

Things yet unseen:

A critical analysis of how the teachings of Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr offer alternative messages of Christian hope.

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1 Introduction to Research Topic

1.1 Theme

In the novel *The Sixth Lamentation* Father Andrew, prior at Larkwood, addresses his novice Anselm regarding the seemingly unsatisfactory resolution of a situation that had presented itself at the monastery:

Those tears are part of what it means to be a monk. Out there, in the world, it can be very cold. It seems to be about luck, good and bad, and the distribution is absurd. We have to be candles, burning between hope and despair, faith and doubt, life and death, all the opposites. That is the disquieting place where people must always find us. And if our life means anything, if what we are goes beyond the monastery walls and does some good, it is that somehow, by being here, at peace, we help the world cope with what it cannot understand. (Broderick 2004:413)¹

In a twenty-first century world which is often critical of the Church and its message – Bentley suggests that the message of the church to many reflects a “closed” orientation (2003:6) – it is helpful to consider how the Christian community can be one which burns a candle of hope, faith and life and thus retains its relevance in an atheistic society.

It is therefore the task of this dissertation to explore the theme of Christian hope as presented by two different, popular, Christian speakers and authors. *Things yet unseen: A critical analysis of how the teachings of Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr offer alternative messages of Christian hope* seeks to address how the Church can go beyond its walls and “help the world cope with what it cannot understand” by studying the two different approaches to the subject in order for the church to rediscover its message in the critical contemporary environment.

¹ William Brodrick is an ex-Augustine friar who left before his final vows. He then became a barrister and later turned to writing. His protagonist, Father Anselm, is a barrister turned monk.

1.2 Background

While chapters two and three of this study deal with the background to a far greater degree, for the purposes of this introduction it is helpful to set out some of the issues dealt with in this dissertation.

1.2.1 Postmodernism, postcolonialism and the church in the twenty-first century

Franciscan priest and one of the subjects of the study, Richard Rohr, suggests that in what has been termed the postmodern era the predominant emotion is one of loss of control. People feel confused and powerless (2001:3), uncertain about the place of religion (“holy disorder”) (:10), fearful (:12) and lonely (:15).

In this era of confusion, especially in terms of spirituality, the church faces many challenges, among them criticism launched against the church, God and Christianity through media and social media. Social media can be described as web-based and mobile technologies which have turned communication into an interactive dialogue (Wikipedia, *Social Media*:2011) such as blogging and Facebook (www.facebook.com). Social media offers public outlets for ordinary people to express their doubts and frustrations about religion, often described as petty, narrow minded and mediaeval (Many popular bloggers on www.thoughtleader.co.za for example, such as Rod MacKenzie, Koos Kombuis, John Vlismas and Sarah Britten are often critical of organised religion) and to engage in debate with others both for and against their views. The popularity of Richard Dawkins’ book *The God Delusion* (2007) and the atheist campaign for people not to worry because there is no God (Rao:2009) have made atheism fashionable in some circles, as noted by John Spong (1999:40) and Marcus Borg (2000:3). It is worth noting that this response is largely predominant in the Western community – that part of society largely affluent, influenced by the United States and Western Europe and where access to social media is ubiquitous. As noted below, it is out of this context that the study speaks.

The response of the religious community has been twofold: on the one hand there has been a recent upsurge in the popularity of Pentecostalism in Europe in countries that were formerly part of the Soviet Union (Johnson and Ross 2009:156-157), and

especially in Africa south of the Sahara as evidenced in South Africa by the popularity of evangelist Angus Buchan. A look at his organisation, Shalom Ministries', statement of faith (see appendix) would show that he embraces this approach to Christianity.

On the other hand, more progressive elements in the church have sought to interpret Christian theology in such a way as to address the concerns of the postmodern generation. Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger suggest that the modern church of the so-called 'baby-boomer' generation, with its controlling nature, "does not satisfy the yearnings of the under-forties" (Gibbs and Bolger 2006:21), and that it is out of this struggle and the postmodern mindset that a phenomenon which has been termed the Emerging Church Movement (ECM), or conversation has appeared. This movement has been studied particularly by Gibbs and Bolger (2006), and also by others such as Marcus Borg (2004), Huston Smith (2001) and Scot McKnight (2007). As noted by McKnight, this movement consists of different strands of tradition and experimentation and seeks new ways of understanding and relating the gospel in a changed world (2007). This study has chosen to focus on Rohr as an example of an author who is popular in the emerging church community.

Both of these responses to twenty-first century threats to the church are relevant to this study as Buchan presents a Christianity that is conservative and fundamentalist while Rohr expresses the "emerging" type of Christian faith.

1.2.2 South African Society

While I will define postmodernism and postcolonialism more fully in chapter two, it is worth noted here that South Africa has not been excluded from these twenty-first century challenges. In this country the confusion of postmodernism – defined by Huston Smith quoting Lyotard as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (2001:20), a realisation that stories once believed in, such as apartheid, are no longer true – has been added to by the transformation of South African society to a postcolonial one – a response to the stories of domination enforced by colonial powers (Loomba et al:2005). This has resulted in fears of change and loss of lifestyle, especially in the white community. At the same time the country has moved from a "Christian state" to a country that is noted for its diversity regarding faith and world-views (Bentley 2003:9). This time of change

can be referred to as a liminal one – a social context which is defined as a state of upheaval and lack of certainty, being “betwixt and between” where the old world is left behind, but one is not yet certain of the new (Rohr 2003b:155). I will define this concept more fully in chapter two and my conclusion.

In South African communities hopelessness is the inevitable result of living in a society with an HIV/AIDS pandemic, rising crime and a high rate of unemployment (:9). We live, says Rohr, in an age of anxiety (the subtitle of his book, 2001).

The hypothesis of this study is that in South Africa – and a larger world of the twenty-first century – the church is able to address this angst with a message of hope, as happened during the apartheid years (Mogoba 1994:v), and that churches that are growing are those that are able to offer a meaningful message of hope to members and the greater community. “A genuine theology,” says Tom Wright, “will always be alive with faith and hope.” (2004:143)² Being a bearer of hope has always been one of the roles of the Church (Bentley 2003:27); Michael Farrell suggests that when “people run short of other doors to knock on, they will beat a path to the door marked Hope” (1994:1).

1.2.3 Scope of the Study

While clearly there is a great need for hope in many sections of South African society, the dynamics, desires and needs are so vastly different that it would be impossible to deal with all of them in a single study. For this reason the focus of the study is particularly on white middle-class society – that part of the South African demographic of which I am a part, and in which I do most of my work as a minister. Indeed, it is to the concerns of this community that I respond, and it is this community’s appreciation of popular South African evangelist Angus Buchan that has been the inspiration to look at the concept of hope in attracting people to church.

One of the most prominent areas of criticism of Buchan has been from feminists in general and feminist theologians in particular. While this study will touch on those issues in identifying and analysing the reasons for Buchan’s appeal, at this point I note

² Commentary on Romans 8.

that a full analysis of the patriarchal nature of Buchan's ministry is beyond the scope of this study.

It is also worth noting at this point that I am a progressive / liberal minister and therefore biased against Buchan, particularly due to his fundamentalist approach to Christianity. It is the continued enthusiasm of both male and female members of past and present congregations for both Buchan's message and his ministry, and their on-going insistence on the reading of his books, the watching of his videos and attendance of his Mighty Men Conferences that has piqued my interest in Buchan.

It is my hope that this study will lead to a greater understanding of Buchan's appeal to the masses so that it may be applied in other contexts.

1.2.4 Two approaches to hope

Chapter three of this thesis deals with the two different approaches to the theology of hope as represented by the two main subjects of the study – approaches which are both popular and find acceptance in the broad church, although they approach the subject from vastly different perspectives.

Jürgen Moltmann, in his article "Hope" in the *New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, suggests that the biblical concept of hope is an expectation of a good future which rests on God's promise, and an anticipation of the expected future which is already at work in the present (1983:271). I will show that the two understandings of the message of hope as expressed by Buchan and Rohr that this paper seeks to explore differ and deal with these them differently in accordance with their different theological approaches. Borg terms these different approaches "earlier" and "emerging" Christianities (2004:2).

While both the earlier and emerging paradigms have many similarities in terms of how they understand hope, perhaps the greatest difference is found in how hope is worked out. On the one hand an "earlier" fundamentalist approach to the transcendent aspect of hope offers primarily the freedom from sin, guilt and judgement expressed as hope for life after death: Things "yet unseen" will be revealed after we die: hope is found in the concept of a better life after this one, and it is this hope which enables a transformation in the present. On the other, an "emerging" approach to this transcendent aspect posits

that things yet unseen are already here, but we need to look differently to see them (Rohr 2009:30). The focus is on living a better life now through a transformed worldview. This approach is far more inclusive of those rejected by the earlier paradigm such as people of other faiths, and gays and lesbians (Borg 2004:3).

The paradigms differ also in the way in which hope is discovered: in the earlier paradigm the hope of transformation can only be found by “giving one’s life to Christ” and “being born again,” casting off that which is contrary to the Word of God; in the emerging approach hope is grounded more fully in transformation in this life through accepting one’s brokenness as a start to the healing of the self. Jesus always begins his healing work in the place of suffering, rather than of sin.

The theoretical framework used in comparing the approaches to hope is that of a phrase often used by Rohr to describe the human search for meaning: “power, prestige and possession.” The fundamentalist approach, typified by Buchan, sees triumphal Christianity – and indeed power, prestige and possession – as something to be achieved, and it is God, a god of power, who will give those things to his faithful. Rohr’s approach to power, prestige and possession, on the other hand, is not one of attaining these things, but one of moving beyond the desire for them and leaving them behind. Meaning is found when we can say that power, prestige and possession are no longer important, are no longer driving factors in our lives.

Buchan, an example of the earlier approach, has gained popularity through an exclusivist message of hope in salvation for life after death. Rohr, representing the emerging paradigm, practices what he calls ‘non-dualism’: trying to see things as ‘both/and’ (2009:9) rather than the either/or as expressed so often by Buchan and others.

2 Literature Study

While chapter three of this study will look at both authors and their respective theologies in more depth, for the purposes of this introduction I offer a brief summary of their background and ideas about hope:

2.1 Angus Buchan

Buchan has become popular through the autobiographical book and movie *Faith Like Potatoes* (1998) – a number of respondents in the study indicated that this was how they first heard about him – his regular television show (*Grassroots*) and the annual “Mighty Men Conference.” A farmer from kwaZulu-Natal, he began to preach following a prompting from God at the end of 1989 (1998:68-69), and is a self-confessed evangelist (2006a:230) and fundamentalist (:176) who preaches an exclusivist message, for example, “...we hear about interfaith meetings and some of our mainline denominations are joining hands with Islam and with Buddhism and Hinduism, and that is an abomination to God.” (:110). Over the years this ministry has attracted comment and criticism in the local secular press.

The book *Faith like Potatoes* (1998), the sequel *The Seed Sower* (2001) – a more detailed account of the last few chapters of the first book, and *Jesus... a Farmer... and Miracles* (2002) – a collection of testimonies told from Buchan’s perspective, form a trilogy telling his story. Buchan writes with assistance and in addition to these three are other books such as *Revival* (2008), a collection of emails and letters of testimony sent to Buchan, *Is Jesus Enough?* (2004), *Hardcore Christianity* (2006a), and *Passing the Baton* (2006b) which are a series of reflections on Christian subjects such as ‘No compromise’, ‘Courage’, ‘Faith’ and so on. In April 2012 a follow up movie, *Ordinary People*, was released. The main focus of this study will be on *Faith like Potatoes* and the relevant reflections from the other books.

2.1.1 Buchan on hope:

As an evangelist rather than a scholar Buchan has no carefully developed theology of hope, however he recognises the need for hope in the lives of the hopeless: “We need to minister to the sick, the hungry and the needy. We need to go to the places where the people are eager to hear the Good News... What we do have is the Word of life, the Word of hope.” (2006b:107). For Buchan hope is to be found in salvation in the evangelical sense of the word as he testifies to the physical healing of people and the transformation of their lives as a result of accepting Jesus as Saviour.

Instead of describing academically what hope is about, Buchan does his theology in a rather postmodern way – he tells stories. And his stories are stories of people responding to God in faith, and finding their prayers and needs answered – in this way the reader is encouraged to be more hopeful. *Faith Like Potatoes* is an exercise in hope as he tells repeatedly of how, in moments of desperation, God comes through for him again and again, whether in his personal life, on the farm, or in ministry.

Buchan clearly communicates that people do not need to hear carefully reasoned theologies about hope, but rather need to be reminded that hope can be real through the faith stories of others.

2.2 Richard Rohr

Rohr is an American Franciscan priest and contemplative who suggests that both conservatives and liberals are too dualistic (2009:10) and believes that non-dualism can form a bridge between the two camps.

He declares his major idea to be that “immediate, unmediated contact with the moment is the clearest path to divine union; naked undefended, and nondual presence has the best chance of encountering the Real Presence” (:105). He is far less popular in the mainstream Christian community, but has a growing following among people looking for an alternative way of doing church and being Christian. He has written extensively about approaching God from the contemplative tradition and also offers a focus on male spirituality, for example *From Wild Man to Wise Man* (2005) and *Adam’s Return: The 5 Promises of Male Initiation* (2004). Many of Rohr’s books such as *Simplicity* (2003a), *Things Hidden* (2008) and *The Naked Now* (2009) have short chapters which are meditative in character – very similar in format to Buchan’s reflections.

His approach to theology can be located within the “emerging” stream of Christianity described by Borg. He is considered a noted voice in the ECM with his regular contributions to *Sojourners* magazine. In *Hope Against Darkness* (2001) Rohr addresses challenges facing the church in a postmodern society and explores themes relative to the ECM and this study, namely hope for an anxious world. He visited South Africa in 2010.

Although the ECM has many diverse streams that are not relevant to this study, central to the stream of which Rohr forms a part is the desire to include “the other” (for example, people of other faiths, other sexual orientations, etc.) on the basis of who they are, rather than who they can become. Borg (2004:14;207ff), Brian McLaren (2010:300) and Rohr all promote this inclusivity. The literature study therefore also looks at ECM authors such as these and others involved in this movement.

2.2.1 Rohr on hope

Just as Buchan has no clear theology of hope, neither does Rohr try to describe what hope is. Rather he deals with humanity’s postmodern anxiety and how the cross calls us to confront that anxiety through the transforming power of love and acceptance, and suggests that the reason there is so much hopelessness in today’s world is that many people have little evidence of God’s goodness (2001:27).

Quoted by blogger CanadaSue, Rohr suggests that for most people the question is not, “Is there a life on the other side of death?” but rather, “Is there life on this side of death?” (CanadaSue). The best solution to this hopelessness is not the ever-increasing self-indulgence of the Western world, but rather coming to God through our imperfection, accepting ourselves as broken people whom God loves. It is this that gives the freedom that leads to hope (Farrell 1994:5). So, he says, biblical hope is the certainty that things finally have a victorious meaning no matter how they turn out (quoted by blogger MikeF 2010) and is to be assured that God is good, the world is good and that we are good (Rohr and Feister 2001:43).

While there are vast differences between the two authors as a result of their different approaches to Christianity, they both offer hope to a person seeking meaning in today’s world. This study seeks to understand how this hope is expressed and what it is that draws people to these different understandings of hope.

3 Research problems and objectives: Key questions that need to be asked

In seeking to understand how Buchan and Rohr challenge the greater church to live out its call to be a beacon of hope to a confused and fearful community it is necessary to consider not only the shape of their hope theology, but also the reasons for the

popularity of their different messages of hope and the background of the people to whom they appeal. This task can be summed up as follows:

3.1 The 'what' question

What are the differences and similarities of the theological message of hope that each of the authors offer and what is it that makes that message attractive? What are their respective messages of hope?

3.2 The 'why' question

Following on to the content of their respective messages, one needs to determine what makes them popular and whether they have been transformational. Why are their messages compelling?

3.3 The 'who' problem

Are there any characteristics that define the respective audiences? The two theologies of hope have evolved from different socio-religious and political contexts; it is to be expected therefore that that respective audiences will differ. To whom do the two messages of hope speak?

The objectives of this study, then, are:

1. To analyse and compare the 'hope' theology of hope of each author
2. To reflect on why this is compelling
3. To enquire who it is that finds the message meaningful

Having done this I hope to show how the approaches to Christian hope offered by both the earlier and emerging paradigms of Christianity continue to speak into the needs of the twenty-first century.

4 Principle theories and methodology

This research project seeks to analyse these two very different responses to the confusion and fear of the postmodern condition – postmodernism being a response to the rigidity of modernism which has resulted in a culture of relativism and pluralism where “nothing is certain and everything is acceptable” (Meylahn 2003:78). As noted

above the study takes place in a particular South African context and intends to determine how the different types of hope offered by each author, and indeed tradition, address the needs of certain people at this time. The hypothesis of this study is that both authors offer hope that is meaningful to their respective audiences so firstly it is necessary to define what hope in the different traditions consist of.

Having defined the concepts of hope in each tradition, it then becomes necessary to determine whether this message of hope is present in the writings being discussed. As I have already stated in chapter three, that is the purpose of the literature review, hung on the framework of “power, prestige and possession.” Chapter four sets out the research methodology in greater detail.

Having determined the presence of the message of hope, and defined it for each author, I ask why that message is compelling and what it means to the respective author’s audience. The study will do that through semi-structured interviews. In the case of Buchan’s supporters I will be looking for an assurance of salvation after death and use of words like ‘saved’ ‘born again’ and so on, whereas for Rohr’s adherents I will look for a sense that “God *is*, God *is good*, God can be *trusted* and God *is on your side*.” (2001:19. Italics his)

The purpose of using the primary data of a qualitative survey is to answer the key questions by determining how each author’s approach has brought hope into their followers’ search for religious meaning. Subsequent to the first four chapters, then, in the main part of this study I present the results of semi-structured interviews conducted with fifteen of Buchan’s followers, and fourteen of Rohr’s.

The analysis of this data will result in a conclusion regarding the message of the two different responses which will show how the messages of hope proclaimed by Buchan and Rohr are meaningful in responding to the fear and confusion of the postmodern world. The analysis of the data is presented in chapter five, and then the conclusion in chapter six.

5 Structure

The structure of this dissertation then, following the introduction, can be summarised as

follows:

5.1 Chapter 2: Faith and Life in the Twenty-first Century

The second chapter introduces the challenges facing the church in proclaiming a relevant message of hope in the early twenty-first century, background and insight into the context of the study by looking at South African society, the ECM and the popularity of Buchan and Rohr in this context.

5.2 Chapter 3: Power, Prestige and Possession: Two Approaches to Hope

Chapter three sketches the background to the concept of Christian hope, introduces Buchan and Rohr and analyses their respective approaches to a theology of hope. Having described the alternative approaches this section will suggest the shape of the empirical study.

5.3 Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter will describe the research methodology, motivation for content of questionnaire and key questions that need to be asked and answered. An overview of the interview / evaluation procedure will also be presented, as well as responses that do not relate directly to hope.

5.4 Chapter 5: Things Yet Unseen

Chapter five presents an overview of the data obtained from respondents to the question of hope and why the author which they follow is meaningful to them, and how it relates to their attraction to the more fundamentalist or emerging church paradigm.

5.5 Chapter 6: A Candle of Hope

I will conclude the thesis by offering an analysis of how the two messages of hope examined in this study are both similar to and different from each other, and how they both continue to offer meaning to a diverse twenty-first century world.

Chapter 2: Faith and Life in the Twenty-first Century

1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to define the context in which the study takes place, looking broadly at some of the ways in which life is experienced and interpreted in the larger Western world of the twenty-first century and also at the more local South African context. In addition I will look at some expressions of the Church in the West in the twenty-first century, and how it is responding to the challenges that are being faced.

2 Life in the twenty-first century

The experience of life for people living in the developed world of the twenty-first century is one which has changed significantly even in the last twenty years. A generation ago the focus was local, today the context for the digitally connected is one of a so-called “global village”, says William Fillebrown:

The movement into the postmodern era has been made possible with the development of the computer and the worldwide web. The world is getting smaller as a result of the increased ability of people to connect with one another for the sharing and exchanging of ideas. Such is the day in which we live (2007:84).

While the benefits of modern technology are manifold they have resulted in a world which is often confusing; the old certainties of the past are gone and people face a future which is often uncertain and scary. Rohr subtitles his book *Hope Against Darkness* as “The Transforming Vision of Saint Francis in an Age of Anxiety” (2001)(Italics mine). Diana Eck contrasts the globalization of our technology, communications, financial markets, and business with the deep fracturing of human community caused by old and new religious identities and rivalries (Borg and Mackenzie 2000:29), while Joan Chittister suggests that this is a time of such ambiguity and instability as has not been seen since the sixteenth century: “There is not a single stable institution around us. Government is changing. So are economics, education and religion. They are changing because something is going on outside them all.” (:187).

Rohr begins the first chapter of *Hope Against Darkness* with the statement that people in the midst of this change feel confused and powerless:

The forces against us are overwhelming: consumerism, racism, militarism, individualism, patriarchy, the corporate juggernaut. These “powers and principalities” seem to be fully in control. We feel helpless to choose our own lives, much less a common life, or to see any overarching meaning in it all (2001:1).

Further on in the same book he suggests that in what has been termed the postmodern era (see below) the predominant emotion is one of loss of control. People feel confused and powerless (:3), uncertain about the place of religion (“holy disorder”) (:10), fearful (:12) and lonely (:15).

The background to this study, then, is first the radical transformation of society that has taken place over the last five or six hundred years as the human experience has moved away from a feudal, mediaeval culture through a modern one of intellect and reason and into the postmodern setting – changes that have been especially fast moving in the last century and which have resulted, says Fillebrown, in a cultural dynamic of modernism versus postmodernism (2007:83). Second we need to consider that South Africa has also undergone tremendous changes in the last few years as the country abandoned apartheid and has begun to rebuild itself as a democratic country, together with the challenges, hopes and failures that have come with that journey.

It is the purpose of the first part of this chapter to explore this transformation, and the second to examine how the Christian faith has responded to these changes.

2.1 Postmodernism

Over the last 500 years the human context has moved from a feudal, mediaeval culture through one of intellect and reason (modernism), into a fast-paced twenty-first century world. Today we find ourselves in an era that many term postmodern. Although this is contested, Dion Forster believes the postmodern approach is one of the most significant social and philosophical forces of our time (2008:30). While postmodernism has its roots in the late 1800s, the term was popularised in the latter half of the twentieth century through the philosophy of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Francois Lyotard and others (Wikipedia, *Postmodernism*:2011). Rohr suggests that postmodernism is “a critique of modernism’s false optimism and trust in progress” (2001:6); theologically it is a critique of the perceived godlessness of the modern era.

Huston Smith quotes colleague Manfred Stanley:

Modernisation of the world is accompanied by a spiritual malaise that has come to be called alienation... At its most fundamental level, the diagnosis of alienation is based on the view that modernisation forces upon us a world that, although baptised as real by science, is denuded of all humanly recognised qualities; beauty and ugliness, love and hate, passion and fulfilment, salvation and damnation (2001:7).

So while the term “postmodern” can be used simply to describe the era and worldview that has succeeded the modern period (Forster 2008:36), most often the greater meaning implied is “a reaction to the rigid and narrow characterisations of modernism” (:36). Smith quotes Lyotard as defining postmodernism as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (2001:20) – that worldview forced upon society by modernism. In other words the “myths” or “big” stories that give meaning to human existence have been questioned as a result of the experience of modernism, resulting in a scepticism of the stories that have been told. These stories have subsequently been deconstructed to a point where each individual trusts more in their own story and experience than the greater story of society. Smith suggests three increasingly strident levels of postmodernism: postmodern minimalism that suggests simply that we have no consensual worldview today; mainline postmodernism which adds that there never will be a consensual worldview, and hardcore postmodernism which terminates the trajectory with “good riddance!” (:20-21).

Meylahn suggests that the reason for the confusion of the postmodern period is that reaction to the absolutes of modernity has resulted in a culture of relativism and pluralism, where nothing is certain and everything acceptable (2003:78). This is experienced in the context of the church, for example, through the rejection of the value of tradition and of biblical witness as an authoritative and absolute norm (:79), which results in moral relativism, narcissistic hedonism, and autonomous individualism (Erickson quoted in Meylahn 2003:78). Rohr suggests that the postmodern mind is about deconstruction. “It does not know what it is for, as much as it knows what it is against and what it fears” (2001:6).

Forster embraces the rejection of a consensual worldview as a good thing in that it

results in the breaking down of one-dimensional and restrictive characterisations in favour of diversity and difference (2008:36), rejecting the idea of one underlying, all-encompassing truth. He sees moral relativism not as a negative characteristic subtracting from truth, but as something positive in that each person's experience adds to a greater truth. Says Foster:

The postmodern perspective on "truth" is that it is no more possible to completely define truth than it is to play a piece of music that would render all other music obsolete! Rather, each attempt at expressing truth adds insight, depth, and richness. (:31)

Postmoderns, says Fillebrown, "desire justice without oppression, spirituality apart from religiosity, relationships not strictly defined in terms of individuality, and beauty beyond mere function" (2007:85).

Although contested, some contend that in South Africa a shift into postmodernism took place far more quickly than elsewhere as Nelson Mandela was released from prison and the country entered not only an era of postmodernism but also postcolonialism (Meylahn 2003:77). While postmodernism, as a response to modernism, can be conceived of as a more Western phenomenon, postcolonialism is its African counterpart, and it is to this which I now turn.

2.2 Postcolonialism

In the last fifty years or so, in addition to the shift from modernism to postmodernism and especially in Africa, society has witnessed the rise of postcolonialism. While postmodernism is a reaction to the characterisations of modernism, postcolonialism is a response to colonialism. Wikipedia defines it as "a specifically postmodern intellectual discourse that consists of reactions to, and analysis of, the cultural legacy of colonialism" (Wikipedia, *Postcolonialism*:2011). As colonial masters have relinquished their grip and the colonised³ have come to understand who they are apart from being a colony, attitudes have changed, especially attitudes towards practices that are perceived to have been forced upon them by colonial oppressors.

³ In the context of this study the aboriginal African people who were colonized by settlers from Europe, however 'postcolonial' also applies to other nations and regions where there is a history of European colonization, for example the Orient and Latin America.

So while the term postcolonialism, just as postmodernism, can be used as a temporal marker, it is more often used to describe a response to “the shifting and often interrelated forms of dominance and resistance” (Loomba et al:2005) quoted by Kenzo (2009:1) which describe an attitude of Western (and by implication, Christian) superiority over others, particularly from a point of view of the colonised as a subject to be studied by the coloniser (:4). Postcolonialism seeks to approach the subject from within and thus has “a deep concern for the perspective of persons from regions and groups outside the hegemonic power structure” (:5).

As an offshoot of the postmodern movement, many of the attitudes of the western postmodern mind are duplicated in postcolonialism, for example a rejection of authority (rejecting the colonial powers) and deconstruction (rejection of the colonial matrix imposed upon the indigenous people) (:5). Due to the colonisation of African minds – the interruption of the “social, cultural and political lives of the people and societies in Africa by the policies applied by the colonial masters during the colonial period and... the social process applied by the those masters to absorb the cultural entities existing in their colonies which transformed them to think, to behave and live a way of life like the people in the colonizer’s homeland” (Alemazang 2010:63) – which included education and conversion to Christianity, a further response of postcolonialism has been to question western Christianity and religion, resulting in either a return to traditional religion, or at least an affirmation of the values of traditional and rejection of a “colonial” Christianity, rather than the rejection of a traditional Christianity (Kenzo 2009:6). The theory is that those who have been newly liberated are now free to explore ways of living that move beyond the constraints placed upon them either by their traditional cultures or by the colonial oppressors.

Achille Mbembe notes, however, that postcolonial Africa has become a “plurality of spheres and arenas, each having its own separate logic yet nonetheless liable to be entangled with other logics” (1992) quoted by (Kenzo 2009:6). Once again there is no consensual worldview and confusion prevails as the absolutes of tradition are replaced by relativism. It is the point of this study that in such an era of confusion people move to that which makes them feel secure. In the case of Africa, in many instances, that would be the hope offered by a conservative Christianity or Islam, rather than by embracing the relativism of postcolonialism or postmodernism.

As a footnote to African postcolonialism, McLaren's postmodern deconstruction of Christianity suggests that much of what is considered the norm in contemporary Christianity is a result of a Greco-Roman colonial paradigm imposed subsequent to the conversion of Constantine in the fourth century. He posits that a post-Greco-Roman-colonial paradigm is necessary to understand Christianity as lived in the early church (2010:45ff).

2.3 Generation-X and social networks

Further dynamics regarding contemporary culture are those of generational theory and social media. Generational theory as developed by historians William Strauss and Neil Howe identifies a fourfold cycle of generational types recurring in American history and in most of today's developed countries (Codrington 2000:20). South African Graeme Codrington developed this theory for a South African context in his Masters thesis entitled *Multi-generational Ministries in the Context of a Local Church* (2000) and later in the book *Mind the Gap* (Codrington and Grant-Marshall:2011).

These factors are particularly significant when it comes to the emerging church conversation in which "Generation-X" – identified by Codrington as those born between 1970 and 1990 (2000:35) – with its social networking savvy has been instrumental in setting the agenda in the church at this time. Admittedly, as far as Generation-X is concerned, this label would be more applicable to the middle class, rather than to the greater community (Schenk and Seekings 2010:3).

Generation-Xers are considered a very spiritual generation, seeking a spiritual home where they can truly belong, however they have a cynical view of the church's relevance. Small group experiences are more attractive because of their own experience in broken relationships; for Generation-Xers faith is something to be experienced (2000:35). As this study will show in the section on the Emerging Church Conversation, Generation-Xers are excited by radically new approaches to church and in many cases are pioneering these approaches. Codrington suggests that they are defined by a new style of learning and communicating:

"truth" and reason don't matter, they don't want to know "is it true?", they want to know "does it work?", they are spiritual seekers who believe in the

supernatural, music is huge - it is the “window on their soul” and the language they use to express themselves (2000:35).

While the very nature of generational theory is a generalization and probably more easily limited to cultures that are heavily influenced by the West it is worth noting these thoughts on Generation-X as influential in the Emerging Church conversation, particularly on its development through the internet and social networks.

Social networking can be defined as “as online community of individuals who exchange messages, share information and... cooperate on joint activities” (Encyclopædia Britannica *Social network*:2012). Examples would be blogging (from weblog – an individual’s diary of thoughts, ideas and opinions that is published online) and social networking sites such as Facebook where online communities are formed. This is a significant part of the way that Generation-Xers express themselves and has played an important part in the rise of the emerging church.

