reading the Bible correctly, especially those who teach and believe that humanity is depraved and therefore sinful. He sets up a certain teaching and belief, which is already unorthodox, as a precondition to be able to make sense of the Bible in the first place. To claim equality in value with God is not considered to be a biblical response to who God is in His being. The proper response to the being of God is rather expressed in words like “humility”, “praise”, “awe”, “worship”, “honour”, “fear”, “beauty” etc. (Geisler, 2003:409-418). Furthermore, a statement that suggests that humanity is not sinful seems to ignore some of the following passages that explicitly insists on the idea that humanity is depraved and hence sinful:

- Psalm 51:1: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.”
- Jeremiah 17:9: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; Who can know it?”
- Romans 3:10, 11 and 23: “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no, not one; There is no one who understands; There is no one who seeks after God ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.’”
- Romans 5:12: “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.”
- 1 John 1:8-10: “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”



### **Case 2:**

When Du Plessis (2016a) mentions that one must grasp the spiritual meaning of words, he also introduces the same position with regard to the Bible. He is after the supposed “spiritual meaning” of words and claims that one must be able to discern things spiritually otherwise no one will understand the teachings of CiMI. He also adds that “only a spiritual mindset can discern the things in [the Bible]”. By implementing such a process or method of interpretation, one loses the plain and literal meaning of any particular passage. Du Plessis (2016a) further claims that the leaders of CiMI received the sign of the Spirit of God descending on them, just like He descended upon Jesus at His baptism. The reason why they know that they have received this sign is because, according to him, the following occurred:

All of a sudden, we are discerning spiritual things in this book [the Bible], and we are not looking with a physical eye anymore ... We are teaching things that the world cannot teach. If man could teach what we taught, why aren't they teaching it? ... The only people that can teach what we teach is us, because we have transformed ... from the fleshly generation to the spiritual generation.

The conclusion for Du Plessis (2016a) is that the other churches in the world cannot teach what CiMI is teaching, because all the other churches are still looking at the Bible with physical eyes and not with spiritual eyes.

This is then another example of an esoteric stance towards the Bible by a teacher of CiMI.

### **Case 3:**

Strydom (2018a) takes an esoteric approach to the Bible once again when he claims,

Any leader who cannot discern the signs of the times is a hypocrite ... Anyone who assesses or teaches or preaches, or I don't care what they do, but they cannot interpret the signs of the times is a hypocrite. So, if you cannot discern what God is busy with, you're a hypocrite. You cannot be a leader.

Strydom (2018a) makes this claim to point out the difference between the leadership of CiMI and the leadership of other churches in the world. He says that if “the leaders are physically minded; the generation will also be physically minded”. Apparently CiMI is able to discern the signs of the time and to know exactly what God is busy with because they are ‘heavenly minded’, unlike the leaders of the other churches who are ‘earthly minded’. He adds that because “the progressive Word is in the spirit”, one must be spiritually minded to hear and understand that Word. Later in the same sermon, Strydom (2018a) emphasises this concept again. He explains that he does not care who the leader of CiMI is, as long as “God has appointed him” and he “has the progressive Word of God”. Only the leaders of CiMI are appointed by God and in possession of the progressive Word, which makes them the only

people who can exposit the Bible legitimately. In this sense Strydom (2018a) is clearly introducing an esoteric stance towards the Bible.

#### **4.3.7.2. Misreading no. 18: Supplementing biblical authority**

Where the previous misreading revolved around “the practice ... of divining the hidden meaning of already existing texts” (Sire, 1980:107), this particular misreading revolves around the idea that new and additional divine revelations about the state of affairs can be, and eventually are gained from a divine source through a postbiblical prophet as the mouthpiece of this divine source (Sire, 1980:107-108, 160). By receiving new and additional revelations, biblical authority is supplemented, which then leads to a situation where authorities other than the scriptural revelation are added (Sire, 1980:115).

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 18 by CiMI**

###### **Case 1:**

Strydom (2016e) claims that one cannot have faith in the teachings of CiMI without hearing the “Word of God”, but he subsequently qualifies what he means when he refers to the “Word of God” in this context. He says, “You cannot have faith in something unless you hear it. And it cannot be anything, it must be the Word of God, not the Bible, the Word. Because God’s Word is progressive.” With these claims, Strydom (2016e) is, to an extent, establishing himself, and therefore CiMI, as new authorities over the Bible as the Word of God. Labuschagne (2016c) also adds to this notion by making a comment in passing that “revelation is progressive”. He explains how certain teachings that he ministered and taught before he became involved at CiMI is now wrong since there is “new revelation”. He explains, for example,

I keep on studying the Word of God and renewing my mind, and in that I came to the conclusion that what I believed and ministered for many years has not been accurate. So, what do we do then? Protect what we ministered? No! We renew our minds and start ministering the new revelation of God.

Labuschagne (2016c) also claims that, as the “Word and revelation progressed”, the teachers at CiMI can now minister and preach with the correct understanding.

In yet another sermon, Labuschagne (2018) claims that CiMI is restoring the day and the Christ specie in this world. He furthermore mentions that at CiMI they have exchanged an “emotional mind” for “the mind of God” and therefore they now have access to an entirely new way of reading the Bible. The condition for this new way of reading is to be transformed and get into the mind of God. Only this act, which CiMI has apparently accomplished, can allow one to read the Bible in this a new way.

DeSilva (2004:873-874) warns that a situation like this is difficult to change once it is established. He states, "Once authority becomes located in the teacher's alleged access to the divine, it is quite difficult to bring external, objective standards to bear on evaluating their claims." In this situation the Bible's authority is supplemented with the views and interpretations of CiMI's teachers.

### **Case 2:**

Another case where Strydom (2017a) is guilty of implicitly supplementing the authority of the Bible is when he tells the members of CiMI:

You are the only church that does signs that no other one is doing. Because you are the progressive Word of God. Signs of the season, fig trees, covenant, a king, a throne, a kingdom, governors of the kingdom. This is what the Bible was speaking of. Because it is the signs and seasons.

Strydom (2017a) again invokes the phrase "progressive Word" to indicate that CiMI is the only church who is staying with the supposed signs of the time. They are the only ones who can interpret the progressive Word of God, and all the other churches are still in the dark. This is once again an example where the authority of the Bible is subjected to the rhetoric and interpretations of the leaders of CiMI.

### **Case 3:**

In one of his other sermons, Labuschagne (2019) supplements the authority of the Bible once again by saying:

But God is not contrary to His own Word. He cannot say one thing and then say another thing ... God can say one thing on the 13<sup>th</sup> of April and say another thing on the 11<sup>th</sup> of May. If we can just open our ears ... So, what I try to say is, we live by the proceeding Word of God! ... Listen, the Word of God proceeded from 2019 ... at least here, and that is why we are alive."

Labuschagne (2019) introduces a similar notion as previously; this time he only labels it "the proceeding Word of God".

The problem with this stance towards the Bible is that there is no consistent method of interpretation and the license for deciding what the correct interpretation to the "proceeding Word" is, lies solely in the hands of CiMI's leadership. This is again implicitly supplementing the authority of the Bible.

#### **4.3.7.3. Misreading no. 19: Rejecting biblical authority**

Sire (1980:118) begins by explaining that “rejecting biblical authority is not so much a mistake in reading as an attitude one takes before beginning to read or, perhaps, a conclusion one comes to after reading. One does not have to look far for challenges to the authority of Scripture.” This rejection of the authority of the text may include the Bible as a whole, or specific passages (Sire, 1980:160). It must be noted that this misreading is not explicitly so prevalent among cults that still claim to be Christian. The rejection of biblical authority is more implicit in these cases. However, you may find it explicitly stated in a New Age environment where “God is an impersonal force or First Cause or Ultimate Energy which got things going in the cosmos but is not concerned personally with the result” (Sire, 1980:118).

##### **a) Examples of misreading no. 19 by CiMI**

Explicit cases of the rejection of biblical authority is not so prominent in CiMI. The researcher was not able to find a specific example of such a case. However, given all the misreadings documented above, it indicates that CiMI is rejecting the authority of the Bible in a very implicit and subtle manner. At one stage Labuschagne (2018) encouraged CiMI members to fall in love with the Word of God. But then he clarifies what the “Word” is. He explains that “if I speak of the Word, I am not referring to ... the Bible only. But ... even personal prophetic word, the commands of God through a Xandré as the appointed one of the hour.” He continues to say that if you love the one, referring to Strydom, whom God appointed, then you will keep his commands. He also latches on to an esoteric stance when he says in this context that “most of the times the Word of God will not make sense for the carnally minded”. With this statement the Bible’s authority is implicitly undermined and rejected. Therefore, although no explicit case was found, the implicit rejection is clear enough.

#### **4.3.7.4. Concluding remarks**

Esoteric interpretations are prevalent in the way cultists interpret the Bible. CiMI is no exception and has proved that they maintain an esoteric stance towards the Bible, losing the plain and simple meaning of the text by claiming there is a deeper spiritual meaning to which they alone have access. They have also implicitly supplemented the Bible with the teachings, and in some cases visions, of their leadership. This inevitably leads them to a place where they also implicitly reject biblical authority.

According to Sire (1980:124), questions like “Where did you get that idea? What is your authority? What evidence do you have for relying on this authority?” are some of the crucial questions to ask and also be able to answer when challenged with them. It can also be asked in

what sense their leaders' claims to authority differ from the leaders of hundreds and hundreds of other cultic groups. It is important not only to think carefully about what one believes, but also why (and on whose authority) one believes it.

#### **4.3.8. Conclusion of CiMI's misreadings of the Scriptures**

This marks the end of the investigation into the hermeneutical abuses of CiMI. It has been successfully demonstrated that CiMI do indeed twist the Scriptures. A total of fifty independent cases of Scripture twisting, or comments indicating erroneous stances towards the Bible, have been documented regarding CiMI. One can therefore conclude that CiMI does indeed twist the Scriptures and the logical consequence of this phenomenon will in turn lead to doctrine twisting. In the following section ten documented cases of misreadings by the Mormons (LDS Church) and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society are discussed. The reason why these more established cults are part of this investigation is to show that CiMI is following in the footsteps of other groups. CiMI does not necessarily interpret specific passages in the same way as these cults, but in theory CiMI does not follow the well-established principles of the historical-grammatical method of interpretation.

#### **4.3.9. The most prominent cases of Scripture twisting in Mormonism**

##### **4.3.9.1. Case 1**

An example of an inaccurate quotation by the Mormons can be seen in one of their "standard works"<sup>164</sup> called *The Pearl of Great Price*. McKeever and Johnson (2015:140) describe *The Pearl of Great Price* as "a part of the LDS Church canon, which was accepted as scripture in 1880. It includes five books as well as a retranslated portion of the Bible." Accordingly, being part of the canon of scripture for Mormons, *The Pearl of Great Price* has authority in LDS theology.

One of the teachings of Mormonism entails that there are many, even countless gods in the universe. The second president of the LDS Church, Brigham Young (1859:333), for example, uttered the following claim: "How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds."

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<sup>164</sup> The LDS Church has four volumes referred to as 'standard' works. These volumes include *The Holy Bible* (King James Version), *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine & Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price* (Reed, 1992:27).

As *The Pearl of Great Price* attempts to echo Genesis 1:26-27<sup>165</sup> in support of a plurality of gods teaching over against monotheism, it inaccurately represents Genesis 1:26-27 when it states the following in The Book of Abraham:

And the Gods took counsel among themselves and said: Let us go down and form man in our image, after our likeness ... So the gods went down to organize man in their own image, in the image of the Gods to form they them, male and female to form they them (4:26-27).

This is clearly an inaccurate representation of Genesis 1:26-27, and inconsistent with the overall teaching of monotheism found in the rest of the Bible (Isaiah 44:8-6<sup>166</sup> for example). Even the plural in Genesis 1:26-27 where God refers to Himself as “Us” has been noted to be a “‘plural of fullness’, which is found in the regular word for God (*’ēlōhîm*), used with a singular verb; and this fullness, glimpsed in the Old Testament, was to be unfolded as triunity, in the further ‘we’ and ‘our’ of John 14:23<sup>167</sup> (with 14:17)<sup>168</sup> (Kidner, 1967:57). To be sure, this specific doctrine of Mormonism will be revisited later, but for now it is sufficient to mention that any interpretation of Genesis 1:26-27 that allows for polytheism is not reconcilable with other passages of the Bible and it also ignores an alternative explanation for “Us” and a “plural of fullness”.

#### 4.3.9.2. Case 2

In Article 8 of the LDS Church’s Articles of Faith as it appears in *The Pearl of Great Price*, one reads that the Mormons “believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly”. The LDS Church adds, “we also believe the *Book of Mormon* to be the word of God”. This is also confirmed by Joseph Fielding Smith (2012: Loc:16248), the tenth president of the LDS Church. He claims that,

We are all aware that there are errors in the Bible due to faulty translations and ignorance on the part of translators; but the hand of the Lord has been over this volume of scripture nevertheless, and it is remarkable that it has come down to us in the excellent condition in which we find it. Guided by the Books of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Spirit of the Lord, it is not difficult for one to discern the errors in the Bible.

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<sup>165</sup> “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

<sup>166</sup> “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: ‘I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; Besides Me *there is* no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared *it*? You *are* My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed *there is* no other Rock; I know not *one*.”

<sup>167</sup> “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’”

<sup>168</sup> “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.”

Both statements suggest that the Bible as it is available today, and especially where it contradicts Mormon doctrine, has errors as a result of faulty transmissions and translations of the text, which render the Bible unreliable. Apparently, the *Book of Mormon* corrects these errors since it is also the Word of God and more recently revealed to Joseph Smith (Rhodes, 1995:136). In the First Presidency Statement on the King James Version of the Bible, the LDS Church asserts that “the most reliable way to measure the accuracy of any biblical passage is not by comparing different texts, but by comparison with the Book of Mormon and modern-day revelations”. In the *Book of Mormon*, in 1 Nephi 13:28, there is a reference to the Bible being corrupted after it went “through the hands of the great and abominable church”. One reads there, with regard to the Bible, that “there are many plain and precious things taken away from the book”.

This is certainly not a specific example of a twisted translation from their side, but this gives the LDS Church a licence to twist the translation of any specific passage, since the Bible can only be trusted as far as “it is translated correctly”. The correctness of any given passage is in turn dictated by additional revelation in the *Book of Mormon*. The fact that there are other authoritative scriptures in Mormonism also contributes to the supplementing and rejection of Biblical authority.

#### **4.3.9.3. Case 3**

As pointed out earlier, Mormonism teaches that there are countless gods in the universe. To support this teaching, the founder, Joseph Smith (Smith, 1977:370) asserts that “the doctrine of a plurality of gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible. It stands beyond the power of controversy. A wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein.”

Smith explicitly claims that this doctrine is so prominent in the Bible that it is “all over the face of the Bible”, but on the contrary, it is not hard to find examples in the Bible where the idea of multiple gods is rejected and labelled idolatry. One needs only to turn to Exodus 20:3<sup>169</sup> and Isaiah 43:10.<sup>170</sup> Yet, according to Smith, the supposed truth of a plurality of gods is visible everywhere in the Bible and beyond controversy. This is a clear example of a biblical hook in the service of rhetoric, an attempt to legitimise a doctrine that is nowhere to be found in the Bible in the first place. This misreading can also be classified as an obvious fallacy since the

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<sup>169</sup> “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

<sup>170</sup> “‘You are My witnesses’, says the Lord, ‘And My servant whom I have chosen, That you may know and believe Me, And understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, Nor shall there be after Me.’”

doctrine of a plurality of gods is presented as if it is obviously true, without persuasive evidence to support it.

#### **4.3.9.4. Case 4**

Since Mormons believe that there are countless gods in the physical universe, they are sometimes given the label of polytheists. Geisler and Watkins (1989:228) state that Mormonism is the fastest growing “polytheistic” religion. To escape the label of polytheism, Turner (1989:102), a professor at Brigham Young University, claims that Mormonism “is simultaneously monotheistic, tritheistic, and polytheistic. There is but one God, yet there is a Godhead of three, and beyond them, ‘gods many, and lords many’ (1 Cor. 8:5).”

Notice that Turner (1989:102) introduces 1 Corinthians 8:5 to support the existence of many “gods” and “lords” in the universe. However, the immediate context of this passage rather suggests the opposite to be true. If one would take note of the surrounding context this will become clear. Accordingly, 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 reads as follows:

Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is* one God, the Father.

Paul actually indicates that there is only one God that exists and that “no reality exists behind man-made gods” (Barnett, 2000:139). Also, by introducing the word “so-called” before the phrase “many gods and many lords”, the apostle Paul is questioning the existence of idols. Barnett (2000:140) explains it as follows:

There are ‘said to be “gods in heaven”’ as there are ‘said to be “gods many ... lords many”’. But these exist only in the minds and words of the people of Corinth. They are merely ‘said to be gods’ and ‘said to be Lords’. The reality is: ‘There is no God but one’ (verse 4). The only and true reality is what we know about the one true God through the gospel and baptismal instruction.

The thrust of Paul’s statement is that there is a difference between idols being called gods or lords, and something actually being God (Rhodes, 1995:264). Hence, Turner is ignoring the immediate context of this passage and arriving at a conclusion that is contrary to the true meaning of the passage.

#### **4.3.9.5. Case 5**

One example of collapsing the context found in Mormon doctrine concerns their system with regard to the “three estates”. McKeever and Johnson (2015:76) point out, “Mormon leaders ...



have built an entire doctrine around the idea that, like God, men and women have eternally existed since before the beginning of this world.”

The first phase in this doctrine is called the “first estate” or “pre-existence”. This refers to the place where every single individual who have ever lived and will ever live, were conceived and came into existence as spirit children of God the Father, and the Heavenly Mother. One third of these spirit children were thrown out of God’s presence because they did not vote for Jesus to be the Saviour. The other two thirds of these spirits received bodies on earth (McKeever & Johnson, 2015:76). Joseph F. Smith (1998:335), the sixth president of the LDS Church, expressed it as follows: “Man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body.”

In their book titled *Gospel Principles*, the LDS Church (2011) attempts to justify the existence of the first estate or pre-existence and lists the following passages as if they all comment on the same issue: Job 38:4-7,<sup>171</sup> Jeremiah 1:5,<sup>172</sup> and Hebrews 12:9.<sup>173</sup>

Concerning Job 38:4-7, the LDS Church (2011) claims in *Gospel Principles*: “When we lived as spirit children with our heavenly parents, our Heavenly Father told us about His plan for us to become more like Him. We shouted for joy when we heard His plan (see Job 38:7).” In context, however, it seems as if God is rather rebuking Job in verse 4-6 because of his pride. God is reminding him that he did not exist when God created the universe, and He does this by asking Job a series of questions. The “sons of God” in verse 7 is also not a reference to some form of our pre-existence in a spiritual realm before we were physically born. More precisely, the “sons of God” is a reference to “the angels of later theology”, as Andersen (1976:296) observes. Hartley (1988:495) also adds, “At the moment the stone was set in place *the sons of God*, i.e., the angels, broke out in joyous singing, praising God, the Creator. Since no human being was present at this occasion, the inner structure of the universe remains a secret hidden from mankind.” The context of Job 38 therefore does not allow for this reading.

When one turns to Jeremiah 1:5, the context also does not refer to the first estate of Mormon theology. It is rather a straightforward reference to God’s foreknowledge and the special way in which God predestined Jeremiah to occupy his prophetic office before he was born (Thompson,

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<sup>171</sup> “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell *Me if* you have understanding. Who determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, When the morning stars sang together, And all the sons of God shouted for joy?”

<sup>172</sup> “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.”

<sup>173</sup> “Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?”

1980:145). It has nothing to do with the premortal existence of Jeremiah's soul somewhere in some spiritual realm. This is yet another passage that is taken out of context as if it addresses a matter that it does not address.

The last passage to discuss in this regard is Hebrews 12:9. This verse is used to argue that God is the Father of our spirits in the first estate. Sire (1980:60) explains that instead of communicating the idea that God gives birth to spiritual children, this verse explains that God is the creator of "all spirits, and there is no necessary connection between these 'spirits' and premortal human beings". The context of this verse is therefore also not considered.

To treat Job 38:4-7, Jeremiah 1:5 and Hebrews 12:9 in a way that suggests that these passages address the same issue in one way or another is to collapse the context of these passages. Job 38:4-7 does not refer to a time when we were all spiritual children and celebrated when God created the world. Jeremiah 1:5 does not refer to Jeremiah's life in this first estate, and Hebrews 12:9 similarly does not refer to God being the procreator of all our souls in the first estate. None of these verses address the existence of a spiritual realm where God the Father and the Heavenly Mother were parents to our souls before we were physically born.

#### **4.3.9.6. Case 6**

For an example of overspecification in Mormonism, we turn again to Genesis 1:26-27 and the doctrine of the plurality of gods in Mormon theology. Joseph Smith (Smith, 1977:372) claims that since the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is in the plural form, "there is a plurality of Gods beyond the power of refutation ... The word Elohim ought to be in the plural all the way through – Gods." Smith allows this verse, and specifically this word, to say too much.

As an alternative explanation of the plural, Mathews (1996:161) remarks, "It is unlikely when we consider the elevated theology of 1:1–2:3, that any polytheistic element would be tolerated by the author; therefore, the ... option can be ruled out." He further indicates that the Trinity can be a possible explanation for the plural form. He mentions that, "although the Christian Trinity cannot be derived solely from the use of the plural, a plurality within the unity of the Godhead may be derived from the passage" (Mathews, 1996:163).

Besides being guilty of overspecification, Smith is also guilty of ignoring alternative explanations in this instance. The plurality of gods doctrine is therefore an overreach of what this passage, and the plural form of *Elohim*, are in fact communicating.

#### 4.3.9.7. Case 7

Mormonism is guilty of a literal fallacy when it comes once again to Genesis 1:26-27.<sup>174</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith (2012:Loc 109) explains that Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, saw the Father and the Son with literal bodies. According to him this explains the notion of being created in the image of God. God has a literal body with flesh and bones; humans are created in His image; therefore, humans have literal bodies. He writes for example:

Joseph Smith beheld the Father and the Son; therefore he could testify with personal knowledge that the scriptures were true wherein we read: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; man and female created he them." This was to be understood literally, and not in some mystical or figurative sense.

McConkie (1958:258) also confirms this as he says, "God the Eternal Father, our Father in Heaven, is an exalted, perfected, and glorified Personage having a tangible body of flesh and bones." All of these statements are in line with another 'standard work' of Mormonism, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, section 130:22, which reads: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's."

Therefore, to Mormons, the notion of being created in the image of God, as stated in Genesis 1:26-27, is to be taken literally and not in some "figurative sense". The question is: Is this interpretation consistent with the broader context of the Bible? On the contrary, Wenham (1989:30) explains that a literal interpretation of the "image of God" is problematic since the Old Testament as a whole emphasises "the incorporeality and invisibility of God". In the end it is not just the Old Testament but also the New Testament that teaches that "God is spirit" (John 4:24) and "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39). This is an example then where a passage is wrongly interpreted literally, instead of figuratively.

#### 4.3.9.8. Case 8

Talmage (1919:284), once a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the LDS Church, provides an example of a speculative reading regarding predictive prophecy. As he comments on Ezekiel 37:15-23,<sup>175</sup> he states the following at length:

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<sup>174</sup> "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.' So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."

<sup>175</sup> "Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 'As for you, son of man, take a stick for yourself and write on it: "For Judah and for the children of Israel, his companions." Then take another stick and write on it, "For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel, his companions." Then join them one to another for yourself into one stick, and they will become one in your hand. "And when the children of your people speak to you, saying, "Will you not show us what you *mean* by these?" – say to them, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Surely I will take the stick of Joseph, which *is* in the

Ezekiel saw in vision the coming together of the stick of Judah, and the stick of Joseph, signifying, as the Latter-day Saints affirm, the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The passage last referred to reads, in the words of Ezekiel:—"The word of the Lord came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions; And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand." When we call to mind the ancient custom in the making of books,—that of writing on long strips of parchment and rolling the same on rods or sticks, the use of the word "stick" as equivalent to "book" in the passage becomes at once apparent, At the time of this utterance, the Israelites had divided into two nations known as the people of Judah, and that of Israel, or Ephraim. There would seem to be little room for doubt that the records of Judah and of Joseph are here referred to. Now, as we have seen, the Nephite nation comprised the descendants of Lehi of the tribe of Manasseh, of Ishmael an Ephraimite, and of Zoram whose tribal relation is not definitely stated. The Nephites were then of the tribes of Joseph; and their record or "stick" is as truly represented by the Book of Mormon as is the "stick" of Judah by the Bible.

According to Talmage (1919:284), the "stick of Judah" and the "stick of Joseph" in Ezekiel's vision refer to the Bible and the *Book of Mormon*, respectively. This interpretation of Ezekiel's vision paves the way for a claim that the *Book of Mormon* is prophesied about in the Bible. Near the end of Talmage's claim (1919:284) he also introduces the Nephite nation whom one reads about only in the *Book of Mormon*.

Sire (1980:72) rightfully asks why one would want to go beyond the immediate possibilities of this prophecy. Other scholars, such as Cooper (1994:326) and Taylor (1969:232), both explain that this prophecy is futuristic in a sense, depicting a situation where God will join Joseph and Judah together and unite His nation under one Davidic king. One only has to study Ezekiel 37:23-28<sup>176</sup> to realise this. It seems as if "the prophet is mainly concerned with the ideal of unity

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hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will join them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand." And the sticks on which you write will be in your hand before their eyes. 'Then say to them, "Thus says the Lord God: 'Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God.'"

<sup>176</sup> "David My servant *shall be* king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David *shall be* their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The

in the Messianic kingdom, i.e. a spiritualized pattern of the future Israel based on the historical precedent of David's united monarchy, which was the golden age of the past" (Taylor, 1969:233). It is clear then that the passage in its larger context makes Talmage's (1919:284) interpretation of the two sticks representing two books impossible. It rather refers to two nations or two kingdoms (Rhodes, 1995:102).

#### **4.3.9.9. Case 9**

McConkie (1958:670), another member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the LDS Church, provides an example of saying but not citing. Mormon doctrine entails that Jesus Christ was born through sexual relations between God the Father and Mary. Since they believe that God is a physical being with a literal body and body parts, this explains how something like this could be possible. As McConkie explains this belief, he states:

God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy Man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about his paternity; he was begotten, conceived and born in the normal natural course of events, for he is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says.

Besides ignoring alternative explanations, McConkie seems to state a particular belief without providing a citation from the Bible. Perhaps it is because Matthew 1:18<sup>177</sup> and 20<sup>178</sup> repeat the belief of historical, orthodox Christianity that Mary was "with child of the Holy Spirit", which therefore contradicts Mormon doctrine on this issue.

#### **4.3.9.10. Case 10**

Mormons are guilty of selective citing with regard to Psalm 82:1<sup>179</sup> and 6,<sup>180</sup> and John 10:34.<sup>181</sup> According to Mormon doctrine, Psalm 82:1 and 6 not only support the plurality of gods doctrine, namely, the belief that there are countless gods in the universe, but also the doctrine of eternal progression. The plurality of gods doctrine has already featured earlier, but the doctrine of eternal progression entails that man and God are the same kind of being. God the Father is only

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nations also will know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore."

<sup>177</sup> "Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>178</sup> "But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.'"

<sup>179</sup> "God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods."

<sup>180</sup> "I said, 'You are gods, And all of you are children of the Most High.'"

<sup>181</sup> "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, 'You are gods'"?"

more advanced than man currently is. If man follows certain laws and ordinances they will also be exalted to godhood. Thus, there is a progression from manhood to godhood.

McConkie (1958:294-295), for example, states:

Godhood is to have the character, possess the attributes, and enjoy the perfections which the Father has. It is to do what he does, have the powers resident in him, and live as he lives, having eternal increase ... Those attaining this supreme height are sons of God ... They are gods (Ps. 82:1, 6; John 10:34-36).

Note that McConkie (1958:294-295) mentions the verses of Psalm 82 and John 10 in brackets as support of the belief that men will become like God.

If one were to select these verses or even just portions of these verses, it is possible to arrive at the conclusion of the LDS Church on this matter. It seems as if Psalm 82: 1 and 6, together with John 10:34, can get one to that conclusion. But that is exactly why McConkie is guilty of selective citing to make this point. If the proper contexts of both these passages are examined, and not cited selectively, this interpretation becomes impossible to maintain. In this regard, White (1997:156) states that “even a brief review of [John 10:34] demonstrates that such is hardly a worthy interpretation”.

Rhodes (1995:252) reminds one to remember that God is pronouncing judgement on the evil judges of Israel in Psalm 82. In a certain sense God has placed the “judges of Israel in a position of being ‘gods’ among the people. They were entrusted with the application of God’s law. God calls them to vindicate the weak and fatherless and to do justice to the afflicted and destitute ... But they are failing that duty. They are not acting as proper, godly judges” (White, 1997:157). In fact, verse 7<sup>182</sup> of Psalm 82 states that although these judges had important roles, they would still perish like mortal men. The reason why this verse is probably never mentioned as well, is because it is certainly not the correct language to apply to a divine being. Therefore, when Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34 in His discussion with the Jews who are accusing Him of blasphemy, He most certainly is not calling His accusers “true divine beings”. White (1997:157) aptly points out that “the use of the present tense verb ‘You are gods’ in John 10:34” explains that Jesus “is saying His accusers are, right then, the judges condemned in Psalm 82. And what kind of judges were they? ... false judges, and they knew it.”

John 10:34 has already been dealt with above as it is a popular verse to use in the service of a belief where people can in some way be gods. It is, however, very difficult to maintain such an interpretation in the light of the immediate context, and also in the light of the broader context of

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<sup>182</sup> “But you shall die like men, And fall like one of the princes.”

the Old and New Testaments. Therefore, by using these passages for such an interpretation makes one guilty of multiple misreadings, including selective citing.

#### **4.3.10. The most prominent cases of Scripture twisting by Jehovah's Witnesses**

##### **4.3.10.1. Case 1**

The Jehovah's Witnesses produced their own translation of the Bible called the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (NWT). The reason why this translation was produced is answered as follows on the Jehovah's Witnesses' website: "For decades, Jehovah's Witnesses used, printed, and distributed various versions of the Bible. But then we saw the need to produce a new translation that would better help people to learn the 'accurate knowledge of truth', which is God's will for everyone" (The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, s.a.).

Since this is the case, the Jehovah's Witnesses not only possess a twisted translation, but also, one could say, inaccurate quotations from the Bible. In this case though, the researcher will admit that the line between an inaccurate quotation and an incorrect translation becomes blurry, since the inaccurate quotation is rather based on an incorrect translation. With this acknowledgement, a popular example from the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society that is worthy of investigation is their version of John 1:1.

John 1:1 reads as follows in the NWT: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god." Notice how in the last phrase, it is stated that the "Word was a god". The Watchtower Bible and Tract society (1989a:27) justifies this translation as follows:

At John 1:1 there are two occurrences of the Greek noun *theos* (god). The first occurrence refers to Almighty God, with whom the Word was ("and the Word [*logos*] was with God [a form of *theos*]). This first *theos* is preceded by the word *ton* [the], a form of the Greek definite article that points to a distinct identity, in this case Almighty God ("and the Word was with [the] God"). On the other hand, there is no article before the second *theos* at John 1:1. So a literal translation would read, "and god was the Word." Yet we have seen that many translations render this second *theos* (a predicate noun) as "divine," "godlike," or "a god." On what authority do they do this? The Koine Greek language had a definite article ("the"), but it did not have an indefinite article ("a" or "an"). So when a predicate noun is not preceded by the definite article, it may be indefinite, depending on the context ... So John 1:1 highlights the quality of the Word, that he was "divine," "godlike," "a god," but not Almighty God.

The translation as "the Word was a god" over against the NKJV, which reads "the Word was God", is motivated by the absence of a definite article in the original Greek language. On this point, the Jehovah's Witnesses are correct. There is no definite article in the Greek text preceding *theos* (*θεός*). White (1998:53), however, notes that the writers of the New Testament

used the Greek article to convey meaning, and that therefore one must be attentive to the information that the writers provided by the use, or even non-use of the definite Greek article. Furthermore, to use this as a reason to render the translation as “a god” instead of “God” is also unwarranted since the definite article is not necessary in the Greek for a word to be in the definite. An example of this can be seen in John 1:6.<sup>183</sup> This verse makes references to “God”, even in the NWT, and yet, there is no definite article featuring in the Greek text. Another example of this also features in Mark 12:27.<sup>184</sup> The word “God” in the Greek text can therefore also be translated as “the God” or at least “God”, even if it does not have a definite article preceding it (Howe, 2010:148). Howe (2010:205) therefore asserts that “whether a word should be considered definite or indefinite is not a purely grammatical or syntactical issue, but is rather a conceptual issue”.

The only way to approach this issue of translation then is by investigating the Greek text for pointers concerning the correct translation. The first thing to note in this process is that the order of words as it appears in the Greek is not as important as it might be in other modern languages like English or Afrikaans, for example. White (1998:53) notes, “The Greeks had no problem putting the subject of a sentence, or its main verb, *way* down the line, so to speak. Just because one word comes *before* another in Greek does not *necessarily* have any significance.” The reason this point is important is because the “woodenly literal translation” of the last phrase in John 1:1 would be “and God was the Word” (Howe, 2010:147). This construction in the Greek language is commonly referred to as a predicate nominative construction which includes a noun as the subject of the sentence, a copulative verb and then another noun, which is in the same form as that of the subject. Hence, John 1:1 can be outlined as follows:

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<sup>183</sup> “There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.”

<sup>184</sup> “He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. You are therefore greatly mistaken.”



|     |                                      |                              |                           |
|-----|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| and | God<br><br>(Predicate<br>Nominative) | was<br><br>(Copulative verb) | the Word<br><br>(Subject) |
| καὶ | θεὸς                                 | ἦν                           | ὁ λόγος                   |

The reason one knows that “the Word” is the subject of this sentence is because of the definite article, which was used by the Greeks in a predicate nominative construction to identify the subject as such. This explains why the translation is then rendered as “the Word was God”, and not literally according to the word order of the sentence in the Greek. Another point to emphasise is that if both the nouns ended up having a definite article in a predicate nominative construction, it would have indicated that the two nouns can be used interchangeably (White, 1998:53-54). It is therefore as Michaels (2010:48) reminds one, “the absence of the article alerts the reader that ‘the Word’ and ‘God’, despite their close and intimate relationship, are not interchangeable”. This would result in an equation between “the Word” and “God” or, as Carson (1991:117) states it: “if John had included the article ... He would have been so identifying the Word with God that no divine being could exist apart from the Word”. This is why the last clause of this sentence rendered as “was God” is qualitative, referring to the nature of “the Word”. This means that “the Word” does not consist of the whole Godhead, but rather that the divine essence of the Godhead is also fully participated in by “the Word”.

One last question worth answering then is: ‘Who is the Word?’ When one reads John 1:14<sup>185</sup> and further, the apostle John is identifying “the Word” as equivalent with the Person of Jesus, which indicates that John 1:1 is a clear reference to Jesus in terms of indicating the doctrine of the Trinity (Howe, 2010:147; White, 1998:54). As stated above, this is not so much an inaccurate quotation as it is a twisted translation. But what becomes clear is that the Jehovah’s Witnesses cherish a theological agenda when manipulating the Greek grammar in this fashion.

#### 4.3.10.2. Case 2

In light of the fact that the Jehovah’s Witnesses produced their own translation of the Bible, there are multiple examples of biblical passages in the NWT that can be classified as a twisted translation. One example of this is Colossians 1:15-17. In the NWT, this passage reads as follows:

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<sup>185</sup> “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; because by means of him all other things were created in the heavens and on the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. All other things have been created through him and for him. Also, he is before all other things, and by means of him all other things were made to exist.

When one turns to the NKJV of the Bible, the same passage is translated thus:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

In the NWT of this passage, the word “other” is inserted four times. This word, however, is not in any way part of the original Greek text. Metzger (1953:76) observes that it was “obviously used by the translators in order to make the passage refer to Jesus as being on a par with other created things”. Rhodes (2009:72) also explains that the motivation behind this twisted translation is because the Jehovah’s Witnesses want to avoid the idea that Jesus Christ is uncreated and existed before all things. By adding the word “other”, the NWT makes it seem as if Jesus was first created by God, or Jehovah, and consequently used by “Jehovah to create all other things in the universe”. This twisted translation clearly has a theological agenda behind it.

#### **4.3.10.3. Case 3**

It has been noted by scholars that the Jehovah’s Witnesses exercise a strong level of control over the interpretation of the Bible through the material of the Watchtower organisation (Rhodes, 2009:28). To motivate the idea that submission to the authority of the Watchtower organisation is biblical, the following claim is made by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1955:156) in a publication titled, *Qualified to be Ministers*: “If we have love for Jehovah and for the organization of his people we shall not be suspicious but shall as the Bible says, ‘believe all things,’ all the things that The Watchtower brings out.”

Besides being guilty of saying but not citing, notice the biblical hook in the rhetoric above. The phrase “believe all things”, which might be a reference to 1 Corinthians 13:7,<sup>186</sup> is introduced with the phrase “the Bible says” and is immediately, without any clarification, connected to believing in the material that the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society delivers. This is a rhetorical move to legitimise the authority of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society as biblical.

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<sup>186</sup> “It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” (NWT).

#### 4.3.10.4. Case 4

The Jehovah's Witnesses are also guilty of ignoring the immediate context in one of their arguments against the doctrine of the Trinity. This argument is based on 1 Corinthians 14:44 which reads: "For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace." In a booklet titled *Should you Believe in the Trinity?* The Watchtower Bible and Tract society (1989a:5) quotes this passage, and then insists that "in view of that statement, would God be responsible for a doctrine about himself that is so confusing that even Hebrew, Greek, and Latin scholars cannot really explain?" Considering the principle identified in the passage, that God is not a God of confusion, the Trinity is dismissed since it only causes confusion, which goes against the principle identified in 1 Corinthians 14:33.

When one reads this verse in its larger context, it becomes evident that the principle that God is not a God of confusion is being applied to worship, and not to the doctrine of the Trinity. If one were to read 1 Corinthians 14:26-33,<sup>187</sup> the context suggests that the apostle Paul is attempting to instruct the Corinthians on practical guidelines regarding speaking in tongues and prophesying during worship. These were important issues to address since the church in Corinth was "plagued by internal division and disorder" (Rhodes, 2009:226). According to the apostle Paul, the church must honour God by striving for harmony in worship and not disharmony. Harmony in this context entails that only one person may speak in tongues at a time and only one person may prophecy at a time. If there is no order in the practice of the spiritual gifts, then worship can collapse into chaos. But the point is that the foundation for engaging in corporate worship in an orderly fashion is because "God is not the author of confusion but of peace". Accordingly, 1 Corinthians 14:33 is not relevant to the doctrine of the Trinity. The Jehovah's Witnesses are clearly ignoring the immediate context of this particular passage, not to mention being guilty of overspecification as well.

An example of a literal fallacy is also present in the teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses. This can be seen when the Watchtower Society deals with Revelation 7:4<sup>188</sup> and 14:1-3.<sup>189</sup> These

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<sup>187</sup> "How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification. If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints."

<sup>188</sup> "And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred *and* forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel *were* sealed."

<sup>189</sup> "Then I looked, and behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred *and* forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists

verses in the book of Revelation speak about the 144 000 who are sealed by God. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:121) states for example: “Revelation limits the number to 144 000 that become a part of the Kingdom and stand on Mount Zion”, and “Almighty God, who sets all members in his organization as is pleasing to him, has limited to 144 000 the number of the ‘body of Christ’, whose members will reign with Christ Jesus in God’s heavenly kingdom”. In another instance, the Watchtower Society (1989b:167, 352) clearly indicates that the number 144 000 is to be taken literally, and that this 144 000 refers to the “spirit-anointed followers” of Jesus Christ who will be in heaven to reign with Him.

#### **4.3.10.5. Case 5**

The Jehovah’s Witnesses are guilty of overspecification as regards 1 Thessalonians 4:16.<sup>190</sup> In the NWT this verse reads as follows: “because the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a commanding call, with an archangel’s voice and with God’s trumpet, and those who are dead in union with Christ will rise first.”

According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Jesus Christ is directly associated with the archangel Michael. To support this claim from this passage, in one of their books titled *Aid to Bible Understanding*, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1971:1152) explains it as follows:

Scriptural evidence indicates that the name Michael applied to God’s Son before he left heaven to become Jesus Christ and also after his return. Michael is the only one said to be the “archangel,” meaning “chief angel” or “principal angel”. The term occurs in the Bible only in the singular. This seems to imply that there is but one whom God has designated chief or head of the angelic host. At 1 Thessalonians 4:16 the voice of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ is described as being that of an archangel, suggesting that he is, in fact, himself the archangel. This text depicts him as descending from heaven with a “commanding call”. It is only logical, therefore, that the voice expressing this commanding call be described by a word that would not diminish or detract from the great authority that Christ Jesus now has as King of kings and Lord of lords. (Matt. 28:18; Rev. 17:14) If the designation “archangel” applied, not to Jesus Christ, but to other angels, then the reference to an “archangel’s voice” would not be appropriate. In that case it would be describing a voice of lesser authority than that of the Son of God.

In the light of Daniel 10:13,<sup>191</sup> the Watchtower Society asserts that there is only one archangel, and that is Michael. Furthermore, following 1 Thessalonians 4:16, it is claimed that Jesus is the

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playing their harps. They sang as it were a new song before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and no one could learn that song except the hundred *and* forty-four thousand who were redeemed from the earth.”

<sup>190</sup> “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

<sup>191</sup> “But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia.”

archangel Michael, since according to them His voice is depicted as being that of an archangel in this text.

Rhodes (2009:183), however, states that “the text never explicitly says that Jesus Himself speaks with the voice of the archangel. This is an unwarranted assumption of the Watchtower Society, based on a strong theological bias.” Reed (1996:158-159) also contends that it is illegitimate to identify Jesus as the archangel Michael in this passage solely for the reason that He will descend with an archangel’s voice. He furthermore points out the incoherent exposition by stating: “If descending with an archangel’s voice makes Christ an archangel, then descending ‘with God’s trumpet’ makes Him God. The same logic must be applied to the entire verse, not just part of it.”

To use 1 Thessalonians 4 in this manner is clearly an overspecification of the passage. The passage nowhere indicates that Jesus speaks with the voice of the archangel Michael. Also, the notion that Jesus will descend with an archangel’s voice does not get one all the way to identifying Jesus as the archangel Michael. As pointed out, if that interpretive move is correct, then it is also correct to identify Jesus with God from this passage. It should also be mentioned that the phrase “one of the chief princes” in Daniel 10:13 does not limit the number of archangels to one.

#### **4.3.10.6. Case 6**

An example of saying but not citing from the Jehovah’s Witnesses can be found in their accusation that the doctrine of the Trinity originated with Satan. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:82) asserts, for example, that “Satan is the originator of the ‘trinity’ doctrine.” Rutherford (1936:185), the second president of the Watchtower Society, also states:

Another lie made and told by Satan for the purpose of reproaching God's name and turning men away from God is that of the "trinity". That doctrine is taught by the religionists of "Christendom" and is in substance this: "That there are three gods in one; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, all equal in power, substance and eternity." No man can explain that doctrine, because it is false.

It is said that the doctrine of the Trinity originated with Satan and is a lie that he popularised. Yet, this statement is just thrown out there without citing a passage to support this claim. If the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed something that started with Satan, perhaps there need to be proof-texts in favour of such a claim. This would be expected since part of the reason the doctrine of the Trinity is rejected is not just because it originated with the devil, but also because there are apparently no proof-texts to support such a doctrine.

#### 4.3.10.7. Case 7

In their book titled *Let God be True*, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:83) addresses the doctrine of the Trinity and attempts to dismiss it by selectively citing certain passages. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:83) introduces the discussion by turning to the “main scriptures” that “organized religion” apparently uses to make a case for the Trinity. The following passages are then mentioned and discussed:

- 1 John 5:7: “For there are three that bear witness in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit; and these three are one.”
- 1 Timothy 3:16: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”
- John 1:1: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”
- John 10:30: “I and My Father are one.”

With regard to 1 John 5:7 and 1 Timothy 3:16, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:84, 86) correctly explains that the different Greek manuscripts do not reflect 1 John 5:7 and that 1 Timothy 3:16 has some translation issues concerning the word ‘God’. This, however, is not a problem for the Trinitarian. Hoekema (1963:242), for example, states that “no reputable theologian from any evangelical denomination would use this passage [1 John 5:7] today as a proof-text for the Trinity!” He also acknowledges that 1 Timothy 3:16 has some translation issues with regard to the word ‘God’, and that churches therefore do not base the Trinity on that verse (Hoekema, 1963:243). The point to emphasise, however, is that one does not need these passages as proof for the Trinity, and a refutation of these particular texts does not refute the whole doctrine of the Trinity.

When the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:88) deals with John 1:1, they are guilty of a twisted translation, since the translation in the NWT reads as follows: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god.” Hoekema (1963:243) again explains that their entire argumentation of this verse is based on a “mistranslation”. This should be sufficient to mention here, since this specific case has been dealt with earlier.

Commenting in turn on John 10:30, the Watchtower Society (1946:86) explains that the words of Jesus, “I and My Father are one”, refer to the unity between Jesus and the Father in “agreement, purpose and organization”, and not in nature or essence. The question however is: If Jesus was not claiming His own deity here, why did the Jews attempt to stone Him for

blasphemy after His claim? This is made very clear in John 10:33<sup>192</sup> when the Jews explain that they want to stone Jesus because He is claiming to be God.

At this point it is worth saying that what the Jehovah's Witnesses are not saying in their refutation of the Trinity, is probably more important than what they are saying (Sire, 1980:81). All the different passages that they do mention can be explained, but they selectively cite these passages, while failing to mention some of the other passages in the Bible that also serve as more proof-texts for the deity of Jesus and the Trinity. Sire (1980:81), for example, lists Matthew 28:19;<sup>193</sup> John 20:28;<sup>194</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:11<sup>195</sup> and 12:4-5;<sup>196</sup> 2 Corinthians 1:21-22;<sup>197</sup> Galatians 3:11-14;<sup>198</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5:18-19<sup>199</sup> and 1 Peter 1:1-2.<sup>200</sup> None of these passages are cited by them.

The researcher grants the point that all these passages must first be unpacked, but for now, this only serves to show that the Jehovah's Witnesses are guilty of selective citing in their attempt to disprove the doctrine of the Trinity.

It is worth pointing out that the Jehovah's Witnesses also object to the doctrine of the Trinity by claiming it is false since "nowhere in the Scriptures is even any mention made of 'trinity'" (The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1946:92-93). In other words, the Trinity is false since the word "Trinity" is nowhere to be found in the Bible. Sire (1980:82) however states that this argument is "off the mark" since "whether the Witnesses acknowledge it or not, the Trinitarian pattern was deeply impressed upon the mind of the apostles and the early church". As seen in Chapter 2, this is also the objection that CiMI raises.

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<sup>192</sup> "The Jews answered Him, saying, 'For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.'"

<sup>193</sup> "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>194</sup> "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

<sup>195</sup> "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."

<sup>196</sup> "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord."

<sup>197</sup> "For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. <sup>22</sup> For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom."

<sup>198</sup> "But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for '*the just shall live by faith*'. <sup>12</sup> Yet the law is not of faith, but '*the man who does them shall live by them*'. Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, '*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*'), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

<sup>199</sup> "... in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit."

<sup>200</sup> "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

#### 4.3.10.8. Case 8

An example of a confused definition can be found when the Jehovah's Witnesses deals with Colossians 1:15.<sup>201</sup> In the NWT this passage reads as follows: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." After citing this verse, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:35) states that Jesus "is ranked with God's creatures, being first among them ... He is not the author of the creation of God; but, after God had created him as his firstborn Son, then God used him as his working Partner in the creating of all the rest of creation." In another book, *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1989b:408) also asserts that the term "firstborn" means that "Jesus is the eldest in Jehovah's family of sons". Hence, every time the word "firstborn" is applied to living creatures, it is applied to a larger group. In short, the term "firstborn" is taken to mean "first-created" (Rhodes, 2009:130).

This is certainly a confused definition of the word 'firstborn' in this passage. Rhodes (2009:130) for example states that 'firstborn' definitely does not mean first-created'. Michaelis (1964:879) for instance explains that the Greek word *prototokos* (πρωτότοκος) must be interpreted in a hierarchical manner referring to the unique "supremacy of Christ over all creatures as the Mediator of their creation". Wright (1986:75) also latches on to this stream of thought by claiming that it conveys priority in both time and rank and that it is "in virtue of this eternal pre-existence that the Son of God holds supreme rank".

To illustrate this point, Rhodes (2009:131) refers to the life of David. Although he was certainly not the literal firstborn of his father Jesse – in fact, he was the last-born son of Jesse – he is still described as the "firstborn" in Psalm 89:27 where one reads: "Also I will make him *My* firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth." It seems clear then that the Jehovah's Witnesses are confusing the definition of a key word in Colossians 1:15, and thereby also "ignoring all biblical evidence to the contrary" of their position (Rhodes, 2009:129).

#### 4.3.10.9. Case 9

The Jehovah's Witnesses are guilty of ignoring alternative explanations when it comes to Revelation 3:14.<sup>202</sup> In the NWT this verse reads as follows: "To the angel of the congregation in Laodicea write: These are the things that the Amen says, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation by God." This is a reference to Jesus Christ. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1946:34-35) uses this verse to indicate that Jesus is created by God. He is therefore a created being with a point of beginning. It is claimed that Jesus Christ "was the first

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<sup>201</sup> "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

<sup>202</sup> "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God.'"



of Jehovah God's creations". Since the Greek word for 'beginning' in this verse is the word *arche* (ἀρχή), the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1989b:14) in another place maintains,

"Beginning" [Greek, *arkhe*] cannot rightly be interpreted to mean that Jesus was the 'beginner' of God's creation. In his Bible writings, John uses various forms of the Greek word *arkhe* more than 20 times, and these always have the common meaning of "beginning". Yes, Jesus was created by God as the beginning of God's invisible creations.

Rhodes (2009:123) correctly points out that the Greek word *arche* has a wide range of possible meanings. Although "beginning" is one of the possible translations, it can also mean "one who begins", "origin", "source", "creator" or "first cause" (Liddell, 1996:121).

Geisler and Rhodes (1997:305) note that the "English word architect comes from *arche*. This verse says that Jesus is the architect of all creation." Furthermore, Morris (1987:84) states that the word *arche* indicates that Jesus is the Ruler with supreme authority over creation since He is the origin of it. Lastly, Kistemaker and Hendriksen (2001:169) assert, "We should not interpret the word *origin* passively, as if Jesus were created or recreated, but actively, because Jesus is the one who generates and calls God's creation into being (John 1:1; Col. 1:15–18; Heb. 1:2)."

It is worth pointing out that the word *arche* is also used in Revelation 21:4-6<sup>203</sup> where it is applied to God and not to God the Son, Jesus Christ. This indicates that it cannot mean a created being, since God the Father would then also be a creature. It seems then that the Jehovah's Witnesses ignore the other explanations on the table and just dismiss them without any argument in favour of it (Geisler & Rhodes, 1997:305).

#### **4.3.10.10. Case 10**

The Jehovah's Witnesses maintain a sort of esoteric stance towards the Bible by alleging that, without the guidance of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, one cannot ultimately understand the Bible. The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (1958:362-363) for example states, "In order to understand God's Word and discern his will we need help ... the help of his dedicated organized people ... All who become Jesus' disciples by dedicating themselves to Jehovah God must ... accept teaching that God provides through his visible organization on earth." This implies that if one were to be a Jehovah's Witness, one can only understand the Bible through the help of the Watchtower Society and its publications. This way, the interpretations of other churches are immediately depicted as inferior to theirs and therefore the

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<sup>203</sup> "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.' And He said to me, 'Write, for these words are true and faithful.' And He said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts.'"

Bible can only be interpreted correctly by the Watchtower Society. Although a spiritual meaning to a specific text is not introduced in this case, there is still a claim to exclusively correct interpretations, and the impossibility of arriving at correct interpretations without their help.

#### **4.4. Summary and conclusion**

With this chapter, the study progressed into the more theological and doctrinal arena of cults by investigating the hermeneutics and exegesis of cultic groups. It was argued that since cults arrive at their doctrines by interpreting some source of authority, in the case of CiMI the Bible, it is important to explore the way a group manages their source of authority before reaching their doctrinal conclusions in the first place. Since the Bible is accepted as a uniquely authoritative book by historical, orthodox Christians, and since these cults use exactly the same source of authority to arrive at opposite doctrinal convictions than the main branches of Christianity do, this issue is especially important. If the hermeneutics of a cultic group, such as CiMI, can be shown to be invalid and in violation of sound principles of interpretation, one can inevitably expect deep theological and doctrinal differences to follow as well, which are dealt with in the next chapter.

The main goal of this chapter was to establish whether CiMI, following in the footsteps of more established cults, is indeed guilty of misreading or twisting the Bible to better fit their preconceived theology and doctrines. To achieve this goal, the historical-grammatical method of biblical interpretation was first spelled out. The well-established principles of this method include the importance of the original biblical languages, extending into the practice of word studies and investigating grammar and syntax, the historical and cultural setting of the Bible, and the context, literary genres and authors of the Bible. It also includes the practice of comparing Scripture with Scripture. Moreover, attention was given to the role of preunderstandings and presuppositions in biblical interpretation, and the universal principles of communication. This was addressed to indicate that although one's worldview has a role to play in interpretation, one can nevertheless arrive at the objective truth of a biblical passage. This was necessary to point out since cults might predetermine their conclusions of their interpretation with a theological bias. This established the notion that one can legitimately and principally arrive at an objectively true interpretation of the text, which gives one the footing to prove another interpretation as incorrect or false. The reason why an overview of the historical-grammatical interpretation of the Bible was provided was so that one can observe and compare the ways in which cults interpret the Bible with the sound way to interpret the Bible.

The discussion then moved on to apply the methods of misreadings, as identified and labelled by Sire, to the teachings of CiMI. The work of Sire on cultic Scripture twisting was used as a

theoretical basis. All the methods of misreadings that he identified were uniquely applied to CiMI to show that they are indeed guilty of misreading and twisting the biblical text as they reinterpret the Bible to arrive at their theological claims. Since the focus was not on critique and countering of their theology and doctrine, comments were mostly limited to the hermeneutics of CiMI, and not necessarily their theological and doctrinal positions. The fact that misreadings and distortions of the biblical text can, according to 2 Peter 3:15-16, potentially culminate in one's own "destruction", also adds to the importance of this issue. This part of the discussion managed to document fifty cases of misreadings or comments regarding typical cultic stances towards the Bible. It was therefore sufficiently demonstrated that CiMI is handling the Bible "deceitfully" (Strydom, 2019d).

With the first body of misreadings, it was shown how CiMI is guilty of providing inaccurate quotations and twisted translations of biblical texts. The Bible is also used in the service of rhetoric where no exegetical argument is necessarily given for their position, but only phrases like "the Bible says", "it is on every page of the New Testament" and "we use Scripture to interpret Scripture" are implemented to opt for their view as being the true one.

Since the Bible is a book, and hence in that sense literature, it was also shown how CiMI violate basic principles when reading the literature of the Bible. Some of these violations include ignoring the immediate context of passages, collapsing the context of two or more passages, over-specifying certain passages by allowing it to say more than the passages allow for, interpreting passages figuratively instead of literally or vice versa, and introducing speculative readings of predictive prophecies. Hence, all the literary guards present in the biblical text is ignored by CiMI.

The next body of misreadings focused on the Scriptures as evidence. It involved instances where CiMI made a certain claim but did not cite any passage to support that claim, or where certain passages were indeed cited, but in a selective manner, providing only a limited number of citations to support their claim. There were also cases where the evidence that CiMI did provide, was inadequate to support their specific position or was in fact a direct contradiction.

It was furthermore shown that CiMI is introducing new definitions for words without the necessary justification, which leads to wrong interpretations of passages; hence they are guilty of confused definitions. Alternative explanations for specific passages are also ignored, and their dubious view is presented as the only obvious true interpretation of a text. CiMI has also established instances where they associated themselves with important figures in order to gain virtue through those associations. This body of misreadings pertained to the category of reasoning from the Scriptures.

The final category of misreadings involved the authority of Scripture. Cults who want to stay associated with the title of 'Christian' are eager to show that the Bible supports their position. However, to introduce heretical doctrines, cults introduce authorities that surpass that of the Bible. This was shown by way of CiMI's esoteric stance towards the Bible and also the way in which CiMI supplements the authority of the Bible by claiming to be the only worthy interpreters of it. Inevitably CiMI implicitly rejects the authority of the Bible and gives that authority to CiMI's leadership, who are considered as the only ones who can produce sound interpretations.

The chapter concluded with ten cases of Scripture twisting by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, respectively. This was part of the investigation to show that CiMI is not new to the practice of Scripture twisting, as well as that they are in principle taking a similar position as other more established groups.

This chapter can confidently conclude that CiMI is guilty of Scripture twisting and, following logically from that, also of doctrine twisting. The next chapter, building forth on this one, and assuming the historical-grammatical method of interpretation, addresses some of the essential doctrines of historical, orthodox Christianity. Chapter 5 therefore counters many of CiMI's theological and doctrinal themes apologetically, but also reclaims and reaffirms important doctrines that CiMI has twisted, as apologetics should do.

## **CHAPTER 5: DOCTRINE TWISTING: RECLAIMING CIMI'S DISTORTIONS OF ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINES**

### **5.1. Introduction**

As stated before, the investigation of the theological and doctrinal beliefs of cults is indispensable to the endeavour of properly practising counter-cult apologetics. Therefore, while Chapter 3 meaningfully investigated the sociological and psychological traits of cults and showed how CiMI portrays many of those traits, Chapter 4 initiated the shift into the more theological and doctrinal domain of cults by examining the way CiMI and other more established cults view, manage, interpret and use the Bible. It was argued that one can consistently arrive at the essential doctrines of historical, orthodox Christianity through the use of the historical-grammatical method for understanding the Bible. The only way a cult, such as CiMI, can use the Bible and reject, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity or the deity of Christ, is by violating the well-established historical-grammatical method of interpretation, and instead setting up their own “infallible” interpretations (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:206; Sire, 1980:12).

Geisler and Rhodes (2008:13) are therefore correct in stating:

[A]ll the essential doctrines relating to our salvation are based on a literal, historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture. Without this there can be no Christian orthodoxy. Many cults specialize in denying this literal method of interpreting Scripture in part or in whole. This is how they so easily twist Scripture to their own heretical advantage ... Allegorical and symbolical interpretation of Scripture do not – indeed, cannot – yield the orthodox fundamentals. Historically and logically, they lead to heresy and unorthodoxy.

In other words, it follows logically that if the consistent application of the correct hermeneutic is a precondition for sound and orthodox theology, especially regarding the essential doctrines of Christianity, a failure to apply the correct hermeneutic, and instead consistently implementing an incorrect hermeneutic, will result in unsound theology and, therefore, in heresy (House & Carle, 2003:13).

Chapter 4 demonstrated that CiMI, together with other more established cults, is indeed guilty of misreading or twisting the Bible. Many examples were documented to show how the proper principles that are necessary for interpreting the Bible are violated by CiMI in one way or another. This was not just a focus on the text and literature of the Bible, but also on providing evidence from the Bible, reasoning from the Bible, using the Bible as rhetoric, the implicit rejection of the Bible's authority, virtue by association, esoteric interpretations, and a supplementation and implicit rejection of biblical authority. It is important to note that Chapter 4

did not attempt to address CiMI's theological and doctrinal conclusions, or to make a detailed case for a different theological conclusion than that of CiMI. As far as possible, the focus was only to point out their illicit hermeneutical abuses and to indicate the possibility for a different interpretation that is contrary or contradictory to theirs. From this perspective, Chapter 4 was setting the stage for a detailed theological and doctrinal analysis.

Given the Scripture twisting of CiMI, it should consequently not be surprising when they arrive at unorthodox theological and doctrinal conclusions. The current chapter moves from evaluating the hermeneutics and exegesis of CiMI to evaluating the theological and doctrinal conclusions reached because of their hermeneutics. Martin (2003:18) mentions that a detailed theological evaluation and apologetic contrast must be part of the researcher's approach, which confirms the aim of this chapter. Although many of CiMI's theological and doctrinal positions have already been pointed out, it has not yet been evaluated and contrasted with historical, orthodox Christianity. The aim therefore falls mainly, in the words of House and Carle (2003:10, 12), on "their aberrant theology", in order to properly respond to "attacks on Christian doctrine by employing good hermeneutics and logic" and to "clarify Christian truth".

The unity of the church cannot be expanded to embrace cults "who are not in agreement with the essentials of biblical Christianity" (Martin, 2003:21). In light of the fact that the "essential doctrines of orthodox Christianity are virtually ... denied and distorted" by cults (House & Carle, 2003:13), specifically in this case by CiMI, Martin (2003:23-24) emphasises that the average Christian must familiarise him/herself with the cardinal doctrines of Christianity to better "detect those counterfeit elements so apparent in the cult systems that set them apart from biblical Christianity". In their opening chapter, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:1) state that there will be times when dogmatics<sup>1</sup> is "in demand, and there are periods when this discipline is not highly regarded". Perhaps, because of a low regard for dogmatics, the church is somewhat to blame for the presence of cults like CiMI. One must not forget that it is the church's responsibility to give its members what Keller (1990) calls a "spiritual bottom". According to Keller, youth join cults because they are not given a "spiritual bottom" in the form of theological and doctrinal truths which are rooted in the Bible and its authority. The consequence is that they fall prey to what McGrath (2009:1) refers to as "heretical ideas".

Brown (1988:2) explains that the word heresy comes from the Greek noun *hairesis* (αἵρεσις), and that it originally meant 'party'. This meaning is clear in verses such as Acts 5:17,<sup>2</sup> 15:5<sup>3</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> Dogmatics is another name for the discipline of systematic theology.

<sup>2</sup> "But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy ..." (ESV).

<sup>3</sup> "But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses'" (ESV).

26:5.<sup>4</sup> However, he continues to say that in the early history of the first Christians, the word 'heresy' started to mean a split resulting from a "false faith". Heresy, according to Brown, can be defined as follows:

It designated either a doctrine or the party holding the doctrine, a doctrine that was sufficiently intolerable to destroy the unity of the Christian church. In the early church, heresy did not refer to simply any doctrinal disagreement, but to something that seemed to undercut the very basis for Christian existence. Practically speaking, heresy involved the doctrine of God and the doctrine of Christ (Brown, 1988:2-3).

Identifying the term heresy in this manner also takes one back to the idea of the essential doctrines of Christianity which define Christianity. Accordingly, a heresy, as such, is something that threatens the very existence of the Christian faith by distorting the essential doctrines that define it. St. Thomas Aquinas (STh., II-II q.11 a.1 s.c.), while discussing the theme of heresy, explains that "a heretic is one who devises or follows false or new opinions. Therefore heresy is opposed to the truth, on which faith is founded; and consequently it is a species of unbelief." He further indicates that the title of heretic belongs to those who claim the Christian faith and yet "corrupt its dogmas".

Rhodes (2001:19-20) observes that it is with good reason that every book in the New Testament, except for Philemon, mention "false teachers, false prophets, false gospels, or heresies". Dealing with a cult like CiMI is therefore nothing new for the historical, orthodox Christian church. Jesus warned His followers to keep an eye out for "false prophets" who will be disguised as sheep but are in fact wolves (Matthew 7:15). He also cautioned about "false Christs" who, with their signs and wonders, will lead many astray (Mark 13:22). In 1 Corinthians 11:4-15, the apostle Paul was concerned about the proclamation about "another Jesus" and the presence of "false apostles". On other occasions he also warned about men who will "speak twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them" and those who preach "another gospel" (Acts 20:29-30 and Galatians 1:8). Finally, the apostle Peter mentioned "false prophets" and "false teachers" who will "secretly bring in destructive heresies" (2 Peter 2:1). The unsettling threat is clear, as Rhodes (2001:19) captures the concerning consequences: "Counterfeit prophets who speak of a counterfeit Christ who preaches a counterfeit gospel can yield only a counterfeit salvation. Because there are eternal consequences to false teachings, Scripture bears numerous warnings." This statement emphasises the serious implications of heresy and why it should be a priority to address it.

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<sup>4</sup> "They have known for a long time, if they are willing to testify, that according to the strictest party of our religion I have lived as a Pharisee" (ESV).

Although heresy is not deemed to be a positive phenomenon for the church to deal with, while reflecting on 1 Corinthians 11:19,<sup>5</sup> Augustine (2005:39) identified the value of dealing with heresy for the church. Under the heading “The Need to Progress from Faith to Understanding: The Value of Heresies in this Regard”, he wrote as follows:

But it has been most truly said: There needs must be many heresies, so that the tried and tested ones among you may stand out (1 Cor. 11:19). So let’s make use of this favour of divine providence too. It’s people, you see, who, even while they were within the Church, would nevertheless go astray that become heretics; when they are outside it, however, they are of the greatest value, not of course in teaching the truth they don’t know but in prodding fleshly-minded Catholics into seeking the truth and spiritual ones into opening up its riches. After all, there are countless tried and tested men in the holy Church, but they don’t stand out among us as long as we prefer to sleep on, enjoying the darkest of our ignorance, rather than to wake up and gaze at the light of truth. Accordingly, it’s through heretics that many people, in order to get them seeing and rejoicing in God’s daylight, are roused from their slumbers. Let’s then make use even of heretics, not by way of giving approval to their errors but by way of upholding Catholic teaching against their wiles and being more wide awake and careful, even if we cannot call them back to the way of salvation.

The prevalent presence of heretics and heresies throughout history has always awakened the church to better clarify the great truth claims of the Christian faith. Although, as Hoekema (1963:2) points out,<sup>6</sup> the church can learn many things from cults, in spite of their deep theological mistakes; the task at hand is to provide an apologetic contrast of CiMI’s theology with historical, orthodox Christianity. This task is further to diagnose some of the historical roots of CiMI’s teachings and to clarify, reaffirm and reclaim the essentials of the Christian faith. In some sense one could say that this task is captured in the words of Jude and Paul, stating that the church must “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3), and that “by sound doctrine” must “exhort and convict those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

Strydom (2017b), the visionary leader of CiMI, briefly states, “Before you fight for something you have to know it is true.” The researcher can certainly agree with this statement. The fact that

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<sup>5</sup> “for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.” (ESV).

<sup>6</sup> Hoekema (1963:2-8) lists 10 things the church can learn from cults. This includes “the importance of having definite convictions about matters of faith”, “the importance of knowing Scripture”, “their zeal for witnessing”, their “effective use of the printed page”, “the strong sense of urgency”, “the large role they assign to laymen”, “the sense of dedication found in their members”, “definite techniques for witnessing”, their willingness “to endure ridicule” and the contribution of the Christian faith to “good health”. Hoekema (1963:8) clarifies the last point by explaining that without embracing the principles of the faith-healing cults, churches have failed to emphasise the relation between religion and health. Although these ten things can be debated, the principle at least still remains that there are things to learn from cults.



CiMI is fighting for their theology and doctrine implies, at least according to Strydom's utterance, that many of them believe they are in possession of the truth. Whether Strydom himself believes his own teachings to be true remains a difficult question to answer.<sup>7</sup> However, in the light of Strydom's statement, may this chapter also serve to place "doubt in the mind of those in error – doubt that paves the way for truth" (Sire, 1980:20).

## 5.2. A critical reclamation of essential Christian doctrines from CiMI

What follows is a critical reclamation and reaffirmation of the essential doctrines of Christianity, specifically the doctrine of revelation and Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the person and the work of Jesus Christ. The discussions of these essential doctrines can be viewed as an apologetic counter against CiMI in order to clarify certain truths of Christianity and to diagnose the insufficiencies of CiMI's theology. This analysis assumes many of CiMI's doctrinal themes which has been presented in Chapter 2 and is structured in such a way as to suggest that this study is reclaiming and reaffirming the truths of these different themes over against CiMI's version of the specific themes. While one could say that Chapter 4 'reclaimed' the proper hermeneutical use of the Bible, Chapter 5 reclaims the proper theology and doctrine, consistently derived from the Bible. Muller (2017:358) discerns that theology may have different meanings, but for the purpose here theology is "the knowledge held by faith that is gained either by the direct reading of Scripture or by drawing conclusions from the text of Scripture" and one can add that it is the "science ... or wisdom ... constructed from revelation by means of reason for the explication and defense of the faith".

According to Calvin (2011:72), a precondition for "true religion" to shine upon one is that one must be a "pupil of Scripture". The Bible as being God's Word will be assumed throughout this chapter. The discussion is therefore not meant to use, in the words of Owen (1858:20), "sundry cogent arguments, which are taken from *external considerations* of the Scripture, that evince it on rational grounds to be from God". That the Bible is from God will be assumed, and therefore it is perfectly legitimate to turn to the Bible for insights regarding the theological themes at hand. In line with this point, Muller (2003:151) reminds one that the Holy Scripture is the cognitive foundation<sup>8</sup> for "revealed theology" and hence the proper source *for* theology. This means that in order to formulate consistent theology, one must turn to Scripture to do so. Accordingly, the

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<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to tell whether cult leaders believe their own ideological teachings or only use it to deceive and manipulate. Take note that both statements can be true of a cult leader at the same time. In other words, it is possible that Strydom believes his own teachings and use it at the same time to deceive and manipulate.

<sup>8</sup> Muller (2017:290) also explains that the cognitive foundation or *principium cognoscendi* is the "ground or basis on which something is known". In this case Scripture is the basis on which revealed theology is known.

current point of departure is that “the Bible alone constitutes God’s revealed word to mankind and that a Christianity based upon it alone is fully true” (Ankerberg & Weldon, 1991:viii).

Corduan (1981:18, 97) reminds one that “the Christian theologian contrives a theology; it is not given to him. What is given to him is revelation, but not theology”. This underlines the importance of using proper principles when “contriving” a theology from God’s objective revelation found in the Bible.<sup>9</sup> Corduan (1981:18, 97) further states:

[W]hen we assert the truth of revelational propositions, we do so with the qualification that (as with any other propositions) awareness of their truth is dependent on historical-grammatical exegesis. This qualification does not beg the question, but it merely applies what is true for any language event to this particular case.

This shows why Chapter 4 also plays its part to make sure that God’s objective revelation is not subjectively twisted and therefore the historical-grammatical method of interpretation is assumed.

CiMI will agree with the researcher, at least to some extent, that the Bible is God’s Word and therefore authoritative as a source of theology and doctrine. In this sense all theological and doctrinal affirmations must ultimately depend on Scripture, including the theology and doctrine of CiMI. The theological and doctrinal themes are addressed by starting with the doctrine of revelation and Scripture. Then the doctrine of the Trinity is addressed, followed by Christology to reclaim the person and works of Jesus Christ.

### **5.3. Reclaiming the doctrine of revelation and Scripture**

#### **5.3.1. Introduction**

By now it has already been established that the leadership of CiMI, and especially Strydom as the visionary leader, claim to be the only ministers with, in the wording of Rhodes (2001:23), a “direct pipeline to God”. Strydom believes with all his heart that CiMI is the “progressive Word of God” in this world (*Carte Blanche*, 2018). He claims that, through the teaching and the preaching of CiMI, he is bringing a “new report” (Strydom, 2016e), and it is said that only CiMI has the authority to teach this new revelation that comes from God, since they are the only ones

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<sup>9</sup> This is not meant to limit God’s objective revelation of Himself to Scripture as His special revelation since, as will become clear, God also reveals Himself in nature as His general revelation. Furthermore, besides the principles for the interpretation of God’s special revelation in the Bible, which were laid out in Chapter 4, Geisler (2002:177-179) also provides good principles when interpreting God’s general revelation in nature. Since it is beyond the scope of this study to pursue these principles, a list of these principles will suffice: the principles of causality, the principle of consistency, the principle of uniformity, the principle of teleology, the principle of noncontradiction, the principle of identity, the principle of excluded middle and the principle(s) of rational inference.

called by God for this task (Du Plessis, 2016a). Moreover, although the message of Christianity has remained the same for nearly 2000 years, now “the message changed” (Strydom, 2018a), and those who are not able to understand this new message or, in the words of Strydom (2018a), are not able to “read the signs of the times”, are still “earthly minded” and reading God’s revelation of Himself with “doctrinal glasses” (Labuschagne, 2016c). Kotze (2017c) further claims that CiMI has “a greater revelation” than that of the historical, orthodox Christian faith.

With their claim of exclusively possessing a “progressive Word” (Strydom, 2018a) from God, CiMI gives precedence to their “new revelations” over that of “past revelations (such as those found in the Bible)” (Rhodes, 2001:24). Strydom (2016e) insists that one cannot have true faith unless one hears the Word of God. He, however, adds that the Word of God, is “not the Bible”, since “God’s Word is progressive”. This implies that the true Word of God can only be heard at CiMI and is not entirely contained in the Bible. In this sense, as already pointed out, there is a real “presence of an extra-Scriptural source of authority” (Hoekema, 1963:378) in CiMI. Even in the face of flat-out contradictions between their apparent new revelations from God and the revelations in the past, the new revelations have the authority to supersede all previous revelations, which have always formed the basis of the Christian faith. Given these claims by CiMI, their illicit hermeneutical abuse of the Bible as God’s special revelation is to be expected. In the words of House and Carle (2003:26), CiMI holds “that their new revelations explain what the Bible actually says”. Therefore, although Chapter 4 has indicated that CiMI’s hermeneutical control and abuse of the Bible as God’s special revelation is illicit, and that CiMI supplements and implicitly rejects the authority of the Bible, more can still be said in a broader context to reclaim the important doctrine of revelation<sup>10</sup> and Scripture.

As seen in Chapter 4 (sections 4.3.9.1. and 4.3.9.2.), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also claims that their founder, Joseph Smith (1805-1844), received a new revelation from God. When Joseph Smith could not decide which church denomination to join, he, on the grounds of James 1:5,<sup>11</sup> decided to ask God which church he should join. Consequently, he went to the woods to ask God in prayer which church was the right one. Suddenly two figures appeared to him in the woods. The one figure pointed to the other one and said, “This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!” Smith then asked his question to the figure, and he received the following answer:

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<sup>10</sup> Van Genderen and Velema (2008:21) warn one not to confuse the meaning of ‘revelation’ in this context with “a surprising insight that would appear to be of great importance”, which is sometimes also labelled as a ‘revelation’. A more accurate description of this phenomenon would rather be a ‘discovery’ than a claim to knowledge which comes directly from a divine source.

<sup>11</sup> “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.”

I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; that: “they draw near to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, they teach for doctrines the commandments of men, having a form of Godliness, but they deny the power thereof” (*The Pearl of Great Price*, 2013:50).

This is documented in *The Pearl of Great Price* and is the Mormon’s version of how they began as a church. As mentioned earlier, they produced additional books which are regarded as having the same authority as the Bible. The point here is, however, that CiMI is making claims similar to some of the other cults in the world. The question for now is: Will CiMI, in time, also produce additional Scripture or another translation of the Bible?

CiMI has abandoned an orthodox view of what revelation is and what it is meant for. It should be emphasised from the start of this discussion that CiMI is not unique in their claims of having new revelations. Ankerberg and Weldon (1991:v) confirm that nearly all cults reject biblical teachings as a result of “the acceptance of new, supernatural (occultic) revelations”. What follows now is therefore a discussion of what revelation is, what it is meant for, and why it is authoritative according to historical, orthodox Christianity. This discussion is meant to reclaim and reaffirm the biblical view and doctrine of revelation and Scripture by formulating a consistent theology of revelation. Furthermore, this discussion also aims to establish, according to a proper theology of revelation, a theological and historical critique of CiMI where the researcher deems it necessary. The discussion ends with a revelational diagnosis of CiMI as the “religious other”<sup>12</sup> (Strange, 2014:38). To start with this analysis, some general remarks with regard to the essence of revelation and its unavoidability are in order.

### **5.3.2. Revelation and its unavoidability in religious matters**

Bavinck (2003:284) leads one into this discussion by claiming that any study of religion will sooner or later arrive at the “subject of revelation”. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:26) also state that “every theological trend reflects a certain concept of revelation”. In this sense, whether one is investigating cults, like CiMI, or other world religions, the subject of revelation must at some point be part of the discussion. This should not be surprising since “Christianity came into the world as a religion of revelation, and as such claimed supernatural origin for its message” (Kelly, 1977:29). This means that any other religion or form of faith that deviates from historical, orthodox Christianity is, according to Christianity, not consistent with God’s objective revelation of Himself. Bavinck (2003:342) therefore explains that true revelation from God, especially special revelation, is what brought “into existence the salvific religion known as Christianity”.

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<sup>12</sup> This phrase is used by Strange (2014:38) to refer to “other religions”, “non-Christian religions” and “world religions”. CiMI as a “pseudo-Christian religion” also falls in this category (Gruss, 2002:7).

Bavinck (2003:300) further contends that for the Christian faith one cannot by one's own thinking capacities alone establish "what revelation is". Instead, he adds that one must "seek the answer to that question in the words and facts that in Christianity present themselves as constituents of revelation and are recorded in Holy Scripture". Accordingly, one cannot dictate to God how and where He must reveal Himself; one rather "listen[s]<sup>13</sup> to what God himself has to say" on the matter of revelation in His written Word. The reason why this should be mentioned is because it is the researcher's contention that CiMI is dictating to God where and how He must reveal Himself.

### 5.3.3. What does Scripture say about revelation?

In the Old Testament one is confronted with many instances where God reveals Himself. For example, in Psalm 98:2 one reads: "The Lord has made known His salvation; His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of nations." This indicates God's "ability and willingness" to reveal "His salvation" and "His righteousness" (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:179). Likewise, in Daniel 2:22, which reads, "He reveals deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, And light dwells with Him", one is confronted with a prayer of Daniel after God revealed to him, in a night vision, how to interpret the dream of king Nebuchadnezzar. The principle to identify here, however, is that God is the One stepping out of hiddenness, and by virtue of His revelation, His servants gain knowledge of Him (Goldingay, 1989:48). Deuteronomy 29:29 is also a clear and significant passage in this regard, reading as follows: "The secret *things belong* to the Lord our God, but those *things which are revealed belong* to us and to our children forever, that *we* may do all the words of this law." According to this passage, some things are beyond man's knowledge, but then there are also things like God's law and His disclosed will which He places "within the range of man's knowledge" (Thompson, 1974:309).

The Old Testament also uses words like 'appear' and 'make known', in which God uncovers or discloses things to people. It is moreover stated that God can "teach", "lead", "guide" or "instruct" His people (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:179). Van Genderen and Velema (2008:23) additionally explain that expressions like "the word of the Lord ... the utterance of the Lord ... and God's speech" are used in the Old Testament to indicate an act of revelation from God.

Turning to the New Testament, the terms used to describe human speech are mainly used to refer to God's communication with people. Hebrews 1:1-2, which reads "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He

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<sup>13</sup> Following in the footsteps of Chapter 4, this act of listening to God also involves the idea of following good principles of interpretation without which one will not be able to 'listen' well.

made the worlds”, immediately takes one to the finality of the “revelation of God in his Son Jesus Christ”. This revelation is then seen to be a fulfilment of the “old order of things” (Hughes, 1977:35). Also notice how the author of Hebrews used the word “spoke”. In Matthew 10:26 Jesus tells the apostles that “there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known”. Here Jesus uses the verb ‘to reveal’ to indicate “the removal of a covering” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:23). In John 17:6, Jesus prays to the Father saying, “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.” In this passage Jesus directly identifies Himself as the agent who made “God’s character known” in the whole of His earthly ministry (Carson, 1991:558). In the New Testament the most general usage of words pertaining to revelation includes “reveal”, “appear”, “manifest” and in some cases “to shine with light” (Beeke & Smalley, 2018:181).

After discussing the “terminology of divine communication” found in the Old and New Testaments, Beeke and Smalley (2019:181) conclude as follows:

[It] revolves around three major foci: first, the idea of a verbal message from God in a form that human beings can receive, understand, and repeat; second, the idea of a gracious revelation of hidden, divine truth that man cannot discover on his own; third, the idea of an intrusion of eternal glory into our ordinary, mundane existence.

In other words, revelation from God involves verbal intelligible communication, the act of making something public that was hidden, and the intrusion of the infinite into the finite (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:24).

Van Genderen and Velema (2008:24-26) claim that, based on Scripture and the vocabulary used to indicate revelation, five observations can be made with regard to the concept of revelation:

1. Revelation originates with God: Revelation as such is always an act of God where He desires and wills to reveal Himself. This act of revelation depends on no one else besides God. In His sovereign will He chooses to do so, and therefore, true revelation always originates solely with Him. God’s revelation finds its climax in the mystery that was kept from the beginning of the world and finally unveiled in the person of Jesus Christ, which “will be accorded to God to all eternity (cf. Rom. 16:25-27)”<sup>14</sup> (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:24).

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<sup>14</sup> “Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith— to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.”

2. God reveals himself: When God reveals, He is not just the source of revelation, but also the One who is communicating Himself. Again, the mystery of God and His revelation of Himself culminates in Jesus Christ “who can say that he has revealed the name of the Father to those who have been given to him (John 17:6).<sup>15</sup> And the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of revelation (1 Cor. 2:10;<sup>16</sup> Eph. 1:17<sup>17</sup>)” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:25).
3. God reveals Himself in His words and actions: The fact that God makes Himself known to people through His Word is prominent in the pages of the Bible. God’s Word is “dynamic and its power is effectual”. Wherever God is making Himself known, He does so through speech, but also through redeeming acts. Creation *ex nihilo* is God’s first revelatory act and His revelation of Himself still continues through His creation today. Therefore, wherever God is “present in word/deed, he presents Himself as both speaking and acting, and His people may meet Him in this way” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:25).
4. There is a history of revelation: Revelation progresses through time. God has not said and done everything at once. There is a “history of revelation” which leads one to the person and work of Jesus Christ in whom “the revelation of God is perfect and definitive, for God has fully expressed himself in [Jesus]” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:25-26). This history of revelation is still in progress, leading to the second coming of Jesus Christ.
5. God’s purpose for revealing Himself is that we can know Him: Knowledge of God is what drives revelation. But, in a full biblical sense knowledge includes “life in communion with God”. In this sense, knowing God means acknowledging God, serving God and glorifying God. When God reveals Himself, He “desires to establish and maintain communion with us and to make this communion between him and us steadily richer” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:26).

It is clear that revelation is an important aspect of theology; in the words of Geisler’s (2002:64) question, “If God has not unveiled Himself, then how can He be known?” Muller (2003:153) asserts that “the sole foundation of all true knowledge of God is God’s own revelation. There can be no true knowledge of God, indeed, no knowledge of God at all, if God does not manifest himself to his creatures.” In line with these observations, Beeke and Smalley (2019:177) insist that it is precisely because “God has spoken” to mankind that theologians practise theology. In

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<sup>15</sup> “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word.”

<sup>16</sup> “But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.”

<sup>17</sup> “... that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.”

this sense the act of God revealing and communicating Himself to His creation is a precondition for knowledge of God and hence theology, whether true or false,<sup>18</sup> to be established. Following this line of reasoning, Bavinck (2003:285-286), for example, also states, “If we are to know something about God, he must come forward out of his hiddenness, in some way make himself perceivable, and hence reveal himself.” Any claim of knowledge of God, whether that knowledge is consistent with God’s revelation of Himself or not, therefore assumes not just creation,<sup>19</sup> but also some prior act of revelation and communication from God in the first place.

As Van Genderen and Velema pointed out above, God’s revelation of Himself is furthermore also meant to establish intimate communion between Him and His creation. God, in His infinite kindness to fallen humanity “willed that all of the knowledge needful for an awareness of Him, and for correct worship, should be provided by Him and proceed from Himself” (Owen, 1994:16). God’s revelation of Himself is therefore not just aimed at the fallen human race in order for fallen humanity to be aware of Him in some sense, but also to intimately worship Him as God. Accordingly, when God reveals Himself, “He does so in human forms that man can understand and receive” His revelation (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:192). Since man is created in God’s image, mankind are rational and moral beings, who are, even after the fall, capable of “receiving a rational and moral revelation from God” (Geisler, 2002:65). Although a revelation from an infinite God can be received by finite man by virtue of being created in the image of God, revelation nevertheless remains such that it is “eternal glory breaking into man’s world” as alluded to earlier (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:192).

Besides these broad observations regarding revelation, the church has always, on the grounds of Scripture, made the distinction between general and special revelation (Bavinck, 2003:302). Geisler (2002:64) briefly explains that general revelation refers to God’s revelation of Himself in His created order, i.e., nature,<sup>20</sup> while special revelation refers to God’s revelation of Himself primarily, but not exclusively, in Scripture<sup>21</sup> (Sproul, 2014:20). The rationale for establishing

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<sup>18</sup> The researcher states the notion that one’s theology can be either true or false, and hence consistent or inconsistent with God’s objective revelation of Himself, to include the ‘theologians’ of cults and other world religions. But the fact remains that to practice theology, one needs objective divine revelation.

<sup>19</sup> This point seems obvious since without creation there would be nothing in the first place.

<sup>20</sup> In a broader sense, general revelation is not just God’s revelation in nature, but also in history, even in one’s own personal life experience (Bavinck, 2002:350). In line with this, Geisler (2002:65-68) also includes the following features under the umbrella of general revelation: “Physical nature”, “human nature”, “human history”, “human arts” and “human music”. The reason why this revelation of God to man is called ‘general revelation’ is because it is given to the whole of mankind, naturally, while ‘special revelation’ is only given to individuals at specific times, supernaturally, with the command to give it to others (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:264).

<sup>21</sup> This distinction is completely in line with the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 2, which states: “We know God by two means: First, by creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters to make us ponder the invisible things of God: God’s eternal power and divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20. All these things are enough to convict humans and to leave them without



these two categories of general and special revelation can be found in Psalm 19, among other places. Boice (2005a:161) comments on Psalm 19 by stating:

What it contains is a profound (and moving) statement of the doctrine of divine revelation. And like the Bible's teaching elsewhere on this subject, it divides this revelation into two main categories: general revelation, which refers to the revelation of God in nature, and special revelation, in this case the revelation of God in Scripture.<sup>22</sup> The first of these is discussed in verses 1–6,<sup>23</sup> the second in verses 7–11.<sup>24</sup> Then there is a concluding section or coda in which the psalmist applies this revelation to himself (vv. 12–14).<sup>25</sup>

General revelation, especially on the grounds of Romans 1:20,<sup>26</sup> and 2:14-15,<sup>27</sup> is meant to establish natural knowledge of God in man. Calvin (2011:43), for example, suggests that natural knowledge of God is inescapable for mankind by virtue of what he called an "awareness of divinity" by natural instinct. This awareness was implanted by God Himself in His image bearers to reveal and establish "a certain understanding of his divine majesty". For Calvin, the fact that there are other religions besides Christianity is ample proof that this natural knowledge of God is "suppressed ... in unrighteousness" by sinful man, as the apostle Paul states in Romans 1:18-20.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, Turretin (1992:5) explains that the theology of revelation includes what he calls "the natural", which refers to knowledge of God in both an "innate (from the common notions

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excuse. Second, God makes himself known to us more clearly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for God's glory and for our salvation."

<sup>22</sup> Owen (1994:38-39) remarks that Psalm 19 "praises the twofold manner of our knowledge of God, that is, His works and His Word".

<sup>23</sup> "The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. *There is* no speech nor language *Where* their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, Which *is* like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, *And* rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising *is* from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat."

<sup>24</sup> "The law of the Lord *is* perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord *is* sure, making wise the simple; The statutes of the Lord *are* right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord *is* pure, enlightening the eyes; The fear of the Lord *is* clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord *are* true *and* righteous altogether. More to be desired *are they* than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, *And* in keeping them *there is* great reward."

<sup>25</sup> "Who can understand *his* errors? Cleanse me from secret *faults*. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous *sins*; Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, And I shall be innocent of great transgression. Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer."

<sup>26</sup> "For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

<sup>27</sup> "... for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*."

<sup>28</sup> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."

implanted in each one) and acquired (which creatures gain discursively)” sense. As a last example, Owen (1994:30-31, 40) also claims that “there is still a native awareness in the human heart of God”, which is an “implanted sense, universal in our species, by which each individual retains an indwelling urge to know God, and which spontaneously stimulates him to attempt some offering to God, some worship of God, and further, that in adults of sound mind this principle is as natural as the exercise of reason itself”. He adds that “creation and providence, viewed through the medium of the innate awareness of God, and with the indwelling conscience of every man, certainly prove that God exists, that He is all-powerful, and that He is all-just”. In this sense, the scope of general revelation is universal.

At this point it should be stated that, although general revelation as a “gift of knowledge to all people” can assist the theologian in establishing many truths concerning God, after the fall it remains insufficient in that it only contains “a nonsaving truth, known partially and imperfectly by the sinful intellect” (Muller, 2017:315). Consequently, special revelation was necessary, since it alone contains “a special gift of saving knowledge in Christ” (Muller, 2017:315). In this sense, only special revelation can make one wise unto salvation (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:53). Therefore, in spite of the fact that general revelation produces some inescapable and natural knowledge of God in man, this knowledge of God is never meant to replace a “dedicated investigation of the revelation [God] has supplied” in His written Word (House & Carle, 2003:16).

Both general and special revelation come to mankind in an objective fashion. However, corresponding to God’s objective revelation of Himself there is also, according to Bavinck (2003:350), a subjective illumination. He observes the following:

Answering to this objective general revelation, there is an illumination of the Logos (John 1:9)<sup>29</sup> or of the Spirit of God, in intellect, conscience, heart, and mind of human beings, such that they can understand God’s general revelation in nature and history. Likewise, answering to this objective special revelation, there is an illumination of human beings who live in the light of the gospel, by the Spirit of God, such that they can recognize and know the special revelation that comes to them in Christ and more specifically in Scripture as special revelation of God.

This means that God, through His Spirit, also works in mankind to make it possible for man to intelligibly grasp God’s revelation of Himself.

Since this study does not demand any further investigation into general revelation, it is to God’s special revelation that the researcher now turns for the rest of the discussion. Suffice to mention here that unbelievers, because of their fallenness and sin, will not just warp God’s revealed truths and natural knowledge of Him in general revelation, but also reject and twist the truths of

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<sup>29</sup> “That was the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.”

God's special revelation in His written Word, according to their own desires and preferences, as seen in Chapter 4 (Geisler, 2002:73; House & Carle, 2001:26). In this sense the defect lies in man, and not in the clarity or objectivity of God's revelation (general and special) of Himself. Geisler (2013b:169) applies this observation specifically to cults saying, "The proliferation of cults, appealing to their twisted view of Scripture, is ample testimony that special revelation is not immune from the effects of depravity that are also seen in man's inability to interpret Scripture properly." In the midst of this, one must remember that "all revelation – general and special – finally finds its fulfilment and meaning in Christ" (Bavinck, 2003:302). Consequently, Jesus Christ must be viewed as the One in whom all of reality and revelation unite in the sense that revelation coheres and is oriented in and towards Him.

Taking all the comments into account thus far, one can legitimately state that the first mistake which CiMI is guilty of lies here in the heart of the doctrine of revelation. It is clear enough that CiMI believes in the reality of a revelation from God,<sup>30</sup> and they are therefore considered to be religious<sup>31</sup>, which is, at least to an extent, consistent with God's general revelation and their natural innate and acquired knowledge of Him. However, in their attempt to claim a "progressive Word" from God, which contains a "greater revelation", and their exclusive ability to read "the signs of the times", which God reveals solely to them as His only chosen church, the leaders place themselves in a position where they are trying to dictate to God where and how He must reveal Himself. In a sense one could say that CiMI is twisting God's revelation of Himself by attempting to intercept it and claim ownership over it. Because "there is nothing surprising in the fact that God can be known only if, and in so far as, He reveals Himself" (Berkhoff, 1938:34), one can describe this act of CiMI as "a subjective idolatrous response to an objective divine revelation" and it is therefore a parasitic imitation of "true divine revelation" (Strange, 2014:239, 247).

#### **5.3.4. God's special revelation**

As pointed out earlier, special revelation is God's revelation of Himself in Scripture as His written Word. It should be mentioned though, that special revelation is not limited exclusively to God's written Word in the Bible, since "not everything that has been revealed has been written

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<sup>30</sup> Take note that CiMI believes in the reality of revelation as such. Therefore, it is not necessary here to argue for the fact of a revelation from God, or to verify the Christian revelation as the only true revelation. Rather, since CiMI claims to embrace the Christian revelation, even to a greater and more advanced level than historical, orthodox Christianity does, this section focuses on establishing and reclaiming in a consistent manner the proper view of what the doctrine of revelation entails.

<sup>31</sup> One can be reminded of Geisler and Corduan's (2003:26) statement that mankind "has been incurably religious". Following Calvin, the researcher deems this to be the case by virtue of the innate awareness of God that He implanted into His image bearers.

down (cf. John 21:25)<sup>32</sup> (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:58). Included in special revelation is therefore what has been called “unmediated revelation”, which is “a direct revelation of God by means of a theophany, a vision, a voice, or some inward inspiration” and other revelatory acts and events, which have not been written down in Scripture. Scripture, as God’s written Word, must therefore be seen as that part of God’s special revelation which, according to God’s providence, has been “produced by the human authors of Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit” and safeguarded for all people at all times as His sufficient revelation of Himself (Muller, 2017:315, 388).

Broadly speaking, God’s special revelation can therefore be divided into certain modes, all of which are clearly observable in Scripture. First, revelation from God can be verbal in the form of divine speech. This mode of revelation is usually introduced with the phrase “thus says the Lord”, as in Ezekiel 35:14. In this sense God speaks with an audible voice to certain individuals at certain times. As an example, one can also consider Genesis 15:4 where “the word of the Lord came to [Abram],” or how “the word of the Lord came to Nathan” in 2 Samuel 7:4. According to Beeke and Smalley (2019:272), “verbal revelation results in the communication of God’s words in human language”. Although Saul’s conversion account in Acts 9 is more than just an audible voice, since it included a shining light, it was nevertheless an instance where he “heard a voice” speaking to him (Acts 9:3-4).<sup>33</sup> This mode of revelation also includes some forms of prophecies wherein “God communicates his thoughts to human beings” (Bavinck, 2003:330). Prophecies, of course do not need to be aimed at the future, it can be God’s thoughts concerning the past, present or future (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:55).

Another mode of divine special revelation is visual revelation, which includes theophanies, dreams and visions. While a theophany can be described as a “divine appearance” (Bavinck, 2003:328), dreams and visions are “representations of supernatural realities that God impressed directly upon the minds of the recipients” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:273-274). It is important to note that a theophany does not presuppose “God’s corporeality” since He is a spiritual being. It is rather “perceptible signs by which His presence is made known” (Bavinck, 2003:328). Visual revelations from God are therefore a momentary confrontation with the supernatural, which is visible to the mind, but not necessarily to the sensory faculties as well. Theophanies were often clouds or fire through which God appeared (Exodus 3:2;<sup>34</sup> Psalm

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<sup>32</sup> “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.”

<sup>33</sup> “As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’”

<sup>34</sup> “And the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.”

99:7<sup>35</sup>). The mysterious figure of the angel of the Lord also appeared to many individuals in the Old Testament (Judges 6:21).<sup>36</sup> Beeke and Smalley (2019:273) note that it “seems best to understand this divine angel of the Lord as a manifestation of the preincarnate Christ, sent by the Father to mediate salvation to his people”.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, in 1 Kings 3:5<sup>38</sup> God appeared to Solomon in a dream. Also, in the book of Acts, God showed visions to the apostles Peter and Paul on different occasions (Acts 10:10-11;<sup>39</sup> 16:9<sup>40</sup>).

The last mode of divine revelation is that of providential revelation or miracles. Miracles are acts that only God can perform and, as acts of God, they are revelations from God (Van Genderen and Velema, 2008:56). Geisler (2002:49) states that “miracles are visible acts that reflect the invisible nature of God” with the purpose “to glorify the Creator”. Miracles are often described in the Bible as “signs”, “wonders” and “power” and as such can be defined as “an unusual event (wonder) that conveys and confirms an unusual message (sign) by means of unusual ability (power)” (Geisler, 2002:44-48). In Judges 6:17 Gideon, for example, asks God for a “sign” in order that he can know it is God who is talking to him. In Exodus 7:3 God says, “I will ... multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.” In Deuteronomy 4:37 Moses explains to Israel that God freed their fathers out of Egypt with His “mighty power”. In the New Testament John 6:2 describes Jesus’s healing miracles as “signs ... on those who were diseased”. God’s miracles through Stephen are described in Acts 6:8 as “wonders and signs” full of “grace and power”. Bavinck (2003:336) mentions that God’s Words and miracles as acts are intricately connected since “Word and deed accompany each other, both in creation and re-creation”.

When God therefore reveals Himself through one of these modes to individual people or groups in biblical accounts, it is, in that historical redemptive moment, considered to be special revelation from God. It is crucial to note that all these modes of God’s special revelation are fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:53) define special revelation as “that revelation of God through which, by special means which have their focus and climax in Christ, he has disclosed the way of life to sinners, whom he grants to live in this

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<sup>35</sup> “He spoke to them in the cloudy pillar; They kept His testimonies and the ordinance He gave them.”

<sup>36</sup> “Then the Angel of the Lord put out the end of the staff that was in His hand, and touched the meat and the unleavened bread; and fire rose out of the rock and consumed the meat and the unleavened bread. And the Angel of the Lord departed out of his sight.”

<sup>37</sup> The researcher is not convinced that this is the case with every single instance where the angel of the Lord appears in the Old Testament. However, in some cases where the angel of the Lord appears to someone there are indeed good exegetical reasons to come to that conclusion. It will therefore have to be approached on a case by case basis.

<sup>38</sup> “At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ‘Ask! What shall I give you?’”

<sup>39</sup> “Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.”

<sup>40</sup> “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us.’”

light”, emphasising the fullness of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Beeke and Smalley (2019:276) state:

In the incarnate Lord, all other modes of divine revelation reach their richest fulfillment. Christ’s every word is the Word of God. He reveals God with every ordinary act of love and every extraordinary miracle. Though clothed in humility as he walks in Galilee and Jerusalem, Christ is the greatest theophany ever known... His second coming will transcend all miracles and visions and will show them to be mere sparkles of the supernatural glory that will dawn upon our fallen world.

It is at this point then that special revelation must be narrowed down further to the Bible as God’s written Word and, as such, a sufficient account attesting to the finality of Jesus Christ. However, to do that, brief comments with regard to the phrase “Word of God” should be made.

#### **5.3.4.1. God’s written Word as His special revelation**

##### **a) Introductory remarks**

Muller (2017:388) explains that the phrase ‘Word of God’ has four “interrelated meanings”. First, it can be used to refer to the eternal Word of God, who is the second person of the Trinity, called the Son. Second, it can refer to the “incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, the divine-human Mediator of salvation”. Third, it may be used for the “inspired Word of the Holy Scripture, which is the wisdom of God given in a form accessible to human beings but nonetheless grounded in the eternal Word and Wisdom of God, God the Son, and historically focused on Christ the Word incarnate.” Finally, it can also refer to the internal Word, who is the Holy Spirit, working inwardly and testifying to the faith concerning Scripture.

The immediate discussion focuses on the third usage of the ‘Word of God’. Notice though, that the third way in which ‘Word of God’ is used is grounded in the second person of the Trinity as the Word of God who is also the Word of God incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ. In this sense it must be maintained that although Scripture as God’s written Word, *is* God’s Word, the second person of the Trinity “as Word, was the agent of divine revelation throughout all ages” (Muller, 2003:182). Muller (2003:155) further emphasises this notion as he explains that in recognising the “identity of Christ as the incarnation of the eternal Word and Wisdom of God in no way diminishes but instead establishes the status of Scripture as Word”. The question that needs to be answered is: Why is this the case? In other words, why does a recognition of the finality of Christ, as the eternal Word of God and the Word of God incarnate, as alluded to earlier, establish the Scriptures as the written Word of God? To answer this question, several factors listed by Van Genderen and Velema (2008:53-54) will be addressed and accordingly pointed out how they pertain to CiMI, their view of God’s revelation and their role in it.

## **b) God's special revelation is progressive**

Van Genderen and Velema (2008:54) note that there is “a history of God’s revelation”. In this sense the claim is that Scripture as God’s written Word has grown out of a “saving word of God in history” (Muller, 2003:183). This means that there is a progress or movement in God’s revelation of Himself in history that finds fulfilment in the revelation of the person of Jesus Christ. Bavinck (2003:379-380) explains it as follows: “The center of ... revelation is the person of Christ. And Christ is a historical person; his incarnation, his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension to heaven are not susceptible of repetition. Indeed it is integral to the Incarnation that he enter [*sic*] history and live [*sic*] in the form(s) of time.” The incarnation of God’s eternal Word in history is the result of previous revelations which anticipated, promised, and unstoppably progressed up to that point when the Word of God became incarnate.

To be sure, CiMI also claims that their revelation from God is “progressive”. Strydom (2016e) for example asserts, “You cannot have faith in something unless you hear it. And it cannot be anything, it must be the Word of God, not the Bible, the Word. Because God’s Word is progressive.” This implies that their claim of progressive revelation goes beyond the Bible, even to a point where God can seemingly contradict Himself. In other words, God can reveal something today, and tomorrow reveal something that is contrary or contradictory to what He revealed yesterday. This, however, is where the two claims of progressive revelation part ways. The discussion at hand will therefore unpack the proper view of what progressive revelation is, resulting in a conclusion which, on revelational and rational grounds, discredits CiMI’s claims to have “new” and “progressive” revelations from God.

The progression of God’s revelation can be stated as a historical movement from His unwritten Word to His written Word. Moreover, within the historical movement of God’s unwritten to written Word, the content of revelation, especially between the Old and New Testaments also became clearer and, in that sense, progressed as well. In other words, there is a progression from unwritten to written in the mode of revelation, and a progression from, one could say, ‘dim’ to ‘bright’ in the content of revelation. Both of these notions of progression will be addressed here and brought together again near the end of the discussion.

The unwritten Word of God is that which God has “spoken to the prophets and apostles” (Muller, 2017:388). Beeke and Smalley (2019:318) affirm that the first mode that the prophets and the apostles used to communicate God’s Word, which came to them, was for the most part oral and therefore unwritten. This oral communication was nevertheless viewed to be God’s Word. When Elisha, for example, speaks to the king in 2 Kings 7:1 he introduces his words saying, “Hear the Word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord.” The apostle Paul also claims that his preaching has the

status of being “the Word of God” when he writes to the Thessalonians that they “received the Word of God”, which they “heard” from him when he was there in person (1 Thessalonians 2:13). In the same manner he also states to the churches in Galatia that the gospel which he preached there was not given to him by man, “but ... *came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:12). There are also times when God’s communication through His servants explicitly includes the role and work of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Samuel 23:2 King David states, “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue.” Likewise, the prophet Agabus uses the phrase “thus says the Holy Spirit” in Acts 21:11. In this way God “commissioned prophets in the Old Testament to speak with divine authority”, while Jesus Christ “commissioned apostles in the New Testament” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:319). These “agents of revelation” proclaimed the divine message that God was speaking through them and thus acted as His mouthpiece (Sproul, 2014:21-22).

Following the mode of revelation and communication historically, it progressed from “the revealing voice of God (the unwritten Word) to the written word” (Muller, 2003:170). Sproul (2014:23) claims that it is through the prophets and the apostles and their writings that there is a “written record of special revelation”. As early as Exodus 17:14 God commanded Moses: “Write this for a memorial in the book.” Moses also “wrote on the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Exodus 34:28). The prophet Jeremiah was likewise commanded to take a scroll and “write on it all the words” that the Lord spoke to him (Jeremiah 36:2). In 2 Chronicles 34:21 “the words of the book” are equated with “the word of the Lord”. These writing activities of Israel resulted in a corpus of material that was the written Word of God, which played a vital role in their worship of God and in their daily lives. In 2 Kings 22-23 the power of Israel’s written corpus is also demonstrated when, under the rule of King Josiah, the “Book of the Law” was rediscovered in the temple after many years. By this time Israel had fallen into idol worship. But when King Josiah heard the words of the “Book of the Law” again, he tore his clothes and made a covenant to God which then resulted in a reform, led by the king, to remove all idols from Israel. Bavinck (2003:390) notes in this regard that “the prophets are conscious, when speaking or writing, of proclaiming not their own word but the word of the Lord”. It is accordingly clear that “God made his covenant people a people of the Book” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:320).

It is also worth noting that Jesus Christ, the apostles and other authors of the New Testament believed that the Old Testament documents were indeed the written Word of God. Time and again Jesus appeals to the Old Testament stating, “It is written” (Matthew 4:4). This phrase was often used to introduce quotations from the Old Testament indicating their divine authority (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:322). Jesus, in some sense, considered the words of the Old Testament as authoritative enough to rebuke Satan with it (Matthew 4:10). In John 10:35 He



briefly mentions that “Scripture cannot be broken”. Jesus also shows that He has a high view of the Old Testament when He states that “it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17). Likewise, He also explains in Matthew 5:17-19 that He did not come to “destroy the Law or the Prophets ... but to fulfill.” Jesus even calls the villagers from Emmaus “foolish ones” for not believing “all that the prophets have spoken” (Luke 24:25). In turn, the apostle Paul claims that Jesus Christ as the gospel was prophesied by “the prophets in Holy Scripture”, referring to the Old Testament (Romans 1:2). Likewise, he vividly refers to the “Holy Scriptures” when writing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15. The apostle Peter, for example, says, “Men *and* brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus” (Acts 1:16). In Acts 2:16-17 he also preaches that the words that “was spoken by the prophet Joel” are what God has said. In this regard it becomes clear that the apostles and especially Jesus Christ “endorsed the Hebrew Scriptures as the unbreakable word of the Lord” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:323). Bavinck (2003:395) confirms this view asserting that “Jesus and the apostles never take a critical position toward the content of the O[ld] T[estament] but accept it totally and without reservation”.

Sproul (2014:23) states that since Jesus Christ never wrote a book; “everything we know about Him is contained in the New Testament record that has come to us through the work of His Apostles. They are His emissaries, who were given His authority to speak on His behalf.” Although Jesus Christ never explicitly commanded the apostles to write anything, they preserved the gospel in writing “by the inspiration and mandate of the Spirit of Christ” (Muller, 2003:201). In Matthew 28:19 Jesus commanded His apostles to “make disciples”, “to baptize them” and also to teach them “all things” that Jesus commanded them. The way they did this was either by preaching and teaching in person, or by way of evangelism through their written documents when they could not be present in person (Muller, 2003:174). The apostle John therefore explains in 1 John 1:1-3 that part of the apostolic witness is, in the words of Hoekema (1963:31), that other people may also “believe on Him [Jesus] on the basis of their testimony”. Moreover, Geisler (2002:269) adds that Jesus Christ did not just confirm the Old Testament to be the written Word of God, but also “promised the same for the New Testament, affirming that the Holy Spirit would teach the apostles” everything they needed to know. In the Gospel of John, Jesus Christ, for example, says to His disciples that the Spirit will teach them “all things” and lead them into “all truth” (John 14:26; 16:13).

Furthermore, just like Jesus Christ stated that the words of the Old Testament will not pass away, He also said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.” In this sense Jesus Christ places His words on the same level of authority as that of the Holy Scriptures in the Old Testament documents. The apostle John, while referring to Jesus,

insists that “He whom God has sent speaks the words of God” (John 3:34). God the Father, referring to the Son, commands one to “Hear him!” (Mark 9:7). Jesus also states that if someone does not believe the writings of Moses, they will also not believe His words since Moses wrote of Jesus (John 5:46-47). When the apostle Paul quotes a passage from the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, together with Deuteronomy, he calls all of it “Scripture” (1 Timothy 5:18). Paul also writes to the Corinthians that if there is a true prophet among them, he will acknowledge that the things Paul is writing to them “are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37). The apostle Peter compared the way people abuse Paul’s letters to the way they abuse “the other Scriptures”, thus placing Paul’s letters on par with the status of Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). Beeke and Smalley (2019:324-325) conclude, “From the writings of Moses to the writings of Christ’s apostles, the Bible resonates with divine authority. It is not merely the word of man about God or a human witness to divine revelation, but is itself the Word of the Lord.”

According to this pattern, the Word of God was first heard by God’s servants and then written down (Muller, 2003:183). Jesus Christ directly confirmed that the Old Testament has divine authority and indirectly confirmed that the New Testament has the same authority as the Old. Therefore, “the whole Bible, Old and New Testaments, is confirmed by Christ to be the Word of the Living God” in written form (Geisler, 2002:271). Muller (2003:173) aptly captures this pattern in the following way:

The history of God’s revelation manifests this pattern: from Adam to Moses, God spoke directly, but thereafter—at least, generally—in the writings of Moses and the prophets. When Christ came, the lively voice of God was again present in Christ’s own person and in the spoken words of the apostolic preaching. But now, once more, in the “apostolical Scripture” of the New Testament, the voice of God is again provided in written form.

Before moving further to the progression in the content of God’s special revelation, it is important to note that there is no difference between the unwritten Word of God and the written Word of God. The “divine truth” revealed in both the unwritten and written Word of God is the same (Muller, 2003:197). In this sense, there are no contradictions between them. Alongside the fact that there is a historical progress from God’s unwritten Word to His written Word, there is also a progress in content, from ‘dim’ to ‘bright’, leading to the finality and a certain completeness in Jesus Christ, as communicated and established *in* God’s written Word.<sup>41</sup> This notion of progress in God’s special revelation, has bearing on the content with respect to the Old and New Testaments.

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<sup>41</sup> In a sense, Lord’s Day 8, response 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism captures the main idea behind this progress. One reads there: “God began to reveal the gospel already in Paradise; later God proclaimed it by the holy patriarchs and prophets and foreshadowed it by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of law; and finally God fulfilled it through His own beloved Son.”

Van Genderen and Velema (2008:63) point out that it is on the grounds of 2 Corinthians 3:14 that a revelatory distinction between the two testaments are introduced. One reads the following in this passage: "But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ." When Hodge (1891:71) comments on this verse, he asserts that "the Old Testament Scriptures are intelligible only when understood as predicting and prefiguring Christ ... The knowledge of Christ, as a matter of fact and as a matter of course, removes the veil from the Old Testament." In this context, Hodge is establishing the notion that there is a sort of movement in the content between the Old and the New Testament with regard to Jesus Christ. In some sense Jesus Christ was concealed<sup>42</sup> in the Old Testament but revealed in the New. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:65, 67) further claim that this progression between the Old and New Testament is to a large extent from "promise to fulfillment" and, following Augustine, mention that "the New Testament is hidden in the Old Testament and that the Old Testament is revealed in the New Testament".

In Luke 24:27 and 44, after His physical resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ explains to the villagers from Emmaus that He is the fulfilment of Moses and all the prophets. One reads there that "He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself". Later He also says, "These *are* the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and *the* Prophets and *the* Psalms concerning Me." Hebrews 10:11-12 also shows how the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross fulfilled all sacrifices of the priests of old. After He "offered one sacrifice for sins forever", He "sat down at the right hand of God". The point is that in the broader narrative of Jesus's person and works between the two testaments, He went from preincarnate to incarnate, from foretold to fulfilled, from prophecy to history, from the shadow to the real, from rituals to reality, and from temporality to permanence. In this sense there is an "unparalleled continuity" in the Bible (House & Carle, 2003:18). It is indeed as Geisler (1979:68) states:

Christ at once sums up in Himself the perfection of the Old Testament precepts, the substance of Old Testament shadows and types, and the fulfilment of Old Testament forecasts. Those truths about Him which bud forth in the Old Testament come into full bloom in the New Testament; the flashlight of prophetic truth turns into the floodlight of divine revelation.

Perhaps this movement with regard to the person of Jesus Christ in the Old and New Testaments is nowhere better expressed than in the analogy provided in Hebrews 8:3-6.<sup>43</sup> The

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<sup>42</sup> This should not be taken to mean that Jesus Christ was totally absent in the Old Testament. He was, instead of explicitly revealed, more implicitly revealed beneath the surface, but nevertheless remained, as the eternal Word of God, the agent of revelation.

<sup>43</sup> "For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore *it is* necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are

author of Hebrews, when comparing the ministry of the priests under the old covenant with the ministry of Jesus Christ in the new covenant, employs the analogy of a “copy and shadow of heavenly things”. In a broad sense, one could say that although there was a real correspondence between the content of the Old Testament and that of the New Testament, it was still just a “copy and shadow” of a greater heavenly reality. Guthrie (1983:175) explains that as a “copy and shadow” the “resemblance is incomplete and not until the original is seen is the full glory recognized”. This greater heavenly reality was finally realised in the person and work of Jesus Christ in whom “the great realities of ... eternal redemption” are provided by God (Hughes, 1977:295). This is also in line with what the apostle Paul writes about Jesus in Colossians 2:2-3 and 9-10 when he maintains that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ. He adds that in Christ “dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” and that one is “complete in Him”. Calvin (2011:1154), in his own way, also explains this summarily by saying that before the coming of Jesus Christ there was “only dim light”, but with His coming “we have the perfect radiance of divine truth”.

To bring the two notions of the progression of God’s revelation together, i.e., the historical progression from God’s unwritten to written Word in terms of mode, and the progression from ‘dim’ to ‘bright’ in terms of content, more comments can be made.

At the beginning of the letter of Hebrews, the theological foundation for the discussion thus far is clearly laid. Jesus Christ is the fulfilment and finality of God’s special revelation<sup>44</sup> as suggested in, among other places, Hebrews 1:1-2: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” In this passage it is striking how the author immediately plunges into the theme of the “uniqueness and finality of the revelation of God in his Son Jesus Christ” (Hughes, 1977:36). The coming and revelation of Jesus Christ is established as both the fulfilment and the contrast of the order of things in “time past” and in this sense Jesus Christ, “the eternal and essential Word, is the ground and foundation, the underlying meaning of the Scriptures” (Muller, 2003:188).

The author of Hebrews establishes the idea that Jesus Christ is the “Word of God incarnate” and the “One about whom the written Word speaks” (Sproul, 2014:23). Sproul (2014:23) helpfully states that it is through the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New

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priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘*See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.*’ But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.”

<sup>44</sup> As stated earlier, Jesus Christ is also the fulfilment of general revelation. However, general revelation is not relevant to the discussion at hand and is therefore left out in this instance.

Testament that “we have been given a written record of special revelation”. In this sense, special revelation in the different modes, as described earlier,<sup>45</sup> to a large extent “belongs to the past insofar as it came directly to the prophets and apostles” (Bavinck, 2003:351) who, as Christ’s “authorized agents of revelation”, in turn brought it to us in written form. Accordingly, since it is in Christ that “we have God’s final revelation for this age” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:436), and the person and works of Christ are truthfully and reliably<sup>46</sup> revealed to the world today in the Bible as God’s written Word, then it is such “that insofar as revelation is a source of information, it all comes down to a book”, which attests to the person and works of Christ (Corduan, 2002:55).

Keller (2015) captures this factor very effectively when he says the following:

Jesus is the ultimate Savior who ends the sacrifices of former times, because there’s nothing more that can be added to his saving work. He is the ultimate revealer who ends the revelations of former times and gives us his final word. What we’re being told here is that in the work, in the life, in the teachings of Jesus Christ, given to the apostles and written down for us in the New Testament, we have a revelation as complete as his salvation is complete. His salvation is complete. His revelation is complete. In the Bible, Old and New Testament, we have God’s final word to us about who he is and how we should live. It’s the final word until judgment day, which means the Bible cannot be improved. It can’t be updated. It can’t be corrected. It can’t be added to. Because how could anything be higher or beyond Jesus Christ?

When we turn to CiMI and their claims of possessing “new” and “progressive” revelations from God, Labuschagne (2016c) argues that since the Word of God is “progressive”, things will change. He adds that it is because of the progressiveness of God’s Word that they, for example, do not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity at CiMI anymore. According to him, one must always “renew” one’s mind when reading the Bible. He therefore labels the doctrine of the Trinity as “inaccurate” and not consistent with God’s revelation of Himself. The deity of Jesus Christ would also be included in the category of being “inaccurate” by CiMI. This is to be expected when the leader of CiMI, Strydom (2017a), states that after 2000 years the message of Christianity “changed” and that they are now the only legitimate mouthpiece of God in this world. In the same manner Du Plessis (2016b) claims that CiMI received new spiritual truths from God, which elevated them “to light”. Playing on Hebrews 1:1-2, one can state their stance as follows: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* [only church called CiMI].”

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<sup>45</sup> The different modes of revelation refer to the verbal mode of divine speech, the visual mode in the form of theophanies, dreams and visions, and the providential mode in the form of miracles.

<sup>46</sup> When Christianity therefore claims that the Bible is true, it means that what it bears witness of really happened as historical events and that it describes reality as it really is. Christianity is therefore a religion that keeps the best track with reality and, as far as reality goes, so far does revelation go.

It is helpful to mention House and Carle's (2003:26-27) observation in this regard: "Whenever an element of extrabiblical revelation plays a role in the formation or continuation of a new religious movement, there is almost always one person who rises to a position of unquestioned leadership and receives the new revelations. Often this person claims to be a prophet of God." This observation as regards CiMI's, and especially Strydom's claims to have new direct revelations from God, seems to confirm his "unquestioned leadership". Strydom indeed claims to be the king who is anointed by God Himself to bring this new revelation to South Africa (*Carte Blanche*, 2018). According to CiMI (2018), "God chose [Strydom] to sit on the spiritual throne of David for this hour." In line with this observation, Du Plessis (2016a) also states that God came to him through a man called "Xandré Christ" and in the end it is through Xandré Christ Strydom that God "revealed the truth" of their teachings to the world.

At one point, Labuschagne (2016c) referred to one of their members at CiMI to whom he had ministered for many years, even before he co-founded CiMI. He reported how this member in a concerned manner asked him why she had to believe him then, since he was contradicting all the earlier things that he once taught her. Apparently, the member said to Labuschagne that "everything" she believed Labuschagne taught her "many years ago". Labuschagne (2016c) then responds by explaining to her that everything which he taught her has been wrong all those years. What he "ministered in those years" is not accurate since "what God revealed in those years" is not in step with God's "progressive revelation" of Himself now. He then told her that he was "glad" she had believed him back in those years, and only asked her "to believe" him again with regard to his teachings. More specifically, Labuschagne (2016c) states that he asked her to "keep on believing me as I guide and lead you". The member then responded by saying, "First you taught me this, now you are teaching me that, and you want me to believe that?"

Although Kotze (2017c) describes CiMI's new revelations as a "greater revelation", this example from Labuschagne illustrates that CiMI's claim of possessing new and progressive revelations can better be described, on the grounds of sound reason, as contradictory revelations. While Strydom (*Carte Blanche*, 2018) believes with all his heart that CiMI is the "progressive Word of God", they are in fact living contradictions. House and Carle (2003:26) provide an accurate diagnosis of CiMI when they say,

Many groups claim that they have an extra source of knowledge about the person or plan of God. They may state that their new revelations explain what the Bible actually says. These new revelations, whether they are verbal or written, supersede the Bible and often contradict it. Yet these groups that claim to have new revelations also continue to stress their regard for Scripture as a true source of knowledge about God.

CiMI seems to be one of those groups who want to claim biblical revelation for themselves and yet, claim a new and progressive Word from God, which contradicts all previous revelations from God. In this sense there is a difference between something being progressive and something being contradictory. House and Carle (2003:36) further insist that whenever a teaching of a cult contradicts the Scriptures “the believer is safe in asserting that the ‘new revelation’ is simply human words, not God’s”.

The words of Jude 3 are relevant to this discussion. One reads the following in this passage: “I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.” When introducing “the faith”, Jude uses the phrase “once for all delivered to the saints”. Oliphint (2003:47) remarks that Jude understood “the revelation that was given in Christ was, like Christ’s own work, completed”. According to Muller (2003:315), claims to be in possession of new revelations or “that new truths are given directly by God” are only “affirmed by enthusiasts” but rejected “by all the orthodox”. When the revelation that was given finally in Jesus Christ is therefore supplemented or diminished, it results in nothing less than a perversion of truth. In this sense “Jude understood that the faith that was to be defended could only be properly defended if it was wrapped up in the once-for-all finished work of Christ ... any attempt to pervert, subvert, supplement, or subtract from that work” should demand one to “contend for the faith” (Oliphint, 2003:48).

The apostle Paul, giving sound reasons, warned Timothy to avoid the “profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith”. While Paul aimed these words at false teachers whom Timothy had to deal with, these words remain relevant to aim at CiMI as well. Claimed revelations that are contradictory to prior revelations are a rejection of “God’s infallible revelation” since God would not contradict Himself (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1957:212). Corduan (2002:73) therefore asserts that there “can be no revealed truths. Either an assertion is based on general or special revelation ... or it cannot be more than a human insight that must be judged against what has been revealed”. On this principle alone the teachings of CiMI can be done away with (in this regard, see House and Carle, 2003:33).

For CiMI to claim new revelations as being progressive, it would have to be consistent with prior revelations from God. Contrary to CiMI, historical, orthodox Christianity maintains, in the words of Turretin (1992:58), that in this progression of God’s revelation “the doctrine was always the same; nor has it been changed by the mode of revelation or delivery, nor by the mutations of time”. In this sense the movement from God’s unwritten Word to His written Word, and the progress of the content from ‘dim’ to ‘bright’, finding its climax is Jesus Christ, amounts to an argument against a claim like the one CiMI is making here. Muller (2003:171) therefore states,

“What was accomplished by divine purpose in the time of Moses—the beginnings of the written Word—has become the normative form for the maintenance and proclamation of the truths of God’s revelation in the church of all ages.”

Summarily, the eternal Word of God “was at length revealed in the flesh” and that Word of God revealed to the world everything “that can be comprehended and ought to be pondered concerning the Heavenly Father by the human mind”. God therefore “will not speak hereafter as he did before, intermittently through some and through others; nor will he add prophecies to prophecies, or revelations to revelations”; one must rather be “content with the perfection of Christ’s teaching, we may learn not to fashion anything new for ourselves beyond this or to admit anything contrived by others” (Calvin, 2011:1154-1155). To be sure, more comments in this regard will be made when discussing the attributes of Holy Scripture (section 5.3.5.).

### **c) God’s special revelation is soteriological**

Although knowledge of God gained from general revelation is enough to leave mankind “without excuse” before God (cf. Romans 1:18-21),<sup>47</sup> it is not, as mentioned earlier, sufficient for salvation. As Geisler (2002:69) strikingly points out: “The heavens declare the glory of God (Ps. 19:1),<sup>48</sup> but only Christ declared His saving grace (Titus 2:11–13).<sup>49</sup> Nature may reveal the ages of the rocks, but only Scripture makes known the Rock of Ages (Jesus Christ).” Special revelation from God is therefore needed for man to know about salvation in and through communion with the triune God.<sup>50</sup> This is why special revelation, as documented in God’s written Word, is considered to be soteriological. Bavinck (2003:342), for example, asserts that “special revelation is a revelation of special grace and thus brings into existence the salvific religion known as Christianity”.

The content of God’s special revelation, finding its climax in the person and work of Jesus Christ, is everything that one needs to know in this present life for salvation. Stated in another way: in God’s act of specially revealing Himself in His written Word, He disclosed to mankind

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<sup>47</sup> “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

<sup>48</sup> “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.”

<sup>49</sup> “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup>teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, <sup>13</sup>looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

<sup>50</sup> The doctrine of the Trinity is not something one can come to know via general revelation, for example. The triune God is only known as the *triune* God in Scripture as God’s special revelation. It is also only in Scripture that one can come to know the true person of Jesus Christ. Knowledge for salvation is therefore only found in Scripture.



the knowledge, necessary and sufficient, to make one wise unto salvation (2 Timothy 3:15). One can therefore say that “the intention of God’s [special] revelation is the salvation and restoration of the whole person and the whole cosmos” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:54). In Isaiah 43:3, God reveals Himself to Israel as “the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior”. In Luke 2:11, the angels announce to the shepherds in the field that the birth of Jesus Christ marks the birth of “a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”. The apostle John testifies that “the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

Following this claim, one must maintain that it is only in God’s special revelation, written in the pages of the Bible, where God reveals Himself sufficiently as the only Redeemer of mankind (Geisler, 2002:69). It should be added though, that the content of God’s written Word is not merely soteriological but claims to be exclusively soteriological. In this sense Christianity claims to be the only religion that offers salvation by virtue of being a true revelation, consummated in Christ who *is* the truth (John 14:6).<sup>51</sup> Acts 4:12, which reads as follows: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name [except Christ’s] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”, confirms that Jesus Christ, as revealed in Scripture, is the only basis for true salvation. Commenting on this verse, Kistemaker and Hendriksen (1990:156) explain that the use of the word “must” reveals what they call a “divine necessity”, established by God according to His sovereign will “to save us through the person and work of Jesus Christ ... [man] has no resource to salvation other than through the Son of God”. Moreover, Paul writes in Romans 10:9 that in order for someone to be saved there must be a confession that Jesus is “the Lord” and also a deep belief in one’s heart that “God has raised Him from the dead”. It is in Scripture as God’s written Word, therefore where salvation in Jesus Christ is exclusively proclaimed.

Turretin (1992:55) summarises this well in his explanation of orthodox Christianity:

[T]he orthodox church has always believed far otherwise, maintaining the revelation of the word of God to man to be absolutely and simply necessary for salvation. It is the “seed” of which we are born again (1 Pet. 1:23),<sup>52</sup> the “light” by which we are directed (Ps. 119:105),<sup>53</sup> the “food” upon which we feed (Heb. 5:13,<sup>54</sup> 14<sup>55</sup>) and the “foundation” upon which we are built (Eph. 2:20).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

<sup>52</sup> “... having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever ...”

<sup>53</sup> “Your word *is* a lamp to my feet, And a light to my path.”

<sup>54</sup> “For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe.”