It does need to be noted that in the context of this study both generational theory and social media were discovered to be largely irrelevant in terms of the interviews. Many of the respondents fell outside the age group indicated for Generation-X and / or Emerging Church, and there was no indication that social media was important in terms of their interaction with either of the authors. It is important as background to the Emerging Church Conversation, however, and this informed the Rohr respondents quite deeply.

2.4 Conclusion

The limited context in which this study takes place – middle class white South Africa – is one characterised by a postmodern, postcolonial paradigm in which truth is relative, there is little consensus regarding worldviews, the traditions and authorities of the past are rejected and diversity is embraced; the world is changing and modern communication has connected like-minded, but independent and rebellious generation-Xers who are spiritually aware. There is a lack of hope for the future and this feeds into a desire for change as seen recently in Libya, for example⁴. In the midst of confusion

⁴ A popular uprising in Libya in February 2011 caused the toppling and death of dictator Colonel Muammar Gadaffi after over 33 years of leadership and has resulted in continued unrest in the region (Michael 2012).

and fear there is a desire and a hope that things can be different. Zimbabwean journalist Jane Modembo comments on the situation in her country in this way:

Zimbabwe went through a cultural, social and political transformation. The political unrest divided people causing neighbours to turn against each other. Many Zimbabweans fled to other countries, separating families. The government's operation clean-up displaced many people. People struggled to survive amid unbearable poverty...

Churches like the Roman Catholic Church, Baptist Church and Methodist are not dominant any more. New churches are gathering pace. Zimbabweans are watching religion programmes 24 hours a day on television.

There are more than 50 obscure sects beaming their programmes via satellite into a gullible Zimbabwean audience. Nigerian prosperous gospel (*sic*) is coming in the form of flashy television broadcasts and DVDs. In the midst of this chaos came the opportunists. Dealers, crooks and religious cults... Internet and Facebook are in play for better or worse (2011).

When people are struggling they search for hope where they can find it, even if it is a false hope offered by con artists.

While this reflects the broad context of much of Africa, clearly there needs to be a more specific context to which this paper speaks. The above is background to a more local context of the white middle-class society which I mentioned in the introduction. It is the fears and hopes of these people – and their appreciation of Buchan – that has inspired this study with a focus on hope in attracting people to church. It is these people who have largely embraced either a fundamentalist approach to hope which trusts in God to supply what is necessary to survive well – a return to a simple faith in a complex world – or who have embraced an emerging approach to church which encourages an engagement with the very things that others are afraid of.

3 Faith in the twenty-first century world

As noted above, the modern period, with its very academic approach to theology, seemed to strip religion of its warmth and turn it into an academic exercise: God became a subject to be studied rather than a reality to be experienced. The postmodern,

emerging church response to this is to return to a spirituality in which experience is important, and in which religion is understood from a point of view of one's own context and relationship between others and the created world (Forster 2008:39). Karen Armstrong says in *God at 2000*, "Confronted with tragedy, we do not want a rational discourse, but may need to listen to music, read a poem, watch a sunset, or turn to prayer" (Borg and Mackenzie 2000:141) and so "the modernist's desire to overcome, to control and to possess is replaced by a desire for peaceful co-existence, a realisation of the fragility of our planet's ecosystem, and the need to live in interdependence with other persons in all of creation" (Forster 2008:39), although we have seen little evidence of this attitude among world leaders.

3.1 A question of truth

In the postmodern world truth is seen as relative so this approach to spirituality criticises the modern religious paradigm of defining clear boundaries within which "true" religion may be practiced. Practically, this means that the postmodern religionist accepts others faiths as being as valid as their own (Borg 2004:3). In commenting on the interfaith discussions presented at Oregon State University in February 2000 and published as *God at 2000*, Armstrong notes:

What is significant is the growing pluralism or the plural consensus that most of us here shared in our talks. People may be deeply embedded in their own tradition but religion changed everybody in the twentieth century, because for the first time in human history we had a chance to look at other people's faith in depth... The result is that we will never be able to see either our own faith or other people's faith in the same way again (Borg and Mackenzie 200:188-189).

This is reinforced by a modern hermeneutic which allows scripture to not be the literal "Word of God" (McLaren 2010:102ff), and its challenge of traditional interpretations (Forster 2008:40).

While there are many, particularly from a conservative background who are suspicious of postmodernism in relation to the church due to its questioning of "truth", it has also had many positive influences, such as a rediscovery of spirituality and community among ordinary Christians and in everyday life (:44).

3.2 Religious language

In *God at 2000* Armstrong suggests that the world has moved to a place where religious language no longer makes sense to a majority of people: “The myths and doctrines of any religious tradition only make sense in the context of prayer, liturgy, meditation, and ethical practice that trains and develops our capacity for an experience of God” (Borg and Mackenzie 2000:143). She suggests that the reason many British find the evidence for God’s existence unconvincing and church services uninspiring is because institutional religion is entirely alien to them (:143), a view echoed by Kristen Bell, wife of emergent pastor Rob Bell: “It’s a cultural jump for our friends to come to church” (Crouch 2004:38). McLaren, popular author and speaker – and de facto spiritual leader of the American voice of the Emerging Church conversation (:36) – suggests “we have to find ways for people to simply encounter Christ – and God too! – without having to figure out two millennia of church history, controversy and dogma” (2006:35).

While postmodern spirituality is obviously a far larger subject than suggested in these short paragraphs, more important for this study is the effect of postmodern spirituality on the life of the church. If church services are uninspiring, and God language is no longer understood, how has the church responded to these challenges?

4 Church responses

Anglican Bishop Mark Dyer, quoted by Tickle, observes that every 500 years the Church feels compelled to hold a giant rummage sale (2008:16) in which prevailing paradigms are shattered in order for new growth to occur. Both Tickle (2008) and Hans Küng (1988)⁵ suggest that the church is currently in the midst of that “rummage sale” as it struggles to redefine itself. This redefinition can be described as taking two radically different roads. On the one side there is the retreat from the new into the fundamentalist paradigm, which rejects a modern critical interpretation of scripture and Christian theology, and on the other a wholehearted embrace of the postmodern worldview, hoping that through an engagement with this philosophy, by all means, to win some to Christ.

⁵ I have avoided noting particular pages as both books mentioned deal fully with the subject of redefining the Church in the present era.

4.1 Embracing Fundamentalism

The first response examined is that of fundamentalism. In a world in which nothing seems certain, and which change is everywhere, including the church, human nature seeks that which is stable and changeless. Says Armstrong, “the more global society becomes, the more some people will react by becoming more tribal, retreating into more denominational ghettos and building up new barricades” (Borg and Mackenzie 2000:189). This is what has happened as those fearful of change have embraced a theology which rejects of modern principles of biblical interpretation and retreats into biblical literalism.

4.1.1 Fundamentalism

The roots of fundamentalism can be traced to the early twentieth century as a response to the growing popularity of contemporary biblical scholarship, and in particular to the challenge offered by the publication of Charles Darwin’s theories on the origin of the species (Spong 2001:1). A group of conservative evangelicals published a series of pamphlets defining what were considered “the fundamentals” of the Christian faith (also the name of the pamphlets). In time five basic fundamentals were defended, namely: the inspiration of scripture as the literal, revealed word of God; the virgin birth as miraculous and literal; the substitutionary view of the atonement that was accomplished in the death of Jesus; the certainty of the physical bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead and the truth of the second coming of Jesus, the Day of Judgement, and the certainty of heaven and hell (Spong 2001:1-2).

Suggestions such as the need to embrace religious pluralism and moral relativism are therefore deeply threatening to fundamentalists who trace their origin to this response to modern biblical scholarship. A group that is threatened is inclined to retreat further into its beliefs and so one response to postmodernism is a resurgence in a fundamentalist theology in which the importance of salvation is stressed, and in which followers are exhorted to commit to “biblical” principals – referring to a literal reading of the text - as being absolute truth. An example of this type of response can be found in the Lausanne Movement – the third Lausanne Conference was held in Cape Town in October 2010 – “to re-stimulate the spirit of Lausanne represented in the Lausanne Covenant.” Billy Graham and others formed this movement in the 1970s with the intention of uniting

evangelicals (www.lausanne.org/about).

Buchan describes himself as such a fundamentalist (2006a:176) and falls into this first way of responding to threats in the church, as a look at his organisation's, Shalom Ministries', statement of faith would show, for example:

We believe... the Bible to be the inspired and infallible authoritative word of God... In the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth... in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection... In the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation (2001:146)⁶.

As a popular South African evangelist, writer and speaker who engages hope from a perspective of a fundamentalist, Buchan is an ideal candidate to study.

4.2 The Emerging Church

The Emerging Church has responded differently to the challenges presented by postmodernism, preferring instead to embrace the change and uncertainty that is characteristic of the age. The definition for the Emerging Church Movement, ECM, that is most often presented is that of Gibbs and Bolger:

Emerging churches are communities that practice the way of Jesus within postmodern cultures. This definition encompasses nine practices. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, and (3) live highly communal lives. Because of these three activities, they (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as created beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities. (2006:44-45).

While this may seem an unnecessarily broad definition, the movement itself rejects categorisation, as I shall show in the next section. According to McKnight, professor of religious studies at North Park Theological Seminary, and self-confessed emergent⁷ (2007:2), "emerging catches into one term the global reshaping of how to 'do church' in

⁶ The full statement of faith is reproduced in the appendix.

⁷ The word "emergent" is often used to describe one who embraces the ideology of the ECM.

postmodern culture” (:2).

4.2.1 Description of the movement

In its essence the emerging church is a postmodern, Generation-X response to dissatisfaction with the modern⁸ church (Gibbs & Bolger 2006:21). Modern Christianity has, says McLaren, “tended to reduce God to being containable by human concepts or propositions or logic. It has too often acted as though it had God bottled, labelled, and hermetically sealed, a commodity we own and distribute at will, logically proven, and theologically defined” (2006:150).

Gibbs and Bolger suggest that the modern church of the so-called “baby-boomer” generation, with its controlling nature, “does not satisfy the yearnings of the under-forties” (2006:21). This emerging generation is disillusioned with institutionalism, sees the church as an obstacle to faith (:21) and has sought new expressions of doing and being church in a way that goes beyond contemporary music or multimedia technology. It is the process of this redefinition which has come to be known as the Emerging Church Conversation, or Movement, which itself consists of different strands of tradition and experimentation and in which proponents seek new ways of understanding and relating the gospel in a changed world. McLaren suggests that the word ‘conversation’ is the most appropriate way to describe what is happening because it really is no more than a network of people across the world. “Right now Emergent⁹ is a conversation, not a movement,” he says. “We don’t have a program. We don’t have a model. I think we must begin as a conversation, then grow as a friendship, and see if a movement comes of it” (Crouch 2004:39).

For most the conversation has taken place electronically in the “blogosphere” and through social media. While leading advocates of the emerging church are prolific writers of books and articles, the popularity of the conversation, particularly in South Africa, has been facilitated through the use of multimedia channels and the internet to establish global networks and converse about major concerns. Stephen Hunt notes that

⁸ In this context the term is used to describe the era foundational to the structures of the church, rather than an attempt by churches to be contemporary.

⁹ In many contexts the terms Emergent and Emerging are used interchangeably to refer to the Emerging Church. More precisely, “Emergent” refers specifically to the part of the conversation coming from McLaren’s organization, “The Emergent Village.”

emergent “blogs” are numerous and “mark not only an effort to be relevant to contemporary culture, but allow the rank and file of the movement to put forward issues and often unorthodox ideas” (2008:291). The result of this is that the conversation is not denominationally based, but is noted among the young leaders of many different denominations (Rohr 2010b). According to Rohr, “Spiritual globalisation is allowing Churches worldwide to benefit from these breakthroughs at approximately the same time... No one is controlling, or limiting this movement. We are all just trying to listen together” (2010). He goes on to define Emerging Christianity as

both longing for and moving towards a following of Jesus that has much more to do with an actual daily lifestyle than with believing things. We do not want to solidify into another word-and-document institution, but we want to stay, if at all possible, at the crucial movement-and-lifestyle stage where all the vital energy is contained (2010).

It is for this reason that Moritz argues for a network-type metaphor in describing the movement (2008:28), rather than a hierarchical type structure. The emerging conversation therefore has no central offices, and, says McKnight, is as varied as evangelicalism itself” (2007:2). He identifies five themes or streams that characterise the movement: it is prophetic in the sense that emerging Christians believe the church has to change and choose to live as if that change had already occurred; they are postmodern, with all the implications of that term; they are praxis orientated and more concerned with how a person lives than what they believe; they are post-evangelical in the sense that they do not have an airtight statement of faith. Because belief is less important, theology becomes a conversation about the Truth who is God in Christ. McKnight sums it up as, “This is what I believe, but I could be wrong. What do you think? Let’s talk” (:5). Finally, says McKnight, Emergents are political in the sense that they’re concerned about social justice. Moritz sums up Gibbs and Bolger, claiming that for Emergents

Church is not a means through which the souls of individuals might ultimately escape this God-forsaken world, but rather is the way through which the body of Christ puts hands and feet on Christ’s gospel and thus embodies the reality of God’s love for the world (Moritz, 2008, p. 31).

Rohr suggests four characteristics of the ECM: an honest, broad, ecumenical Jesus scholarship; a contemplative mind; a conclusion that many of the major concerns of Jesus are at major variance with what most of our churches have emphasised; new structures and new community mechanisms that avoid forming a new denomination (Forster, 2009). According to emergent leader Abbess Karen Ward, “If there is anything [we do differently to attract young people] it’s that we radically hang our lives on this stuff at the centre of our common life [Anglican liturgical practice] and this matters to the young adults you speak of” (2010:167). Moritz suggests that “confronting the rampant individualism, consumerism, and forces of alienation so prevalent in contemporary urban society” (Moritz 2008:30) is a way of addressing the cultural and intellectual challenges of postmodernism.

While McKnight’s streams categorise the commonalities, there are three broad types of emerging church – all a response to postmodernism – noted by Scott Bader-Saye: first those which try to repackage Christianity to suit a new cultural form without real theological and ecclesial transformation; second, those that arise out a conscious reaction against the evangelical theology and subculture; and third those arising in England, largely from mainline churches, as a response to a ‘maintenance’ mind-set prevalent there (2006:13-14).

In South Africa the emerging conversation has largely revolved around the second model. Bell, speaking from an evangelical theological background, notes, “We’re rediscovering Christianity as an Eastern religion, as a way of life. We grew up in churches where people knew the nine verses why we don’t speak in tongues, but had never experienced the overwhelming presence of God” (Crouch 2004:36). Bell’s experience is a common one for the second type of emerging church. Tired of the black and white theological stance of their parents, this generation is “looking for a faith that is colorful (*sic*) enough for their culturally savvy friends, deep enough for mystery, big enough for their own doubts” (:38). Shane Claiborne, another emergent writer, criticises his conservative background in this way:

I kind of stumbled into that [realization] when I began to discover every year that we were going and getting born again, again. We would come forward singing, ‘Just As I Am,’ and leave just as we were. Then I started to read scripture and I saw that we’re not just called to be believers, but to be disciples and to live out

that faith as Jesus did with the same marks of justice, peace and reconciliation.
(Quoted in Roberts 2010).

For many of the young people driving the emerging church conversation issues of justice and inequality are of great concern. Diana Eck asks

How can we sustain our faith in a world where the wealthiest twenty percent control eighty-six percent of the world's product, while the poorest twenty percent are left out of the growth of globalization entirely? How do we relate our faith and our faith communities to a world of millions of refugees, orphans, and new millionaires? Is this the God to whom we all pray, the recipient of such a Babel of tongues? (Borg and Mackenzie 2000:29).

So while the different expressions of the emerging church have these different roots and are manifest differently, the essence is the same: trying to imagine different forms of church life that fit the mission needs of a new cultural context. "The dominant tone," says Bader-Saye, "is one of hope, possibility and opportunity" (2006:15).

Because the conversation refuses to be categorised, and is weak on theology, Hunt suggests that it has begun to offer an unprecedented challenge to conservative evangelicalism – particularly since many of its loudest voices are those who have left the conservative evangelical fold – in the postmodern era. The ECM marks a response to postmodernity and to both liberal and conservative forms of evangelicalism (2008:287-288). McLaren, quoted by Bader-Saye, says it this way:

We realized very early on that we weren't going to find the intellectual sources we needed in the evangelical world, so we were either going to have to create them or borrow them and it turned out that a lot of us were reading the same people... such as Walter Brueggemann, Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas. What happened is that we started to identify ourselves as post-conservative and then we found out that there was almost a parallel movement going on in the postliberal world... When you have a liberal way of being a Christian and a conservative way of being a Christian that are both modern, and modernity is over, you've got to find another way of being a Christian (2004:22).

4.2.2 Criticism of the Emerging Church

As much as the Emerging Church has been enthusiastically embraced by members of Generation-X, there are nevertheless some areas of criticism. These fall into the areas of racial make-up, theology and continued relevance of the emerging church.

The first criticism mentioned, and particularly relevant to the South African conversation, concerns those who find the conversation meaningful. Crouch notes that the proponents of the ECM are “frequently urban, disproportionately young, overwhelmingly white, and very new” (2004:37). Jason Mach notes that as he began exploring the emerging church he noticed “the large majority of emerging church leaders were white twenty to thirty year olds... in trendy clothing, sporting cool hairstyles and eyewear” (Rah and Mach 2010). Rah and Mach indicate that there has been disproportionate coverage given to the emerging church, particularly from the white Western perspective.

Second, some of the more liberal theology adopted by those previously conservative has led to leaders being called heretics and apostates (McLaren 2010:1-2). The author¹⁰ of a blog called *Emerging Church Concerns* – an online version of a research paper – says, “It now seems that the Emerging Church *is* the new liberalism, skilfully packaged to appeal to young people as an authentic, radical, modern interpretation of Christianity, professing orthodoxy and using the language of evangelicalism but denying many its key doctrines” (Emerging Church Concerns, 2010). He goes on to list what he perceives to be heretical theology, mentioning beliefs such as denial of original sin; Universalism; denial of the inerrancy of the bible; redefinition of the purpose of the Jesus’ first coming; denial of the existence of hell; denial of the reality of Satan; denial that Jesus’ second coming will be to judge the earth; dismissal of penal substitutionary atonement; denial of, or downplaying, the need to be born again; pacifism; Christianity being just one of many ways to God; and elevating tolerance above truth and thereby condoning homosexual practice (2010).

Armstrong notes that at an early stage of their history, Jews, Christians, and Muslims were all called atheists by their pagan contemporaries, not because they did not believe

¹⁰ He mentions on the contact page of his blog that he prefers to remain anonymous and implies that he himself has come in for attack for some of his comments.

in God but because their notion of the divine was so different that it seemed blasphemous (Borg and Mackenzie 2000:147). For many, such as the author of the aforementioned blog, this is where they would place the emerging church.

Third, there is the question of the ECM's continued relevance in society. It seems as though there is a notion among some that the emerging church has died (Rah and Mach 2010). Its proponents suggest that it is the hype that has died rather than the conversation or its beliefs, and suggest that the conversation continues in the larger church with the emphasis shifting from "a belief-based system to a relationship-based system" (Julie Clawson quoted in Rah and Mach 2010).

At its best the emerging church represents a move away from the fundamentalist theology of conservative evangelism towards the more inclusive and broader theology of liberalism but with holding on to the experiential aspect of God which has made the Pentecostal movement so meaningful for many people. It needs to be noted once again, however, that the ECM movement is orientated less towards theology; more towards praxis and doing, and so any seemingly inclusive or unorthodox theology is as a result more of the postmodern nature suggesting an inclusion of many truths or points of view and a desire to be practically inclusive rather than a carefully thought out systematic theology.

5 The South African Context and Liminality

The release of Nelson Mandela from prison and the shift to democracy in the early 90s signalled the start of a time of change for South Africans. White Generation-Xers were young adults at the time and either embraced the change gladly or took advantage of a gap year between school and university or university and work to emigrate. Their parents have mainly stayed but continue to express concern for the future of South Africa, some of them having gone through the trauma of retrenchment, in some cases perceived to be as a result of affirmative action. As noted below in my research, many white South Africans feel as though South Africa is no longer their home, and they no longer have a role to play here. They are afraid of the future and feel impotent regarding their future prospects.

5.1 White Afrikaner Fears

As Nadar notes in her article on Buchan's Mighty Men's Conference (2009) there is a

crisis particularly for White Afrikaner men in South Africa in which “the nature of White Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity is being challenged by the democratic order ushered in 1994; be an increase in diverse sexual orientations; and not least of all by a steady rise in women’s emancipation” (:557). She quote Kobus Du Pisani who suggests that in the light of the decline of male Afrikaner power both public and domestic sphere Afrikaner nationalism has not disappeared but that “given it’s record of pragmatic adaptation to circumstances it is conceivable that a new hegemonic Afrikaner masculinity may in due course emerge” (:558). She argues that the Mighty Men phenomenon is this new version of Afrikaner hegemonic masculinity. It is possible that the popularity of this movement is a response to the fears of the Afrikaner male in South Africa – fear, which, as expressed by the respondents in the study and noted below, relate to the fear of black leadership and white control and political and economic power.

Early in the years of the “New South Africa” Suzanne Daley, writing in the New York Times noted the fear of the Afrikaner in this new and unusual country:

Many feel humiliated and powerless and think their very existence is under attack. They point to the work of the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which nearly every day hears former police and army officials with Afrikaner surnames confess to torture and murder. They say new legislation threatens to force public schools that teach in Afrikaans, an offshoot of Dutch, to switch to English or African languages. And the civil service, once an employment agency for Afrikaners, now almost exclusively hires blacks. Income surveys indicate that Afrikaners are slipping down the economic ladder for the first time in decades (1998).

It is not clear whether fears have abated or intensified during the previous fourteen years. According to Lucy Holborn, research manager at the South African Institute of Race Relations, feelings of persecution by the Afrikaner male are not supported by the facts. She affirms the feelings and perceptions of (white) South Africans as being real, particularly in regard to affirmative action and black economic empowerment saying, “While the claim that such policies are racially discriminative may hold ground - there are both moral and practical arguments against using race on its own as a measure of disadvantage - the facts show that whites are actually doing quite well,” and quotes

statistics to show that the white population still has many more opportunities than the majority of the black population (Politicsweb *How Legitimate are White Fears?*2012). A response by Henri Le Riche (Politicsweb *White Fears are Legitimate and Real*:2012) the following week took her to task about her assumptions, indicating that statistics do not present the correct data, and indeed statistics do not measure fears and perceptions, especially when political parties such as the ANC Youth League and Afrikaner civil-rights organisation Afriforum fan the flames with talk of the expropriation of white farms talk of black organisations having war plans against whites and farmers in particular (SAPromo Magazine: *Fear of Civil War after 'War Talk'*:2012).

As I suggested in my introduction, this time of confusion could be referred to as a “liminal” time, betwixt and between. This term was coined by Arnold van Gennep to refer to “in-between situations and conditions that are characterized by the dislocation of established structures, the reversal of hierarchies, and uncertainty regarding the continuity of tradition and future outcomes” (Wikipedia *Liminality*:2012).

In terms of South Africa we could apply this not only to the changes in the social and political sphere, but particularly to the threats that Afrikaners feel they are facing to both their culture as their masculinity and some of the respondents in this study. Rohr believes that this kind of “threshold experience” usually happens when one’s own “system of logic, meaning, success and truth break down” (2005:39). In many cases South Africans who knew the rules and their place in the system have had that security taken away from them – in the context of this study white males in particular.

I shall explore the concept on liminality in more detail in my conclusion.

Ironically, in this time of transition and fading hopes, white South Africans are united with a majority of the country’s black population for whom little seems to have changed and in which opportunistic leaders take advantage. They are still stuck in poverty, reliant on social grants and dependant on a dysfunctional health care and educational system with little hope for the future (Dube 2011).

5.2 Difficulties Noted by Respondents

Broadly speaking, then, the South African context today is a difficult one for most people. In terms of the study, only two respondents, both followers of Rohr, expressed a

clearly positive outlook regarding the South African context. Rev Dalene Jordaan, although terminally ill, when asked about challenges that she faces as a South African today responded that her life is so good that there aren't many challenges, but conceded that there are challenges in terms of race and gender issues (Dalene Jordaan, interview conducted by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011 in Ruimsig). Rev Colin Andrews repeatedly indicated that he believes that there is no other country like South Africa and expressed a great deal of hope for its future, but also recognised that he is very aware of those who do not have (Colin Andrews, interview conducted by Neil Vels, 30 January 2012, Pinetown).

Some of the respondents in the study noted that while it was difficult for them (as white middle class), it was more so for others, for example Ds George* said this: "people work in my workshop... I get exposed to their way of life and their struggles, and what's difficult for them as well. And one realised that when I struggle, their struggles are even more difficult... (George*, interview conducted by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011, Bapsfontein).

Rev Paul Oosthuizen, a minister at the Edenvale Methodist Church notes that people trapped in poverty are becomingly increasingly frustrated.

We've had political a liberation, but we haven't... had an economic liberation. We haven't had meaning and purpose for people's daily lives; people live in squalor and are hopeless in that sense... Sooner or later the masses say, "Enough!"... Increasingly there is a riot pretty much weekly, service delivery riots last year and this year... And I think the emigration of the wealthy, you know, a million people leave, and that's not just white. It's black, white, coloured, Indian people who can have chosen a different context. (Paul Oosthuizen, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Edenvale).

Some respondents expressed concern expressed at the growing emphasis on materialism in South Africa, with George* commenting that the dominate cultural conversation, including that of the church, is one which is "very materialistic, very action orientated, very goal orientated... very superficial" (George*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Bapsfontein) and others identified a sense of loss as being definitive. One of Buchan's followers, Louis Marneweck, ex-politician and currently a part-time farmer

spoke about how Afrikaners live with a sense of loss:

The Afrikaans people tend to find their security in... the *broederbond* and all that and they will ensure that I will get a certain position... and all of that was taken away... [you] have this sort of illusion that you'll find your security in your possessions and your position and all of a sudden you are relegated to the back seat they say, "you know what? We're not interested in your opinion on certain things..." And some of the people have emigrated, said, "Well, we must leave South Africa." (Louis Marneweck, interview by Neil Vels, 11 November 2011 in Standerton).

For Trevor Spencer-Crooks, one of Buchan's adherents, the sense of loss was more acutely related to Christianity itself, commenting on the move to take religion out of schools and other places and expressing a feeling that Christians are being challenged (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011, Brackenhurst). A recent article in the *Mail and Guardian* dealing with the declining membership of the Dutch Reformed Church quotes DRC minister, Ds Jan Potgieter:

There is still an uncertainty, a fear, especially with our people – we talk about us and them. The Afrikaans people, especially, are fearful... So you've got a bunch of people who are uncertain... uncertain about their language, about the language their kids will be educated in. They are uncertain if they'll get a job in case of BEE. So the last fortress people feel that they have, the church, they feel must be Afrikaans and it must be reformed. So when they talk about unification, people feel that "they'll take my church and I will have nothing left" (Leonard 2012:21).

While Potgieter is speaking specifically about the concept of uniting the low attendance black and white congregations in Dullstroom, the poignancy of his final sentence in the quote above was echoed in many of the interviews conducted. It is this sense of loss, lack of hope and difficulty in life that appears to lead to a general sense of insecurity, particularly expressed by the Afrikaner people, and which leads people to seek security, and also their identity especially in their church. These ideas will be explored more fully in chapters five and six.

I hope to show that the church that is going to be popular and "successful" is the one which is able to meet people where they are – in their sense of insecurity and loss – and

rekindle in them a vision for a future in which God's presence can clearly be discerned. Fundamentalists like Angus Buchan who preach a message of empowerment speak directly to the needs of many white South Africans.

5.3 The Emerging Church in South Africa

The emerging movement, on the other hand, speaks not only to a younger generation who have stayed in South Africa and want to see the country grow up to fulfil its potential, but also to older people who have become dissatisfied with their experience of church, as opposed to God. While there are not many purely emerging congregations, there are many young denomination leaders who are very enthusiastic about the emerging conversation. Roger Saner, one of the prominent South African voices wrote on his blog in 2007:

Last year we had a national gathering of South African 'emerging church' leaders and most of the people there weren't involved in an emerging church – they were involved in the normal church life and denominations of this country (Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, charismatic, Afrikaans churches and others). However, every one of us resonated with the values of Emergent and the emerging church (Saner 2007).

The Tall Skinny Kiwi, aka Andrew Jones, another prominent emerging blogger, reviews the *Google Insights* tool (a method of tracking search statistics) and notes "The search term 'emerging church' ... has been declining in use since its peak in early 2007 and South Africans come out on top as the top users of this term"¹¹ (Jones 2008). Leaders like McLaren encourage the growth of young leaders who are socially aware and committed to building society in all its diversity. His African organisation, Amahoro, meets annually – it has met twice in South Africa – as a gathering of young Christian leaders from across the continent.

Rohr is one of the emerging church authors who is popular among these young leaders in many denominations, and who has visited South Africa twice, the last time in 2010, and so becomes a worthwhile candidate to study as an opposing view to the

¹¹ I have duplicated the search and the US, Canada and Australia come out tops with South Africa not featuring at all. Google does however state on their site "An improvement to our geographical assignment was applied retroactively from 1/1/2011".

fundamentalists represented by Buchan.

6 Conclusion to chapter

Emerging Church leader Karen Ward sums up the characteristics required of spiritual leaders at the start of the twenty-first century by quoting missiologist Gerard Kelly:

Leadership that doesn't inspire the imaginations of those who choose to follow is little more than cleverly disguised bureaucracy... If human beings did not need help in understanding their times and inspiration to overcome fear and inertia, they would not need leaders. It is crucial that leaders see this and take seriously their responsibility to inspire – to switch on the imaginative functions of those they lead. This is just the opposite of closing down creativity because it is too much of a threat. The capacity to inspire courage, to give vision against the odds, to create dreams out of the raw materials of fear and uncertainty is more needed than ever in a context of fluidity and change (2010:170-171).

Chapter 3: Power, Prestige and Possession: Two Approaches to Hope

1 Hope Defined

Having looked at the background to the study in the previous chapter, this chapter seeks to explore the traditional Christian concept of hope, as well as hope in relation to the how the two subjects of the study have interpreted it in a way that is meaningful for their followers.