<sup>55</sup> “But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

<sup>56</sup> “... having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone* ...”

When Shedd (2003:89-90), comments on special revelation, he explains that the Bible as God's Word contains "truths" which "are the most important part of the contents of Scripture and constitute the most strictly supernatural element of the written word". He further states that these "truths and facts" link directly to man's salvation and include the "Trinity, creation and apostasy of man, incarnation, and redemption". In this sense, Shedd affirms that God's revelation of Himself in Scripture presents one with the essential and cardinal doctrines of historical, orthodox Christianity. These theological doctrines are therefore based on God's revelation of Himself in His written Word. Martin (2003:21) notes,

It has been wisely observed that men are at liberty to reject Jesus Christ and the Bible as the Word of God; they are at liberty to oppose Him; they are at liberty to challenge it. But they are not at liberty to *alter* the essential message of the Scriptures, which is the good news that God does care for the lost souls of His children, and so loved us as to send His only Son that we might live through Him.

At this point one must ask: How does this pertain to CiMI? Stoker (2020:69) states that "religious cults" of which CiMI appears to be one, will "actively set out to control both the earthly and the eternal lives of people ... They reconfigure or repack their members' entire minds to control their ... salvation." In some sense this feature of cults links directly back to the claim of possessing new and progressive revelations from God. Singer (2003:29) reminds one that many religious cults will "preach the contents of a supposedly 'secret' learning, which the leaders assert can only be revealed to those who join them". CiMI (2018p), for example, states that their new revelation and progressive Word of God "has to do with the veil that needs to be removed from our picture (understanding) of Jesus Christ. This is important because it will bring the salvation of the soul, which will usher in the second coming of Christ." By claiming that their new revelation will "bring the salvation of the soul" which will in turn "usher in the second coming of Christ", CiMI is subtly attempting to control the salvation of their members, but also to place their message soteriologically at the centre. CiMI is therefore convinced that they are "the only true community of God's people" (Hoekema, 1963:384) who is "the unfolding of God's plan on earth" (Rhodes, 2001:30). Since, by way of prophecy, CiMI believes that they were divinely established by God to fill in a gap in His revelation to His creatures, they claim to possess the exclusive soteriological revelation from God. Hoekema (1963:386) explains that although "the cult may now be small and insignificant, when the final climax of history arrives, it will receive from God the place of honor it deserves as a reward for its faithfulness to His commandments".

In the act of claiming new revelations from God, which offer exclusive salvation, such a person or group is actively seeking to control not just the earthly lives of people, but also their eternal lives. It is as if CiMI is taking "God by the arm" (Hoekema, 1963:384) and dictating to Him where and how salvation will be revealed and, in this act, CiMI is seeking to save themselves "apart

from biblical revelation” (Martin, 2003:18). Playing on Acts 4:12, CiMI’s position can be formulated as follows: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name [except CiMI’s] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

It should be noted that CiMI is not the first church in history to claim new revelations and progressive Words from God, which yield exclusive salvation and also contradict previous revelations. The apostle Paul, when writing to the churches in Galatia, warned at length about deserting God’s true revelation for a “different gospel”, which is preached by people who want to “pervert the gospel of Christ” (Galatians 1:6-7). As he comments on this passage in Galatians 1, George (1994:92) contends, “By adding additional requirements for salvation to what Jesus Christ has once and for all done, the Galatians had deserted God.” With regard to this passage, Calvin (2010a:29) also asserts that once the false apostles mingled the true revelation of God in Christ “with their own inventions”, they “held a false, corrupt, and spurious gospel”. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul also forewarns that people may appear on the scene and preach “another Jesus” and “another gospel” (2 Corinthians 11:4).

This has proved to be the case throughout history. During the first centuries of the Christian church, a movement called Gnosticism made many claims similar to that of CiMI with regard to new revelations producing exclusive salvation. Stark (2006:142-143) explains that “*Gnosticism* comes from a Greek word meaning ‘one who knows’, and what such a person knows is called *gnōsis*”. This *gnosis* is not a reference to the mere understanding of things in the world but refers to direct revealed knowledge which comes from a divine mind. He further says that Gnosticism “resembled what are known today as initiation cults”, thus linking the term directly with groups like CiMI. Instead of turning to God’s written Word, as found in Scripture, for the soteriological wisdom of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, Gnosticism “dispenses with the historical Christ of Christianity, choosing instead to pursue self-salvation through secrets that come from beyond the earthly and historical scheme of things” (Herrick, 2003:179). In this sense, Gilchrist (2013:12-13) notes that the Gnostics did not call people to believe in the Gospel, but rather taught that there was only a handful of people with a “special divine spark in their souls”, who could find salvation through “particular *gnosis*”.

Herrick (2003:179) claims that “Gnosticism was a persistent and highly influential force in the development of the Western religious traditions, one constantly in tension with the Revealed Word (Christianity)”. This hidden revelatory knowledge “comes to and through a small minority of the spiritually capable” like Strydom as the visionary leader and king of CiMI (*Carte Blanche*, 2018). When Strydom (2018a), for example, insists that other church leaders must “shut up” since they are “exposing their spiritual intelligence”, he is following in the footsteps of the ancient Gnostics and their “spiritual elitism”. Du Plessis’s (2016b) statement that CiMI has

received “new revelations” since 2014, and ever since then “were elevated to light”, while the rest of humanity remained “in darkness”, is typical of what Herrick (2003:178) calls the “Gnostic impulse”. CiMI (2018e) also states that one needs the “revelation knowledge of the difference between Jesus (flesh) and Jesus Christ (spirit)” to understand that one can become a Christ, a spiritual being, and a Son of God. In this way it is also in a sense new *gnosis* that saves one, according to CiMI. In other words, only the knowledge, which CiMI has to offer, can save you once you join CiMI and believes in their gospel.

If one, on a theological level, changes the content of the gospel, which is true revelation from God, Oliphint (2003:48) calls it a perversion of the “truth”. The only way to settle this conflict between Christianity and CiMI is thoroughly unpacked by Stark (2003:142, 152) when he argues that even if one assumes that CiMI sincerely believes that they are in possession of true revelation, and that “conventional Christians” have it all wrong, while the conventional Christians are equally sure that their belief is the only true Christianity, “within the confines of faith, the charge of heresy can be resolved objectively only on the basis of which side more accurately transmitted the original teachings of Jesus. That decision comes down to sources.”<sup>57</sup> The concern about CiMI and salvation is therefore obvious in the words of Rhodes (2001:19): “*Counterfeit prophets who speak of a counterfeit Christ who preaches a counterfeit gospel can yield only a counterfeit salvation. Because there are eternal consequences to false teachings, Scripture bears numerous warnings.*”

#### **d) God’s special revelation is Trinitarian**

God reveals Himself in special revelation as the triune God. This means that “God has a plurality of persons and a unity of essence” (Geisler, 2003:279). He is a Holy Trinity as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. This is evident from the accounts of Jesus Christ’s baptism in the gospels (Matthew 3:13-17;<sup>58</sup> Mark 1:9-11;<sup>59</sup> Luke 3:21-23<sup>60</sup>), and also from the

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<sup>57</sup> One could say that this is part of the purpose of this chapter: to go back to the ‘sources’ and to show CiMI’s inconsistencies.

<sup>58</sup> “Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan to be baptized by him. And John *tried to* prevent Him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by You, and are You coming to me?’ But Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Permit *it to be* so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.’ Then he allowed Him. When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

<sup>59</sup> “It came to pass in those days *that* Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And immediately, coming up from the water, He saw the heavens parting and the Spirit descending upon Him like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’”

<sup>60</sup> “When all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also was baptized; and while He prayed, the heaven was opened. And the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, ‘You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased.’”

baptismal formula in Matthew 28:18-20.<sup>61</sup> Since the doctrine of the Trinity is addressed in more depth and detail in section 5.4., this discussion will only focus on those aspects of the Trinity that are currently deemed relevant to the doctrine of revelation.<sup>62</sup>

It should be noted that this Trinitarian character of God “is much more pronounced in the New Testament than in the revelation of the Old Testament” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:53). The Trinity is not totally absent in the Old Testament, but the New Testament speaks more clearly and directly about this doctrine. Vos (2012:38) explains that the reason for this is because the Old Testament was only preparatory in its purpose, and that the concept of the “oneness of God had to be deeply impressed upon Israel’s consciousness in the face of all polytheistic inclinations”. The Trinity in the Old Testament is only described as an “inexplicit indication of God’s trinitarian existence”, which gradually unfolds into the doctrine of the Trinity (Bavinck, 2004:261). In line with this explanation, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:143) express it as follows: “The one name of God unfolds in the Word of God in three names, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”

The doctrine of the Trinity is therefore also part of God’s progressive revelation in terms of content between the Old and New Testaments. Just like God’s revelation of Himself finds its climax in the person and works of Jesus Christ, so the Trinity is also thoroughly and clearly revealed in and through Jesus Christ. Keller (2011) points out that nobody could have made up the doctrine of the Trinity. The question then is: Where did it come from? According to Keller, Jesus Christ revealed the doctrine of the Trinity. He states that “the greatness of Jesus, the wonder of Jesus, the worshipfulness of Jesus” is what forced the church to see that there must be a fullness and depth in God that surpasses the intellect.

[It] was Jesus himself who forced an understanding of the Trinity ... Once you have Jesus, you look back and you see the angel of the Lord sometimes being sent by God, sometimes speaking as if he is God. You go back to the Old Testament and you see God in the very beginning, Genesis 1, saying, “Let us make man in our image ...” Who is he talking to? The angels? No. The angels didn’t make human beings. Who is God talking to? He says, “Let us make man in our image ...” In other words, once you get the light in, once Jesus and his greatness exploded on the consciousness of these Jewish people, these first Christians, they looked back and they saw it everywhere. Jesus forced people to realize the Bible, all along, had been teaching the doctrine of the Trinity (Keller, 2011).

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<sup>61</sup> “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen.”

<sup>62</sup> The exegetical foundations of Trinitarian theology are addressed elsewhere and are therefore not part of this immediate discussion.

In short one could say that Jesus Christ, as the climax of God's revelation, also revealed the doctrine of the Trinity to the church.

The important aspect to realise for now, however, is that God does not just reveal Himself as the triune God, i.e., as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, but also establishes His Trinity as a mediatorial precondition for the act of revelation. In other words, if God is not a Trinity, then creation, revelation and communication from God would not have a *ratio* in the first place. Beeke and Smalley (2019:265), for example, claim: "Revelation is necessarily Trinitarian, for all communication is rooted in the life of the Trinity." Since CiMI rejects the doctrine of the Trinity,<sup>63</sup> this point needs further investigation, especially because the conclusion of this discussion results in a critique against CiMI's Unitarianism as a basis for revelation. In other words, the concept of a Unitarian God cannot serve as a sufficient foundation for creation, revelation and communication, which renders their claims of new revelations from God as unjustifiable and void of any theological truth.

When considering the doctrine of the Trinity *ad intra*, it becomes clear that God's *ratio* for creation, revelation and communication is archetypally nested in His very being as the *triune* God. Legge (2017:11), following the thought of Aquinas, states: "The eternal processions of the divine persons *in* God – that is, the eternal generation of the Son (the Word) by the Father, and the Holy Spirit's procession from the Father and the Son – are the cause and ratio of every other procession that comes forth *from* God." In turn, Bavinck (2004:332), relying on Athanasius, makes a stronger claim, insisting that "if the divine being were not productive and could not communicate himself inwardly (*ad intra*), then neither could there be any revelation of God *ad extra*, that is, any communication of God in and to his creatures".

Since God's act of creation, revelation and communication is dependent on His inward communication of Himself or the eternal processions of the divine persons, or as Vos (2012:48), expresses it, His "internal works", this begs the question: What exactly are these "internal works" of the divine Trinity on which creation, revelation and communication of and to His creatures ultimately depend?

The doctrine of the Trinity *ad intra* concerns the paternity and innascibility of the Father, the eternal generation of the Son by the Father, and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son (Emery, 2011:111). Legge (2017:110) captures the order of the

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<sup>63</sup> For the purpose of accessibility it is worth repeating some of CiMI's statements in this regard:

- "God is not a triune God" (CiMI, 2018g).
- Strydom (2018c) claims that CiMI embraces a "one God faith" over against the "many God faith" of Trinitarians.
- "In Christ in Me International ... We believe in the one true God – the Father of Jesus Christ our Lord" (CiMI, 2018g).

processions<sup>64</sup> when he explains that the “divine persons are distinguished because they are subsistent relations, relations that do not divide but that subsist in the one divine nature, relations that are founded on the order of processions in God: the Son is *from* the Father, and the Holy Spirit is *from* the Father and the Son”. All three persons of the triune Godhead have the divine essence fully, but their relations are founded on this order of processions.

Notice that in this explanation of the order of processions, the Father is not generated or begotten, and does not proceed. In this sense the Father is unbegotten or innascible. As the first person of the Trinity, the Father is therefore “the Source and the Principle of the Son in the same divine nature” (Emery, 2011:115). This means that the name of the first person as ‘Father’<sup>65</sup> signifies the relationship with the second person, namely the Son, which is a reference to the Father’s eternal “paternity” as His personal attribute (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:154; Vos, 2012:52). Emery (2011:113) plainly states that “the personal relation by which the Father is Father is his paternity”. Bavinck (2004:307) adds that the scriptural name as “Father” is the most proper name for the first person of the Trinity, since “He is Father alone, he is Father by nature and Father eternally, without beginning or end”. Since the Father has no point of origin, He has no principle that could send Him, and therefore is the “Principle without principle in the intimate life of the Trinity” (Emery, 2011:123). The Father is revealed as the Source of the Son and the Holy Spirit. In this sense everything comes from the Father through the Son and the Holy Spirit “in order that, in the Spirit and through the Son, it may return to the Father” (Bavinck, 2004:426). Since the Father’s paternity is eternal it carries with it the eternity of the Son.

The person of the Son is eternally generated by the Father (Vos, 2012:52). This is also referred to as His Sonship or “filiation” (Van Genderen and Velema, 2008:155). Muller (2017:138) explains that the generation of the Son from the Father is the “eternal and changeless activity in the Godhead by which the Father produces the Son without division of essence and by which the Second Person of the Trinity is identified as an individual subsistence”. He indicates that this generation of the Son from the Father is not voluntary, but natural and necessary since it belongs solely to the divine essence. The generation of the Son should therefore not be taken to mean that He is generated “out of divine essence”, but rather as “the generation of another person ‘in’ the same divine essence” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:934). Turretin (1992:293) states

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<sup>64</sup> The order in the processions should never be seen to indicate subordination between the persons, the inferiority of the divine persons according to the order, or any hierarchical authority. Rather, the processions are eternal in and with the same full divine essence, and with infinite glory, majesty and authority (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:940).

<sup>65</sup> In Scripture, the name Father is not always used in the same sense. Besides from the context of the Father as the first person of the Trinity, Vos (2012:51-52), for example, explains that “Father” can refer to God as the origin of all created existence where it would include the Trinity as a whole. In another sense, God is the “Father” of His children, adopted through His Son in His sovereign works of grace.

that the eternal generation of the Son by the Father is “rightly expressed as a communication of essence from the Father (by which the Son possesses indivisibly the same essence with him and is made perfectly like him)”. Emery (2011:125) in a similar way says,

The Son has *the divine fullness received by generation*. When one speaks of the communication of the divine “nature”, this includes all the plenitude of God: wisdom, love, power. The Son is Son in the eternal act by which he receives from the Father, in the filial mode of generation, all the divine being, wisdom, and love of the Father.

In this sense, eternal generation is the personal attribute of the Son.

Vos (2012:57) further mentions with regard to the Son also being called the “Word of God” that “Christ is not called *Logos*, ‘Word’, for what He does with respect to the world, but for what He is with respect to the Father”. Hence, the Son as the second person of the Trinity, is the eternal Word of the Father signifying His divinity and His eternal relation to the Father. The Father speaks “from all eternity His own Word that is distinct from him, while remaining in him” (Emery, 2011:130). Emery (2011:130) explains that the name “Word” covers the Son’s “origin from the Father”, since He is conceived by the Father; it also covers the Son’s “immanence with the Father”, since there is an eternal mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son. Lastly, it covers the Son’s “perfect identity of nature with the Father”, since the Word is the eternal and perfect expression of the Father.

Aquinas (STh., I q.27 a.2 ad 3) captures this in an analogy by explaining that the “Word in God is generation” that proceeds “by way of intelligible action, which is a vital operation”. This creaturely analogy is therefore based on the operation of the intellect to generate a concept which focuses on intelligibility. He further says that the concept generated by the intellect “exists in the same nature, because in God the act of understanding and His existence are the same”. He concludes that “the procession of the Word in God is called generation, and the Word Himself proceeding is called the Son”. Bavinck (2004:309) echoes this analogy, stating that “thought and speech” express the eternal generation of the Son, especially since Scripture makes reference to the Son as the “*Logos*”, entailing speech, word and reason. According to Bavinck (2004:309), in the same sense in which the “human mind objectivizes itself in speech, so God expresses his entire being in the *Logos* [Christ]”. In this manner, when God speaks, He eternally communicates Himself in the “one person of the *Logos*”.

The Son is furthermore also described as the image of the Father, which emphasises the idea that the “Son comes forth from the Father, and he is the perfect expression of the Father” (Emery, 2011:131). When identifying the Son as the image of the Father it also signals His equality and full likeness with the Father (Bavinck, 2004:308). As the perfect image of the



Father, the Son is the “exemplar” according to which the Father “conceived his plan of creation and grace” (Emery, 2011:131).

The Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, eternally proceeds<sup>66</sup> by way of procession as His personal attribute, from the Father and the Son; this has also been referred to as the “spiration” of the Spirit (Bavinck, 2004:311). Muller (2017:341) establishes that the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son is “the inward act by which the Father and the Son simultaneously and eternally produce the Spirit from their own substance, without division of substance, and entirely within the one divine essence”. The Holy Spirit does not go “forth out of God’s essence”, but “proceeds ‘within God’s essence’ as an internal (*ad intra*) act of the Father and the Son” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:942). Although a difference between the generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit must be maintained since they are different persons in the Godhead, “the nature of this distinction cannot be explained and may more safely be unknown than inquired into” (Turretin, 1992:309). Since the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in a different manner than that of the generation of the Son from the Father, it is in the procession of the Holy Spirit that the “inner movement of the Trinity comes to conclusion and rest” (Vos, 2012:72). In this sense the Trinity is in itself complete without any room for augmentation or decline (Bavinck, 2004:312).

Aquinas, building forth on his analogy of the eternal generation of the Son, explains that just like the Son analogously proceeds from the Father by way of intelligible action in the sense of the intellect generating a concept, the Holy Spirit proceeds analogously from the Father and the Son by way of volitional action in the sense of the will focusing on love. Aquinas suggests that while the eternal generation of the Son from the Father is focused on intelligibility, the Holy Spirit’s eternal procession is the operation of the will towards an object “whereby the object loved is in the lover” (Aquinas, STh., I q.27 a.3 resp.). He furthermore analogously relates the procession of the Spirit to the generation of the Son, stating that “nothing can be loved by the will unless it is conceived in the intellect” (Aquinas, STh., I q.27 a.3 ad 3). The “procession of the will” is therefore “by way of impulse and movement towards the object”, and since “the Holy Spirit proceeds as love”, the procession of the Holy Spirit focuses on love (Aquinas, STh., I q.37 a.2 ad 3). Therefore, the procession of the Spirit has been described as “the procession of *Love* in person”<sup>67</sup> (Emery, 2011:151).

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<sup>66</sup> The procession of the Holy Spirit is co-eternal with the generation of the Son.

<sup>67</sup> “Love” in this sense should not be confused with “Love” as the essence of God. Emery (2011:151) states that “the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are Love by essence, in the same degree to which they are God”. Therefore, when applying “Love” to the person of the Holy Spirit it is attributed to Him as the third person of the Trinity.

Legge (2017:15-16) explains that because of this, another name for the Holy Spirit also “unfolds”, which is “Gift”. This is also a proper name since “love is the ‘first Gift’ from which every other gift proceeds”. In this sense, Emery (2011:154, 156) explains that as Love, the Holy Spirit is the “*mutual Love* of the Father and the Son”, which signifies that the “Holy spirit is the *Love who proceeds from the Father and the Son*” as the “Gift of the Father and the Son”. In this sense the Spirit is God’s gift and “the Father and the Son are the Givers” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:941).

To summarise the processions, before briefly moving on to the Trinity *ad extra*, one could say that the Father, who, according to His paternity, is unbegotten and does not proceed, has eternally communicated the fullness of His essence to the Son by generation. The Son, as the Word and Image of the Father, is therefore eternally begotten of the Father and eternally has the same essence as the Father. The Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son, in the full divine essence as Love and Gift from the Father and the Son. This is the archetypal realities of the Godhead, which is God’s procession and communication of Himself *ad intra*, and which forms the *ratio* for creation, revelation and communication of Himself *ad extra* on an ectypal level. To put it another way, one can say that the eternal and irreducible relationships found archetypally in the Trinity, i.e., paternity, generation and procession, are what grounds creation, revelation and communication ectypally. Because the Son is the perfect image (Word) of the Father (intellect), He is the most intelligible revelation of the Father, which exists in the gift of the Holy Spirit (Love/Gift). In other words, God creates because He is triune, He reveals because He is triune, and He communicates because He is triune (Bavinck, 2004:420).

Beeke and Smalley (2019:265) state that all of God’s works outside of Himself, i.e., the Trinity *ad extra*, will engage all three persons, since Father, Son and Holy Spirit have one divine essence. These authors capture this feature as follows:

The Father sends the Son with divine love and gives the Spirit to equip the Son for his work. The Son speaks the words of the Father and works by the power of the Spirit. The Spirit accompanies the Son with infinite, divine fullness to accomplish the Father’s will. The Three act as One to reveal God to man. The sending of Christ refers to his mission as the divinely appointed Mediator to give eternal life to God’s elect by making God known to them.

In turn, Owen (1994:602) explains that the revelation of the will of God was gifted by the Father to the Son, Jesus Christ. This revelation was then communicated by Jesus Christ through the gift of the Holy Spirit to the apostles for the good of the church. This, according to Owen, is the “divine teaching of the gospel”.

Legge (2017:13) clearly observes that “the Trinitarian processions themselves ground both creation *and the Trinitarian dispensation of grace*”, which is God creating the world and revealing and communicating Himself to the world. The Father is the sovereign Author of divine revelation, and as unbegotten, is, apart from the Son, “wrapped in impenetrable mystery”. This means that in the Incarnation, the Son, eternally generated by the Father, as the Word and image of the Father, and as Mediator of divine revelation, takes on flesh and intelligibly makes the Father known. The Holy Spirit, eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son as their Gift and Love, and as the effective agent of divine revelation, communicates the truth and grace of the Father, which He gave through the Son. Thus, “operating in beautiful harmony and mutual love, the triune Lord reveals himself so that, by union with the Mediator, others may join in the circle of divine love and fellowship” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:265-268).

Turning again to CiMI and their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, this discussion has direct bearing on them and their claim of having direct revelational access to God as His chosen mouthpiece and church on this earth. In light of the fact that “ultimate theological knowledge is the inner-Trinitarian knowledge that God has of Himself” (Kelly, 2008:21), Bavinck (2004:332-333) points out the following:

The doctrine of God’s incommunicability, with its implicit denial of the Son’s generation and the Spirit’s procession, carries within itself the corollary of the existence of a world separate from, outside of, and opposed to God. In that case God is absolutely hidden, “cosmic depths,” “absolute silence,” “the unconscious,” “the groundless”. The world does not reveal him; there is no possibility of knowing him ... The dogma of the Trinity, by contrast, tells us that God *can* reveal himself in an absolute sense to the Son and the Spirit, and hence, in a relative sense also to the world ... The names Father, Son (Word, Wisdom), and Spirit most certainly denote immanent relationships, but they are also mirrored in the interpersonal relations present in the works of God *ad extra* ... Generation and Procession in the divine being are the immanent acts of God, which make possible the outward works of creation and revelation.

This indicates that any rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, as is found in CiMI, also loses any ground for claiming revelation from God in the first place. A Unitarian concept of God, as that of CiMI, does not have the necessary *ad intra* and archetypal communication for any *ad extra* and ectypal creation, revelation and communication. If Unitarianism embodied the truth about God, He would have no *ratio* to create, and even if He did create, he would have no *ratio* to reveal and communicate Himself. Hence, one would still end up with Deism.

It is therefore, in the words of Chesterton (1909:252), “not well for God to be alone”. Chesterton does not apply the “alone” in this sentence to God’s essence, but rather to His persons, which allow for the *ad intra* communication of Himself. He explains that “it is certainly healthier to have the Trinitarian religion than the Unitarian” and added: “For to us Trinitarians ... God Himself is a

society. It is indeed a fathomless mystery of theology ... Suffice it to say here that this triple enigma is as comforting as wine and open as an English fireside; that this thing that bewilders the intellect utterly quiets the heart." The doctrine of the Trinity is what grounds any claim to revelation and what grants one a "quiet heart" that rests in the certitude of a revelation of salvation, which is accordingly also accomplished by the triune God. As Vos (2012:49) reminds one, "[God] is present as Creator and Sustainer, as Savior and Sanctifier, as the source of all being, of all thought, of all life in the world".

#### **5.3.4.2. Conclusion of God's written Word as His special revelation**

It has been shown that objective and special revelation from God is to be found in a book which He has providentially safeguarded. The Bible reveals God and therefore any other revelation which contradicts His revelation in His written Word must be rejected and avoided. God's written Word was written by many authors and over a long period of time. God slowly but surely unveiled His revelation of Himself to mankind and made sure that it progressed to its ultimate climax in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But to know Jesus Christ, one must study the written Word of God since it alone as God's Word attests truthfully to the person of Jesus Christ. God also gave mankind everything that is necessary for salvation so that no one needs to claim access to secret and divine knowledge from God. No one needs to plumb the depths of the universe for ancient or secret revealed knowledge to find God. He made Himself clear in His creation, but especially in His Word, written down by His people. God unveiled the mysteries in the face of a man, His Son Jesus Christ, who is sufficiently revealed in Scripture. God has also shown that as the triune God, He is a self-contained being with the necessary, eternal *ad intra* functions to create, communicate and reveal Himself *ad extra* in the first place. Any other notion of God cannot sustain the fact of creation, communication, and revelation from God. It is as Keller (2009:227) states: "Within God is a community of persons pouring glorifying joyful love into one another." Therefore, God creates, communicates and reveals because every act of God outside of Himself comes forth from the eternal processions of the Son and the Spirit. CiMI's Unitarianism, a god with one essence and one person, cannot account for it.

### **5.3.5. The Holy Scriptures and its attributes**

#### **5.3.5.1. Introductory remarks**

At this point it is necessary to reaffirm some of the attributes of Scripture which have always been confessed by historical, orthodox Christianity.<sup>68</sup> Bavinck (2003:387) claims that, “from its very beginning, the Christian church has always accepted Holy Scripture as the Word of God”. Following this claim, Beeke and Smalley (2019:334) remark that since “the Bible is the written Word of God”, it will possess certain attributes that set it “apart as holy and sacred, superior to any merely human document”. In this sense, although the Bible is nothing less than a book containing propositional statements which can be read like any other book, it is also more than merely a book because it is the written Word of God (Geisler, 2002:244).

During this discussion one will also see how many of these attributes of Scripture come from Scripture itself. This is unavoidable, for as Corduan (1981:18) states:

It is not possible, without engaging in some form of intellectual schizophrenia, to claim acceptance of Scripture as revelation from God on the one hand, and not heed its own claims about itself on the other. The Bible clearly ascribes to itself divine origin, completeness, all-pervasiveness in scope, and truthfulness. It assumes, many times over, a divine standpoint; and it consistently witnesses to that fact. Thus either the Bible is accepted by the theologian as the inspired Word of God, and hence as supreme authority, or it is not truly accepted at all.

The attributes of Scripture that are discussed here include the divinity and inspiration, canonicity, inerrant veracity, authority, clarity, sufficiency and necessity. Although some of these attributes of Scripture have already been mentioned or alluded to in one way or another, more comments and remarks can still be made. At the end the researcher will also briefly suggest, where necessary, how CiMI may be guilty of perverting or even intercepting these attributes of Scripture, and instead of applying it to the written Word of God alone, claiming it for themselves in an attempt to set themselves up as the only “mouthpiece or word of God” who, in turn, solely possess these attributes.

#### **5.3.5.2. The divinity and inspiration of Scripture**

It has already been stated earlier that the Scriptures are the written Word of God. Likewise, it has also already been stated that the Word of God has been spoken through the prophets and apostles who have also eventually written it down. Accordingly, one could say that there is a “mystery about the character of the Bible, for it consists of human words that are also God’s

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<sup>68</sup> The researcher is aware that there is controversy over some of these attributes, even in Christian circles. But most of these attributes are affirmed to a lesser or greater extent by all Protestant Christians at least.

words” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:325). In this manner Calvin (2011:78) states that, although the prophets and the apostles wrote the Bible, “God is its Author”. The questions that therefore need to be answered are: How is it possible for the Bible to be God’s Word, and yet, written down by human authors in human languages? What was the mechanism that God used to accomplish the divinity and inspiration of His written Word?

To answer these questions, one needs to introduce the doctrine of inspiration (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:70). The idea of the doctrine of inspiration is that, in the words of Aquinas, “Scripture” is “inspired of God” (STh., I q.1 a.1 s.c.). Following the Greek word, this is also referred to as the “*theopneusty* of Holy Scripture”, which carries across the idea that Scripture, being God-breathed, was written by human authors under the divine “supervision of God” (Sproul, 2014:28). Although there are other theories of how Scripture was and is inspired by God through its human authors, the researcher maintains that the organic theory of inspiration fits best with the biblical data. Two particular New Testament passages<sup>69</sup> can be used to ground the organic theory of inspiration. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:76) note: “Those who delve more deeply into the mystery of Holy Scripture definitely cannot ignore verses such as 2 Timothy 3:16 and 2 Peter 1:21.”

In 2 Timothy 3:16, the apostle Paul writes: “All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God.” When Calvin (2010b:248-249) comments on this passage he states that Paul declares the Scriptures to be “divinely inspired” and then further says:

This is a principle which distinguishes our religion from all others, that we know that God hath spoken to us, and are fully convinced that the prophets did not speak at their own suggestion, but that, being organs of the Holy Spirit, they only uttered what they had been commissioned from heaven to declare. Whoever then wishes to profit in the Scriptures, let him, first of all, lay down this as a settled point, that the Law and the Prophets are not a doctrine delivered according to the will and pleasure of men, but dictated by the Holy Spirit.

Calvin links the act of inspiration in this context directly with the work of God the Holy Spirit and refers to the authors of Scripture as the “organs” of the Spirit. Before Calvin, Augustine (1886:114, 181) also attributed the inspiration of Scripture to the work of the Holy Spirit. He confessed to God that the Bible is the “venerable writing of Thy Spirit” and that the books of the Bible are “the oracles of the Holy Ghost”.

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<sup>69</sup> There are also Old Testament passages which clearly suggest the act of divine inspiration. One can consider Deuteronomy 18:18, for example, where God said to Moses: “I will put my words in His mouth.” Likewise, in Zechariah 7:12 the law and the words of God are described as being “sent” by the Spirit “through the former prophets”.

The fact that it is the work of the Holy Spirit is confirmed by 2 Peter 1:20-21 where the apostle Peter wrote that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit”. Calvin (2010:391) in this instance asserts that the prophets “obediently followed the Spirit as their guide, who ruled in their mouth as in his own sanctuary”. Following the meaning of these passages, it is clear that the Holy Spirit is the divine agent in the act of inspiration.

The activity of the Holy Spirit in the writing process ... consisted in the fact that, having prepared the human consciousness of the authors in various ways (by birth, upbringing, natural gifts, research, memory, reflection, experience of life, revelation, etc.), he now, in and through the writing process itself, made *those* thoughts and words, *that* language and style, rise to the surface of that consciousness, which could best interpret the divine ideas for persons of all sorts of rank and class, from every nation and age (Bavinck, 2003:438).

Muller (2017:173) also unpacks the doctrine of inspiration in an organic fashion when he explains that it refers specifically to “the role of the Spirit in the composition of Scripture”, which in no way detracts from “their reason, their usual forms of expression, or the thought patterns typical of their time in history and specific culture”. The organic theory of inspiration should not be seen to rule out the reality of “verbal inspiration” where God in some cases provided the exact words that a speaker or writer needed to communicate. However, the “precision of verbal inspiration does not imply that God took over the prophet’s body and negated his individual mind and personality” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:327).

The organic inspiration of the Bible consequently maintains that although Scripture was “breathed out (inspired) by God Himself” (Geisler, 2002:230), there was still “allowance for the individuality and the personal activity of each of the authors of the books of the Old and New Testaments” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:80). In line with the organic theory of inspiration, Geisler (2002:254-257) helpfully lists the following human characteristics of the Bible: It has human authors, it was written in human languages, it has literary styles, it uses different literary forms, it reflects different human perspectives, it reflects different human thought patterns, it reveals human emotions, it manifests specific human interests, it expresses human culture, and it utilises other written sources.

In summary, one could say that although God is the ultimate source of the Scriptures, it came through men who were inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in that inspiration delivered the Scriptures as the authoritative Word of God (Geisler, 2002:230). Beeke and Smalley (2019:327) state it succinctly as involving “absolute divine sovereignty and full human responsibility”. It is ultimately the case that what the Bible says, God says. It is important to add that, in light of the two passages discussed above, it also provides one with the extent, meaning and implications of inspiration:

- Concerning the extent, it is explicitly stated that “all Scripture” is breathed out by God which “should be understood to say that the entire Bible is inspired” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:328). This means that every Word carries “divine authority” (Sproul, 2014:28).
- Concerning the meaning, it is in itself an immediate act of revelation produced by God’s breath, so to speak. Muller (2003:248) asserts that “the divine knowledge that is contained in Scripture and the truth of biblical prophecy can only be explained by the influence of the Holy Spirit”.
- Concerning the implications, the doctrine of inspiration, flowing forth from Scripture’s divinity, to a large extent forms the basis for the rest of the attributes of Scripture, i.e., that since the Bible is inspired by God, certain attributes necessarily follow from this truth (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:330).

One final point to remember is that, although the act of inspiration occurred in the past when the biblical authors produced the texts of Scripture, the Holy Spirit did not abandon Scripture since then. Rather, as Van Genderen and Velema (2008:83) note, the Holy Spirit still “sustains and animates it and in many ways brings its contents to humanity, to its heart and conscience”.

### **5.3.5.3. The canonicity of Scripture**

The canonicity of Scripture concerns the issue of why only the sixty-six books of the Bible are indeed considered to be the inspired canonical books, which together form God’s written Word. Although the redemptive historical side of the canonicity of Scripture has already been discussed when the progressive aspect of special revelation was handled, there are more comments to make in the context of church history.

With the progression in the mode of revelation from God’s unwritten Word to His written Word, the primitive church ended up with a collection of books, and the “question of *which* books God inspired” and “how the Bible received its *acceptance*” had to be addressed (Geisler & Nix, 1986:202). The reason why this attribute of Scripture is important is because, as Muller (2017:315) explains, claims of receiving new revelational truths from God is a rejection of the “closure of the canon of Scripture”.

Sproul (2014:35) stipulates that the word *canon* comes from the “Greek word, *kanon*, which means ‘measuring rod’ or ‘norm’. To call the Bible ‘the canon of Scripture’ is to say that its sixty-six books together function as the supreme measuring rod or authority for the church.” In this sense, the books of Scripture as we have it in the Bible are the *norma normans*, which means that it is the standardising norm that stands behind any confessions which claim to be based on and consistent with the Bible (Muller, 2017:234).



Kruger (2012:113) notes that “all canonical books possess – divine qualities, corporate reception, apostolic origin – and the work of the Holy Spirit to help us recognize them”. Moreover, Kruger (2013:42) identifies three features when it comes to the canon of Scripture, especially the New Testament canon, which are central to an accurate understanding of this historical development:

- First, the canon of Scripture did not “fall in place overnight”. It actually took several centuries for the canon to “solidify” in the early community of Christians.
- Second, prior to the final formation of the canon, there was already a well-established collection of central books in the Christian church which “functioned with supreme authority”.
- Finally, the collection of books was not given its authority by the church; it was authoritative by virtue of what they are as “books given by God” Himself.

Kruger (2012:118-119) summarises these features as follows, using the keywords ‘exclusive’, ‘functional’ and ‘ontological’:

If one looks at the canon from the perspective of corporate reception, then canon is most naturally defined as the books received and recognized by the consensus of the church (exclusive). If one looks at the canon from the perspective of divine qualities, then canon is most naturally defined as those books that are used as authoritative revelation by a community (functional). And if one looks at the canon from the perspective of apostolic origins, then the canon is most naturally defined as those books given by God as the redemptive-historical deposit (ontological).

Muller (2003:243) maintains: “The work of canonization assumes the existence of the inspired text and is accomplished when the Scriptures are carried forward in and sealed to the church as its rule of faith.” In this sense, the church received from God the inspired and canonical books contained in Scripture as the rule and norm of faith. Although the Gnostic movement also produced books during the first centuries of the church, they were “quickly and easily dismissed ... because they were so obviously fraudulent” (Sproul, 2014:36), reflecting a lack of evidence that they were written by “accredited prophets of God” (Geisler, 2002:528). Van Genderen and Velema (2008:113) emphasise that there was nothing included in the canon which should have been excluded, and nothing excluded which should have been included.

The sixty-six books of the Bible were therefore providentially delivered by God to His church in history as a “self-authenticating canon” (Kruger, 2012:89). Bavinck (2003:371) accurately states, “The canonicity of the Bible books is rooted in their existence. They have authority in themselves, by their own right, because they exist.” Calvin (2011:79) explains this notion further by also adding the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. He claims, “For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before

it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.” Although the testimony of the Holy Spirit is not the basis for the recognition of the canon, since it is self-authenticating, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:114) contend that the inner witness of the Holy Spirit has nevertheless “led to the recognition that these books of the Bible are the Word of God, which is normative for our faith and our lives”.

In the fourth century A.D., the canon of Scripture was officially closed. The closure of the canon, however, needs to be carefully defined. Kruger (2012:280) explains that the canon is the “result of the redemptive-historical deposit that God gave through his apostles”. The canon, as a gift of God and the norm for faith, therefore points beyond itself (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:113). Since the church is not the origin of the canonical books of the Bible, the church cannot officially close the canon. It was rather the case that there was “something inherently closed about the canon from the very beginning, even in the midst of ongoing discussions about its boundaries ... long before the fourth century there was a fundamental trend toward limitation and restriction, not invitation and expansion” (Kruger, 2012:281). In fact, as already pointed out, the authors of the New Testament already accepted the authority of the Old Testament, and even considered their own writings as authoritative Scripture. In this sense, the Scriptures as canon were “something that ... have grown naturally and innately out of the earliest Christian movement” (Kruger, 2013:203). Some of the earliest church fathers therefore accepted “a core collection of Scriptural books” as apostolically authoritative. Brown (1988:74) emphasises that the closing of the canon was especially important for the church, since any theological controversies faced after that could no longer change the text of Scripture as the source of theology. He also discusses the “modern religious scene” of cults who illustrate modern “maximalism” by substantially modifying “the teaching of the Bible itself”.

#### **5.3.5.4. The inerrant veracity of Scripture**

The inerrant veracity of Scripture flows from the doctrine of inspiration. Beeke and Smalley (2019:372) introduce this attribute of Scripture as follows: “The term *inerrant* simply means ‘without error’, and *veracity* means ‘truthfulness’. Therefore, by inerrant veracity, we mean that the Bible does not declare anything contrary to what is true and real, and all that it does declare is faithful and accurate, because it is the Word of God.” The attribute of inerrancy is confessed by the likes of Augustine and, citing Augustine, Aquinas states that he believes that the authors of Scripture “have not erred in any way in writing them” (STh., I q.1 a.8 ad 2). He also says, “It is unlawful to hold that any false assertion is contained either in the Gospel or in any canonical Scripture, or that the writers thereof have told untruths, because faith would be deprived of its certitude which is based on the authority of Holy Writ” (STh., II-II q.110 a.3 ad 1).

This attribute of Scripture should not be understood in the sense that the human authors as people were inerrant in themselves. Turretin (1992:69), for example, explains that the authors of Scripture as “inspired men” did not “fall into mistakes in those things which they wrote”. However, the distinction lies in the fact that the Holy Spirit “was to lead them into all truth so that they might not err, but not into all holiness that they might not sin”. Muller (2017:173) also addresses this point by adding that the act of inspiration is a guarantee that what the authors of Scripture wrote down is nothing less than the truth. This, according to him, “underline that the traditional assumption of the infallibility of the text, specifically the freedom of the text from error in both its literal and its spiritual senses”.

On a theological level, the doctrine of the truth and hence inerrancy of Scripture is argued on the grounds that “it is impossible for God to lie” (Hebrews 6:18). Since God cannot lie, He cannot contradict Himself. With regard to the work of the Holy Spirit in inspiration, Calvin (2011:814) notes that “it is sure that the Spirit is not in conflict with himself”. Consequently, since the Bible is the Word of God, and God cannot err, then the Bible as God’s Word cannot err either. In John 17:17 Jesus, in His prayer to the Father for His disciples, asks Him: “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.” In the same way one reads in Psalm 119:160 that “the entirety” of God’s word “is truth”. After discussing this attribute of Scripture, Sproul (2014:34) concludes: “If the Word of God cannot fail, and it cannot err, it does not fail or err.”

It is also worth addressing the extent of biblical inerrancy. In other words, How far does the inerrancy of the Bible extend? Geisler (2002:498) explains in this regard that the factual truths of the Bible are inseparable from the spiritual truths. In this sense theology is to a large extent grounded in factual events through which God revealed Himself in history. Therefore Geisler (2002:499) concludes, “Whatever the Bible declares is true, whether it is a major point or a minor point. The Bible is God’s Word, and God does not deviate from the truth at any place in it. All the parts are as true as the whole they comprise.”

#### **5.3.5.5. The authority of Scripture**

Muller (2017:47) states that the authority of Scripture focuses on the “power or genuineness of Scripture that rests on its inspiration ... and therefore on the absolute authority of God, the primary author of Scripture”. Turretin (1992:62) claims that the authority of Scripture is linked with its origin. In the same manner, Geisler (2002:246) plainly asserts that “as the Word of God, the Bible has divine authority”. One can see how the inspiration of the Bible as the Word of God through human authors grounds the authority of the Bible. In other words, since the Bible is inspired by God, it carries with it the authority of God.

In Luke 4:32 one reads about the reaction of the people to the teachings of Jesus Christ: “And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority.” Beeke and Smalley (2019:335) accordingly state that the same authority of Christ “shines in every part of Holy Scripture”. Moreover, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 that Jesus Christ’s salvific work was attested to “according to the Scriptures”. This also indicates that the authority of the Scriptures is central to Christianity.

Calvin (2011:80) notes that since Scripture “flowed to us from the very mouth of God by the ministry of men”, it is indeed “self-authenticating”. Bavinck (2003:452, 465), following Calvin, explains that the authority of Scripture rests in itself and is therefore “trustworthy in and of itself” as the “primary norm for church and theology”. He also states that “Scripture guards its own authority”. This self-authenticated authority of the Bible is in turn attested to in one’s heart by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. In this sense the “certainty” of the “unassailable truth” of Scripture “is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit”. Sproul *et al.* (1984:168) phrase this theological truth by labelling this as a “genuine confirmation that the Bible is the Word of God”. This self-authenticating nature of Scripture has been commonly referred to, following the Greek word, as “the *autopistia* of Scripture” and, according to Van Genderen & Velema (2008:85), should be maintained. Besides the ‘autopistia’ of Scripture, Calvin (2011:82-85) continues to list what he calls “sufficiently firm proofs”, which also establish the authority of the Bible. Sproul *et al.* (1984:139-140) list these proofs of Calvin as the “majesty of style, the heavenliness of its content, its marvellous inner coherency and detailed consistency”.

Muller (2003:269) notes the following: “Scripture, then, broadly and canonically understood, in all its parts but primarily in the whole, is Divine and authentic in itself and needs no human assent in order to be so—as the sun is light even if all men were blind.” This means that just like the whole of Scripture is inspired and canonical, so also the whole of Scripture is authoritative. This authority, since it is divine, is absolute in its nature, and its “majesty ... far transcends all other powers” (Bavinck, 2003:465). It is worth noting that Geisler (2002:246-247) also lists the “indestructibility”, “indefatigability” and the “indefeasibility” of Scripture. These features of Scripture also flow from its divine inspiration, which in turn flows from its authority.

#### **5.3.5.6. The clarity of Scripture**

The clarity of Scripture is also referred to as its “transparency or perspicuity” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:96). Irenaeus (1885:398), for example, stated that “the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them”. To be sure, Scripture teaches one about truths that far surpass the reach of one’s intellect and understanding. The apostle Paul, for example, writes

about the “depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” and that God’s judgements and ways are “unsearchable” (Romans 11:33). Peter also admits that there are things which are hard to understand in the letters of Paul (2 Peter 3:16). However, Christianity maintains that the Bible is “not the sole property of an elite guild of teachers, but the treasure of the whole family of God” (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:343). Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds one that there are impenetrable mysteries which belong to “the Lord our God”. But there are also the things that are revealed which “belong to us and to our children forever”.

When Paul writes to Timothy, he explains to him that the “Holy Scriptures” are “able to make you wise for salvation”. The clarity of the Scriptures therefore does not “imply that all passages are clear”. The point is rather that all things “necessary for salvation are clearly stated” in the pages of the Bible (Muller, 2017:265). One can understand why this attribute of Scripture is important to maintain. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:96) ask these questions: “Does not every heretic base himself on some passage of Scripture? Is the Bible clear enough?” The proper response is that God’s revelation of Himself in Scripture is clear enough for sinners to read it and, in turn, arrive at the essential and cardinal truths of Christianity. Although Scripture is “at the mercy of all sorts of arbitrariness” like “enthusiasm”, any person “concerned about the salvation of his or her soul can easily, by personal reading and study, learn to know that truth from Scripture” (Bavinck, 2003:477).

As he followed Augustine, Calvin (2011:925) implemented an analogy of a mother “stooping to her child” to communicate with him. Just like the child can understand the basic communication of his mother, “we can safely follow Scripture”, which is clearly communicated by God in human language. According to Turretin (1992:144-145), the perspicuity of Scripture “may be urged” from passages which proclaim a certain “clearness”. One example is Psalm 119:105 where one reads that the Word of God is like a “lamp” to one’s feet, indicating its clearness. 2 Peter 1:19 is perhaps a very effective passage that supports the clarity of Scripture. The apostle Peter first testifies to the reliability of the apostle’s testimonies about Jesus Christ, since they did not follow “cunningly devised fables”. Second, he confirms the writings of the prophets since the ministry of Jesus Christ fulfilled them, thus proving their reliability. He ends with the exhortation to take heed to the Word since it is like “a light that shines in a dark place”. Turretin further says that the Scriptures are “luminous formally and effectively because like the sun they emit rays and impress themselves upon the eyes of the beholder”.

Beeke and Smalley (2019:346) conclude that “the Bible is not a dark and cloudy book that men must illuminate, but a divine light that penetrates the darkness of men’s ignorance of God. Though parts of the Bible use figurative language, overall the Bible speaks plainly.” When a heretic therefore attempts to “base himself on some passage of Scripture”, it does not mean that

the Bible is obscure, but rather that the “great obstacle to our understanding of the truths of God” in Scripture “is not the Bible”, but sin (Beeke & Smalley, 2019:347; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:96).

### **5.3.5.7. The sufficiency of Scripture**

The attribute of the sufficiency of Scripture, also known as the perfection of Scripture, is in one sense closely related to the clarity of Scripture. While the clarity of Scripture focuses on the fact that everything one needs to know for one’s salvation is clear in the Bible, the sufficiency of Scripture maintains that everything one needs to know for salvation is sufficiently and perfectly revealed in Scripture. Muller (2003:58), for example, notes: “The primary truths necessary for salvation are given by divine revelation in the canon of Scripture; Christ and faith in him is the foundation of our salvation.” Although this aspect has already been unpacked in part when the soteriological aspect of special revelation was discussed, brief comments may still be relevant.

The apostle Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:15-17 that “Holy Scriptures” can make one “wise for salvation,” and that all of Scripture is “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”. When Turretin (1992:136) comments on this verse he asks the question: “For what do we desire more than to be made partakers of salvation?” He is concerned about attempting to reach beyond the Scriptures in search of knowledge for salvation elsewhere, while salvation is not available elsewhere. He adds that “God expressly forbids us to add anything unto or diminish from his word”. This is confirmed in Deuteronomy 4:2 where God says, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you”, and also in Revelation 22:18-19,<sup>70</sup> which prohibits one from adding or taking away from God’s Word. This act of adding something or taking something away can take many forms, especially claims towards new revelations that contradict prior revelations. Muller (2003:322) therefore reminds one that “Scripture remains the rule to which nothing can be added and from which nothing can be taken away”.

The closing of the canon accordingly “implied that in the future other traditions, not documented by the apostles, would not be made normative” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:104). Moreover, since Scripture is the canon, i.e., the rule of faith, it is perfect and sufficient, for “a rule which is not entire and adequate is for that very reason no rule at all because a rule is such a measure as cannot be added to, nor diminished” (Turretin, 1992:138-139). In Matthew 15:9,

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<sup>70</sup> “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.”

Jesus Christ quotes the prophet Isaiah with the words “in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men”. This is relevant since it confirms the mandate that doctrines that are not revealed in God’s written Word, but yet taught by men, must be rejected. In reference to cults, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:104) remind one that “the result of all of these additions is that they overshadow and crowd out the truth of Scripture”.

Beeke and Smalley (2019:398) are correct in stating that this doctrine does not mean that Scripture is sufficient for “all human activities in every respect”. There are disciplines like politics, sports, medicine and geology, for example, which are not comprehensively covered in the pages of the Bible. This, however, is not the goal of the Scriptures. Rather, the Scriptures were written that we “may believe that Jesus is the Christ” (John 20:31).

#### **5.3.5.8. The necessity of Scripture**

Muller (2003:163), referring to Romans 10:17,<sup>71</sup> states that as long as faith comes by the hearing of the Word of God, the Scriptures will always remain necessary. As pointed out earlier, general revelation is insufficient for salvation and therefore special revelation in God’s Word, which progressed from unwritten to written, is necessary for the salvation of mankind. According to Muller (2003:169), “the necessity of Scripture is grounded on the necessity of revelation as a form of mediated knowledge—and the Scripture, once given, reveals the necessity of a mediated salvation”. Following this line of thought, God’s written Word is necessary, since only therein lies the knowledge that is necessary for salvation. In this regard, Beeke and Smalley (2019:353) add: “Only biblical religion brings reconciliation with the true God.”

Calvin (2011:71-73) notes that “in order that truth might abide forever in the world with a continuing succession of teaching and survive through all ages”, God’s Word progressed from unwritten to written. At length, Calvin proceeds to express the necessity of God’s written Word:

Suppose we ponder how slippery is the fall of the human mind into forgetfulness of God, how great the tendency to every kind of error, how great the lust to fashion constantly new and artificial religions. Then we may perceive how necessary was such written proof of the heavenly doctrine, that it should neither perish through forgetfulness nor vanish through error nor be corrupted by the audacity of men. It is therefore clear that God has provided the assistance of the Word for the sake of all those to whom he has been pleased to give useful instruction because he foresaw that his likeness imprinted upon the most beautiful form of the universe would be insufficiently effective. Hence, we must strive onward by this straight path if we seriously aspire to the pure contemplation of God. We must come, I say, to the Word, where God is truly and vividly described to us from his works, while these very works are appraised not by our depraved judgment but by the rule of eternal truth.

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<sup>71</sup> “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Calvin compellingly confirms the necessity of Scripture as the “rule of eternal truth”, which is God’s gift to His creation so that humanity can know the works of God as Creator and Redeemer. The apostle Paul writes in Romans 1:16 that he is “not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes”. In this sense one could insist that the gospel attested to by the Scriptures is necessary. Beeke and Smalley (2019:357) accordingly capture the necessity of Scripture when they state, “Through the gift of the Scriptures, the gospel in all its revealed richness is directly accessible to millions of people around the world.” Bavinck (2003:470) further adds, “The church never lived from itself or rested upon itself but always lived by and in the word of God.” This implies that the written Word of God is not just necessary for salvation, but also for the “wellbeing ... and being of the church” (Turretin, 1992:179), which rest on God’s written Word.

Referring to Gnosticism, Bavinck (2003:466) argues that many mystical movements have in the past denied the necessity of Scripture. For these movements, the Bible was not in any way a source of truth, but rather “the means by which the elite can elevate themselves to the higher level of *gnosis*”. In this context God’s written Word is necessary, but it is only the first step of a ladder reaching to God and, after that first step, it is not necessary anymore. However, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:106) argue that, contrary to “various fanatics”, Christianity maintains that it “depend[s] on Scripture”. Since God, in His providence, has found it necessary to reveal Himself ultimately in His written Word, the books of the Bible are necessary and therefore one must apply “oneself diligently to the reading and hearing of Scripture” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:107).

#### **5.3.5.9. The attributes of Scripture in relation to CiMI**

With the attributes of Scripture laid out, one can now turn to CiMI and their relation to these attributes. It is the researcher’s contention that CiMI in one way or another, implicitly or explicitly, not only rejects these attributes of Scripture, but also intercepts it and illicitly claims it for the leadership of CiMI as God’s only mouthpiece on earth. What follows here are brief comments on each of the abovementioned attributes of Scripture and they relate to CiMI’s teachings.

Concerning the attributes of the divinity and inspiration of Scripture, CiMI believes themselves to be the divine and inspired Word of God. When Strydom (2019a) starts one of his sermons by saying that he believes with all his heart that “if God was a man, he would preach this sermon, this morning on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February 2019, to the whole of South Africa”, he is claiming divine inspiration for CiMI and the message that he brings to the world. Likewise, Du Plessis (2016a) claims that since CiMI understands the revelation that they are Christs, they also preach what



God tells them. Du Plessis (2016a), for example, explains that, given the revelation that they have received, “flesh and blood does not tell you anymore ... what to preach. But the Father in heaven is sharing with you what to preach and to say”. In their understanding, the divinity and inspiration of the Bible are also attributed to CiMI, and more specifically to Strydom as the leader. His and his leadership’s words are *theopneusty*, i.e., breathed out by God Himself. This is to be expected if Strydom claims to have a “direct pipeline to God” (Rhodes, 2001:24).

When it comes to the canon of Scripture, it is clear that the leaders of CiMI have set themselves up as the canon, i.e., the norm for faith, doctrine and worship. Kotze (2017b), for example, insists that CiMI is from God and if “anybody speaks against us; he is not from God ... If anybody speaks against us, he is not from God. We are of God, he who knows God, hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us.” In this sense they are also a closed canon, since no one can add anything to them or take something away, except for them. They alone have that authority and they alone exist as the divine norm for faith. As indicated above, the canon as a closed canon was meant to guard the church against exactly the kind of claims that CiMI are making now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The attribute of the inerrant veracity of Scripture is also taken by CiMI and applied to their teachings. In other words, their leadership is the inerrant and true mouthpiece of God. They alone “have the truth” (Rhodes, 2001:32). Kotze (2017b) asserts: “We are preaching truth. We do not wonder; we do not guess. We know what we aim for.” In the same manner, Strydom (Kotze, 2017c) claims that he preaches the truth at CiMI, while “religion lies to people and calls it truth”. Moreover, Strydom (2017a) states, “There is only one truth. There is only one dream, one plan, and one way. God commanded me to lead the people of covenant and the true Israel into the promised land, a new heaven and a new earth.” In this regard, CiMI claims to be the inerrant truth of God on earth, while anyone who contradicts them is immediately guilty of lying.

Coming to the authority of Scripture, CiMI in some sense claims to be the sole divine authority on earth. Since Strydom was appointed by God Himself, and accordingly speaks for God, he has ‘autopisty’ authority. The authentication of CiMI’s message lies in their origin, which comes directly from God. Since they are God’s inspired and true Word on earth, their authority is self-authenticating. Du Plessis (2016a), for example, claims that “the only people” who “can teach what we teach, is us” because only they have the self-authenticating authority that comes from God. This is then clearly an “extra-Scriptural source of authority”, where “God is no longer allowed to speak as He does in the Bible; He may now speak only as the sect deems proper. Thus the Word of God is brought under the yoke of man” (Hoekema, 1962:378-379).

The clarity of Scripture is also attributed to CiMI. There is an irony here, however. On the one hand Strydom (2018a) labels his teachings as “duidelik soos daglig”,<sup>72</sup> attributing clarity to it. But on the other hand, CiMI also claims esoteric teachings in the form of deeper “spiritual meanings” (Du Plessis, 2016a), which are only accessible by the leadership of CiMI who, in turn, explicate it to their members. Consequently, one could say that CiMI claims perspicuity, but also obscurity, since they are a guild of elite teachers possessing new, spiritual and hidden revelations, while all other churches are “earthly minded” (Strydom, 2018a).

The attribute of the sufficiency of Scripture is also intercepted by CiMI in some way. CiMI (2018p) claims that the revelation and teachings of Strydom with regard to Jesus Christ will “bring the salvation of the soul”. Accordingly, CiMI is sufficient for salvation. Being the sole means of salvation on earth, and therefore sufficient, one cannot add to them, or take away from them. They are perfect and sufficient, and in the words of Hoekema (1962:384), they are absolutised “as the exclusive community of the saved”. If one wants salvation, one must therefore go to the sufficient word of CiMI.

Concerning the necessity of Scripture, CiMI also claims this attribute for themselves. CiMI is necessary. Their revelation is a necessary revelation, especially since the church, according to God Himself, or rather according to Strydom according to God, “took a wrong turn for 2000 years” and has never accomplished anything (Strydom, 2018a). Strydom therefore claims that CiMI is busy correcting the things that the church did wrong all these years, and is moving South Africa, and the world, into a position of “spiritual maturity”. The necessity of CiMI also lies in their claims of fulfilling divine prophecy and in that way unfolding God’s plan on earth.

### **5.3.6. A revelational diagnosis of CiMI as the religious other**

#### **5.3.6.1. Introductory remarks**

Since a proper and consistent doctrine of revelation and Scripture has been reclaimed and reaffirmed, this objective revelation of God in Scripture can now be turned on CiMI to revelationally explain their very existence as a “religious other” (Strange, 2014:37) or, in the words of Gruss (2002:7), a “pseudo-Christian religion”. It was mentioned at the beginning that any religion that deviates from Christianity is not consistent with God’s objective revelation of Himself. The triune God is the God who created the world and also revealed and communicated Himself to the world. His revelation finds its climax in the person and works of Jesus Christ, to whom the Scriptures attest. As Strange (2014:216) reminds one: “In the person and work of

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<sup>72</sup> Translation: Clear as daylight.

Jesus Christ we reach the 'Omega' point ... of the biblical revelation and redemptive history." Ultimately, both general and special revelation find their fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The point to realise here, however, is that the unbelief of groups like CiMI is addressed in God's special revelation. In other words, a reason for unbelief is given in Scripture. When Guinness (2015:232) therefore explains that "the Christian faith always stands before humanity as revealed, and therefore addresses us as a word to be believed or disbelieved", the question to answer is: Why is there such a prevalent presence of unbelief or disbelief in CiMI and other groups, especially if God's revelation of Himself is objectively true and clear?

Although Chapter 4 demonstrated the Scripture twisting of CiMI, which results in distorted doctrines, this discussion, on the grounds of God's special revelation, seeks to go deeper still to the human heart, and in this sense conduct a revelational diagnosis of CiMI's leadership. Sproul *et al.* (1984:58) indicate that there are certain psychological categories involved when it comes to the knowledge of God and how humanity reacts to it. Since an "encounter with the light of God's revelation is a traumatic experience", unbelief suppresses and substitutes this knowledge (Sproul *et al.*, 1984:59-60). Oliphint (2003:105) maintains that in God's written Word, especially Romans 1:18-32,<sup>73</sup> we are given information about unbelief "that we could never have access to by ourselves". However, since God discloses to us "what is going on in the 'inner recesses' of a person, we should not simply believe it, but apply those truths". Oliphint calls this "divine psychology", since it is God's infallible insight into the "human psyche". In turn, Guinness (2015:85) argues that the Bible takes one to "the very heart of its diagnosis of unbelief, for in the biblical view *the central core of the anatomy of unbelief stems from its willful abuse of truth*". This abuse can either be with regard to God's general or special revelation.

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<sup>73</sup> "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them."

At its deepest level, this abuse of truth happens because of idolatry. Calvin (2011:108) aptly notes that human nature is “a perpetual factory of idols”. This means that fallen humanity will, in rebellion against God, always seek to produce idols for themselves. He further remarks that “the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth”. This kind of idolatry results in what Turretin (1992:605) concisely describes as “false faith”. Strange (2014:75) defines this “false faith” as a state where one “believe[s] lies about God, lies that are both rationally and ethically unjustified”. Since CiMI for example rejects the triune God and deity of Christ, even when engaging with the clearly revealed truths of Scripture, they are guilty of idolatrously cherishing a “false faith”. In this sense Strange (2014:77) observes that “idolatry includes both physical and mental creations. Crucially, its scope includes not only *displacements* of the triune God, but also *distortions* and *denials*.” He further adds that a “false faith” in the Son of God, which does not recognise “the risen and ascended Lord Jesus for who he truly is, is an act of idolatry” (Strange, 2014:220).

This diagnosis mainly focuses on two themes, namely the “perilous exchange” and “subversive fulfilment” (Strange, 2014:228-229, 267-268). To be sure, there is overlap between these two themes, but as far as possible, it will be addressed separately.

#### **5.3.6.2. The ‘perilous exchange’ applied to CiMI**

The idea of a ‘perilous exchange’ is based on the apostle Paul’s words in Romans 1:25 where he says that the unbeliever has “exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator” (Strange, 2014:241). One can detect the theme of idolatry as a basis for unbelief in this verse. Sproul *et al.* (1984:55), note that “the substitution of a lie in place of the truth of God”, which obscures the antithesis “between truth and falsehood”, is the essence of idolatry. Earlier in the first chapter of Romans Paul already introduced the notion that unbelief is the suppression of “the truth in unrighteousness” because of “ungodliness and unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). Strange (2014:241) comments that the suppression and exchange of truth should be understood as humanity’s attempt to “flee from the living God of the Bible”.

To be sure, Paul applies these statements to how unbelievers react to God’s objective, general revelation, and not necessarily His special revelation. One may wonder whether it is legitimate to apply the theme of the “perilous exchange” to CiMI with regard to their abuse of truth in special revelation. Geisler (2013b:169) argues that the “disadvantage caused by sin does not exist only for general revelation ... It also exists for those who are recipients of special revelation.” Therefore, one could say that in the same manner that unbelief suppresses and exchanges the truth of God found in general revelation, unbelief also suppresses and exchanges the truth of God found in special revelation. Geisler (2013b) explains that the “defect

is not in the revelation but in the fallen human being interpreting it ... the understanding of both (general and special revelation) is subject to the noetic effects of sin on the human mind. Hence, neither is immune to distortion.”

On the grounds of 2 Peter 3:16,<sup>74</sup> it has already been demonstrated that there is indeed a type of suppression and exchange of the truth taking place regarding God’s special revelation. Idolatrous unbelief can therefore also be the cause of a situation where a group like CiMI “twist the meaning of Scripture so that the truth of God’s revelation is turned into a lie. As torturers make a victim on the rack say the opposite of the truth, so the false teachers place Scripture on the rack and distort its message” (Kistemaker & Hendriksen, 1987:346). The perilous exchange of the truth for a lie is therefore also observable regarding special revelation.

Although CiMI’s idolatrous response of suppressing and exchanging God’s truth can be observed most vividly in their handling of special revelation, the rest of the discussion focuses more broadly on idolatrous unbelief as the motivation behind the perilous exchange, irrespective of where it manifests in CiMI. It is sufficient for now only to take note of the fact that this theme of suppressing and exchanging God’s truth does indeed occur in CiMI. Any position that deviates in one way or another from God’s objective revelation of Himself therefore has a deeper explanation. Guinness (2015:86-90) identifies four “prominent emphases” of how this perilous exchange most frequently takes place. The researcher discusses it here, particularly with CiMI in mind:

1. Unbelief, according to Guinness (2015:86), “abuses truth through a deliberate act of suppression. Unbelief seizes truth, grasps it roughly, silences its voice and twists it away from God’s intended purpose. By itself, truth speaks naturally and clearly, but its voice is censored, blocked and silenced, so that it is no longer allowed to speak as it does naturally.” To support this statement, the following words of Job 21:14 and Psalm 50:17 are cited: “Yet they say to God, ‘Depart from us, For we do not desire the knowledge of your ways’”, and “Seeing you hate instruction And cast My words behind you?” Commenting on the passage in Job, Hartley (1988:315) explains that Job is here depicting the “fate of the wicked” by addressing the disposition of “these evil, successful men”. They do not want God with them and instead they order God to depart from them. Their “flagrant words show that their rejection of God is conscious and willful” and they have no interest in the true ways of God. In a historical redemptive fashion, Boice (2005b:419) explains that in this

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<sup>74</sup> “... and consider *that* the longsuffering of our Lord *is* salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable *people* twist to their own destruction, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures.”

passage in Psalm 50 God is addressing the “alleged people of God” who, although they are “mouthing everything they are supposed to”, are in reality ignoring the “Bible’s precepts”.

2. Unbelief also “abuses truth through a deliberate act of exploitation. Unbelief not only suppresses the real truth and twists it away from God’s true ends, but wrests it toward its own ends and its own agenda” (Guinness, 2015:86). Here Micah 3:9 is cited, which is written against wicked prophets and rulers. This passage reads as follows: “Now hear this, You heads of the house of Jacob And rulers of the house of Israel, Who abhor justice And pervert all equity.” Wiseman *et al.* (1988:180) suggest that Micah is here tracing the problem back to the “immoral appetite” of man. Instead of “delighting in justice, they are repulsed by it ... From their darkened hearts come distorted actions: they twist everything that is upright.”
3. Guinness (2015:87) explains that “unbelief goes further still and abuses truth through a deliberate act of inversion. Unbelief not only suppresses truth and exploits it for its own ends, but seizes it and turns it completely upside down, inside out and the wrong way around, and then holds it there for its own purposes. Above all, through inversion we as creatures put ourselves in the place of our Creator, and we believe our own lie rather than God’s truth. We make ourselves gods instead of God, so that proper self-love becomes prideful self-centering love.” In Isaiah 29:16 the blindness of disobedience is addressed by the prophet as follows: “Surely you have things turned around! Shall the potter be esteemed as the clay; For shall the thing made say of him who made it, ‘He did not make me’? Or shall the thing formed say of him who formed it, ‘He has no understanding’?” Oswalt (1986:536) explains that the rulers have “turned things upside down. They tell God what to do rather than seeking to discern what he means to do.”
4. Finally, Guinness (2015:89) also notes that “unbelief abuses truth through a deliberate act of deception that ends in its own self-deception. Unbelief seizes God’s truth, twists it away from God’s purposes and toward its own, and is therefore forced to deny the full reality of the truth it knows. But in the futile act of trying to deny the undeniable, it both deceives others and deceives itself, and so becomes self-deceived. Unbelief therefore manufactures not only idols but illusions.” Jeremiah 17:9 is cited in support of this observation. This passage reads as follows: “The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?” Man’s heart, which in Old Testament usage refers to the seat of one’s thoughts and will, is here described as being deceitful. The capacity of the heart to hide from truth and to justify and rationalise things that one knows not to be true and right should not be underestimated (Thompson, 1980:421-422).

It is important to note that in many of these passages the source of the suppression and exchange of God's truth, i.e., the source of the perilous exchange lies in the sinful and idolatrous desires of the unbeliever who, instead of seeking truth, "chooses ... the suggestions of his own mind" (Aquinas, STh., II-II q.11 a.1 resp.). Therefore, the unbelief and perilous exchange found in CiMI must be traced back to the hearts of their leadership. Instead of facing up to reality and truth, they are trying to, in a deep idolatrous sense, fit reality into their own schemes (Guinness, 2000:115). In the words of Guinness (2000:116), CiMI, as with a plane, "is attempting to hijack truth and force it to fly to [their] own destination". There is indeed a "dark dynamism" behind the perilous exchange where the leaders of CiMI set themselves up as the "autonomous self" who "bows to no one and seeks to be the sole arbiter of life and truth" (Guinness, 2000:116). God's revealed truths, in Scripture especially, are therefore suppressed, exploited and inverted by CiMI, which inevitably results in the deception of others, and in self-deception. This is the result of idolatry.

The leadership of CiMI is therefore, according to God's special revelation, part of the "evil, successful men" who are ordering God to depart from them and have a very deep, wilful and conscious rejection of God. They have no interest in the true ways of God. They are the "alleged people of God" who are, in reality, ignoring "the Bible's precepts". Their "immoral appetite" repulses God's true justice and delivers "distorted actions" that "twist everything that is upright". They have "turned things upside down" and are implicitly telling "God what to do". In their attempt to hide from truth, they are deceiving others, and ultimately deceiving themselves.

### **5.3.6.3. 'Subversive fulfilment' applied to CiMI**

Strange (2014:266-267) explains that there will be levels of discontinuity and continuity between "counterfeits and the reality upon which they are based". Since this relationship between CiMI as a "pseudo-Christian religion", based on the perilous exchange and Christianity, based on the real, will be complex, the feature of 'subversive fulfilment' captures this relationship effectively.

As background to this theme, one could say that in the same way as evil can be explained as a *privatio boni*,<sup>75</sup> in some sense, following the idea of the perilous exchange, falsehood can be explained as a *privatio veri*, i.e., a privation of truth. In other words, a false system like CiMI parasitises and relies on that which is true and real for their own existence. This is why the

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<sup>75</sup> This term, meaning a 'privation of the good', is used to explain the nature and origin of evil. This means that there is no such thing as absolute evil. Muller (2017:292) explains it as follows: "Since God did not create evil and since evil is not an actuality but a falling short of actuality, it cannot be a substance (*substantia*, q.v.) or a thing (*res*, q.v.) but, if it exists in any sense, must be in a substance or thing. In other words, evil is not a created thing or an actual substance but rather wrongness or distortion in a thing or substance."

name given to cults by Gruss (2007:9) as a “pseudo-Christian religion” is so fitting. In the same manner Konnikova (2016:309) notes:

All cons, cults not least of all, rely on a basis of some sort of truth and reality. What sets them apart from their more legitimate counterparts is where and how that truth is then used. Manipulate it well enough, and no matter the evidence, people will continue to follow.

Reflecting on the perilous exchange, one can say for example that unless there is an absolute truth, there would be nothing for CiMI to idolatrously suppress and exchange in the first place. CiMI is therefore dependent on the truth to exist in the first place. Guinness (2015:89), relying on Augustine, therefore notes: “A key part of deception and self-deception is the fact that evil must imitate good, unbelief must copy truth, and vice must mimic virtue.” God’s objective and true revelation, which finds its fulfilment in the person and works of Jesus Christ, is therefore relied upon by CiMI for their own existence as a false ideological system.

Starting with the theme of subversion, one could say that “the gospel of Jesus Christ stands as the subversion, antithetical contradiction, confrontation, condemnation and crisis of all manifestations of the religious Other” (Strange, 2014:269). In other words, the true gospel will always contradict other false ideological systems like the one found within CiMI. This is then referring to the discontinuity between Christianity and CiMI. Bavinck (1960:136) fittingly captures the notion of subversion in saying that the real Christ will differ drastically from the “redeemers and saviors” which “the religions of man” evoke. According to him, the true gospel of Jesus Christ is the condemnation of “such human fancy and speculation”. Martin (2003:24) also reminds that, within the theological system of cults like CiMI, there will be a “considerable truth” which is drawn from biblical sources. This truth however, is “diluted with human error to be more deadly” than falsehood. This is the discontinuity and is why CiMI with their false and “disfigured” Christ is a counterfeit who is dependent on the truth of Christianity (Gilchrist, 2013:13).

Proceeding to the notion of fulfilment, it emphasises the continuity between Christianity and CiMI. Strange (2014:270-271) notes: “There is a relationship between the disastrous dream (CiMI) and glorious reality (the true gospel of Jesus Christ) ... Biblically speaking, the cracked cisterns of idolatry that bring only disillusionment, despair and unfulfilled desires are wonderfully fulfilled and surpassed in the fount of living water, Jesus Christ the Lord.” In this sense all of CiMI’s attempts to erect for themselves a “tower of Babel”, so to speak, expose their desire for salvation and mediatorship between God and man. Their idolatrous response to God’s revelation, however, is what causes them to create illusions and holds them up as reality and truth. Bavinck (2006:491) explains it as follows:

The human heart is created for God and is restless until it finds rest in him. Insofar as every human more or less consciously strives for a lasting happiness and an unchanging good, one can say, with Augustine, that every human also seeks God, who alone is the highest good and our eternal



salvation (Acts 17:27).<sup>76</sup> One must immediately add, however, that in the darkness of our understanding and the evil thoughts of our heart, we seek him not in the right way and not where he may be found.

The leaders of CiMI, because of sin's effect on the mind and heart, have deceived themselves and created a fictional world for themselves where they can be their own gods and, in the process, deceive others. All of their desires for salvation, however, can only be fulfilled in the true Son of God, Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture.

#### **5.3.6.4. Final remarks**

As the leaders of CiMI are attempting to claim ownership “of reality itself” and in effect creating an environment where reality and truth can be dispensed and controlled (Lifton, 2019:1), they are manifesting their subjective idolatrous response to God's objective revelation of Himself. As Hassan (2016:140) states, in cults like CiMI, “the doctrine is reality ... Therefore all thinking, desires and action – except of course those prescribed by the cult – do not really exist.” In the same manner Stein (2017:116) observes that the deeper the members of a cult move to the centre of the group as a result of being deceived by a self-deceived leadership, “the more distant from reality” they become, and eventually “enter the ‘fiction’ of the closed and secretive totalitarian world”.

When Strydom and his leadership therefore attempt to own truth by suppressing and exchanging it according to their idolatrous and sinful hearts' desires, they are in effect enthroning themselves as gods in their own fictional kingdom. In a very real sense, the perilous exchange and subversive fulfilment link one back to many of the themes and findings in Chapter 3. This revelational diagnosis therefore becomes a theology of psychology. Stoker (2020:68) explains that conversion “takes people not from utter ignorance to a basic understanding of reality, but from a distorted understanding that is typical of cults to knowledge, built on Scripture, that enables them to understand things as they are”. In this sense, the task of counter-cult apologetics is therefore to break through the “control of conscience by human-made religion, to bring these cult-invested people back to the living, loving God” (Stoker, 2020:81). A proper understanding of the ‘perilous exchange’ and ‘subversive fulfilment’ can also assist in this task.

While the leaders of CiMI are keeping people from truth and reality by deceiving them into their delusional and theological parasitic existence, and introducing them to what Gilchrist (2013:13) calls a “disfigured” Jesus, they are keeping people from the very foundation of truth and reality,

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<sup>76</sup> “so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.”

the eternal *Logos* (John 1:1), and Lord of glory, who is the truth, the way, and the life Himself (John 14:6). According to Strange (2014:242), this route leads only to destruction:

Idols and the religious traditions built on them do not save, but lead only to divine judgment and condemnation. Idolatry also brings about human disintegration. Idols deceive, and no one stops to consider this deception. As counterfeits, they promise much and mimic divine attributes and actions, but ultimately bring only disappointment, disillusionment and destruction.

### **5.3.7. Conclusion of the doctrine of revelation and Scripture**

The doctrine of revelation and Scripture has now properly been reclaimed and reaffirmed against CiMI. God's objective special revelation of Himself is progressive, soteriological and Trinitarian. All three of these themes have been addressed to point out how CiMI, their view of revelation and their claims of new revelation are contradictory, gnostic and insufficient. It is contradictory in the sense that although they claim new and progressive revelations from God, they are, in reality, claiming contradictory revelations. Since God's objective revelation in Scripture exhorts one to dismiss contradictions and different gospels that go in against what God has already revealed in Scripture, one has good reason to dismiss CiMI's theology and doctrine as false. It is gnostic in the sense that they are following in the footsteps of the ancient Gnostics who also claimed new soteriological revelations from God. The ancient Gnostics asserted that such new revelations, which are only available to and embraced by an elite group, are what grant one the knowledge to become wise unto salvation. This is problematic however, since only the true gospel of Jesus Christ can make one wise unto salvation and to claim otherwise is to go beyond God's objective revelation of Himself, which only ends in counterfeit gospels that deliver only a counterfeit salvation. It is insufficient in the sense that their Unitarian concept of God lacks the foundation for any revelation from God in the first place. If one rejects the Trinity, one also loses the sufficient grounding for a God who creates, communicates and reveals Himself.

Although CiMI does not explicitly reject the attributes of Scripture, implicitly they not only reject them, but also intercept them and apply them to CiMI as the only true organisation of God. They set themselves up as the divinely inspired, canonical, inerrant, self-attesting, necessary, sufficient, clear, yet ambiguous Word of God. In their eyes they are God-breathed in their message. They are the canonical norm for faith, life and doctrine. They are God's inerrant Word. They are the sole authority of God. They are irreplaceably necessary to exist. They are sufficient and no one can take away from them or add to them. They are God's clear mouthpiece, but also secretive and elitist. *Sola Scriptura* has lost its meaning for them. It is now rather *sola* CiMI.

Once the doctrine of revelation and Scripture is properly reclaimed, it is necessary to relate it to CiMI and to diagnose their unbelief. God's Word gives one a unique insight into the heart of unbelief where one finds nothing but idolatry. CiMI's rejection and interception of God's revelation in Scripture is the result of a deep-seated idolatrous response to it. The leadership of CiMI wants to claim ownership over reality itself, but in the process exchange the truth of God and His glory for the lie and to put forth the lie as the truth. This is the perilous exchange of unbelief, which only suppresses, exploits and inverts the truth. They not only deceive themselves but deceive their members as well and seek to dissolve them in their fictional worldview. Furthermore, because of the perilous exchange, CiMI subverts the gospel and conjures a 'disfigured' Jesus who cannot save. They parasitise on the truth to present their falsehoods, which deviate from God's revelation. In the end, their hunger for salvation, which is distorted by idolatry, can only be fulfilled in the true gospel of Jesus Christ. It can only be fulfilled in the one who is the foundation of reality and the very truth itself – Jesus Christ.

To be sure, the themes of the 'perilous exchange' and 'subversive fulfilment', because of their theological richness, can in future studies be applied to cults in more nuanced ways than what has been done. Since the scope of this chapter is broader than only these themes, it was only briefly set out.

## **5.4. Reclaiming the doctrine of the Trinity**

### **5.4.1. Introduction**

A rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity is in no way unique to CiMI. Rhodes (2001:25-26) confirms that many cults deny the doctrine of the Trinity. One only needs to look as far as the Jehovah's Witnesses, for example (see Chapter 4, section 4.3.10.4. and 4.3.10.6.). Rutherford (1936:185), one of the presidents of The Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, is very explicit about the origin of the Trinity as well as their rejection of it when they attribute it to Satan:

Another lie made and told by Satan for the purpose of reproaching God's name and turning men away from God is that of the 'trinity.' That doctrine is taught by the religionists of 'Christendom' and is in substance this: "That there are three gods in one; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, all equal in power, substance and eternity." No man can explain that doctrine, because it is false. That false doctrine was prominent in the religions of ancient Babylon and Egypt and among other mythologists, all of which are Devil religions.

Strydom (2016d), in a similar way, claims, "Religion made God ... unknown by a triune God lie." Labuschagne (2016c) asserts quite wrongly that "there are three gods ... God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. That is what they believe, there are three gods." In turn, Kotze (2017c) insists that the doctrine of the Trinity is false since the word 'Trinity' is nowhere used in the

Bible. CiMI (2018g) also claims that the doctrine of the Trinity “divided God”. Along with these explicit rejections of and objections to the Trinity, CiMI also introduces other concerns regarding this doctrine which will be attended to in this discussion.

Geisler and Rhodes (2008:33, 41) argue that “without the tri-unity of God there is no orthodox theology, for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each play a crucial role in all the essential doctrines of Faith”. They further claim that it astonishes them when they contemplate the number of ways the Trinity has either been “denied, distorted, or misinterpreted throughout church history”. In the same vein, Bavinck (2004:258) notes that “all error is traceable to a departure from this doctrine”. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:44) share this view by saying that “a fallacious view of the Trinity (based on faulty hermeneutics) will lead one far astray in one’s broader theology. This is certainly borne out in the cults.”

It is clear then that CiMI rejects a doctrine that has always, even before the Council of Nicaea, been essential to the Christian faith. Often, the notion of sounding pious and piety as such become the norm for theology in cults, in order to appear spiritually deep and sincere and to lure followers. For example, Strydom’s (2016c) insistence that he is proclaiming the true God to the world and that he is only here to show people the true Jesus manifests a sense of deep piety. The departure point of this discussion, however, is from the words of Gilson (1964:41-42):

Excellent as a rule of personal devotion, and as long as it is restricted to the sphere of religious feeling, such a principle can become dangerous when used as a criterion of theological truth ... In theology, as in any other science, the main question is not to be pious but to be right. For there is nothing pious in being wrong about God!

This discussion, as an attempt to apologetically critique CiMI, but also to apologetically reaffirm the doctrine of the Trinity, begins with basic remarks and definitions regarding this doctrine. After this, the biblical foundations for the doctrine of the Trinity are addressed and from there the discussion moves towards the theological and historical development of this doctrine.

## **5.4.2. Basic remarks on and definitions of the doctrine of the Trinity**

### **5.4.2.1. The Trinity is the highest revelation of God**

God’s revelation of Himself as triune can be described as “dangerous”, “laborious” and “profitable”. These are the three terms Augustine (1887a:19) used when he approached the doctrine of the Trinity. Referring to this doctrine, he suggests that “in no other subject is error more dangerous, or inquiry more laborious, or the discovery of truth more profitable”. This observation confirms the importance of first defining some terms and establishing certain basic features and aspects of the Trinity.

White (1998:14) argues that the Trinity confronts one with the “highest revelation God has made of himself to His people”. According to him, the Trinity is the “capstone, the summit, the brightest star in the firmament of divine truths”. Emery (2011:1-2) provides two reasons why the revelation of the Trinity is God’s highest revelation of Himself:

First, the believer’s knowledge of the Trinity rests on the revelation that takes place in the words and in the historical events to which the words are connected. These events are the incarnation of the Son of God and his life in our human condition, as well as the sending of the Holy Spirit to the Church at Pentecost. This manifestation of the Trinity is different from other forms of revelation (for example, the revelation that God can make simply by the interior inspiration of the mind of prophets), because the revelation of the Trinity takes place in events manifested to human eyes. Second, in these events God himself comes. God is not only at the origin of these events, but he also gives himself in them. Thus, in the incarnation, the Son of God in person becomes human and, by his life and his offering on the cross, he obtains salvation through love of his Father and through love of humankind. Similarly, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit in person is given and comes to dwell in the heart of believers. And when, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, believers receive Jesus as the Son of God, the Father himself comes to dwell in their hearts, as Jesus promised: “If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him” (Jn 14:23).<sup>77</sup> In the events of salvation, God the Trinity gives not merely “some thing,” but rather he gives himself: God the Father sends his Son and pours out his Holy Spirit.

The doctrine of the Trinity was accordingly finally and clearly revealed in the persons of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. Kelly (2008:448-449), echoing Athanasius, maintains that the doctrine of the Trinity originally comes from the “Church’s scriptural reflection upon the Father/Son relationship ... The basic issue in the life and theology of the early Church was the reality and significance of who Jesus is.” He furthermore says that the “outpouring of the Holy spirit at Pentecost” further revealed the Trinity to the church. In this sense, the Trinity has always existed, but was only brightly revealed at a certain point in time. Emery (2011:43-44) gives a constructive summary of this point:

Trinitarian faith is based exclusively on the recognition of the divine lordship of Jesus, the Son of God, Word and Image of the Father, as well as on the recognition of the equal divinity of the Holy Spirit. Before being the object of a doctrinal reflection, the Trinity causes faith, thanksgiving, and the believers’ praise of God.

The doctrine of the Trinity is therefore the highest revelation by God and of God in which He gives Himself in a historically redemptive way to His church. In this sense there is a real uniqueness when it comes to the doctrine of the Trinity. This uniqueness is not just a uniqueness within the revelation of God as His highest revelation, but also, according to Keller

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<sup>77</sup> “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.’”

(2009:223), a revelation that makes Christianity utterly unique from all other religions and/or worldviews. According to him, “Christianity, alone among the world faiths, teaches that God is triune.” In this sense, when CiMI rejects the doctrine of the Trinity, they are rejecting God’s highest revelation of Himself. Compared with CiMI, Christianity consequently still maintains its uniqueness, since CiMI has abandoned the very doctrine that makes Christianity unique in the first place. This appears ironic since CiMI wants to be unique with all their claims but loses uniqueness by attempting to be unique.

#### **5.4.2.2. The Trinity cannot be fully comprehended**

The doctrine of the Trinity has been described as an “adorable mystery” (Turretin, 1992:253). The reason is because it can neither be fully comprehended nor demonstrated by human reason, and it cannot be adequately shown by way of an example or analogy. Accordingly, in the words of Turretin (1992:253), this doctrine is “to be received by faith and adored with love” on the grounds of “the authority of divine revelation”. In this sense one could say that the Trinity “rests exclusively on the gift that God makes when he enables believers to know him in faith” (Emery, 2011:1). Morey (1996:72) also explains that since the Trinity is such a deep mystery it “forces us to our knees in wonder, awe, and praise”. He continues to say that “any god we could fully understand and explain would be *less* than what we are. Such a god would not be worthy of our worship, awe or praise. The inescapable truth is that God will always be greater than our finite capacity to understand fully or to explain exhaustively.”

This, however, should not be understood to indicate any kind of fideism in Christianity. Although the doctrine of the Trinity is ultimately received by faith, it is nevertheless intellectually and theologically “laborious”, as Augustine points out. Following this observation, Brown (1988:152) insists that “God does not require a *sacrificium intellectus*, a ‘sacrifice of the intellect’ as part of faith. Because the sacrifice of the intellect is a violent affront to the integrity of one’s soul, it is always dangerous and certainly is a poor way to begin to love God with all one’s heart, soul, and mind.”

Accordingly, on the grounds of passages like Titus 1:2<sup>78</sup> and 2 Timothy 2:13,<sup>79</sup> it is maintained, on the one hand, that no mystery of God can ever be irrational and hence illogical. On the other hand, it cannot be dictated by human reason as well. It is rather ‘suprational’ which means that it is a truth that lies “above and beyond ... human discovery and comprehension”, but does not contradict human reason at the same time (Campbell, 2020:297-298). In this sense there is a difference between something that contradicts human reason and something that transcends

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<sup>78</sup> “... in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began.”

<sup>79</sup> “If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.”

human reason. The doctrine of the Trinity definitely transcends human reason by going above and beyond it, but it does not contradict human reason and can therefore be rationally defended and at least shown that it is not a doctrine that entails contradictions in any sense. This is mentioned to indicate that a mystery is not irrational, and that the Trinity as a cherished mystery is worthy of the church's defence<sup>80</sup> (Geisler, 2003:293).

Since the Trinity cannot be fully comprehended, one should not expect to grasp it in its fullness. When CiMI (2018g) therefore, in one instance, dismisses the Trinity, since it is impossible to "grasp" it, one could say that they maintain a rationalist approach to God. If God is God, one should expect mystery because the divine essence cannot be known exhaustively and is incomprehensible to the finite human mind (Sproul, 2014:47).

#### **5.4.2.3. The Trinity is central to the gospel**

Bavinck (2004:333-334) states that the doctrine of the Trinity is of "incalculable importance for the Christian religion". He also states:

[A]ll of special revelation, stands or falls with the confession of God's Trinity. It is the core of the Christian faith ... all who value being called a Christian recognize and believe in a kind of Trinity ... In the doctrine of the Trinity we feel the heartbeat of God's entire revelation for the redemption of humanity ... Our salvation, both in this life and in the life to come, is bound up with the doctrine of the Trinity.

These statements clearly emphasise how central the Trinity is to the gospel, and that it defines Christianity.

The salvific works of the triune God are therefore the very content of the gospel. In other words, salvation as it comes to humanity in the gospel, is, in every aspect connected to the doctrine of the Trinity. Each distinct person of the Godhead has a distinct role in accomplishing salvation. Emery (2011:178) explains it in this way: "The Trinitarian gift of divine life is accomplished by the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit—that is to say, by their salvific sending." This "salvific sending" of the Son by the Father, and the Spirit by the Father and the Son is properly called the "divine missions" and is divided into the "visible" mission and the "invisible" mission (Legge, 2017:13). The visible mission of the Son and the Spirit signals the incarnation of Jesus

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<sup>80</sup> Howe (2015:219), while discussing the laws of logic as the principles for sound human reason, formally phrases this point as follows: "[O]rthodox Christianity has historically asserted the truth of the doctrine of the Trinity. No one would want to claim that the doctrine of the Trinity is inferred from or derived from the law of contradiction. Nevertheless, the doctrine is based on this law, because the doctrine, in order to be true, cannot assert essential principles that are contradictory. Assertions that are contradictory cannot be true. The orthodox doctrine of the Trinity does not make assertions that are contradictory. So, although we do not discover it from foundational principles, the doctrine of the Trinity is nevertheless based on the law of contradiction in that it does not make contradictory assertions."

Christ in history and the event of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was given to the church. The invisible mission of the Son and the Spirit entails the sending forth of the Son and the Spirit into the hearts of people (Emery, 2011:178-179). Legge (2017:12), following Aquinas, remarks that “the pattern of the Trinitarian processions is at the very foundations of the world ... and marks all of the Triune God’s actions in it”. This most certainly includes His salvific actions, and hence, the Trinitarian pattern is what makes salvation what it is.

Beeke and Smalley (2019:879) also contribute to this aspect of the Trinity by stating that the gospel is, in its core, Trinitarian. They further explain it as follows:

Every member of the Trinity performs an indispensable function in our salvation. Without God the Father, there would be no one to send the Son and Spirit into the world, to accept the Son’s sacrifice, or to hear the Spirit-wrought prayers of the redeemed. Without the obedience and sufferings of God the Son, no one could escape God’s curse or enjoy God’s blessing in the Spirit. Without the renewing work and indwelling presence of God the Spirit, no one would benefit from Christ’s redemptive work or have any assurance of being reconciled to God as his child. Apart from the divine Spirit, God could not dwell within the hearts of the redeemed to relate them to the Father and the Son. Without the Trinity, the gospel disappears.

This emphasises the distinct roles of each person and how dependent the gospel is on the doctrine of the Trinity.

When CiMI therefore rejects the Trinity, they in effect lose the heart of Christianity, and no longer qualify to be classified as Christian. If the doctrine of the Trinity is central to the gospel, and CiMI dismisses the Trinity, they are dismissing the gospel and are instead preaching a “different gospel” (Galatians 1:6).

#### **5.4.2.4. Definitional remarks and qualifications regarding the Trinity**

Beeke and Smalley (2019:877) summarise the main propositions of the doctrine of the Trinity in the following manner:

There is one God. The Father is God. The Son is God. The Holy Spirit is God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three persons. The Father is the Father of the Son. The Son is the Son of the Father. The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are one God. Though the full systematic theology of the Trinity contains more than these statements, they show us the simple and core truths of this fundamental church doctrine.

These are some of the features that together formulate the doctrine of the Trinity and which are crucial to maintain.

The working definition of the Trinity for this discussion will be the one offered by Geisler (2003:279) which states that “God has a plurality of persons and a unity of essence. God is



three persons in one nature.” In this context, “nature” and “essence” are used synonymously. The formal definitions of an essence and a person in the context of the Trinity are the following, according to Emery (2011:200, 201):

- Essence: “that by which a thing is what it is and is distinguished from other things. The essence of God is his very divinity (which is incomprehensible). The divine essence is one and identical in the three divine persons.”
- Person: “the individual substance of rational nature—that is to say, the individual who subsists through himself and who possesses by nature the faculty of knowing, of willing, and of acting freely by himself ... The three divine persons are distinguished by their personal properties: paternity, filiation, and procession.”

Calvin (2011:123) explains that although some people object to the word “person” as “a term fashioned by the human mind, they cannot shake our conviction that three are spoken of, each of which is entirely God, yet that there is not more than one God”. This claim by Calvin will become clear as the chapter progresses since the personhood of each of the three persons of the divine Trinity will be demonstrated. The following clarifications must also be introduced when defining the Trinity:

- There is only one God (monotheism) whose divine essence is not composed of parts (simplicity) (Geisler, 2003:269).
- God’s oneness is not eternal while His threeness is temporal, and His threeness is not eternal while His oneness is temporal (Muller, 2017:369).
- God’s oneness does not abolish His threeness, and His threeness does not abolish His oneness (Muller, 2017:369).
- The three divine persons are coequal and coeternal with no subordination between them (White, 1998:26).

All of these clarifications serve to show that the doctrine of the Trinity, as God being one essence and three persons, avoids both “a monadic oneness and a tritheistic view of God” (Muller, 2017:369). Kelly (2008:448) also states that the “Trinity of Persons in organic relationship” to one another “within the one being (or substance) of God is constitutive of who God is from all eternity, without ‘amounting to’ more than one substance (or more than one essence of God, or more than one God).” In this sense, as a purely actualised being, there is no potentiality in the eternal triune God that can add to His essence. In this sense it should be noted that in no way is Jesus Christ or the Holy Spirit added to God. Rather, God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and to have faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is to have faith in the one

true God. The three persons are therefore not different functions or modalities. It is rather the case that “their existence concerns the very reality of God” (Emery, 2011:44).

Before moving on, one final factor needs to be addressed. White (1998:66) states that in the different functions of the persons of the Trinity one must not introduce subordinationism. He rightly insists that “*Difference in function does not indicate inferiority of nature.*” It is worth quoting White (1998:67) at length on this point:

The large portion of arguments against the deity of Christ and the Trinity make one major unspoken (and false) assumption: that for either the Son or the Spirit to be truly and fully God, *they have to do the exact same things as the Father in the exact same way.* That is, they assume there cannot possibly be any differentiation in the persons of the Trinity without introducing an automatic inferiority on the part of those who do something ‘different’ than the Father. Any difference in function, they assume, results in an inferiority of nature. To put it simply, they *assume* a unitarian view of God (as opposed to the Trinitarian view), and *assume* that God could never do what He has revealed He has done in the work of redemption.

Many objections are brought to the fore against the Trinity because of a misunderstanding of the different functions of the three persons. Since some of the basic features and definitions surrounding the Trinity have now been laid out, the discussion proceeds to the biblical basis of the Trinity.

### **5.4.3. The biblical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity**

#### **5.4.3.1. Preliminary remarks**

Vos (2012:41) explains that if one sets out to biblically prove the doctrine of the Trinity, one will have to prove, first of all, that there is only “one God”. Second, that there are also “three distinct persons named, respectively, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, called God and considered as God”. And finally, that there is accordingly “unity in trinity and trinity in unity”. The researcher, to some degree, followed these statements, although additional factors will also be addressed and incorporated into this discussion where necessary. This discussion is meant to show, over against CiMI, that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblically sound and that in the end, it is CiMI who fails to reckon with the available biblical data in a consistent manner.<sup>81</sup>

#### **5.4.3.2. There is only one true and simple God**

Sutcliffe (2016:12) correctly notes that the doctrine of the Trinity does not deny that God is one God, “no matter how it may be argued otherwise”. The conviction that there are not many gods, but only one true and living God, “is the consistent testimony of Scripture from Genesis to

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<sup>81</sup> This has, in part, already been established in Chapter 4.

Revelation. It is a thread that runs through the entire Bible” (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:21). In this sense the doctrine of the Trinity maintains a “rigorous form of monotheism” (Morey, 1996:63).

Starting with the Old Testament, in Exodus 20:3 God commands that “no other gods” may be brought before Him since He is the only living and true God. The first commandment therefore flows forth from the truth of monotheism. If God is the only God, then He ought to be worshipped as God. In Deuteronomy 32:39 God also says that “there is no God besides me”, indicating that He is the only true God. Accordingly, one reads in Jeremiah 10:10 that “the Lord is the true God” and that He is “everlasting”. However, the prophet Isaiah provides the most “explicit testimony to God’s utter uniqueness and to the resultant truth of absolute monotheism” (White, 1998:36). Isaiah 44:6-8 is worth quoting in full:

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, And his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: “I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; Besides Me *there is* no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, Since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, Let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; Have I not told you from that time, and declared *it*? You *are* My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed *there is* no other Rock; I know not *one*.”

The Old Testament consequently states there is only one, true, living and eternal God.

The New Testament consistently follows the teaching that God is the only one, true, living and eternal God. Paul, for example, writes in 1 Corinthians 8:4-6 that idols are “nothing in the world” and that there “is no other God but one”. In other words, idols do not have real existence, only the one true God really exists. In 1 Timothy 2:5 the apostle Paul also states that there is “one God”. In Romans 16:26 there is also a brief reference to God as the “everlasting” God. Acts 14:15 serves as a very clear reference to God being unique and in a class of His own. Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra and after Paul had performed a miracle, the gentile crowd started to worship Paul and Barnabas. Their response is very telling: “Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them.” One final example is Galatians 4:8, which is a commentary on the nature of idols. Paul writes to the churches in Galatia that before they knew God, they “served those which by nature are not gods”. These words are of great importance, indicating that over against the false gods, idolatrously fashioned, the one true and living God is by nature God. Morey (1996:67) comments on the use of the word ‘nature’ and explains that it “means the essential nature of things in and of themselves. It refers to what things are in their nature as opposed to mere appearance.” God therefore is by His very nature and essence God.

Kelly (1977:83) notes that from the earliest stages of the Christian church, monotheism “loomed large in the minds of the earliest fathers ... they were fully conscious that it marked the dividing line between the Church and paganism.” Emery (2011:50), however, reminds one that it is not “enough to affirm the existence of one God. It is also necessary to consider the *unity* of God, and to see how God is one.” Accordingly, alongside monotheism, indicating God’s numerical oneness, also stands the doctrine of God’s simplicity, indicating God’s qualitative oneness (Bavinck, 2004:136). Geisler (2003:39) notes that the simplicity of God means that God’s divine nature is “without parts”, which by implication means that God is “not capable of being divided”. Vos (2012:44) states that the “divine substance is not divided among the three persons as if each possesses one-third”. In this sense God does not only have unity, but He is “absolute unity and simplicity, without composition or division” (Bavinck, 2004:300).

The *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4 testifies to God’s absolute unity. This passage reads as follows: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord *is* one!” It is noteworthy that in Mark 12:29 Jesus repeats the *shema* from Deuteronomy 6, stating again that the Lord is “one”. In this sense God is not multiple in His being but an absolute unity of essence. The doctrine of simplicity is also derived from John 4:24, stating that “God is spirit”. This means that God is immaterial and does not have any material parts like a body with flesh and bones. It is also the case that verses like Exodus 3:14,<sup>82</sup> Colossians 1:16-17<sup>83</sup> and Acts 17:25,<sup>84</sup> which establishes God’s aseity or self-existence is used to illustrate God’s simplicity, since, in the words of Geisler (2003:41), God “neither came into existence nor will go out of existence. He simply is existence.” Beeke and Smalley (2019:627-628) also helpfully explain that “beings essentially composed of parts derive those parts from something outside of themselves and must be assembled by another being. However, God exists of and in himself.”

To summarise, the Trinity does not proclaim a plurality of gods or that God can somehow be divided into more parts. The Trinity remains consistent with the biblical teaching of God’s numerical unity as God, and God’s qualitative unity as a simple, uncomposed being. To accuse Trinitarians of denying that there is one God “as if that is all that is needed to refute the doctrine”, falls short of successfully critiquing the doctrine of the Trinity (Sutcliffe, 2016:21). Also, to state that the Trinity somehow divides the essence of God into three parts likewise fails to level a fair critique against the Trinity. White (1998:45) explains that although the doctrine of the

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<sup>82</sup> “And God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

<sup>83</sup> “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

<sup>84</sup> “Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”

Trinity does not compromise on monotheism, “it does, however, fulfill it, bring it to full realization, and reveal to us how this one true and eternal God exists as three coequal and coeternal persons”. In this sense one can speak of “Trinitarian monotheism” (Emery, 2011:50). This then leads the discussion to the plurality of divine persons.

#### **5.4.3.3. There is a plurality of divine persons**

Van Genderen and Velema (2008:143) explain that “the one name of God unfolds in the Word of God in three names: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The church confesses that God has revealed himself in his Word in such a way that these three distinct persons are the one, true, and eternal God.” The revelation of three divine persons is not as clear in the Old Testament as it is in the New. However, Bavinck (2004:256) does note: “The seeds that developed into the full flower of New Testament trinitarian revelation are already planted in the Old Testament.” This means that there are some traces of a plurality of divine persons visible in the revelation of the Old Testament.

Kelly (2008:456), although in a lengthy fashion, captures the continuity of the Old and New Testaments regarding the Trinity:

Since the Christian Church is in direct continuity with Israel in the one Covenant of Grace, the Scriptures of the New Testament are to be seen as fulfilling those of the Old Testament, not contradicting them, nor inconsistent with them, for the One God is not divided in His Being nor in His revelation. Therefore, from the vantage point of the coming of Christ in the flesh and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, we can look back and see that the Old Testament teachings on the being and activity of God are consistent with who God shows Himself to be in the New Testament, although in the ongoing development of revelation, more light is shone than previously ‘in the fullness of the times ...’ And from that perspective, the Fathers and later teachers of the Church have found intimations of the Trinity in the Old Testament, even where it was not yet clearly revealed.

According to Brown (1988:151), the Trinity is especially crucial when it comes to the plurality of divine persons since it is “required to come to terms with the distinction of Persons in Scripture”. In other words, if one does not uphold the Trinity, one will have to find a different way of reconciling the divine persons in Scripture. A couple of examples can be discussed in this regard.

#### **a) Old Testament examples of a plurality of divine persons**

In Genesis 1:26-27 one reads the account of how God created man. This passage reads as follows:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

One can see in this verse that God is referring to Himself in the plural "Us" and "Our". Moreover, the verb 'to make' is in the singular. Mathews (1996:162-163) explains that an "intra-Trinitarian dialogue" between the three persons was the way the early Church Fathers and the Reformers read this verse. He further states: "Although the Christian Trinity cannot be derived solely from the use of the plural, a plurality within the unity of the Godhead may be derived from the passage. This was the essential line of argument among the Reformers, who expanded this thought by appealing to the New Testament for corroboration." This established the possibility of interpreting this verse in a Trinitarian manner, but it also established the fact that this verse is not enough to arrive at the doctrine of the Trinity and that one needs the New Testament to do that (Emery, 2011:45).

Another example that serves to show, in the words of Kelly (2008:458), a "mysterious diversity within the one being of God", is Psalm 110:1 where one reads: "The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" In this verse the Lord addresses the Lord Himself. Psalm 45:6-7 also communicates this 'diversity' in God. One reads there that "Your throne, O God, *is* forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness *is* the scepter of Your kingdom. You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions." Kelly (2008:458) explains this psalm as the envisioning of a wedding where the persons involved are clearly more than human, but rather points to deity, and in verse 7 God is anointed by God. Beeke and Smalley (2019:883) make the following comment with regard to this verse: "the King is God, but also stands in a mediatorial relationship with God". This is clearly a "mysterious diversity" which only becomes clear and is fulfilled in the New Testament.

If one turns to Isaiah 63:15-16, the prophet prays to God, and addresses Him as "our Father". The whole passage reads as follows:

Look down from heaven, And see from Your habitation, holy and glorious. Where *are* Your zeal and Your strength, The yearning of Your heart and Your mercies toward me? Are they restrained? Doubtless You *are* our Father, Though Abraham was ignorant of us, And Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O Lord, *are* our Father; Our Redeemer from Everlasting *is* Your name.

The reason why it is worth quoting this passage in full is because it echoes the beginning of the Lord's prayer by Jesus Himself: "Our Father in heaven." "Father" is accordingly a name that is already in use in the Old Testament.<sup>85</sup>

Proverbs 30:4 also speaks of the "Son". One reads there: "Who has ascended into heaven, or descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What *is* His name, and what *is* His Son's name, If you know?" Morey (1996:175) explains that in this verse God is described as "having a Son". He adds that, although many other non-Christian (Jewish and Unitarians) scholars agree about the presence of God's Son in this verse, it is the identity of the Son over which they disagree. The Son in this context is clearly a person and also, "the Father and the Son are both described as *incomprehensible* in their natures because in Hebrew idiom, to know the name of someone is to know their nature" (Morey, 1996:175). The question at the end of the verse is therefore a rhetorical question. Keil and Delitzsch (1996:448) comment on this verse saying, "But he would not have ventured this question if he did not suppose that God was not a *monas* [unity] who was without manifoldness in Himself." Another passage that speaks about the Son of the Father is Psalm 2:7 where the Father said to the Son: "You are My Son, Today I have begotten You." This specific reference is later quoted in Acts 13:33<sup>86</sup> in the context of the resurrection of Jesus, which means that these words refer to God raising Jesus from the dead, which in turn confirms Jesus to be the only-begotten Son of the Father (Boice, 2005:26).

Morey (1996:135) explains that one of the most interesting theophanies in the Old Testament is "the appearance of a 'Man' who is called ... 'The Angel of the Lord.'" He adds that this "Man" was a manifestation of God. One can consider Judges 2:1-5,<sup>87</sup> for example. While all the prophets throughout the Old Testament always started their message with the phrase "Thus said the Lord", the messenger of God in this instance immediately starts talking and says in verse 1: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers." There is no introduction of any kind and He talks in the first-person plural. Moreover, when He

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<sup>85</sup> Muller (2003:246) warns one that there is a distinction between Scripture calling God "Father" in an essential manner, which is then applied to the Godhead, and Scripture calling God "Father", referring to the first person of the Trinity. This, however, is an issue which can be addressed on a case by case basis and need not be laboured here.

<sup>86</sup> "God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: '*You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.*'"

<sup>87</sup> "Then the Angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, "I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars." But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, "I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be *thorns* in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'" So it was, when the Angel of the Lord spoke these words to all the children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voices and wept. Then they called the name of that place Bochim; and they sacrificed there to the Lord. And when Joshua had dismissed the people, the children of Israel went each to his own inheritance to possess the land."

speaks, He echoes Exodus 20:2: “I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” In this sense Bavinck (2004:262) explains that “the angel of the Lord” surpasses the status of a normally created angel, which is why Morey (1996:156) concludes that “the identification of the Messenger as anything less than Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel, [is] impossible”.

Another example is also in the book of Judges where the angel of the Lord appeared to a woman who was barren. In Judges 13:3ff, the angel told the woman that she would conceive a son. In this instance the angel of the Lord had a humanlike appearance and so the woman’s husband, Manoah, asked the angel to tell him his name. The angel of the Lord responds in verse 18 saying: “Why do you ask My name, seeing it *is* wonderful?” Rhodes (1992:82) unpacks this verse explaining that “the Hebrew word for ‘wonderful’ means ‘surpassing,’ ‘ineffable,’ or ‘beyond human capacity to understand’”. He further says that this name is exactly the same name used in the prophet Isaiah’s prophecy regarding the incarnation of Jesus. In Isaiah 9:6 one reads the following: “For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Furthermore, after the angel of the Lord left Manoah, one reads his words in Judges 13:22: “And Manoah said to his wife, ‘We shall surely die, because we have seen God!’” The only way to reasonably explain this phenomenon in this passage is to assert that God is multi-personal by His very nature (Morey, 1996:164).

There are many other occasions where the Angel of the Lord appeared to people in the Old Testament. Vos (2012:40) summarises some of these other occasions by adding reasons for a divine interpretation of the Angel of the Lord in the individual occasions:

1. “The Angel speaks with God’s authority (Gen 16:13).<sup>88</sup>
2. He is addressed as God (Gen. 16:13).
3. He does divine works (Exod. 23:20).<sup>89</sup>
4. He has divine attributes (Gen. 16:8).<sup>90</sup>
5. He accepts divine honor (Josh. 5:14).<sup>91</sup>
6. He is distinguished from a created angel, Exodus 33, where the Angel of the Presence is distinguished from an ordinary angel (Isa 63:9;<sup>92</sup> Deut. 4:37<sup>93</sup>).

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<sup>88</sup> “Then she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, You-Are-the-God-Who-Sees; for she said, ‘Have I also here seen Him who sees me?’”

<sup>89</sup> “Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared.”

<sup>90</sup> “And He said, ‘Hagar, Sarai’s maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?’ She said, ‘I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress Sarai.’”

<sup>91</sup> “So He said, ‘No, but as Commander of the army of the Lord I have now come.’ And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, ‘What does my Lord say to His servant?’”



7. His name alternates with the name Elohim (Zech. 12:8).<sup>94</sup>

If one turns to the prophecy of Isaiah, which was introduced previously, it is also clearly a reference to the Messiah, who is given the status of God. Oswalt (1986:244-245) for example notes with regard to the Messiah figure in Isaiah 9:6, “the divine ruler will not merely be God, but although partaking of the divine attributes, will have the most human of all arrivals upon the earth, namely, birth. The expected perfect king will be human and divine.” This observation already paves the way for the reclamation of a conciliar Christology. But for now, it is enough to note that whoever the Messiah is, He is fully God. Micah 5:2 is yet another prophecy which reads as follows: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.” The word used here for “everlasting” is exactly the same Hebrew word that is used in Habakkuk 1:12 where the quality of eternity is ascribed to God by way of a rhetorical question: “Are You not from everlasting, O Lord my God, my Holy One?” This means that the “Ruler” who would be born in Bethlehem, is eternal, and has therefore always existed, which is an attribute which only belongs to God.

The Old Testament also has multiple references to the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 63:10-11, for example, mentions that Israel “grieved” the “Holy Spirit”. As he comments on this verse, Young (1972:482-483) observes:

The fact that Israel grieved the Spirit shows that the Spirit is a Person; how can one grieve an impersonal spirit? Here the Spirit is set forth as the object of the people’s action. Furthermore, as the Spirit is joined with the Lord here, so in the previous verse the angel was joined with Him (cf. Ps. 78:17,<sup>95</sup> 40<sup>96</sup>). Here, then, the Spirit of holiness is distinguished from the Lord in its personal existence, just as the angel is in the previous verse. The Spirit is here distinguished as a Person by the fact that He can be grieved and so feel grief. Upon the basis of this passage Paul utters his remarkable statement: “Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God” (Eph. 4:30).<sup>97</sup>

Geisler (2003:289) lists the preceding verses in Isaiah 63, leading up to verse 10, as an example where all three the persons are speaking at once. He quotes verse 7-10 as follows, indicating in brackets where the reference is to one of the three persons:

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<sup>92</sup> “In all their affliction He was afflicted, And the Angel of His Presence saved them; In His love and in His pity He redeemed them; And He bore them and carried them All the days of old.”

<sup>93</sup> “And because He loved your fathers, therefore He chose their descendants after them; and He brought you out of Egypt with His Presence, with His mighty power.”

<sup>94</sup> “In that day the Lord will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, and the house of David *shall be* like God, like the Angel of the Lord before them.”

<sup>95</sup> “But they sinned even more against Him By rebelling against the Most High in the wilderness.”

<sup>96</sup> “How often they provoked Him in the wilderness, *And* grieved Him in the desert!”

<sup>97</sup> “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.”

I will tell of the kindnesses of the Lord, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the Lord [*Father*] has done for us ... and so he became their Savior. In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence [*Son*] saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them ... Yet they rebelled and grieved his *Holy Spirit*.

In 2 Samuel 23:2 one reads David's words: "The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, And His word was on my tongue." This refers to the inspirational work of the Holy Spirit. Isaiah 48:16 clearly makes a distinction between God and His Spirit: "And now the Lord God and His Spirit Have sent Me." One can also turn to Psalm 104:30 where one reads of God sending forth His "Spirit", which results in creation and the renewal of the face of the earth. Boice (2005:843) explains that this verse "reminds us that everything about us is dependent upon the Spirit or life-giving breath of God". This explains why Morey (1996:194) concludes that the Spirit did not just inspire the Old Testament prophets, but is also the "Creator and Providential Ruler of the world".

There is therefore, a certain 'preparation' of the Trinity in the Old Testament. The Old Testament revealed distinct persons who had certain divine characteristics and, in some cases, are called 'God'. Emery (2011:45) explains for example that since God reveals Himself to Israel as a "transcendent mystery" who in a "supereminent way, enjoys all the perfections of life", the revelation of God in the Old Testament "brings a 'depth' that enables Christians of the New Testament to recognize that the Son and the Holy Spirit are associated with the Father at the very heart of the divine life".

### **b) The New Testament revelation of the three divine persons**

Arriving at the New Testament, the revelation of the three persons of the Trinity is clearly observable. Bavinck (2004:270) argues that the New Testament is entirely Trinitarian. While the Old Testament implies the doctrine of the Trinity, the New Testament explicitly teaches the doctrine of the Trinity.

If one were to take any of the accounts in the synoptic gospels of Jesus's baptism, the three persons of the Trinity are clearly revealed. The account in Luke, for example, states that when Jesus Christ was baptised, the Holy Spirit "descended in bodily form like a dove upon Him, and a voice came from heaven which said, 'You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased'" (Luke 3:21-22). Here you have the Son being baptised, the Holy Spirit descending from heaven in bodily form and the voice of the Father confirming the status of the Son. Turretin (1992:267) explains that in this instance "One is heard, but is neither seen nor descends. Another is not heard, but descends in a visible form. Another descends to and ascends from the river, baptized in the sight of all." He further adds that the word of the Father to the Son "cannot be said of a created person, but only of a divine person". In the same way the Spirit cannot merely

“designate some will or property of God because the properties of God are never in Scripture said to descend from heaven on anyone”. Accordingly, if one seeks to be consistent with the passages of Jesus’s baptism, one must maintain that there are three distinct persons, and hence there “is no confusing of the persons at the baptism of the Lord Jesus” (White, 1998:155).

At the end of the Gospel of Matthew, when giving the Great Commission to His disciples, Jesus Christ states: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19). As already pointed out in Chapter 4, the fact that “name” is singular, even if three names are given, “express unity of Being ... The Father is God the Father. Just as he is a divine person, so are the Son and the Holy Spirit divine persons” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:145). Beeke and Smalley (2019:884) remark that the three persons are listed in such a way as to indicate “equal honor to each”. Furthermore, in an attempt to make a point, they state: “Imagine the blasphemy of baptizing someone ‘in the name of God, of a man, and of an angel!’ Since baptism is the initiatory rite of Christian discipleship, this Trinitarian formula places the entire Christian life under the singular lordship of these three persons.” Consequently, three distinct persons are again introduced in this passage without room to confuse them with one another in any sense.

One can also consider the so-called apostolic benedictions in, for example, 2 Corinthians 13:14. Paul ends his letter to the Corinthians with these words: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit *be* with you all. Amen”, which immediately introduces the three persons of the Trinity once again. In this regard, Turretin (1992:269) mentions that “if the Lord who confers grace, and God who bestows love are persons, why should not also the Holy Spirit (who is classified with them) be of the same order and dignity?” In the same manner, the apostle Peter begins his letter with a Trinitarian benediction: “To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” This establishes that there are indeed three equal, but yet distinct, persons introduced in the New Testament.

Without discussing the following passages, it is worth quoting some of them here, since the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are explicitly and distinctly mentioned:

- Galatians 4:4-5: “But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we

might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!'"

- Titus 3:4-6: "But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior."
- 1 John 4:13-14: "By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world."

One can conclude that, in the words of Beeke and Smalley (2019:885), "the apostles gave us a Trinitarian pattern to follow in the New Testament. We neglect it to the impoverishment of the church. The more biblical the church becomes, the more the Trinity will become the explicit and implicit center of its worship, teaching, and witness."

Both the Old and New Testaments reveal a plurality of divine persons. Although it is still not that clear in the Old Testament, the New Testament provides one with sufficient data to conclude a plurality of divine persons. At this point the case for the doctrine of the Trinity must also establish that the three persons are indeed persons and fully God. Geisler (2003:279) states, "Scriptures affirm that there are three distinct persons who are God. All are called God, and all have the essential characteristics of a person." Following this observation, the biblical foundation for this must now be addressed.

#### **5.4.3.4. God the Father of Jesus and His personhood**

There are many passages speaking of God as being a Father, and more specifically as "God the Father". When John speaks of the Son on whom the Father has set His seal, he refers to the Father as "God the Father" (John 6:27). In the same manner, the apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome saying, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:7). He also uses the phrase "God the Father" in Galatians 1:1. In John 17:3 Jesus Christ states that eternal life is to know the Father who is "the only true God".<sup>98</sup> He adds

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<sup>98</sup> Muller (2003:249) explains that in instances like this, the "statements that the Father is the one true God stand in oppositions not to the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, but to the claims of the false gods of the Gentiles". This is furthermore not to mean that three gods are one God, but that each of the three persons participates fully in the same divine essence and is therefore only one God. In this regard Bavinck (2004:273) also states: "It is also noteworthy that Scripture nowhere says that the *Father alone* is the true God but rather that the Father is the only true God, a fact that is fully recognized in the church's doctrine of the Trinity. Furthermore, it is not that all these verses posit an antithesis between the Father on the one hand and the Son and the Spirit on the other, but instead between the Father as the one true God and the gods of the Gentiles."

however, that eternal life is also to know Him, “Jesus Christ whom [the Father] have sent”. This added phrase also paves the way for the deity of the Son.

Besides explicit references to the Father as “God”, He is also represented in such a way as to possess certain divine attributes, performing divine acts, and given divine titles. In Matthew 5:48 Jesus alludes to the fact that the Father is “perfect”. The Father is described as “heavenly” (Matthew 6:14). The apostle Paul worships the Father by bowing his knees “to the Father” and giving Him eternal glory (Ephesians 3:14; Philippians 4:20). Jesus thanks the Father as “Lord of heaven and earth” in Matthew 11:25; therefore, as “Lord of heaven and earth”, the Father is sovereign. The Father is also the Creator of heaven and earth, since all things are for Him and by Him “*are* all things” (Hebrews 2:10). After creation He still upholds all things “through the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:1-3) and in His providence provides for His creation to the extent that a sparrow will not fall to the ground “apart from [the] Father’s will” (Matthew 10:29). The Father is also the one who elects and therefore saves according to “the council of His will” (Ephesians 1:3-11).

Morey (1996:271) discusses 1 John 1:3, which reads as follows: “That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.” He maintains that since humans can have fellowship with the Father, it demonstrates His divinity. He explains it as follows:

The Apostle John clearly assumed that *all* believers in *all* places at *all* times in *all* generations under *all* circumstances can fellowship with the Father who is in heaven. This is possible only if the Father is eternal, immortal, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, etc. In other words, the Father *must* be God in order for fellowship with Him to be possible.

For the most part the deity of the Father is not a matter of dispute. Muller (2003:246) concludes that the reason for this is the “consistent biblical identification of God as Father”. It is in this sense proper to speak of the first person of the Trinity as “God the Father”. The person of the Father therefore has the full divine essence. In other words, He is fully God.<sup>99</sup>

When it comes to the personhood of the Father, Morey (1996:263) lists certain characteristics of the Father that make Him a person. According to Matthew 6:8, for example, the Father “knows”.

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<sup>99</sup> Beeke and Smalley (2019:885-886) expand on the deity of the Father as follows: “God’s Word gives explicit testimony to the deity of each divine person in the Trinity. The *Father* is the ‘one God’, the Creator ‘of whom are all things’ (1 Cor. 8:6). His divine attributes shine in the titles ‘holy Father’ (John 17:11), ‘righteous Father’ (17:25), ‘the Father of glory’ (Eph. 1:17), ‘the Father of mercies’ (2 Cor. 1:3), ‘the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change’ (James 1:17 ESV), and the ‘Father’ who is ‘the Lord Almighty’ (2 Cor. 6:18). He knows what his children need before they ask him and sees what they do in secret so that he can reward their good works (Matt. 6:6, 8).”

In Mark 9:7,<sup>100</sup> at the mount of transfiguration, the Father speaks with a voice from heaven as He did at the baptism of Jesus as well. He therefore communicates. According to Matthew 7:21, it is also clear that the Father has a “will”. Matthew 11:25<sup>101</sup> also states that the Father hides as well as reveals things. It is further implied in John 7:16-17<sup>102</sup> that the Father teaches. Passages like these reveal that the Father is indeed a person with an intellect and a will (Geisler, 2003:287). Morey (1996:264) visits 1 John 1:3 again and explains that this passage does not just show a clear distinction between the persons of the Father and the Son, but also establishes the personhood of the Father in the sense that “fellowship” only takes place when it is with a “someone” and not a “something”, one could say.

Geisler (2003:290) argues that the Father’s function is presented in such a way as to indicate that He is “the Source, Sender, and Planner of salvation”. In this sense the Father is generally placed first when there is a reference to the Trinity. This is not because the Father is in any way of “greater dignity” than the persons of the Son or the Spirit, but only because, according to His paternity, He is “not himself begotten or sent by any” (Muller, 2003:252-253). That is to say that just because the persons of the Trinity have different functions, they are still co-eternal, and co-equal. Morey (1996:257) stipulates that the person of the Father is the eternal Father of the eternal Son. He adds that “He was never anything less than the Father. Thus, God the Father functions as a Father because He *is* the Father. If every human being ceased to exist, He would still be the Father because He is the eternal Father of the eternal Son.” One could therefore say that “Fatherhood” is not “an added property” to the person of the Father. Rather, just like He, as the first person of the Trinity, is eternally God, He is also eternally Father (Muller, 2003:253).

Following this line of reasoning, Bavinck (2004:272) notes that the name “Father” does not first apply to “God’s relation to Israel and to believers; on the contrary, in its original sense it applies to the Father’s relation to the Son”. Emery (2011:23) adds that in this relationship, the Father is therefore “more fundamentally Father” in His unique relationship with the Son. He adds: “It is through his paternity with respect to Jesus that the Father exercises paternity in favor of humankind and other creatures.” This point is worth making, especially since CiMI emphasises the sonship of believers to the Father as being equal to the sonship of Jesus Christ to the Father. However, there is a difference since Jesus Christ is Son to the Father eternally and by His very nature as the “beloved son” of God (Mark 1:11). The sonship of believers is dependent

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<sup>100</sup> “And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!’”

<sup>101</sup> “At that time Jesus answered and said, ‘I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from *the* wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes.’”

<sup>102</sup> “Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on My own authority.’”

on the eternal sonship of Jesus Christ and is sonship by way of adoption, as the apostle Paul clarifies in Galatians 4:5<sup>103</sup> and Ephesians 1:5.<sup>104</sup> When Foulkes (1989:56-57) comments on Ephesians 1:5, he states:

Men and women were created for life in fellowship with God, as children with the Father (Gen. 1:26;<sup>105</sup> Acts 17:28<sup>106</sup>). By sin that privilege was forfeited, but by grace, in and through Christ, restoration to sonship is made possible (John 1:12). Adoption is the best way to describe this (cf. Rom. 8:15,<sup>107</sup> 23;<sup>108</sup> Gal. 4:5), because adopted children have their position by grace and not by right, and yet are brought into the family on the same footing as children by birth.

This explains the deep difference between the sonship of Jesus Christ and that of believers. The first is by nature, the second by adoption, which occurs by grace and not by right.

The relationship between the Father and the Son, Jesus Christ, is accordingly so intimate that the apostle John asserts: "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:23). In John 10:30 Jesus states that He and the Father "are one". Furthermore, as the Father had eternally generated the Son in the Trinity *ad intra*, He, "when the fullness of the time had come, sent forth His Son born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5). In other words, the Father, in history, sent the Son into the world as Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ makes exactly this point in John 8:42: "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me."

Emery (2011:30) argues that the Father is eternally the Father of the Son and sends Him into the world, which can be clarified as follows:

Thus, it is *in Jesus that we discover what the name 'Father' means*. The paternity of the Father is not illuminated first by studies in psychology or religious sociology ... It is in hearing and contemplating Jesus that the Church discovers who God the Father is. The whole person and action of Jesus are characterized by his relationship to his Father—a relationship available to human beings who welcome him. This teaching acquires a profound echo in the patristic age, when

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<sup>103</sup> "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons."

<sup>104</sup> "... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

<sup>105</sup> "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'"

<sup>106</sup> "... for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'"

<sup>107</sup> "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"

<sup>108</sup> "Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body."

the Church is confronted with heterodox doctrines, according to which the Son is a being inferior to the Father, unlike the Father, a creature. The Church then recalls that the unity of the Father and Son is not only “moral,” but concerns their being. The Father and Son are inseparable in their salvific act and in their very being.

This observation leads one to the person of the Son, especially since CiMI does not only reject the Trinity, but also the deity of Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of the Father.

#### **5.4.3.5. God the Son as the Lord Jesus Christ and His personhood**

CiMI (2018g) states that “Jesus is not God” and also insists that any attempt to prove that Jesus Christ is God, will “distort the Scriptures and form unmotivated linguistic arguments”. If anything, Chapter 4 already indicated that CiMI is guilty of distorting the Scriptures and forming “unmotivated linguistic arguments”. Accordingly, the issue at hand deserves extensive attention to demonstrate the deity and personhood of the Son to face up to CiMI’s rejection thereof. Rhodes (2001:26) observes that a denial of the deity of Jesus Christ is a common trait of cults in a theological sense. He adds, “Cultists have come up with many strange ideas about Jesus.” Hoekema (1963:382) labels this feature of cults as a “devaluation of Christ”. According to him, this should not be surprising, since any group that assumes a central role in the salvation of people will end up minimising Christ as the only Mediator.<sup>109</sup> This is precisely what one has seen so far in the theology and doctrine of CiMI.