The title of the dissertation, *Things yet unseen*, is taken from Hebrews 11:1 in which the author describes faith as being sure of what is hoped for and certain of what is not seen. While there is little clear evidence regarding the author of this book, its place of writing or the situation of the intended audience (Laymon 1971:897) it seems that the Christ followers, possibly Jewish, were under threat of Roman persecution although commentators differ on which emperor that might be (:897; Gaebelein 1979:8). In addressing the persecution with which the Christians appear to be struggling the author uses the stories of the Hebrew heroes of the faith – as an example of how the ancients overcame their struggles through their faith and hope. While the author doesn't define faith, he calls attention to its significant features and how it works out in practice – this isn't about a personal “warm fuzzy” feeling, but is practical – a word that many of Buchan's followers use to explain the attraction of his message. In illustrating this passage Wright tells a story about how he and friends were hiking through mist, the mist opened and they were able to see how hikers ahead of them had tackled an obstacle. He says, “Now we knew, looking ahead to the others, what we would be facing, what we would need to cope with it – and the fact that it was possible.” (2004:127). The author reviews what faith – which is a present and continuing reality – has accomplished in the past and describes it as a title deed, a promise, of good things to come, combining the elements of hope, confidence and trust (Laymon 1971:913).

So the author describes the faith journey of the people of God, from the very beginning, Abel (verse 4) through to David (verse 32) and explains their journey in faith as one in which they hope for something better. They believe in and hope for things that are unseen. Jürgen Moltmann says:

[God's] name is a wayfaring name, a name of promise that discloses a new future, a name whose truth is experienced in history inasmuch as his promise discloses its future possibilities... This god is present where we wait upon his promises in hope and transformation. When we have a god who calls into being the things that are not, then the things that are not yet, that are future, also become 'thinkable' because they can be hoped for (1993:30).

Hope is therefore "forward looking and forward moving, and... also revolutionizing and transforming the present" (:16) with a vision that is not yet realised, and can be defined in lay terms as a "feeling of expectation and desire combined; a desire for certain events to happen (Hawkins 1988:389). John Macquarrie further differentiates Christian hope as being grounded in realism as opposed to a hope which is based on humanity's belief that it can build for itself a secure and prosperous future (1977:347). This is particularly relevant in looking at a postmodern response to the failed hopes of the modern era, as noted in the previous chapter and below.

Hope, however, whether Christian or otherwise, is a notoriously difficult term to capture, particularly, according to Daniel Migliore due to the "confusing and contradictory interpretations... in twentieth-century biblical and theological scholarship" (1991:237). Describing Christian hope in *Faith Seeking Understanding*, he notes four tensions in a contemporary Christian definition: a conflict between futurist and realised eschatology (is the kingdom of God a present reality or is it entirely in the future?); conflict between personal and corporate eschatology (fulfilment for the individual or social, economic, and political fulfilment); conflict between historical and cosmic eschatology (human life or nature and cosmic process); and conflict between God's activity and human activity (does God build God's kingdom, or are people to do that?). He suggests that the reign of God for which Christians hope embraces all of these aspects (:237), a view echoed by Klaus Nürnberger who states, "The existentialists' insistence on personal authenticity, the political insistence on social authenticity and the ecological insistence on the dignity of creation do not exclude but complement each other" (1994:147). Indeed, these tensions were observed in the interviews conducted as part of this research in the various ways in which the respondents tried to define hope.

In the psychological sense hope can be seen as a survival mechanism. Speaking of a study conducted at New York University, Elizabeth Phelps said, “A little optimism helps promote actions that lead to good outcomes. Not everything in life will turn out great, but if you thought everything will turn out bad, you’d never do anything” (Choi 2007).

According to RVG Tasker, hope is a psychological necessity (1982:489), particularly regarding human self-consciousness and the need to live with the knowledge of one’s own mortality and the apparent meaninglessness of life that is often difficult. Migliore describes it such:

Death seems to have the last word. Each human life, the whole of human history, and the entire cosmos drive inexorably toward death... It is the power of negativity and destruction that threatens the fulfilment of life created and redeemed by God. Disease, disability, alienation, injustice, oppression, war, and a host of other evils constantly remind us that ‘in life we are in death’ (1991:238).

Nürnberger identifies some of the other evils as “frustrations stemming from physical handicaps, intellectual limitations, professional failures, irredeemable family conflicts, unsuccessful revolutions or disillusionments experienced after great social transformations” (1994:148) as part of the human experience that leads to hopelessness, which he describes as “the greatest killer – of joy, of initiative, of loving concern, of social and ecological responsibility, even of physical life” (:148). Because men and women can never be free from the anxiety that results from these frustrations Macquarrie believes that life can only be lived on the basis of a hope that life is worthwhile and so humans therefore “live between the two poles of anxiety and hope” (1977:64).

This is particularly so for people living in the postmodern period, responding to the dashed hopes of the modern. Moltmann suggests that during the previous two centuries, hopes for the future of the world were moved from faith in God to the secular realm, “the messianic hopes emigrated from the church and became invested in progress, evolution and revolutions” (1968:370). Hope in progress was revealed to be insufficient, however, in the many crises of the twentieth century – many brought about by the same

progress that people had placed their hopes in, and so in the “postmodern, postliberal world people no longer have hope that reason, science and technology can guarantee a golden future” (Migliore 1991:234).

Nürnbergger names the spectres of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as “population growth, environmental pollution, breakdown of moral values and social cohesion, the growth of violence and brutality, the emergence of new diseases, the threat of nuclear holocaust” (1994:148) and suggests that the purpose of hope is to “reassure, liberate and motivate people in situations of need... [in order] to weather the storm of the future, especially in South Africa...” (:148).

People in a postmodern world who have experienced the failure of hope placed in technology and progress in the modern age – and people in a post-liberation South Africa who may have experienced disappointment in what has happened following democracy in 1994 – are expressing a longing for hope and meaning beyond that of reason, and so this brings the question of religion into the search for hope.

1.1 Christian hope

While the Judea-Christian history has hope at its core, Christian hope is diverse and complex and changes according to context. Religious hope is more than “hope for the reunion of a disembodied soul with a personal Saviour in heavenly bliss” (Nürnbergger 1994:148) as many would suggest, and this section seeks to present only a few aspects of this complex subject.

Rex Chapman suggests that there are two aspects of hope which are relevant to spirituality, first a personal experience of hope for the future as an attitude of mind and way of approaching life in expectation of a future goal, and second the nature of hope as a goal or object that is hoped for and awaited in confidence (1983:195). He states that the two emphases are linked because experience of hope is based on confidence that goal can be achieved (:195). The aspect of hope which is added by religion is that human hope is not just a hope based on human potential, but is a hope which transcends the limitations of this world. Nürnbergger:

Hope does not only serve to conquer our destructive desires and challenge our human initiative to move forward constructively, to conquer social evil and mobilise for social reconstruction, to arrest the deterioration of the environment... it also serves to conquer our desperation where human capacities and earthly possibilities are finally and totally exhausted. It reassures those who have stared into the abyss of death and destruction that the power centre of reality is located beyond this reality, namely in its divine Source (1994:147-148).

This idea is described by Moltmann not as a hope of something which is to come in the future, but rather as the hopes of the anticipated future already at work transforming the sufferings of the present (1968:371). In this way the coming power and presence of God reaches into the present from the future and in so doing transforms that which is to come.

By future we do not mean a faraway condition, but a power which already qualifies the present – through promise and hope, through liberation and the creation of new possibilities. As this power of the future, God reaches into the present. As creator of new possibilities he liberates the present from the shackles of the past and from the anxious existence of the status quo. Thus God becomes the power of the protest against the guilt that throws us into transiency and produces death, and he also becomes the ground of the freedom that renews life (Moltmann 1968:376-377).

In other words, the anxiety brought about by the knowledge of one's own death and concern for present troubles are overcome by the hope of new possibilities for the future as noted by Fredrickson above.

While Moltmann and others see hope for the future having a largely positive influence on the way people live today, and hold in their minds a positive picture of the fulfilment of all things, described by Migliore as the “final victory of the creative, self-expending, community-forming love of the triune God, hence triumph of love of God over all hate; justice of God over all injustice, God's freedom over all bondage, community of God over separation, life with God over power of death. (1991:238), there is also a view which paints the future in far more negative terms. Migliore uses the term

“fundamentalistic apocalypticism” which describes “dark and terrible pictures of the future, transfixed by the destruction of the earth and a coming dystopia which feeds on the fears of the people” (:235). As noted further in this chapter Buchan touches on this type of theology in which hope for the Christian is not the reconciliation of all things, but the avoidance of the dark and terrible apocalypse.

As mentioned above one of the key struggles in defining hope is the tensions which one finds. As will be seen in chapter five, the respondents expressed a tension between understanding hope as something promised in the future or something experienced in the present. Moltmann traces this struggle back to Franciscan spiritualists following Joachim of Fiore in the thirteenth century who were concerned with God’s future, and Enthusiasts and Baptists in the sixteenth century who were actively seeking to transform their oppressive present (1983:272). He further identifies tension between the fulfilment of earlier promises and the arousing of new hopes (:271) and the difference “between hope and experience, between vision and reality” (1968:378). He notes that hopes are always greater than what can be fulfilled in reality but believes that the new, experienced reality causes hope to be reinterpreted. (:379).

Ultimately, though, says Chapman, “hope that is rooted in the gracious activity of God removes as a reason for hope either anxiety over the future or the participation for personal rewards” (1983:196) and so Christian hope depends on God and God’s activity and presence in the world rather than human endeavour for its fulfilment, and it is faith in this God that enables the Christian to live in hope, as Tasker says:

Hope [in the biblical sense] is not a matter of temperament, nor is it conditioned by the prevailing circumstances or any human possibilities. It does not depend on what a man possesses, upon what he may be able to do for himself, nor upon what any other human being may do for him... biblical hope is inseparable... from faith in God... The existence of this hope makes it impossible for the Christian to be satisfied with transient joys; it also acts as a stimulus to purity of life and enables him (*sic*) to suffer cheerfully... (1982:489).

According to Macquarrie, Christian hope is therefore not escapist in nature but has to do with “where we are now, in the midst of this world... how we cooperate now with

God's work" (1977:347-348). For the Christian, God is revealed in Jesus Christ and Christians find the foundation of their hope in the cross and its message of victory over death.

1.2 Hope in the cross

Moltmann traces the foundation of hope in the Judea-Christian religion to "the experience of the liberating action of God in the exodus of Israel from slavery and in the overcoming of death in the cross and resurrection of Christ" (1983:271). For the Christian, he says, the cross is not only a sign of hope, but is also the criterion for all dreams and fantasies about the future and it is this which distinguishes Christian faith from superstition and unbelief (:272). So, he says,

[The cross of Christ] alone makes the resurrection meaningful for us. Resurrection faith can only be grasped as faith in the crucified one. And eschatological hope can be "hope against hope" only if it is born out of the redeeming and freeing efficacy of the cross of Christ. For in one crucified "for us" and for our justification, hope in freedom is not only portrayed paradigmatically before our eyes but is actually mediated. Hope is not born out of enthusiasm but out of love which liberates us from old bonds and opens up new opportunities (1968:381).

Moltmann is saying that the only way in which theology can have meaning in the "godlessness and godforsakenness" of the modern present is through a demonstration of the "spirit of the resurrection". "The theologian is... to transform [history and human nature] in expectation of a divine transformation" (1993:84). Hope cannot be otherworldly, but has to "transform... the negative, contradictory and torturing aspects of the world into terms of 'not yet', and does not suffer them to end in 'nothing'" (:197). In other words present suffering can be understood in the light of Christ's suffering on the cross, and just as the suffering on the cross resulting in a resurrection, so too the suffering which is experienced in this present age is grounds for hope in a resurrection to come. Jesus is not a divine being who had supernatural power to do this thing, but suffered in his humanity, with us.

1.3 Hope of community

Another aspect of Christian hope is its basis in community. Migliore states the “many dimensions [of hope] – personal, corporate, cosmic... are inseparable, [and] grace enables us to rise above egocentricity of personal salvation (1991:239), and Nürnberger notes that the essence of political theology moves vision from personal authenticity to authenticity of social order therefore is a corrective to [the egocentric focus of] existentialism (1994:146). The hope of a Christian, therefore, is not only about personal salvation, but has to extend beyond the individual into society as a whole. In the next chapter I shall show that this desire is expressed in different ways.

It is also in community, says Chapman, that the love of God is able to be expressed, in which a “number of strands involving the hope of individual together with the hope of community, human race and universe – ultimately for future fulfilment includes hope for the increasing manifestation of love, righteousness and justice on earth as signs of eternal love and activity of God. God of love is encountered wherever love is expressed (Chapman 1983:196).

1.4 Hope and identity

Also noted as a part of hope is the concept of human identity. Moltmann suggests that the recipient of God’s promise, the one who hopes in God, is

identified, as what he is – and at the same time differentiated, as what he will be. He comes ‘to himself’ – but in hope, for he is not yet freed from contradiction and death... Thus the believer becomes essentially one who hopes... Thus comes into harmony with himself *in spe*, but into disharmony with himself *in re*... Hence the man who hopes is of all people the one who does not stand harmoniously and concentrically in himself, but stands eccentrically to himself (1993:91).

And so hope is about possibilities and potential. “Where there is no longer any possibility of anything new happening, there hope also comes to an end and loses all prospect of the realising of what it hopes for” (1993:92). Macquarrie quotes philosopher Paul Ricoeur who suggests that anxiety and faith are two ways of experiencing the same relation – anxiety is the difference between finite being and mysterious totality in which

he has an insignificant place; whereas hope arises from the sense of belonging to that totality and having affinity with it (1977:65). This will be important in understanding some of the attraction that the authors hold for their followers.

1.5 As a virtue with faith and love

Finally in this discussion, it is worth noting that hope is considered one of three theological virtues (the other two being faith and love) and, as a virtue, arises from the will and not the passions (Wikipedia *Hope (virtue)*:2012). The connection with faith was noted in many of the interviews conducted for the study. According to Tasker, “Faith, hope and love are thus inseparable. Hope cannot exist apart from faith, and love cannot be exercised without hope... together they comprise the Christian way of life” (1982:490). Chapman says that the experience of trusting in God as basis of faith gives grounds for confidence in hope of final fulfilment (1983:195) which leads in turn to the possibilities of “eternal life and loving union” (:196). Furthermore, according to Tasker, “by its connection with love, Christian hope is freed from all selfishness – the Christian does not hope for blessings for himself which he does not desire others to share” (1982:489). Moltmann suggests

hope opens up this faith to the all-embracing future of the risen Christ... love accepts the [world of evil and death on] earth because it draws hope for the new creation. Thus hope draws believers into the life of love and frees them for solidarity with the whole of suffering creation (1983:272).

I now turn to Buchan and Rohr to show how, in their respective theologies, they have been able to express hope in a way that things that are unseen become real and transformative to their followers.

2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework used for this chapter is that of a phrase often used by Rohr to describe the human search for meaning: “power, prestige and possession.” Rohr argues that these were the very three things that Matthew has Jesus confronting in Jesus’ encounter with the demon in the wilderness. He describes them as the need for power, righteousness and success (2003a:173-174) and suggests that until the individual has

stared down these demons there is no possibility of getting out of the wilderness (:174). Elsewhere he suggests that it is these three things (power, prestige and possession) that prevent us from recognising and receiving the Reign of God (:56), and that it is because too many of our religious structures are built upon them that Christians end up playing the same games as everybody else (:61-62). “Although we claim that Jesus is the Lord, it’s obvious that in reality power, prestige and possessions are the Lord’s” (:148). Christians, he says, didn’t want the “Pax Christi” but rather the triumphal Christianity of the “Pax Romana” (:60).

This framework is helpful because the approach to power, prestige and possession is very different between the two subjects of the study. The fundamentalist approach, typified by Buchan, sees triumphal Christianity – and indeed power, prestige and possession – as something to be achieved, and it is God, a god of power, who will give those things to his faithful. Rohr says it like this:

We’ve taken Jesus over and placed a crown on his head, not a crown of thorns, but a royal crown, which he expressly rejected... we have read the Gospels from the perspectives of power instead of from the side of the poor and disestablished (2003a:27).

In contrast to Buchan, Rohr suggests that in order to discover meaning in religion we need to let go the compulsions to be successful, right and powerful (:42) and embrace poverty: the poverty of our sinfulness, of oppression, the poverty of humility, and the poverty of our own limitedness and weakness (2003:72-74). Yet it is exactly this humility and weakness that Buchan seems to oppose.

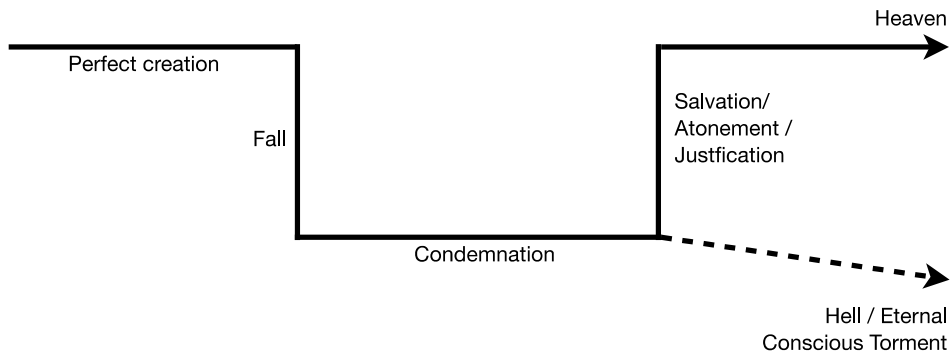
Sarojini Nadar notes that for Buchan “men taking responsibility” means asserting dominating and coercive measures to maintain power (2009:553) which is maintained both positionally – through promoting hierarchical ideologies in which the male is seen as superior – and discursively through the use of language (:555). Power in the home is to be asserted through dominance of the rest of the family. Likewise, the theme of possession comes across clearly in Buchan’s communications. For example Nadar notes his comments in a newsletter on his website quoting Deuteronomy 1:6 and suggesting

that it is time to possess that land given to them (:557)¹². JH van Wyk expresses concern that there could be elements of a prosperity gospel in the film of *Faith like Potatoes* and notes that that was not the message of Christ (2008:9). The theme of prestige is picked in the very use of the name “Mighty” to describe his annual men’s conference. Men are people who are not to be weak, but who are to be strong and have standing in their homes and communities. Nadar notes that Buchan’s focus on a crisis in masculinity is appealing for his mainly white Afrikaner audience who are struggling with a decline in public power and challenges to conservative values encountered in the post apartheid South Africa (2009:559). Buchan’s message meets the needs of the people he is speaking to, mainly white, Afrikaner farmers who are threatened by a loss of meaning in a postmodern, postcolonial – and post-liberation – South Africa.

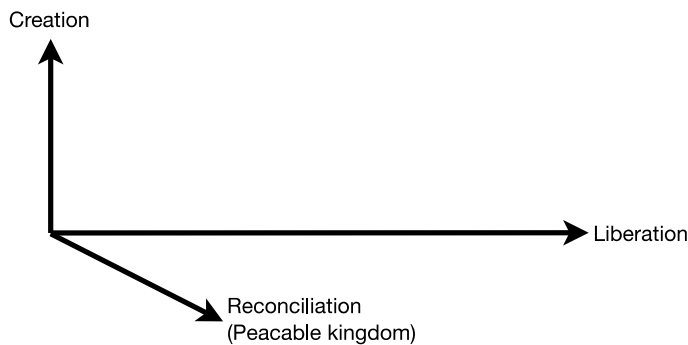
Rohr’s approach to power, prestige and possession, on the other hand, is one not of attaining these things, but of moving beyond the desire for them and leaving them behind. Meaning is found when we can say that power, prestige and possession are no longer important and are no longer driving factors in our lives.

This approach also expresses the emerging response – one based on a generation tired of excessive materialism and abuse of power. In his book *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions that are Transforming the Faith*, McLaren suggests two different views that describe the Christian narrative which he illustrates with diagrams. He suggests firstly that what he calls “the six line gospel” (perfect creation, fall, and either condemnation to hell or salvation to heaven) traditional storyline of the Bible reflects the colonial narrative of the Greco-Roman empire (and subsequent incarnations of colonial Christianity) rather than the Christianity that Jesus taught (2010:45-60). Essentially this is a Christianity based on power, prestige and possession and assumes that those things can only be attained by falling in with the colonial / religious power structures, which are the people who are right and have value (humanity before the fall). Everybody else is below them and is of inferior worth (fallen and condemned to hell). In order to achieve anything the inferior need to be lifted (saved) to the same level as the power structure. In other words, you need to become “like me” to be worth anything. He represents it diagrammatically as follows:

¹² At the time of writing this page had been removed from Shalom’s website.



McLaren proposes a three dimensional storyline which he feels is more indicative of the Jewish view that Jesus would have held and suggests that God is less concerned with salvation for heaven and more concerned with people learning to live this life fully, or in three dimensions, i.e., a life of creation as suggested by Genesis, a life of liberation (from self and others) as suggested by Exodus, and a life of relationship or reconciliation as suggested by the prophets, in particular Isaiah (:73-86).



These two diagrams represent both Buchan's and Rohr's respective approaches well. The first diagram indicates that the "things yet unseen", the promised land to which God's people are called, is a place of domination, of power, prestige and possession which needs to be attained. The second indicates that the things yet unseen: fullness of creation, liberation from the oppression of self and others and reconciliation with God and others are based on relationship rather than domination. Indeed, the Exodus narrative of liberation and journey to that which is promised is a fundamental part of Christian hope.

With this as background I now turn to the two subjects of this study, Buchan and Rohr.

3 Angus Buchan

3.1 Background

As noted by Nadar (2009:553) few academic resources on Buchan and his ministry with the “Mighty Men’s Conference” exist, and so it is necessary to rely on his own books, of which there are a number, and articles in the popular media to describe his background and theology.

Buchan makes much of his Scottish background, describing himself as “a real Scottish lad” (1998:13), being born to parents who were both Scottish, studying agriculture in Scotland and having received, on a mission trip to Scotland, his clan’s kilt. None of this detracts from the fact that he considers himself African, being born and growing up in Africa (Bulawayo and Ndola respectively) and making his home here for a number of years. After spending some time in Australia as a young man he says that he returned to his “beloved Africa” (:17), and as the political situation in Zambia deteriorated, rather than go back overseas, he travelled south, eventually buying a farm in Greytown, KwaZulu-Natal where he lives today (:26).

Buchan traces the start of his Christian journey to a Saturday afternoon when he attended a Billy Graham outreach film at a local cinema. At the age of about six he “was one of the first” (1998:14) to respond to the altar call “saying the sinner’s prayer and giving my life to Jesus” (2004:7). He started attending church by himself because none of his family were interested and writes how, as he grew older he would spend time with God behind the family home (:7). He describes how when he was about fifteen and a half he dreamt that one-day he would be preaching to stadiums full of people (2008:271) and tells that he preached his first sermon at the age of 16 (1998:14).

As Buchan grew older, however, through the course of travelling and working overseas, he lost touch with God and became “an arrogant, successful, self-made man” (:17). He describes how much work there was to do on the farm, and how busy it kept him. He says

I kept telling myself that once the farm was secured, I would find the peace and contentment I longed for, but the harder I worked, the more I wondered what I

was doing it all for... Deep down I knew I needed God in my life, but just then I didn't have time to stop and think about what was happening to me (1998:23).

It was at this time in his life that the local Methodist church was running a lay witness mission and he and his family were invited to attend. On the Sunday morning after people had shared their testimonies he again responded to the altar call.

Jill [his wife] and I walked to the front of the church with many others, and knelt before the Lord. We prayed the sinner's prayer together, saying sorry for our sins and asking Jesus to rule our hearts (1998, p. 31).

Buchan describes his call to preach in chapter six of *Faith Like Potatoes* and writes of how he was inspired by the stories of ordinary people in scripture who were blessed by the power of God. He describes himself speaking to his pastor and telling him, "I want to be used by God. I want to trust him at all costs and see his power manifested" (1998:67). The pastor responded by giving him an opportunity to speak at a youth meeting that Friday night at which apparently "many young people came to repentance and restoration" (:68). As Buchan relates his story he tells how he began to feel more and more strongly that God was calling him to evangelism and the sacrifices that would be required of him (:69-70), and relates the challenges he had in getting his first evangelical campaign in Ladysmith off the ground in the early 90s (:70-90). In 1992 he held a campaign in Newcastle in a hall which could seat 3000 people. It was filled to capacity every night (:81) and became a pivotal moment for him and his family (:96) in that it revealed to him that the Lord had called him into full time ministry and that it would require his total commitment (:97). It was at this point that invitations for evangelism became far more frequent and he appointed a farm manager so that he could minister full time (:97).

3.2 The Mighty Men's Conference

There is not much information regarding Buchan's activities between the conclusion of the *Faith like Potatoes* story and the advent of the Mighty Men's Conferences. It seems that his ministry was mainly focussed on preaching the gospel in Africa by means of his

pantechnicon¹³, but it was the Mighty Men's Conferences and his stadium meetings that really brought Buchan into the public eye. The first conference was held in 2004 after Buchan claims God called him to "father... to mentor young men: there are no spiritual fathers in our nation" (Carte Blanche 2009).

The first year the conference was held only 240 men arrived (Carte Blanche 2009), but by April 2009 no fewer than 250 000 people, mainly men, attended the three day event at his farm near Greytown, and estimates of around 300 000 are given for the final conference in 2010 (van Wyk 2010:10).

Buchan claims that the purpose of the Mighty Men's Conference is to "restore masculinity" with a repeated theme of men not being wimps or sissies. He says that men must pull back their shoulders, puff out their chests and be proud in God (*my translation from Afrikaans*) (de Villiers & Cloete 2010). Significantly, his message of a restored masculinity is understood by Nadar to mean that men have to be leaders in home and society, they should love their wives and that they should be able to show emotions and remorse by crying and repenting (2009:554). A common criticism, as noted by Nadar, is that this means that the woman needs to submit to the man (:554). Nevertheless these conferences have proved popular among the men with many claiming that Buchan has made a significant difference in their lives (Jackson 2008).

3.3 Theology

As already noted in this study, Buchan is a self-confessed fundamentalist and as such his theology reflects those influences as well as his evangelised roots. His primary source is the Bible:

We've told our people here at Shalom that we can encompass anything as long as it's the Word of God. At Shalom we are fundamentalists... The Word of God means everything to me... It's the temperature gauge, the compass, the direction finder, everything you can think of... It's life itself... If we take the Word of God literally as it is written, we will never default, we'll never be led astray, and we'll definitely never compromise (2006a:176).

¹³ This story is told in *The Seed Sower*.

He himself describes his message in *Faith like Potatoes* as “short, punchy, fiery and challenging, about our need to get back to God and a life of holiness” (1998:75). Dreyer suggests that people associate with him more easily because

he speaks their language, in a way that they understand. He emphasises God’s power, old-fashioned morality and family values, the guiding of the Holy Spirit and a fundamentalist interpretation of scripture. With him here is no confusion about basic faith values and no critical questions about the Bible (2009). (*My translation*)

While Buchan doesn’t use the word “postmodern” in any of his musings, he is clearly critical of a culture which questions the Bible and a fundamentalist point of view. Far from accepting a worldview which proclaims a truth that is multifaceted and relative he clearly understands that the Bible is “the Truth” and anything that deviates from it detracts from a life of holiness, ideas that were confirmed in the interviews conducted for this study. Hand in hand with his literal reading of the Bible comes a patriarchal attitude towards women. He ascribes many of today’s family problems to the fact that women do not know their place:

Some women are the major breadwinners in the home... and they have a real problem submitting to their husbands... Unless wives obey the Biblical principle, their marriage will soon be in trouble because they are going against the Word of God (2004:169).

Because they do not obey “the Truth” he says, “disaster is on the horizon” (:170), rejecting any contemporary cultural thoughts on child-raising in favour of “Biblical principles” (:170). He says, “it is very hard for a husband to love his wife when she insists on wearing the trousers and refusing to submit. The children become traumatised when the wife belittles the so-called head of the house, or he beats up his wife because she will not submit. The result is rebellious children” (:170). Nadar notes that evident in Buchan’s message is a language of conquest and might and strength (2009:555), and in this sense, as a man, he speaks to the men about their role. He himself says, “even though I preach a very strong message, a fire and brimstone message, I don’t like to see people hurt in any way. Yet, sometimes when you have to obey the prompting of the

Holy Spirit, people do get hurt...” (2006:10).

As an evangelist Buchan stresses the importance of being born again and of saying the sinner’s prayer: “Jesus says if you are not born again you will never see the kingdom of heaven... There’s got to be a time in your life when you can say, ‘My life changed on that day’” (2006a:290).

Johnny van Dyk, one of the attendees at an Angus Buchan event sums up Buchan’s message in the article ‘*Soeke na iets positiefs’ lok duiende na Angus*: “There is a lot of concern regarding the situation in this country, but if everybody turns to the Lord, everything will come right” (Jackson 2008) (*My translation from Afrikaans*). This is a clear echo of Buchan’s theological proposition that hope for the country lies in everybody, but particularly the leaders, giving their hearts to Jesus and living Christian lives. Indeed, he blames the negative experiences in the country on the fact that people have turned from “the Truth” as I have described above.

3.4 Criticism of Buchan

Van Wyk offers a balanced reflection of both the good and bad of Buchan’s ministry, dividing the responses into four groups: those who write Buchan off totally, those who are reserved with their criticism, those who offer unconditional praise, and those who are reserved with their acknowledgment of the good that he is doing (2010:10).

Those who write Buchan off totally question the whole movement and describe Buchan and his followers very negatively, commenting on his fundamentalist use of scripture, out-dated theology, that it is strongly patriarchal, that it depends on mass hysteria, is populist, is a form of prosperity teaching, cheap religious propaganda, that it depends on an oppressive situation in the country and fear and uncertainty for the future for its popularity, and finally that is a personality cult (:10-11).

The second group who are reservedly critical are not as vocal in their criticism, but have reservations regarding revival movements that are not grounded in the church and which often make little difference in the long run. (:11)

Those who offer unconditional praise see the gatherings as exceptional and enriching

experiences that they wouldn't miss for anything. Van Wyk notes that apparently there is a deep-seated need for a personal, experienced spirituality that is free of the dry intellectualism that people feel they get in the traditional (Afrikaans) churches (:11).

The final group believe that there is value in the gatherings, but they have their reservations. They recognise that it is biblical for the people of God to get together to celebrate, but that the personal salvation offered is less than what Christ taught and more focus should be given to the Kingdom of God (:11-12).

Van Wyk sums up his observations by suggesting that Buchan needs to be critically examined in these areas: the danger of prosperity gospel, particularly as portrayed in the film version of *Faith like Potatoes*¹⁴; the danger of an overarching patriarchy in the sense that masculinity and fatherhood are emphasised at the cost of femininity; the danger of it being a "white" movement – particularly in a country where the deepest need may be reconciliation between black and white, and the fact that the movement is not attached to any church. He asks the question, "How sustainable is this movement?" (:12-13). This concern was noted in a later informal conversation with one of Buchan's followers that since Buchan is no longer leading the Mighty Men Conferences, there seems to be very little interest in them.

A common criticism of Buchan's theology is the role that he assigns to women. Nadar says "'men taking responsibility' is hardly an unpalatable idea, but 'if 'taking responsibility' means asserting dominating and coercive measures, including those in the religious domain, to maintain power, then our justice antennas have to be tuned in, so that we are not deceived by this palatable patriarchy, masquerading as 'restoring masculinity'" (2009:554), thoughts echoed by a female letter writer to *Die Burger* who takes Buchan to task regarding his insistence that a woman must submit to the man (van Rensburg 2008).

Jean Oosthuizen, webmaster of an online discussion forum about faith, writes in *Rapport* about the danger of Buchan's theology. She refers to him as "the potato

¹⁴ I note here that in my own reading of Buchan I haven't noticed any prosperity gospel alarm bells ringing, although in informal conversations with his opponents "it's all a money-making racket" has been a common criticism.

farmer” and his belief system as “potato theology” (2009) and argues that his “fast-food” theology is ultimately destructive, particularly when it comes to the so-called healings that take place at his services. She asks how responsible it is to allow a person to think that they are healed, when Buchan has no idea of the person’s medical condition, and wants to know who is going to be responsible for the *misoes* (failed harvest) when the emotion and excitement of the moment has passed, there have been no miracles and all that remains are spiritually disillusioned wrecks (Oosthuizen 2009)¹⁵.

Not only is his theological viewpoint criticised, but also his behaviour. For example at the 2009 Mighty Men’s Conference Buchan collapsed from heatstroke. A newspaper headline proclaimed “Jesus red siek Buchan” (*Jesus saves sick Buchan*) and the event was widely portrayed as Jesus saving Buchan from dying due to heart failure. Oosthuizen criticises the psyche of a nation that sees the event as ascribing to Buchan the status of a Messiah risen from the dead (2009).

Rohr criticises this kind of theology by suggesting that people of religion have forgotten that religion is supposed to be about “the Great Mystery” and see it instead as “crime and punishment”.

This is the only way that the postmodern Christian can put shape into the basically shapeless, bad novel called human life. It looks like an answer, or even gospel, but it is the same old story line of most of history; the big and strong win; Prometheus passes for Jesus (2001:8).

While Rohr criticises both conservatives and liberals, his comments on conservatives are that they tend to avoid the horizontal claims of the gospel – the claims to breadth and inclusion of the Kingdom of God, fearful of mercy and compassion, or breaking of rules. “They are always circling the wagons around this very fragile God that they have to protect” (2001:36) – exactly the words used to describe Buchan by some of his critics (laager mentality). Rohr goes on to describe how conservative types fight as soon as they have targeted the appropriate sinner, or anyone who threatens their strong control

¹⁵ Paraphrased from the Afrikaans article.

needs. They usually have a strong punitive need and a false moral superiority (:36).

3.5 Buchan on hope

Buchan is not a scholar and does not claim to be (2006a:69) – in fact, he holds academia in low esteem (:82, 95) and so he has no carefully developed theology of hope, however he recognises the need for hope in the lives of the hopeless: “We need to minister to the sick, the hungry and the needy. We need to go to the places where the people are eager to hear the Good News... What we do have is the Word of life, the Word of hope.” (2006b:107). For Buchan hope is only to be found in salvation in the evangelical sense of the word as he testifies to the physical healing of people and the transformation of their lives as a result of accepting Jesus as Saviour. He draws his own understanding of hope from his own salvation experience – the two occasions in his life when he gave his to Jesus and he experienced a transformation in his life – and therefore extrapolates that to the salvation of others. he is critical of missionary attempts that preach a social gospel, saying,

They seem to be more concerned about education, social awareness, food clothes, transport and so on, than about the eternal destiny of men, women and children... First and foremost we must tell people that every person must be born again and receive Jesus as personal Saviour in order to have eternal life. (2004:199)

He is critical of well educated African (and European and American) leaders who are very knowledgeable but who “have not met Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour” (:199). He appears to proclaim a message – that his followers echo – which indicates that the hope of a transformed South Africa lies not in better education or health care, but in the leaders making a commitment to Jesus. That said, part of their vision and mission for Shalom is to take care of the widows and orphans (Buchan 1998:112) and he has both a school and an orphanage for AIDS orphans on his farm (:114-122).

As Buchan describes their mission he quotes well-known words¹⁶ as he defines evangelism being one hungry beggar showing another where to find bread (2006a:7)

¹⁶ Buchan fails to identify the source; an internet search suggests that this may be DT Niles’ definition of evangelism, which is somewhat paradoxical particularly as Niles embraced the type of interfaith dialogue that Buchan is so critical of (Newbigin 1991:730).

and describes the crowds before the altar as “people looking hopeless, people carrying huge burdens” (:62). He suggests that a meeting has been successful when “people who came with no hope had hope” (:103). He describes his mission in this way:

What is the aroma, the fragrance of Christ? Surely we become the aroma and fragrance of Christ when we start to preach faith, love and hope. That’s what people are looking for in these last days...

When people do not know what to do, they do not want to listen to a message of negativity, doom or gloom. They want to hear a message of hope...

We have to tell people that we’re living in the last days and it’s going to get progressively tougher, but Jesus has promised us that He’ll never allow us to be tempted above that which we’re able. Therefore, if we keep our eyes fixed on him, the author and the finisher of our faith, He’ll make a way for us where there seems to be no way. When you share this good news with a dying people there is suddenly new life, new hope, new opportunities that are given birth (2006a:86-87).

“We believe that Jesus gives people a reason for living,” says Buchan “there are so many people in what seems to be hopeless situations.” (1998:125)

So instead of describing academically what hope is about Buchan does his theology in a rather postmodern way – he tells stories. And his stories are stories of people responding to God in faith, and finding their prayers and needs answered. Faith, Buchan reminds us, is the substance of things hoped for (2006a:220), and indeed, after reading these stories the reader is left with a profound sense of hope, as Dale testifies in *Jesus... a farmer... and miracles*: “My faith is being sorely tested. Reading *Faith Like Potatoes* has lifted my spirits and I know that God can do the impossible.” (2002:40). So hope is communicated via the story of faith, first and foremost being his own story, which Dale found so compelling – the story which propelled Buchan to international fame: *Faith like Potatoes* (1998).

This autobiography is an exercise in hope as he tells of how, in moments of desperation, God comes through for him again and again, whether in his personal life, on the farm,

or in ministry. He tells, for example, of how God undertakes for him in farming, not only by providing the correct growing conditions for his crops, whether potatoes or maize, but also in emergencies. He tells the story of how God sent rain to extinguish a veld-fire which threatened to engulf the farm:

The sky was clear, the wind was blowing and there wasn't the slightest sign of rain. All the same, I closed my eyes and said a simple prayer... Less than five minutes later we heard a mighty clap of thunder!... The impossible had happened... A few minutes later a gentle drizzle began to fall over Shalom [the name of his farm] and I watched in awe as the rain doused the raging fire.
(1998:42-43)

And how God has made a difference when everything seemed hopeless: He tells of his first revival meeting in Ladysmith and the negative reception he received from the pastors in town:

The first meeting was scheduled to begin at 7 p.m. and at 6:45 p.m. the hall was empty. [Later] I went upstairs again and peeped into the hall – it was half full.

That first night six people came forward... By the end of the week, 50 or 60 people were coming forward each night. (:75-76)

He tells of how God works in the life of people, for example the story of Mike, a “hard-drinking, smoking, sports-loving man, and a good organiser” (:124) who, under pressure, agreed to help set up their meetings but was clearly anti-evangelism.

There was a moment of silence, then 26 men got up and walked up the aisle; the third man was Mike Francis... From the night of his conversion he gave up both smoking and drinking and never looked back... When I see things like that happening, it builds up my faith in the Lord Jesus, who has the power to transform lives (126).

In *Faith Like Potatoes* Buchan tells of God's plan for him to buy a truck to use to evangelise into Africa, he summarises the call in this way: “We had no idea where we would find such a vehicle or how we would finance it... but that didn't matter. William

Carey... said, 'Attempt great things for God and expect great things from God'... At Shalom we have a saying that if your vision doesn't scare you, it isn't big enough." (:145). He shares more details for the struggle to get the truck in his second book *The Seed Sower*. Funds had started to dwindle, however they believed that the vision had come from God and God would provide.

"Carry on," we told the people working on the truck. "God will make a way..."

The truck builders called me around April. "The truck is complete and we need you to fetch it."

The outstanding balance, they informed me, was R192 000. "It is the end of our tax year." They said, "and you need to pay us within ten days..."

Ten days? Where would I find that kind of money in ten days?

There are times when your faith is tested to such a degree that you just have to go ahead in blind faith... We must know and understand the leading of the Lord in order to stand on His word in times like this. Now it was my turn, once again to stand firmly on the word. "God, you said it – I believe it – and that settles it." (2001:44, 49-51)¹⁷.

Buchan received a cheque for the full amount just days before it was due (:51).

Jesus... a Farmer... and Miracles is a book of testimonies of those who were hopeless, but who have found hope in Jesus through his ministry. In it Buchan presents the stories in their own chapters, each chapter being prefaced with a scripture verse relevant to the particular story – and often dealing with hope. And so for example he quotes Mark 9:23, "Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes,'" (2002:32) and Hebrews 11:6, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that he is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (:111)

Buchan leaves the reader – and the member of his congregation – feeling hopeful that

¹⁷ The story of obtaining and paying for the truck is told over two chapters, "The Vision Becomes a Reality" and "The Miracle of Provision."

God CAN.

When we pray for the deaf, by faith, we ask them to remove their hearing aids, and stand on the other side of the auditorium, facing the wall so we may test their healing. We switch off the microphones, and call their names out very quietly. The people watching get very excited as they see formerly deaf people responding... Faith is strengthened as people see healings taking place. It is a real faith building experience to see people who have been carried onto the platform, often in wheelchairs, get up and walk (2004:229-230).

“Never become discouraged when the healing process seems to take a long time,” he says. “Trust God and ‘keep on keeping on’ until the process is complete.” (2002: 113).

For Buchan, being a Christian is not complicated and doesn't require academic discourse. As mentioned above, he believes the Bible as it is written, and if the Bible says something, then it must be true. His job as a Christian is simply to believe what is written and then to act on it. One of his earliest experiences after becoming a Christian is the fire on his farm described above. He explains how he knew what to do in this way: “Just then a scripture flashed into my mind: “Whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it and it will be yours (Mark 11:24)” (1998:42). Over the years this has become his mantra. In everything, if he believes God is telling him to do something, he does it and trusts that there will be results. Buchan's theology is to believe what the Bible says, and when he does that, as far as he is concerned, he experiences miracles, and therefore has no reason to doubt that God will do it again. This creates for him a sense of hope. This describes the way he has lived his life since that first experience, and the way he encourages others to live their lives, and as his followers hear these stories of Buchan's faith being fulfilled, they too come to believe that their hopes will be fulfilled. The danger, as noted by Oosthuizen above, is that when their hopes are not fulfilled, his followers blame themselves for not having enough faith (Stan*, interview by Neil Vels, 7 December 2011 in Standerton).

So Buchan clearly communicates that people do not need to hear carefully reasoned theologies about hope, but rather need to be reminded that hope can be real through the stories of the faith of others.

4 Richard Rohr

4.1 Background

Far more reticent to speak about himself than Buchan, most biographical information is to be found on the covers of his books which describe him as “a Franciscan priest [who] offers talks around the world on contemplation and spiritual renewal... he is the founder of the Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque, New Mexico” (2003:back cover). He does offer slightly more information about himself in the preface to *The Naked Now*, describing himself as being born into a conservative German Catholic family with farming roots in the middle of the Great War (2009:9) and being formed by twentieth century American culture, Catholic theology both “for good and for ill, and by wisdom traditions of world religions, especially Franciscanism “largely for the good” (2009:10). Even the usually omniscient Wikipedia offers little more insight into his life than this, however Michael Farrell in his article, “Richard Rohr is Forever Searching for Elusive Meaning” (1994) describes some of his journey.

Farrell notes the distinct stages of his life since becoming a priest at the time of Vatican II. While teaching high school his gift for preaching was noticed and a series of talks was tape recorded, which were published to great acclaim as *The Great Themes of Scripture*. As a result of a charismatic experience he began a movement known as New Jerusalem in which he and about two hundred 18 and 19 year old boys formed a community in a working class neighbourhood of Cincinnati. In the late 1970s he began to be invited to lead retreats, particularly with missionaries. It was during this time that he began to feel a calling to a social justice period of ministry which led him from East Germany to Africa, especially to places of upheaval. In 1985 he asked the Franciscans for a year of contemplation and spent a month in Thomas Merton’s hermitage at Gethsemane Abbey in Kentucky. This experience started him on a journey that led to the start of his Center for Action and Contemplation in Albuquerque (Farrell 1994).

Rohr has been a prolific writer and popular speaker, addressing subjects such as male spirituality, the Enneagram, the integration of action and contemplation, community building, peace and social justice issues, and eco-spirituality (Wikipedia, *Richard Rohr*:2011).

4.2 Theology

Rohr believes that the difficulty of the present age is that people no longer have a vision of something that is bigger than this life and are unable to perceive a transcendent meaning to their struggles. While he stresses in his teaching the inclusion of all at all levels – much to the chagrin of his detractors – and is very aware of white male hegemony and his own place in that (2003a:123), he fears that the contemporary church's attempts at inclusion are meaningless if the belief system fails to change to address the experience of emptiness in the lives of people, "What good is inclusive language if no one is even listening to our message?" he says. "Why would a young person join a group of 50-year-old complainers who are unwilling to speak of God and joy and peace beyond comprehension?" (Farrell 1994). He suggests that religion has become "a search for social order, group cohesion, and personal worthiness, or a way of escaping into the next world" (2009:15) and because of that has lost its transformative power. He suggests that religion has become a ritual of gambling and bargaining with God and the reluctant attendance of religious services; seeing Jesus only as the one who can keep us from pain later, rather than the one who "teaches us how to live with peace and freedom in this world" (2001:22). True spirituality, he says, is "not a search for perfection or control or the door to the next world; it is a search for divine union now" (:16).

It is the contemplative life which Rohr believes holds the key to the next level of Christian existence which he calls "nondualistic thinking" (Roberts 2010:2), a way of thinking that avoids taking sides. Non-dualistic thinking is "a non-oppositional, contemplative mind and heart... embodying the wonderful holism of Jesus" (in O'Leary 2010:14). Rohr further quotes the late Jesuit theologian Fr. Karl Rahner, describing non-dualism as a consciousness that has "a respect for not knowing, for unknowing" (2010:2) and "keeping your heart and mind spaces open long enough for the mind to see other hidden material" (2009:34). He suggests that the way to a great church is not through the doctrines and theology of the mind but rather through the experience of the soul because theology doesn't solve the problem, only spirituality does. He says you can only live the mystery (Farrell 1994):

The soul prefers to embrace things, not to name things. It is what it is without a name. It is what it is as it is. The soul has a different set of eyes, and my assumption is that the soul sees with contemplative eyes. It sees things without needing to label them up or down (Roberts 2010).

As such Rohr – as do other emerging church leaders – rejects the desire to take the side of either the conservatives or liberals. He says, “The new insight for many of us is that we now know illusion and egocentricity lie behind both the liberal and conservative facades. Both ideologies lend themselves to the private ego. It is just a matter of temperamental preferences and different disguises” (Farrell 1994). The discipline of contemplation calls people into a place where they are able to go beyond the divisions of religion, which he says, in its common forms

largely protects the ego, especially the group ego, instead of transforming it. If people do not go beyond first level metaphors, rituals and comprehension, most religions seem to end up with a God who is often angry, petulant, needy, jealous and who will love us only if we are ‘worthy’ and belong to the correct group... Such a salvation system will never work, unless we allow an utterly new dimension of love to ‘astonish us and stand us on our ears’ (2007:20).

He notes that it is an absurdity that stingy people – and he points to himself as an example – end up being more “caring, patient, generous and merciful” (:20) than the picture which many Christians have of God and questions how this is when Jesus spent his time ministering to those who were wounded, unworthy, unsuccessful, abnormal and otherwise outcast. Rohr says, “what makes the Good News good news is precisely that God loves and defends the unworthy and non-innocent life” (:21) and that the starting point for Jesus is not human sin, but human suffering (:22). He notes that most people live with the incorrect assumption that good morality will lead to mystical union. Rather, he says, “mystical union produces correct morality – along with a lot of joy left over” (2001:30).

Rohr’s approach to life and spirituality is one which rejects the spirituality of (often white male driven) power, prestige and possession. Critiquing this approach he says that it communicates the message that “happiness is optional. What is mandatory and

necessary is that the world be divided into those who have the power and those who don't. It makes for good order... and order is more important than happiness" (2003:124). He notes that in this patriarchal system all relationships are defined in terms of superiority and inferiority and the need for control is assured by the exercise of dominative power (:124). He notes sadly that the language of patriarchy is always a noble or macho language of patriotism and freedom (:125).

For centuries we've put up with atrocious evils in the church and have been incapable of calling them evil... We in the priesthood were repeatedly warned about going to bed with women – which, if we took a vow of celibacy, we should be. But why did no one warn us about going to bed with ambition? Or going to bed with power? Or with money? For some reason we didn't recognise those demons... We have always railed against those obvious, material, gross, so-called sins instead of the much more subtle demons that suffocate and destroy the power of the gospel in God's people (Farrell 1994).

Particularly regarding male spirituality he notes the importance of a journey of initiation which moves men beyond ego, control and power into what he calls "the 'second half of life,' the nondualistic mind that we call wisdom" (2010:21).

4.3 Criticism of Rohr

By and large there seems to be little academic criticism of Rohr and his brand of theology. He seems to be fairly widely supported in Catholic newspapers, however as can be expected there is a lot of criticism from conservatives, particularly conservative Catholics.

The website CatholicCulture.org, which exists, according to the website, to "give faithful Catholics the information, encouragement, and perspective they need to become an active force for renewal in the Church and in society, working to shape an authentically Christian culture in a secular world... in conformity with the mind of the Church" (Trinity Communications) and which "draws special inspiration from the outstanding Catholic vision and wisdom of Pope Benedict XVI" (Trinity Communications) is vocal in their lack of support for Rohr.

Fr Bryce Andrew Sibley, writing on the site, criticises Rohr for: describing God as “Mother” commenting, “like many others today, Rohr thinks that patriarchy carries a negative connotation. Once again, however, he runs into the problem of Revelation. It was Christ who became incarnate as male, who deliberately chose men to lead His Church”; and for his viewpoint on homosexuality,

Since homosexual activity is the ultimate denial of sexual difference, Rohr's support of homosexual-advocacy groups such as Soulforce (and thus his implicit support of homosexual activity) is a radical contradiction of the apparent importance he places on sexual difference in his presentation on “male spirituality.” As the Catechism states, “Basing itself on Sacred Scripture, which presents homosexual acts as acts of grave depravity, tradition has always declared that ‘homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered.’ They are contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved” (#2357) (Sibley).

Further, Rohr’s rejection of the substitutionary atonement theory to explain Christ’s death on the cross comes in for criticism, “I will not belabor (*sic*) arguing the point in detail that the crucifixion and death of our Lord was not only part of God’s eternal plan but also necessary for the atonement of sins. I would hope all faithful Catholics already know this” (Sibley). He also criticises Rohr’s understanding of original sin, his embrace of nondualism and what Sibley refers to as the “pagan rituals” that accompany his men’s retreats.

Where others are critical of Rohr they often quote the Sibley article, for example in the answer to the question “is Fr Richard Rohr a dissenter?” on website Catholic Answers Forums (Dolores49 2005). This website allows lay people to ask questions that they may have, and others from the Catholic community (who may well be unqualified) to answer them.

The article is also quoted by the website *Los Pequeños de Cristo, Inc.* which maintains a dossier on his activities. This group, “comprised of individuals from around the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, New Mexico,” (Los Pequeños de Cristo Inc) who are “devoted

to the Roman Catholic Magisterium, the Holy Father, and to the bishops and clergy in union with him” (Los Pequeños de Cristo Inc). The site claims to publish research papers on topics of concern to the Catholics in the Santa Fe Archdiocese (the area where Rohr has his retreat centre).

4.4 Rohr on hope

Just as Buchan has no clear theology of hope, neither does Rohr try to describe what hope is. Rather he deals with humanity’s postmodern anxiety and how the cross calls us to confront that anxiety through the transforming power of love and acceptance. He speaks of the difficulties that people face, not just in everyday life, but also in the perception of the absence of a good God. “[Postmodernism] is a major crisis of meaning for the West, and at the deepest level it is a loss of hope,” he says (Farrell 1994:1). “Were we honest, maybe many of us would admit we do not have a lot of evidence of God’s goodness. For many people, faith is just whistling in the dark, hoping against hope that God is indeed good” (:3). He describes the spirit of the age as one of hopelessness: “There is no hope in most countries I visit. It’s almost as if there is no future for this planet” (Rohr & Feister 2001:27).

Blogger MikeF quotes Rohr’s understanding that “biblical hope is the certainty that things finally have a victorious meaning no matter how they turn out. We learned that from Jesus, which gives us now the courage to live our lives forward from here” (2010). Hope then is about having courage in the midst of the difficulties and challenges that life presents rather than some vague belief that “all will work out well” (MikeF 2011).

So hope for Rohr is not the about the quick fix of an altar call, but about transformation through accepting a different reality – the reality that God is there and is good even when so many things may seem to indicate the opposite. He speaks about his brother and family choosing to live outside the mainstream and mentions his brother’s children and their friends coming to see him and bringing animals to be blessed while he was visiting there. “To these folks it’s still an enchanted universe, filled with communion and mystery. If religion does not give us that sense of belonging to a sacred world of meaning, it is pretty useless (Rohr and Feister 2001:49). He claims that in the midst of a daily struggle, people need “the mythology of a bigger, better world to ‘recover’ to.”

(Farrell 1994:2).

His criticism of much religion is that “somehow Jesus becomes the great problem-solver and answer-giver for the next world and not primarily the one who teaches us how to live with peace and freedom in this world. It’s fire-insurance religion instead of a banquet-right-now.” (2001:22)

Hope is not to be found in a tribal world defined by the black and white of both conservatives and liberals, in a denial of one’s struggles through the papering over of what is wrong with platitudes, but in being able to say yes to one’s brokenness and in so doing to own it. He says, “Hope is about people who know the dark side but build anyway,” (:79) but also notes “I’m not encouraging mindless enthusiasm, but the enthusiasm that is based on intelligence and wisdom and that great gift of hope. Hope is a participation in the very life of God” (:52). Grappling with reality rather than trying to escape it is a way to let go of postmodern anxiety and trust that God is good, the world is good and we are good (:43). He expresses the same sentiment elsewhere when he says that people need to know that “God *is*, God is *good*, God can be *trusted* and God is *on your side*” (:19) (Italics his).

Hope, for both Buchan and Rohr, is to be found in the reinstatement of what has been damaged through the religious establishment of the modern era and deconstructed in postmodernism. They present, for their followers, a vision of hope in a confusing postmodern era.

Just as Buchan is concerned about young people who feel they have no hope for the future (1998:68), Rohr is also concerned about the next generation. “They seem to have nothing... our people are dying for lack of vision, for lack of transcendent meaning to name their souls and their struggles” (Farrell 1994:6). Farrell notes that Rohr believes that the only worthwhile contribution is in “searching out and pointing at what’s right, worthwhile for the next generation to place its hope in” (:6).

Blogger CanadaSue, who writes on issues of spirituality, quotes from Rohr’s devotional CD:

What word of hope does the Church have to offer the world? The world is tired of our ideas and theologies. Its tired of our lazy church services. Its no longer going to believe ideas, but it will believe love. It will believe life that is given and received... Yet we've lived in our heads so long, the world no longer listens to us. I don't need your words, the world says to us. I don't need your sermons. I want life. And I want life more abundantly. What word of hope do we have to offer to the millions of workers in the world who see no meaning in their life? What word of hope have we for all the women who bear children and, day after day, say, what is the meaning of this life? For most people in the world the question is not, Is there a life on the other side of death? It is, rather, Is there life on this side of death? Until we Christians give evidence that there is life on this side of death, the world does not need to believe our dogmas and giant churches. It doesn't need our words of hell. It needs our promise of heaven (Canadasue).

Farrell sums up Rohr's teaching on hope for the broken with these words:

We come to God through our imperfection... When we can live with that, can accept that humble, broken state, and even rejoice in it, then we're free. Then we have nothing to protect, no illusions to maintain before ourselves and other people. We know who we are, and that's whom God loves. That's freedom. There's no other freedom to match it (1994:5).

This, says Farrel, is hope.

5 Conclusion to chapter

Speaking as an member of the audiences at one of Buchan's meetings, Johan Bisschoff of Vereeniging said that the Afrikaans people and the whole of the country are looking for something positive (Jackson 2008), the "capacity to inspire courage, to give vision against the odds, to create dreams out of the raw materials of fear and uncertainty" mentioned at the end of the last chapter (Ward 170-171). It would seem that both Buchan and Rohr regard hope as an economic product to be marketed, albeit in a way that uses different methodology and is meaningful to different people. I turn now to a closer look at the audience and why the respective messages are meaningful for them.

Chapter 4: Methodology

1 Introduction

Having completed the literature review to determine the nature of each author's theology and approach to the subject of hope, the second part of the study seeks to understand how each authors' followers perceive and appropriate those messages. This chapter therefore intends to present an overview of the research methodology used and will also deal with some of the issues raised in the research that are not particularly concerned with the subject of hope. The next chapter will consider the information related to hope in more detail.

The qualitative research survey consisted of two sets of semi-structured interviews of ten to twenty people each, one set for Buchan's followers, and one for Rohr's, the intention being to determine the respective adherents' views of the author and his message of hope. The research was conducted in the following manner:

2 Nature of interviews

2.1 Subjects and location

In my choosing respondents the most important characteristic was finding people who were enthusiastic about the particular author. As far as possible I tried to select participants known to me who are involved in my congregation as average members of the church. It became clear very early on in the research that the two groups of respondents would have very different backgrounds and interests. While it would have been ideal from a study point of view to have people of a similar demographic and background, with such different authors this was not going to be the case.

In order to select interviewees, then, for Buchan's followers I started with people that I knew who had been to one or more Mighty Men's Conference and were passionate about recruiting others to join them. In the case of Rohr's followers I was aware of a colleague who had been to see Rohr in Cape Town and asked him for a list of people he knew who may be willing to participate in an interview. In both cases after each interview I asked the participants if they knew of others who were enthusiastic and were willing to be a part of the study, and in that manner increased the size of the group.

2.1.1 Buchan's followers

The motivation behind doing this study was to compare two different ways of doing theology and particularly to determine why a fundamentalist theology is attractive to people of different denominations. Because Buchan's followers are evident in most congregations – including my own – he was chosen as a case study representing the fundamentalist point of view.

In terms of Buchan's followers, the majority of the respondents come from either the East Rand (Brackenhurst and Benoni) or Standerton, a farming community about 160km southeast of Johannesburg. Brackenhurst and Standerton Methodist Churches are my previous and current congregations respectively.

Fifteen respondents were interviewed regarding Buchan between October and December 2011. It should be noted that with one exception all of the respondents are lay people, one of whom is in the process of entering the ordained ministry of the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, MCSA, as a deacon. The exception is an ordained pastor in the Volle Evangelie Kerk (Afrikaans Full Gospel Church). Other clergy persons approached were reluctant to be interviewed in spite of their professed enthusiasm for Buchan, offering excuses such as not knowing his work that well, or suggesting that there are members of their congregation who would be better to interview or who are more *aux fait* with Buchan's work, had attended more conferences and so on.

A number of the Buchan interviews which took place in the Standerton area were conducted with respondents who are or were involved in farming; while some are Methodist, others are originally members of diverse congregations with many currently worshipping at *Replika* Church in Standerton. In some cases the respondents are Afrikaans speaking, but as far as possible interviews were conducted in English, although sometimes a mixture of English and Afrikaans was used and in two cases were conducted mainly in Afrikaans.

By and large the lay people approached were very enthusiastic about being able to participate in the research and of the fifteen interviewed, nine had attended a Mighty

Men's Conference, six had not attended (two being women who both said that they would have liked to) and one respondent did not indicate.

2.1.2 Rohr's followers

Rohr's emerging approach to Christianity is offered as a contrast to the fundamentalist approach of Buchan, and so the demographic of Rohr's followers was naturally different to that of Buchan's. Rohr is much less well known among the laity and average congregation member, and his followers were far more difficult to pin down, although they were equally enthusiastic to share their views and to participate.

A total of fourteen interviews took place between September 2011 and February 2012 over a far greater area than Buchan's followers. Followers were interviewed in the Western Cape, Johannesburg, KwaZulu-Natal, the East Rand and Mpumalanga. As far as possible interviews were conducted face to face, but due to distances involved five were conducted using Skype.

In contrast to Buchan's followers the majority of the respondents are ordained, mainly in the MCSA. Of the three who are not, two are involved in counselling / spiritual direction. Some respondents have worked closely with Rohr: three were involved in bringing him to South Africa in the early 2000s or in 2010, and another has done an internship at Rohr's Center for Action and Contemplation in New Mexico. Of the fourteen respondents interviewed, eleven had attended a workshop at which he presented, two had not seen him live and one didn't indicate.

Both sets of interviews took place most often in the respondent's home, and occasionally at a church, in coffee shops and in one instance at my home. In no case did a respondent indicate that a pseudonym should be used, however seven of the 29 respondents indicated that their first name only should be used. Where this is the case I have indicated it by means of an asterisk (*). To differentiate the responses of ordained respondents I identify them for the first time as "Rev."

2.2 Structure of interview

In order to determine what it is that makes the particular author's theology of hope

meaningful to the respondents, the semi-structured interviews covered material such as home background, education and profession; the respondent's own faith journey, understanding and experience of God, and understanding of the point of Christianity; hope and how they understand it, particularly hope for South Africa; their own awareness of the author – either Buchan or Rohr – and how he has given them hope; and then finally they were questioned regarding the other author. The full outline of interview structure is reproduced in the appendix, however, as a semi-structured interview, there were departures from this guide.

The purpose of the questions was mainly to determine what it is that makes an author attractive to them and their understanding of hope. A secondary goal was to determine if there are areas of commonality in terms of background, age, education, and whether the encounter with the author and his theology could be transformative, not only in the theological sphere of life, but also in other areas such as relationships with significant others and in social, South African settings.

3 Preliminary comments

In this section I wish to add a few brief observations to comments already made regarding the respondents and the content of some of their interviews. This is not intended to be an analysis, but is rather an observation of some of the trends that were noted.