It must inevitably be maintained that “any view of Jesus not found in Scripture must be condemned as ‘another Jesus’” (Morey, 1996:282-283). Turretin (1992:282) remarks that “the divine majesty and glory of the Son of God, our Redeemer”, must be established against heretics who oppose it. Muller (2003:275) also adds that orthodox theologians have always offered arguments from Scripture to demonstrate the “unique ... personhood of the divine Son and his eternal generation from the Father” against ancient and recent heresies. This is precisely what this discussion provides – arguments from Scripture to demonstrate the deity and personhood of God the Son as the Lord Jesus Christ. It will also become clear that these arguments do not distort the Scriptures but are rather consistent with it.

##### **a) The divine titles and names attributed to the Son**

Concerning the names attributed to the Son, Vos (2014:5) explains that in God’s revelation, names are not just a “meaningless sound”. Instead, names are deemed expressions of reality. In this sense “the names of the Mediator have something to tell us about His significance”. Kelly (2014:72) also insists that if “we receive [the] Old and New Testaments as divine revelations,

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<sup>109</sup> Jesus Christ as Mediator will be addressed in section 5.5.



then it is clear that God is in charge of the naming concerning the person of his incarnate Son". Following these observations, it will be helpful to briefly consider some of the names and titles given to Jesus Christ. This is a relevant investigation with regard to CiMI, especially concerning the title of "Christ", which is also briefly addressed in the following paragraphs. CiMI maintains that the title of "Christ" can be applied to every member who believes their teachings and is consequently born from above because of it. Members of CiMI in effect believe that they become Christs.<sup>110</sup>

## Lord

Need (2008:2) explains that the title of "Lord" comes from the Hebrew word *adonai* (אֲדֹנָי) and the Greek word *kyrios* (κύριος). According to Van Genderen and Velema (2008:445), this title "indicates power, sovereignty, and authority". This title is especially attributed to Jesus Christ in His exaltation in verses such as Philippians 2:11: "... *that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*". This is a consistent trend in the teachings of the apostles, especially the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians 4:5 Paul very clearly states the content of his preaching: "For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." He also states that a true and sincere confession of Jesus as Lord cannot happen "except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Paul places a distinction on the Lordship of Jesus to refer to creation since it is through the "Lord Jesus Christ" that all things exist and "through whom we *live*" (1 Corinthians 8:6). One could therefore say that for Paul, Jesus has a role in "God's creative activity and purposes" with a "cosmic significance as Lord" (Need, 2008:2). Although Jesus was not often called "Lord" before His resurrection, He does refer to Himself as Lord in Mark 2:28<sup>111</sup> and Matthew 7:21-22.<sup>112</sup> In John 20:28 the title "Lord" is aptly used alongside the name "God".

There is especially one instance where Jesus takes the title of 'Lord' from Psalm 110:1 and applies it to Himself, indicating His eternal Sonship to the Father and alluding to His divine Lordship. In Matthew 22:41-46 Jesus asks the Pharisees a question regarding the identity of the Messiah: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?" (verse 42). They respond by saying that He is "the Son of David". The rest of the discussion goes as follows:

He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him '*Lord*,' saying: '*The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"*'? If David then calls Him '*Lord*,'

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<sup>110</sup> Kotze (2017b) for example states: "You cannot be a Son of God if you are not Christ, you cannot be a Christ if you are not a Son of God." This indicates, as unpacked in Chapter 2, that members of CiMI believe that they become Christs when they are reborn.

<sup>111</sup> "Therefore the Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

<sup>112</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'"

how is He his Son?” And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.

Jesus is here directly quoting Psalm 110:1. Kelly (2014:76) explains that “the Psalm contained an ontological reference to deity—it is God himself who exercises messianic lordship, not normally in view in the messianic expectations during the time of Christ. Yet Christ appropriates this divine reference to himself, in this roundabout way with the religious leaders of Israel.”

Need (2008:3) observes that although there are different meanings to “Lord” it is at least clear that when “Lord” was attributed to Jesus, it was to “indicate Jesus’ particularly close relation to God and was much more than simply a title of respect”. The way in which the title of ‘Lord’ is applied to Jesus in the New Testament cannot be used in the same sense for someone who is only a man. Vos (2014:15) explains that it is impossible for a man to “exercise that sovereignty and to possess that unlimited right of possession over soul and body that is attributed to Christ as our Lord”. He continues to say that the title ‘Lord’, as it attributed to Jesus, refers to rights which solely belong to God and cannot be given to someone else, “unless this other is Himself God”.

## Jesus

Van Genderen and Velema (2008:441) explain that the name *Iēsous* (Ἰησοῦς) is the Greek form of the Hebrew name *Jehoshua* (יהושע), translated as ‘Joshua’ in English. The name ‘Joshua’ means “the Lord saves”. In this sense in the name ‘Jesus’, as it is translated into English, “we learn that the Lord redeems” (Need, 2008:3; Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:441). In Matthew 1:21 the angel appears to Joseph and tells him that Mary will “bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins”. In John 4:42 Jesus is also described as “the savior of the world”. This indicates that Jesus is the One who will accomplish salvation.

Kelly (2014:78-79) appositely explains it as follows:

‘Jesus’ refers to his divine mission of salvation that only God could accomplish. Yet it is a historical name, based on that of Joshua, who led God’s people into the Promised Land. Hence, he is one of us, a true human person, yet on mission from God, and conceived by God in the womb of the Virgin. The meaning of this human name of the Messiah has not been contested by scholars.

This confirms the theological significance of the name ‘Jesus’ and how it is intimately connected to His visible mission as Saviour.

Although ‘Lord’ was a more important name than ‘Saviour’, it is clear that “early Christians used both” (Need, 2008:4). There was therefore a certain sense in which the people acknowledged

Jesus to be the 'Saviour'. Need (2008:4) explains that His disciples "saw him as playing a particular part in God's purpose and as revealing to them what God was like". Vos (2014:8) makes even a stronger claim, insisting that the name 'Jesus' signifying Him as 'saviour' in the New Testament "revealed more clearly that righteousness and salvation would be planned and wrought by God Himself so that the Second Person of the Triune Being would appear in the flesh as Surety. *For us*, then, there lies in such expressions nothing less in fact than the deity of the Mediator."

## Christ

Need (2008:7) states that *Christos* (*Χριστος*) or, the Hebrew *Mashiach* (מָשִׁיחַ), is one of the best-known titles given to Jesus. 'Christ' is therefore the Greek version of the Hebrew 'Messiah', which means 'the anointed one'. Kelly (2014:79) explains that in the Old Testament there was a certain "royal anointing" for kings, priests and prophets. However, the concept of a Messiah, in the ancient Jewish context, was a dim reference with no clear explanation of who it is or what the circumstances are in which he will appear. One thing that the Old Testament does point out is that "an 'anointed one' had a special relationship with God and a special role in God's purpose in creation and history. This obviously put the 'messiah' very close to God in his purposes."

Vos (2014:10) links the title of 'Christ' to "the designation of an office". This is in line with the meaning of anointing, since one is anointed into a specific office and through the anointing given the necessary gifts to perform the task that the office demands. As alluded to above, priests, kings and prophets were anointed in the Old Testament. David was anointed as king over Israel in 1 Samuel 16:13 where one reads that Samuel "anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward". In Psalm 45:7<sup>113</sup> one also reads about the anointing of an unnamed king. Leviticus 4:3<sup>114</sup> implies that priests were anointed and in 1 Kings 19:16<sup>115</sup> one reads that Elisha was anointed as a prophet. In this sense the offices of king, priest and prophet are in a unique way fulfilled in the ministry and person of Jesus Christ. All three of these offices were mediatorial between God and His people in some sense. Vos (2014:11) accordingly mentions that to correctly understand the anointings of the Old Testament one must understand that it was "a type that pointed forward to the anointing of the Mediator".

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<sup>113</sup> "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

<sup>114</sup> "if the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, then let him offer to the Lord for his sin which he has sinned a young bull without blemish as a sin offering."

<sup>115</sup> "Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place."

Jesus as the Christ therefore refers to Him as Mediator in a kingly, priestly and prophetic manner. This theme will however be investigated in more depth when reclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ. Suffice to mention for now that the title 'Christ', although it became a personal name of Jesus, never lost its messianic significance. Wright (1996:486) argues that,

Many have tried to argue that Paul, writing within twenty or so years of Jesus' crucifixion, already used the word *Christos* as a proper name, with its titular significance ('Messiah') being swallowed up by other theological meanings. I believe this to be mistaken. But, even if it were true, the only explanation for it would be that the early Christian movement had been so definite in its application of the *title* to Jesus, surprising as this must have been, that even those who did not agree with the ascription were forced to continue using the word even though, on this hypothesis, it must have been an embarrassment to them. I think, in point of fact, that the mental gymnastics required to sustain this train of thought are themselves an indication that the truth is simpler, and that Paul, in company with all other very early Christians actually known to us (as opposed to those invented by ingenious scholars), believed that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah, and held that belief as a central identifying mark.

The title of 'Christ' therefore made Jesus Christ utterly unique as the Messiah, and as Messiah identified Him as the Mediator between God and man.

### **Son of God**

Rhodes (1992:31) indicates that "ancient Semitics and Orientals used the phrase 'Son of ...' to indicate likeness or sameness of nature and equality of being". This explains why there are so many misunderstandings surrounding this title of Jesus in our modern era. While "some have taken this term to mean that Christ came into existence at a point in time and that he is in some way inferior to the Father", others believe that since "Christ is the Son of God, he cannot possibly be God in the same sense as the Father".

However, as alluded to above, the claim to be the 'Son of God' is a way of claiming deity, i.e., to claim equality in terms of being with God. In Luke 22:70, for example, the chief priests and scribes asked Jesus whether He is the Son of God. When Jesus answered, "You rightly say that I am", they responded by suggesting that they did not need any more proof to crucify Him. This indicates that the claim by Jesus to be the "Son of God" is much more than merely being a believer, but rather to claim equality with God, which in the eyes of the Jews was blasphemy and punishable by death. The same can be observed in John 19:7. In this verse the Jews state

the following: “We have a law,<sup>116</sup> and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God.”

Need (2008:6) explains that the use of the title of ‘Son of God’ had a unique use when it was applied to Jesus. In some sense, it indicated His filial relationship with the Father and “the belief that something of the very nature of God had been revealed in him.” This explains why in John 14:8 when Phillip asked Jesus to show them the Father, Jesus responded as follows: “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?” (John 14:9-10). This of course, takes one back to the eternal relationship between the Son and the Father. In this regard Emery (2011:31) states, “The revelation of the Son and the revelation of the Father are simultaneous and reciprocal: they are included within each other.”

The name ‘Son of God’, as attributed to Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity, therefore in its “deepest significance indicates an eternal-essential constitutive relationship between Father and Son—thus within the Triune Being—that exists entirely apart from the work of the Mediator and does not first flow from it” (Vos, 2014:15). The title of Son is therefore first and foremost an “immutable, immanent law of the Divine Being itself that must exist in three hypostases [persons]” (Vos, 2014:15). The fact that Jesus is the Son of God, is furthermore the basis for His coming as Mediator.

### **Final remarks**

Since the title ‘Son of man’ has already been addressed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.4.1.), it is not repeated here. It is clear from this discussion that already in some of the titles that were given to Jesus and those claimed by Him, lie the status of deity. Bavinck (2006:362-363) explains that the names and titles of Jesus already suggest “incomparable dignity”. Of course, His names are not sufficient to conclusively demonstrate Jesus Christ’s deity. It does, however, serve as a good place to start when investigating the person of Jesus Christ, since it has a place in the bigger picture of Jesus’s identity. The names of Jesus might still be dismissed, but there are certain explicit references to Jesus as ‘God’, which are clear, and in many ways speak for themselves.

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<sup>116</sup> This is a reference to Leviticus 24:16: “And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death.”

## **b) Explicit references to Jesus as 'God' (*Theos*)**

Emery (2011:31) asserts that although the name 'God' is almost always used to refer to the Father or the Godhead, there is however, a couple of passages where the word 'God' is explicitly applied to the Son. According to Harris (2008:298), when the name 'God' is applied to Jesus it is not merely a reference to His office or function, but to His very nature; in other words, it designates an ontological status. Three of these passages are discussed here.

### **John 20:28**

John 20:28 is the climax of the post-resurrection account of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John. White (1998:68) describes this account as "one of the most touching scenes in all of Scripture". He additionally states that the meaning of this verse is "clear, unambiguous, and plain". There is also no reason to raise any doubts with regard to the translation. Accordingly, this verse reads as follows: "And Thomas answered and said to Him, 'My Lord and my God!'"

However, there is a certain build-up to this specific point where one reaches the confession of Thomas. For some or other reason Thomas was absent when Jesus Christ first appeared to His disciples. This is mentioned in John 20:24-25:

Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe."

One reads in verse 26-27 that eight days later Jesus appeared to the disciples again, and this time Thomas was present. Jesus immediately invited Thomas to put his finger in Jesus's side where His wound was, and also to look at His hands where the nails pierced them, and then Jesus told Thomas: "Do not be unbelieving, but believing." This was the moment when Thomas answered Jesus by saying to Him: "My Lord and my God!"

Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:142) argue that it is impossible to confuse this statement from Thomas in such a way that he is not addressing Jesus, but rather the Father. They explain it as follows:

The reason is simple: John prefaces what Thomas said with the words, "Thomas answered and said to Him" (v. 28a NASB). This seemingly redundant wording reflects a Hebrew idiomatic way of introducing someone's response to the previous speaker. John uses it especially frequently, always with the speaker's words directed to the person or persons who have just spoken previously in the narrative ... It is therefore certain that Thomas was directing his words to Jesus, not to the Father.

Moreover, this statement by Thomas can also not be confused with a “shocked profanity” from Thomas’s side since “such profanity would not have been found in first-century Palestine on the lips of a devout Jew” (Carson, 1991:658). Harris (2008:109) adds to this point that to interpret this as an “exclamation of surprise is to rob the cry of the ingredient of direct, personal encounter that is demanded by the context”. This is rather a clear and “personal confession of faith”. Thomas not only shows his belief in the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ, but also “points to its deepest meaning”, which is the revelation of the identity of the person of Jesus Christ. In the words of Carson (1991:659), “The most unyielding sceptic has bequeathed to us the most profound confession.”

White (1998:70) further argues that if Thomas had been wrong with his confession regarding Jesus Christ as “Lord” and “God”, one may have expected discomfort or a correction from Jesus’s side. When the pagans in Lystra, for example, said of Paul and Barnabas that they were “gods” who came down “in the likeness of men” and started to worship them, they corrected them, saying: “We also are men with the same nature as you” (Acts 14:11-14). In this context it is “highly revealing that Jesus never sought to correct his followers” when they called Him ‘God’ (Rhodes, 1992:169). What one finds in the next verse, John 20:29, is not discomfort, but, in the words of White (1989:70):

He then pronounces a blessing upon all who will believe like Thomas without the added element of physical sight. There is no reproach of Thomas’s description of Jesus as his Lord and God. No created being could ever allow such words to be addressed to him personally. No angel, no prophet, no sane human being, could ever allow himself to be addressed as ‘Lord and God.’ Yet Jesus not only accepts the words of Thomas but pronounces the blessing of faith upon them as well.

In the past these truths of verse 28 have been dismissed by pointing one back to verse 17, which reads as follows: “Jesus said to her, ‘Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, “I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.”’” On the grounds of this verse it has been objected that it is impossible for Jesus to talk about His ‘God’. If He is ‘God’, how can He address the Father as ‘God’? Notice that this objection fails to account for the Trinitarian claim that it is the Son as the second person of the Trinity who became incarnate. White (1998:71) accordingly refutes this objection by stating:

Thomas’s confession is in perfect harmony with the fact that the Incarnate Son spoke of the Father as His God. As long as one recognizes that the word “God” can refer to the Father, to the Son, to the Spirit, or to all three persons at once, the asserted contradiction is seen to be nothing more than a circular argument designed to avoid having to make the same confession that Thomas made long ago.

Any attempt to twist the truth of this passage can only take place through 'mental gymnastics'. While this verse reveals the person of Jesus Christ as "Lord" and "God" for Christians, it is for CiMI an "unsurmountable barrier" (White, 1998:68). The language is clear, the translation is unquestionable, and Thomas's confession leads one to the identification of "Jesus Christ as God himself" (Bowman & Komoszewski, 2007:143).

### **Titus 2:11-14**

In the letter of Paul to Titus he writes the following:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.

Notice that in verse 13 one reads the words: "our great God and Savior Jesus Christ". Although this reading is as straightforward as it seems, certain remarks may be made for clarification and to anticipate and answer a possible objection against the clear reading of this passage. The apostle Paul is here explaining that Christians are "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing" of Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. The question that has been asked with regard to this text is whether both the terms "God" and "Saviour" may be applied to Jesus Christ. Howe (2010:107) phrases the issue as follows:

Is this verse saying that Jesus is our "great God" and our "Savior," or is it referring to God as our "great God," and Christ Jesus as our "Savior"? This is a crucial distinction. Some modern translations add a comma after the word 'Savior' indicating that the words 'great God' and 'Savior' are both referring to Jesus. Other translations do not add a comma leaving the passage ambiguous. Modern orthodox theologians argue that this is a declaration that Jesus is 'our great God'.

One can therefore say that there have been attempts in the past to alter the clear meaning of this passage by applying the term 'God' to God alone as Father, and the term 'Saviour' to Jesus Christ. There is however a technical solution when this objection is made. Harris (2008:180) explains that whenever two or more nouns in the same case are linked by *kai* (*καί*), which is the Greek word for 'and', and there is no repetition of the definite article in front of the two nouns, then "the nouns are being considered corporately, not separately, or that they have a single referent". Since the nouns 'God' and 'Saviour' are linked by *kai* and there is no repetition of the definite article in front of 'Saviour', the single referent in this case is Jesus Christ. Following the natural reading of this passage one can therefore safely conclude that "'God and Savior' are referring to the one individual, Christ Jesus" (Howe, 2010:125). According to White (1998:76),



there is only one reason that someone would want to alter the meaning of this passage, and that is to reject Jesus Christ as “God and Savior”. Moreover, if one were to turn to Titus 1:3, God is described as “our Savior”, which enhances the clear and plain reading of this passage.

White (1988:76-77) adds an Old Testament passage to the discussion that seems to be echoed here in Titus 2:14. In verse 14 one reads that Jesus Christ will “purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works”. According to White (1998:76), this is “a phrase that would bring to mind none other than Yahweh himself”. In Psalm 130:7-8 one reads the following: “O Israel, hope in the Lord; For with the Lord *there is* mercy, And with Him *is* abundant redemption. And He shall redeem Israel From all his iniquities.” This verse has the same terms that Paul uses in Titus 2:14. Both passages has the term ‘redeem’ and while Paul uses the word ‘lawlessness’, the psalm uses the word ‘iniquities’. Hence, while Yahweh redeems His people in the Old Testament, in Titus 2 it is Christ who is the Redeemer.

Apart from the natural reading of the text, Harris (2008:178-179) adds that the phrase ‘God and Savior’, which was also a “stereotyped formula common in first-century religious terminology ..., was (apparently) used by both Diaspora and Palestinian Jews in reference to Yahweh, and invariably denoted one deity, not two”. This socio-historical background of the time adds weight to the clear reading of the text, which also renders other interpretations inconsistent with the socio-historical background.

White (1998:76) asks the probing question whether it is possible for Christians to have a real and blessed hope if that hope is “anchored in looking for the appearance of a mere creature”, i.e., anything less than God. This seems to be a good question to ask someone who is guilty of changing the meaning of this verse. Since no one can save him/herself, it can only be God who saves and redeems and is therefore one’s only hope. By way of ending the discussion about Titus 2:13-14, it is also worth noting that 2 Peter 1:1<sup>117</sup> may be dealt with in the same way as Titus 2:13-14.

### **Hebrews 1:6-9 and Psalm 45:6-7**

White (1998:74) argues that in Hebrews 1:6-9 the author is showing one that Jesus Christ is superior to the angels and that they are worshipping the “Firstborn”. One reads the following in Hebrews 1:6-8:

But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” And of the angels He says: “Who makes His angels spirits And His ministers a flame of fire.”  
But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of righteousness is the

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<sup>117</sup> “To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.”

scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than companions.”

Notice the word ‘but’ to introduce a contradistinction between the angels and the Son. Howe (2010:128) notes with regard to verse 8, “If this statement is about the Son, and God is being directly addressed, then the Son is God.”

It is important to note that Hebrews 1:8-9 is a quotation of Psalm 45:6-7. Psalm 45 was a wedding psalm written for the king of Israel. But the author of Hebrews is here giving it a much greater meaning, especially since it is applied to the “King of kings, Jesus Christ” (White, 1998:74). Emery (2011:31) further states that the author of Hebrews would not simply cite a verse from Psalm 45 and use the terminology of the verse cited without “understanding Jesus to be God in a proper sense”. This clarifies why Harris (2008:227) explains it as follows:

The appellation ὁ θεός that was figurative and hyperbolic when applied to a mortal king was applied to the immortal Son in a literal and true sense. Jesus is not merely superior to the angels. Equally with the Father he shares in the divine nature (ὁ θεός, v. 8) while remaining distinct from him (ὁ θεός σου, v. 9). The author places Jesus far above any angel with respect to nature and function, and on a par with God with regard to nature but subordinate to God with regard to function. There is an ‘essential’ unity but a functional subordination.

Therefore, the proper way to understand Hebrews 1:8 is that, by quoting from Psalm 45:6-7, God the Father is here making reference to God who is the Son, saying to Him: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.” Jesus Christ is accordingly not just worshipped by the angels in Hebrews 1:6, but also explicitly addressed as God. This context is also typical of a Messianic Psalm referring to the eternal reign of the Messiah on the throne of King David. Hughes (1977:64) therefore makes the following comment, saying that,

The author can assert that it is *of the Son* that these words are spoken, since, as the eternal Son who humbled himself to become man and endure the cross and who has been raised from the dead and exalted to the place of supreme authority, he is the fulfilment of every messianic hope. In him, as the incarnate Son, the divine and the human meet and the Davidic kingdom becomes truly the kingdom of God.

Without unnecessary additional remarks, it is also worth pointing out the use of the word “Firstborn” in verse 6. Hughes (1977:59) explains that the author’s “designation of the Son as *the first-born* carries important doctrinal implications”. He adds that “it carries on the thought of the immediately preceding verse in which the Mediator is assigned the dignity of the divinely begotten Son: as the unique Son he is also the first-born, and as the first-born he has precedence over all others.” It would seem that the author of Hebrews is suggesting that if Christ is the Saviour “he must become, human, not simply indwell a man or be distinguished as a human” (Papandrea, 2016:28).

## **Final remarks**

In summary one could say that these passages clearly, unambiguously and explicitly attribute the term 'God' to the person of Jesus Christ. There is no room for the translations to be mistaken, and there is no room for moving the word 'God' around in the sentences to indicate that it does not apply to Jesus. The disciple Thomas called Jesus Christ his "Lord and God". The apostle Paul wrote to Titus that Jesus is their "great God and Savior". And finally, the author of Hebrews indicated that the Father says of His Son "Your throne O God, is forever and ever", establishing Him as the eternal God and King. Any deliberate attempt to dismiss these passages therefore has a clear agenda driving the dismissal, namely that Jesus Christ is not God, and no matter how clear the Bible may be, it is wrong. In any confrontation with these passages, CiMI will have to either submit to the clear meaning or twist the Scripture and exchange the truth for a lie.

### **c) The incarnation of the Son**

When it comes to the incarnation of the Son, i.e., the Son taking up a human nature in the person of Christ, there are at least two New Testament passages from which it can be substantiated, along with two Old Testament prophecies ultimately being fulfilled in no one else but Jesus Christ.

#### **Isaiah 9:6**

White (1998:80) introduces one to the passage of Isaiah 9:6 by saying that long before the night of the Incarnation, i.e., the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, Isaiah already uttered a prophecy that would come into fulfillment with the birth of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but also as the "mighty God" himself. Here are the words of the prophet in Isaiah 9:6: "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

According to Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:135), the belief that Jesus Christ is God can be identified in the Old Testament, especially because of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah affirms that "the future Messiah would be God". Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:135) depict the broader context in which Isaiah 9:6 is situated as follows:

[It] focuses on the judgment about to come on the northern kingdom of Israel and on what this judgment would mean to Jerusalem and the southern kingdom of Judah. Although the immediate concern was the Assyrian Empire and its conquest of Israel—events that took place during Isaiah's lifetime—the issue of the future of the Davidic line in Jerusalem broadened Isaiah's prophetic vision far beyond his own day.

This means that although the immediate context is in one sense primary, it nowhere prohibits one from interpreting this verse as a prophecy delivered to Isaiah by the Holy Spirit. Through this prophecy, God is giving assurance to Israel that, despite the judgement coming to Israel through the Assyrians, God will establish the everlasting Davidic kingdom through the coming of the Messiah.

As Young (1965:329) comments on this verse he explains that the prophet was pointing to an event of deliverance in the future. Furthermore, this event is in no way vague, but “something to be brought about by a birth in history upon this earth at a definite time and at a definite place. The birth of this Child is a gift of God. He is a Child, but He is also a Son.” White (1998:80) adds that in the first phrase one reads that this child will be “born”; however, in the next phrase one also reads that this child will be “given”. He emphasises the fact that this passage is definitely Messianic, and that the birth of Jesus Christ was in a sense a birth like any other childbirth, thereby signalling a human nature. However, given that Jesus’s birth was a virgin birth, it “was also the Son, given to us so as to redeem us”. Brown (2003:37) asserts that when one puts all the exegetical considerations together, and reads this verse at face value and in an unbiased fashion, the text “points to an everlasting, worldwide reign for this son of David, a king whose nature transcended human bounds”.

It is especially the names and titles given to the child in this verse that makes the meaning so clear. The child who is born and the Son who is given, will be given these names: “Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace”. Young (1965:131) captures the significance of these names as follows:

The thought is that the Child is worthy to bear these names, and that they are accurate descriptions and designations of His being and character. In the Bible the name indicates the character, essence or nature of a person or object. When, therefore, it is stated that He shall be called, we are to understand that the following names are descriptive of the Child and deserve to be borne by Him.

Rhodes (1992:41) claims that the eternity, derived from the name “Everlasting Father”, and deity, derived from the name “mighty God”, of the Son as the Messiah cannot be doubted as the intended meaning of the prophet Isaiah. Hence, the child who would be born in Bethlehem is eternal and God Himself. This is then one passage that clearly points to the Incarnation from the Old Testament and establishes the deity of the Son as the second person of the Trinity.

### **Micah 5:2**

In Micah 5:2 one reads the following: “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in

Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting.” This passage is given a Messianic interpretation in both Matthew 2:5-6<sup>118</sup> and John 7:40-44.<sup>119</sup> According to Morey (1996:331), this prophecy not only states that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, but that the Messiah “pre-existed His birth from all eternity”.

The phrase “whose goings forth *are* from of old, from everlasting” indicates that the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was born in Bethlehem, did not begin to exist in Bethlehem, but is “from everlasting”. Morey (1996:312) states that this verse “begins by saying that the ‘goings forth’ of the Messiah took place ‘a very long time ago’. How far back ‘his goings forth’ goes is determined by the words of the second phrase.” The next phrase, however, is “from everlasting”. Rhodes (1992:39) also maintains that it is the same Hebrew word translated in Micah 5:2 as “from of old” that is used in Habakkuk 1:12 to render God’s eternal nature. Since it is Jesus Christ who was born in Bethlehem, one could say that the prophet Micah was describing Jesus Christ’s eternal nature as God, who, although He existed “from everlasting”, was born in time in Bethlehem. Consequently, this prophecy is another instance in the Old Testament that very explicitly links the Messiah with eternity and therefore deity. In this sense, the Incarnation which took place in Bethlehem is the invasion of eternity into time.

It is worth noting that Brown (2003:40) mentions that the prophecy of Micah also undergirds the previous reading of Isaiah 9:6, “pointing to the Messiah’s divinity”.

### **John 1:1-18**

Although certain issues with regard to John 1:1-18 has already been addressed in Chapter 4, more can still be said since this is such a rich passage. The first eighteen verses of John’s gospel mark the prologue of the gospel. White (1998:48) notes that the apostle John clearly meant this prologue to function as a “lens ... through which we are to read the rest of his Gospel”. He continues by saying,

If we stumble here, we are in danger of missing so much of the richness that is to be found in the rest of the book. But if we work hard to grasp John’s meaning here, many other passages will open up for us of their own accord, yielding tremendous insights into the heart of God’s revelation of himself in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>118</sup> “So they said to him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet: “But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, Are not the least among the rulers of Judah; For out of you shall come a Ruler Who will shepherd My people Israel.”’”

<sup>119</sup> “Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, ‘Truly this is the Prophet.’ Others said, ‘This is the Christ.’ But some said, ‘Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?’ So there was a division among the people because of Him. Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.”

The first eighteen verses of John's gospel are therefore crucially important and deserves investigation in this study, especially as it relates to the incarnation of the Son.

"In the beginning" should remind any reader of the creation account in Genesis 1:1-3. The beginning is therefore absolute and marks the "beginning of the universe" (Carson, 1991:114). Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:139) explain that this is no mere coincidence since both John 1:1-3 and Genesis 1:1-5 immediately proceed to "talk about creation and light ... John states that everything that came into existence—the world itself—did so through the Word." John 1:1-3 reads as follows: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made."

It should be remembered that in this prologue of his gospel the apostle John is interested in revealing the identity of the Son as that of "the Word". The Greek word for 'Word' in John 1:1 is the word *Logos* (λόγος). White (1998:50) explains that the Greeks have used this term in their philosophical explanations "regarding the function of the world". He further says that to the Greeks "the *logos* was ... an impersonal ordering force, that which gave harmony to the universe. The *logos* was not personal in their philosophy, but it was very important." In this sense John is "offering notably a point of contact with philosophical reflection" (Emery, 2011:32). However, the use of the term *Logos* goes further than just a deep philosophical reflection. Morey (1996:320) points out that in another and deeper sense, John is "referring to Jesus as the 'Word of the Lord' mentioned in so many times in the Old Testament". "The Word of the Lord" had a deep significance for Jewish people. One can think of Psalm 33:6, for example, where one reads: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made."

The point John is making when using the word *Logos* is that, in the same way as one's words reveal one's mind, analogously "the pre-incarnate Word is the revelation of the mind of the Father" (Morey, 1996:320). God's "Word" is his self-expression in creation, revelation and salvation (Carson, 1991:116). Therefore, attributing *Logos* to the Son as God's ultimate self-disclosure can in one sense be seen as the manifestation of "the word of creation, providence, revelation, and salvation accomplished by Jesus" (Emery, 2011:32). This is accordingly another divine title or name given to the Son.

White (1998:50) moves on to draw one's attention to the word 'was' in verse 1: "In the beginning was the Word." According to him, the form of this verb expresses "*continuous action in the past*". This, in turn, helps one to answer the question of how long the *Logos* has existed. According to Kelly (2014:144), the verb 'was', used in this specific manner by John, "is consistent with the concept of eternal existence". This means that the *Logos* did not come into

existence at some point in time, but rather has always existed. Whenever the beginning of creation occurred, the Word was already in existence. White (1998:51) therefore concludes that “whatever else we will learn about the Word, the Word is *eterna*”.

Verse 1 further states that “the Word was with God”. The preposition translated as “with” is commonly used to express ‘intimacy’, in this case between the Word and God. This means that the Word, in eternity past, has been “with God”, indicating an eternal intimate relationship between the Word and God. Carson (1991:116-117) suggests that this already points to the notion that the Word is a person. In the last phrase of verse 1, there is then another confrontation with, what can be seen as a case were the Son is explicitly referred to as ‘God’: “and the Word was God”. This, however, should not be taken to mean that “all of the Word” equals “all of God” (White, 1998:52). If it is meant in such an interchangeable manner, the previous phrase of the verse would lose its meaning, since the Word cannot be with himself. This should rather be understood in a qualitative sense, meaning that the Word is in nature God. In other words, the Word fully has the divine essence and is therefore fully God. Wuest (cited by White, 1998:57) provides an accurate translation of this phrase as follows: “And the Word was as to His essence absolute deity.”

Kelly (2014:146) states that this understanding is very important since it “settles the question of whether the Word was of the very substance of God, and indeed, God himself. It takes someone as big as God to remove sins and transform the created order. No lesser being could accomplish it!” Although the apostle John has not yet given the exact identity of the *Logos* as the Son of God, he has already stated that the Word is eternal, personal and deity. Verse 3, however, adds the Word as Creator to this list: “All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.” There is no room to misinterpret this verse; all things were made through the Word, and He is therefore the Creator. Carson (1991:117) concludes his comments on the first verse of the Gospel of John by saying that the ingredients to a “full blown” doctrine of the Trinity are already observable here. In this regard Howe (2010:211) correctly states: “The fact that the church may have developed the terminology and expressly determined definitions in later years does not mean that the theology was not there in the writings of John or the rest of the New Testament.”

For the purpose of this discussion, one can move ahead to verse 14: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” According to Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:139), this is where the “identity of this Word starts to become clear”. The phrase “dwelt among us” literally refers to the act of pitching your tent somewhere to make it your dwelling place. In this context it alludes to the tabernacle found in the Old Testament as God’s dwelling place. The tabernacle

was the “tent of meeting” where Moses met with God. In Exodus 40:35 one reads, for example, that “the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle”. Kelly (2014:153) states that the Word “tabernacled” among us. Although this is significant, especially to the name given to Jesus as “God with us” (Matthew 1:23), the emphasis at this point should be on the first phrase “the Word became flesh”.

The word ‘became’ should be addressed first. While the verb ‘was’ (encountered earlier in verse 1) indicates a “*continuous action in the past*” (White, 1998:50), the verb ‘became’ now takes on the form of “an action in time” (White, 1998:59). Kelly (2014:144) explains it as follows: “the verb γίνομαι — ‘to become’ is used of the Word’s becoming flesh (John 1:14), and hence indicates historical, creational coming into being from nothing. *Eἶμι* is suitable to express the eternal being of the Word, while γίνομαι suits his historical becoming.” This means that the Word was not eternally flesh, He became flesh.

[The Word is not] an eternal ‘cosmic’ principle that became flesh, but the person Jesus Christ, who is the eternal Son of God, who is as ‘old’ as the Father. As Athanasius, and then Cyril of Alexandria, write, the Son is like the Father in every respect, except for being Father. God himself, in the person of his Son, who belongs to the eternal inner being of God, ‘became flesh,’ like us Adamic humans in every respect, except for sin (Kelly, 2014:152-153).

The Greek word for ‘flesh’ that John used here is a word that “was easily understandable in his day” (White, 1998:59). It is accordingly not an unusual word, and it designates, in this case, a whole human nature. White (1998:60) therefore states: “The *Logos* entered into the physical realm. He became a human being, a real, living, breathing human being.” Consequently, this establishes the incarnation of the Son. He took a human nature upon Himself without compromising His divine nature, i.e., the Son as the second person of the Trinity is fully God and fully human. Carson (1991:126) explains that it is here that the “‘in-fleshing’ of the Word is articulated in the boldest way”. The Word of God, who was eternally with God, and was eternally God, “became flesh”. In this way God chose to make Himself known in the face of a man, Jesus Christ.

Although the discussion thus far has assumed that the Son, Jesus Christ as the second person of the Trinity, is the true identity of the *Logos*, in verse 17-18 this assumption is justified, since the apostle John connects the “only begotten of the Father”, who is “full of grace and truth” in verse 14, with “Jesus Christ” through whom “grace and truth came” in verse 17. Moreover, verse 18, more accurately translated in the ESV, identifies the Word and therefore Jesus Christ, as “the only God, who is at the Father’s side” and as the One who “has made [the Father] known”. This brings one to the Greek word *monogenes* (μονογενής) again. Sutcliffe (2016:158) explains that this word means “one of a kind” and has nothing to do with “begettal”. Jesus Christ



is accordingly the one and only God who is literally “in the bosom of the Father” (Carson, 1991:135). Furthermore, the Word or the person of Jesus Christ, as the one and only God, is the one who made the Father known. This is the phrase following the apostle’s assertion that “no one has seen God at any time” (John 1:18).

White (1998:64) explains the following:

The *μονογενής* has ‘made Him known’ or ‘explained Him’. The *unique One* has made the Father known. Or, in light of the use of the term Father, *the Only Son* has revealed the Father. But this is not merely a dim reflection, a partial revelation, provided by the Only Son. This is the *monogenes theos*, the Only Son *who is God*. The divine nature of the *μονογενής* is again plainly asserted, just as it was in verse 1.

This is then another explicit reference to Jesus Christ as ‘God’. Harris (2008:82) adds that the Word who made the Father known is both the only Son of the Father who is God Himself and who therefore “knew the Father and was qualified to make him known”. Carson (1991:135) unpacks the meaning of verse 18 in the same manner, explaining that the “Word-made-flesh, himself God, is nevertheless differentiable from God, and as such is intimate with God; as man, as God’s incarnate Self-expression, he *has made God known*”. While previously the Father could not have been seen, now the Son “has broken the barrier that made it impossible for human beings” to see the Father, and has narrated God the Father to His creation (Carson, 1991:134-135).

This, however, begs the question: Who did the people in the Old Testament then see if no one has ever seen God? For example, one reads in Isaiah 6:1-6 that he “saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifter up”. Also, in Genesis 18:1 one may wonder who was there with him between the “trees of Mamre”? White (1998:63) correctly asserts that the person whom these people in the Old Testament saw was “none other than the preincarnate Jesus Christ, the eternal *Logos*”. Without the doctrine of the Trinity the prologue of John’s gospel will not make any sense. The proclamation of John 1:1-18 therefore can only and consistently conclude that “Jesus Christ is God in human flesh, the eternal Creator of all things, ‘the Only Son, *who is God!*’” (White, 1998:64).

### **Philippians 2:5-11**

The immediate context of Philippians 2:5-11 is an exhortation for the church to live in a specific manner. The question that Paul is trying to answer with the first four verses of the chapter is how Christians should treat one another. For example, verse 4 states that everyone should not only care about their “own interests”, but also the “interests of others”. For the apostle Paul, the best way to teach this to the church is to point to none other than Jesus Christ as an example of

selflessness and humility. In other words, the Son of God incarnate has set the perfect example for selflessness in Christian life. Kelly (2014:159) confirms this when he says, “Our supreme examples of self-forgetting love, which also enable us to practice this love, are the incarnation and death of the Lord Jesus Christ. As true man, Jesus Christ manifests the fulness of who God is, and thus demonstrates the actions appropriate to God within human relationships.”

Although Ephesians 2:5-11 is a lengthy passage, it is worth quoting it here:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to *the point of death*, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

According to White (1998:119-120), these verses were a “commonly known song” titled the “Carmen Christi”. In the same way that a preacher may end a sermon today with the words of a popular hymn like “Amazing Grace”, without ever having to explain what song he is quoting, White explains that the apostle Paul did exactly the same here with the words of this passage. As he points to Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of selflessness and humility, he is quoting a well-known song of that time, which takes one to the “highest points of Scriptural revelation, speaking of great eternal truths”.

Paul starts by explaining that the same attitude, which was observable in the person of Jesus Christ, must also be present in Christians. He then explains what the attitude of Jesus Christ really was. In verse 6 he writes that Jesus Christ was “in the form of God”. The Greek word for ‘form’ is *morphe* (μορφή). Emery (2011:17) translates this word as ‘condition’ to indicate that Jesus Christ was in the very “condition of God”. According to Kelly (2014:159), this is not a mere reference to accidental properties, but rather “essential attributes”. According to Fee (1995:204), the *morphe* of something is “that which truly characterizes a given reality”. Since Jesus Christ is in the *morphe* of God, He fully has the characteristics which characterise that which is essential to God. This clearly indicates “the deity of the Son” (Kelly, 2014:159).

Furthermore, the verb ‘being’ in the phrase “being in the form of God” is again in such a form as to indicate that it does “not point to a time when Christ entered into this state” (White, 1998:123). Jesus Christ has consequently eternally “existed in God’s form” (Bowman & Komoszewski, 2007:279). In other words, Jesus Christ has eternally been God in His very essence or nature, both before and after His incarnation. White (1998:124) adds by explaining

that this existence is clearly referring to the existence of “divine essence” and nothing less than that. According to Kelly (2014:161), this means that Jesus Christ “who is eternal God in the fullest sense became true man without ceasing to be who he always was”. The incarnation therefore never affected the divine essence of the person of the Son. White (1998:124) explains that, given this revelation, “it is hard to get away from the fact that Paul is plainly presenting the deity of the pre-existent Christ”. Martin (1987:105) goes a step further to confirm that this clearly reveals Jesus in His “pre-temporal existence as the second person of the Trinity”.

The next phrase that deserves attention is the phrase “Jesus Christ ... did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation”. At this point it is important to remember the broader context. The apostle Paul is pointing to Jesus Christ as the ultimate example of humility and selflessness. Kelly (2014:162) unpacks this part of verse 6-7 by explaining that the word “robbery” does not in any way mean in this instance “to rob something that one does not have”. It has just been stated earlier in verse 6 that Jesus Christ is equal with God – He is the eternally existing Christ who is eternally in the form of God, and therefore He is equal with God.

In the past it has been suggested that Jesus Christ in some way became equal with God by grasping for this equality with God. Besides the theological problem pointed out by Kelly, since one would have to ignore verse 6 entirely to interpret it in such a manner, there is also a philosophical problem that Howe (2010:68) points out. He correctly asks the question: “What in the world would it mean to become equal with God?” He explains that since God is eternal, it is not possible for someone to become eternal. Anyone who is not God is by implication created by God and therefore a temporal being, who came into existence at some point in time. Temporality is therefore a creaturely limitation and what is temporal is by definition not eternal. Howe concludes as follows:

Philosophically it is irrational to talk about becoming equal with God. In Fact, those who have tried, for example Adam and Satan, have failed. Unless we want to charge Jesus and Paul with being irrational, the notion of becoming equal with God could not have been what Paul meant by the use of this term. The only way any being can be equal with God is to *be* God.

One further reads that Jesus Christ, eternally existing in the “form of God”, “made Himself of no reputation”, or as the ESV translates it: “He emptied Himself.” Note that Jesus is the one who emptied Himself and that it was not forced onto Him by anyone. White (1998:125) explains that therefore it is a “voluntary” act from Jesus Christ. Moreover, this is meant in a metaphorical way. Paul does not suggest that Jesus Christ in some way ceased to be God or stopped being equal with the Father when He emptied Himself. It is rather the case that Jesus was God, but “He laid aside all the rights and privileges of His position and became a servant” (Howe, 2010:65).

Jesus's act of emptying Himself is followed by an act of taking up a human nature. He took on the "form of a bondservant" and came "in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). Note that it is the same word for 'form' that is used here again. Howe (2010:77) unpacks the theological significance effectively by stating:

[T]he *morphe* indicates the nature or essence that someone actually possesses. This is not something that some can obtain. Rather, this is something that someone must already have and be. Jesus was and is God, but He did not grasp at the *morphe* of God. Rather, He laid aside the *morphe* by which His essence could be perceived so that when we look at Him, 'He has not stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him' (Isa. 53:2). Having the *morphe* of God is not something that can be acquired ... Jesus already possessed the *morphe* of God, but was willing to lay this aside and take on the *morphe* of a servant.

Kelly (2014:163) adds by way of clarification that the incarnation of Jesus Christ in no way caused Jesus to lose the "form of God". He remained in the form of God "as Lord of all", but he took on the form of a servant in His human nature. Instead of a literal "emptying out" of anything He was, He rather added the form of a servant to His person. In the context of humility and selflessness, it is difficult to think of a better example than Jesus Christ. Matthew 20:28 in this regard states, "[J]ust as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." In the same manner Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:9: "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." Jesus was definitely not financially or materially rich; His richness lies in the fact that He shares in the eternal glory of the Father. But, instead of keeping this "infinite riches", He gave up those privileges to serve. The passage continues to include His voluntary obedience to the Father, which ended in His death on the cross.

The apostle Paul concludes this passage in verse 9-11. After Jesus Christ's death on the cross, God the Father "exalted Him" and gave Him "the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father". Paul concludes with a reference to Isaiah 45:23, which reads as follows: "I have sworn by Myself; The word has gone out of My mouth *in* righteousness, And shall not return, That to Me every knee shall bow, Every tongue shall take an oath." While this passage in the Old Testament is about Yahweh, the God of Israel, Paul is applying it to Jesus. The only way Paul could have done this was not because he believed in more than one God. White (1998:128) argues as follows:

But he realizes that *both* the Father *and* the Son are worthy of the name Yahweh! To bow the knee to the Son, Jesus, is to bow to Yahweh. To do so is in no way to slight the Father, who, like the

Son, shares the one divine name, Yahweh. The glorification of the Son results in the glorification of the Father as well. Perfect balance, perfect consistency with the entirety of divine revelation.

In turn, Hurtado (2005:73) states that Paul is here giving “the most stridently monotheistic passage in the Old Testament”, a Christological interpretation.

Morey (1996:341) concludes, “The deity of Christ and His dual natures are both clearly in view in this ancient hymn.” This remark is consistent with the intended meaning of the apostle Paul. Fee (1995:205) adds the following:

What the earliest followers of Christ had come to believe, of course, on the basis of his resurrection and ascension, was that the one whom they had known as truly human had himself known prior existence in the “form” of God—not meaning that he was “like God but really not,” but that he was characterized by what was essential to being God.

In Philippians 2:5-11 one is confronted with another reference to the deity of Christ, but also His humanity, and accordingly the incarnation of Christ.

### **Final remarks**

On the grounds of these passages, one can consistently conclude that Jesus as God took upon Himself a human nature. The two prophecies from the Old Testament both emphasised the Messiah’s eternity and His deity. Furthermore, both Isaiah 9:6 and Micah 5:2 prophesied about the birth of Jesus Christ as the pre-existing Messiah who is God in the flesh. Isaiah explicitly states that the child who will be born is also the Son who is given. This child is worthy of the name “mighty God”. Micah attests to the notion that the child who would be born in Bethlehem did not begin to exist at His birth but pre-existed His birth in eternity past. Thus, both prophecies confirm the incarnation of Jesus as the second person of the Trinity.

The prologue of John’s gospel is evidently one of the richest passages testifying to the deity of Jesus Christ on multiple levels. It affirms His pre-existence and eternity. It establishes His close and intimate relationship with the Father. It explicitly states that Jesus Christ as the Word has the full divine essence. It attests to the incarnation of Jesus where He as the Word of God became flesh. It teaches that Jesus Christ in His preincarnate state was already the active agent of revelation in the Old Testament. Also, it presents Jesus Christ as the one and only God who came to reveal His Father to creation. In Philippians 2 the apostle Paul also shows that Jesus Christ is fully God who has fully and eternally existed in the form of God, i.e., Jesus Christ has eternally had the full divine essence. Paul also establishes the incarnation of Jesus Christ as God when He came in the likeness of a man, without ceasing to be God after His incarnation.

When CiMI therefore rejects the deity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God incarnate, they clearly have to explain away the true meaning of these passages. Most of their denials, however, only confirm the human nature of Jesus as if a confirmation of His humanity automatically refutes His divine nature.<sup>120</sup> Someone might reject the translations and meanings of these different texts, but the discussions above at least show that there is no bias involved in the translations and the interpretations thereof (Howe, 2010:77). In fact, in these cases the interpretations presented above arrive at the most literal and reasonable conclusions. Hence, when Kotze (2017b) calls everyone who confesses Jesus as God “deceivers”, he is not engaging with any real arguments, but is only attempting to gain the rhetorical high ground, and again exchanging the truth for a lie and putting the lie forth as the truth. Nowhere in the sermons of CiMI to which the researcher has listened, is there any meaningful engagement with Christianity’s view that two natures, human and divine, are united in the one person of Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that although these passages clearly demonstrate that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is consistent with biblical data, there also lies a deep theological significance in the incarnation of Jesus. Geisler (2003:290-290) explains the function of the Son as follows:

The Son ... is the Means, Sent One, and Achiever of salvation. The Father sent, and the Son came to save us; the Father planned it, but the Son accomplished it on the cross ... the Son is eternally “begotten” or “generated” from the Father, but the Father is never said to be “begotten” or “generated” from anyone.

As explained earlier, the Father, as the eternal Father of the eternal Son, sends the Son into the world as, in the words of Paul, “God and Savior” (Titus 2:13). This demonstrates the unity of will between the Father and the Son and establishes Him as “the fulfilment of the Scriptures” (Emery, 2011:34). Moreover, it identifies the Son as the Saviour of the world.

Apart from explicit references to Jesus as “God” and clear passages establishing His incarnation, Hurtado (2005:637) points out that there are “other very eloquent ways” in which “first-century Christians treated Jesus as sharing in God’s attributes, and as worthy of the sort of

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<sup>120</sup> Kotze (2017b), for example, states: “For many deceivers has gone out. Many ... This is what the church world is about today, Jesus is God. Many deceivers have gone out into the world who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, in a mere human nature. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.” This is a reference to 1 John 4:1-6. He uses this verse as an argument against the deity of Jesus Christ. But Trinitarians do not deny that Jesus has come in a mere human nature. Therefore, this remark only confirms the human nature, and does not refute the divine nature. Kotze (2017c) also mentions that he will never be able to believe “that the all-powerful, all-knowing God ... self-existing God ... became a little baby.” He explains that “if ... according to religion this baby was indeed God, and he does not need man, who changed his nappies? Who gave Him milk?” He further suggests that the teaching of Jesus as God is the teaching of the “antichrist”. One can again respond that many of his remarks only confirm the human nature of the person of Jesus and do not refute His deity.

reverence otherwise to be reserved for God". The researcher will now focus on some of these other "eloquent ways" in which the deity of the Son can also be demonstrated.

#### **d) The Son creates everything and upholds everything**

Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:103) explain that "the most fundamental specific attribute of God that separates him from everything that is not God is that he is *uncreated*. If this attribute is true of Christ, and he is a real, existent being, then he is by definition God." John 1:3 already established that the eternal Word is also the Creator of everything. Also, if Jesus Christ has always existed in eternity past, as demonstrated in previous discussions, He is uncreated. Although these truths have already been established, one would be remiss not to investigate Colossians 1:15-18. White (1998:109-110), however, warns that this passage is "cited by so *many* different groups, both orthodox and heretical, that we must be very careful to look as closely as possible at the text so as to be able to give a proper, God-honoring, consistent, and truthful answer to those who ask us concerning our belief in Christ as the eternally pre-existent Creator of all things".

In Colossians 1:15 the apostle Paul writes that Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation". Paul explicitly refers to Jesus as the "image of the invisible God". The first point to make is that 'form' (μορφή) and 'image'(εἰκὼν) are not synonyms. This does not mean that both terms cannot be predicated to the same person, in this case, Jesus Christ, but that they should not be viewed as interchangeable synonyms (Howe, 2010:71). Emery (2011:131) explains that the "name *Image* signifies first the relation of the Son to his Father: the Son comes forth from the Father, and he is the perfect expression of the Father. Christians use the name *Image* for signifying that the Son is fully like and equal to the Father." The close relationship between the Father and the Son, but also a distinction between them should be emphasised here since an attempt to dismiss the deity of Jesus Christ in this verse by pointing out that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God" and not God himself, wrongfully assumes that the Father and the Son are the same person. However, Wright (1986:74-75) points out that "from all eternity Jesus had, in his very nature, been the 'image of God', reflecting perfectly the character and life of the Father". He further says that it is only in the person of Jesus that we "understand what 'divinity' and 'humanity' really mean".

The Son is accordingly the only perfect image of God. One could say that "*what the Father is invisibly, the Son is visibly*" (Morey, 1996:497). The author of Hebrews also communicates the same point, but more emphatically describes the Son as "being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person" (Hebrews 1:3). In the ESV this verse is translated as Jesus being "the exact imprint of his nature". White (1998:110) summarises it as follows: "The Son can

perfectly reflect the nature of God, and be the perfect *image* of the Father, because He, like the Father, is eternal and unlimited in His deity.”

Moving on to the title of “the firstborn over all creation”, the question is: What is meant with “firstborn”? Howe (2010:88) mentions that the Greek word for ‘firstborn’ is *prototokos* (*πρωτότοκος*), which signifies supremacy or priority. Furthermore, the background of this word stretches back to the Old Testament as well. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint (LXX), in Psalm 89:27, God says of David that He will make him His “firstborn”. This cannot mean literally, since David was the youngest son of Jesse and therefore was not a ‘firstborn’ in the literal sense of the word. The same is true in Jeremiah 31:9 when Ephraim is called “firstborn” while his brother Manasseh was the eldest son. In the New Testament it is also clear that the word “stresses superiority and priority rather than origin or birth” (White, 1998:112). Romans 8:29, for example, refers to Jesus as “the firstborn among many brethren”. The “brethren” in this case are the “glorified Christians” and the superiority and sovereignty of Jesus over the “brethren” is emphasised here. In Colossians 1:18 Jesus is also described as “firstborn from the dead”. Again, this does not mean that Jesus was the first person ever to be raised from the dead, but that He is the preeminent one who has been raised from the dead, and according to White (1998:112), it means that His resurrection from the dead brings new life to His followers.

The meaning of ‘firstborn’ can therefore not be used to argue that Jesus Christ is the very first creature created by God before everything else. The meaning of ‘firstborn’ and the immediate next verse do not allow for such an interpretation since “by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Colossians 1:16). This verse clearly “exhausts the Greek language” to make the point that Jesus Christ created everything (White, 1998:114). All things are “by Him”, “through Him” and “for Him”. In verse 17 Paul also adds that Jesus Christ “is before all things, and in Him all things consist”. The ESV translates this last phrase as “in him all things hold together”. As Wright (1987:77) comments on this verse he explains that “the world is now sustained and upheld by Christ ... The verb ... is in the perfect, indicating that ‘everything’ has held together in him and continues to do so. Through him the world is sustained, prevented from falling into chaos.” Jesus Christ, therefore, is not only the “Creator of the world”, but also the sustainer (Morey, 1996:498), which is why “in all things” He must “have the pre-eminence” (Colossians 1:17).

If one were to read Hebrews 1:1-3 next to Colossians 1:15-18, the similarities are striking:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through



whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power.

The act of creation is not attributed to the Father alone or to the Son alone. One must remember that the three persons of the Trinity each still has the full, divine essence, even if they have different roles in their processions and function.

Instead, creation is the work of *Yahweh*, and the New Testament reveals to us with glorious clarity the differing roles the Father, Son, and Spirit play in that great exhibition of divine power. The Father decrees, the Son enacts, the Spirit conforms. Just as all three share the one divine name, so they also share the one divine description as “Creator,” even while maintaining the distinction of roles that exists between them (White, 1998).

In this sense the author of Hebrews reveals that the Father, in line with Psalm 33:6, created everything and upholds everything by His Word, who is the Son.

#### **e) The Son claims to be the eternal “I AM” (*Ego Eimi*)**

Howe (2010:139) describes the words of Jesus in John 8:58 as “the most unusual statements by Jesus”. In this verse one reads the following: “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’” Like many other instances in the gospels, Jesus is here in a confrontation with hostile Jews. Earlier, in John 8:52-53 someone said the following to Jesus: “Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.’ Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?” Jesus responded in verse 56 saying, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad.” In turn, the Jews replied to Jesus: “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” After their reply, Jesus uttered the words of verse 58: “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” The response of the Jews is telling since they immediately picked up stones to kill Jesus.

Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:96) state that at minimum one must grant that Jesus in this verse “claims to have existed before Abraham was born”. White (1998:97) further points out that in this verse “there is a clear differentiation being made here between the derivative existence of Abraham and the eternal existence of the Lord Christ”. The Greek phrase *ego eimi* (ἐγὼ εἰμί), which is translated as “I am”, is according to Howe (2010:140-141) not a customary Greek usage in this context. However, he further says, “The problem with Jesus’ statement is not its grammar. We can understand exactly what Jesus is saying from the words He uses. He is saying that before Abraham existed, He exists – He is before Abraham.” Carson (1991:358) points out that it would have been normal for Jesus to say “Before Abraham was, I was”, but since it is placed in the present indicative tense, to read “Before Abraham was, I AM”, Jesus

made a bigger claim than just His pre-existence or that He has been alive longer than Abraham<sup>121</sup> (Morey, 1996:364). Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:96) point out the difference, namely that Jesus did not just claim to exist “prior to Abraham but also [claimed] existence of a different order than that of Abraham”.

Howe (2010:144) explains that the reaction from the Jews who wanted to stone Jesus because of His claim is because “in their eyes, Jesus was blaspheming”. The reason for this is because there is an Old Testament background to the phrase *ego eimi*, which these Jews understood. White (1998:98-99) summarily captures this connection with the Old Testament:

The closest and most logical connection between John’s usage of *ego eimi* and the Old Testament is to be found in the Septuagint rendering of a particular Hebrew phrase, *ani hu*, in the writings (primarily) of Isaiah. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew phrase *ani hu* as *ego eimi* in Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; and 46:4.

He further explains that the use of *ani hu* (אני־הוא) is a ‘euphemism’ for the name of God. In all the passages from the prophet Isaiah referred to above, the phrase *ani hu* is translated as “I am He”, corresponding to, for example, John 13:19 which reads: “Now I tell you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe that I am *He*.”

The roots of *ego eimi* in the Old Testament can ultimately be traced back to Exodus 3:14 where the Lord appears to Moses and gives Himself the name “I AM WHO I AM”.<sup>122</sup> Rhodes (1992:161) explains that this is the Hebrew name *Yahweh* (יהוה) and is connected with the verb referring to being or existence itself. He further says,

‘I am’ may seem like an odd name to the modern ear. But Moses understood in some measure what God was saying to him. The name clearly conveys the idea of eternal self-existence. *Yahweh* never came into being at a point in time, for he has always existed ... To know *Yahweh* is to know the eternal one.

In light of the Old Testament background to the phrase *ego eimi*, one can better understand the reaction of the Jews in attempting to stone Jesus for blasphemy.<sup>123</sup>

Hurtado (2005:371-372) points one to the only conclusion that fits the context of John 8:58:

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<sup>121</sup> The Jews could have dismissed such a claim from Jesus by maybe just classifying Him as delusional. It would not have warranted a penalty of death.

<sup>122</sup> It can also be pointed out by way of a question: Who is the one speaking in this verse? According to Exodus 3:2 it is the “Angel of the Lord”. According to verse 4 it is “the Lord” or “God”. This turns out to be one of the cases where the “Angel of the Lord” can legitimately be deemed to be the preincarnate Christ as the second person of the Trinity, who is fully God.

<sup>123</sup> There are other occasions where Jesus was charged with blasphemy as well. One can also note the instance in John 10:31ff. When the Jews wanted to stone Jesus, the reason they provided for their action was “because You, being a Man, make yourself God” (John 10:33).

[I]n light of the biblical passages to which the obvious allusions are directed, this absolute use of “I am” in the Gospels amounts to nothing less than designating Jesus with the same special referential formula that is used in the Greek Old Testament for God’s own self-declaration. That is, the “I am” expression as used in [the] G[ospel] [of] John reflects the belief that Jesus is in some direct way *associated with God*.

In John 8:24 Jesus states that “if you do not believe that I am *He*, you will die in your sins”. For faith to be saving faith it must be directed at the true Jesus who is the eternal “I AM”. It is worth quoting White’s (1998:104) final remark in this regard since it is such a relevant observation in the context of cults, especially regarding CiMI:

A faith that demands a change in *Jesus* before a commitment is made is not real faith at all. The Jews standing around Him during this conversation most assuredly would not have denied that He was a man—but that was not sufficient for faith. Some had only recently proclaimed Him as Messiah—but that was not sufficient for faith. Some might hail Him as a prophet or a miracle worker, blessed by God—but that was not sufficient for faith. Some today say He was a great moral teacher and philosopher—but that is not sufficient for faith. Some call Him “a god” or a great angel—but that is not sufficient for faith. No, Jesus himself laid down the line. Unless one believes Him for who He says He is—the *ego eimi*—one will die in one’s sins. There is no salvation in a false Christ. If we are to be united with Christ to have eternal life, then we must be united with the true Christ, not a false representation.

#### **f) The Son accepts worship**

Morey (1996:376) maintains that the authors of the New Testament worshipped Jesus. He also states that if they truly believed Jesus to be God, one would expect them to use the words that would indicate divine worship when Jesus is worshipped as God. In Matthew 4:9, one reads about the third temptation by Satan. After taking Jesus up a high mountain and showing Him all the kingdoms, he declares to Jesus Christ: “All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me.” Jesus then rebukes Satan and responds by saying, “*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve*” (Matthew 4:10).

To further set the stage for this point, one can also briefly refer to Revelation 22:8-9:

Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, “See *that you do not do that*. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”

It is important to note how the angel responds to the apostle John when he worships the angel. The angel objects to John’s act of worship and tells him to “not do that”. He ends with the words

“Worship God”. If one couples Revelation 22:8-9 with Matthew 4:10, it is clear that the act of worship belongs to God alone.

The Greek word for worship is *proskuneo* (προσκυνέω) and is used by both Satan, Jesus and the apostle John in the passages above. Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:37) state that when the act of “worship” is performed towards some or other being, it is an acknowledgement of that being’s deity. Howe (2010:43) also adds,

Regardless of how one wishes to translate the word – worship, prostrate, bow down, render homage, etc. – Jesus said that this action should be performed only with reference to God. It would seem that Matthew would become inconsistent and contradictory if he should use this word with reference to Jesus and yet not mean it by its use an action that should be performed only to God.

Since Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, clearly limits the act of worship to God alone, there are two particular instances where the disciples worship Jesus, which is worth investigating. To be sure, there are more instances in the entire gospel which can be pointed to,<sup>124</sup> but the following two will suffice to make the point.

In Matthew 14:24-33 one reads the account where the disciples went before Him in their boat:

Now in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.” And Peter answered Him and said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus. But when he saw that the wind was boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink he cried out, saying, “Lord, save me!” And immediately Jesus stretched out *His* hand and caught him, and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. Then those who were in the boat came and worshiped Him, saying, “Truly You are the Son of God.”

The disciples had just witnessed a miracle. While they were in the midst of a storm at sea, Jesus walked on the water. Initially the disciples thought He was a ghost. France (2007:569) explains that in such circumstances “the superstitious reaction of the disciples is hardly surprising. A disembodied spirit could appear where a physical body would sink.” They evidently calmed down once they heard the familiar voice of Jesus. The apostle Peter then displayed “a characteristic mixture of attitudes” (France, 2007:570). On the one hand he would not walk to Jesus unless Jesus commanded Him to do so. On the other hand, once he received the command, he failed to follow through on it because of his little faith. Once he started to doubt, he sank, but Jesus “overrides the lack of faith, and saves Peter”.

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<sup>124</sup> One can also investigate Matthew 2:2, 8 and 11, for example.

When Jesus and Peter got into the boat, the wind ceased and then the disciples who were in the boat came to Jesus and “worshipped” Him with the confession that He is the “Son of God”. Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:37) assert that “it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the disciples were viewing Jesus as more than a man. He has just walked on the sea and calmed the wind and waves, displaying supernatural power and a numinous presence, which elicits from them a confession that he is God’s Son.” This is then clearly an act of worship towards Jesus, while Jesus explicitly rebuked Satan, saying that such an act of worship belongs solely to God. One should also notice their confession that accompanied their act of worship, which is that Jesus is the “Son of God”.