3.1 Respondents

As noted above, a majority of the Buchan respondents are farmers or involved in the farming community, while the Rohr respondents could perhaps be described as professional religionists. Although age wasn't considered a critical area of study, a comparison of the age spread between the two groups of followers shows that the spread is very similar. The age of Buchan's respondents tended to be slightly younger with more falling into the 30-50+ age group, while the age of Rohr's followers tended to be a bit higher with several respondents describing themselves as older than 60. This is of interest regarding comments made in chapter two which indicated that it was mostly the younger Generation-X who were excited by the emerging church. It was also noticed, although not indicated in the interviews, that Rohr's followers tend to have a

greater involvement with social media.

In terms of education and work, Buchan's followers tended to have less formal, tertiary education with few being educated to post-grad level. Comments made frequently by these respondents indicated that the reason that they enjoy his teaching is his simplicity and ability to relate to the common person, not just in terms of his teaching, but also in relation to his dress, life experience and apparently simple lifestyle. Respondents expressed a "he's one of us" attitude towards him, and there was a clear sense from many of the respondents in the Buchan interviews that "we see from his life that he has overcome and emerged victorious, and if he – who is one of us – can do it, then so can we." It is this attitude, in many cases, that gives the respondents hope.

Rohr's followers, on the other hand, almost universally hold at least an under-grad degree, two didn't mention their studies and one indicated that he had attended university but had not passed.

Most of Rohr's followers felt that Buchan's teaching is genuinely meaningful for his adherents, and particularly for Christ-followers at a particular stage of their journey. Some of them expressed the sentiment that it is a necessary part of the faith journey to be fundamentalist and shared some of their own stories regarding the time in their lives when they read scripture far more literally, however they also saw that stage as a stepping stone from which further growth is needed, rather than the journey's end.

I had also wondered about the relationship between childhood attitudes towards God, either personal or in the home, and whether those attitudes had had any influence in the faith and preference of the respondents as adults, however this was not evident. Some respondents in both groups indicated that they had had a difficult childhood and issues with their fathers. Some indicated that they grew up in religious homes while others indicated a non-religious background but the spread between the two groups seemed to be very similar. A quantitative study would be more helpful for drawing any conclusions in this area. A couple of comments were made, however, regarding fathers and their role in society and suggest that this could be an important area for further study.

3.2 Concept of Hope

To a large extent respondents struggled to define what they understood by “hope” or “Christian hope.” As expected there was a fairly clear line between followers of Buchan and Rohr, with Buchan’s followers stating a hope of life beyond death and the purpose of Christianity being to save souls, as expressed in Buchan’s Ministry Statement. While this was a common response of Buchan’s followers, there were those who responded differently. Rohr’s followers, to a greater extent, expressed the purpose of Christianity as a way to a fuller, richer life in the present.

Most respondents found it difficult to express what hope could mean either for themselves, other Christians (particularly the South African “pale male”) or for people of South Africa in the first part of the twenty-first century. Perhaps this was simply a result of not having had an adequate opportunity to reflect, but it does raise questions regarding the work of the church in society. As indicated at the close of chapter two, the challenge faced by South Africa and the Church in South Africa at this juncture is to paint a clear picture of what hope looks like.

3.3 Understanding of God and purpose of Christianity

Part of the interview was to determine how the respondents understand God and the purpose of Christianity and how that understanding influences their idea of hope. It is helpful to consider that in some detail here, as I will not return to this topic in chapter five.

3.3.1 Buchan

When asked about God and the point of Christianity, Buchan’s followers most often spoke about giving one’s life to Christ to go to heaven one day, but a number of them also spoke about personal transformation and making a difference in this world.

In terms of early Christian experience many of the respondents, especially those from an Afrikaans background, spoke about a strict religious upbringing and regular attendance at church. Some, such as Marneweck, indicated that because of their upbringing they didn’t have a “Damascus” experience (Louis Marneweck, interview by

Neil Vels 11 November 2011, in Standerton) while others, like Tony Habgood and Gerrit Smit, spoke of a life-changing event.

I felt the Holy Spirit take hold of me. I felt the power of the Spirit. You know I, my whole body felt as if it was going to explode. It was a very physical experience, I was tingling all over... it's hard to describe in detail, but you know it was a very physical experience... the moment I got up there from my knees, I've never stopped talking about God. I knew instantly, "Now I have to share..."

(Gerrit Smit, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Volksrust).

In most cases conversion, or giving one's life to Jesus, was seen as an important part of the faith journey and was mentioned regularly in respect of hope.

A common word used by Buchan's followers to describe God was relationship and they often referred to their experiences of God as Dave Stols does:

When you have that real experience, God is alive. He's there, it's as real as what I might be talking to you right now, that was the experience. Hence I want to try and give people, try and give more and more, people that experience... that face-to-face, that face-to-face, that's how real it was to me... That's just stayed with me... (Dave Stols, interview by Neil Vels, 25 November 2011 in Brakpan).

Yvonne Cawood also emphasised her experience of God as deep knowledge of presence speaking to her and revealing his love for her and her purpose in life, firstly that came to her as a teenager but which has continued to give her strength and courage daily (Yvonne Cawood, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Platrand). The sustaining presence of Christ in day-to-day challenges was a common theme expressed by the respondents.

When asked about the purpose or point of Christianity, Buchan's followers answered mostly as expected with something along the lines of Allen Duncan's words: "If I read the Bible and I believe every word, and I keep it simple, then there's only one way to heaven and that's through Jesus Christ." (Allen Duncan, interview by Neil Vels, 21 November 2011 in Standerton). Again the word "relationship" was used and Christianity was seen as setting a standard for one's lifestyle. There was a greater

emphasis than expected on the fact that Christianity isn't only about going to heaven, but is also about transformation in this life and doing God's work with Stan*, Cawood, Duncan, Smit and others indicating something along those lines. Habgood expressed it this way:

It's about suddenly realising that Christ has come to give you a better life and you're gonna live in this world in a different way, and you're going to be free of the things that kind of captivate you in a way that's not healthy. Whether it is work, whether it is something ugly, but even your family can be so captivating that it robs you of the joy of walking with Christ... (Tony Habgood, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Benoni)

3.3.2 Rohr

Like Buchan's followers, Rohr's followers spoke of their early Christian faith in a similar way. Some of them came from homes in which they attended church regularly, others not, but to a large extent described a response to the presence of God at an altar call or similar evangelical experience of "giving their life to Christ," for example Revs Jenny*, Trevor Hudson and Brenda Timmer:

the context was evangelical so I made a commitment to Christ as a teenager, I had my sins forgiven, I said the right formula of "Jesus come into my heart, I confess all my sins," so that was the beginning, the traditional evangelical, make a commitment thing. And really was very much part of my journey (Brenda Timmer, interview by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011 in Soweto).

Subjectively this theme was downplayed in comparison to Buchan's followers, and the idea of journey emphasised, "I was there but I've moved on and my faith looks different now." As Sergio Milandri says, "it's been a consistent journey. With time, in a sense, it deepens because things change and situations demand shifts in perspective and in commitment" (Sergio Milandri, interview by Neil Vels, 2 February 2012 in Cape Town (via Skype)). Others echoed this view such as Rev Steven Lottering and Hudson as they described their view of God changing over the years.

As the respondents described this journey of change they spoke of how their

understanding of God had grown to make God bigger and more inclusive than God had been in their past and spoke more of God being mystery than of having come to a place where they feel that God can be described. There was a great emphasis on the contribution of other faiths, for example Jenny*:

Christianity doesn't have a monopoly on God any more. There was a time when I believed that the whole world was needing to be saved, and they needed to know Jesus as their Saviour... But I don't believe that any longer. I believe Muslims, Hindus and Baha'i and African traditional and whatever there is come to God in a different way and, ja, and there's no great need for me any more to convert them to Christianity. (Jenny*, interview by Neil Vels 21 December 2011 in Durban (via Skype)).

Respondents such as Rev Kevin Sprong, Milandri, Jordaan, George* and others were more inclined to describe God as presence and life force and spoke about the sacred in everything and everyone, for example Lottering:

It's a presence that I think sustains and holds all things together, and so it's at the very core of life. And it's at the very core of my being that I find God. So I'm able to experience God in so many different things, I'm able to just find God coming through in unexpected ways. In encounters with people, and all people, not necessarily specifically Christian people... (Steven Lottering, interview by Neil Vels, 24 January 2012 in Cape Town (via Skype))

Marina Fick says "God is real by just being able to breathe! It's not something out there; it's not someone out there... God is not a person, but he's personal. God is so much bigger, so vast, such a mystery, but personal" (Marina Fick, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Benoni), a view affirmed by Andrews who sees God as close, warm presence and Christ as the expression of God, but not God (Colin Andrews, interview by Neil Vels, 30 January 2011 in Pinetown).

The purpose of Christianity, then, is not about "getting saved" but is about getting to know the God whom Jesus reveals and learning to live that presence of God out in the world in an integrative way, as Hudson says, "learning what it means to live with God

in this world and to participate in God's dream for this world... with the particularities of my very local life, as a father, as a husband, as a citizen, et cetera..." (Trevor Hudson, interview by Neil Vels, 20 November 2011 in Benoni).

Oosthuizen sees Christianity as engaging the Kingdom of God (Paul Oosthuizen, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Edenvale) which means "to step into what is already happening through God and his Spirit and all of that and not so much having our own agenda set up..." (George*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Bapsfontein). Many of the respondents, such as Milandri, spoke about Christianity as a connection with all things,

It connects one with the ultimate, with the ultimate essence of life... and so for me it's living to the full and connecting with every aspect of my being, with the God who calls me into being, and who invites me to be fully myself, and who also wants to us integrate and be in communities that give life, so it's a sort of integrating reality which actually gives meaning and gives substance and gives direction to life...

There was a strong understanding that in Christ everything is joined together and that this is what he came to reveal to us, for example Fick and Rev Terry Howell:

God was in Christ reconciling all things to himself, I think that's what Christianity is about. It's about the process of everything in the world being reconciled to God. It's not just getting people into heaven. It's kingdom of God coming into being wherever we are... Christianity is a relationship. Which *is*, not that works (Terry Howell, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011 in Secunda).

One of the interesting observations is that although Buchan's followers in particular emphasised his instruction to join a "Bible-based" church – which many of them had done – when asked about the purpose of Christianity none of the respondents linked being a Christian to going to church, with at least two, one each of Buchan and Rohr's followers (Habgood and Jordaan), indicating that church was an insignificant part of being a Christian.

3.4 Relationship to author

Regarding Buchan, most respondents had seen him live or had met him – he held a campaign in Standerton a number of years ago, and many of those interviewed from Standerton had been a part of that – and most had attended one or more of the Mighty Men’s Conferences and watched his television appearances. To a large extent the respondents, especially the two women, see Buchan as a father figure, often referring to him as “Oom Angus” (Uncle Angus). There is a familiarity when speaking about him that was not found among those who follow Rohr. He is referred to almost as a family member by his first name, whereas with a few exceptions those who follow Rohr address him by his surname as an academic.

The exceptions are those respondents mentioned earlier who have had opportunity to meet and work with Rohr, one respondent having hosted him in his home when he visited South Africa for the first time in 2002. Respondents’ experience with Rohr is varied with many having listened to audio recordings and read his books. Respondents also reported receiving daily devotions from him via email and a majority have seen him live as indicated above.

It is noted that most of the Buchan respondents had not heard of Rohr, some indicated that the name sounded familiar, and one said that he knew of Rohr but had no thoughts regarding him. All the Rohr respondents stated an awareness of Buchan, however, mostly through his movie, and in the case of ministers through members of their congregations who are enthusiastic Buchan supporters. To a large extent they declined to comment as they felt they did not know him or his work well enough. Where comments were made they tended to describe the effect that they had observed on men in their congregations.

3.5 Effect on life

While not one of the questions in the semi-structured interview, as a follow up to the question regarding how the respective authors encourage and give their readers hope, some respondents described further long-term effects as a result of following their respective author. Positive effects that resulted in behaviour change were remarked on

either by the respondents themselves, or by others who knew the respondents, for example Dave Crookes:

Everything's started to ripen and I feel the Lord in my life more... And I speak to him more, interact with him more easily, and Angus too, with his books, you know and starting to read his daily devotions, his prayers each day and then that little line of, say of scripture that was at the bottom of each page, and then picking it up that it started to really come home to me... (Dave Crookes, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Platrand).

This was attested to particularly by Buchan's followers as they described how they returned from a conference with a renewed zeal to spend time with God and in reading the bible, for example Manie* who said, "if you say you haven't got time in the morning, that your day is too busy, then stand up at five... and if you still haven't got time then you stand up at four..." (Manie*, interview by Neil Vels, 8 December 2011 in Standerton, translated from Afrikaans).

Typical of emerging Christians, Rohr's followers seemed more inclusive and accepting of diverse points of view, and enjoy the freedom that Rohr offers them to come with their own points of view, however what they seemed to get out of their reading and/or listening to Rohr was very different. If Buchan's followers are encouraged to activism and battle against, Rohr's are moved to a more contemplative state and ability to just "be" (for example Dalene Jordaan, interview by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011 in Ruimsig). It is in this area where the most notable differences in attitudes to "power, prestige and possession" were observed. It is not clear if this is a result of the subjects' teaching or the differing personality types of the respondents who are naturally attracted to different leading / teaching / living styles – the expression of human nature to be attracted to someone who affirms one's own certitudes.

One of the common comments regarding Rohr was that he enabled the respondent to embrace the "shadow-self" and this was seen as being helpful. These ideas, which relate to the concept of hope, will be explored further and in greater detail in the next chapter.

4 Analysis of data

4.1 Recording procedure

All interviews were audio recorded with the respondents' permission and "Informed Consent" forms were completed. In the first interview the battery of the recording device went flat before the interview was over, but otherwise recordings were done without any difficulties. My experience was that as soon as participants were aware that they were being recorded they became less spontaneous, and often more helpful or insightful conversation was held before recording started or after it had been stopped.

After the interviews the recordings were transferred to computer as MP3 files (with the exception of the Skype interviews which were recorded directly onto the computer) and burnt onto optical media. The audio recordings were transcribed into written documents which were used for the basis of analysis.

4.2 Analysis

There are two potential options which can be used for analysing qualitative data collection from semi-structured interviews. The first is coding, the second recursive abstraction (Wikipedia, *Qualitative Research*:2011).

4.2.1 Coding

Coding is a process whereby data is separated into clearly demarcated sections, each of which is then labelled with a "code" such as a word or phrase. The different responses relating to that word are then compared or contrasted. This method of analysis is more effective when used with highly structured data, and so is not always useful for analysing a semi-structured interview.

4.2.2 Recursive abstraction

Recursive abstraction is a different technique whereby the data is analysed without being coded. Rather, the different data sets are summarised to extract the core information which is then repeatedly summarised further to produce a more compact summary.

Although there are criticisms against both methods this study did not use a formal coding method but made use of recursive abstraction to summarise the datasets as it is more appropriate to the data collected from the semi-structured interview. In order to identify the different data sets coloured highlighters were used on the appropriate section of the printed transcripts. These highlighted sections were then analysed and summarised to extract the core information which is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Things Yet Unseen

1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine two different approaches to the topic of Christian hope with the purpose of offering insight into how the church as a group of people who claim to follow Christ can be a bearer of hope in the world of the twenty-first century, particularly in white middle-class South Africa. Up to this point the focus of the thesis has been on background necessary to deal with the information provided by the respondents. So far I have examined two different approaches, one a shift to a more fundamentalist paradigm exemplified by popular South Africa evangelist Angus Buchan, and the other an emerging church approach in which I have chosen to study popular American author and speaker Richard Rohr, and have looked at Christian hope and how the respective subjects differ in their approaches to this topic. In this chapter I examine the replies of respondents interviewed in order to understand what they find attractive about the authors, and how the authors speak a message of hope to them.

1.1 Outline of Chapter

I will begin this chapter by returning to some thoughts about the South African context as defined by the respondents in order to determine where their need for hope lies. Once I have done that I will move on to exploring the appeal of both Buchan and Rohr and how their adherents understand their respective messages of hope in their South African context. Part of the discussion will be a look at the picture of hope that is presented by each author for a Christian community. In the concluding chapter I will look at how Buchan and Rohr speak a message of hope to their followers in South Africa today.

1.2 Overview of differences

As discussed earlier, a marked difference between the two authors is found in the way that they approach the themes of power, prestige and possession. It is helpful at this point to recap the key differences in the respective approaches to hope, noting that the appeal of each author lies in the way they present their topic to their respective audiences.

Buchan's approach understands power, prestige and possession to be given by God to the faithful and is something to be desired: Men are not people who are weak, but people who are strong, who have standing in the community and who can have hope largely through a restored place for the man in a society in which his position has apparently been eroded. Indeed, as stated, his objective is the recovery of a powerful masculinity (Cloete & de Villiers 2010:1) In addition, hope is to be found in salvation in the evangelical sense as Buchan testifies to lives that are transformed – and positions restored – as a result of accepting Jesus as Saviour. The stories that he tells are stories of people responding to God in faith, and finding their prayers answered as he has experienced in his own life.

In contrast Rohr, as one of the leaders of the emerging church, suggests that in order to discover meaning people need to let go of those compulsions for power, prestige and possession and embrace the poverty of human limits and weakness. Indeed, people find hope by having courage in the midst of difficulties and challenges through accepting the reality that God is there and is good even when it doesn't seem like it. He suggests that people come to God not through righteousness but through imperfection, with hope being found in the freedom to do that. It is only when the demons of power, righteousness and success are stared down, that humans are able to escape the wilderness (Rohr 2003a:174). It is power, prestige and possession, the very things that Buchan seems to advocate, that prevent people from recognising and receiving the reign of God (:56). This response is very much a reaction to the perceived materialism of the modern world, and while it is commendable, in terms of this study, both Rohr and Buchan's followers – although some may disagree – are all economically privileged.

It would appear then that those who feel deprived or rendered impotent, or who feel as though they have had those things taken from them are going to feel attracted by one who offers to return what they have lost – in this case Buchan; likewise the one who is able to give up is more likely to be attracted by a speaker who affirms the value of loss – here Rohr who affirms what he calls “the path of descent”. In many cases those who affirm Rohr's message have already travelled the path of “power, prestige and possession” and found it wanting. The respective understandings of hope are therefore deeply coloured by the people who hear the message.

It is also worthwhile noting that while there are key differences in the respective approaches to theology and spirituality, there are some common themes and these will also be explored in the subsequent section.

I will return to the theme of power, prestige and possession in concluding the chapter.

2 South African Context and the need for hope

The challenging South African context is one in which people are required to live in hope daily in order to survive. While some respondents see South Africa as having untold potential, there are others who are less hopeful about the country. Some expressed dismay at the growing culture of materialism both inside and outside the church, and others were concerned at the sense of loss – both of security and identity.

Having already discussed the South African context broadly in chapter two, I now turn to those issues in more depth. Subsequent to that I will look at how the respondents perceive the South African context, and how their faith helps them to discern hope and meaning in that.

2.1 Insecurity and the search for identity

It is the sense of insecurity, whether expressed overtly as a fear of crime – being insecure in one's home, fear for one's safety, or fear of lack of employment, or insecurity in terms of who they are and their place in society – that seems to drive Buchan's adherents to him as a person who offers a place and position of security and a new identity in a world where the old one has been taken away. In the interviews respondents spoke of their struggles, for example farmers mentioned their difficulties farming, such as land claims and weather and a general sense of everything and everyone in the South Africa being against them (Yvonne Cawood, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Platrand); Annette Smit said this:

You see the news and the newspapers and it's very negative. And because we stay in a farming community and it's dangerous and, we're inclined to be negative every time you hear something has happened and I often wonder how a person, a Christian, is supposed to deal with this (Annette Smit, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Volksrust).

Fear was identified by Lottering as one of the great difficulties faced in South Africa today, “I think that’s one of the key struggles in South Africa as well, is people living in fear, fear of unemployment, fear of the consequences of that, violence, crime, a lack of education.” (Steven Lottering, interviewed by Neil Vels, 24 January 2012 in Mossel bay (via Skype)). Lottering made a further observation, however, which I believe is helpful in studying the Buchan / Rohr dynamic, particularly from a point of view of insecurity:

People in South Africa are struggling with... a sense of identity. Or maybe a lack of identity. I think for so long in our country a huge percentage of our population found their identity in the struggle, and the struggle became everything. It defined who they were, what they did, how they lived their lives, and now that that struggle has changed... I think it’s left people... without a sense of identity.
(Steven Lottering, interview by Neil Vels, 24 January 2012, in Mossel Bay)

While his comment is related to the difficulties with gangsterism and the search for identity and meaning in a common group, I would posit that it is this same search for identity in a context of loss that has led Buchan’s followers to embrace the sense of community that the Mighty Men’s movement creates so enthusiastically. While Lottering also mentions lack of education, crime, violence and unemployment as contributing toward a sense of hopelessness in South Africa today, Howell, a minister at Ermelo, agrees that Buchan offers his followers a sense of security (Terry Howell, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011, in Secunda).

Rohr’s followers recognised that there are bad things happening in South Africa but celebrated the presence of God even in the midst of the bad. As they looked at South Africa they tended to express a desire for transformation and for justice. Van de Laar said:

Here we sit the day after the Information Bill is passed in parliament and I’m looking online and I’m seeing all the pessimism and all the cynicism and all the lack of hope coming out of that. And there’s a big part of me that’s going, yes, I’m frustrated by that, yes I’m concerned for what that might mean for our democracy... but I have hope! That even in the midst of this, God is at work...

(Rev John van de Laar, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011 in Cape Town (via Skype)).

2.2 Male insecurity

While the focus of this study is on hope and not on masculinity, with both of the authors having a ministry that is aimed at men, there are a number of issues relating to masculinity and the context of men in South Africa that need to be acknowledged. Once again these issues come up strongly in what it is that men find appealing about Buchan and his approach to power, popularity and possession.

Hudson offers insight into why Rohr's theology is helpful in South Africa today:

I think we have very powerful discourses, social discourses about masculinity in South Africa. Very powerful, across the board, and how we have constructed what masculinity needs to look like, as a nation. I think on the whole, the proof is in the pudding, really, when you look at the effects of that in terms of women, children, the abuse situation... (Trevor Hudson, interview by Neil Vels, 20 December 2011 in Benoni)

It is worth noting that at the time of writing a television advertisement featuring male South African celebrities has appeared which challenges some of the negative images of masculinity prevalent in society.

For many men, local white male insecurity is linked to a loss of power and control over the future of South Africa. According to Habgood, presently a lay pastor, a lot of white men in South Africa have an idea that the future is bleak because of BEE (Anthony Habgood, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Benoni). South Africa today is a place where men feel impotent and stressed (James*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 December 2011 in Standerton) and are inclined to blame it on race (Gerrit Smit, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Volksrust). Oosthuizen notes how society has changed for the white male in the last fifteen to twenty years:

I think for many white males it's been deeply, deeply wounding, and their sense of who they are, what it means to be a male, their sense of power, status, all those

things have been challenged, undermined, shaken up and what they believed in completely turned out to be a lie. (Paul Oosthuizen, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Edenvale)

The research suggests that many people feel that they are not a part of a community in South Africa anymore and long for a new community, either the type of community that they find at a Mighty Men's Conference, or a community that they hope to find overseas. It is these issues that lead men to look for a support system and, as noted below, many of Buchan's followers stressed the importance of the masculine community discovered at the Mighty Men Conferences. Watson* said it this way, "We are experiencing things and we are experiencing this country and business and work and family and all these things, but we don't share with each other" (Watson*, Interview by Neil Vels, 18 November 2011 in Standerton). He goes on to claim that men are "hungry":

Hungry for the Word of God. Hungry for, sometimes hungry for something which they don't really know. All of us know that there is a God. All of us are hungry for a god. It's just we don't all know the God. And the thing is so all of us are hungry, all of us are hungry to get, we all want and need healing and we all need to be told, that, you know, it's gonna be okay. (Watson*, interview by Neil Vels, 18 November 2011 in Standerton)

3 The Appeal of Buchan and Rohr

While it has been helpful to consider the context spoken about by both groups of followers together because, to a large extent, it is the same context, although experiences and perceptions of it may vary, for this section it will be more helpful to consider the responses of the two groups of respondents separately.

Buchan is a fundamentalist and so it is expected that his followers will be attracted to this type of theology – a theology which claims to hold to complete truth as expressed in the inerrant Word of God for the purpose of salvation for those who believe in Jesus Christ.

3.1 Angus Buchan

The reasons for Buchan's appeal are many and, to a large extent, wrapped up in each other and his message, so it is difficult to focus on one aspect of who he is and to proclaim this as a reason why he is so popular. Perhaps the best short response is Watson's* comment that men are hungry for something, and Buchan seems to offer it. There are several common themes, however, and to a great extent nearly everybody interviewed agreed on these items, using very similar language to do so.

An important part of why Buchan appeals is his message, and this will be considered in the next section as essentially it is a message of hope. Buchan follower and pastor Ps Gerhard* says, "there's hope in what he's teaching... [what] is very significant to me, is the fact that his messages are not highly theological messages. It's plain and ABC, it's not that deep, you know, but still he's delivering a message of hope to the guys" (Gerhard*, interview by Neil Vels, 14 November 2011 in Standerton).

3.1.1 He is simple

The first comment that most of the respondents made when asked about why they find Buchan attractive is that he is simple and direct. Often this was presented in contrast to the church and ministers who, respondents felt, are difficult to understand and who are not always able to relate to their situations and circumstances. As has been mentioned elsewhere, the respondents found Buchan's lack of education important in the way he relates to them, for example Watson*:

And that's another thing that struck me of Uncle Angus, is, you know, that he didn't study anything. I think he has a standard eight... I don't care about titles and stuff, and that's what I like about Angus as well (Watson*, interview by Neil Vels, 18 November 2011 in Standerton).

This way of communicating was expressed in different ways such as simplicity (for example Cawood, Stols, Manie*, James*, Crookes, Smit and Marneweck), being practical (Watson* and Duncan) being direct (Stols and Watson*). As an example of what the respondents had to say, Smit and Duncan expressed things very similarly:

Now if ever there was a person in South Africa that had the image of being from the people, for the people it was Angus Buchan. He's a farmer... and he's a fairly easy communicator, good talker... He speaks very simple, simply, uses simple language, uses day to day experiences – his own – and he's not too scared to call a spade a spade, you know, he's fairly direct, but in a Christian manner (Gerrit Smit, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Volksrust).

Because he's down to earth, he can relate to us people who aren't Bible scholars and he's just basically, and he's so dependent on God, I mean he's just... that's what makes him special. He's... this farmer that rides horses and he's got his Stetson and he wears his denims and he'll kneel down on stage and he's not afraid to confess and to do what he does in front of the last, was it 200 000 men? The undiluted Word of God (Allen Duncan, interview by Neil Vels 21 November 2011 in Standerton).

The simple way in which he uses scripture, “the undiluted Word of God” (Duncan), is an important part of his appeal, with a number of respondents, such as Watson* agreeing. People also commented on his personality as a part of what attracted them to him, feeling that he is genuine, real and honest (For example Naudé, Spencer-Crooks, James* and Crookes).

3.1.2 He is a farmer

The fact that Angus is a farmer and ‘of the land’ also makes him and his message very appealing, particularly for the people interviewed in the more rural areas of South Africa and who are farmers themselves. Again, this came across in a majority of the interviews conducted, but some of the typical comments made were:

Angus also knows farming. You see the majority of South Africans has got some link with the soil and they care about the environment and all that and Angus also knows about droughts and he knows about bumper crops and all that, but... he's not telling you about himself. He's telling you about Jesus Christ, and that is one of the things that appeals to Afrikaans people. (Louis Marneweck, interview by Neil Vels 11 November 2011 in Standerton)

You can relate because it is a farmer who's speaking... Because it's a farmer, you can say, "Right, what that guy is saying, I can connect with." And that's for a start. So you get there, and you can relax because I know the guy isn't going to feed us bull. What is coming is from the heart. (James* interview by Neil Vels, 6 December 2011, in Standerton, translated).

And it is this way of relating to people that enables his adherents to feel that they can relate to him, or him to them. They see him as somebody they can identify with.

3.1.3 We are able to identify with him

Buchan's work as a farmer and his down to earth nature has made it easy for people to identify with him, for example Dave Stols who says "I looked at this and I thought, you know what, his story is so much like mine. Not exactly, but there's a lot of similarities, in the oke who just couldn't care, and then he has this, this life-changing experience. And I can, I can relate to that, okay?" (Dave Stols, interview by Neil Vels, 25 November 2011 in Brakpan). Watson*, expressed similar sentiments.

A surprising area of identification came in the story of the death of his nephew. Buchan tells the heart-breaking story of how he took his nephew for a ride on a tractor in chapter five of *Faith like Potatoes*. The boy fell off the seat and under the wheel of the tractor and was killed (Buchan 1998:55-66). This story came up repeatedly as respondents spoke of their own experience of the death or injury of a loved one due to accident.

Stan speaks of how Buchan told the story when he spoke in Standerton and how he relates it to the death of his own child in a car accident with his wife (Stan*, interview by Neil Vels, 7 December 2011 in Standerton), Crookes relates the story to an incident in which his friend died when they were both were struck by lightning (Dave Crookes, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Platrand), and Cawood tells the story of her brother being driven over by a tractor:

I went through that same thing, my dad tramped J, and he couldn't speak to my mom because he knew that she'd absolutely swear and curse at him and what have you, that in his, dad said to me, "Yvonne, just clean him up, just clean him up for

me, and then we wake mom.” (Yvonne Cawood, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Platrand).

Yvonne’s brother survived, but clearly that story strikes a chord with many people.

3.1.4 He serves as an example for us

What came out very clearly is that while Buchan is simple and a farmer, ultimately he is an example. Because he keeps it simple, because he’s gone through tough times, because he knows what it is like, people can look to him as an example when they themselves are facing tough times.

He’s had things that happen to him. The one year... It was very, very dry, and he didn’t want to plant, and I think, if I remember rightly, he prayed, and God told him to plant. And I don’t know how long after he planted the rains came. And he had a bumper crop that year. And there again, it’s showing you, or it showed me, what can be done with your own faith, you know if you, how can I say? If you can get through to God. (Stan*, interview by Neil Vels, 7 December 2011 in Standerton)

Buchan is seen as an example of spirituality, of how to have faith, and also as a practical example. An example of how to deal with the day-to-day troubles that one faces.

You know, he went through all of these things, he knows what it is to have droughts, in other words to go through troubles in his company, his business, farming. He knows what it looks like to see people who are hurting in this country, black and white, and everybody. And what’s nice is because our farmers, traditionally our farmers, battle to work with the blacks. He is a farmer, who didn’t start farming now, got a farm and now he calls himself a farmer. He started in this country years ago. He also went through all these things, he also saw the apartheid era, he saw, and sees what’s going on now (Watson*, interview by Neil Vels, 18 November 2011 in Standerton).

3.1.5 More than an example

This last point of why people find Buchan attractive is really an extension of the

previous point. While Buchan is seen as an example, in the minds of many there seems to be an attitude that Buchan can get it right and has a level of faith that ordinary people don't have and so they could never do what he has done. In this sense it seems that he has been elevated to a status higher than your average Christian in the minds of many, with claims that his example will last "for a very long time" (James* interview by Neil Vels, 6 December 2011 in Standerton) and others, such as Smit and Watson* longing to be able to meet with him.

Stols commented that he would like to have "just a little bit" of the same faith as Buchan (Dave Stols, interview by Neil Vels, 25 November 2011 in Brakpan) and Stan, in struggling with his own faith, felt that he should be more like Buchan. (Stan*, interview by Neil Vels, 7 December 2011 in Standerton). Others, such as Naudé, also expressed the attitude of following and listening and using his life as a model for one's own (Trevor Naudé, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackenhurst).

So Buchan is seen as somebody who is deeply South African, simple, of the soil, who is like us, who has had similar troubles to us and has overcome them in ways which we could never hope to achieve. His simplicity speaks to a "birds of a feather syndrome" in which his followers find a common identity based on their similarities to Buchan and each other. Rohr, on the other hand, appeals in different ways and so now I turn to his adherents for more insight on what they find attractive about him.

3.2 Richard Rohr

A word that can be used to describe Rohr's followers is "searching". While Buchan's appreciate his simple message and practical application, to a large extent Rohr's have tried that approach and found it wanting. They are searching for something deeper that embraces their darkness rather than tries to hide it or that denies its existence.

Rohr is described as one of the voices in the emerging church conversation, and so his followers – whether they are aware of the emerging church conversation or not – are expected to express some of the values of the ECM, such as embracing change and uncertainty; the idea of a God being bigger than any single truth; rejecting a controlling and institutional church; inviting conversation about beliefs – and doubt – rather than a

fixed ‘truth’; and having an emphasis on justice and God’s transforming presence in the secular, rather than a focus on saving souls for the hereafter. As such they spoke of being attracted to Rohr through his willingness to move beyond the boundaries and guilt (for example Jordaan) and simplicity of easy to follow rules. They expressed appreciation for his more fluid way of embracing God and his teaching of the interconnectedness of all things, his emphasis on contemplation and the mystical, and a different approach to scripture than Buchan’s. Rohr’s adherents found his willingness to embrace “the path of descent” meaningful and also, like Buchan’s followers, enjoy his personality. I have outlined each of these below, and in each of them the respondents express sentiments that reject the “this is the way it is” approach to faith of Buchan and describe their faith journey in terms that are more appropriate to the ECM.

3.2.1 Beyond simplicity

Most of the respondents reported that they had enjoyed a Buchan type of faith at a certain stage in their lives, but often something went wrong and their Christianity imploded or they simply found that this type of Christianity was no longer feeding them. In their search for meaning beyond fundamentalist Christianity they were pointed in the direction of Rohr – and others – who restored meaning to their Christian faith. Spiritual director Marina Fick describes her experience:

I think I was looking for that life that Jesus was talking about... And knowing my Bible and doing all the prayers, going to church, all the regular stuff, didn’t give me that life that I was looking for. And then when I started listening to Richard Rohr, and it’s almost as if he takes you to a different level or a different place... he’s talking about the letting go of things, and not so much doing things, but letting it go, and unlearning things, that kind of thing... I think what I’ve found in him, is this letting go, the freeing of almost my spirit, my soul, not to be, to be free in this world with God and not to be so... obsessed with doing things right. (Marina Fick, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Benoni)

In many cases his followers got to know him by listening to tapes or reading books recommended by others and they express a gratitude for discovering a way of worshipping God that is meaningful to them again, such as van de Laar, who says that

this helped him reconstruct a faith very different to the one he'd had before (John van de Laar, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011, Cape Town, via Skype)), similar to sentiments expressed by George* and Andrews:

He just spoke to me like Leslie Weatherhead spoke to me at one stage. And I thought this guy makes so much sense... and he wasn't into either/or, the dualistic approach, of life, but he challenged the system all the time... Richard, I guess, pushes the boundaries, that's where God has put me in a way (Colin Andrews, interview by Neil Vels, 30 January 2012, in Pinetown).

Milandri appreciates that Rohr's material is accessible to non-Christians without being full of "christianese." It seems to him to be more easily accessible to those who do not have Christian background, and he quotes people saying, "This is very good. I'm not a Christian but I can really relate to what this guy's saying," (Sergio Milandri, interview by Neil Vels, 2 February 2012 in Cape Town (via Skype)).

The simplicity of Rohr's approach means that people feel they can experience the presence of God without having to be bound to the narrow constraints of fundamentalism (Geoff*), and this approach helps them in a deeper way to "integrate the shadow" (Hudson and Milandri). Rev Brenda Timmer sums it up:

I find Richard Rohr to move away from Christianity is about "doing this" to "who am I"... growing deeper as opposed to being – achieving – [my] faith... So it's been that gentleness, a different picture of Christianity than the one I was brought up with, really... Now I need something that is, I don't know if the word "more gracious" is what it is for me? It more easily embraces my weakness, as opposed to "I need to live better." Or "have more faith" (Brenda Timmer, interview by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011 in Soweto).

3.2.2 Interconnectedness

Another common thread expressed by many of Rohr's adherents was that of interconnectedness – everything is connected and all are part of a bigger whole (for example Jordaan). Sprong speaks of the "interconnectedness of the whole universe and the spirituality and the synchronicity, the things that God is doing in many, many...

more diverse ways than he's got credit for" (Kevin Sprong, interview by Neil Vels 21 December 2011 in Durban (via Skype)), and van de Laar says it well in this comment:

I've heard [Rohr] say things like, "God is either everywhere or nowhere," that kind of stuff really resonated with me... The kind of compartmentalisation of my old kind of conservative faith was one of the things that ultimately had to come down. I couldn't compartmentalise... humans there, animals there, the planet there, God there, angels there. I began to realise that lines were blurring for me... And Richard Rohr really works in that way, for him it's very much a question of participating in life with one another, participating in life with the planet, with other creatures, participating in life with God. So the sense of integration, of connectedness, of participation, I find really, really attractive (John van de Laar, interview by Neil Vels in Cape Town (via Skype)).

A part of this focus on all things being interconnected is discussed in *Everything Belongs* (Rohr 2003b), as Rohr's philosophy of "non-dual thinking" is discussed in *The Naked Now* (2009). Lottering says that he has come to an understanding that his spirituality is not "either/or" but is rather "both/and" and it is Rohr who has enabled him to give expression to that way of thinking. (Steven Lottering, interview by Neil Vels, 24 January 2012, in Mossel Bay (via Skype)). While Rohr's teaching may seem to promote a Christless Christianity, it would be a mistake to make this assumption. As a Franciscan he takes St Francis' experience of the Christ, and of Jesus crucified, very seriously (2001:113), and stresses the incarnational presence of Christ (2009:67ff). In fact, he claims that it is because the Church has failed to take Jesus' teaching seriously that the world fails to take Christianity seriously (2001:114).

3.2.3 The contemplative / mystical

A number of Rohr's followers described the appeal of the contemplative and mystical as being significant in their faith journeys. Andrews describes himself as a mystic, and Fick believes that it is his focus on the contemplative which allows for a greater depth to one's faith than using Jesus' words to indoctrinate (Marina Fick, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2012 in Benoni). Sprong says this:

An important part of it... is that he's a contemplative, you know there's a contemplative side to him, and that silent mystical relationship with God has also been deeply important to me, and he is one of the people who best relates the act with the deed, the actions of his life with his, with his contemplation, contemplative lifestyle (Kevin Sprong, interview by Neil Vels, 21 December 2011 in Durban (via Skype)).

Lottering and Oosthuizen (who has spent time with Rohr at his Center for Action and Contemplation in the United States) also identified the linking of action and contemplation as being important. "It's not purely about just being all mystical and sitting... on a mountain somewhere, or in a cave somewhere, under a tree somewhere trying to achieve some kind of spiritual experience," says Lottering, "but rather that our action, our lived out life, is found in that connection that we have which we discover through contemplation (Steven Lottering, interview by Neil Vels, 24 January 2012 in Cape Town (via Skype)). Oosthuizen sees in Rohr a contemplative lifestyle based on encounter with God through the spiritual disciplines, alongside of social justice (Paul Oosthuizen, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2012 in Edenvale).

3.2.4 Use of scripture

While Buchan is described by his followers as being faithful to scripture and using it simply, and by his critics as encountering scripture in a way that is shallow and lacking in scholarship, Rohr's approach to scripture, while unconventional (and thus open to criticism from Buchan's followers), is one of the things that attracts his adherents. Van de Laar:

I find often he puts a perspective on passages that I've known for a long time, that's completely different from anything I've ever thought or read. I don't always agree with him, but I always find he stimulates my thinking in ways that I find exciting... And scripture's coming alive for me in a way that I'm far more passionate about scripture than I ever was (John van de Laar, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011 in Cape Town (via Skype)).

This view was echoed by George* as he described how Rohr had widened his point of

view and allows him not to feel threatened by other religions (George*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Bapsfontein). Jenny*, a feminist theologian, was grateful for the way in which Rohr helped her to understand the place of Paul's writing in Christianity (Jenny*, interview by Neil Vels, 21 December 2011 in Durban (via Skype)) and Oosthuizen noted Rohr's ability to identify the great themes of scripture. (Paul Oosthuizen, 30 December 2011 in Edenvale).

3.2.5 The path of descent

The "path of descent" is a term used by Rohr to describe the way of the cross, the way of self-sacrifice and the way of surrendering the ego (2003b). This was also described by adherents as being important for them, particularly in contrast to Buchan's teaching which focuses on the restoration of a powerful masculinity. "He's also the opposite of this triumphalist, consumer focussed church," says Howell, "It's also downward movement" (Terry Howell, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011 in Secunda). It is this downward movement which invites the individual to look at him or herself and recognise the part that's got to die, the false self, which has to be let go of (Marina Fick, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011, in Benoni). Jenny* says, "it's when we give up our little self so that we can have this big self, the big self in Christ" (Jenny*, interview by Neil Vels, 21 December 2011 in Durban (via Skype). Geoff* says it this way:

His whole approach [is] basically getting past our egos. His concept of the first part of life is where you're living in your ego, achieving, doing, building a family, building the career, but saying there's something more than that. And the second part of life is when you sort of get on top of your ego and it, your soul, starts being noticed and taking over and the whole concept of that switch is something that appeals (Geoff*, interview by Neil Vels, 25 November 2011 in Benoni).

Van de Laar observes that the paradox that Rohr speaks about so often is that we empty ourselves in order to be full, in order to know God's light and know God's resources, and that the Christian life is about giving up our resources, our own life, and emptying ourselves (John van de Laar, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011 in Cape Town (via Skype). It was here that the difference between the two approaches to power, prestige and possession were most evident.

3.2.6 Personality

As much as people were attracted to Buchan's personality, the same is true of Rohr with respondents describing him as humorous, delightful, having a wonderful sense of openness and grace, depth and integrity (Andrews, van de Laar and Jenny*).

Interestingly Milandri used words identical to Buchan's followers to describe Rohr, although in a different context: "He can call a spade a spade and he challenges the top down structures and the hierarchies that the church is stuck with" (Sergio Milandri, interview by Neil Vels, 2 February 2012 in Cape Town (via Skype)).

3.3 The need for community

While adherents to both of the subjects of this study had reasons that were specific to the person that they followed, such as simplicity in the case of Buchan, or a greater depth in the case of Rohr, there was a common thread of community in the stories that they told.

In the case of Buchan there was a strong theme of the new community that they have found in realising that other men go through the same difficulties that they do, the idealistic community that they found at the conferences and how they enjoyed the support system created by men upon their return, and also of an ideal community that they hope to experience "if there were more men like Buchan."

Rohr's followers also indicated that Rohr's teaching called them to a new community, yet this is a community of acceptance of all and which is all interconnected and in which people don't need to be right or righteous and which all are responsible for building. There was also a sense in the interview of being grateful to be able to discuss their differing views of God with others who see God and faith in the same way that they do.

I will explore these ideas further after looking at the different understandings of hope.

4 Defining Hope

While I have tried to define Christian hope in chapter three, with a focus on how both subjects express it, it is now time to turn to the way their followers interpret this

concept. I will first explore what Buchan's followers found appealing about his message of hope, and then compare it with Rohr's.

An essential difference between the two approaches is found in how the respondents approach life and the question of God's presence. Buchan's followers tended to see life as a battle. Troubles will come, there is an enemy to be fought, and the human task is to struggle against these problems. If people are faithful soldiers God will help them in their battles and grant victory. Christianity is seen from this triumphalist viewpoint.

Rohr's followers seem to approach life differently, best summed up by Timmer, "There's a grace and a hope that life is not about succeeding, but God is at work in all things." (Brenda Timmer, interview by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011, in Soweto). It isn't about fighting and struggling against challenges that come, but rather is about embracing life and God's presence in the mess. Once again, this is very typical of the ECM.

4.1 Buchan

Upon examination of the responses to questions regarding the definition of hope it becomes apparent that there are common themes found throughout the interviews. In this section the study attempts to identify those themes, again themes that are typical of the fundamentalist paradigm:

4.1.1 Salvation / Eternal Life

The most common comment made by Buchan's supporters when asked about hope related to the concept of eternal life as stated by Marneweck: "it's the fact that I know that Jesus have died for my sins... God have granted me the grace and that my sins are forgiven and that Jesus is the mediator and the way that I can come to God at any time, day or night, and that gives me hope... whatever the circumstances is (*sic*)" (Louis Marneweck, interview by Neil Vels, 11 November 2011 in Standerton).

Marneweck was not alone in his assertion. Other comments made were, "there is a future in eternity with him. And that is a massive hope," (Habgood); "Jesus can become the point of deliverance and the point of salvation for everybody," (Gerhard*); "It is to

hold fast to the belief that Jesus was on the earth, that he died for your sins and that we will be with him in heaven one day and that we will have eternal life with him (Manie*, translation). Others made similar statements (Crookes and Smit). Stols summed up his hope in eternal life in this way:

God promises us a life in eternity, a life of eternity with him. And that's a hope... I want desperately to have that promise fulfilled for me... I look forward to the day I die. Not that I've got a death wish! But I look forward to seeing the people that have gone before me... So, ja, that's my hope. My hope is real. Because, like I say, I know his promise is true, and I just hope that his promise for me can be fulfilled. So that's my hope. (Dave Stols, interview by Neil Vels, 25 November 2011 in Brakpan).

4.1.2 Something in the Future

While hope in eternal life obviously deals with what is to come, another aspect of respondents' understanding of hope was that hope is something that we anticipate:

Hope, if you want to look at practically it's something that you hope for, something that you wish for yourself out there. Hope is something that you're looking to... you've got this hope that something will improve your life, an intangible that is out there... (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackenhurst).

Others also expressed the sense of hoping that things will turn out well, and Habgood spoke of the hope for the future being the hope of transformation, that as men follow Jesus they begin to change, and his hope is seeing that change in others. (Tony Habgood, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Benoni).

4.1.3 Strength to Carry On

An important aspect of hope for Buchan's followers is that which gives them the ability to carry on in spite of the difficulties they may face. Habgood believes that the difficulties he faces, although being troublesome, are not the real issues and because of that he can hope for a better life (Tony Habgood, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December

2011 in Benoni) and Cawood suggests that she can have hope in the Lord because there is nothing in her life that he hasn't allowed. Her task, she says, is to learn to trust him in the hard times (Yvonne Cawood, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Platrand). James* says this:

In my environment now I can see first-hand almost everyday see how the enemy tries just to do the opposite, to give you no hope. I've experienced it... where can I get the courage, the hope, the belief to carry on? And so just before you go out the door you ask God, give me today the freedom and peace just to relax and face the day with him. With the truth, not with the hopelessness of the world. Because they're hopeless (James*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 December 2011 in Standerton, portions translated from Afrikaans).

4.1.4 Dissatisfaction with Self and the World

Many of the respondents in this paradigm expressed dissatisfaction with themselves and the world in general, whether in the sense of "the world" being a definition for the secular and thus in opposition to God and the sacred, in the sense of others who are not Christians or who believe differently, or in the sense of the darkness within themselves. A common theme was that of identifying themselves as sinners hardly deserving of God's grace, for example Habgood, "hope, number one, is that I can be the person that God wants me to be, even in spite of my past and in spite of who I am now, that God can use me" (Tony Habgood, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Benoni).

In regard to the "world" Naudé suggests that we should not trust it because if we do we will be disappointed – our only hope can be in God (Trevor Naudé, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackenhurst), and Gerhard*, after mentioning eternal life as his first hope, goes on to say,

The hope there is that we can be delivered out of the world that tries to capture you, takes hold of you and wastes your time, you can be delivered and be set free and be transferred to a new kingdom which is called the kingdom of God (Gerhard*, interview by Neil Vels, 14 November 2011 in Standerton).

4.2 Rohr

It is notable that when speaking about hope many of Rohr's followers connected their understanding of hope with their understanding of God who is present in all things as described in the previous chapter and is typical of those who embrace the ECM. While they spoke about hope as something for the future, there was a much greater emphasis on God's activity transforming the secular present. Hudson first speaks of a future hope:

The characteristics of that divine hope would be... that ultimately there will be a new heaven and a new earth, and that like in the end God kinda wins, and in the end all will be well type thing. And that's rooted in resurrection so it's not wishful. (Trevor Hudson, interview with Neil Vels, 20 December 2011, in Benoni)

And then goes on to say, "I think the other aspect of that hope is coming back to my central theme of the Christian faith. That in the midst of my broken hopes, I have the hope that God is with me, sharing my life, my grief, my pain, and that I'm not alone in this. And that's a very hopeful thing for me" (Trevor Hudson, interview with Neil Vels, 20 December 2011, in Benoni).

And so as I discuss their perception of hope each of the points in this section – presented as counterpoints to those offered by Buchan's followers – have God's presence in the present as their central theme. While not offering a viewpoint that is opposite to Buchan's adherents, they do display a different understanding.

4.2.1 More than pie in the sky (vs eternal life)

A number of respondents used the term "pie in the sky" or a variation thereof in their description of what hope is not. Van de Laar criticises a theology that is based solely on what happens after one dies:

Brian McLaren calls it "evacuation theology," where we have to endure what we have here for as long as we believe in Christ... then we have this hope, that we will spend eternity in heaven and not in hell... What was so attractive about Richard Rohr is that his theology for me is very rooted in what's happening now.

It's a lived eschatology... a sense that our hope is not just waiting for pie in the sky when you die by and by. Our hope is that we can experience God and God's reign now, on a daily basis. (John van de Laar, interview by Neil Vels 22, November 2011 in Cape Town (via Skype)).

Other respondents also picked up on the theme of hope being knowledge of God's presence in the present, for example Lottering, "God is not for some distant future, but that the hope that God offers is hope for here and for now, and that God is at work... it's something that we begin to experience now," and Jenny*, while recognising that there is still more than this life, described hope as "a big, all-encompassing, fulfilling kind of a hope that is not pie in the sky one day" (Jenny*, interview by Neil Vels, 21 December 2011 in Durban (via Skype)). George expressed the sense that hope is not just something that we move towards*:

It's not so much a projection of something missing, and that I long for, but it's the experience of something already there. And so hope is not so much a future action... I think there's movement towards the future, but it's more a current experience. It has an impact on my life here, so in other words it's being aware of the fact that God is always busy before I know it. God is always active before I'm aware of it, and stepping constantly into that action field and knowing it is wider, it is bigger than me. (George*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Bapsfontein).

4.2.2 God everywhere (vs something in the future)

Rohr's adherents see hope not so much in what will be one day, and see God not as only active in one place or with a few people; rather God is everywhere now, and it is this knowledge of God's all encompassing presence, God's being at work even in places where the individual would prefer not to find God (George*) that allows hope to be an important part of their worldview, granting them a "bigger picture of reality" (Milandri), a picture which proclaims that one can discover God and God's presence in everything around one (Howell). Milandri describes his experience eloquently:

I think the whole point of a spirituality is that we have a bigger picture of reality... it's like having spiritual eyes. In a sense you see more dimensions, and God is interwoven in reality, yet though God is unseen, but is actually seen everywhere so that there's this wonderful translucence to everything, and hope is really knowing that there is a bigger picture... we're part of a much bigger reality and our subjective sense always needs to be addressed in terms of a bigger, sometimes unfathomable, and sometimes wondrous reality which we're floating on... (Sergio Milandri, interview by Neil Vels, 2 February 2012 in Cape Town (via Skype)).

Adherents spoke about the God's presence being available consistently and constantly that their hope is to be able to partner with God in "what is going to happen, is happening, and has already in some areas happened" (Paul Oosthuizen, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Edenvale). As suggested earlier there is a far more mystical understanding to the presence of God, and this extends into how Rohr's adherents understand suffering.

4.2.3 God present in suffering (vs strength to carry on)

Where Buchan's adherents see God as being present in their suffering to give them the strength they need to carry on, Rohr's followers are more inclined simply to celebrate the presence of God in the midst of their difficulties. Howell speaks about how he sees hope in contrast to member of his congregation, speaking about some of the fears they have of what is happening in South Africa, "It's not something that if I do this, this, and this, then everything is going to be all right. It's a hope linked with "I know that God's presence will always be with me in whatever situation." (Terry Howell, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011 in Secunda).

This view that darkness is not to be feared was expressed by several of the other respondents as well. Timmer spoke about darkness as possibility, the "promise of, the reality that life is not dead, even when it looks dead. God is at work, there's possibility," (Brenda Timmer, interview by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011 in Soweto) and Milandri believes that in spite of all the ups and down of life there is still predictability (Sergio Milandri, interview by Neil Vels, 2 February 2012 in Cape Town, via Skype)).

So the darkness has a redemptive purpose. According to Fick it's "in the dying and in the suffering that new life emerges, where healing comes, where wholeness comes... you know that darkness has got it's own treasures, that's where hope comes in," (Marina Fick, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Benoni), a view echoed by Howell who suggests that as a result of the darkness, we'll find meaning and our lives will be meaningful in relationship with God (Terry Howell, interview by Neil Vels, 22 November 2011 in Secunda).

Hope is more than just God being at work in the darkness, however. Another theme spoken about repeatedly by Rohr's followers is that of God's presence not just in the mess, but also in "my" mess, and the opportunity to experience God in failure and weakness.

4.2.4 God present in failure (vs dissatisfaction with self)

Rohr's followers speak of acceptance of human failure and the welcoming nature of God, rather than a focus on our weakness and God's judgement on that. Hudson says:

[Rohr has] encouraged me into the hope that all of my humanity, light and dark, mistakes, sins, failures, as well as successes, achievements, that God can kind of use all that stuff in God's work in my life. So I think he has a very hopeful theology, that affirms every part of human existence... I think his one statement sometimes is that we come to God not by getting it right, but by getting it wrong. It's quite a hopeful statement for those who've got it wrong (Trevor Hudson, interview by Neil Vels, 20 December 2011 in Benoni).

Timmer believes that this understanding has been very helpful to her, "I think the greatest contribution of Rohr for me has been in the sense of being able to accept who I am, where I'm at, the way in which he just is able to hold the real me," (Brenda Timmer, interview by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011 in Soweto) and Fick is grateful that through this understanding she has come to experience the gospel really as good news, "this is good news that, that the mess is okay... [and] to say we don't know what is right and what's wrong in the end... And not to get all tied up in a knot about things, but to move with it... (Marina Fick, interview by Neil Vels, 6 October 2011 in Benoni).

Jordaan sums it up as she says, “the purpose of life for me that Christianity brings, that God brings to us is that it is good enough, we are good enough just as we are. Actually we don’t need fixing, we don’t need change, we actually just need to know that we are as we are... (Dalene Jordaan, interview by Neil Vels, 27 September 2011 in Ruimsig).

4.3 Comparison

To conclude this section a brief comparison of the two approaches will be helpful. In the first instance, for Buchan’s followers hope is primarily in life that is eternal. Because of Jesus they can go to heaven one day when they die and spend eternity with him. While Rohr’s followers agree that hope is greater than what we experience in this life, hope is more about God’s presence in this realm.

The second point of comparison is that where Buchan’s followers see hope as something for the future, something to be anticipated, for Rohr’s adherents the focus is on the here and now and that we can live and experience the sense of being a part of something far bigger and more wonderful in the present.

Thirdly, where Buchan’s followers see God as giving them the strength to carry on in the midst of their struggles, Rohr’s followers tended to see hope as God’s presence transforming the darkness from something to be feared into an opportunity for change.

The final difference identified in this study is the respondents’ different attitudes towards life in this world and human nature. Buchan’s followers were clear on the idea that Jesus has died for our sins because we need to be saved from our sinful natures and this world, whereas Rohr’s followers were far more gracious in the understanding that God accepts me as I am.

4.4 An Alternative Theology of Hope

Having looked at what it is that gives the author’s respective followers hope, it is necessary also to vestige the commonalities in order to posit an alternative theology of hope which could be acceptable to both groups and of use to the church in proclaiming a message that is attractive to those outside the walls.

4.4.1 A Sense of Identity and Purpose

While this is discussed in far greater detail in the conclusion, in both cases hope serves to ground people in their place in the world. Hope is about who people are and who they can become, whether identified as one of the Mighty Men, as a person of power, prestige and possession, or as one who lives with those on the fringes. Hope gives a sense of identity and meaningful purpose, particularly in the sense of their being something bigger.

4.4.2 Something Bigger

The sense of identity that hopes gives, in both cases, is grounded in something more than can be perceived in the present, physical world. While Buchan proclaims God as deity, and Rohr a God who is incarnational, both calls their followers back to Mystery, that which cannot be explained by the science and technology of the modern period. There is a call to partner with Mystery in making Mystery known to the world, and hope for something bigger after death.

4.4.3 Wholeness

Both approaches to hope express a desire for and the ability to experience healing and wholeness through relationship with Mystery. Buchan's followers abound with testimonies of how God has healed supernaturally, while Rohr's speak also of the healing they have found in following Rohr's God. Both groups speak of their call to be agents of healing to others.

4.4.4 Something Practical

For both groups of followers, hope is to be found not in an abstract sermon but in practical application. The message of hope has to be practical and speak into the hearer's circumstances. Buchan's followers spoke about how practical he is, and Rohr's commented that his message is not just about contemplation, but also about action.

4.4.5 Things yet Unseen

Returning to Wright's comments on Hebrews 11:1, and the title of this dissertation,

once again for both groups there is a sense of the importance of there being a guide to lead them through the mist and reveal to them that the way is safe and passable.

If the Church is to be a beacon on hope, then, it needs to remember that hope is to be found in identity, mystery, and wholeness expressed in a practical way by leaders who have made the journey.

Finally groups expressed an understanding of how hope is found in community, such that it warranted a section of its own, and it is to this which I now turn.

5 Hope and Community

An immensely important part of the story for those who follow both Buchan and Rohr is that of community – what it means to be people together, whether people who are all the same and going through similar things, or people who are diverse in outlook and circumstances. I will explore this further in the conclusion as I look at the concept of liminality. Buchan’s followers in particular spoke again and again of the special community that they found when they attended the Mighty Men’s Conferences, and there was a clear sense that they wish life in South Africa could be like this every day. Many respondents expressed the notion that if only somebody like Buchan was in government things would be much better. This desire for a better community is in keeping with the hope expressed in scripture, and noted by Borg in the *Living the Questions 2.0 Bible Study* as one of the two deep yearnings of the human heart, “that the world would be a better place... for themselves, for their children, for others...” (Borg 2010). Rohr’s followers, having not had a large gathering experience tended not to express the desire for community so overtly, but rather spoke of their hopes for a healed South Africa, and the fact that this healing comes about through relationship in community.

5.1 Benefits of Community

When Buchan’s followers were speaking about what was meaningful for them in regard to the Mighty Men’s Conferences they spoke a great deal about the community that it created. In this section I look at the community away from the conferences, in the next the community at the conference. A common theme, noted in particular by Watson*,

Habgood, Stols and Spencer-Crooks was the “realisation that yeah, we’re all in a similar boat, we’re all experiencing similar things, we’re not an island, you know.” (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackendowns). They recognised that their attendance at the conferences brought them together in a way that was meaningful even once they had returned home:

He put a couple of guys in my life and as a result of our, of Angus and going to the Conference ... we’ve created quite a good bonding and ... at one stage we were seeing each other once a month just to reaffirm our discussions and saying where we are... (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackendowns).

An additional benefit identified by Spencer-Crooks was an experience of doing business with somebody and making a mistake on the quote. His client pointed it out to him instead of taking advantage, and this Spencer-Crooks attributes to the fact that the client had also been to Mighty Men (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackendowns). It is these types of experiences that allow the men to feel that the more men embrace Mighty Men, the greater the benefit will be for everybody. It is this that will contribute to the building of a better, fairer South Africa.

5.2 Mighty Men’s Conference as ideal community

During the interviews a number of the men who had attended a conference spoke about how it was not only Angus’s teaching that had been meaningful for them, but that the community event had played a huge role as well, says Spencer-Crooks:

It was an amazing experience, to walk around and here’re guys singing, and go from one camp and see guys sitting around the table reading Bible. And just the conversations that for those days it’s all about God, and Angus was just the means, he just basically opened the door, provided the opportunity (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackendowns).

At the Conference they experienced the way society could be if only people were as God-centred during everyday life as they are during the Mighty Men experience.

5.2.1 Stories of Community

While there were many general comments regarding the joy of men being together, and surprise at the lack of fights, three memorable stories were told which speak of the desire for a different community, which answer the wish for “a society like this” in South Africa.

The first is told by Spencer-Crooks who lost his cell phone, which he’d dropped somewhere. He was surprised when he dialled his number, somebody answered and he was able to retrieve his phone. He does not expect that the same would happen if he dropped his phone elsewhere “in the world”. (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackendowns).

Second were stories told about how polite the drivers were on leaving the conference. Surprise was expressed that other drivers let them go in front as attested to by Marneweck, “People would be tolerant on the roads... People were sitting for a hour and even longer in the traffic. Everybody was smiling. Got out of the car, spoke to each other... But if they’d done that in Jo’burg you would have seen tempers and all that.” (Louis Marneweck, interview by Neil Vels, 11 November 2011 in Standerton).