Another case is Matthew 28:16-17 where one reads the following: “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had appointed for them. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted.” This is just prior to the Great Commission and already after His resurrection from the dead. One reads here that some of the disciples “doubted”. However, to apply that in any way to suggest that it diminishes the act of worshipping Jesus will be an impossible case to make.

Howe (2010:58-59) explains that since Jesus, in the following verses, told His disciples that He had been given all authority, and then sent them out to make disciples of all the world, it suggests that they “were in fact not having doubts about who Jesus is or whether He should be worshipped”. He continues to say that it is reasonable for people to believe in God and worship Him, but still have doubts. This can especially be the case if those doubts are not about whether God should be worshipped. France (2007:1111) explains it in another way by arguing,

[T]he last time these eleven disciples had seen Jesus was as they ran away from him in Gethsemane; so what sort of reception could they now expect from the master they had deserted? The conflicting instincts to worship the risen Jesus and to avoid a potentially embarrassing encounter make very human sense in this context.

In whatever way one would end up explaining the act of doubting, it still leaves the act of worshipping Jesus untainted, at least by some of the disciples. Furthermore, Jesus Christ never rebuked or corrected His disciples when they worshipped Him. In fact, He accepted it.

France (2007:1110) continues to comment on the disciples’ act of worship in the instance of Matthew 28 and mentions that “there is little doubt that here Matthew intends the full sense of ‘worship’, implying that Jesus is now recognized as more than human”. One can safely conclude that in both these instances, one before and one after the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples responded to Jesus “as to a powerful supernatural being, not as a mere rabbi or prophet” (Bowman & Komoszewski, 2007:40). If worship solely belongs to God, and the disciples as monotheistic Jews understood this commandment, also in the light of Old Testament passages

like Exodus 20:1-5<sup>125</sup> and Deuteronomy 5:6-9,<sup>126</sup> but still continued to worship Jesus, it means that they believed Him to be God in the flesh. Jesus also never rebuked or corrected them for doing this.

### **g) The Son forgives sins**

On the concept of sin, Sutcliffe (2016:91) states that it is in its essence a transgression against God and His authority. Echoing C.S. Lewis, he continues to say that since “God is the one offended by every sin ... he is the only one whose right it is to forgive in the ultimate sense”. In Mark 2:7 this is confirmed by the scribes in Capernaum when they asked each other the question: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?” This observation by the scribes is certainly correct but note that this is how they reacted against Jesus when He claimed that He can forgive sins.

In Mark 2 Jesus was in a house and when people heard that he was there “many gathered together”. It is stated that there was no more place in the house, not even in the door. In verse 3-4 one reads:

Then they came to Him, bringing a paralytic who was carried by four *men*. And when they could not come near Him because of the crowd, they uncovered the roof where He was. So when they had broken through, they let down the bed on which the paralytic was lying. When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.”

At this point the scribes reasoned in their hearts, accusing Jesus of blasphemy and consequently asking the question: “Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

In verse 8-9 Jesus asks the scribes the following hypothetical question: “Why do you reason about these things in your hearts? <sup>9</sup>Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Arise, take up your bed and walk?’” Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:211) comment on this verse saying, “Hypothetically, it is easier, of course, to forgive someone’s sins than to make a paralyzed man walk. Thus, if Jesus has the ability to make the man walk, his claim to have the ability to forgive the man’s sins should be accepted.” In other

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<sup>125</sup> “And God spoke all these words, saying: ‘I *am* the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.’”

<sup>126</sup> “I *am* the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me.”

words, the forgiveness of sins is not something that can be empirically proved in front of the crowd. Therefore, Jesus introduces a claim that can be empirically proved – the healing of a paralytic. Sutcliffe (2016:92) also adds that even the newly introduced claim to heal the paralytic would be something only God can do as a miracle. Therefore, if Jesus demonstrates that He can heal a paralytic, it would prove the credibility of His claim to be able to forgive sins.

Jesus Christ accordingly backs up His claim by healing the paralytic. In verse 10-12 one reads the following:

But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins—He said to the paralytic, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” Immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went out in the presence of them all, so that all were amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw *anything* like this!”

When Jesus healed the paralytic, it confirmed that He has the authority to forgive sins, which in turn confirms that He is God, since only God can forgive sins.

Moreover, Bowman and Komoszewski (2007:211) point out that Jesus attributes the title “Son of man” to Himself. As already established in Chapter 4, this title comes from the vision in Daniel 7. The figure in Daniel 7 who is called “the Son of Man” receives, not just eternal authority, but also worship by all nations and languages (Daniel 7:14). Since Jesus identifies Himself as “the Son of Man” who has eternal authority, His “claim that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins may simply make explicit what is already implicit in Daniel’s vision” (Bowman & Komoszewski, 2007:212). The prophet Daniel also considered the authority to forgive sins a “divine prerogative”. In Daniel 9:9 he says, for example, “To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness.” This is then a case where Jesus Christ as the Son of Man claims a “divine prerogative” for Himself, and implicit with that, His own deity.

#### **h) The personhood of the Son**

The Scriptures attest to Jesus Christ as saying and going many things one would expect a person with an intellect and a will to do (Geisler, 2003:287). In John 2:24 Jesus knows. In Matthew 5:1 Jesus “opened His mouth and taught”. Matthew 26:39 also implies that He has a will. The shortest verse in the Bible, John 6:38, states that Jesus “wept”. It is also the case that the personal pronoun, ‘He’ is consistently used for the Son. Morey (1996:290) points one to 1 John 1:3 once again, only this time to indicate that believers have fellowship with the Son as well. The apostle John states that what “we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”. Morey explains that this verse “presupposes that Jesus is aware of and is capable of responding to our prayers and praise. While Trinitarians are completely comfortable

with this truth, anti-Trinitarians have yet to face the implications of 1 John 1:3.” The person of the Son is accordingly distinct from the Father, but is also not a ‘something’ but a ‘someone’ with whom believers can have fellowship.

### **i) Concluding remarks**

Van Genderen and Velema (2008:454) note: “There is but one explanation of the faith in the divinity of Christ that lives in the church, namely, the evidence of the revelation of Christ.” The arguments from Scripture presented here show, in the words of Turretin (1992:291), that Jesus Christ as the Son of God, is “God-of-himself”. In other words, it is proper to call the second person of the Trinity God the Son. He fully has the divine essence and is therefore fully God. The Son, as the eternal Son of the Father was sent forth by the Father to reveal the Father. Emery (2011:34) states that the Son, “existing with the Father from before all time, Jesus has come into the world”. Being the perfect image of God and eternally in the form of God, Jesus Christ can say of Himself “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

In the face of the clarity of these passages when read and interpreted in their context, one wonders why CiMI rejects the incarnation of Jesus Christ. To them He is only a man, and not God who took upon Himself a human nature. In other words, He is not fully God *and* fully man, but only fully man and at most becomes spiritual or godly when He is anointed at His baptism. CiMI (2018m), for example, contrasts Jesus as a “natural man” with Jesus Christ as a “Spiritual man” after His anointing. Jesus could only be called “the Christ” when His flesh was disregarded, and He became spiritual. Strydom (2017c) moreover asserts that “to say that God can become flesh<sup>127</sup> is absolute blasphemy. God is not flesh ... For God to become sin is absolute blasphemy ... Man, religion lies to people and calls it truth.” CiMI (2018e) also claims that one needs the “revelation knowledge of the difference between Jesus (flesh) and Jesus Christ (spirit)” to understand that one can become a Christ, a spiritual being, and a Son of God.

The researcher suggests that the problem lies, at least in part, in their metaphysical commitments to a certain Gnostic dualism, i.e., a dualism between spirit and matter or the spiritual and the physical. Such a dualism is clearly observable in the statements above. Notice how “natural” and “Spiritual” are contrasted with each other. Also note how Strydom equates “sin” with “flesh” in his statement. He also insists that flesh is that which prevents one from being the image of God and says that “flesh ... keeps God from being Immanuel” (Strydom, 2017c). Strydom (2017a) furthermore asserts, “We’re no longer flesh ... [the flesh] is not God’s offspring; the Spirit is God’s offspring.”

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<sup>127</sup> This is a reference to John 1:14.



Van Genderen and Velema (2008:351) aptly observes the following:

Through the ages, Gnosticism, has been an enormous threat to the church. Perhaps we should say that although Gnosticism has been rejected, it has continued to have influence via the backdoor (we are tempted to say: via the lower half of the door) by way of an underappreciation of the body and matter.

In the same manner White (1998:60) states:

[E]ven while the apostles lived on earth, false teachers were entering into the church. Specifically, there were men teaching a system that would eventually become known as “Gnosticism”. This belief system teaches that everything that is spirit is good, and everything that is material (including flesh) is evil. This is known as the belief in “dualism”. Spirit is good, matter is evil.

This serves as an accurate diagnosis of CiMI’s metaphysical commitments and therefore they cannot accept any notion that God incarnates into a human body with flesh and bones. However, Howe (2004:3) explains that metaphysical assumptions are unavoidable when interpreting the Bible and that “bad metaphysics can produce bad interpretations”.

This also links up with Sire’s (1980:25) concept of a “worldview confusion”. According to Sire, the “most significant and pervasive explanation of how the Bible is used to support essentially nonbiblical ideas involves world-view confusion”. Sire (1980:25) describes the concept of worldview confusion as follows:

[It] occurs whenever a reader of Scripture fails to interpret the Bible within the intellectual and broadly cultural framework of the Bible itself and uses instead a foreign frame of reference. In other words, rather than seeing a statement of Scripture as a part of the whole biblical scheme of things, the reader or interpreter views it from a different standpoint and thus distorts the Bible, perhaps seriously, sometimes even reversing the meaning.

The “foreign frame of reference” in this case is CiMI’s Gnostic dualism. By doing this one loses the original and intended meaning of the passages and ends up distorting the meaning in service of an idea that may be foreign to the text (Sire, 1980:128). Sire (1980:128) further concludes that a world-view confusion can be either the cause or the result of all the different misreadings covered in Chapter 4 (Sire, 1980:127).

The apostle John did not share CiMI’s dualistic metaphysical view which they inherited from Gnosticism. In 1 John 4:2-3 he insists: “Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.” Kelly (2014:153) explains that the word for ‘flesh’ (σάρξ) used in 1 John 4:2-4 and John 1:14 designates ‘real humanity’. He opposes this view, based on Gnostic ideas, stating the following: “Gnostic ... theories that God could never become ‘nasty flesh’” work with a wrong assumption of flesh. He continues to say,

Since our fallen flesh needs cleansing and lifting up, Christ (without himself being personally sinful) came all the way down into our frail, condemned condition, our state of mortality, in order to lift us up out of the desperate condition which we could not transcend by ourselves. He took on true Adamic flesh, without personal guilt. This is implied by the term σάρξ ... By accepting the flesh of true man, the Word did not become sinful, but rather made sinful man able to accept the Word of God.

There are many passages in the New Testament to which one could also refer. Galatians 4:4 is clear about the Incarnation, stating that “when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman”. In Romans 8:3<sup>128</sup> one reads that the Son came, apart from sin, in a human nature. Kelly (2014:153) comments by saying, “God the Son assumed the fallen condition of humanity, apart from sin (Rom. 8:3), in order, by coming down where we were in our shame of sin and death, to lift us up to where he was in his glorious light and life with God.” Hebrews 2:14-15 is also clear that as much as mere humans “have partaken of flesh and blood”, the Son also took on real human flesh and blood. In Romans 1:1-4 Paul explains that Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah was “born of the seed of David according to the flesh”, affirming His human nature. He however adds that Jesus was also “the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”, suggesting that although He is nothing less than a human, He is much more than just a human. He is the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, who is God Himself.

One must remember that the incarnation of Jesus Christ is not a mere confession with no theological significance to it. Courthial (cited by Kelly, 2014:223-224) manages to point out the deep significance of the deity of the Son with respect to the idolatrous inversion of worshipping the creature, rather than the Creator. He states the following:

Since the personal ... union of God and man in Jesus Christ is *unique* and a once-for-all reality, no other man and no other human institution (even the Church, which is the mystical body of Christ; even the State, which has been established by God) has the right to seek some sort of divinity for itself. Since there is a God-man: Jesus Christ, there can be neither a deified Church nor a deified State. *This man alone*: Christ Jesus is truly God, and in him and in his person, since the two natures—divine and human—are united, they are united in a way that precludes either confusion between the two natures, or the transformation of one into the other. How much more is it impossible for this same reason, for such realities as Church, State, science, and work—beautiful and necessary as they are when they are faithful to their calling—to become divinized; it is immoral for them ever to seek to take on Godhood!

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<sup>128</sup> “For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God *did* by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.”

These observations emphasise the place of Jesus Christ as fully God and fully man. There is no confusion or separation between His two natures as divine and human, and there is also no transformation of His human nature into the divine nature. Since Jesus Christ is the true “God-man” there is no room for idolatry, whether it is the self, an ideology, a church, the state or anything else. He continues to explain that when churches reject this view of Christ, they reject the “sovereignty of the triune God and of His Word” and will “inevitably wind up having only a false Christ, who only has the word Christ; a Christ submerged in temporal history, and confounded with it; a ‘Christ’ who is no longer true God who made Himself man, truly man by love and grace”. This is the significance of the Incarnation that CiMI rejects. To be sure, CiMI’s rejection of the deity of Christ leads to many more theological shortcomings, which are addressed in the section on Christology.

#### **5.4.3.6. God the Holy Spirit as gift and His personhood**

Beeke and Smalley (2019:888) claim that “God’s Word ... reveals that the Holy Spirit is God”. The deity and the personhood of the Spirit can be demonstrated in different manners. CiMI firstly rejects the personhood of the Spirit and secondly, by implication the deity of the Spirit. Strydom (2019d) for example asks: “Who is the Holy Spirit? God! God is Spirit, God is a Holy Spirit ... the Holy Spirit is not a thing. It is the Holy Spirit, not just any Spirit. It is God’s Spirit.” CiMI (2018g) also explains that “[God] does not have a Spirit, He is Spirit ... the Holy Spirit”. Since CiMI rejects the personhood and per implication the deity of the Holy Spirit, the discussion will begin with the personhood of the Spirit.

Howe (2010:219) provides some clarification with regard to the theological analysis of the person of the Holy Spirit, stating that “the formulation of a doctrinal statement about the Holy spirit did not create the doctrine. Rather it merely articulated the doctrine that was already taught in Scripture.” This is a helpful and important comment to remember as one approaches the person of the Holy Spirit, as revealed in Scripture.

##### **a) The personhood of the Holy Spirit**

The person of the Holy Spirit is not absent in the Old Testament. Already at creation one reads about the Holy Spirit who “hovered over the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). One also reads that Samson exercised extraordinary power when the Spirit came “upon him” (Judges 15:14). In Job 33:4 one reads: “The Spirit of God has made me, And the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” Bavinck (2004:277) explains that in principle the personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit are present in the Old Testament, and that the New Testament did not “furnish any other doctrine of the Spirit than that which is found in the Old”.

Moving on to the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is clearly revealed as a distinct person with an intellect and a will (Geisler, 2003:288). When Jesus says in John 14:26 that “the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you”, it not only distinguishes the Spirit from the Father, but also suggests that the Spirit has a mind and hence also teaches. John 16:13 also applies the personal pronouns of ‘He’ and ‘His’ to the Holy Spirit: “However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own *authority*, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.” This personhood of the Spirit is also visible in Acts 13:2 where one reads the phrase that the “Holy Spirit said”, meaning that He spoke. This can also be observed in Acts 8:29,<sup>129</sup> 10:19-20<sup>130</sup> and 21:11.<sup>131</sup>

Morey (1996:407) explains that “the very same evidence that demonstrated the personhood of the Father and the Son likewise demonstrates the personhood of the Holy Spirit. For example, just as our communion with the Father and with the Son reveals their personhood, even so our communion with the Spirit reveals His personhood.” He then points to 2 Corinthians 13:14 where one reads that the “communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all”. The question is: How can one have communion or fellowship with the Spirit, if He is an ‘it’ rather than a ‘He’? Furthermore, this verse in 2 Corinthians 13 once again distinguishes the Spirit from the Son and the Father. The distinction between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit was also pointed out from Matthew 28:19 where Jesus provides the baptismal formula as “in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit”. If the Father and the Holy Spirit were the same person, why would Jesus repeat it?

Geisler (2003:288) in great detail concludes that “the activities of a person are ascribed to the Holy Spirit: He searches, knows, speaks, testifies, reveals, convinces, commands, strives, moves, helps, guides, creates, recreates, sanctifies, inspires, intercedes, orders the affairs of the church, and performs miracle”. This serves to establish the personhood of the Spirit, but also over against CiMI, that the Father and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons in the Godhead.

Before moving on to the deity of the Holy Spirit, it is worth addressing John 4:24. One reads the following in this verse: “God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The reason why this verse is important is because CiMI uses it to say that since “God is spirit”, He is a Holy Spirit, and therefore there is no distinct person called the Holy Spirit, which is a building block for the doctrine of the Trinity. One must remember that the immediate context

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<sup>129</sup> “Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go near and overtake this chariot.’”

<sup>130</sup> “While Peter thought about the vision, the Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are seeking you.’”

<sup>131</sup> “When he had come to us, he took Paul’s belt, bound his *own* hands and feet, and said, ‘Thus says the Holy Spirit, “So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver *him* into the hands of the Gentiles.’””

of this verse is the account where Jesus spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus arrived at a city in Samaria called Sychar, and at Jacob's well He rested. A woman came to the well to draw water, and Jesus asked her if she could draw some water for Him as well. Given the history between the Samaritans and the Jews, the woman asked Jesus: "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" (John 4:9). Jesus responded by saying to her that if she had asked Him, He would have given her "living water". After she pondered where Jesus would get the living water from, since He had nothing to draw water with and the well was so deep, Jesus told her: "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13-14).

The woman consequently asked Jesus for some of this "living water". Jesus, however, first asked her to bring her husband to the well. Her response was that she had no husband. Jesus then answered the woman saying: "You have well said, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one whom you now have is not your husband; in that you spoke truly." After this response from Jesus the woman perceived that Jesus was a prophet. Beeke and Smalley (2019:606) comment that this account also illustrates "Christ's divine knowledge upon her life". The woman then told Jesus that her forefathers had worshipped on that mountain in Samaria while the Jews insisted that they had to worship in Jerusalem where the temple was situated. The response from Jesus is telling as He stated:

Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

One might have expected Jesus to affirm that the Samaritans must worship in Jerusalem. Michaels (2010:253) explains that "a Jew whose worship is centered other than in Jerusalem is defining himself as something other than a Jew". This shows how important the temple was to the Jews. Jesus, however, suggests that neither of the places of worship are compulsory. Jesus, with His response, is not focusing on where the correct place to worship is. He is rather establishing who the true worshippers are. The true worshippers are not the Jews in the temple, or the Samaritans on the mountain, but those who worship the Father "in spirit and truth". With the coming of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the hour is now here to worship the Father through the Son in "spirit and truth". If one were to ask why in "spirit and truth", the answer Jesus gives is because "God is spirit". Carson (1991:225) states that in this context this phrase characterises "what God is like". This is to say that the essence of God is spiritual.

Howe (2010:260) explicate that it would be irrational to translate this verse as “God is a spirit” with the indefinite article, since it would then only place God as one spirit in a category of spirits. “Since there is no God but God, there cannot be another like God or of this kind. God is not a spirit. Rather, He is Spirit. Whereas other beings *have* spirits, God *is* Spirit” (Howe, 2010:260). He is a spiritual being and hence incorporeal. In the same way that “God is light” (1 John 1:5), and that “God is love” (1 John 4:8), God is also spirit. Carson (1991:225) concludes to say that “God who is spirit can be worshipped only in spirit and truth”.

Take note though that there is no direct reference to the person of the Holy Spirit in this verse. This verse, as a description of God the Father, cannot be used to conflate the person of the Father and the person of the Holy Spirit, especially in the light of the clear distinctions the apostle John introduces between the Father and the Holy Spirit later in his gospel. In fact, Carson (1991:225) suggests that to worship God in “spirit and truth” would not be possible without the work of the distinct person of the Holy Spirit. He states, “There are not two separable characteristics of the worship that must be offered: it must be ‘in spirit and truth’, *i.e.* essentially God-centred, made possible by the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in personal knowledge of and conformity to God’s Word-made-flesh, the one who is God’s ‘truth’.” In other words, without the doctrine of the Trinity, the worship Jesus is talking about in this passage with the woman is impossible to experience. The central role of the Holy Spirit in the prayers and benedictions in the New Testament also confirms this, as discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **b) The deity of the Holy Spirit**

According to White (1998:147), the deity of the Holy Spirit follows irrefutably from His personhood. He states that once the personhood of the Spirit is established, “the argument about His deity is over”. He contends that the fact that the Holy Spirit shares the divine name with the Father and the Son in Matthew 28:19 “makes His deity irrefutable”. However, there is several ways to demonstrate the deity of the Holy Spirit, apart from explicit references to the Father and the Son as well.

### **The Holy Spirit possesses the names of deity**

In Acts 5:3-4 one reads the following account:

But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back *part* of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.”

These are the words of the apostle Peter to Ananias who, together with his wife, sold possessions but did not share it with the rest of the community and consequently lied about their actions. The question to answer is: To whom did Ananias lie? Did he lie to the Holy Spirit, or to God? Beeke and Smally (2019:888) explain that “the Spirit is God, for he knows the secret thoughts of men, and to lie to the Holy Spirit is to lie to God and suffer punishment”. This event should be seen against the backdrop of the warning in the Old Testament to “not tempt the Lord your God”. To lie to the Holy Spirit is to tempt the Lord, as is warned in Deuteronomy 6:16 (Morey, 1996:415).

If one were to compare 1 Corinthians 3:16 with 1 Corinthians 6:19, in this first reference Paul describes believers as “the temple of God” and adds that “the Spirit of God dwells in you”, while in the second reference he describes believers as “the temple of the Holy Spirit”. Paul replaced the word “God”, which he used in the first instance, with “Holy Spirit” in the second instance, while describing the same notion, which is the teaching that believers are the temple of God. In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul explicitly calls the Holy Spirit “Lord”, saying that “the Lord is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

### **The Holy Spirit is identified as *Yahweh***

Apart from these cases, there are a couple of examples where the New Testament writers apply a passage directly to the Holy Spirit, which was originally written about *Yahweh* in the Old Testament. One can consider Isaiah 6:8-10 and Acts 28:25-27, for example. In Isaiah 6:8 the prophet explicitly states that he “heard the voice of the Lord” and then continues to write what the Lord said to him. In Acts 28:25 the apostle Paul states that “the Holy Spirit spoke rightly through Isaiah the prophet to our fathers” and then continues to quote Isaiah 6:8-10. White (1998:148) concludes that since the Holy Spirit is the ultimate Author of Scripture and *Yahweh* said those things directly to the prophet Isaiah, the apostle Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit interprets that to be the word of the Holy Spirit Himself to the prophet Isaiah; “the Spirit is fully divine” because He is *Yahweh*.

Another similar example can be observed between Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Hebrews 10:15-17. Jeremiah explicitly introduces his message with the words: “Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord.” When the author of Hebrew quotes the particular passage of the prophet Jeremiah, he states that “the Holy Spirit also witnesses to us, for after He has said”, which is followed by the passage in Jeremiah. Hughes (1977:403) comments on this, saying:

[T]he Holy Spirit and *Yahweh* are one [which] is plainly implied by the equation of what the Holy Spirit says with what the Lord (in the Hebrew, *Yahweh*) says. This teaching coincides with the

declaration of 2 Peter 1:21<sup>132</sup> that the prophets were men moved by the Holy Spirit who spoke from God.

### **The Holy Spirit possesses the attributes of deity**

Only God is eternal. Yet, one reads the following in Hebrews 9:13: “how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” The Spirit is described as the “eternal Spirit”. This would mean that the Holy Spirit is God.

The apostle Paul writes the following in 1 Corinthians 2:10: "But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." According to Morey (1996:425), this passage describes the omniscience of the Holy Spirit. The verb in this verse translated as “searches” is in the “timeless or gnomic tense which indicates an eternal attribute of the Spirit. His knowledge is all embracing at all times.” Take note that this verse cannot be interpreted in such a way as to indicate that the Holy Spirit goes out and acquires knowledge. He rather just “knows all things at all times”. Only God is omniscient, which makes the Holy Spirit God. In the same way that the Father “searches the hearts” (Romans 8:27), and the Son “searches the minds and hearts” (Revelation 2:23), the Spirit “searches all things” (Morey, 1996:426). Paul, however, also includes the “deep things of God”. According to Hodge (1857:39), this passage “proves at once the personality and the divinity of the Holy Ghost. His personality, because intelligent activity is ascribed to him; he *searches*; his divinity, because omniscience is ascribed to him; he knows all that God knows.”

When the Gospel of Matthew deals with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, His holiness is also emphasised. One reads in Matthew 12:31-32:

Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy *against* the Spirit will not be forgiven men. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the *age* to come.

Given that the Holy Spirit has a different function than the Father and the Son, blasphemy against Him cannot be forgiven. In this regard one should again note the explicit distinction between the Son and Holy Spirit. Morey (1996:427-428) further explains that “if the Spirit were only a part of the Father, to blaspheme the Father would be to blaspheme the Spirit. But this is not the case. Whoever blasphemes the Father can be forgiven, but not those who blaspheme the Spirit. They must be separate persons.”

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<sup>132</sup> “... for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit.”



Another attribute is also the omnipresence of the Spirit, which can be observed in Psalm 139:7: “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” In the light of this verse the Holy Spirit is not a localised spiritual being like an angel, one could say. He is rather, in the words of Beeke and Smalley (2019:888), “the omnipresent God”. One can also briefly list the following attributes of the Holy Spirit: Life (Romans 8:2), truth (John 16:13), love (Romans 15:30) and holiness (Ephesians 4:30).

### **The Holy Spirit performs acts of deity**

The Holy Spirit is involved in and self performs certain acts which can only be ascribed to God. In Genesis 1:2 one reads that the Spirit is in some way involved in God’s act of creation. Job 33:4 states the act of creation more explicitly as “the Spirit of God has made me”. Referring to God’s creation, the Psalmist also addresses God saying, “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created.” It is also clear that the Holy Spirit is involved in the act of redemption. The apostle Paul, for example, maintains that one must not grieve the Holy Spirit, since He is the one Who sealed one “for the day of redemption” (Ephesians 4:30). The apostle John describes the Spirit as the agent of our regeneration (John 3:5). According to Paul the Spirit is also the one who stands behind our “sanctification” (2 Thessalonians 2:13). The Holy Spirit is moreover involved in the performance of miracles and the bestowal of supernatural gifts. The author of Hebrews ascribes certain “signs and wonders”, “various miracles” and “gifts” to the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 also states: “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.”

Morey (1996:428) summarises the work of the Holy Spirit as follows:

He glorifies Christ (John 16:14) and convicts us of sin and brings us to repentance (John 16:8–11). He gives us assurance of salvation (Rom. 8:16). He develops faith, hope, love, patience, and all the other “fruit of the Spirit” in our lives (Gal. 5:22–23). He prays for us when we do not know what to pray for (Rom. 8:26). To do all these things He has to be omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, etc. In other words, He has to be GOD.

If the Holy Spirit is the agent behind acts that can only be performed by God, He is God.

### **The Holy Spirit is associated with God in prayers and worship**

Jude 1:20 exhorts Christians to build themselves up in the faith and to pray “in the Holy Spirit”. Paul, in Philippians 3:3 also speaks of worshipping “God in the Spirit”. In Ephesians 2:18 he also explains that believers, through the Son and by “one Spirit”, have access to the Father. True worship of the Father is therefore not possible without the work of the Holy Spirit in one’s heart. In John 14:23 one reads the following: “Jesus answered and said to him, ‘If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our

home with him.” In this regard, White (1998:149-150) reminds us of Jesus’s promise that the Father dwells in those believers who “love him” and the way He does this is “by His Spirit”.

### **c) Concluding remarks**

God the Holy Spirit, which is here demonstrated to be a legitimate way to refer to the Holy Spirit, usually does not receive the same amount of attention as the Father and the Son. However, one must remember that the function of the Spirit is not to attract the same kind of attention. White (1998:139) explains it as follows:

But, since it is the Spirit’s role to direct the hearts of men to Christ, and to conform them to His image, He does not seek to push himself into the forefront and gain attention for himself. One result of this voluntary role of the Spirit in the work of salvation is that the evidences of His personality and deity are not as numerous or obvious as those for the Father or the Son. He is not “up front” and is not spoken of as often as the other persons.

In this sense the Spirit’s role is to draw people’s attention, not to Himself, but to the person of Jesus Christ and to convict people of their sins. One could say in some sense that just as the Son shows one the face of the Father, the Spirit shows one the face of the Son.

The functions between the three persons can be phrased in such a way as to indicate that “the Father is the Planner, the Son is the Accomplisher, and the Holy Spirit is the Applier of salvation to believers” (Geisler, 2003:291). While the Father is the Source who eternally generated the Son, the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is sent forth by the Father and the Son at Pentecost. In John 15:26 the apostle wrote the following: “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.” This passage introduces another distinction between the three persons, but also reveals a theological truth about the relationship between the three persons. Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as “the Helper”, which is the Greek word *parakletos* (παράκλητος). According to Emery (2011:41), this means that the Holy Spirit is “the protector, the advocate, the intercessor, the consoler, and the interior teacher of doctrine. The Paraclete makes the work of Christ active in the believers whom he teaches, helps, and protects in fidelity to Jesus.” In this sense one can see how the Holy Spirit, as God, applies the salvation accomplished by Jesus in the hearts of believers.

Moreover, Jesus also indicates that He “shall send” the Holy Spirit in the future. At this stage in John 15, the Pentecost had not yet taken place. Elsewhere Jesus expresses how important the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost truly is. In John 16:7 He states that if He does not go away, referring to His ascension into heaven, “the Helper will not come to you”. If Jesus did not ascend into heaven, the Holy Spirit would not have been given to the church, and therefore

Jesus labels His ascension as an “advantage” for believers, because then the Spirit will come forth. It is significant that, like so many times in Trinitarian theology, the verb “to proceed” in John 15:26 is again used in such a way as to indicate timelessness (Morey, 1996:423-424). The Holy Spirit was therefore eternally at the Father’s side and eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son until He is also sent on His visible mission as a gift from the Father and the Son to the church. The Spirit indwells all believers and establishes a “supernatural unity” with Christ, which is true Christian fellowship and worship. It is properly called, in the words of White (1998:151), “a divine fellowship, brought about by a divine person, the Holy Spirit of God, the eternal third person of the blessed Trinity”.

According to Emery (2011:42-43), the sending of the Holy Spirit as “the Helper” or “Paraclete” is based on His relation to the Father and the Son. It is only by the Spirit that Christians have “direct and immediate communion” with “no one less than the Son and the Father themselves” (Bavinck, 2004:278). Emery continues by saying, “The relation of the Spirit with Jesus is essential: it shows the nature and value of the action of the Paraclete in reference to Jesus; it makes apparent the continuity between the work of Jesus and that of the Paraclete.” The incarnation of Jesus Christ, together with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is what led believers to the confession of the doctrine of the Trinity. Kelly (2008:449) states that the church “had to seek to understand who this Christ and Holy Spirit were, who brought them into the saving community of Israel”.

#### **5.4.3.7. Conclusion of the biblical basis for the Trinity**

Given all the arguments presented above, the conclusion is that the doctrine of the Trinity is not unbiblical, but is in fact consistent with biblical data, and consequently can be demonstrated by reasoning from the Scriptures. Brown (1988:151) is accordingly correct in stating that one cannot come to terms with the evidence in Scripture without the doctrine of the Trinity.

Gregory of Nazianzus (1894:375), a church father from the fourth century, reflected on the doctrine of the Trinity in a comprehensive way as follows:

Besides all this and before all, keep I pray you the good deposit, by which I live and work, and which I desire to have as the companion of my departure; with which I endure all that is so distressful, and despise all delights; the confession of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. This I commit unto you to-day; with this I will baptize you and make you grow. This I give you to share, and to defend all your life, the One Godhead and Power, found in the Three in Unity, and comprising the Three separately, not unequal, in substances or natures, neither increased nor diminished by superiorities or inferiorities; in every respect equal, in every respect the same; just as the beauty and the greatness of the heavens is one; the infinite conjunction of Three Infinite Ones, Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost;

the Three One God when contemplated together; Each God because Consubstantial; One God because of the Monarchia. No sooner do I conceive of the One than I am illumined by the Splendour of the Three; no sooner do I distinguish Them than I am carried back to the One. When I think of any One of the Three I think of Him as the Whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking of escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of That One so as to attribute a greater greatness to the Rest. When I contemplate the Three together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the Undivided Light.

The Trinity does not compromise on monotheism, nor the oneness of God. It therefore upholds the fundamental belief that there is only one true God, and that this one true God's essence cannot be divided into smaller parts. He is consequently not composed of parts. It also upholds the distinct divine persons in Scripture as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, without confusing them with each other or conflating them in any sense. They are distinct persons who possess the same divine essence fully and eternally, making each of them fully God as God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Moreover, the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ maintains that the Son is fully God and fully man. The Son, as the second person of the Trinity took upon Himself a human nature. As will become clear, this is an essential precondition for the Son to be able to save mankind. As God, He can bear the full penalty of sin and reach to God, and as man, He can bear the penalty of man and reach to humanity in order to unite humanity with Himself.

All of this can be presented to CiMI in the form of questions. How can they, without the Trinity, uphold monotheism when there is a plurality of divine persons in Scripture? If they want to reject the Trinity, they must either twist Scripture to fit their theological assumptions, or concede that the Bible has errors.

Moreover, CiMI's (2018g) claim that the doctrine of the Trinity is false because the word 'Trinity' appears nowhere in the Bible has been answered many times over and CiMI is also not the first cult to introduce this objection. Although it may seem compelling, there is no merit to such an objection. If this were a criterion to determine truth, it does not face up to its own criteria in the first place. In other words, if anything can only be true if one can find the exact words for it in the Bible, this criterion would be self-refuting since the Bible nowhere stipulates that something can only be true if it is stated word for word in the Bible. The words 'international' and 'collective' are not found anywhere in the Bible and yet CiMI uses them in their name. The word 'Bible' is also not mentioned in the Bible. This objection misses the point of systematic theology. House and Carle (2003:54) explain that "the term *trinity* simply summarizes certain aspects of biblical teaching about God's nature". Summarily then, the conclusion thus far is that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical, while CiMI's concept of God is unbiblical.

#### 5.4.4. A brief historical overview of the doctrine of the Trinity

One final consideration with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity is the early history in which it was more formally framed. CiMI (2018g) insists that the doctrine of the Trinity was voted in by way of a majority vote at the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D., and consequently the church has accommodated the doctrine into the different translations of the Bible. Moreover, CiMI also claims the following:

However, when we look at the studies and works of many theologians who lived in the years 120-325 A.D. (before the Council of Nicaea) we clearly see that many of them did not believe in a Trinity doctrine and differed with one another on several aspects. Looking at what Jesus Christ and the Apostles taught in the Bible we cannot find such a doctrine, but rather the opposite (almost on every page of the New Testament).

Consequently, considering CiMI's claim that the Trinity was voted in with a majority vote, and that no one prior to the Council of Nicaea had believed in the Trinity, this is an issue worthy of attention. Their claim regarding the absence of the Trinity in the Bible has already been showed to be false.

It should be noted that CiMI is not new when it comes to this historical objection against the Trinity. In their booklet, *Should you believe in the Trinity?* the Jehovah's Witnesses also level this objection claiming that the Trinity was created around the time of the Council of Nicaea, but is nowhere to be seen in the Bible. They also contend that this doctrine was not taught by any theologians prior to the Council of Nicaea. Thus, the Jehovah's Witnesses (The Watchtower Bible & Tract Society, 1989a:7) conclude that "the testimony of the Bible and of history makes clear that the Trinity was unknown throughout the Biblical times and for several centuries thereafter". In this sense, CiMI is only following in the footsteps of other cults, whom the church has already thoroughly critiqued and refuted.

The way in which the researcher addresses the historical overview of the Trinity is to focus first of all on a handful of Ante-Nicene fathers to show that an understanding of a broadly Trinitarian theology was already visible in their writings. Afterwards, a broad overview of the Council of Nicaea is provided to address the objection of CiMI and to place the Council in its proper historical context. It is important to remember, in the words of Morey (1996:451), that while "early Church history may *verify* that a doctrine was indeed taught in the first centuries of the Christian Church, it *cannot* establish that doctrine as truth. Only Scripture can determine what doctrines make up the faith once and for all delivered unto the saints." This is precisely the reason why the biblical basis for the Trinity first had to be established before moving on to the history. Even if CiMI dismisses the historical account of the Trinity provided here, the biblical basis for it remains true.

#### **5.4.4.1. The Ante-Nicene Fathers and the Trinity**

Bavinck (2004:280) leads one into this discussion by noting that the doctrine of the Trinity was not “born from philosophical reasoning about the nature of God, but from reflection on the facts of revelation, specifically on the person and work of Christ”. This means that the content of the doctrine of the Trinity was not brought about by the imagination of the early church fathers. It was rather the inevitable result of deep and consistent reflection on the truths of Scripture, even by theologians prior to the Council of Nicaea.

It is also worth pointing out what the role of heresy was in the formulation of the Trinity. Emery (2011:59) observes that it is precisely the errors of heresy that provided “the Fathers of the Church with the occasion for deeper reflection on the Trinity” and which “led the Church to make precise the formulations of her faith”. He emphasises that this aspect is not only applicable to the past, but also relevant today when engaging with a group like CiMI. He states that the “consideration of an error enables one to discover the depth of the truth, and a more profound knowledge of the truth helps one to discern the root of the error that opposes it”. In this sense, dealing with a Unitarian group like CiMI is an opportunity of restating the truth of Scripture and the doctrines it teaches.

Morey (1996:452) explains it as follows:

Trinitarians do not expect to find in the literature of the early Church the sophisticated terminology and definitions of the trinity worked out at Nicaea and at later church councils ... What we do expect to find is that the early Christians followed the New Testament in viewing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as God. It does not really matter that they had not thought through all the implications of this truth, or that they were oblivious to all the sophisticated philosophical questions which would eventually arise.

This explains why the doctrine of Trinity, although it was not officially systematised yet, had been believed for centuries before the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. Hence, that there had already been an understanding of Trinitarian theology by the church fathers before the Council of Nicaea can clearly be observed in their writings. What follows is therefore a brief overview of some of these Ante-Nicene Fathers, starting with Clement of Rome.

##### **a) Clement of Rome (d. 99)**

One of the earliest letters written outside of the New Testament was eventually credited to Clement who was one of the early bishops of the church in Rome. White (1998:179) comments that Clement “is soaked in Scripture. That there is only one true God, and that the Father, Son, and Spirit are separate persons, are clearly truths fundamental to Clement’s beliefs.” Together with Ignatius, Clement is properly known as an Apostolic Father. However, there is not much

otherwise known about Clement of Rome (Kelly, 1977:31). The letter that was attributed to him had no name to identify the author, but it tells of a group of people who rebelled against the eldership at the church in Rome and eventually removed them from their leadership positions. The letter is consequently addressed to a church in Corinth, taking issue with what had happened to them (White, 1998:179).

Clement (1891:63) writes as follows:

For Christ is with them that are lowly of mind, not with them that exalt themselves over the flock. The sceptre [of the majesty] of God, even our Lord Jesus Christ, came not in the pomp of arrogance or of pride, though He might have done so, but in lowliness of mind, according as the Holy Spirit spake concerning Him.

One can clearly observe the three persons of the Trinity in this citation. He speaks of Jesus Christ and refers to the Holy Spirit. In the same letter he also asks the following question: "Have we not one God and one Christ and one Spirit of grace that was shed upon us?" (Clement, 1891:77). Moreover, near the end of his letter he writes these words:

For as God liveth, and the Lord Jesus Christ liveth, and the Holy Spirit, who are the faith and the hope of the elect, so surely shall he, who with lowliness of mind and instant in gentleness hath without regretfulness performed the ordinances and commandments that are given by God, be enrolled and have a name among the number of them that are saved through Jesus Christ, through whom is the glory unto Him for ever and ever. Amen (Clement, 1891:82).

Clement of Rome clearly acknowledges the three persons of the Trinity. White (1998:180) comments that Clement incorporated the same language one finds in the letters of Paul, using the words "God," "Lord" and "Spirit. He also refers to the three persons as "the faith and hope of the elect" and gives eternal glory to Jesus Christ. Whether it is Clement who wrote this letter or not, it is clear that the vocabulary of the Trinity was present at this early stage already.

### **b) Ignatius of Antioch (d. 107)**

White (1998:181) indicates that the first Christian to write multiple letters of a theological nature was Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch. According to tradition, Ignatius knew the apostle John. One of the first heresies regarding the person of Jesus Christ was called Docetism, and Ignatius was one of its major opponents, who refuted the Docetists in the early decades of the second century (Hurtado, 2005:529). The Docetists taught that Jesus never had a physical body with flesh and bones, but, like a phantom, only appeared to be physical (Brown, 1988:52). Ignatius was martyred during the reign of Emperor Trajan and on his way to his execution in Rome, he wrote many of his letters to different churches, confessing that Jesus was truly man and not only a man in appearance as taught by Docetism.

White (1998:181) notes that the most important contribution of Ignatius “is his crystalline testimony to the deity of Christ”. Ignatius (1885:49) commences his letter to the Ephesians as follows:

Ignatius, who is also called Theophorus, to the Church which is at Ephesus, in Asia, deservedly most happy, being blessed in the greatness and fulness of God the Father, and predestinated before the beginning of time, that it should be always for an enduring and unchangeable glory, being united and elected through the true passion by the will of the Father, and Jesus Christ, our God: Abundant happiness through Jesus Christ, and His undefiled grace.

Notice that he explicitly refers to Jesus as “our God”. He also distinguishes Jesus Christ from the Father.

He writes that Jesus Christ is “the Lord our God”, who “became ... man, of Mary the virgin” (Ignatius, 1885:52). He further mentions and distinguishes the three persons of the Trinity, writing that “the Son of God, who was begotten before time began, and established all things according to the will of the Father, He was conceived in the womb of Mary, according to the appointment of God, of the seed of David, and by the Holy Ghost” (Ignatius, 1885:57). From these quotations it is clear that the content of the Trinity was already functioning in the theology and worship of the early church (Morey, 1996:458).

### **c) Justin Martyr (ca. 100–ca. 165)**

Justin Martyr has been described as the “greatest apologist of the second century” (Edgar & Oliphint, 2009:35). His era witnessed a skirmish for the hearts and minds of people which was mainly philosophical in nature. Justin was killed under the reign of Caesar Marcus Aurelius during one of the persecutions (Brown, 1988:77). Hurtado (2005:642) proposes that the works of Justin Martyr provide the earliest “example of a proto-orthodox Christian seriously attempting to articulate an understanding of Jesus as divine in terms he hoped to make comprehensible and even persuasive both to Jewish interlocutors and the wider culture”.

Here is a statement from Justin Martyr’s (1885:164) works where he mentions all three persons of the Trinity and explicitly states that they are worshipped by him in “reason and truth”:

Hence are we called atheists. And we confess that we are atheists, so far as gods of this sort are concerned, but not with respect to the most true God, the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues, who is free from all impurity. But both Him, and the Son (who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of the other good angels who follow and are made like to Him), and the prophetic Spirit, we worship and adore, knowing them in reason and truth, and declaring without grudging to every one who wishes to learn, as we have been taught.



It is clear then that Justin Martyr believed in the theological content of the Trinity, and worshipped the Father, Son and Spirit as God. He also states that Jesus Christ is “the Son of the true God Himself” (Ignatius, 1885:166-167). This is more evidence that the doctrine of the Trinity was already present as early as the second century.

#### **d) Irenaeus (120-202/3)**

After studying under Polycarp, the disciple of the apostle John, Irenaeus became a priest in the city of Lyon, which is situated in modern-day France (Edgar & Oliphint, 2009:83; Geisler, 203:299). According to Bavinck (2004:283), he was a “vigorous opponent of the gnostic idea of God and of the theory that makes the Logos the rational principle of the universe”. Brown (1988:78) points out that Irenaeus is best known for his work titled *Against Heresies*, which served as the “chief source for Gnostic theologies” for many centuries. There are two theories of how he died. The one is that he died in the massacre of 202 A.D., which was a result of Emperor Severus’s reprisals. The other is that he lived until the reign of Emperor Commodus and died naturally in 203 A.D.

In *Against Heresies* Irenaeus (1885:330) wrote the following:

The Church, though dispersed throughout the whole world, even to the ends of the earth, has received from the apostles and their disciples this faith: [She believes] in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and His [future] manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father ‘to gather all things in one’.

Irenaeus therefore also maintained the distinction between the three persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, he explicitly refers to the “incarnation” of Jesus Christ which is “for our salvation”. Also note that he speaks of the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus into heaven. He also states that “there is one God, the Father over all, and one Word of God, who is through all, by whom all things have been made” (Irenaeus, 1885:456). Finally, he also explained the following:

But the path of those belonging to the Church circumscribes the whole world, as possessing the sure tradition from the apostles, and gives unto us to see that the faith of all is one and the same, since all receive one and the same God the Father, and believe in the same dispensation regarding the incarnation of the Son of God, and are cognizant of the same gift of the Spirit (Irenaeus, 1885:548).

All of these citations from Irenaeus demonstrate once again that the doctrine of the Trinity was not absent in those early centuries of the church. All three persons are acknowledged and are worshipped in unity. The deity of the Son was also established by these early writers.

#### **e) Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215)**

According to Brown (1988:87), Clement of Alexandria was the first Christian to publish a “treatise on ethics”. He was accordingly not so much a dogmatist as an ethicist and ever since his writings, moral theology accompanied dogmatic theology (Kelly, 1977:127). He did however contribute to theology. He mentions the following in his works: “The universal Father is one, and one the universal Word; and the Holy Spirit is one and the same everywhere” (Clement, 1885a:220). One can gather from this statement that he acknowledged the three persons of the Trinity and knew that in some sense they were all one in their essence.

He also makes the following statement with regard to Jesus Christ as the Word:

There was, then, a Word importing an unbeginning eternity; as also the Word itself, that is, the Son of God, who being, by equality of substance, one with the Father, is eternal and uncreate. That He was always the Word, is signified by saying, ‘In the beginning was the Word.’ But by the expression, ‘we have seen with our eyes,’ he signifies the Lord’s presence in the flesh, ‘and our hands have handled,’ he says, ‘of the Word of life’ (Clement, 1885c:574).

Finally, Clement (1885b:468) also states, “I understand nothing else than the Holy Trinity to be meant; for the third is the Holy Spirit, and the Son is the second, by whom all things were made according to the will of the Father.”

In the light of these comments one can already see that the doctrine of the Trinity was embraced long before the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. Although Clement of Alexandria already used the word ‘Trinity’ in his works, the Ante-Nicene Father who used the word ‘Trinity’ for the very first time was Tertullian.

#### **f) Tertullian (160–225)**

Edgar and Oliphint (2009:115) note that in the third century the church became more confident with its teachings. During this time, the “foremost thinker from Carthage was Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus”, who is better known as Tertullian in English. Geisler (2003:300) describes him as the “African apologist and theologian”. As mentioned above, he was the first person to use the term ‘Trinity’. Hurtado (2005:433) also notes that Tertullian, together with some of the other names mentioned and discussed above, has “hammered out the basics of an influential understanding of God in the energetic disputation among various competing Christian views of their day, and in desperate argumentation with pagan religion and philosophy”.

Tertullian (1885b:603) writes the following: “I testify that the Father, and the Son, and the Spirit are inseparable from each other ... my assertion is that the Father is one, and the Son one, and the Spirit one, and that They are distinct from Each Other.” Tertullian clearly identifies the three distinct persons, and also maintains their unity. He also asserts with regard to Jesus Christ that He is “God of God” (Tertullian, 1885a:34) and thus he already paves the way for the words of the Creed of Nicene.<sup>133</sup> Once again it can be observed that the Trinity was observed by early figures of the church.

#### **g) Hippolytus (d. 235)**

Together with Tertullian, Hippolytus was influenced by some of the previous figures, especially Irenaeus. Hippolytus devoted a great deal of time to the “refutation of Gnostic dualism” (Kelly, 1977:110). Kelly (2008:193) mentions that, although Hippolytus was not “a great theologian”, he was still “widely read in the philosophies, religions and heresies of his day”. His major work was titled *Refutation of all Heresies*. He argues that “heresies are only superficially Christian” and are essentially identifiable as paganism clothed in religion.

Hippolytus (1886b:226) asserts as follows:

A man, therefore, even though he will it not, is compelled to acknowledge God the Father Almighty, and Christ Jesus the Son of God, who, being God, became man, to whom also the Father made all things subject, Himself excepted, and the Holy Spirit; and that these, therefore, are three. But if he desires to learn how it is shown still that there is one God, let him know that His power is one. As far as regards the power, therefore, God is one. But as far as regards the economy there is a threefold manifestation, as shall be proved afterwards when we give account of the true doctrine.

He was clearly convinced on the grounds of Scripture that there are three divine persons. He also refers to his explanation above as “true doctrine”. Additionally, he describes Jesus Christ as the “God above all” (Hippolytus, 1886a:153).

Hippolytus clearly believed in the Trinity and affirmed the deity of Jesus Christ. One final figure worth discussing is Origen.

#### **h) Origen (ca. 184–ca.254)**

Origen “distinguished himself as one of the most prolific of the Eastern Fathers” (Edgar & Oliphint, 2009:157). To be sure, Origen was plagued with “doctrinal troubles” for the most part of his career and did not remain consistent with Scripture in every aspect. He did however believe in the Trinity. He, for example, writes that “the Holy Spirit would never be reckoned in the Unity

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<sup>133</sup> The wording of the Nicene Creed with regard to Jesus Christ states that He is “God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God”.

of the Trinity, i.e., along with the unchangeable Father and His Son, unless He had always been the Holy Spirit” (Origen, 1885a:253). Following the baptismal formula in Matthew 28, he also mentions the following:

From all which we learn that the person of the Holy Spirit was of such authority and dignity, that saving baptism was not complete except by the authority of the most excellent Trinity of them all, i.e., by the naming of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by joining to the unbegotten God the Father, and to His only-begotten Son, the name also of the Holy Spirit.

Origen clearly maintains the distinction between the three persons of the Trinity and calls the three names “the most excellent Trinity”. He also emphasises the eternity of the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity.

### **i) Concluding remarks**

This historical overview shows that CiMI’s claim is historically unfounded. The doctrine of the Trinity did exist before the Council of Nicaea and was not invented there. It was clearly understood by all the abovementioned figures of the early church. They believed in the content of the Trinity, and it was the rise of heresy that forced the church to clarify and systematise the doctrine of the Trinity in greater detail.

Hunt (2011:365) summarises this observation regarding the early church:

What is remarkable is that, even at this early stage, the community is clearly well acquainted with this Triadic pattern. No explanation is offered; evidently none is necessary. The pattern is apparently already well established as the distinctively and typically Christian way of speaking of God. This text, along with many others in the New Testament, clearly attests to the lived experience of the Three in the early Christian Community. Now, there is no question that this is Trinitarian doctrine. It would not be for some centuries that doctrine per se would be formally defined. But what is very evident, here in our earliest sources, is a distinctly triad-shaped faith, a faith that was given expression in prayer and worship. It is this lived experience of these Three that would eventually blossom in the Doctrine of the Trinity.

CiMI’s (2018g) claim that “when we look at the studies and works of many theologians who lived in the years 120–325 AD (before the Council of Nicaea) we clearly see that many of them did not believe in a Trinity doctrine”, is a false assumption which is just mentioned but not proved by any means. In fact, the abovementioned citations from the writings of many Ante-Nicene Fathers prove the opposite to be true.

What follows is a brief overview of the Council of Nicaea. The focus is not on the technical discussions which took place during this Council, but rather on the reason why the Council was arranged and how it was conducted.

#### **5.4.4.2. An overview of the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.)**

Sutcliffe (2016:219) confirms that the doctrine of the Trinity was “hammered out in response to conflict” with heresy. The Council of Nicaea therefore did not take place in a historical vacuum. While heresy was one of the important factors to consider, the other was persecution. Christians had endured persecution for nearly two centuries up to 313 A.D., when the “dominant policy of imperial Rome toward Christians did a complete about-face” (Sutcliffe, 2016:216). When Constantine became Emperor of Rome; he changed the policy and declared Christianity a legal religion in the Roman empire. This, in part, explains why the doctrine of the Trinity had not been more thoroughly addressed earlier than the Council of Nicaea. White (1998:178) explains the situation as follows:

The reason is very simple: when you are running for your life, in-depth theological reflection, study, and writing is not a high priority. Until the beginning of the fourth century, the church experienced intense persecution. Sometimes it was localized, sometimes it spanned the Roman empire. There were a couple of periods when the church enjoyed a decade or two of peace. But on the flip side, there were other periods in which they experienced a decade or two of horrific persecution resulting in great bloodshed.

According to Sutcliffe (2016:216), Constantine was concerned about the unity of the Christian Church in the face of doctrinal conflict and decided to support the church by assisting with the councils from the throne’s side. He was worried that a divided church might have political ramifications for the empire. Anatolios (2011:17), for example, notes, “After Constantine defeated his Eastern rival, Licinius, and become sole emperor in 324, he quickly addressed the threat to unity created by this ecclesial debate.” It would be wrong however to “attribute to him personally the decisive theological input which led to the formulation of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity”. The major heresy that needed to be faced was Arianism, after its main proponent Arius. Ayres (2004:13) unpacks some of the background regarding the Arian controversy as follows:

Many summary accounts present the Arian controversy as a dispute over whether or not Christ was divine, initially provoked by a priest called Arius whose teaching angered his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria. Eventually, this traditional account tells us, the controversy extended throughout the century—even after the decisive statements of the Council of Nicaea—because a conspiracy of Arians against the Nicene tradition represented particularly by Athanasius perpetuated Arius' views.

Arianism therefore proclaimed that only the Father is God, and the Son was a created being who is inferior to the Father. Arius was convinced that, although the Son is an exalted being, he was still created and therefore not eternal. Consequently, this meant that the Son was “not of the same substance as the Father” (Berkhof, 1937:86). The dispute was in this sense narrowed

down to the deity of the Son in the context of the Trinity.<sup>134</sup> White (1998:186) observes that the Council of Nicaea was the greatest important council in the history of the church. In June of 325 A.D. 300 bishops from the eastern parts of the Roman empire gathered for this occasion. Most of them “bore the scars of years of persecution that had only recently ended”. This means that these bishops were all willing to lay down their lives for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Only bishops could be part of any decision-making at this Council. However, there was a deacon present at the Council named Athanasius who challenged the Arians and maintained that the Father and the Son are the same essence or substance (Berkhof, 1937:86). Sutcliffe (2016:219) affirms that Athanasius became known as the “champion of the orthodox position” against that of Arianism. Athanasius argued as follows:

Arianism was basically a reversion to polytheism by undermining the complete unity of the Godhead, that it went against baptism in the threefold name and the worthiness of Jesus to be worshiped and most importantly, that it undermined redemption. Only if the Savior and Mediator was himself divine ... could humans be reconciled to God.

Eventually, on the grounds of consistent arguments from Scripture, the Council condemned Arianism and maintained the deity and immutability of the Son. To be sure, the Council of Nicaea did not end the controversy, but did establish the necessary groundwork for the formal doctrine of the Trinity. White (1998:189) explains that the definition of the Godhead, as worked out at the Council of Nicaea, “had to fight for its life not on the basis that it was an ‘infallible church council’ and therefore had some special authority in and of itself, but on the only meaningful and solid foundation: its faithfulness to the Scriptures”.

To conclude one could say that, although the creedal formula produced by the Council of Nicaea was indeed voted in by a majority, the arguments were still based on Scripture. The Council also did not settle the position once and for all. In fact, Athanasius had to flee his church numerable times after the Council because of the resurgence of Arianism. It was only by the end of the fourth century that Arianism was officially rejected by the mainstream churches. This did not happen “by political power, but by the irresistible force of truth” (White, 1998:190).

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<sup>134</sup> Anatolios (2011:47-48) adds the following clarification: “In Arius’s theology, any being that is in any sense posterior to the Unbegotten can only be considered as coming into being as the effect of the sovereign will of the one who is unqualifiedly prior. The bringing about of this effect is called creation; the effect itself must be called a creature; and, from the perspective of the creature, what precedes this effect is nothing. Given all of the above, we must say that the Son, as begotten and caused by the one God, is a creature who came to be from nothing. But Arius staked his claim to a coherent interpretation of Christian faith not by devaluing the Son as a creature like all other creatures, despite his opponents’ caricatures, but by proposing a positive and carefully constructed reinterpretation of the primacy of Christ.”

### 5.4.5. Conclusion of the doctrine of the Trinity

This marks the end of the reclamation and reaffirmation of the doctrine of the Trinity over against CiMI. It has been shown that the Trinity has a strong and more compelling biblical basis than any other concept of God. God is the one true God, who is triune. He is one essence, and yet three persons. CiMI fails to deal with the deep theology behind the doctrine of the Trinity. It also seems as if CiMI cannot decide which line of critique they want to follow. The historical critique is, as shown, not accurate and cannot account for the historical data and context.

When it comes to a theological critique, they claim that the Trinity divides the essence of God, but also teaches there are three gods.<sup>135</sup> This seems strange, since one would expect the critique to be either one of these two, but not both. Either the Trinity divides God's being into three parts, or it creates three gods. Whichever one they end up pursuing, it has been shown that both critiques fail. The Trinity does not compromise on God's simplicity, neither does it compromise on monotheism. The Creed of Athanasius (Dionysus, 1886:366) summarises the Trinity in an excellent way and also answers all of CiMI's objections:

That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; Neither confounding the Persons: nor dividing the Substance. For there is one Person of the Father, another of the Son: and another of the Holy Ghost. But the God-head of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son: and such is the Holy Ghost ... And yet there are not three eternal; but one eternal.

## 5.5. Reclaiming the person and work of Jesus Christ

### 5.5.1. Introduction

One cannot reclaim the doctrine of the Trinity without reclaiming and reaffirming the deity of the Son as the second person of the Trinity. The person of Jesus Christ has therefore already been reclaimed and reaffirmed in previous discussions. Van Gendered and Velema (2008:438) point out that the person and the work of Christ cannot be separated. It is because of who Jesus Christ *is* as the second person of the Trinity, God the Son, Jesus Christ, that He performs His acts and accomplishes salvation. Although the discussion at hand mainly focuses on the reclamation and reaffirmation of the work of Jesus as the Christ, one must remember that His work flows forth from His person. It is precisely because He is Lord that He reigns sovereignly; it is precisely because He is the Saviour that He saves mankind from sin; it is precisely because

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<sup>135</sup> For accessibility purposes one can consider these statements:

- "Today, the church is divided because we divided God" (CiMI, 2018g).
- "There are three gods ... God the Father, God the Son, God the Spirit. That is what they believe, there are three gods" (Labuschagne, 2016c).

He is the Christ that He, as the Anointed, mediates between God and man. In this sense “the significance of the person of Christ is manifested in all of his work” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:440).

These comments explain why Hoekema (1962:382) states that a “devaluation” of the person of Christ, as seen for example in the theology of CiMI, will also lead to a “depreciation of His work”. Sutcliffe (2016:244) also affirms that “an inadequate understanding of the person of Christ ... [results in] an inadequate understanding of the atonement” as part of Christ’s work. Although cultists may explicitly claim that Jesus’s work is sufficient, it will never be sufficient since He has lost all His uniqueness for them. In this way, by denying His deity CiMI has ‘robbed’ Jesus Christ of His ‘unique soteriological significance’. The point is that CiMI will inevitably reinterpret Jesus Christ’s works because of denying His Lordship as God.

It has already been established that if Jesus Christ is not God, who took upon Himself a human nature of flesh and bones, then one will inevitably end up with contradictions. Sutcliffe (2016:246) gives a salient summary of this point:

The Father glorifying the Son, the Son glorifying the Father, the Holy Spirit bringing glory to both; Christ addressed as Lord and God, the centrality of Christ in every aspect of God’s plan, the worthiness of Christ to be worshipped; how could that possibly sit with a God who *will not share his glory with another*, who proclaims that *he alone* is God?

The only way to at least attempt to escape contradictions is by redefining terms and titles of Jesus like the term ‘Christ’, for example.

CiMI does not only reject the deity of Jesus Christ, but introduces an idea pertaining to His person and work that is not consistent with God’s revelation of Himself. According to CiMI, Jesus was only the first “Christ” who “contributes to salvation but, does not accomplish salvation” (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:104). CiMI (2018e) maintains that Jesus became the first Christ at His baptism, stating, “The base word of Christ is the act of anointing. To become a Christ, you need to be anointed. This is exactly what happened at the baptism of Jesus. God anointed Jesus with His Spirit making him a Christ (anointed).” Kotze (2017c) claims that the teaching that Jesus Christ is God is preventing other people from “becoming a Christ”. As the first Christ, Jesus made it possible for others to become Christs as well. Strydom (2019d), for example, tells the members of CiMI: “You are no longer a fallen Adam specie, you are reborn as a Christ specie, and Jesus Christ was the first of many brethren.” He also states that anything in the Bible that reveals something about “Jesus, the first Christ” also reveals something about them as Christs (Strydom, 2016d). CiMI (2018e) additionally teaches the following:

As Jesus was anointed with the Spirit of God and was made a Christ, so also every born-again Child of God is anointed with the Spirit of God, making each an anointed, a Christ. This is what the



cross of Jesus Christ made possible. It made it possible for us to pass over from one Adam specie to a second Adam specie.

Take note that in the theology of CiMI the cross of Christ only made the transition from the old Adam specie to the new Christ specie possible for true believers.

Since Jesus Christ, besides being the first Christ, is in no other way unique from the leaders and members of CiMI (who are all also Christs), they have to redefine the title of Christ in order to apply it to themselves as well. To achieve this, they have to devalue Jesus Christ and overvalue themselves as Christs. As unpacked in Chapter 2, a Christ for CiMI is not a 'who' but a 'what'. CiMI defines a Christ as a "spiritual specie", more specifically, the "second Adam specie" or the new "godly specie" that God created because Adam fell into sin (Strydom, 2019a). This means that when one becomes a Christ, after believing CiMI's gospel, one is reborn into the Christ specie and consequently becomes a Christ. CiMI (2018e) elaborates on the background of their view of a "Christ" as follows:

Growing up, we were taught that Christ was the 'surname' of Jesus. We were also taught that Christ had the same meaning as God and therefore is God. Christ is not God and Christ is also not the surname of Jesus, but rather an explanation of what Jesus was. While Christ can be used as a noun, it is mostly used in the Bible as an adjective that describes a noun. Hence, Jesus (noun) who is a Christ (adjective).