Finally James* tells an amusing anecdote about daily life at a conference:

You don’t even know the guy, now you’re standing at the toilet and you start to speak. I mean, it’s canvas, it’s veld, it’s for men! And you start talking, and you hear this guy’s got a burden... or maybe something positive... but you don’t know this guy... and you talk and you stand for half an hour, and I’m done, but I’m still speaking! (James*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 December 2011 in Standerton, translated).

He notes that nowhere else is one going to walk down the main road and start a conversation with a guy coming from wherever and ask him about his Bible study or reading that morning but, he says, you do it there. And that is another important aspect of life in the Mighty Men community:

5.2.2 God in Community

Testimonies abound regarding the presence of God among the men, feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the miraculous that takes place other than men being nice to each other. There is a strong emphasis on the pleasure of men being together, praying together, singing together and on the miraculous ways in which God works. The most common example of this was after Buchan collapsed on stage and the men, believing that he had had a heart attack prayed. Buchan was soon discharged from hospital and returned to the conference. “Angus himself has got three heart attacks or whatever... So say you had 100 000 guys, 50 000 guys, praying. And he was healed, and he came back and spoke the Sunday morning...” (Dave Stols, interview by Neil Vels, 25 November 2011 in Brakpan).

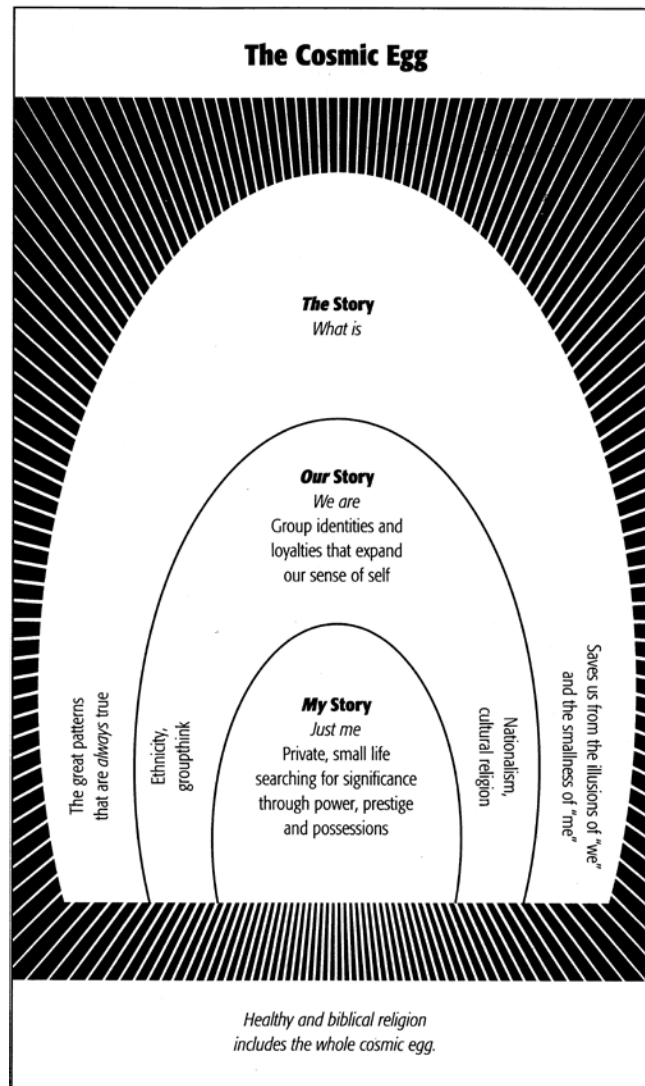
Another miracle story was recounted by three of the respondents from the Standerton area. Manie* spoke about his brother who was supposed to attend but was unable to due to his baby daughter being ill. During a time of prayer Buchan asked for people to stand for prayer for those who were not present, and he put his hand up for his niece. The next morning his brother phoned to say that she was well again (Manie*, interview by Neil Vels, 8 December 2011 in Standerton).

While this story is evidence of God’s power for those who were there, God was also experienced in other ways. Marneweck tries to describe what it felt like:

You can feel... the presence of the Holy Spirit, you really could feel it. You know people being relaxed and in the sense that they would share their problems with other guys and making new friends and all of that, and the thing that binds you together is Jesus and the grace of God that you are saved... There was just a sort of peace that came down (Louis Marneweck, interview by Neil Vels, 11 November 2011 in Standerton).

5.3 ‘Men’s men’ or moving beyond ego?

In the diagram below, which appears in *Hope Against Darkness* (2001:84), Rohr



describes three different levels of the healthy psyche which genuine religion should address. The first is the individual level, the second the tribal level and the third he describes as the “greater truth”. The first level is all about “me and my story,” the second relates to “Our story” – community and group identity, being a part of the tribe. The third level, “The Story” is that of universal meaning that every culture and religion discover in some manner. It is the integration of all three levels that results in holiness, the ultimate form of wholeness (2001:83-96).

Many of Buchan’s adherents spoke firstly of the attraction of “men’s men” and the masculinity of Buchan as being important to them, for example Watson*:

He's a tough character! And that's what I like about him, Uncle Angus. He's not a sissy. Not this neatly dressed person always with a suit and tie or all those kind of things. It's like and he's practical. He's one of us. And that's what I like about him... I love strong characters (Watson* interview by Neil Vels, 18 November in Standerton).

Habgood agrees when he says, "I like the witness of men's men, often big guys, work, strong businessmen or strong men physically, to show other men that wow, God really does make a change," yet there was consensus that when they went to the Mighty Men's Conference, these big men cried. According to Watson*, "I dunno if we did in the past, but we, you know the thing is, we are... Men! So, you know, cowboys don't cry. And there, when we got there, men cry." (Watson* interview by Neil Vels, 18 November in Standerton). Spencer-Crooks identifies this process as Buchan breaking down the barriers in terms of egos:

We're not very emotional about our Christian life... we generally don't show our emotion about our Christianity. And I think the bonding that it created amongst the guys that you had that freedom... And I think that in itself broke down a lot of barriers and opened up the doors... It has an effect. I don't think anybody can... stand round and not look around and see the emotion, guys breaking down and the praise and worship that happens, and just the power that it generates... (Trevor Spencer-Crooks, interview by Neil Vels, 3 October 2011 in Brackendowns).

While James* referred to the healing of the girl mentioned earlier and how that led to tears (James*, interview by Neil Vels, 6 December 2011 in Standerton), Marneweck and Stols both commented on the freedom that the men have to cry without feeling embarrassed.

You're just being fed on the Holy Spirit because it's really tangible and there's a lot of times where, I can feel the Holy Spirit working and then you see big burly men in tears, you know, just by a song, or something that's said, you know, it has meaning, real meaning to them. It can only be the Holy Spirit cutting out and chipping off the stone cast around the heart and that kind of stuff. (Dave Stols, interview by Neil Vels, 25 November 2011 in Brakpan).

While there was the physical response of tears, another aspect, which was testified to, was the freedom to worship and praise God by not being afraid to be yourself. Both Duncan (Allen Duncan, interview by Neil Vels, 21 November 2011 in Standerton) and Manie* (Manie*, interview by Neil Vels, 8 December 2011 in Standerton) spoke about this being an important part of the experience for them.

Another point that is of value in this section is the place of the, particularly white, male in the community. Smit for example says

Angus has given them pride, the Christian white man, has told him that you are supposed to be the spiritual leader of the home, of the house. You must take your position, and I think he's repositioned them, many, thousands in this country, where white males now proudly will say, "I am Christian, I am the head of the home..." and things like that (Gerrit Smit, interview by Neil Vels, 2 December 2011 in Volksrust).

As noted earlier, South Africa has become a place where many are uncertain of their position in society. To a certain extent they feel that their place has been eroded by women's and gay rights as noted by Nadar, and in addition have had to deal with a changed South Africa in which they may feel that their place is being usurped by people of other races. In listening to Buchan, men come to understand that once again they have a role and place in society. While comments like these could be construed as a race theology, numerous respondents spoke about the joy of worshipping God together with men of other races, although admitting that they were in the majority. Oosthuizen reported that there was a reluctance on the part of men from his congregation who had attended to interrogate the racial dynamics of a Mighty Men's Conference (Oosthuizen, interview by Neil Vels, 31 December 2011 in Edenvale).

It seems that Buchan certainly as a role in encouraging men in community, and in particular for men to grow beyond their own egos and selfishness and reach out to and think of others, to become a part of the group. This movement from first level spirituality to second level spirituality is especially attractive in a context of insecurity and search for identity.

5.4 Relationships as community

Rohr's adherents expressed an understanding of community that goes beyond those who are "just like me" and who make me feel comfortable. Andrews expressed the richness that he finds in community:

When I have the opportunity of meeting up with people who are terminally ill, who are suffering, who have been through incredible pain with abuse... and see the hope that they expressed in dire circumstances, that gives me hope. There must be a divinity in all this, there must be a grace, there must be a God who loves all humankind, and that's rich for me. (Colin Andrews, interview by Neil Vels, 30 January 2012 in Pinetown).

Sprong also believes that hope is related to a movement of the Spirit of God amongst people and particularly that the community of social networks can lead to what he calls, in reference to the so-called Arab spring, a "Christian Spring" (Kevin Sprong, interview by Neil Vels, 21 December 2011 in Durban (via Skype), and Oosthuizen sees the community that Christians are called to as one where we

stand against unrighteousness, injustice and systems of oppression, marginalisation, exclusion.... anytime there's a boundary drawn of who is in or out, when I discover people who are out, the hope that comes from that is that that's not where history, humankind, God's vision is heading, God's heading towards an inclusive reality (Paul Oosthuizen, interview by Neil Vels, 30 December 2011 in Edenvale).

So it is these different understandings of what community means – for Buchan's followers it's those who are just like us, for Rohr's it's the outsider. Perhaps a difference between the two approaches would be that Buchan's followers feel a good life is to be found away from the mess and desire to create a community that is uniquely theirs with their values in which everybody thinks alike and shouts 'Amen!' to the same things. All are welcome to be a part of this community, and the more who are a part, the happier everybody will be. In contrast Rohr's followers are okay with mess, and rather than expecting everybody to be a part of their perfect community, they believe that

community is created by responding to the needs of others, especially others who are different and excluded.

6 Conclusion to chapter

In concluding this chapter I return again of the themes of power, prestige and possession. Initially these appear attractive, particularly in a context of loss, where either those things have been taken away or they have never been held in the first place. A theology and a promise of community which offers those things is going to be attractive, particularly to those without. Indeed, this appears to be the appeal of Buchan to his adherents. As they embrace his teaching and become a part of his Mighty Men Community they do indeed discover a place of belonging, security and identity – and this is where they find hope.

On the other hand Rohr's followers, as people who participate in the emerging church conversation, knowingly or unknowingly, have found themselves attracted by his path of descent. Instead of seeking for power, prestige and possession they have chosen rather to give those things up, and this is where they have found meaning in their lives. They have discovered the presence of God in the mess, brokenness and failure of society, even where they did not expect to find God's presence. This is what gives them hope.

As I turn to the conclusion of this study I will examine and do a deeper analysis of how these two different approaches are able to speak a word of hope into the South Africa context.

Chapter 6: A Candle of Hope

1 Introduction

In chapter one I suggest that the church needs to be a candle of hope, faith and life, bringing light into the places of despair, doubt and death, burning in a place of tension between two extremes, much as Rohr suggests that we live in a world of non-dualism. Chapter two concludes with Karen Ward quoting Kelly and suggesting that the leaders required at the start of the twenty-first century are those who have the capacity to inspire, give vision and create dreams.

The purpose of this study has been to determine how that can be and has been done by looking at the example of two popular speakers, Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr, both of whom have been able to inspire their respective audiences to a greater faith in the presence of a good God. I have done this by looking at three questions, namely

1. What is the 'hope' theology of each author
2. Why is it compelling
3. Who it is who finds the message meaningful

Before exploring the answers to these below I note that this thesis presents a only few of many possible interpretations and that in seeking to answer the questions by offering psychological or sociological interpretations I am not attempting to devalue or demean the genuineness of the individuals' spiritual experiences, but rather to understand them better.

2 Analysis of study

It is necessary to examine and analyse the responses in regard to the subject of hope on three levels, namely in the areas of liminality and identity; power, prestige and popularity; and, finally, with regard to my definition of hope.

Liminality applies to both the context of South Africa and also to those interviewed in the study who may be searching for ritual to help them make sense of life and their identity, particularly the sense of loss (and loss of identity) as described in chapters two and five.

In terms of power, prestige and popularity I note the differences between the two approaches in terms of how both speakers approach the subject and how their followers respond.

Finally, the similarities between the two authors in regard to hope as defined in chapter three as necessary for meaningful life on a philosophical level are noted. These qualities are fundamental to any teaching about hope and necessary to be aware of in any approach that the church offers to hope.

2.1 Liminality and identity

As noted in chapter two, liminality refers to in-between times or situations, with the Oxford English Dictionary defining liminal as “relating to a transitional or initial stage” (2007). I have already noted the use of liminality as an anthropological concept in terms of analysing social problems regarding transformation in respect to South Africa and the threats that Afrikaners feel they are facing, but a further dimension of liminality that might possibly be relevant is the notion that it is a psychological state which is deliberately induced as a part of male initiation rituals. This ritual would see a three fold structure of: preliminal rites – for example where the boy is taken away from the tribe, liminal rites – in which identity is challenged and shaped, and postliminal rites in which the man is reincorporated into society (Encyclopædia Britannica, *Rite of Passage*:2012). Rohr says, “these initiation rites are always about leading the boy out of the world of business as usual... and leading him into liminal space... they had to be displaced and shocked to teach them that this isn’t the only world” (2003b:47-48). He goes on to say that liminal space is always “an experience of displacement in the hope of a new point of view” (:49).

Rohr suggests that because we don’t have genuine liminal experiences in our culture we substitute them with what he calls “liminoid” experiences – turning to the material to give a sense of meaning or “getting away from it all” by spending two weeks at the beach, for example (2003b:53). To escape this kind of ultimately meaningless existence he suggests that people have to allow themselves to be drawn into liminality, away from “business as usual” to the threshold, the place of being “betwixt and between” where the old world is left behind, but one is not yet certain of the new as this is the place where

God can work as the old world falls apart and the new is revealed (:155). The time spent in the liminal experience can be either voluntary, as in the case of initiation ritual, for example in sports and military service (Rohr 2005:144), or involuntary:

There's another darkness, however, that we're led into by God and grace [where] the loss of meaning... is even greater... the saints call it "the dark night"... We know we are in "liminal space," betwixt and between, on the threshold – and we have to stay there until we have learned something essential. It is still no fun, and filled with doubt and "demons" of every sort. But it is the darkness of God. All transformation takes place in such liminal space (Rohr & Feister 2001:165).

Rohr believes that this kind of "threshold experience" usually happens when one's own "system of logic, meaning, success and truth break down" (2005:39).

It is during liminal times that the individuation process of self-realisation takes place, for example during initiation rites into common-interest societies such as fraternities, which may confer on the individual a new status (Encyclopædia Britannica, *Rites of Passage*:2012). Rohr believes that this type of experience is essential in shaping the male identity. The lack of helpful initiation experiences in the West has resulted in a loss of male identity which gangs and other unhelpful activities seem to fill.

2.1.1 Identity

People undergoing a liminal experience are placed in a situation where they lose their identity either intentionally or involuntarily. Columnist Sarah Britten, writing in the *Mail and Guardian's* "Thought Leader" blog suggests South Africa is in crisis because there is no helpful national identity, and so South Africans try to find their meaning in all manner of other pursuits such as drugs, cars or shoes (Britten 2012) – pursuits of power, prestige and popularity. Nadar notes in particular that the identity crisis for white, Afrikaner men results as their "hegemonic masculinity is being challenged by the democratic order ushered in 1994; by an increase in acceptance of diverse sexual orientations; and not least of all by a steady rise in women's emancipation" (2009:557).

Rohr suggests that identity is a way of trying to hold on to oneself by manufacturing a "fixed identity and defences against unconscious which makes us feel superior and in

control” (2003b:84). People become fixated on the image that they create for themselves, based on nothing more than changing opinions and feelings (:90-91) which move them to a life of hatred and consumer culture. Rohr believes that this false image – which is inherently unstable (2001:154) – is what needs to die and that this is the purpose of good religion (2003b:84-85), as Moltmann stated much earlier, “The misery underlying the illumination of existence is the identity question, the question of man as to his authenticity.” He believed that human identity is resolved in faith as an internal expression of identity and community as an expression of the outer (1968:374). He suggests that “the Christian message proclaims the new man (*sic*) and thus leads man (*sic*) into an identity crisis, that is, into conscious suffering in view of the misery of his inability to recognize his true humanity (:375). Rohr says “Self-esteem comes naturally when I am aligned with who-I-am-in-God.” (2001:154).

2.1.2 Masculine identity

While I do not claim to be overly concerned with the subject of masculine identity in this study, preferring to focus on hope for people in general, both Buchan and Rohr have made much of the need for restored masculine identity, and this concept features prominently in the reason for both authors offering hope to their respective followers, with their respective approaches to male identity. While Buchan is one example of “restoring” masculinities in South Africa, Nadar notes that how men are made in our contexts can either promote or hinder patriarchal violence in our various societies (2009:552). She comments that masculinism actively promotes male power and shows Buchan as such an example.

Male identity in South Africa is clearly a problem, and while one may critique Buchan’s approach as being unhelpful, as Nadar does, “‘men taking responsibility’ is hardly an unpalatable idea, but if ‘taking responsibility’ means asserting dominating and coercive measures, including those in the religious domain, to maintain power, then our justice antennas have to be tune in, so that we are not deceived by this palatable patriarchy, masquerading as ‘restored masculinity’” (:554).

Rohr suggests that a large part of the problem with masculine identity is the enforced separation of body and mind which has enabled men to survive as hunters and warriors

and slave labourers (2003b:114) in the past and their continued lack of control in the present. He says, “most men are paid for doing what someone else wants done. They do not really control their own lives. No wonder so many men have become passive, and no wonder that so many men seem to be angry” (2005:26). In the past

[Men] made things that had form and meaning which made their world liveable, which gave it beauty and which enriched the community in which they lived... [today] more and more men are no longer engaged in the traditionally masculine enterprise of making things. Instead they are engaged in the business of making money (:59).

His argument is that the making of money is “first of all directed inward towards self-image, personal security, personal power and private satisfaction” (:61).

Other dynamics which Rohr notes in terms of the masculine identity is what he calls “father hunger” and “father wound”. He says that men need someone to affirm and approve them:

They always hunger for it, and they search for it from teachers and coaches, ministers and scout masters, and any older man who will offer it to them. Later, in the military or business world, they seek to be approved by their superiors in exactly the same way. They become the good team players, the good soldiers, who would do anything for the president or the general so long as it meets with his approval. It feels like the assurance of God himself (2005:67).

This was noted particularly among Buchan’s followers. Rohr believes that the distortion created by the Father wound is at the heart of “much crime, militarism, competitive greed, pathological need for leaders and family instability” (:77). This is particularly important in evaluating why Buchan is so popular, and is also seen in terms of gang culture. I noted in chapter five how Lottering mentioned the need for young people in the Western Cape to join gangs to give them a sense of who they are, to find their identity in the new South Africa. Rohr writes of a nun working in a prison in Peru who realised that most of the men were in jail because they had no fathers:

Seventeen-year old boys trying to get father energy from other seventeen-year old boys... constantly trying to prove who they are. Whether they engage in “macho” games of physical fitness, sexual prowess or business success, they desperately need to show themselves and others that they have made it and are really men... Not having found their self-worth, they try to prove their value by accumulating things or money or exercising power (2005:74).

Rohr’s approach to masculine spirituality would be one that encourages men to take the radical gospel journey from their own unique beginning point, in their own unique style, with their own unique goals... (:11) and in which they do not need status symbols because they draw their identity from God and from within. “He does not need monogrammed briefcases and underwear; his identity is settled and secure. He possesses his soul and does not give it lightly to corporations, armies, nation-states or the acceptable collective thinking” (:11).

2.1.3 Observations regarding liminality and identity in terms of this thesis:

It is not the purpose of this dissertation to evaluate Buchan or Rohr’s approach to restoring masculinity from a feminist perspective or to pass judgement on which approach is better, rather it is to note the two different approaches and how they bring hope to their respective followers. Therefore in this section I want to note how Buchan and Rohr give their followers hope both in and through liminal experiences and in offering to them a male spirituality that they can relate to.

If the current South African context is seen as a liminal one, particularly for Buchan’s followers who feel that they have lost that which gives them identity, the first stage of ritual has already been experienced. Followers feel that they have been removed from what is familiar and are therefore in unfamiliar territory. What is needed is a leader who is going to guide them not only in the ritual of forming a new identity, but also in leading them out. In Buchan’s case this is done by means of a liminal experience within the liminal as he calls men to leave their homes and join with him at a Mighty Men’s Conference – a place where they can cry (Rohr notes that almost all initiation rites had to teach young men how to weep (2005:83)) and deal with their ego and their problems – but also be reminded of who they are supposed to be as men, a place where their

identity can be restored in spite of the confusion of the outside world. It is this *Communitas* (Wikipedia, *Liminality*:2012) that tells them who they are and enables them to overcome race and other barriers that may be experienced at home.

In this sense Buchan plays the role of an initiator and leader, leading the men out of a place of confusion to where they can have an identity that they can be sure about again. It's notable that men deem it important for their sons to accompany them. Buchan's followers, feeling that many of the things which gave them identity have been taken from them and left them impotent, are finding their identity in the "mighty men" gang. Women respond to this, saying that Buchan has given them their husbands back again.

The value of Buchan to people is that he asserts an Afrikaner identity that has been taken away, the "I" image that has been created, and gives them security in having their place back. The danger, notes Rohr, is that this religion can become an ideology which "leads to over-identification with the group, its language and symbols. Group loyalty becomes the test rather than loyalty to God or truth" (2003:94).

But a mixed up identity is not only applicable to the Afrikaner. As I have suggested in chapter two, this need is also present in the postmodern generation; Rohr argues that a longing for great religion is strong in western culture (2003:116) and again in this context the concept of liminality is helpful. In terms of the respondents in this study it was noted that liminality speaks into the experience of people for whom the conservative evangelical identity has ceased to have meaning, says Rohr, "Our old country doesn't make sense; we can't buy it anymore... We can't worship as we were trained to do" (2003:158). The old has ceased to work, the formulas no longer hold, and the new has not yet been discovered. Rohr suggests that in order to transition to a new level of faith one must be prepared to live in temporary chaos – liminality – and to hold the necessary anxiety that chaos entails. He suggests that it is this that is missing in the West.

[Those in poorer communities] have a more properly shaped ego. The tragic, the broken, the sinful is already woven into reality. We in the West have gotten away with a false sense of entitlement that did not weave the tragic into our worldview. We actually suffer more because of it... Life is neither perfectly consistent and

rational nor is it a chaotic mess. It does contain, however, constant paradoxes, exceptions and flaws. That is the shocking and disappointing revelation of the cross (2001:155).

So both Buchan and Rohr are father figures and play a role as providers of an experience in the sense of initiation and creating a male identity by providing a counter-narrative to that of South Africa today, albeit from different perspectives. Both are seen leading people from a place of liminality back into regular society where their followers are given hope that things can be different. Rohr notes many men's "intense loyalty and love toward a good boss or teacher, like Forrester Gump's 'Sergeant Dan,' or the student adoration of 'Mr Chips' or Robin Williams in *Dead Poet's Society*" (2005:131), and we see this in male attitudes towards the authors.

The place of greatest difference between the two authors, however, is how they approach the need for power, prestige and possession.

2.2 Differences in regard to power, prestige and possession

For many people in South Africa today – male and female – there is a sense that their identity is inadequate. As Britten and others in this study have noted, a large part of the discourse of this country at present is about trying to find identity and meaning through power, prestige and possession – if I have certain things, I feel okay about myself, although the real question of identity is not really dealt with.

For Buchan's followers, they have hope that their relationship with God, living as a faithful "mighty man" will bring them the power, prestige and possession that they desire, which will make them feel good and give them an identity as someone who has something or is somebody.

Buchan restores to the men what has been taken away: Political power – I'm okay, I can have hope, because political power has been returned to me (at least in the home). And even if the government says something is okay (like same sex unions) we have power restored to us because God says it's wrong. Nadar notes that "we have the power of God on our side" (2009:556); social prestige – as a white Afrikaner male I may be *persona non grata*, but that's okay, because I have the prestige of being one of the Mighty Men.

I am recognised by others as having been a part of something bigger; and private possession – although I may feel that much has been taken from me, God will give me what I want and my faith validates my quest for material possession.

My identity as a man, therefore, is shaped by Buchan's affirmation of and call to return to a masculinity that has apparently been lost as a result of changes in society. Nadar concludes her article with a call for an alternative view of masculinity (2009:561), and Rohr offers this as he approaches power, prestige and possession differently, as demons to be faced down rather than status to be desired. His followers have discovered that finding their identity in power, prestige and possession is ultimately meaningless and have sought identity elsewhere in giving up the ego based identity and discovering the true self apart from the need for those things.

Instead of difficulties in life being seen as taking away from one's power, prestige and possession and leaving one hopeless, one can have hope because

All of life is grist for the mill. Paula D'Arcy puts it, "God comes to us disguised as our life." Everything belongs: God uses everything. There are no dead-ends. There is no wasted energy. Everything is recycled. Sin history and salvation history are two sides of one coin. I believe with all my heart that the gospel is all about the mystery of forgiveness. When you "get" forgiveness, you get it. We use the phrase "falling in love." I think forgiveness is almost the same thing. It's a mystery we fall into: the mystery is God. God forgives all things for being imperfect, broken, and poor... those who risk everything to find God – always meet a lover, not a dictator." (Rohr 2003:130-131)

So hope for South Africa is thought of by the respective adherents in two different ways. Buchan suggests that South Africa needs more Christian leaders, more men in particular, to stand up and take possession of the land. Rohr's followers, on the other hand, concede that although things are messy, God is in control, and that the solution is for people to discover their identity as people who are loved by God and who in turn are able to love others even in the mess and then to participate in God's dream of making the kingdom of God real even wherever they are.

2.3 Similarities based on hope

The differences between Buchan and Rohr's approach to power, prestige and popularity notwithstanding, when returning to the definition of hope in chapter three, and the responses to the question of hope explored in the previous chapter, there are many similarities in terms of the needs that are being addressed. Aside from issues relating to identity, it is these which are helpful in determining how the Church can best remain relevant and rediscover the role of being a burning candle.

Foundational to hope as suggested by Moltmann is the idea of promise that discloses a new future in a way that things dreamt of in the future change the way we do things now, even though the original vision may not come to pass. This speaks into the Church's calling to proclaim a future that is good, and to create a vision of that future in the minds of her hearers, as both Buchan and Rohr do. While that future may, indeed not come to pass, it changes the perception of the present. In doing so the Church takes a hold of its mission to preach not optimism, but resurrection, in the midst of the trials and tribulation of daily life.

While hope is considered by psychologists to be a survival mechanism, in the context of this study hope is not only about helping people to cope with a sense of despondency about life and the inevitability of death, but is also a way of coping with loss of identity and challenges of the new. This is especially so in South Africa, where people find themselves living between anxiety and hope on a daily basis, between an often depressing reality and moments of joy and hope for the country. Buchan does this through calling for a return to traditional moral values and a picture of a country where all work together under God; Rohr does so by reminding people of the presence of God in the mess; nevertheless both believe and promote and speak of a transcendent power for real change, which is a positive influence on life today in the lives of all their followers.

This is done not by simply being optimistic, but by rediscovering the sense of mystery and enchantment that was removed from the modern era and replaced by faith in rationality, by creating an image of God and reminding people of the reality of God for the postmodern era.

Followers of both recognise that hope is only found in community. This is especially relevant in South Africa today as racial and cultural tensions seem to be increasing. Moltmann commented during the cold war that due to the ability of humans to completely eradicate each other, the only way to survive is in community (1968:370). This is also true of South Africa at the present.

It is here that we note the importance of the Church as a leader during times of liminality to facilitate the construction of meaningful identities – both human and Christian. Of deep relevance to South Africa is the male identity in particular. Rohr notes that most men simply require an adult's respect and honest admiration (2005:77). and that healing the father wound can have a radical effect on social society. The Church's role is to proclaim identities that enable people to live with a sense of hope and vision, and to work towards making that vision a reality today. I conclude by looking at this in more detail.

3 Role of the Church in faith and hope

3.1 What is the hope theology?

In chapter three I looked at the hope theologies of each author in depth, and then explored that concept further in chapter five as I looked at how their respective followers understand that message. While there are differences in terms of how the message of hope is presented and understood, in both cases I draw a conclusion that the message of hope is one that gives the followers an identity in a place of loss, and assures them that God is present with them in that place.

In terms of the differences of each author, particularly in regard to power, prestige and possession, for Buchan this is about God giving his faithful what is desired, what they hope for. Rohr, on the other hand, speaks about hope being found in the ability to give up one's need for power prestige and possession and how God is only discovered by taking a journey of descent and finding God in the mess of the present.

In terms of commonality the concept of hope for salvation is important, whether that was salvation from sins, or for salvation expressed as healing and wholeness from brokenness (one's own or that of the country). I suggest in both cases that salvation has

a lot to do with identity. Also important in regards to hope is that there is meaning, even in suffering; that God is active in the present, and that I am not alone.

3.2 Why is it compelling?

Both author's respective messages are compelling because they speak into a place of spiritual need – that of loss of identity – in people's lives. Two respondents, one a follower of Buchan and one of Rohr, used the word "hunger" to describe this need, which was evident in both groups of adherents. Both groups found their respective mentor attractive and able to communicate well in terms of relating to them.

Buchan's followers were able to embrace his message of hope because it is plain, simple and direct, often in contrast to an academic, intellectual message taught by clergy, and they are able to relate to Buchan because he is a farmer and one of them with a story that is similar to theirs – in this way he becomes an example.

Rohr's followers expressed appreciation for the way in which he reminds them that God is present in all things and all times, including the mess that world – and often their own life – is in. These people feel that they are able to relate more deeply to Rohr because has led them out of a faith that no longer works for them.

In both cases people have discovered in their mentors someone who leads them out of the liminal to a lifestyle of greater contemplation and action.

3.3 Who finds it meaningful?

As indicated in chapter four the adherents of both Rohr and Buchan are diverse in nature and background. The major difference in terms of this study is that Rohr's followers are mainly ordained.

It is worth noting two items in regard to the demographic of the study. First, the respondents were all white. While respondents indicated the presence of other races at events led by both Buchan and Rohr and their appreciation of the speaker, I was not able to identify any for the purposes of the interviews. This may be as a result of the predominantly white context from which I was working and a discourse of the white male norm, or it may be because, in the case of Buchan, his appeal is particularly to the

Afrikaner identity.