'Christ' is therefore not considered by CiMI to be a title that solely belongs to Jesus, but only explains what Jesus was, namely a Christ, and only the first one of many to follow.

Kotze (2017c) also establishes this teaching of CiMI, explaining it as follows: "When you anoint someone, what is he then called? An anointed. Did you know that that word 'anointed' in the Greek is the word 'Christ'? So, if someone was [anointed], he became a Christ. If you were not [anointed] you are not a Christ." A 'Christ', according to CiMI, does therefore not refer to a specific person like Jesus Christ, but rather an impersonal spiritual specie that rises up and dwells inside of mankind by virtue of being anointed with the Spirit of God<sup>136</sup> and consequently being born again. This happens when one embraces the gospel preached by CiMI.

This discussion starts with a focus on what it means for Jesus to be called "the Christ" (Matthew 16:16). The title of 'Christ' has already been introduced earlier in this chapter, indicating that 'Christ' comes from the Greek version of the Hebrew word for 'Messiah'. More depth and detail can now be added to the theological significance of this title. As pointed out earlier, 'Christ' as 'an anointed' is intricately linked with the mediatorial offices of a prophet, priest and a king,

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<sup>136</sup> One should be reminded that this is not a reference to the Holy Spirit as the third person of the Trinity. CiMI rejects this view and explains that since God is a spirit, He is a Holy Spirit.

found in the Old Testament. Accordingly, this discussion also focuses on the threefold office of Jesus as the Christ and shows how CiMI intercepts it. The resurrection of Jesus will also be reclaimed and reaffirmed over against CiMI's view of Jesus's resurrection.

## **5.5.2. Jesus “the Christ” as Mediator between God and man**

### **5.5.2.1. Jesus is the only Christ**

As was established earlier, Hurtado (2005:99-100) explains that “Christ” as it applies to Jesus, was never reduced to merely a name or a surname. It always remained a title which was applied to Jesus as the Messiah. He further says that “to refer to Jesus as ‘Christ’ (with or without the definite article) was to assert his significance as the divinely approved figure who acts as the eschatological agent of God”. It is important to note that there are certain passages in the New Testament which refer to Jesus only by using the title “Christ, and which are usually connected to His death and resurrection. The apostle Paul, for example, writes in Romans 5:8 that “Christ died for the ungodly”. In Galatians 3:13 he writes that “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, ‘*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*’). He also states in 1 Corinthians 15:20 that “Christ is risen from the dead”. This shows that even when ‘Jesus’ was not explicitly added to ‘Christ’, the title of ‘Christ’ was always used to refer to Jesus Christ who suffered, died and rose again from the dead. Bavinck (2006:361) accordingly claims that “from the beginning the belief that Jesus is the Christ was the heart and core of the Christian confession”.

When looking briefly at some of the gospels, one can also come to the same conclusion. In Luke 23:2 the title of Christ is used individually in reference to Jesus: “And they began to accuse Him, saying, ‘We found this *fellow* perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.’” One should note here that the title “Christ” is used together with “King”. Luke 23:39 accounts the words of one of the criminals who were crucified next to Jesus, saying to Him: “If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us.” This clearly ascribes supernatural abilities to the Christ since the criminal expects Him to be able to take Himself off the cross if He is the Christ. This expectation of the Christ is also brought forth in Mark 15:32: “Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” In Luke 2:11, when the birth of Jesus is announced, the angels state that Jesus is born “in the city of David” and He is “Christ the Lord”. Here the title “Christ” is used together with “Lord” and this passage also serves to show that Jesus in no way became the Christ after His anointing at His baptism, as CiMI would want one to believe, but was already the Christ at His birth. There is also nothing in the context that might suggest these words of the angels to be a prophecy. Jesus is clearly born as the Christ. Another point to observe yet again is that ‘Christ’

without the name 'Jesus' is used to refer to no one else but the person of Jesus Christ. In the book of Acts the apostles clearly used 'Christ' as a title for Jesus and no one else. They did not stop "teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ" (Acts 5:42). Likewise, in Acts 17:3 the apostle Paul is in the synagogue "explaining and demonstrating" to the Jews that "the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead". He also adds that "this Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ".

CiMI is certainly correct to state that 'Christ' means 'the anointed one'. But CiMI fails to account for this title in the broader context of God's special revelation. In the Old Testament there is already what Kelly (2014:79) calls "messianic longings". The Davidic kingship was always viewed as a hope for the future in ancient Israel. Both Lamentation 4:20 and Habakkuk 3:13 mention the "anointed" of God. As indicated earlier, Micah 5:2<sup>137</sup> and Isaiah 9:5-8<sup>138</sup> prophesied about the birth of the coming Messiah in Bethlehem, who is eternal and "Mighty God" Himself. Many of the Psalms also expanded on the concept of a Messiah. Psalm 2:2, for example, talks about kings who set themselves up "against the Lord and against His Anointed". Zachariah 9:9 prophesied that the Messiah is a king who is "just" and have "salvation". He will come "lowly and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey". This prophecy is fulfilled when Jesus Christ does indeed ride into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey, as described in Matthew 21:1-11.

When it comes to the New Testament, in His first sermon Jesus reads a portion of Scripture from the prophet Isaiah. This account is to be found in Luke 4:18-19:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken hearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

After Jesus had read this portion of Scripture, He said the following in verse 21: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus is directly identifying Himself with the Messiah whom the prophet Isaiah spoke about. The implications of His claim are clear in the sense that "the messianic age is already realized in Jesus' coming" (Stein, 1992:157).

One must furthermore remember that it is because of Jesus's title as Christ that the believers in Antioch were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). Moreover, Jesus's title as Christ is applied to Him alone since He alone is the promised Messiah who fulfilled the prophecies. When Jesus, in

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<sup>137</sup> "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Though* you are little among the thousands of Judah, *Yet* out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting."

<sup>138</sup> "For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

Matthew 16:13 asks His disciples who the people say He is, and the apostle Peter answers, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”, an exclusivity is given to this title in the sense that Jesus is “the Christ” and no one else. When commenting on this verse, France (2007:618) explains that although there are Jewish political nuances and expectations in the title of ‘Christ’ or the Hebrew version as ‘Messiah’, the apostle Peter “has gone beyond the popular acclamation of Jesus as a prophet to the point of recognizing him as not just one among many, not even, like John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets (11:11), but as the one climactic figure in whom God’s purpose is finally being accomplished. In that [Peter] has made the crucial breakthrough”. Likewise, the apostle John explains the purpose of his gospel as follows: “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”. That the title of ‘Christ’ was unique to Jesus cannot be doubted, and as the apostle John adds here, “life” can only be granted to someone who believes in His name. It is telling in this regard that Jesus also warned against the presence of “false Christs and false prophets” (Mark 13:22).

Although CiMI believes that Jesus is only the first Christ, and that He became the first Christ at His baptism, it is unfounded and cannot be maintained in light of the New Testament. In Chapter 4 some of their exegetical interpretations in this regard have already been shown to be wrong. He is not a “natural man” who were turned into a “Spiritual man” as a result of being anointed as the first Christ (CiMI, 2018m). Jesus did not become “the first Christ, the first second specie at the baptism waters. At the Jordan River” (Strydom, 2019d). Rather, the Scriptures attest to the fact that He was the long-anticipated Christ who would be born from the virgin Mary. He is the only Christ in the midst of many false Christs, and as will be shown later, He demonstrated this to be the case through His physical, bodily resurrection from the dead. In conclusion, Jesus was the Christ in whom the Father chose the elect “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:4). In no point in time did He become the Christ, it is “a title, a dignity Jesus can claim because he has been chosen by God himself” (Bavinck, 2006:365-366).

#### **5.5.2.2. Jesus Christ as God and man is the only Mediator between God and man**

The theme to address now is that the title of ‘Christ’ leads to the role of Jesus as the final and sufficient Mediator between God and man. Since ‘Christ’ means ‘the anointed one’, and in light of the fact that prophets, priests and kings were anointed into their mediatorial offices, Jesus as ‘the Christ’ is the final and sufficient Mediator between God and man. Therefore “Christ is the name of him whom God anointed. He was anointed with the Holy Spirit to be prophet, priest, and king” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:463). On these grounds, Vos (2014:11) asserts that the true Church of God had no other, and needs no other prophet, priest and king than the “only Mediator” who is Jesus Christ. In His mediating role, or as Sproul (2014:149) puts it, “in the

drama of redemption”, one sees that Jesus Christ “has a *munus triplex*, a threefold office ... Christ is our Prophet, our Priest, and our King.” Before focusing on the threefold office of Christ, however, more general observations must be made regarding Jesus Christ as Mediator, His substitutionary atonement, and how it pertains to CiMI.

When it comes to the role of a mediator, Van Genderen and Velema (2008:436) correctly point out that when there is a mediator present, it assumes “that there is a gap that needs to be bridged, a guilt that must be atoned, and an enmity that must end”. Since mankind has fallen into sin, no man can reach God in a soteriological sense. All of mankind is “under sin” (Romans 3:9), and “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1); no man can ultimately save himself or any other human being for that matter. Indeed, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22). Jesus Christ as the final “Mediator” between God and man is therefore a suitable way of describing His work (Bavinck, 2006:363). Take note that in the same way as there have been “messianic longings” in the Old Testament, there is one case in the Old Testament where there is also a longing for a Mediator.

In Job 9:33 one reads the following words where Job addresses God: “Nor is there any mediator between us, *Who* may lay his hand on us both.” Bavinck (2006:363) notes that this “denotes the rescuer or helper (umpire, arbitrator) whom Job wished would stand between God and himself”. It is suggested that this passage has contributed to the New Testament theology of a Mediator. Hartley (1988:181) unpacks this verse explaining that in his sufferings “Job is grasping after any means to restore his relationship with God. His sense of meaninglessness before inexplicable suffering is deepened by God’s absence from his life. That is why his search for vindication is essentially a search for God again to make himself known to him.”

This longing for a mediator that one can observe in Job is more clearly defined in 1 Timothy 2:5 by the apostle Paul where Jesus Christ is established as this Mediator between God and man for whom Job was longing. Paul states: “For *there is* one God and one Mediator between God and men, *the* Man Christ Jesus.”<sup>139</sup> This verse is in one sense an affirmation of monotheism, but in another sense the focus is rather on Jesus Christ, identified as the “Mediator” between God and man. Kelly (2014:185) explains that “‘Mediator’ means something like ‘one who stands in the middle’ and brings two parties together”. Because of sin, man cannot approach the one, true and holy God, therefore God takes the initiative and approaches man. As referred to already, God the Father is the one who sends God the Son on a mission, and in complete and voluntary

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<sup>139</sup> It should be noted that CiMI uses this verse as an argument against the deity of Jesus Christ. This is again not achievable through this verse, since at most, it only confirms His human nature since He is described as a “man”. However, this verse does not dismiss the divine nature of Jesus.

“subjection to the will of the Father” (Vos, 2014:11), the Son takes upon Himself a human nature, apart from sin, to approach man and be the Mediator between God and man.

Although 1 Timothy 2:5 does not mention the divine nature of Jesus Christ as Mediator, but only refers to Him as the “man”, in the very next chapter Paul states that “God was manifested in the flesh”<sup>140</sup> (2 Timothy 3:16). Accordingly, Kelly (2014:186) observes that 1 Timothy 2:5 focuses on the humanity of Christ since “that would be where the work of reconciliation must primarily occur, though never in separation from his deity”. This indicates that there is a deep theological significance to the Incarnation, which serves as a basis for Jesus Christ to be the Mediator in the first place. In other words, there is a reason why the final and sufficient Mediator must be fully God, and fully man.

Paul’s thought in 1 Timothy 2:6 goes further to include the notion that Jesus Christ as Mediator “gave Himself a ransom for all”. His mediating work therefore takes one to His life and His work on the cross, which includes the payment of penalty that “God’s law demanded” for the transgression of man’s sin (Hendriksen & Kistemaker, 1957:98). Hendriksen and Kistemaker (1957:99) explain that “Christ’s vicarious death, his sacrifice of himself *in the place of others*, is taught here as clearly as words can possibly convey it”. They further clarify that Christ’s death was “substitutionary” and advantageous for it delivers the elect from God’s wrath and grants them salvation, “regardless of rank, station, race, or nationality”. This theme is prevalent in the pages of the New Testament. Matthew 20:28 states, for example, that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” In Ephesians 5:2 one reads: “Christ ... has loved us and given Himself for us.” Finally, in 1 Corinthians 15:3 it is said that “Christ died for our sins”. Jesus Christ, as God and man, lived a sinless life in perfect obedience to the Father. Paul states that after the Incarnation Jesus was obedient “to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8).

Jesus Christ lived a perfect life and gave Himself as the perfect sacrifice for fallen humanity to achieve righteousness for them and to pay the penalty of sin in their stead. Because of sin no man can achieve this righteousness for him/herself. In this sense Jesus, as a sinless and perfect man, “is man the way God intended man to be” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:456).

With His crucifixion Jesus took humanity’s sins on Himself and “bore the penalty for them” (Sutcliffe, 2016:247). In Romans 5:18-19 the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ is described in detail as follows:

Therefore, as through one man’s offense *judgment* came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man’s righteous act *the free gift came* to all men, resulting in justification of

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<sup>140</sup> This is yet another explicit reference to Jesus Christ as “God”.

life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

If God the Son did not add a human nature to His divine nature in the person of Christ, humanity would never have known the Father. According to Kelly (2014:190), "God gives himself in the incarnation of the Son so that we can know him truly in and through Christ. Ever remaining God, he takes on our genuine humanity so that we humans can apprehend the transcendence of God through that graspable humanity." The Son perfectly reveals the Father, but if He had no real human nature, humanity would have no part in the salvation that He accomplished in and through His substitutionary atonement on the cross. As a sinless human being, but take note, of flesh and blood, He achieved righteousness through His obedience, and sufficiently paid the penalty of sin with His own blood on the cross. Ware (2012:113) explains that "the atoning death of Christ was only efficacious because Jesus who died for our sin was a full and integral human being".

Moving on, one must also maintain that if Jesus Christ were not also fully God, His actions and His teachings would not have been "true as God himself is true" (Kelly, 2014:192). Moreover, a mere man cannot overcome sin by living "a perfectly righteous life by [his] own power" (Sutcliffe, 2016:266). To be sure, the Mediator had to be human, but "we need a human whose payment for sin is of infinite value" (Ware, 2012:112). No mere human person can achieve any form of reconciliation with a "holy God", which is why "Christ, the agent of reconciliation, is fully God". The incarnation therefore signals, in the words of Sutcliffe (2016:267),

The atonement is a work of God, from beginning to end, which is why it is efficacious; there was no (mere) 'man', able to do it, so his own arm brought salvation (Isa. 59:16)<sup>141</sup> and God himself provided the Lamb. God reconciled us to himself in Christ (2 Cor. 5:18-19)<sup>142</sup> and purchased us with his own blood (Acts 20:28).<sup>143</sup> Christ gives eternal life (John 10:28)<sup>144</sup> and with the Father and Holy Spirit, sanctifies (1 Cor. 1:2;<sup>145</sup> 1 Thess. 5:23;<sup>146</sup> 2 Thess. 2:13<sup>147</sup>).

Calvin (2011:466) saliently expresses the following notion:

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<sup>141</sup> "Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; And His own righteousness, it sustained Him."

<sup>142</sup> "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation."

<sup>143</sup> "Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood."

<sup>144</sup> "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

<sup>145</sup> "To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

<sup>146</sup> "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

<sup>147</sup> "But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth."

For the same reason, it was also imperative that he who was to become our Redeemer be true God and true man. It was his task to swallow up death. Who but the Life could do this? It was his task to conquer sin. Who but very Righteousness could do this? It was his task to rout the powers of world and air. Who but a power higher than world and air could do this? Now where does life or righteousness, or lordship and authority of heaven lie but with God alone? Therefore our most merciful God, when he willed that we be redeemed, made himself our Redeemer in the person of his only-begotten Son [cf. Rom. 5:8].<sup>148</sup>

Geisler and Rhodes (2008:64) effectively summarise this essential theological truth as follows: “Because Christ is the mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5), He must be both God *and* man. As God, He could reach to God. As man, He could reach to man.”

At this point it becomes clear how the denial of the deity of the Son leads to a devaluation of His work as Mediator. This explains why CiMI, without maintaining the deity of the Son, cannot give a sufficient theological account for Jesus’s work as Mediator. Strydom (2017b) may use the same vocabulary as the church does, saying that “Jesus had to pay the price”. He also states that “God goes, and God pays the price through Jesus Christ for mankind” (Strydom, 2016d). However, the physical crucifixion of Jesus and His blood that flowed on the cross as a substitutionary atonement lose its meaning in CiMI’s theology. Instead, Strydom (2016d), again because of his Gnostic dualism, turns the physical blood of Jesus into “spiritual blood”. He states: “You were bought with ... blood, the spiritual blood, not the flesh blood. The flesh blood had to become sin. There is a spiritual blood born of God.” Consequently, the cross only becomes an instrument to deny the physical flesh of Jesus Christ and embrace the supposed higher spiritual reality. CiMI (2018g) also contends that “through his blood, we received the redemption or salvation from sin. This means we have been spiritually purified of the position of sin and have been dedicated to God spiritually.” Moreover, it should be added that for CiMI the cross only marks the initiation of a process that makes it possible for more people to also become Christs and consequently become spiritual. In this sense CiMI (2018e) explains that in the same way as Jesus was anointed at His baptism and was “made” a Christ, so “every born-again Child of God is anointed with the Spirit of God, making each an anointed, a Christ. This is what the cross of Jesus Christ made possible.”

This is inconsistent with the New Testament. As already indicated, Jesus is the only Christ and there can be no other Christs but “false Christs”. Furthermore, His sacrifice “once for all” accomplished salvation (see Romans 6:10; Hebrews 7:27; 9:12; 10:10). Paul, for example, writes in Colossians 1:19-20 that through the person of Jesus Christ and “the blood of His cross” peace was made, and reconciliation achieved. He also states in Romans 3:25 that Jesus Christ

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<sup>148</sup> “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”



was set forth as “a propitiation by His blood” and in Romans 5:9 that we have “now been justified by His blood”. In Revelation 1:5 the apostle John also asserts that Jesus Christ “washed us from our sins in His own blood”. The author of Hebrews is very clear, stating that “with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption”. There is no mention of any ‘spiritual blood’ that achieves a spiritual salvation. CiMI’s claim is therefore diminishing Christ’s work on the cross. Sutcliffe (2016:254) remarks that the price to save mankind from sin was “no less than the blood of the Son of God”. The salvation in view here is also not a mere process through which one is spiritually uplifted to the same level as Christ, also bearing His title as Christ. The salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ is completed and finalised with His words “It is finished” (John 19:30). It is only through the broken body of Jesus Christ and the shedding of His blood that the promise of forgiveness is realised (Ware, 2012:101). This indicates that he “paid in full the price for our redemption” (Geisler & Rhodes, 2008:105), and as will be discussed later, He does not only accomplish a spiritual salvation, but He redeems one’s body and physical reality as well.

Kotze (2017c), while claiming that Jesus Christ’s work is sufficient, on the one hand says the following: “Do I believe in the finished work of Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ enough? Definitely!” Yet, he later seems to contradict this statement by saying that Jesus’s work “is not enough. Because in vain you are the condition [*sic*] acceptable to God, but you do not do the things that is [*sic*] acceptable to God.” All of these comments regarding CiMI beg the question: If Jesus Christ as Mediator is not sufficient and CiMI is diminishing His work by denying His deity, who is the sufficient Mediator in the eyes of CiMI? Bavinck (2006:238-239) points out: “Mediators between humanity and the deity, messengers of God who convey his blessings and revelations to humans and, conversely, lay their prayers and gifts before his throne, occur in all religions.” In this sense it is not difficult to identify who the mediator in the ‘religion’ of CiMI is. Strydom (2017a), who claims to be the divinely appointed leader and anointed king of CiMI, is the mediator between God and man. Labuschagne (2016c), playing on the Christian concept of “unity with Jesus Christ”, states: “Here in Christ in Me International we become one with Xandré. You are baptised into him ... into the word that he brings to us.” Likewise, Kotze (2017b) also states: “God raised up the man, Xandré, and gave him His name, His word, and glory. This is the same name, the same Word, and the same glory that was given to Jesus. All who come to Him, to Xandré, will receive this name, this Word, and this glory. Amen.”

In their deception and self-deception, CiMI’s leadership has effectively exchanged the mediatorial work of the incarnate Lord, Jesus Christ, for a fallen man called Xandré Strydom who, as only a man, cannot be a sufficient mediator between God and man. Beeke and Smalley (2019:270) explain that “the theological point of contact between God’s infinite mind and our finite and fallen minds is the incarnation of Jesus Christ”. This is why it is only in the true Gospel

of Jesus Christ, as fully divine and fully human, that a cult member will find what no theological system, such as provided by CiMI, can ever deliver – “peace with God and fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ” (Martin, 2004:24).

The “disfigured” Jesus, held forth as the truth by CiMI, is not sufficient to save mankind (Gilchrist, 2013:13) and Xandré Strydom, as a mere man and nothing more, is also not sufficient to save anyone, not even himself. Only the true Christ of Scripture can save. Kelly (2014:194-195) makes this compelling observation:

The various forms of [Unitarianism],<sup>149</sup> which by definition cannot have God on the cross, ‘reconciling the world unto himself’ ... are left with a vacuum as concerns redemption of a sinful world ... The replacements for redemption by Christ will always be unsuccessful, and hence will keep mutating. It may not be so important here to point them out, or even to critique them, as it is to be aware of their folly in wishing to replace the one way of salvation established by the eternal Godhead, and instead to bow in adoration to the God-man, the only possible Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim. 2:5), for he is the one ‘who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time’ (v. 6). In doing this, we obey the Messianic Psalm 2: ‘Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him’ (v. 12).

Christianity, on the grounds of biblical evidence, therefore points one towards the “Savior of the world, Jesus Christ” (Martin, 1980b:14), who is fully God and fully man.

Now that the context is established in the sense that only the physical sacrifice of Jesus Christ as God and man on the cross was sufficient to save, one can move on to the threefold office of Jesus Christ. His work as Mediator involves the office of prophet, priest and king. This threefold office will now be briefly applied to Jesus Christ as Mediator, and in each case it will be shown how CiMI intercepts these offices and attributes them to Strydom and/or the leadership of CiMI. In the end this discussion is relevant to CiMI since it serves as a polemic against their Christology and their view of Jesus as Mediator.

### **5.5.2.3. Christ’s threefold office**

#### **a) Preliminary remarks**

Bavinck (2006:367) notes the following about the office of Jesus Christ:

He does not just perform prophetic, priestly, and kingly activities but is himself, in his whole person, prophet, priest, and king ... He had to be a prophet to know and to disclose the truth of God; a priest, to devote himself to God and, in our place, to offer himself up to God; a king, to govern and protect us according to God’s will.

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<sup>149</sup> The researcher replaced the word ‘Deism’ with ‘Unitarianism’ in order to apply Kelly’s words to CiMI.

The threefold office of Jesus is therefore not offices given to Him over time. He had them eternally as the Mediator and His work as Mediator already began in His preincarnate state after the fall of man into sin (Bavinck, 2006:365). As alluded to earlier, the offices of prophet, priest and king, which one reads about in the Old Testament, find their ultimate “culmination in the kingly, priestly, and prophetic office of Christ” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:465).

In His mediatorial work, Jesus Christ “stands for God before us as Prophet, for us before God as Priest, and to our benefit toward our environment as King” (Vos, 2014:86). In this sense one could say that as Jesus relates from His divinity to humanity, He is Prophet. As He relates from His humanity to God, He is Priest. And in His sovereign Lordship over everything, including humanity, He is King (Bavinck, 2006:367). These offices have also been related to the reality of sin. Since “sin is a darkening of the mind; it is guilt in the conscience; it is, as inherent corruption, a power in the individual and moreover, by organizing itself, a power in the world”, there is a threefold office of the Mediator which corresponds to the “threefold action of sin”, consisting in “knowledge, righteousness, and holiness” (Vos, 2014:88) In this sense all three offices of the Mediator are foundational for the “completeness of our salvation” from sin (Bavinck, 2006:367).

Although the office of Christ is introduced as threefold, one must beware not to make it seem as if Jesus, in one instance acts solely as Prophet, while in another instance acts solely as King, for example. It is rather the case that these offices are only three “facets of the one work of the Mediator” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:464). Bavinck (2006:367) unpacks this notion by saying that Jesus bears all three offices “at the same time and consistently exercises all three at once both before and after his incarnation”. The threefold office of Jesus Christ is therefore, in the words of Turretin (1994:392), sustained by Christ, “not separately, but conjointly”. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:466) note that the threefold office of Jesus Christ is combined in the following way: “He is Prophet in a priestly and kingly manner, Priest in a prophetic and kingly manner, and King in a prophetic and priestly manner.” In turn, Vos (2014:89) expands on this notion to state that “an appreciation of the three offices is the touchstone of the versatility and integrity of our Christianity. Only those who honor Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King have the whole Christ according to the Scriptures.” What follows is an overview of Christ’s threefold office, starting with His office as Prophet.

### **b) Christ as Prophet**

Sproul (2014:150) explains that Jesus Christ is “the Prophet *par excellence*”. The prophetic office of Jesus refers to His acts in which He “as the authoritative representative of God” reveals

the “council of God for the salvation of His people” (Vos, 2014:91). This happens both through the words and the deeds of Jesus.

In the Old Testament a prophet was “a spokesman, an agent of revelation by which God, instead of speaking directly from heaven to the congregation of Israel, put His words into the mouths of men” (Sproul, 2014:149). In this sense a prophet knew, as he stood facing the people and speaking on behalf of God, that God was in a way standing behind Him. This explains why their messages were frequently introduced with the phrase “thus says the Lord”.

False prophets also emerged in ancient Israel and in many instances became more popular among the people than the true prophets (Sproul, 2014:150). In Jeremiah 23:25-27 one reads about the account where God says,

I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in My name, saying, ‘I have dreamed, I have dreamed!’ How long will *this* be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies? Indeed *they are* prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal.

The next verse indicates that God does not want Jeremiah to be too concerned about these false prophets and that he should only continue to faithfully speak the word of God. In verse 28 God says: “The prophet who has a dream, let him tell a dream; And he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What *is* the chaff to the wheat?” It is clear that false prophets, although they may claim dreams and revelations, only “prophesy lies”. Thompson (1980:501) explains as follows: “Once men forgot the character of Yahweh they could be persuaded to accept all kinds of doctrines. This had happened to the ancestors of Jeremiah’s generation.” Over against these false prophets who are like “chaff”, the true ones were given God’s Word, and they faithfully and consistently spoke God’s Word to the people, without deception.

In Deuteronomy 18:15 one reads that God will “raise up ... a Prophet”. This was an important passage for Jews, establishing an anticipation of a great Prophet who will come in the fullness of time. In Acts 3:23 the apostle Peter refers to this Old Testament verse and applies it to Jesus Christ, indicating that “Jesus is the prophet Moses pointed to” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:465). Although Jesus was the Prophet already in His preincarnate state, after the Incarnation the difference is “only a matter of clarity” (Vos, 2014:93). Accordingly, in the New Testament Jesus often compares Himself with other prophets. For example, in Hebrews 1:1-2 He is contrasted with the prophets who functioned in the Old Testament and is identified as the One who is “appointed heir of all things”. Jesus Christ as the final and ultimate Prophet came to

“bear witness to the truth” (John 18:37)<sup>150</sup> and to proclaim the Word of God, but more than that, He *is* the truth (John 14:6)<sup>151</sup> and He *is* the Word of God, according to John 1:1.<sup>152</sup> Consequently, Jesus Christ revealed “the only saving truth” (Turretin, 1996:393), and it is through His “prophetic dignity” that one is lead to “the sum of doctrine” wherein “all parts of perfect wisdom are contained” (Calvin, 2011:496).

In John 12:49<sup>153</sup> Jesus clearly states that He has not spoken on His own authority, but on the authority of the command given to Him by the Father. Since He is eternally “in the bosom of the Father”, only He knows the Father, and only He can “declare” the Father (John 1:18). In John 17:6 one also reads that Jesus Christ “manifested” the Father’s name: “I have manifested Your name to the men whom You have given Me out of the world.” Bavinck (2006:366) also notes that Jesus’s “miracles are signs of his teaching”. This can be observed in John 10:37 where Jesus said to His opposers who wanted to stone Him, that if He does not do “the works” of His Father, they should not believe Him.

After His resurrection and ascension into heaven, the prophetic office of Jesus continued. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:466) summarise this notion as follows: “Following his resurrection he continues his prophetic work, for through the preaching of the apostles and the proclamation of the Word by office bearers his Spirit – as the Spirit of truth – points the way for the church.” In Acts 1:3, after His resurrection and before His ascension, Jesus appears to His disciples and speaks to them about things “pertaining to the kingdom of God”. The Holy Spirit comes forth from the Father and the Son and He, as the Spirit of Christ, guided the disciples “into all truth”. This can also be clearly observed in the book of Acts where the apostles continued the work of Jesus Christ after they had been sent out in Matthew 28:19-20<sup>154</sup> to “make disciples” and to teach them “to observe all things” that He commanded them. Vos (2014:93) adds that the prophetic office of Christ as Mediator was also exercised by “causing the origination of Scripture and all that pertains to it”. The apostle Peter wrote that “no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). In light of these comments, Geisler

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<sup>150</sup> “Pilate therefore said to Him, ‘Are You a king then?’ Jesus answered, ‘You say *rightly* that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.’”

<sup>151</sup> “Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.’”

<sup>152</sup> “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

<sup>153</sup> “For I have not spoken on My own *authority*; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak.”

<sup>154</sup> “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.’ Amen”

(2003:610) explains that all the teachings of Jesus recorded in Scripture are part of His prophetic ministry.

Bavinck (2006:467) notes, “All these ministries and workings proceed from the exalted Christ, who is the one Lord of the church (1 Cor. 8:6)<sup>155</sup> in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Col. 2:3;<sup>156</sup> 1 Cor. 1:30<sup>157</sup>).” As the One who came to bear witness to the truth, He opposed all falsehood. Through His prophetic teachings He leads one to true knowledge of the Father, which grants “eternal life” (John 17:3). Jesus Christ is the “chief subject” of prophecy and “the focal point of all the prophetic teaching of the Old Testament” (Sproul, 2014:150).

### **c) Christ as Priest**

Vos (2014:94) defines the priestly office of Jesus Christ as “His appointment and authorization by God to satisfy for all who are His through sacrifice and intercession before God”. As the final and ultimate Priest “Jesus did not come simply to speak to His people but also to be a sacrifice for them” (Geisler, 2003:610). Calvin (2011:502) observes that Jesus Christ is the only Priest for God’s people since He “blotted out our own guilt and made satisfaction for our sins”.

Sproul (2014:150-151) explains the difference between a prophet and a priest in the Old Testament by saying that while a prophet was facing the people, representing God and bringing His Word to them, the priest was facing God. He adds: “Like the prophet, the priest was a spokesman, but he spoke for the people rather than to them. He made intercession on behalf of the people and prayed for them.” Besides prayers and making intercession, the offering of sacrifices to God was a major part of the priestly office. In Hebrews 5:1 the office of a priest is summarised as follows: “For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins.” Notice that a priest is appointed from “among men ... for men in things pertaining to God”. Hughes (1977:175) observes that an essential characteristic of a priest was his humanity, since “only one who is himself man is fitted to serve as the representative of his fellow men before God”.

In the Old Testament the sacrifices were always considered to be a “substitution”, i.e., that there is an exchange of that which is sacrificed for the one who brings the sacrifice (Vos, 2014:102). This is especially clear in Leviticus 17:11 where one reads the following in the ESV: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your

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<sup>155</sup> “... yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*.”

<sup>156</sup> “... in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

<sup>157</sup> “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.”

souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.” This verse explains why the blood of Jesus had to be poured out as atonement for one’s sins. When Harrison (1980:184) comments on this specific verse, he argues that the sacrifices in the Old Testament were “such that whenever cleansing from sin was required there had to be a blood ritual, since the relationship with God could not be renewed without it”. This means that without the sacrifice of life, there can be no atonement for sin. The animals that the priests sacrificed in the Old Testament also had to be “without defect and clean”, meaning that the best animals were given for sacrifice (Vos, 2014:102).

There is a significant chapter in the book of Leviticus which deserves attention for the purpose of Christ’s priestly office. In Leviticus 16, one is introduced to the “Day of Atonement”. In verse 6 one reads that Aaron, as the high priest, first had to sacrifice a bull to “make atonement for himself and for his house” before he could make sacrifices for the people of Israel. Only when his own sins were atoned for by the sacrifice of the bull, could he “kill the goat of the sin offering, which is for the people” (Leviticus 16:15) and consequently enter into the “Holy Place”. Take note that the “Day of Atonement” is “an everlasting statute” for Israel where they have “to make atonement for the children of Israel, for all their sins, once a year” (Leviticus 16:34). In other words, the “Day of Atonement” had to be repeated once a year.

The author of Hebrews in the New Testament places this Old Testament theology in its proper context with regard to Jesus Christ as our High Priest. In Hebrews 8:5 one reads that the priests of the Old Testament only ministered “the copy and shadow of the heavenly things”. This explains the limitations to their priestly ministry. Where they first had to bring an offering for themselves and their own sin before they could make a sacrifice for the sins of the people, one reads in Hebrews 7:27 that Jesus Christ “does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself”. The priestly office of Jesus Christ is not a mere “copy and shadow”, but the real person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, without having to make a sacrifice for Himself first, nor having to ever repeat it, did not only, as the High Priest bring the sacrifice, but “is at the same time the sacrifice” itself (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:465). In Hebrews 9:28 one reads, for example, that “Christ was offered once to bear the sin of many”.

The reason why Jesus Christ sacrificed Himself is because “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins” (Hebrew 10:4). Vos (2014:105) explains that the sacrifices in the Old Testament were “types” and as types it “depicted the perfect sacrifice of Christ, which alone could effect true atonement”. In this sense Jesus Christ is the only “self-sacrificing, atoning-toward-God, substituting, and actual guilt-removing High Priest” (Vos, 2014:106). Where priests in the Old Testament died and others needed to be appointed, Jesus

Christ “continues forever” and has “an unchangeable priesthood” (Hebrews 7:24). In this regard Sproul (2014:151) explains that the priestly office of Christ continues “even to this moment – not by continually offering sacrifices to satisfy the justice of God but by interceding for His people in the heavenly Holy of Holies within the heavenly temple”.

After His resurrection from the dead and His ascension into heaven, Jesus Christ “lives forever to intercede for His people” (Van Genderen & Velema, 2008:466). Hebrews 8:1-2 communicates the notion that He is “seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man”. This “true tabernacle” is also “foreshadowed in the holy of holies of the Old Testament tabernacle” (Bavinck, 2006:476). Jesus, not with the blood of animals, but with His own blood “entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12) and now sits at the right hand of God where He intercedes for the saints. Bavinck (2006:478) notes that “the sacrifice Christ brought on earth has an eternal character. It remains present in and carries over into Christ’s appearance before the face of God and in his intercession on our behalf.” It is precisely because of Jesus’s priestly work on the cross that He can intercede for His people at the right hand of His Father.

The apostle John aptly states that “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.” Boice (2004:38) explains that in John’s description of Jesus as “Advocate” he means that Jesus “is the one called in to help us before the judgment bar of God”. Since He is also called the “righteous” one, who is the “propitiation for our sins”, it is clear that He, as the final and perfect High Priest, is the “perfect intermediary, now and forever” (Sproul, 2014:151). Bavinck (2006:478-479) summarily observes:

Inasmuch as he once for all offered himself up without blemish and by a single sacrifice for all time perfected those who are sanctified ... he is able for all time to save all those who draw near to God through him ... In this intercession his sacrifice continues to be operative and effective. Not a sacrifice detached from Christ’s person, a sacrifice once for all offered on earth, but the exalted Christ, who is simultaneously the crucified Christ, is and remains the expiation for our sins.

#### **d) Christ as King**

When the birth of Jesus was announced it was already stated in a royal manner in Luke 1:32-33. One reads there that the “Lord will give Him the throne of His father David ... and of His kingdom there will be no end”. The office of king is associated with the “official appointment and activity” of Jesus “on behalf of God to rule and protect His church” (Vos, 2014:175). Since Jesus, as the second person of the Trinity, fully possesses the divine essence, He also eternally has “the royal power over all creation that belongs to God” (Vos, 2014). Christ’s kingship is not



only over the church, but over the whole of creation. According to Turretin (1992:393), it is through Christ's kingly office that "he quickens and protects us through his efficacy".

Bavinck (2006:365) notes that in the Old Testament the coming of Jesus was especially predicted in his kingship. Sproul (2014:152) explains that the kings of Israel were not autonomous with absolute authority. The kings were anointed, and they were mediators in the sense that they were under God's law and thus accountable to is. But they also helped to "establish and maintain the law of God to the people". One also reads the following words in Isaiah 42:1: "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One *in whom* My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles." This is a reference to God's Anointed and explicitly states that He will "bring forth Justice" with His rule. In Psalm 89:20<sup>158</sup> the psalmist contemplates the anointing of David as king. Sproul explains that King David "introduced the royal golden age in Israel". However, many of the kings in Israel were corrupt at times, even the "ideal king", David. In 2 Samuel 11 one reads of the account where King David commits adultery with Bathsheba and have her husband, Uriah, murdered.

After King David died, the people of Israel, in some sense, longed to see a restoration of the Davidic kingdom. One reads in Amos 9:11, for example, that God will restore Israel by raising up "the tabernacle of David": "On that day I will raise up The tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, And repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, And rebuild it as in the days of old." One could say that a major part of the Old Testament's messianic expectation was a king like David. This is why the synoptic gospels provide one with the genealogy of Jesus Christ in order to demonstrate His Davidic lineage.

It is in Psalm 110:1<sup>159</sup> that one reads the phrase "sit at My righthand", which is a kingly and royal reference. God is here promising that His Son will be that King. This is why the birth of Jesus Christ is announced in such a royal and kingly manner. Bavinck (2006:365) further notes that in the Old Testament the coming of Jesus was especially predicted in his kingship. The kingship of Jesus is also different from the kingship of all earthly kings, in the following sense:

It is a kingship in God's name, subject to God's will, designed to direct all things to God's honor. It is not a kingship of violence and weapons; it is exercised and governs in a very different and superior way. It rules by Word and Spirit, by grace and truth, by justice and righteousness. This king, accordingly, is at the same time a prophet and priest. His power is designed to be used in the service of truth and righteousness (Bavinck, 2006:365).

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<sup>158</sup> "I have found My servant David; With My holy oil I have anointed him."

<sup>159</sup> This psalm is directly applied to Jesus Christ by the author of Hebrews in the New Testament.

In John 18:36, when Pilate asked Jesus about His kingship, He responded as follows: “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.” The kingship of Jesus is of a different order. This statement by Jesus does not mean that His kingdom is not active in this world. It is just of such a nature that it cannot be “effectively oppose[d] by armed might” (Carson, 1991:594). Moreover, in Matthew 28:18, after His resurrection, Jesus says: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” He not only gathers, protects and rules His church, but He is also given “the highest political office in the universe” (Sproul, 2014:153). This point is also made by Bavinck (2006:479). The apostle Paul notes that Jesus has “disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15). This also indicates His kingship over Satan and his followers.

Jesus, as the risen King, ascended into heaven and now sits at the right hand of the Father, not only interceding for His people, but ruling as King. In Ephesians 1:20-23 one reads the following of the Father’s power:

He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all *things* under His feet, and gave Him *to be* head over all *things* to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

This indicates that Jesus Christ governs everything and that everything is under His kingship. Bavinck (2006:480) explains that with His second coming everything, even if it is unwillingly, will recognise Him as King. The only difference between His kingdom today, and His future kingdom is its “visibility” (Sproul, 2014:153). Bavinck (2006:481) concludes as follows:

At the end of the days, when Christ has subdued his church and all his enemies, he will deliver the βασιλεια, the kingship, the royal office, to the Father. Then his mediatorial work is finished. The work the Father instructed him to do will have been completed. God himself will then be king forever.

The apostle John, in Revelation 19:16, notes that the name written for Jesus is “King of Kings and Lord of Lords”. The kingship of Jesus is eternal, and unequal.

#### **e) The threefold office of Jesus Christ in relation to CiMI**

Since the threefold office of Jesus Christ has been explored, one can turn to CiMI and their relationship to these offices of Christ. In a context where the title of ‘Christ’ is achievable for oneself, one may also expect that the work that solely belongs to Christ as Mediator will be intercepted and given to someone else. It is again, as with the attributes of Scripture, the researcher’s contention that CiMI intercepts this threefold office of Jesus and claims it for the

leadership of CiMI in general, but also for Strydom in particular. This will now be briefly observed.

Since CiMI, under the leadership of Strydom, is believed to be prophetically called into existence by God Himself, and is now the only true mouthpiece of God, CiMI's leadership intercepts the prophetic office of Christ and attributes it to themselves. They are the prophetic mediators between God and man who are bringing God's Word to the people. It is worth referring to Kotze's (2017b) words again in this regard: "I promise you if anybody speaks against us, he is not from God ... If anybody speaks against us, he is not from God. We are of God, he who knows God, hears us. He who is not of God does not hear us ... We are preaching truth." As indicated above, however, "false prophets" are not a new phenomenon. The prophet Jeremiah already encountered them, and God said to him that they are like "chaff".

Jesus Christ's office as Priest is in one instance distinctly attributed to Strydom as the leader, but also as priest. Kotze (2017a), while speaking of Strydom and his leadership, says the following: "That you have laid down your life for these people." Strydom is now the priest who represents the people of CiMI before God and brings "sacrifices" for them. In some sense, he has "laid down" his life for the people of CiMI. This is an implicit rejection of Jesus Christ's "once for all" sacrifice on the cross and His intercession at this very moment.

The kingship of Jesus is very explicitly intercepted by CiMI. In one of their documents, CiMI (2018l) for example claims that Strydom is a "type-David-king" and that "Jesus Christ cannot be the king of the church ... Church leaders want to convince you that Jesus is the current or reigning King, because then they can hide behind the lie to rule and reign as 'kings' in their own churches." Strydom is the anointed king who had an anointing ceremony where some of CiMI's members bowed down to him. In this sense, CiMI is attempting to dethrone Christ as King and enthrone a mere man, Strydom. As indicated above, even those who reject the kingship of Jesus Christ will one day unwillingly bow their knees "at the name of Jesus" and confess with their tongues that "Jesus Christ *is* Lord" (Ephesians 2:10-11).

When France (2007:902) comments on Matthew 24:5, where one reads the warning from Jesus that many people will come with a claim "I am the Christ" which, in the light of verse 24 is a "false Christ". He explains that these false Christs will be coming "in the name of Jesus". However, they will not be "impersonating Jesus" but will rather come in the name of Jesus because they are "claiming the role and title which properly belong to Jesus". This is what one observes regarding the leadership of CiMI. As he echoes Augustine, Calvin (2011:494) states that "the heretics, although they preach the name of Christ, have herein no common ground with believers, but it remains the sole possession of the church. For if we diligently consider the

things that pertain to Christ, we will find Christ among the heretics in name only, not in reality.” This serves as an efficient summary of CiMI’s leadership.

#### **5.5.2.4. Conclusion of Jesus Christ as Mediator between God and man**

It has been shown that CiMI’s views regarding Jesus as only the first ‘Christ’ has no sufficient biblical foundation. ‘Christ’ is not the kind of title that one can attribute to oneself or to anyone who is born again and anointed with God’s Spirit. Jesus is the only Christ and there is no other Christ but Him. There must be a reason why Jesus warned about “false Christs” who will come in His name. The apostle Peter’s confession is clear about the fact that Jesus is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). There is consequently an exclusivity to the title of ‘Christ’ which prohibits one from devaluing Jesus Christ, and overvaluing people, by attributing the title ‘Christ’ to humans. Martin (1980b:11) observes that cults will typically “take biblical Christianity and change it into a clever counterfeit of the real thing”. This is what CiMI is doing when they attribute the title of ‘Christ’ to other people.

Furthermore, the cross of Jesus is also much more than an instrument that made it possible for more people to become Christs. The cross signifies the substitutionary atonement for one’s sin. Jesus Christ, as fully God and fully man, stepped in as the only and final Mediator between God and man. He had to be fully God and fully man to be a sufficient Mediator and to atone for the sins of man. He also had to be God to be able to bear the punishment of sin and to live a sinless life. Anything less would not have been enough. It is because Jesus is God and man that He could say, “it is finished” (John 19:30). The Jesus proclaimed by CiMI cannot be a Mediator because He lost His deity and is only a man. Strydom, the leader, can also not be a sufficient mediator between God and man because, although he is nothing less than a man, he is nothing more than just a man either. The only Mediator must be both God and man.

It is also clear that CiMI intercepts the threefold office of Jesus Christ. While Jesus is the final Prophet who came to reveal the Father in truth and to confront falsehood, CiMI’s leaders claim that they are now the only true prophets on earth and that they are representing God to the people. While Jesus is the only High Priest, CiMI has intercepted Christ’s priesthood and claimed it for Strydom. He has laid down his life for the people of CiMI and is now their priest. While Jesus is the only King who reigns over His creation and His church, CiMI has attempted to dethrone Christ and enthrone Strydom as the current king of the church. According to them, Jesus’s reign has ended, and theirs has begun.

### 5.5.3. Jesus Christ, the Mediator who rose bodily

#### 5.5.3.1. The theological context of Jesus Christ's resurrection

The discussion must now turn to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. One must remember that the resurrection of Jesus is in many ways a continuation of His work as Mediator. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:494), for example, state that “the resurrection is the resurrection of him who was crucified”. In this sense there is also a progression in His work as Mediator. The apostle Paul states, “*It is* Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” He seems to acknowledge this progression in His work as Mediator. Calvin (2011:521) explains that “through his death, sin was wiped out and death extinguished; through his resurrection, righteousness was restored and life raised up, so that—thanks to his resurrection—his death manifested its power and efficacy in us”. The apostle Peter, for example, notes that we are given a “living hope”, not through the death of Jesus for our sins, but “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Peter 1:3). This indicates that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is still part of His work as Mediator. As indicated above, His threefold office continues after His resurrection and ascension as well.

In the Old Testament one finds certain predictions of Jesus Christ's resurrection. In Psalm 2:7 one reads the words of the Father saying: “The Lord has said to Me, ‘You *are* My Son, Today I have begotten You.’” This verse is specifically applicable to the resurrection of Jesus in Acts 13:33-34 where Paul says, before he quotes this psalm, that “God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm.” Another example is Psalm 16:10, which reads as follows: “For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.” In Acts 2:29-32 the apostle Peter explains that this psalm does not refer to David, since King David is already dead and his grave is still with them “to this day”. He consequently states the following:

Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses.

Peter connects Psalm 16:10 directly to the resurrection of Jesus saying that the flesh of Jesus did not see corruption because it was raised to life. Finally, one can also mention Job 19:25-26 where Job cries out: “For I know *that* my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this *I know*, That in my flesh I shall see God.” As Hartley (1988:297) comments on this verse, he explains that Job's confession is based on the “same logic of redemption that stands as the premise of the N[ew] T[estament] doctrine of resurrection”, which became the “cornerstone” of the faith.

In Matthew 20:18-19 one reads that Jesus predicted His own resurrection when one reads the following:

Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and to scourge and to crucify. And the third day He will rise again.

This is also attested to in Matthew 16:21.<sup>160</sup> One of the clearest examples of Jesus Christ predicting His own bodily resurrection from the dead is documented in John 2:19-21. Jesus, referring to the temple of the Jews in Jerusalem, said: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews answered Jesus, indicating that it took forty-six years to build the temple, while he can raise it up in three days. However, in verse 21 one reads that Jesus was "speaking of the temple of His body". When Carson (1991:182) comments on this verse he mentions:

It is the human body of Jesus that uniquely manifests the Father, and becomes the focal point of the manifestation of God to man, the living abode of God on earth, the fulfillment of all the temple meant, and the centre of all true worship ... In this 'temple' the ultimate sacrifice would take place; within three days of death and burial, Jesus Christ, the true temple, would rise from the dead.

Jesus was accordingly predicting His own bodily resurrection from the dead. Finally, in John 11:25 Jesus also refers to Himself as the "resurrection", saying: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." This also brings a deep soteriological significance to the bodily resurrection of Jesus.

The resurrection of Jesus is also theologically explained in a Trinitarian context. Kelly (2014:487), for example, reminds one that "the whole Triune Godhead participates in the resurrection of Jesus". In Acts 2:24<sup>161</sup> one reads that God the Father raised Jesus up from the dead. In Romans 4:24 one reads the following: "It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." When he begins his letter to the Galatians, he also writes that he is an apostle "through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead" (Galatians 1:1). It is also the case that God the Son, Jesus Christ, raised Himself from the dead. In John 10:18 one for example reads that Jesus is the One who laid down His life that He "may take it again". He states that He has the "power to take it again". God the Holy Spirit also participates when one reads in Romans 8:11 that "the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you".

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<sup>160</sup> "From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day."

<sup>161</sup> "whom God raised up".

Kelly (2014:488-489) aptly summarises the Trinity as the agent of Jesus's resurrection as follows:

In sum, as we see the entire Holy Trinity active in Christ's incarnation and in his atoning death, so we also see the Triune activity in his victorious resurrection. Hence, all that Christ was and continues to be for us as the one Mediator between God and man is backed up to the fullest extent in the innermost life of the Triune God. Thereby the salvation of all who believe in Christ is as certain, lasting, and secure as God is God: 'I AM THAT I AM.'

This indicates the theological explanatory power of the doctrine of the Trinity as it pertains to Christology. In their rejection of the Trinity, CiMI loses access to this kind of explanation of Christ's resurrection.

### **5.5.3.2. The bodily resurrection of Jesus is central to the gospel**

Geisler and Rhodes (2008:109) assert that "on any short list of fundamentals of the Christian Faith, the resurrection has a firm priority". In Romans 10:9-10 a true belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus is established as a precondition for salvation. Paul asserts in these verses that "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved". House and Carle (2003:85) observe the same notion, namely that the resurrection signalled Jesus Christ's victory over death and is also the "guarantee of our salvation and future resurrection".

According to Bavinck (2006:438), the resurrection of Christ was, from the beginning, an "enormously important constituent of the faith of the church: without that faith it would never have started". He further indicates that while the crucifixion of Jesus left the disciples offended and scattered in hiding, the resurrection "revived" their faith. In 1 Corinthians 15:14 Paul emphasises the centrality of Jesus's resurrection to the gospel when he explains that his "preaching" and the "faith" of believers are "empty" if Jesus did not rise from the dead. Moreover, in verse 17 he also adds that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, all Christians "are still in [their] sins". In the words of Geisler (1992:26), "the whole of Christianity crumbles" if Jesus did not physically rise from the dead. Van Genderen and Velema (2008:495) describe the resurrected Jesus as the "trailblazer who opens the way for all of his people. His resurrection is the great breakthrough of the powers of the kingdom of God."

It is important to note that the bodily resurrection is not merely an escape from death, it is the conquering of death. Death came into the world because of sin (see Genesis 2:17;<sup>162</sup> Romans

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<sup>162</sup> "... but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

6:23<sup>163</sup>), but Jesus Christ as “Savior ... has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). This is why He is described as “the firstborn from the dead” in Revelation 1:5 and Colossians 1:18. This does not mean that He is the first one ever to rise from the dead, since that would be false, but rather that He is the *prototokos*, signifying that He is the most important One who has ever risen from the dead. Furthermore, Romans 4:25 links the resurrection of Jesus directly with one’s “justification” and in 1 Peter 1:3 it is “through the resurrection” that one is regenerated. In Ephesians 1:19-20 Paul connects the regenerative power of the resurrection to the spiritual power that is active within a true believer. He says that the “exceeding greatness” of God’s power towards believers is in accordance with “His mighty power”, which was at work when Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Finally, it is because of Jesus’s resurrection that His followers will also one day be raised from the dead, as Paul indicates in 2 Corinthians 4:14, “knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present *us* with you”. Paul even refers to the resurrection of Jesus as the “assurance” that Jesus Christ will come again to “judge the world in righteousness” (Acts 17:31).

House and Carle (2003:86) argue that the entire New Testament rests “on the assumption that Jesus Christ is reigning as living Savior over the church and will one day return as King over the earth in power and exceeding great glory. Indeed the epistles would not make any sense whatsoever without this underlying conviction.” In the same way Kreeft and Tacelli (1994:176) note the following:

Every sermon preached by every Christian in the New Testament centers on the resurrection ... The message that flashed across the ancient world, set hearts on fire, changed lives and turned the world upside down was not “love your neighbor” ... The news was that a man who claimed to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world had risen from the dead.

They further say that His bodily resurrection “validates his claim to be divine and not merely human, for resurrection from death is beyond human power; and his divinity validates the truth of everything else he said, for God cannot lie” (Kreeft & Tacelli, 1994:176). In this sense Wright (2003:733) also claims that:

[T]he resurrection of Jesus from the dead] declares that Jesus really is God’s Son: not only in the sense that he is the Messiah ... not only in the sense that he is the world’s true lord ... but also in the sense that he is the one in whom the living God, Israel’s God, has become personally present in the world, has become one of the human creatures that were made from the beginning in the image of this same God.

All these observations establish, without any shortcoming, the centrality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ to the gospel. If He were not raised from the dead, one’s faith is in

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<sup>163</sup> “For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”



vain and empty. His resurrection gives one total assurance of salvation and Christ's victory over death provides a living hope of one's own bodily resurrection.

Since CiMI, as has already been established, rejects the bodily resurrection of Jesus, they, once again reject a belief that is central to the gospel and hence proclaim another gospel. What follows is a brief look at CiMI's approach to the bodily resurrection of Jesus, together with a focus on 1 Corinthians 15.

### **5.5.3.3. The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ in relation to CiMI**

It is important to note that CiMI says that they believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Strydom (2016d) for example claims that if "you have the revelation that you are the Christ, and you understand it, then you can also understand that the body of Jesus had to go and Jesus Christ had to be resurrected". On another occasion Kotze (2017c) asserts that the church is wrong to affirm the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. In turn, Strydom (2016d) continues by saying that it was rather "the spiritual body of Jesus Christ [that] conquered death and was resurrected, and that the spiritual body is the one that saves us".

CiMI therefore believes in the 'resurrection' of Jesus Christ, but it is just not a physical, bodily resurrection. According to them it is rather a spiritual resurrection of sorts. Strydom (2019d) also, for example, claims that when Jesus Christ "was raised to life, it was a glorified one, the one that was on the inside. The tent was consumed." The body of Jesus Christ is here referred to as His "tent". But notice that His "tent" was consumed. It was only the one "on the inside", in other words the spiritual Christ man, that was raised with a "heavenly body". In this sense the "heavenly body" or "spiritual body" is recognised to be a body, but not a body with flesh and bones that was crucified (Strydom, 2018a). Strydom (2016d) also states:

God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and the heavenly body can express itself in many shapes and forms. It was not the flesh Jesus who was raised to life otherwise his disciples would have recognised Him. They recognised the voice and the one that was on the inside, the spiritual Jesus Christ. Hence, Jesus Christ expressed himself through the heavenly body and not the fleshly body anymore.

Although some of these aspects have already been addressed in Chapter 4 (section 4.3.4.2., 4.3.4.5., 4.3.5.3. and 4.3.6.1.), more can still be added in this regard. The researcher therefore provides an overview of two key passages and themes, which are relevant to the bodily resurrection of Jesus, to consequently show that there is no reason other than a deliberate exchange of the truth for the lie, to conclude from biblical data that Jesus only had a spiritual resurrection.

It will serve as a good reminder that “everyone comes to the text with presuppositions about the nature of reality” (Howe, 2004:8). CiMI’s view of reality is that of Gnostic dualism where flesh is viewed to be equal to sin, while the spiritual reality is rather sought after at the cost of physical reality. Gilchrist (2013:171) explains that the early Christian apologists who were confronted with Gnosticism continually “attacked the Gnostic attitude that the physical body is unimportant ... Early Christian writers constantly emphasised the physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the ultimate glorification of the body (1 Corinthians 15:53) as one of the great truths of Christians doctrine that the Gnostics, in their supposed superior wisdom, simply ignored.” It seems as if the teachings of CiMI call for this emphasis once again.

According to CiMI, Jesus could not have been raised in a physical, bodily manner. Strydom (2017a) makes this clear when he says that when one claims that the physical body of Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, one “raises up sin again”. He further says, “We’re not denying Jesus. We’re denying the flesh of Jesus! We’re eating it up – flesh and blood! Because flesh and blood ... cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (Strydom, 2018a). He also expands on this teaching as follows:

The flesh needs to die, because that flesh became the sin offering and ... an offering cannot be raised to life, it has to be done with. So, the Spiritual one was raised to life, Jesus Christ, the Son of God ... Now that we see him, we are changed into that image from glory to glory. Because we are that specie now.

Since flesh is sin and cannot inherit the kingdom of God, Jesus Christ was never raised back to a physical body with flesh and bones.

#### **a) 1 Corinthians 15:42-44**

In this passage the apostle Paul refers to the resurrected body as a “spiritual body”. To be sure, this is not a direct reference to Jesus’s resurrected body, rather the state of a Christian’s own resurrected body when he/she will be raised again. In verse 34 Paul introduces the issue with a question: “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’” Wright (2003:348) comments by saying that although Paul is rather referring to the resurrection bodies of Christians in general, “it is widely and correctly recognized that his picture of the Christian resurrection body is modelled closely on what he thinks was and is true of Jesus”. From this perspective, whatever was and is true of Jesus’s resurrected body will be true of the Christian’s resurrected body. It is precisely because of Jesus Christ’s bodily resurrection that the Christian’s body will also be raised.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Paul is using an analogy of seed that is sown in the ground and the plant that it produces. Licona (2010:404) remarks:

[A] seed is sown and something different comes up. But there is a continuity between the seed and the plant that comes forth from it ... The seed that is dead and sown (buried) is made alive once again. In the same way, there is continuity between the believer's present body (the seed) and the resurrection body. What dies and goes down in burial comes up in resurrection, having been made alive and transformed.

This continuity is confirmed by Paul's reference to "the body is sown" and then replacing "the body" with "it" in the following phrases. In 1 Corinthians 15:42-44 he says for example: "*The body* is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body." There can therefore be no doubt that the body, which is sown, is the same body that rises from the grave. Licona (2010:406) explains it in the following way: "There is neither an elimination of a body or an exchange of one for the new. Rather, it is the mortal being transformed into immortality."

Verses 42-44 also consist of four contrasts between the body that died and the body that is resurrected. The first three of these contrasts are quite clear. The body that is buried is corruptible, dishonourable and weak, while the resurrected body is incorruptible, glorious and powerful. This is the first three contrasts identified by Paul. The fourth one is where the conflict with CiMI lies. Paul states that the body that was sown is "natural", while the resurrected body is "spiritual". Wright (2003:348) explains at this point that many English translations followed "Plato's ugly ditch" by translating it as a "spiritual body". He further says that people who read some of the English translations will "assume at this point that Paul is describing the new, resurrection body as something which, to put it bluntly, is non-physical—something which you could not touch, could not see with ordinary eyesight, something which, if raised to life, would leave no empty tomb behind it".

If one wanted to say that the resurrected body is an immaterial body, one "would use *psychikos*, not *pneumatikos*, which shows how misleading the regular translations are!" (Wright, 2003:350). The Greek word for 'spiritual' is *pneumatikos* (πνευματικός), and instead of designating the meaning of immaterial in this case, rather means "a life indwelt by the Spirit of God" (Wright, 2003:350). Furthermore, when a word in the Greek has the '-ikos' ending, it has a more "functional" nuance than a substantial nuance referring to the substance of "which something is composed" (Wright, 2003:351).

Geisler (1992:109) also contributes to this discussion by explaining that a "spiritual body", instead of referring to an immaterial body, rather refers to an "immortal" body. He goes on to say that a "spiritual body" is "one dominated by the spirit, not devoid of matter". According to him the correct translation would be a "supernatural" body which would then be a proper contrast with a

“natural” body. He grounds this translation in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) translation of 1 Corinthians 10:4.<sup>164</sup> Although it is the same Greek word used here to refer to the “rock” that followed the Israelites in the wilderness, if one were to read the accounts in the Old Testament, it was nothing less than a physical rock from which the Israelites drank water. Geisler (1992:110) explains that “the *actual* water they drank from that *material* rock was produced *supernaturally*”. In 1 Corinthians 10:4 Paul identifies Jesus Christ as the supernatural source of this provision for the Israelites in the Old Testament. Geisler therefore observes that “the supernatural Christ was the source of these supernatural manifestations of natural food and water. Just because the physical provisions came from a spiritual (that is, supernatural) source did not make the provisions themselves immaterial.”

If one were to turn to 1 Corinthians 2:15,<sup>165</sup> it is also clear that although Paul spoke of a “spiritual person” in the ESV translation, he did not mean an immaterial person. He was rather “speaking of a flesh-and-blood human being whose life was empowered by the supernatural power of God. He was referring to a literal person whose life had spiritual direction” (Geisler, 1992:110). One can see then that the word ‘spiritual’ is also used to refer to material objects. Geisler (1992:111) contends that in some sense “the resurrection body can be called a ‘spiritual body’ in much the same way we speak of the Bible as a ‘spiritual book’. Regardless of their spiritual source and power, both the resurrection body and the Bible are material objects.”

Therefore, any attempt to use this passage to justify the view that Jesus Christ’s resurrected body is a spiritual, immaterial and incorporeal body, ultimately fails. After all of these observations, the conclusion is therefore, not that a “spiritual body” in this series of contrasts is immaterial, but rather that it is spiritually directed and adapted “to the higher state of existence in heaven, and therefore not adapted to an earthly condition” (Hodge, 1857:348). This does not mean that it is devoid of matter, it remains corporeal, but is transformed by God’s Spirit.

#### **b) 1 Corinthians 15:50**

This verse is often introduced to argue that since a body of flesh and blood “cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Corinthians 15:50), the resurrected body of Jesus and Christians cannot be a physical body of flesh and blood. This is another point of conflict with CiMI. Geisler (1992:123) insists, however, that “to conclude from this phrase that the resurrection body will not be a body of physical flesh is without scriptural justification”.

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<sup>164</sup> “... and all drank the same supernatural drink. For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ” (RSV).

<sup>165</sup> “The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one” (ESV).

Licona (2010:418) observes that the expression “flesh and blood” neither indicates “physicality”, nor, according to Hodge (1857:353), “sinful human nature”, but rather means “mortality”. Licona further says that this meaning is undergirded “by the fact that, elsewhere in 1 Corinthians 15 where the body is described, its mortality rather than physicality is the issue”. Geisler (1992:122) also adopts this stance and explains that the reference of “flesh and blood” rather refers to the current mortal state of one’s body. The body, prior to being resurrected, is mortal and perishable, and Paul is saying that in that state the body cannot inherit the kingdom of God. To inherit the kingdom of God, a mortal and perishable body must first be transformed into an immortal and incorruptible body.

One must further note that directly in the next phrase of this verse one reads “nor does corruption inherit incorruption”. Paul is therefore stating that mortal bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom but, furthermore, that corruptible bodies cannot inherit incorruption. Geisler (1992:122) explains this as follows: “Paul is not affirming that the resurrection body will not have flesh, but that it will not have *perishable* flesh.” This links up again with the previous remarks suggesting that “our mortal bodies in their weak state will not be what we have in the resurrection. They must be transformed” (Licona, 2010:420).

Any view that would read Paul in a manner as to suggest that Paul is saying our resurrected bodies will be immaterial, is a contradiction with what Paul says in other places. In Romans 8:11 he for example states: “He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies.” In Romans 8:23 he also mentions that Christians are waiting for “the redemption of [their] body”. He also explains this in more detail in Philippians 3:21: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Finally, it is also worth referring to the apostle Peter since he states that the resurrected body of Jesus is the same body of flesh that went into the tomb. He explains that “His flesh” did not “see corruption” (Acts 2:31).

This verse in 1 Corinthians 15 is therefore not a reference to the resurrected body, but to the body prior to being resurrected in its current mortal and perishable state. In this state no body can inherit the kingdom of God. But, after being transformed into an immortal, imperishable and incorruptible body, which is the Word of God, it can inherit the kingdom of God. To interpret this verse in any other way will only result in contradictions.

### c) Continuities and discontinuities between the natural and supernatural body

Since the risen body of Jesus Christ is the same physical body that was crucified, there will be continuities between His natural body and His glorious, supernatural body. But, on the other hand, since His risen body is a glorified body, there will also be discontinuities.

The mere fact of an empty tomb already indicates a bodily, physical resurrection of Jesus (Bavinck, 2006:440). Moreover, although Jesus was able to keep people from recognising Him after His resurrection from the dead, as He did on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:15-16,<sup>166</sup> one can observe in John 20:16<sup>167</sup> that Mary, for example, recognised Him after He spoke to her. There is also the account of the disciple Thomas, who doubted the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and only after seeing and touching the wounds of Jesus believed that Jesus was resurrected. This points to a physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus (John 20:27-28).<sup>168</sup> The fact that Jesus kept His wounds is also an indication thereof and correspond to Revelation 5:5 where one reads that “in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain”. Finally, in Luke 24:39 and 42 Jesus explicitly says the following: “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.” Afterwards, He also ate a fish “in their presence”. That Jesus had the same body cannot be doubted.

Although the glorified body of Christ is the same body that was crucified and not less physical, there are, however, differences. In Luke 24:36 Jesus suddenly appeared in the midst of His disciples saying, “Peace to you.” This caused them to be terrified and frightened. In John 20:19, although the doors of the room where the disciples were, were locked, “Jesus came and stood in their midst”. Luke 24:31 describes an incident where He also “vanished” in an instance. This data indicates that although it was the same body, it was manifested in glory. This is to be expected if it is transformed into a supernatural, glorified body.

As was already seen in Chapter 4, CiMI has great difficulties to reconcile certain biblical accounts with the doctrine of a spiritual, immaterial resurrection. Geisler (1992:127), on the grounds of Scripture, concludes that Jesus’s body after His resurrection “possessed numerical identity, materiality, and was an event in real history. Despite its immortality, it did not possess immateriality. When present it was as visible and tangible as any other object in the space-time

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<sup>166</sup> “So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him.”

<sup>167</sup> “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to Him, ‘Rabboni!’ (which is to say, Teacher).”

<sup>168</sup> “Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand *here*, and put *it* into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ And Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’”

world.” One could therefore say that Jesus’s resurrected body was nothing less than a physical body of flesh and blood but, as a glorified body, more than a perishable body of flesh and blood.

#### **d) CiMI’s loss of a theology of hope**

In CiMI’s rejection of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, there is a loss of any hope for a future resurrection and recreation. Strydom (2019d), for example, asks the members of CiMI: “When Jesus Christ died on the cross and gave up his flesh, what happened with the body of Jesus? Where was it for three days?” He answers this question by saying that it was in a tomb, “broken down” and “beaten”. He then also asks another question:

Do you know what happened with Jesus Christ, the Spiritual one? He went into death itself and conquered death. Because a Son of God cannot die ... you cannot die! ... And when Jesus Christ was raised to life, it was a glorified one, the one that was on the inside. The tent was consumed. It is exactly what will happen with your tent ... [Your body] is corruptible.

According to CiMI, the physical body of Jesus Christ was consumed like any other buried body. Only the “spiritual body” of Jesus rose again from the dead.

Strydom (2016d) additionally explains, according to their view of the body and resurrection, the scenario of what will happen when one dies:

If I take a gun and I shoot you in the head and you die, and your tent dies, what will be standing there will be your glorified body, your spiritual man. The Christ Adam. The Christ specie. The anointed specie. This is very difficult for people to understand when we speak of people as a Christ. I don’t understand why? Do you know why? Because religion corrupted us to think that Jesus was God... Jesus gave himself ... over into the ability and power of God that He acted on behalf of God as God’s image and likeness and we started calling him God when Jesus is not God.

CiMI (2018b) moreover states: “God created mankind as a spirit being with a soul (mind), contained in a fleshly (carnal) body.” Man’s soul is therefore merely contained in the body. Labuschagne (2018) argues that since God is spirit, one’s spirit is the only thing that is created in His image. Since God is not a material being, one’s body with flesh and bones, which is material, is not created in God’s image. Strydom (2018a) explains as follows: “We’re not denying Jesus. We are denying the flesh of Jesus ... Because flesh and blood ... cannot inherit the kingdom of God. So ... please write this down, ‘a Christ is not flesh and blood’.” He further says,

Exactly what would happen with your flesh if the end would come? You would be transformed into the Spirit man. If the veil is removed ... [if] flesh is removed ... we can start to become the image of God. Because listen to me, your flesh, the old Adam, is not the image of God. The spiritual Adam is the image of God.

All of these statements place a priority on one's "spirit man" as a Christ, and view one's body and the material world as unworthy of God's kingdom. One's body with flesh and bones is therefore sinful and evil.

Strydom (2017b) also states that if one does not understand "the difference between Jesus and Jesus Christ" one will not have the correct view of the resurrection. In this sense one must understand that "Jesus was not raised to life; Jesus Christ was raised to life". Accordingly, the one that was raised back to life was the one that was born from above "at the Jordan River, the Spiritual man" (Strydom, 2019d) and since God is not "the Father of flesh", He would never raise up a physical body with flesh and bones. According to Strydom (2017a), this is the message of the "gospel". This is the "revelation" that must be preached since the Jesus "that the church is raising to life is not ... a Lord and a Christ. That is not the Messiah, the Saviour."

Since it has already been established that Jesus is the only Christ, which negates their claim that He became a Christ and that there is therefore a difference between Jesus and Jesus Christ, the question at this point is: If Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, how can that provide one with any future hope? Furthermore, how can such a theology provide one with a proper 'Saviour'? In what sense did He really conquer death? The Jesus Christ whom CiMI presents to one is not interested in redeeming all of reality. He is only interested in one's "spiritual body". All physical reality, including one's physical body with flesh and bones, is ultimately and inevitably insignificant to God in the theology of CiMI. While they maintain that God wants nothing to do with human flesh, since He is not the "Father of flesh", the question is: Why did He bother to create a physical universe and, as the crown of His creation, create man with a physical body?

House and Carle (2003:87), in reference to the truths of the New Testament, note:

This line of argument would have no meaning unless Christ's bodily resurrection from the dead were a fact taken for granted in the New Testament. We are not exhorted to live the ethereal life of "a spirit" but the resurrected life of a new being who is no longer dead in trespasses and sins. Death is a consequence of sin. Our parents in the Garden in the beginning were undoubtedly "physical" (no one doubts this), created for a physical realm of existence in eternity. This was the original pristine state that Christ redeemed for us, continuing on with God's original plan.

The true Jesus Christ of Scripture is interested in all of physical reality, including one's body with flesh and bones. Jesus will grant all Christians the same resurrection that He received. He, as God and man, redeems the whole of creation with the promise to resurrect and recreate a new heaven and a new earth. In Revelation 21:1-4, the apostle John mentions the new heaven and new earth. He states that he saw "a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away". This means that in orthodox Christianity there is no room to be



“despisers of matter, as if in this in itself lurks a profane principle that must be eliminated and purged. Matter can be glorified so that divine glory permeates it at every point and the Spirit of God governs it completely” (Vos, 2014:229). This is what the bodily resurrection of Jesus made possible.

Wright (2003:737) aptly summarises the theological significance of Jesus Christ’s resurrection as follows:

The story of Jesus of Nazareth which we find in the New Testament offers itself, as Jesus himself had offered his public work and words, his body and blood, as the answer to this multiple problem: the arrival of God’s kingdom precisely in the world of space, time and matter, the world of injustice and tyranny, of empire and crucifixions. This world is where the kingdom must come, on earth as it is in heaven. What view of creation, what view of justice, would be served by the offer merely of a new spirituality and a one-way ticket out of trouble, an escape from the real world? ... It is the real world that, in the earliest stories of Jesus’ resurrection, was decisively and for ever reclaimed by that event, an event which demanded to be understood, not as a bizarre miracle, but as the beginning of the new creation.

Christianity, on the grounds of Jesus’s resurrection, therefore presents one with the future hope of a new creation. CiMI however, loses this hope. In their rejection of a bodily resurrection, they are attempting to ‘escape’ the real world, while the real world is that which Jesus Christ redeemed from sin and death.

#### **5.5.3.4. Conclusion of Jesus Christ as the risen Mediator**

The bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is essential to the gospel. It marks the victory of Jesus over death and it is also a continuation of His work as Mediator between God and man. With His death He paid the penalty for sin through His sacrifice on the cross, which is sufficient, and with His resurrection He ultimately conquered death and proved His true identity as the Son of God incarnate. The biblical data points explicitly to a physical, bodily resurrection and not a mere spiritual, or immaterial resurrection, as CiMI believes. Since the gospel depends on the bodily resurrection of Jesus, CiMI, in their rejection of a bodily resurrection, is not in a position to confess Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:55: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” The cross of Jesus Christ, together with His empty tomb, is what accomplished salvation and what provides a living hope. Bavinck (2006:442) captures the centrality of the resurrection as follows:

Scripture ... teaches that both heaven and earth, spirit and matter, have been created by God; that the body belongs to the essential being of humans and in its way exhibits the image of God; that death is a consequence of and punishment for sin. For Scripture, then, everything depends on the *physical* resurrection of Christ. The *that* is integral to the *how*: if Christ did not arise physically, then death, then sin, then he who had the power of death has not been defeated. In that case, actually,

not Christ but Satan came out the victor. According to Scripture, therefore, the significance of the physical resurrection of Christ is inexhaustibly rich.

A rejection of the bodily resurrection of Jesus is either caused by or leads to a rejection of, or at least a very poor view of physical reality. If Jesus did not physically rise from the dead, He did not redeem the physical world and one's physical body. CiMI's dismissal of the body should therefore not be surprising seeing that, in their theology, Jesus did not rise bodily. In the words of Wright (2003:551), one could say of CiMI that they represent "a form of spirituality which, while still claiming the name of Jesus, has left behind the very things that made Jesus who he was, and that made the early Christians what they were".

#### **5.5.4. A historical diagnosis of CiMI's Christology**

##### **5.5.4.1. Introductory remarks**

Van Baalen (1962:11), as he echoes Ecclesiastes 1:9,<sup>169</sup> notes: "There is little that is new under the sun." The overarching Christology of CiMI is no exception. As far as the researcher could establish, the historical roots of CiMI's teachings go back to the Gnostic heresy, known as Adoptionism.<sup>170</sup> It has already been established that the Scriptures attest, in a clear manner, to the true identity of Jesus Christ. Yet, there have always been "contrary voices that seek to deny the divine testimony" (Kelly, 2014:251). Kelly (2014:251) notes that heretics and their heresies "rise and fall over the ages, but they are never very far from us (although usually in mutated and updated forms)". This seems to be the case with CiMI as well. Although they do not reflect a perfect resemblance to ancient Adoptionism, they do display parallels in "mutated and updated forms".

In one sense one could say that the question Jesus posed to His disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" (Mark 8:27) has been answered in many different ways. Sutcliffe (2016:130), for example, states that "the thinkers and writers of the early church mulled over" the identity of Jesus Christ "and sometimes ... came up with erroneous ideas ... Each of these ideas was rejected by orthodox Christianity." Kelly (2014:251) diagnoses the appearance of heresy regarding the true identity of Jesus as follows: "What they deny and seek to replace is like a devious vandal breaking into a museum, in order to deface a beautiful statue or master painting, by adding in some features, and blotting out others. What is left is not a beautiful portrait or sculpture, but an ugly parody." This "breaking into a museum" to change the identity of Jesus is therefore not newly devised by CiMI. They are only borrowing ideas that are very old and have circulated in many forms through the centuries.

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<sup>169</sup> "And there is nothing new under the sun."

<sup>170</sup> Adoptionism is unpacked in more details in the next section.

The issue to which the researcher now turns is to provide an overview of the heresy known as Adoptionism. Consequently, parallels between Adoptionism and CiMI will be identified.

#### **5.5.4.2. The heresy of Adoptionism in relation to CiMI**

##### **a) Introductory remarks**

In a broad sense Adoptionism can be defined according to two basic features. Bird (2017:7) explains these two features as follows:

The first said that divine sonship was not essential to Jesus. Rather, it was acquired at some point in his terrestrial life. The second claimed that divine sonship is not ontological but honorific. Thus, sonship is not derived from Jesus's unique filial relationship to Israel's God, but is conferred as a legal fiction even if it means elevation to divine status.

Accordingly, Adoptionism taught that Jesus was in essence only a man but was adopted to be the Son of God at some point in His life. His sonship to the Father is therefore not by nature and consequently not eternal, as explained in Trinitarian theology, but by adoption (Papandrea, 2016:17). Adoptionism was one of the "most potent if not persistent heresies of the second and third centuries" (Bird, 2017:7).

Although it is not strictly in the theoretical area of Christology, the Adoptionists were also Unitarians. According to this group, "there was one sovereign God, who had no internal relationships with other co-equal persons" (Kelly, 2014:252). In this regard Adoptionism and CiMI already share an important concept of God. Miles (2018:105), when also addressing the heresy of Adoptionism, explains that although there are variations of Unitarianism, they all agree on an "overemphasis on there being one God (monotheism) that leads to a denial that there are three persons in the Godhead (the Trinity). To Unitarians, Jesus Christ was a good man, an incredible teacher, and a wonderful life model who was uniquely empowered by God to do remarkable things." Miles (2018) therefore suggests that the strict emphasis on Unitarianism, found in Adoptionism and CiMI, leads to a rejection of Jesus's deity but, one could say, not His remarkability, since He is still valued in some sense.

Papandrea (2016:17) distinguishes between what he calls "Spirit Adoptionism" and "Angel Adoptionism". According to him, both versions of Adoptionism emphasised the humanity of Jesus Christ and "diminished or denied his divinity" (Papandrea, 2016:18). He further states that both forms of Adoptionism introduce a "radical separation between Jesus and 'the Christ', as if they are two different entities". The distinction between the "Angel Adoptionists" and the "Spirit Adoptionists" is made on the grounds of Origen's (1885b:570) remark about the so-called "twofold sect of Ebionites". Origen states that while the one group acknowledged the virgin birth

of Jesus, the other group denied it. This is why Adoptionism is better known as “Ebionitism” (McGrath, 2009:105-106). The Ebionites were a Jewish Christian group whose “origins are shrouded in mystery”, without any clear trail as to their exact beliefs and texts (Bird, 2017:112). McGrath (2009:106) acknowledges that the Ebionites possessed the features “of an essentially Jewish Christology”.

Although Ebionitism is also an accepted name for the heresy of Adoptionism, for the rest of this discussion the researcher used the term Adoptionism as far as possible. The researcher especially relied on Papandrea’s insights in this regard and also followed his classification of Angel and Spirit Adoptionism, which will be addressed separately.

### **b) Angel Adoptionism**

The Angel Adoptionists did believe in the virgin birth of Jesus and accordingly also in the humanity of Jesus. The main feature of this group of Adoptionists is that ‘the Christ’ is identified as an angel. Papandrea (2016:24) provides a comprehensive explanation of their Christology:

These adoptionists understood Jesus of Nazareth as a mere man but took the spiritual Christ to be a separate entity, specifically an angel ... by separating the man Jesus from the “angel Christ,” these adoptionists were able to account for the miraculous nature of Jesus’ ministry while still holding to an essentially Jewish understanding of Christ as a mere human – possibly anointed by God but indwelt by an angel.

The Angel Adoptionists held that Jesus, as a mere man, was justified by His obedience to God’s law and was accordingly adopted by God as His son. The gifts that He received from God when He was adopted was “an indwelling of an angelic spirit, who is called Christ, but who is not divine and is usually not thought to be pre-existent” (Papandrea, 2016:26). The indwelling of the angelic spirit already commenced at the conception of Jesus since God foresaw that Jesus would be perfectly obedient to the law during his life. This made it possible for the Angel Adoptionists to believe in the virgin birth of Jesus without ascribing deity to His person. Papandrea (2016:26) explains that “the union of man and angel begins at conception, but this union is temporary since the indwelling angel was believed to have left Jesus alone at the cross”. He adds that the separation between Jesus and Christ is a characteristic of Adoptionism, but also of the larger early Gnostic movement.

In Angel Adoptionism God and the Son, Jesus, is therefore not of the same essence. In addition, the Christ is neither of the same essence as God nor the Son. The Christ is created by God as an angelic spirit to indwell the man Jesus and is therefore not divine. This cannot be classified as an incarnation since there is not a union of humanity and divinity, but rather “an indwelling and an empowerment of a mere human, and then only temporarily: from conception

to crucifixion” (Papandrea, 2016:27). When Jesus died, He was not resurrected from the dead, according to Angel Adoptionism. Papandrea (2016:27) further notes that this group used the canonical Gospel of Matthew as their authoritative source.

In summary, Papandrea (2016:30-31) states:

Their Christology envisioned a savior who was the product of a miraculous conception in which a created angel ... indwelt a mere human. This assumes that a distinction is made between the indwelling angel (Christ) and the man (Jesus) as two separate entities. However, neither Christ nor Jesus is divine – both are created, though the Christ may be considered to have been created in advance of the conception of Jesus. This is not an incarnation, but rather a possession.

### **c) Spirit Adoptionism**

The Angel Adoptionists marked a minority group in the broader Adoptionist camp, while the Spirit Adoptionists were the majority group. The Spirit Adoptionists also made the distinction between Jesus and the Christ and they also denied the deity of Jesus. However, one of the big differences was that “whereas Angel Adoptionists ... denied the divinity of the indwelling entity (the Christ is a created angel), Spirit Adoptionism may have allowed for the divinity of the anointing entity, since ‘the Christ’ was for them equivalent to the Holy Spirit” (Papandrea, 2016:34).

This group rejected the virgin birth of Jesus and held that He was Joseph’s biological son. Although Jesus was a mere man, he “transcended the rest of humanity by excelling in righteousness” (Papandrea, 2016:34). As a reward for His righteous life before God, He was adopted at His baptism. When He came up from the waters after His baptism the ‘Christ Spirit’ came down from heaven and entered Him. The indwelling of the Christ Spirit empowered Jesus to perform miracles. This indwelling was also only temporary since the Christ left Jesus before His crucifixion. The words of Jesus on the cross: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46) are taken to indicate the moment when the Christ left Him. Papandrea (2016:35) unpacks their view of the resurrection as follows:

[A]lthough Spirit Adoptionists may have believed in a future general resurrection, most apparently did not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. More likely, they understood resurrection as a metaphor for eternal life, and any reports of postresurrection appearances would have been taken as a spiritual visitation, not as a bodily resurrection.

Spirit Adoptionism maintains that God and the Son, Jesus, are not of the same essence. The Christ Spirit, however, may have been viewed to be pre-existent. Nevertheless, Spirit Adoptionism is also not an incarnation.

[It is rather] the anointing of a mere human by the Holy Spirit, who may be divine or may also have been created ... What is more, this anointing was the same as that experienced by the prophets

and remains available to anyone. Indeed, the Ebionites considered themselves christ in the making and believes that by following the example of Jesus, anyone could become a christ as he did... Thus he is not unique among humanity except by the degree to which he excelled. As with all forms of adoptionism, he is the Savior by example, not by atonement (Papandrea, 2016:36).

Furthermore, the Spirit Adoptionists used an edited version of the Gospel of Matthew, which excluded the miraculous birth of Jesus.

While Angel Adoptionism placed an emphasis on the indwelling of the Christ, the Spirit Adoptionists emphasised the anointing of Jesus by the Christ Spirit. Moreover, “after the anointing with the Holy Spirit, Jesus could be called by the title ‘Christ’” (Papandrea, 2016:41, 42).

#### **d) Additional remarks**

To be sure, the following comments will revisit the themes already laid out. However, it is necessary to substantiate the heresy of Adoptionism with more sources and to identify other versions of the same heresy.

Irenaeus (1885:325), when commenting on the teachings of a man named Cerinthus, exposed some form of Adoptionism, stating the following:

He represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men. Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon him in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and that then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and that then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.

Hippolytus (1886a:114-115) also addressed a form of Adoptionism, which he attributed to a man named Theodotus. He explains it as follows:

(According to this, Theodotus maintains) that Jesus was a (mere) man, born of a virgin, according to the counsel of the Father, and that after he had lived promiscuously with all men, and had become pre-eminently religious, he subsequently at his baptism in Jordan received Christ, who came from above and descended (upon him) in form of a dove. And this was the reason, (according to Theodotus,) why (miraculous) powers did not operate within him prior to the manifestation in him of that Spirit which descended, (and) which proclaims him to be the Christ.

This seems to correspond more with Spirit Adoptionism mentioned above.

Kelly (2014:252) explains that in the context of Adoptionism, Jesus “became ‘Christ’” at His baptism and was therefore adopted by God in some sense. Bavinck (2006:253) also briefly

addresses the heresy of Adoptionism. However, he does not explicitly refer to the “Spirit of God” as a Christ who descended upon Jesus at His baptism. He unpacks it as follows:

Ebionitism, though it did hold Jesus to be the Messiah and sometimes also believed that he was supernaturally conceived and endowed at his baptism with divine power, saw in Jesus nothing more than a human being, a descendant of David, anointed with the Spirit of God and appointed king over an earthly realm to be established at his return.

Doveton (2012:Loc. 1334) briefly elaborates on the concept of Gnosticism, explaining that “the aim of the Gnostic was to achieve enlightenment through gnosis and to progress from being merely a Christian to being ‘a christ’”. He further refers to a comment in the Gospel of Philip<sup>171</sup> which reads as follows: “You have seen the Spirit and have become Spirit, you have seen Christ and have become Christ, you have seen the [Father] and will become Father” (Meyer, 2007:169; *The Gospel of Philip*, 61,20-35, translated by Meyer, 2007). Doveton further comments that one who receives the power of the cross “is no longer a Christian, but a Christ”.

Other labels have also been given to Adoptionism. Bird (2017:119) introduces the concept of “possession Christology”, which he defines as “a heavenly power or angel entered into the man Jesus. He then became the exalted Son of God.” Pearson (2007:37) names it “separation Christology”, because of the separation between Jesus and Christ as two different entities. He explains that it serves to explain “what happened to Jesus after his baptism: the heavenly Christ descended on him in the form of a dove and proclaimed the unknown Father”. He brings it back to a “adoptionist Christology” saying that “Jesus was adopted by God as his son (the Christ) on the occasion of his baptism”.

In more recent cultic developments, particularly in New Age circles, one can observe a similar trend. Geisler and Rhodes (2008:58) for example mention that “New Agers typically argue that Jesus was a mere human vessel who embodied the Christ – a cosmic, divine entity”. Groothuis (1990:222) remarks that for the New Age movement in general “the Christ is a universal Presence”. He further says that the “New Age Christ is an impersonal cosmic process or principle”. In this context Jesus was also only a mere man, and He, “along with many others, deserves the highest praise as a god-realized man” (Groothuis, 1990:221, 223). House and Carle (2003:74) observe that, in other ‘Mind Science’ cults, such as Christian Science, “Jesus and Christ are not the same person ... Jesus is the man, while Christ is the spiritual idea or element of God”. One example of this can be seen in the works of Holmes (1938:285), the founder of The Church of Religious Science. He wrote that “JESUS – the name of a man.

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<sup>171</sup> *The Gospel of Philip* is a text with a “definite Gnostic character”. This text is properly defined as a ‘pseudepigrapha’, which is to say it is a ‘false writing’. It forms part of the Nag Hammadi Library (Gilchrist, 2013:167-168).

Distinguished from the Christ. The man Jesus became the embodiment of the Christ, as human gave way to the Divine idea of Sonship.”

#### **e) Parallels with CiMI**

Some of the traits already described in Adoptionism, and in the more recent New Age developments, clearly reflect parallels with CiMI's Christology, which can be briefly discussed. Like the Adoptionists, CiMI maintains that Jesus was only a man and that His baptism signalled His anointing with the Spirit of God. Strydom (2019d), for example, mentions that they do not celebrate Jesus's birth in Bethlehem, but His baptism in Galilee. CiMI (2018g) states:

Jesus, the son of man, at the age of thirty was anointed by God at his baptism when the Holy Spirit descended on him and stayed on (in) him ... Here Jesus became the first, and in that time, the only Son of God on the earth ... A Son of God is someone whose spirit, like Jesus' spirit, becomes one with God's Spirit, whom God anoints, who is made a Christ by God. No one without the Spirit of God can be a Son of God.

One could therefore say that for CiMI Jesus was adopted as God's Son at His baptism when He was anointed with God's Spirit.

Moreover, CiMI also reflects a 'separation Christology' since Jesus and Jesus Christ are not the same person. Strydom (2016d) considers this separation as the foundation of the church when he says: "Understanding the difference between Jesus and Jesus Christ is the foundational cornerstone of how you will be built as a church." He also states that, after His anointing, Jesus was two persons, Jesus and Jesus Christ. While the Adoptionists still attribute personhood to the Christ as an angel or God's Spirit, CiMI defines the Christ as a "spiritual", "godly" and "heavenly" specie of sorts that was created by God (Strydom, 2019d). Although Jesus must be anointed with God's Spirit to receive the Christ specie, the Christ is not the Spirit of God. This specie, after Jesus's anointing, indwells Him and, where in Adoptionism this indwelling or anointing was only seen as temporal, in CiMI it seems to be more permanent.

Adoptionism taught that after Jesus had been anointed, He was able to do miracles and to start His ministry. CiMI also holds a similar view. The anointing of Jesus with the Spirit of God, which granted Him the Christ specie, empowered Him to do miracles. CiMI (2018e), for example, explains that the baptism of Jesus, entailing His anointing as a Christ, signalled the beginning of His ministry. He was then able to perform all His miracles since God was with Him. Therefore, the anointing of Jesus includes the idea that He was given "the necessary powers" to start His ministry. In CiMI's Christology, when Jesus died as a Christ, His inner Christ person, Jesus Christ, survived death and continued to dwell spiritually. As already pointed out, there is no bodily resurrection in the theology of CiMI.



CiMI (2018e) also states, “To become a Christ, you need to be anointed. This is exactly what happened at the baptism of Jesus. God anointed Jesus with His Spirit making him a Christ (anointed).” According to CiMI, anyone who is anointed and born from above, by embracing the teachings of CiMI, becomes a Christ. Jesus was therefore not unique. Some of the Adoptionists also referred to themselves as Christs like CiMI does. The title of Christ is therefore available for anyone who has been anointed with the Spirit of God and received the Christ specie. One aspect that is important to note, and is also a parallel with Adoptionism, is that just like the Jesus of the Adoptionists, the Jesus of CiMI does not save by substitutionary atonement and a conquering of death, but only by example.

#### **5.5.4.3. Conclusion of the historical diagnosis of CiMI**

Although CiMI may claim that their teachings with regard to Jesus are new and unique, their Christological roots go back to the first three centuries of the early church. One can therefore say that CiMI is only a resurfacing of an ancient heresy, which has already been refuted by the church. Miles (2018:5) creatively states that “every bad idea about Jesus can be illustrated by a superhero”, but superheroes are made up by people in a fictional universe and cannot save anyone in reality. Therefore, as Miles (2018) reminds us:

The bad ideas about Jesus throughout history, the subtle changing of who Jesus is here and there, all make Jesus less remarkable, less magnificent, and less of a Savior. In fact, it makes him not savior at all. According to the logic and story of the Bible, *it takes everything that Jesus is and does to save us*. Any alteration of Jesus, no matter how small, turns him into someone who cannot rescue humanity, who cannot re-create the cosmos, and who cannot reign over it as the great sovereign King.

Through the ages many figures have attempted to change the identity of Jesus Christ, and CiMI is not new in this regard. The ancient heresy of Adoptionism is still being kept alive in our 21<sup>st</sup> century by CiMI and their New Age counterparts. To be sure, there are still differences and new nuances, but the main Christological narrative of Adoptionism can be identified in CiMI’s teachings. CiMI’s ideas are therefore not new for the church.

#### **5.5.5. Conclusion of the person and work of Jesus Christ**

The person and the work of Jesus Christ have also now been reclaimed and reaffirmed over against CiMI. By rejecting the true ontological identity of Jesus Christ as God, CiMI fails to provide a sufficient theological basis for salvation. The Jesus held forth by CiMI cannot save anyone. The only Mediator between God and man can only be someone who is both God *and* man. Neither the Jesus who as a mere man became a Christ at his baptism, nor the Xandré Strydom, who also as a mere man became a ‘Christ’, can be that Mediator. Only the true Jesus

who has eternally and exclusively been the Christ and who came from the bosom of the Father can sufficiently be a Mediator between God and man.

CiMI has attempted to intercept the threefold office of Jesus Christ and to give it to the leadership of CiMI. In their theology, Jesus Christ is no longer the only Prophet. CiMI claimed that role and they are now bringing God's new and progressive Word to the people. Jesus Christ is also no longer the Priest to them. They have given that office to Strydom who has given his life for the people of CiMI. He is the one who sacrificed himself. Jesus Christ is also no longer the King. Strydom has formally been anointed as the king of God's people and in that they have attempted to dethrone Jesus and enthrone Strydom. CiMI, and particularly Strydom, now carry the threefold office of prophet, priest and king. However, since the true Jesus Christ attested to by the Scriptures, is God *and* man, there is no room for anyone else to not only finally and sufficiently carry the threefold office, but also to finally and sufficiently be the threefold office.

It has also been shown that without a bodily resurrection from the dead there is no victory over death. When CiMI therefore reinterprets the Scriptures to deny Jesus Christ's bodily resurrection, they not only exchange the truth for a lie, but they lose the content of the Christian faith and hence a foundation for hope. When CiMI claims that there was only a spiritual resurrection, they are, instead of facing up to the real world including physical bodies with flesh and bones, fleeing from it to an imaginary spiritual world. God is interested in His whole creation and Jesus Christ redeems the whole creation with the promise to resurrect and recreate a new heaven and a new earth. That is the hope that the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees.

Although CiMI may claim that their teachings are unique to them, they are only echoing an ancient heresy called Adoptionism. Many years before CiMI, Adoptionism already taught many of the things that CiMI is now teaching. This means that the church has already faced previous versions of the modern CiMI and thoroughly addressed their heresy. CiMI's ideas regarding the person of Jesus can therefore be traced to the second and third centuries of the early church, and know that CiMI is only repackaging ancient Adoptionism in their own way, which they deem fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **5.6. Summary and conclusion**

This chapter set out to provide a theological and doctrinal reclamation and reaffirmation of certain themes which CiMI has rejected and twisted. CiMI has delivered a theological and doctrinal framework which deviates from historical, orthodox Christianity, and must therefore be

addressed in a theological manner. This task could only take place by going back to sources to see whether their theological content is consistent with what Jesus Christ taught.

The chapter commenced with the doctrine of revelation and Scripture. The reason why these themes needed to be addressed is because of CiMI's insistence that their teachings are the result of new revelations which come directly from God. The case against CiMI's claim showed that God's special revelation of Himself has progressed over time in two manners. First, it progressed from unwritten to written. God revealed Himself in different ways to different people in the past, but He turned His people into a people of the book. God made sure that His objective special revelation of Himself was written down for future generations to read. Second, it progressed in its content from 'dim to bright'. In the Old Testament many shadows of Jesus Christ were revealed, but in the New Testament, the person whose shadow was visible in the Old Testament arrived, and was no longer a shadow, but reality. In this sense God's revelation finds its climax in the person and the work of Jesus Christ to whom the Scriptures attest. There are no contradictions in content between the Old and New Testaments, since there is a difference between progression and contradiction. CiMI's revelations, rather than being progressive as they claim, are rather contradictive. They are in effect teaching a different God from the One already written down and who climactically introduces one to the person of Christ, whose work is sufficient.

It was also argued that Scripture is soteriological in the sense that God reveals everything that one needs to know in the Scriptures in order to become wise unto salvation. New and secret revelations from God are not necessary for salvation. God speaks clearly through His Son in His written Word. CiMI's claims are therefore a modern form of Gnosticism, claiming new soteriological revelations from God and forming an elitist theological group, while God's written Word is enough. It was also pointed out that, in the area of revelation, a Unitarian concept of God like that of CiMI, cannot provide the necessary, eternal and internal functions for such a god to create, communicate and reveal. In their rejection of the Trinity, CiMI therefore also loses the necessary grounding to claim any revelations from their god in the first place. Only a Trinitarian God can create, communicate and reveal.

CiMI has also rejected the attributes of Scripture which make Scripture what it is. The attributes of divinity, canonicity, inerrancy, authority, necessity, sufficiency and perspicuity have no meaning in the theology of CiMI. The reason for this is because CiMI has intercepted these attributes and claimed them for themselves as God's mouthpiece in the world. One can say that CiMI is attempting to silence God's Word and is not teaching what God's Word dictates, but dictates to God's Word what must be taught.

God's objective revelation of Himself in His written Word has also revealed certain insights regarding the heart of unbelief that one can observe in CiMI. In other words, God's Word explains the existence of unbelief in the world, which includes CiMI's leadership. Because of a deep-seated idolatry in the heart of fallen human beings, there is a perilous exchange of the truth for a lie. CiMI's leadership has consequently exchanged the truth of God and His revelation for a lie and they are now holding forth the lie as the truth. Truth is being suppressed, exploited, and inverted in many different ways by CiMI, which leads to self-deception and the deception of their followers. In a theological sense CiMI's presentation of the gospel is a product of their own self-deception, but their gospel is dependent on the truth of historical, orthodox Christianity. In this sense they represent a parasitic existence on the truth and cannot exist without it. They are a 'pseudo-Christian religion' with a 'disfigured' Jesus. Their pursuit for salvation through claiming new revelations can only be fulfilled in the true Jesus Christ of Scripture; nothing less than the gospel can quiet their hearts.

The next major theme that was addressed was the doctrine of the Trinity. This was necessary since the Trinity is the heart of the Christian faith, and CiMI explicitly rejects this essential doctrine. The doctrine of the Trinity is God's highest revelation of Himself and a cherished mystery in Christianity. It was shown that the doctrine of the Trinity has a strong biblical basis and does not compromise on monotheism or God's simplicity. God is one essence and three persons as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was pointed out that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, and yet that there is only one God. It became clear throughout this discussion that CiMI's objections to the Trinity are either based on a wrong view of what the doctrine of the Trinity is, or are arguments with no merit to them. Moreover, their conflation of the persons of the Father and the Holy Spirit was demonstrated to be inconsistent with biblical data. An important observation, especially with regard to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, was that their metaphysical commitments to a Gnostic dualism of sorts prohibit them from interpreting biblical passages in an accurate, consistent, and sound manner. The Scriptures, however, do not share their Gnostic dualism regarding the nature of reality.

Since CiMI has objected against the doctrine of the Trinity on historical grounds, an overview of certain Ante-Nicene Fathers was provided to show that the Trinity already existed prior to the Council of Nicaea and was not invented there for the first time, as CiMI suggests. Moreover, when the Council of Nicaea gathered in 325 A.D., many of the bishops who attended had experienced persecution and were ready to die for the Christian faith. The Trinity was voted in by a vast majority. It was not a political agenda as to lie or deceive, but it was solely voted in because of its biblical basis as truth.

The chapter ended by addressing the theme of Christology. Jesus Christ's works flow forth from His identity as the Son of God who is fully God Himself. Accordingly, when CiMI rejects His deity, they will inevitably devalue the sufficiency of His work. This is shown by their abuse of the title of 'Christ', claiming that Jesus was only the first 'Christ', but that the leaders and members of CiMI are also now Christs. This is shown to be a wrong deduction from Scripture since the title 'Christ' exclusively belongs to the true Christ, Jesus Christ. While CiMI might use the right vocabulary when talking about Jesus Christ's atonement, only someone who is God and man can mediate between God and man. Therefore, it was argued that the 'disfigured' Jesus whom CiMI holds forth as the mediator between God and man, is not sufficient because to them He is only a man. Only the Jesus Christ of Scripture, revealed as God and man, can be a sufficient and final Mediator. It was also pointed out that CiMI only replaced the mediatorial work of Christ, first with a different Jesus, but also with Strydom as the leader who, as a mere man, cannot mediate and therefore cannot save anyone.

When CiMI claims the title of 'Christ' for anyone who embraces their teachings and is reborn, they also reject and intercept the threefold office of Jesus Christ. The Bible reveals Jesus Christ as the Mediator in a threefold office of Prophet, Priest and King. In this sense Jesus Christ is the final Prophet who revealed the Father to the people and as the Word of God brought them the true Word of God. Through the proclamation of the true Gospel throughout the world today, His prophetic office continues under the enlightening guidance of His Spirit. He is the final Priest who brings a sufficient sacrifice, Himself. After living a sinless and righteous life, He willingly sacrificed His life on the cross to pay the penalty for sin. As Priest, He is also now at the right hand of the Father interceding for His people. He is also the final King who was born from the line of David. His kingdom, however, is not of this world. He reigns as King at this very moment at the right hand of God with might and authority and one day His kingdom will be as clear as daylight. CiMI, in their theology, attempts to take away His prophetic office and give it to their ministers who preach their message, especially to Strydom, since he was given the prophecies to start CiMI. They also claim Christ's priestly office for Strydom since he has laid down his life for CiMI. Moreover, they have also claimed Christ's kingly office and have given it to Strydom by anointing him as king over the people. Jesus Christ therefore has no true mediatorial role in CiMI; Strydom has intercepted His threefold office.

Since the bodily resurrection of Jesus is central to the gospel and CiMI rejects that, it was also addressed. Instead of a bodily resurrection, CiMI believes in a spiritual and immaterial resurrection. It was shown that there is no room for interpreting the biblical data, especially in 1 Corinthians 15, in a matter as to justify a spiritual resurrection. CiMI's view of a spiritual resurrection is also shown to be another result of their Gnostic dualism as a metaphysical commitment. The theological significance of a physical, bodily resurrection is also the

foundation of a future hope in Christianity. The bodily resurrection of Jesus finally defeats death and secures the resurrection and redemption of God's whole physical world. God, through Jesus Christ, was not interested in only redeeming spirits, but physical reality as well. CiMI therefore loses a theology of hope, and also attempts to flee the real world and take refuge in a spiritual realm.

Finally, it was shown that, although CiMI claims that their teachings regarding the person of Jesus are new and progressive, the roots of their Christology go back to heresies of the second and third centuries. They have resurfaced a modern form of ancient Adoptionism, which has already been dealt with by the early church. Ancient Adoptionism already taught that Jesus and Christ are two separate entities and that Jesus was anointed at His baptism, where He became the Christ. Although there are slight differences here and there, the resemblance between CiMI and Adoptionism is still large enough to conclude that CiMI is an expression of ancient Adoptionism.

By 'going back to the sources' this chapter demonstrated CiMI's heresy and inconsistencies with the teachings of Jesus Christ, as found in Scripture. The claims of new revelations from God and the content of those new revelations are contradictory to Scripture and therefore false. Their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity is unwarranted. Finally, their rejection of Christ's divinity leads to a devaluation of His work as Mediator and their rejection of His bodily resurrection is shown to be unbiblical, which leaves their theology without any grounds for hope.

## CHAPTER 6: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 6.1. Introduction

When a group like CiMI becomes known to the general public in a relatively short period of time, with media exposure because of their statements against Christian doctrines, and owing to the devastating influence they have on Christian people and families, it becomes the task of Christian apologists confronted with such groups to provide answers. This first ever formal counter-cult apologetic inquiry into the South African originated cultic group, CiMI, was therefore necessitated, especially because of their influence on peoples' lives in the name of Christianity, and due to what they teach and preach as Scriptural, but which is contrary to the Scriptures. The goal of this final chapter is to pull the main features of this study together in a succinct and concentrated manner. To meaningfully accomplish this goal, the researcher will revisit the initial research questions, objectives and central theoretical argument of this study as it was set out in **Chapter 1**.

As central theoretical argument the study was focused on the possibility that CiMI is a cult from both the theological and doctrinal perspective, as well as from the sociological and psychological perspective. Furthermore, it was hypothesised that CiMI is guilty of Scripture twisting, which leads to doctrine twisting, and that their theological commitments are unbiblical and therefore false and must be addressed by historical, orthodox Christianity in an apologetic way.

### 6.2. Research questions and objections<sup>1</sup>

#### 6.2.1. What is CiMI's history of origin?

The first research question that was asked in Chapter 1 with regard to CiMI was about the origin and history of CiMI. This question was addressed in **Chapter 2** and was introduced to enable this study to achieve the goal of tracing the origin and history of CiMI. It was stipulated that since CiMI is only a decade old, their historical roots would not be as deep as other cultic groups like the Mormons or the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Three important factors with regard to CiMI's origin and history were stipulated. These three factors include claimed prophecies, the dream of Strydom and an overview of CiMI's history. The apparent prophecies and documented dream of Strydom gave insight into how CiMI views

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<sup>1</sup> Each of the subheadings below entails one of the research questions that were asked at the beginning and entails a summary of how the study answered the particular research question.

their own origin. According to CiMI, certain prophecies in the 1700s anticipated their coming as a church. According to them, these prophecies very specifically indicated that CiMI would start in the east of South Africa to introduce the world to the last day gospel. Strydom, the visionary leader of CiMI, also had a dream in which God revealed to him the gospel of CiMI. In this dream God also revealed to Strydom the name “Christ in me” and the concept of man being equal in value to God. The last factor, namely the history of CiMI, answered the question of when, where and by whom CiMI was established. In this regard an interview was conducted with Dawie Spies, the person who was an important witness to the beginning of CiMI. CiMI began in Pretoria on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2010 and the three people who were involved in the establishment of CiMI were Xandré Strydom, Neels Labuschagne and Thys Kotze. Soon after their establishment, Labuschagne crowned Strydom as the king of God’s people in CiMI. The account of their establishment leaves one with many more questions, but it at least demonstrates that CiMI has a questionable history of origin, which does not point to a wonderful new beginning with CiMI as God’s only true church and community on earth.

### **6.2.2. What are the major theological and doctrinal themes in CiMI’s theology?**

This second question was specifically aimed to answer what CiMI believes. As for the above, it was addressed in **Chapter 2**, and is the first ever formal, academic attempt to produce an overview of CiMI’s theology and doctrine. It was necessary to answer the question on what the major theological themes of CiMI are to prevent this study from being guilty of a straw man fallacy. The study was limited to CiMI’s concept of revelation, their concept of God, their view on the person and works of Jesus Christ and their anthropology.<sup>2</sup>

CiMI claims to not only have direct revelational access to God, but also exclusive revelational access to God. This means that, according to CiMI, they are the only true and chosen church of God on earth. God now works solely through CiMI and no other church has the authority to make the same claim. In other words, CiMI views itself as God’s only mouthpiece on earth. Moreover, CiMI also claims that God’s revelation is progressive, which is to say that it develops and improves over time, and only the leaders of CiMI have access to this progressive Word of God. CiMI allows for a view in which the current progressive revelation of God can overrule previous revelations. God’s progressive revelation, which is only accessible by CiMI, allows them to ‘interpret’ the Bible in new ways.

In their rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity, CiMI proclaims a Unitarian view of God. That is to say that He is one essence and one person. For CiMI it is reason enough to reject the doctrine

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<sup>2</sup> What follows is a brief overview of CiMI’s views with regard to these theological themes, which is a concentrated version of how the question was answered.



of the Trinity because they claim that it is impossible for them to understand it. Moreover, the doctrine of the Trinity is also viewed as false since it teaches, according to CiMI, that there are three gods, and also because it divides the essence of God. Since the word 'Trinity' appears nowhere in the Bible it cannot be true. CiMI explains that in 325 A.D. the doctrine of the Trinity was voted in at the Council of Nicaea and that everyone before that time did not believe in the doctrine of the Trinity. This means that Jesus Christ is not the second person of the Trinity who became flesh, and therefore not God. The Holy Spirit is also not the third person of the Trinity, but is rather a reference to God as a Holy Spirit. In other words, since God is Spirit, He is a Holy Spirit. CiMI therefore conflates the person of the Father and the Holy Spirit.

CiMI introduces what they call "God's restoration plan". Ever since mankind fell into sin, God is (according to them) not represented on earth anymore and hence He cannot fill the earth with His glory. Therefore, He needed a restoration plan. The first aspect of this plan is that God wants to fill the earth with His glory. The glory of God refers to God's view, judgement and opinion. Since God is invisible and the ruler of the heavenly kingdom, He cannot rule the earthly kingdom. Only man can rule the visible earthly kingdom and represent God on earth. This is where CiMI comes in — according to them.

The second aspect is that God has chosen mankind to be "in Christ". The Christ of CiMI is not a person, but an impersonal specie, which is referred to as the Christ specie, the godly specie, or the second Adam specie. After the first Adam and fleshly specie fell into sin, God created the Christ specie to dwell in man so that mankind can represent God on earth again and fill the earth with His glory. While the Adam specie is identified as fleshly, and flesh is identified as sin and evil in the theology of CiMI, the Christ specie is identified as godly and spiritual. Jesus, according to CiMI, became the very first Christ on earth when He was anointed at His baptism. As the first Christ, Jesus had to sacrifice Himself to make it possible for many after Him to also become Christs. According to CiMI's teachings, if you become a Christ, you are primarily a spiritual being who is contained in a body. When one becomes a Christ one's spiritual man on the inside comes alive.

The third aspect of God's restoration plan, according to CiMI, is that one must be washed with the gospel of the glory of Christ. When one understands that one is a Christ and accepts the teachings of CiMI, one is born from above to also become a Christ. As a Christ, you are the image of God again and can accurately represent Him on earth and consequently the earth will be filled with God's glory. Only Christs can fulfil the restoration plan of God, and only a Christ is a true Son of God and a true image of God.

CiMI views Jesus as a human being who was a carpenter for thirty years, but after He had been anointed at His baptism, He became the very first Christ. His baptism is therefore viewed as the highlight of His life. Although Jesus had a virgin birth and a sinless life, He is not God in the flesh, but only a man who became a Christ. CiMI insists that He was not born the Christ but became the Christ. Jesus Christ had to sacrifice Himself on the cross to make it possible for other people to also become Christs. It is often explained that through the cross of Jesus more people can now “cross over” or “pass over” from the first, fallen Adam specie into the new, godly Christ specie. If one comes to the right knowledge that one is a Christ, one is born again and from that day is part of the Christ specie and accordingly a Christ. This is what the cross of Jesus Christ accomplished, according to CiMI’s teaching. Jesus Christ never rose bodily from the dead. The body of Jesus died on the cross and was buried and never resurrected. The spiritual man, Jesus Christ, however conquered death and remains as a spiritual being. This is also CiMI’s explanation of what will happen to a person when they die. Their bodies will be buried and will never be resurrected, while their inner spiritual Christ man will remain forever.

When it comes to the anthropology of CiMI, they believe that when someone becomes a Christ by virtue of their anointing with the Spirit of God, they also become a godkind. They argue that since God created mankind in His image, He created an exact replica of Himself in man. This image was lost after the fall but is restored again when one becomes a Christ. Since God made sure everything in creation brings forth after its own kind, when He created man He brought forth after His own kind, which means that man is a ‘godkind’. But this does not affect man in his/her entirety. CiMI upholds a matter-spirit or Gnostic dualism, according to which one’s physical body with flesh and bones is viewed to be evil, and one’s spirit is viewed to be godly and primary. Since God is Spirit, only our spirits were created in God’s image, not our bodies. One’s own body and the body of Jesus need to be disregarded, and one’s inner spiritual Christ man needs to be embraced.

It was necessary to document the major theological and doctrinal themes of CiMI as accurately as possible, based primarily on CiMI’s own sermons and documents as primary sources, before the apologetic evaluation of their doctrine and conduct could be done. After the question about the major theological and doctrinal themes of CiMI was answered in Chapter 2, the next chapter focused on the hold that the group acquired on their members through these ‘unique’ views.

### **6.2.3. Does CiMI conform to the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults?**

In **Chapter 3** the sociological and psychological perspectives on cults were discussed, focusing on the third main research question, namely whether CiMI conforms to the sociological and

psychological characteristics of cults. The role and the profile of a typical cult leader were scrutinised and the leadership of CiMI was measured against it.

Since the leader is viewed as the control mechanism initiator, it follows logically that before one can address the control mechanisms, the leadership of a cult should first be discussed. The first component of cult leadership concerns their roles in the structure that they implement in the cult. This typically refers to a strict hierarchy where the leader is at the top of the pyramid to control the cult from top to bottom. He usually has a loyal leadership who operates directly beneath him and who makes sure that the leader's wishes are fulfilled. The second component is the profile of a cult leader. In other words: What are the typical personality traits of cult leaders? Although other traits were also identified, it was mainly shown that the combination of charisma and authoritarianism is a dangerous union and results in a leader who has the capacity to make people love him *and* fear him — and follow what he says as God-given truth. This served as the theoretical basis regarding the leadership of cults from a sociological and psychological perspective.

Attention was then given to the leadership of CiMI. The data for this section was gathered from CiMI's own sources and interviews with former CiMI members. The strict hierarchy was unequivocally confirmed by the former members of CiMI, but also by information available in the public domain where Strydom is portrayed as the divinely appointed king of CiMI. He was anointed by Labuschagne and CiMI members bowed to him as the king. As the divinely appointed leader, he is the final authority on all matters and former members mentioned how his authority is unparalleled and incontestable. The deadly combination of charisma and authoritarianism was not just confirmed by former members to be observable in Strydom, but also in many of his appointed leaders who are loyal to him and serve directly beneath him. The one moment CiMI's leaders will be friendly, with winsome and pleasant personalities, but the next moment they will shout at members who may be asking questions or who are in some way disobedient. This demonstrates that CiMI's leaders are indeed sociologically and psychologically manipulative and match the typical role and profile of cult leaders.

To go further into the question of whether CiMI conforms to the sociological and psychological characteristics of cults, a breakdown of the so-called control mechanisms of cults was given to determine whether and how they manifest in CiMI, which will define them as a cult according to sociological and psychological standards. In each case the focus was first on providing a theoretical basis regarding the sociology and psychology of cults, and consequently to determine whether the theoretical data manifests in CiMI.

While the sociological and psychological aspects of a cult are not primary when viewed from a Christian perspective, it nevertheless provides one with valuable insights regarding the finer behavioural mechanics of cults. Many theologians who approach cults in an apologetic manner acknowledge the important place of the sociological and psychological perspective on cults. The general control mechanics of cults primarily entail the use of a thought-reform process during which members are turned from new recruits into loyal and committed members of the cult. This is achieved by keeping them socially engaged in the cult and psychologically dependent on the cult on more than just one level, including socially, emotionally, ideologically, etc. This is achieved by implementing control mechanisms that refer to the different components of a person's life and social environment, which the leader and/or leadership of cults attempt to control. Once the leaders gain control of a variety of aspects, they exercise a firm grip of control over members to keep them adhered to the cult for as long as possible.

A thorough discussion of the different control mechanisms of cults was conducted by consequently applying each one of them to CiMI. The different control mechanisms, with all their finer components, include control over membership, thoughts, emotions, behaviour, norms, language, information, environment and history. The last group of control mechanisms possesses a strong religious flavour. These control mechanisms are 'control' over God, control over salvation, control over the interpretation of an authority and control over doctrine. The data gathered from CiMI's own sources and the interviews and informal discussions with former members provided the researcher with enough material to demonstrate that CiMI's leadership implements all these control mechanisms in one way or another to control their members and keep them adhering to CiMI and its leadership for as long as possible. It also proves that CiMI can be described as a cult from a sociological and psychological perspective, thus answering the main question in this regard.

#### **6.2.4. Is CiMI guilty of Scripture twisting in a cultic manner?**

The fourth question moved from the sociology and psychology of cults to the theology and doctrines of cults, which were scrutinised with regard to the hermeneutics of cults in general, and CiMI in particular. If it could be determined that CiMI is guilty of consistently twisting the Scriptures to fit their peculiar doctrine, as done by cults, the logical consequence would be that they are also in this regard actually guilty of doctrine twisting, while pretending to act according to the will of God and to be biblically faithful. **Chapter 4** therefore endeavoured to answer the question whether CiMI is guilty of twisting the Scriptures. However, the discussion had to first provide an overview of the historical-grammatical method for interpreting the Bible to better contrast the correct principles of interpretation with the incorrect principles of interpretation, as found in many cults. The assumption is that only the historical-grammatical method of

interpreting the Bible can consistently enable one to arrive at the essentials of historical, orthodox Christianity.

James Sire's (1980) work on Scripture twisting served as the theoretical basis for the different methods of misreading. While he identified different methods of misreading and applied each one individually to a different cult to show how cults in general are guilty of the specific misreadings, this study applied all the methods he identified to CiMI to exhaustively expose the Scripture twisting of CiMI and to demonstrate how CiMI, in particular, is guilty of these methods of misreading found in cults. The result was that it was conclusively shown that CiMI was guilty of inaccurate quotations, twisted translations, the biblical hook, ignoring the immediate context, collapsing contexts, overspecification, the figurative fallacy, speculative readings of predictive prophecy, saying but not citing, selective citing, inadequate evidence, confused definitions, ignoring alternative explanations, the obvious fallacy, virtue by association, esoteric interpretations, the supplementing of biblical authority, and the implicit rejection of biblical authority.

Within each of these categories, two or three explicit cases from CiMI were documented, which were all gathered from their sermons. Although CiMI uses the same Bible that Christianity uses, these methods of misreading, of which they are guilty, showed that they do not implement a consistent hermeneutic when they arrive at their theological conclusions. It was also demonstrated that CiMI disregards the authority of the Bible, while claiming to be biblical. Given that they are guilty of Scripture twisting, one should not be surprised that they reject some of the essential doctrines of Christianity. Hence, the fourth question of this research project was also addressed and answered.

#### **6.2.5. How to reclaim the essential doctrines of Christianity from CiMI**

The last question was formulated in such a way as to enable this study to, not only contrast CiMI's doctrines with historical, orthodox Christianity, but as an apologetic study also to reclaim and reaffirm the essential doctrines of Christianity over against CiMI. This question was answered in **Chapter 5** and was narrowed down to the doctrines of revelation and Scripture, the doctrine of the Trinity, and the person and work of Jesus Christ. While also deemed important, the anthropology of CiMI was not addressed in this chapter since other opportunities to address it had already been exploited.

This discussion on the essential doctrines of Christianity started with a reclamation of the doctrine of revelation and Scripture to answer the question why CiMI's views on revelation and Scripture are theologically insufficient and false. This was necessary since CiMI claims progressive and exclusive revelations from God. In light of the Scriptures, the proper

understanding regarding the concept of progressive revelation, the soteriological aspect of special revelation and the Trinitarian aspect of special revelation were introduced to address CiMI's shortcomings. This demonstrated that CiMI does not have progressive revelations, but rather contradictory revelations worth disregarding. It also showed that CiMI is following in the footsteps of ancient Gnosticism with their claims of receiving new revelations, which are soteriologically at the centre. It also explained the shortcomings of a Unitarian concept of God when it comes to revelation as such, since a Unitarian view of God does not have the eternal *ad intra* capacities to account for it. The attributes of Scripture were also provided, and it was shown how CiMI rejects and intercepts these attributes to claim it for the leadership alone. Finally, once the doctrine of revelation and Scripture was reclaimed, it was applied to CiMI to provide a revelational diagnosis of their idolatrous existence. Hence it was shown why CiMI's view of revelation and Scripture is wrong.

A reclamation of the doctrine of the Trinity was next on the agenda. Since CiMI objects to the Trinity on multiple levels, it was necessary to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is indeed biblical. It was demonstrated that the Trinity neither compromises on monotheism, nor on God's simplicity. It was shown that there are indeed three persons, the Father who is fully God, the Son who is fully God, and the Holy Spirit who is fully God. Yet, there is only one true, living and simple God. CiMI's objections were shown to be unfounded. In the light of CiMI's insistence that the Trinity was not endorsed by the early church and only voted in at the Council of Nicaea, it was demonstrated that many Ante-Nicene Fathers believed in the Trinity and that the Council of Nicaea was not driven by some sort of political agenda, but only by a pursuit of truth. Accordingly, it was shown that CiMI's concept of God is false and not biblical.

The discussion finally also focused on the person and the works of Jesus Christ to show why CiMI's approach to Jesus Christ is ultimately wrong. The discussion started with an explanation why the title 'Christ' solely belongs to Jesus as *the* Christ. He did not become the Christ; He has eternally been the Christ. CiMI's view with regard to the title 'Christ' is therefore incorrect. It was argued that since CiMI rejects the deity of Jesus Christ, they have theological insufficiencies to account for salvation. If God is a holy being, and man is sinful, only someone who is fully God and fully man can be the Mediator between God and man. Sinful man cannot approach a holy God and therefore needs a Mediator who is God and man. As God, Jesus Christ can reach to God and, as man He can reach to man in order to accomplish salvation on the cross by way of substitutionary atonement. It was also demonstrated how Strydom and his leadership intercept the threefold office of Jesus Christ. The discussion further reclaimed the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, since CiMI, on the grounds of their Gnostic dualism, rejects the bodily resurrection and only holds to a spiritual resurrection. It was shown how such a view of Jesus's resurrection cannot be justified by Scripture, but also collapses into a theology of hopelessness. Although

CiMI claims that their ideas with regard to Jesus Christ are new, a historical diagnosis of their Christology was conducted in order to trace their Christological roots back to the early heresy of Adoptionism. In this regard, CiMI's view of Jesus Christ was shown to be false and recognisable as an old heresy that had already been dealt with centuries ago.

The last chapter consequently answered the question of how to apologetically reclaim the essential doctrines of Christianity from CiMI. The answer can in short be stated that one reclaims the essential doctrines of Christianity from CiMI by going back to the sources, primarily that of the Scriptures, but also to early church history.

### **6.2.6. Final remarks**

It is safe to conclude that the central theoretical argument of this study, as stated in Chapter 1, has been achieved and demonstrated in the following way:

- CiMI has been shown to be a cult from a sociological and psychological perspective.
- CiMI has been found guilty of Scripture twisting and hence doctrine twisting.
- CiMI has been apologetically addressed by reclaiming the essential Christian doctrines from them and showing why their views are false.

### **6.3. Contributions of this study**

The main contribution of this study lies in the fact that this is the first ever formal study conducted on the phenomenon of CiMI in South Africa. This means that there were no scholarly researched sources available on CiMI to guide the researcher in an attempt to understand their teachings. All information needed to be synthesised from their own sources and from insights obtained from former members.

In one sense, the contribution of this study also lies in the fact that CiMI may be with us in South Africa for the foreseeable future. In this way it may serve as a source for Christians and interested parties to understand CiMI and also answer them in apologetic and evangelistic encounters. It may also help Christians to apologetically address other similar cults that come and go.

The following factors can also be mentioned:

- Although the control mechanisms discussed in Chapter 3 have been introduced by Henk G. Stoker and thoroughly applied to the Jehovah's Witnesses, the researcher attempted to update the control mechanisms with insights from more recent sources. These mechanisms were accordingly also applied to a new cult, namely CiMI, which according to Stoker, is a contribution to the field of counter-cult apologetics.

- Although the methods of misreading discussed in Chapter 4 have been introduced by James W. Sire to expose the phenomenon of Scripture twisting in cults in general, the researcher was able to apply all the methods of misreading to one cult in particular, namely CiMI. While Sire used different cults to confirm different methods of misreading, the researcher used CiMI across the board to confirm all the methods of misreading.
- Although the main structure of Chapter 5 has been part of counter-cult apologetics in the past, the researcher attempted to provide certain theological explanations in the field of theological etiology to diagnose CiMI's unbelief and theology. This was particularly part of the discussion about the Trinity *ad intra*, the revelational diagnosis of CiMI, their interception of the attributes of Scripture and the threefold office of Christ.

It is the hope of the researcher that these contributions will form part of future counter-cult apologetic studies.

#### **6.4. Potential future research**

Since this study is, by its nature, limited, there are certain potential research opportunities worthy of investigation. Consider the following:

- With regard to CiMI in particular, one can develop guidelines for counter-cult evangelism. Ron Rhodes produced two books titled *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Mormons* (1995) and *Reasoning from the Scriptures with the Jehovah's Witnesses* (2009). These have served as great guidelines for the church regarding evangelism encounters with members of these cults. In the same way one can produce a piece of research titled *Reasoning from the Scriptures with Christ in Me International and similar Gnostic cults*. Chapter 4 has already started to lay a foundation for such a project.
- Regarding hermeneutics, Thomas A. Howe produced many valuable insights in the field of hermeneutics and the role of metaphysics in it. He produced an article titled "Hermeneutics and Metaphysics" (2004) and a book titled *Objectivity in Biblical Interpretation* (2015). His article was specifically applied to the metaphysical commitments of open theism and how that influences the biblical interpretations of theists. This study on CiMI exposed how their Gnostic dualism as a metaphysical commitment influences their interpretation of Scripture. There are, however, more opportunities in this field as pertaining to cults. A refutation of certain metaphysical commitments will richly contribute to exegetical refutations as well, and vice versa.
- When it comes to theological explanations and the theology of religions, Daniel Strange produced a book titled *Their rock is not like our rock: A theology of religions* (2014) with rich themes to apply to cults in particular. This can also be supplemented with the work of Os Guinness on the anatomy of unbelief in his book titled *Fool's talk: Recovering the*



*art of Christian persuasion* (2016). A study such as this will explain, in a theological fashion, the existence and unbelief of cultic groups and show how some of the themes identified in the abovementioned works manifest in cultic groups.

- One final suggestion is with regard to the sociological and psychological perspective of cults. In future, additional control mechanisms implemented by cults may be identified to enrich such an analysis. Moreover, many of the control mechanisms may potentially be exegetically grounded to show that certain sociological and psychological abuses of cults have accompanied the phenomenon of heresy for a long time. This may potentially be identified in biblical themes like deception, as it pertains to false prophets and teachers in the Bible. The question would be: What is necessary on a sociological and psychological level to deceive someone with false doctrine?

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