Second, particularly in terms of Buchan's supporters, the majority of the respondents were male. I suggest that this does not indicate that Buchan is not popular among women. Anecdotally many of the wives of the men I interviewed expressed admiration for him and a wish that he would organise something for them. I believe the reason for fewer women being interviewed was again white male hegemony and perception among the men that Buchan fans are male and had been to a Mighty Men's Conference, however his focus on masculine image could also have played a role.

All of the respondents indicated that they found a more meaningful experience of God through their respective mentor. By and large most respondents had been called into a deeper relationship with God at some point in their lives through a moment of response such as "giving one's life to Christ".

Buchan's followers like the image of tough men called to power, prestige and possession, but what appeared especially meaningful for them was the experience of the call to move beyond ego even as tough men. Rohr's followers, who had mostly experienced a more fundamentalist faith earlier in their lives, perceived the on-going call of God as one of moving beyond fundamentalism towards what they felt was a more mature faith, with two respondents mentioning Fowler's *Stages of Faith* (1981), indicating that they felt there had been a growth from a Buchan type faith to something different.

4 Conclusion

As noted in chapter two, for many people South Africa is not a particularly hopeful place to be. While this could be true for most South Africans, this study focuses particularly on the "previously advantaged" who have felt disempowered in the "New South Africa" and who feel that they are losing or have already lost what has been important for them. Respondents from both groups spoke of how they felt their mentor had been able to restore in them a sense of hope for South Africa. For Buchan's followers that hope is based to a large extent in the power of Jesus as Saviour and in what a country run by "born again" Christians might look like.

While Buchan has given men their pride back – although according to Nadar that has been done in a questionable way – and has called them to take their place first in their homes and then in their communities, a more practical response to the needs of the country was also indicated as being where hope lay, which was, to a large extent, more important for Rohr's followers. The idea of God being at work in the midst of the difficulties and of being able to see the current South African context not as one of threat but of opportunity ran through Rohr's followers' responses.

As was indicated in the responses, there are many factors which result in the respective authors' popularity, among which we could name the ability to allow followers an encounter with God in a way that is meaningful and transformational in their lives; then a simplicity and willingness to engage with people where they are – particularly in terms of their struggle for identity; and to communicate their vision simply to their followers.

Both approaches to hope have their strengths and their weaknesses. It could be argued that Buchan's theology and outlook on the world is shallow; whereas Rohr is too confusing to people who aren't theologians; in some cases, Buchan helps us to see more clearly than Rohr, and in others it is Rohr who offers a clearer vision, but both have something to teach the church today about being relevant in a postmodern world, and how to approach the hunger people have for an authentic identity that will see them through difficult times in their own lives and in the country.

If churches, church leaders and Christians are able to do this, then, as stated in the introduction, the church can indeed continue to be relevant and go beyond its walls and the walls that society places around it. It can become a candle "burning between hope and despair, faith and doubt, life and death," and will continue to be relevant to a society that is hungry for the spiritual, but doubts that the church can supply it.

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Appendices

1 Statement of Faith – Angus Buchan

What is set out below is the Statement of faith of Buchan's organisation, Shalom Ministries: (2001, p. 146)¹⁸

We believe...

- 1 The Bible to be the inspired and infallible authoritative word of God.
- 2 In the eternal triune God.
- 3 In the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
- 4 That for the salvation of the lost and sinful man (*sic*), regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
- 5 In the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.
- 6 In the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto resurrection of life, and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
- 7 In the creation, test and fall of man (*sic*), as recorded in Genesis; his total spiritual depravity and inability to attain to divine righteousness apart from God.
- 8 In the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour of men (*sic*), conceived of the Holy Spirit, both of the virgin Mary, very God and very Man.
- 9 In the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ This was taken from *The Seed Sower*, however the same statement of faith appears in many of Shalom's publications.

2 Statement of Faith – M.A.L.Es.

Men As Learners and Elders is a programme started by Rohr to “direct men in lifelong spiritual learning, train men to be elders, maintain on-going relationships with participants, provide Men’s Rites of Passage and to develop additional Rites as Needed” (2005, p. 179). Their statement of faith is reproduced below as a comparison to Buchan’s view. Rohr also offers “A Reconstructionist Creed” at the conclusion of *Hope Against Darkness* (2001:180).

We believe...

- 1 Every man is a beloved Son of God
- 2 Men are ready for serious spiritual journeys.
- 3 Our message is grounded in the Christian Paschal Mystery while integrating the symbols and rituals from other religions and cultures.
- 4 Men must seek to improve their conscious contact with God through prayer and meditation.
- 5 Men must have the affirmation and guidance of wise mentors
- 6 Men have a need and responsibility to mentor future generations.
- 7 In a universal message that transcends the boundaries of race, nation, culture, gender, economics/class. politics, sexual orientation and religious differences.
- 8 Men must seek honest mutuality in their relationships with women in thought, word and deed.
- 9 Men must recognise and critique their own power in regard to women, minorities and the poor, and use their power for justice in the world.
- 10 There is a need for collaborating with like-minded groups and other faith traditions.

3 Interview Topics

The semi-structured interviews covered material in the following areas:

Profession, education, gender and home background

Christian / religious background and their own understanding of the depth of their Christian experience and what is meaningful to them in their faith walk. How do they understand the point of Christianity?

How is God real to them?

How would they define hope? Christian hope? Has this been influenced by the author?

How has the respondent first become aware of the author? What is attractive about his theology and what is the level of their experience with him, i.e., does the respondent know of him through books, television, audio? Has the respondent seen the author live and / or met him in person?

How has the author influenced their faith? Why has that been meaningful?

Have they been encouraged / been given hope by reading / hearing / seeing the author? In what way?

What are the challenges that they face as South Africans today?

How does this approach to hope help the respondent in today's world? Does it answer the challenges of a postmodern, post colonial South Africa? (Those items mentioned by Rohr: confusion and powerlessness, holy disorder, fear and loneliness, and in the white South African context fears of change and loss of lifestyle, and political and social impotence.) Does this approach bring meaning to Christianity today?

For both groups there was a question as to whether the respondent had heard of the other author or not, and their thoughts of him and his approach to theology.

4 List of Respondents

The following are the names of the people interviewed in the fieldwork component of this dissertation, together with the date and place that the interview occurred. First names marked with an asterisk indicate that they requested that their first names only be used. Ordained respondents are indicated with the appropriate designation.

4.1 Buchan's followers:

Trevor Naudé	3 October 2011	Brackenhurst
Trevor Spencer-Crookes	3 October 2011	Brackenhurst
Louis Marneweck	11 November 2011	Standerton
Ps Gerhard*	14 November 2011	Standerton
Watson*	18 November 2011	Standerton
Allen Duncan	21 November 2011	Standerton
Dave Stols	25 November 2011	Brakpan
Annette Smit	02 December 2011	Volksrust
Gerrit Smit	02 December 2011	Volksrust
David Crookes	02 December 2011	Platrand
Yvonne Cawood	02 December 2011	Platrand
James*	06 December 2011	Standerton
Stan*	07 December 2011	Standerton
Manie*	08 December 2011	Standerton
Tony Habgood	30 December 2011	Benoni

4.2 Rohr's followers:

Rev Dalene Jordaan	27 September 2011	Ruimsig
Rev Brenda Timmer	27 September 2011	Soweto
Ds George*	06 October 2011	Bapsfontein
Marina Fick	06 October 2011	Benoni
Rev Terry Howell	22 November 2011	Ermelo
Rev John van de Laar	22 November 2011	Cape Town (via Skype)
Geoff*	25 November 2011	Benoni
Rev Trevor Hudson	20 December 2011	Benoni
Rev Kevin Sprong	21 December 2011	Durban (via Skype)
Rev Jenny*	21 December 2011	Durban (via Skype)
Rev Paul Oosthuizen	30 December 2011	Edenvale
Rev Steven Lottering	24 January 2012	Mossel Bay (via Skype)
Rev Colin Andrews	30 January 2012	Pinetown
Sergio Milandri	02 February 2012	Cape Town (via Skype)

5 Informed Consent form

University of KwaZulu-Natal School of Religion and Theology

Things yet unseen: A critical analysis of how the teachings of Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr offer alternative messages of Christian hope.

Rev Neil Vels
084 580 0664
neilvels@mweb.co.za

Supervisor: Prof Tony Balcomb
033 260 5560

I am a student at the UKZN School of Religion and Theology, and I am conducting interviews for my Master of Theology thesis. I am studying the ministries of the popular Christian speakers and writers Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr in order to determine what it is that makes their different theologies of hope popular so that it may be applied in the local church.

Through preliminary research I have determined that you have a particular interest in Angus Buchan / Richard Rohr and therefore request your contribution to this project.

During this study, you will be asked to answer some questions as to why the work of a particular author is meaningful to you and how it has shaped your view of God. This interview was designed to be approximately a half hour to an hour in length. However, please feel free to expand on the topic or talk about related ideas. Also, if there are any questions you would rather not answer or that you do not feel comfortable answering, please say so and we will stop the interview or move on to the next question, whichever you prefer. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation. There may be follow up questions at a later stage conducted telephonically or by email.

Please note that there is no payment or reimbursement of financial expenses claimable by participation in this study, however the results of the study will be available for your use should you require them.

All the information will be kept confidential. I will keep the data in a secure place. Only myself and the faculty supervisor mentioned above will have access to this information. Upon completion of this project, all data will be destroyed or stored in a secure location.

Participant's Agreement:

I am aware that my participation in this interview is voluntary. I understand the intent and purpose of this research. If, for any reason, at any time, I wish to stop the interview, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

I am aware the data will be used in a Master's thesis that will be publicly available at the Cecil Renaud Library on the UKZN Pietermaritzburg Campus. I have the right to review, comment on, and/or withdraw information prior to the study's submission. The data gathered in this study are confidential with respect to my personal identity unless I specify otherwise. I understand if I say anything that I believe may incriminate myself, the interviewer will immediately rewind the tape and record over the potentially incriminating information. The interviewer will then ask me if I would like to continue the interview.

I grant permission to use one of the following:

- ☐ My first name only
- ☐ My full name
- ☐ Just a pseudonym

I will be given a copy of the:

☐ paper, ☐ audiotape, ☐ videotape ☐ transcribed interview

Additional conditions for my participation in this research are noted here:

If I have any questions about this study, I am free to contact the student researcher or the supervisor (contact information given above). I have been offered a copy of this consent form that I may keep for my own reference.

I _____ (full names of participant) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

Participant's signature

Date

6 Release form for interviews appended

This agreement ensures that you have granted permission for your interview to be quoted in full

I, _____ (interviewee), hereby authorize Neil Michael Vels to record my name, likeness, image, and voice on tape, film, or otherwise to be reproduced in the appendix of his dissertation entitled *Things yet unseen: A critical analysis of how the teachings of Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr offer alternative messages of Christian hope*.

In consideration of my participation in said recording, I agree that:

- The full transcript of the interview will be reproduced in the appendix of the above mentioned dissertation which will be publicly available in the Cecil Renauld Library at Pietermaritzburg campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Copies will be held and made available as a public reference resource for possible use in research, teaching, publication, electronic media (such as the Internet or the World Wide Web). Copies may be made available, in whole or in part, in any and all media, in perpetuity, throughout the world, subject to limitations stated below.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with the uses and restrictions mentioned below.
- All public use is made in strict accordance with copyright law and 'fair use' provisions.
- The University of KwaZulu-Natal, shall hold the copyright in this interview and I hereby cede any copy-right that I may have in my contribution to it.
- This agreement represents the entire understanding of the parties and may not be amended unless agreed to by both parties in writing.

The use of the interview is subject to the following restrictions (if any):

1. I require my name to be kept confidential and anonymity to be preserved. YES – NO

2. Other restrictions _____

Interviewee signature: _____

Signed at: _____

Date: _____

In the presence of (interviewer): _____

Administrative Use Only

Interviewee details

Full names: _____

Home address: _____

Home telephone: _____ Work _____
Mobile _____

Work address: _____

Fax number _____ E-mail address: _____

Interviewer and project details

Full Names: Neil Michael Vels

Research Project title: Things yet unseen: A critical analysis of how the teachings of Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr offer alternative messages of Christian hope.

Location of interview (s): _____

Number of tapes: 1 **Total length of interview (s):** _____

Transcribed by: Neil Vels

Additional Comments: _____

7 Sample interview 1: Louis Marneweck

Things yet unseen: A critical analysis of how the teachings of Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr offer alternative messages of Christian hope.

Interview transcript

Interviewer:	Neil Michael Vels
Student No:	210506432
Interviewee:	Louis Marneweck
Dates:	11 November 2011
Place:	Methodist Manse 16 Joubert Str, Standerton 082 414 5424
University:	University of kwaZulu-Natal
Supervisor:	Prof Tony Balcomb
Date completed:	29 February 2012

Louis Marneweck is an ex-politician and part time farmer in the Standerton area who has attended a number of the Mighty Men Conferences and watches Angus Buchan regularly on television. He discusses the need men have to be able to be emotional and for a support group as he shares some of his experiences with other men at the Conferences.

11 November 2011

Persons present: Neil Vels (**bold**)
Louis Marneweck

Louis, thank you for agreeing to meet with me and to participate in this interview, you have signed the disclosure saying that you're happy

Ja, no, it's pleasure for me, Neil.

We're just going to chat very informally about Angus Buchan and maybe we can begin if you can give me some of your own background, Christian background also.

Well, Neil, I grew up in an Afrikaans family, so we've always been part of the NG church and then I moved to the Baptist church. We experienced a lot of resistance because the whole family was Baptist, and some of our relatives said, you know, your children are too small, our youngest was ten and I said, you know what, we did the whole, can't say, ja, it's like a course, so we knew exactly what it's about, but what we did in our quiet times, as a family, we dealt with the whole story of baptism with our children, and they decided themselves that they are ready to be baptised. And so that was... I got involved in politics, first with a party like the Freedom Front, based on their religious views, but then after a while I realised, that... so I formed a political party called the Christian Party. After prayers, and many other people praying, and we said, well, our only duty is to proclaim the name of Christ. And our slogan was, some people were upset with that, we said you know everybody's got an idea of the solution, there's only one solution of Africa and that is if South Africa can commit themselves 100% to Christ, so that's roughly the background. I started off as a teacher, and...

What do you do now?

Neil, I'm a part time farmer. In 2009 I didn't return to the legislature. I was a member there for two terms and representing the Christian Party so that was also something which is, was very helpful in the sense that it opened the conversation. People would say - I was the chairperson of Scopa - so there was a SADC grouping and there people, like in Malawi, they would say, "Christian Party?" You know they would want to know

more and that. So it always said, in my speeches, I always said, “What does the Bible say?” about this topic. Be it social welfare, economics, and that was what my speech was about. And I said, well, I used politics in that sense to tell people about Jesus Christ and what the Bible says. So that was my background in a nutshell.

And as a child growing up, as an Afrikaner you obviously went to church fairly regularly.

Ja, we went regularly Neil and you know my parents have always been religious, and my mother especially, you know she was always praying and reading Bible. My father as well, so it's, you know I didn't have that Damascus experience of being totally... possibly the big danger is that you can be luke-warm, so as life went on I experienced the, I would say, a deeper progression in my religious life and as a family when we were baptised that was also...

And something happened to move you from the NG kerk to the Baptist?

I think, you know what happened, Neil? I always said you mustn't use politics, religion, to boost your political ambitions, and at some stage the congregation that was in tend to be very political. There would get political messages on Sundays, instead of the gospel. And then I said, well it's not, you know, this cannot be, that's not right to me. If I go to church I want to be enriched and... I must realise where I'm wrong and what can I do for my salvation. But to me that is the message that the church should... Of course the church must speak about social ills and all of that, using the Bible as your point of departure, but you cannot use the policy of a political party as your point of departure, and to gather votes for... I don't believe that the *dominee* or whoever was... So we had that exp... and I just said, well, it's not... but our whole family felt like that. You would walk out of church and say, “you know, I don't know what the message was today.” And I think it's, that's something that's happening, especially in the Afrikaans community. I've experienced that, is that people tend to want to move on where they find food for their soul, just that, just going through the motions is not sufficient for people anymore. And I think it's also... I discussed that with the *dominee* and all that, he just felt, well, he was on the right side. I served on the church council and all that... and you know, for instance, you've got that report where you must report to the Synod

about sins in your congregation. And one of the schools, you know, like George Hofmeyr we had the Vlakteskool and there was a spate of bad newspaper reports about some of the children that was being used for prostitution and... also they were pregnant and all that. But they were in the congregation, so here we are with visitation from the Synod and everything is hunky-dory. No mention of that. And then I said, well, I've got a problem that we've omitted some of the problems that we experience, and I raised it and the *dominee* said, "no, you know you've got it wrong, it's those children..." I said, "Those children are part of this congregation." We can paint a rosy picture to the Synod, but what do we say to God about that children? We mustn't condemn them, but we must help them. And if we say they don't exist, then we will never help them. So it was just that sort of things and then I said, no let me... we must go where there's a message for your children, for ourselves, so that we can realise the grace of God and it must, you know, you're longing for more. So that's why I've left the church and I said, there's only one reason when, why you can leave your church and that's is if there's no message for you anymore, and you stop growing and then I believe you must go where you can grow.

And if Louis you can maybe expand on it a bit, you're now going to Replika, hey? Ja How would you describe the Christian message? Not necessarily the... but the Christian message that you communicate, the gospel?

Ja, I believe, Neil, that the gospel we must, must be plain and simple in the sense that a child of eight years old must be able to understand the fact that Jesus have died for our sins, that he's the only way, and that if we don't, you know if we look at this new sort of movement that... everybody's god is also the same God that we get away from that to say that there is only one way. We don't hate other people that believe differently from us like Muslims, but we pray for them and that whenever we've got the opportunity that we can also speak to them. You know, I think away from, sometimes you get confronted with people saying that "*draai* or *braai*" situation, but I believe that first of all you - I think Angus puts it very well, he always says he's not interested in your story, only what is God's story. But I think people want to know the truth, plain and simple, and they must be able to understand the message. Or sometimes it's, there's difficult things in the Bible for some people to understand, but if you, if a preacher's got

the gift to be able to simplify all of that. But I believe Jesus have used stories to simplify the gospel for us, but to me that's important, that what our, why you, how it should be. But it's only when you ask God to help you with the message that you can simplify it .

Let's talk a little bit about hope, the focus of my thesis is looking at Christian hope. What is hope for you? What is Christian hope for you?

Well, Neil, for me it's the fact that I know that Jesus have died for my sins. And because of that I've received grace, but grace is a continuous, thing that's happening. And it's not a once off. And we are sinners, and some sins, there's nobody that's perfect and if I realise that God have granted me the grace and that my sins are forgiven and that Jesus is the mediator and the way that I can come to God at any time, day or night, and that gives me hope that whatever the circumstances is. You know when I was involved in politics... like Julius Malema for instance, people have asked me what should they do. Should they emigrate or leave? I say you know what? If you read the Bible you will see that God appoints people and he takes them away as well. And the same will happen to Julius Malema, that we must pray for him that he, he can be saved because he's got lots of talents, but God is protecting us, our lives is in his hands and that he will, he will keep us there. And if he wants us to do something differently like emigrating or whatever then you must go, but make sure that that is the message from God, not only your own, but don't get despondent about it because, you know, I don't know if you remember Peter Mokaba? And I said to this one guy, he's a farmer, I said "Do you what, do you remember Peter Mokaba?" and he had to think for quite a while. I said that was the guy who said, the settlers and one bullet, you know one farmer and all of that. I said, a long time ago he passed away. The stadium in Polokwane is named after him and there's a street in Potchefstroom. At that point he was one of the biggest threats and people have said, well we must leave South Africa because of this man, and I said and he's been taken away. So don't despair, you know, put your trust in God. That's my view

If we talk about Angus Buchan. I think Angus's message is one of hope.

Ja, definitely.

Maybe just to give a bit of background. How did you become aware of Angus?

Neil, he visited Standerton, but then I couldn't attend. There was, I wasn't in the Baptist church at that point but that wasn't the issue. I think 72 people attended.

This must have been a few years ago?

Ja. He just started off. And then he came to Standerton, you know and... but my brother-in-law, they are staying in, they stayed in Escourt, but they staying in Ladysmith now. He went there first, you know when they were still very, just a couple of hundred, and he told me about that and I also went down there and it's, to me it was just an amazing experience with all the men there because I believe that the men are under pressure. You're the leader in your house, but economic circumstances and all of that puts men under pressure and especially, I would say, my generation who still did national service and you were involved in the border and all that, and some guys that was in the permanent force, you know felt that, look, all of a sudden they are all the bad guys and you went after...

Sorry, Louis, how old are you?

I'm 57. So it was just that era of, you had no choice. I know I met some guys from New Zealand when they were here on a rugby tour and we were on a tour and I was invited by one of the directors of teaching to come to New Zealand, stay there for four years, play rugby, and be a teacher there and come back, but you first had to do national service, so that... and then that window of opportunity then passed, you know closed, and it wasn't there any more. But all of that and people then felt, well, they felt they were betrayed, they received medals and all of that sort of issues if you look at all of that, and then the message that Angus gave them, Here's men, they are open out in the veld with other men and they can feel free to cry if they want to, nobody will feel that they are embarrassing them or that sort of thing. They could just deal with their problems and the message of course, first of all the message that Angus brought to them that there is hope and there's salvation and he also, the encouragement that, where you give your life to Christ, go out and join a Bible-based church, become part of the church family. To me that was, that's what men needs today. You know and I was there when

we filled the big tent, so that was also really, you can't explain it to people, you can feel, I think that's what all of us said, is that you can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, you really could feel it. You know people being relaxed and in the sense that they would share their problems with other guys and making new friends and all of that, and the thing that binds you together is Jesus and the grace of God that you are saved. I think that is the big thing that Angus makes very simple for guys. To say, well, it's not a difficult thing and also his own experience that he tells people what happened to him. So I've met him through that, that's how I went, word of mouth.

Have you actually met Angus?

I haven't met him in person there's too many guys, but you know he, I think I know him quite well in the sense that all the tv broadcasts that's part of our, we are watching it every, you know the message there. So it's, by that and the way that he shares it is, you feel like you know him very well, that is very true. But I would love to meet him in person, and that's a, I think that'll be an experience as well.

One of the things that I find interesting is that so many Afrikaans speaking people are going to his meetings.

Ja it also goes back you see, if you look at the way the Dutch Reformed Church also started in South Africa is that a lot of the Presbyterian preachers played a very big role so the fact that Angus is of Scottish ancestry also helps with that, but I think the fact that Angus, also the other issue is you see farmers there. That goes there and they are not ashamed to show their emotions and all of that. And the fact that Angus also knows farming. You see the majority of South Africans has got some link with the soil and they care about the environment and all that and Angus also knows about droughts and he knows about bumper crops and all that, but the fact that he speaks a simple and a plain language and he's not telling you about himself. He's telling you about Jesus Christ, and that is one of the things that appeals to Afrikaans people. Because I think also it shows a development. You know, Neil at some stage the Afrikaner turned their leaders and also the language, everything into an idol. And so the transgression that have happened in South Africa the whole change in government, all of that, I think it also plays a role in the sense that the Afrikaans people tend to find their security in, you

know the *Broederbond* and all that and they will ensure that I will get a certain position and all of that, and my promotion and this club that they've had, and all of that was taken away.

So it's a sense of loss?

A sense of loss and I think Angus, well it's also some maturity with the Afrikaner who said that you know, all this typical Afrikaans things is useless. And that laager mentality and all of that have changed. That must be it because I was fortunate in the sense that my family was in the United Party, so it was quite different, you know we didn't have this story of, I know there was campaigns there with people, you mustn't buy from the Indian guys, you know and this total Afrikaans issue, you must be, my father was never part of the *Broederbond*, not a member of any secret society, that's, so we were in that sense a less exposed to that, but I think that played a role especially with a, that's why it changes... you know you find a lot of Afrikaans people today in the DA for instance. Where they will speak English and they will sit next to a black guy, that sort of issue, you know, if you look at all of that, then you must ask yourself, was all the other things really necessary? But I think it also helped in the sense that, to break that down, that you must realise that your home language and that sort of things, that's not something that you must have like an idol. There's more to life like that. You know, but I think Angus can speak to the people in the sense that he simplifies the message, and you find many people that can't speak English will struggle, but they sit there and also young children, young boys. You know, that you've seen there that they want to come to Angus. I know my... at one stage he said they must be older than twelve, so my brother-in-law, his son was ten, and he wanted to go. He said, alright, "We'll make you twelve". It won't hold against us the fact that we've lied about your age. But if you just look at the impression, after we came back. Angus said to the guys, your first fruit of the day, you must give it to God. So when you wake up, take your quiet time, and after we came back his father found him, as he went in the passage past his room, he was up and he was on his knees before the bed. So that is the impact, but it's not Angus Buchan, it's the message that he brings.

So the Afrikaner people have, have a sense of loss, and they're looking for something else, and they're finding that in Angus?

I think in his message, Neil, in the message, yes. If you look at that and it's, so to me it's a very good development that people find their security in their faith. In God and his Son Jesus Christ and that they know, you know the last one when we were there, there was a guy from Zimbabwe staying across us, and his brother-in-law, okay, he's a professional hunter, this guy's a tough guy, and their father-in-law came with them, they were three brothers-in-law there, and he wasn't a believer, the father-in-law, but they said, "no, come with us" and the second day - they arrived early we also went the day before the time - the second day, night, he gave his heart to Jesus. And if you look at those tough guys, they're not ashamed to, well that guy shoots buffaloes and elephant, and all that, but to tell you about his love for Christ and the way his life have changed and all of that, so that is, I think that is what everybody wants when you can have this sort of illusion that you'll find you security in your possessions. And your position and all of a sudden you are relegated to the back seat and somebody you what we're not interested in your opinion on certain things. And at some stage many Afrikaans people, for instance, have isolated themselves. We don't want to watch the news, don't read the papers, nothing at all, I'll just be self-sufficient and keep myself busy with my things. And some of the people have emigrated, said, "well, we must leave South Africa," and all of that is changing because of that message, or that security being replaced with... So I think there's revival in South Africa, I must say.

I just want to pick up on what you've been saying now because I'm quite interested in that you said in the past we found our security in possessions and position and so on, and it's been taken away. What is Angus replacing that with?

He's replacing it with the Word of God. That's what he's replacing it with. The message that he brings is Bible-based, and he will also tell you if somebody comes to you with a story and he can't show you in the Bible where he finds it, don't listen to him. Because then he's telling you his own story. And that is what Angus is replacing it with. In my view God used him to replace it, and to say to people, there's simple message of salvation, and that gives you hope for the future. And whatever happens around you, you know that you are living within the will of God, that he's your Father, you can come to him at any time, day or night, and that, he will take you out of that situation - maybe not into the situation that you would like to be in - but he will be with you in that

situation and you're not alone in it. So all of a sudden, Neil, I think it's also that feeling of isolation that people have experienced, in my view have moved away and they've found that, they find peace because once you've replaced the worldly message with the Word of God then there's, people say, well, you know I've read many of the testimonials of women that've said, "you know what, I've received my old husband back. He's totally a changed person - for the good, not for the bad." Well, that's also the challenge that I see. Because people come to salvation and then Angus has said to them, "Go back, go to a Bible-based church." But I don't think there's always sufficient follow up on that in our congregations, where people will, that new believer, will, because some of the guys, they don't know the Bible, they don't even know how to, the books, they don't know how, they don't know, they've said, no don't tell me about the Old Testament, New... I don't know anything about that, so there's a task that must... so that people can have knowledge, and by having the knowledge they, then you know what to do in the different situations. But because it also says people perishes because of a lack of knowledge. That is just a thing that I believe, well Angus have said that God has led him into say, well, we've completed the Mighty Men, although, I receive his prayer letters and all that, they've had negotiations with one of the major tv channels that there will be a Mighty Men programme, in prime time, at six o'clock at night, just before the top soapies, so it's just the finances for that, but I think that is, that will also, take the message further. Because I really believe that our men's ministries are, I'm talking general here, we not doing enough, the church as a corporate body, if I can call it that, are not doing enough for men. You've got women, and women find it easier to talk with each other, and all of that, but the men find it more difficult, so I think that's a challenge where we've had the Mighty Men, if I can say something, call it the phenomenon, but, if we can take it from there so that there will be in all our congregations, and not necessarily only congregations, but I believe if we look at some churches are so afraid that they might lose members that they don't cooperate with, they in fact view the other churches in town as an opposition to them. And that's not how it should be, and if we can have, in every town, or, wherever, a men's, I wouldn't say organisation, but where the men can talk to each other and have say, just a, especially when you go out in nature, 'cause all of a sudden there's not all this luxury! Amenities and all that you know, but some people said, well, they didn't like the toilets, for

instance, they won't go there again because of that. We had, when we had the tent there, we were 146 guys that went down there from *Replika*. Well not everybody was in *Replika*, but we went as a group, and there was a father and two sons, and you know Angus at that one, they gave you your food for free. And they had like a bunny chow, but there was not enough meat left because they prepared for about 23 000, slaughtered many oxen and all of a sudden there was about 60 000. Plus even. So they got bread and they said, no they don't like it and they packed up and left. I said you know what, it's so sad that you were invited here, you didn't have to pay anything, the food you got for free, and now you're cross because there's too many people. So, but then afterwards they talked to people and said, no they know they were wrong and all that and they missed the message. So you also had those guys it was outing, that because of, maybe they got caught up in the hype or whatever to go there. But I believe that if they were there, the Holy Spirit spoke to them. They might have came for the wrong reasons, but that's what happened. So I believe that there's a vac... a void, or a vacuum that's being filled for men that they want to be, I believe, in the company, that's why people go and hunt and go and camp and that sort of thing, but, and everybody came down there. You know what was so interesting is that as you drove down people would be tolerant on the roads, you know, they would wave, and no, "you go first..." and being in that queue with the traffic there. People were sitting for a hour and even longer in the traffic. Everybody was smiling. Got out of the car, spoke to each other... But if they'd done that in Jo'burg you would have seem tempers and all that, but nothing like that. In fact we had a, you know the showers and all that, it was just too many people, so there was a dam there on Angus's farm and our group and also some other groups - there was a photo in the *Farmers' Weekly* about it - we just said well, we're going to wash, we all went into the dam. All the guys in their underpants there in the dam washing and all, so that was all of that. But also, people from different race groups. There was just a sort of peace that have came down.

It's almost the way we wish the country could be.

Ja, really Neil, it is, and also the feeling of peace that you don't have to. I think people are so tensed up as well, if you look at the crime, especially in the cities and all that and here they can relax, you know, you leave everything open nothing will get lost, that sort

of issue is, I think it's what people want.

So there's a level of trust amongst you.

Ja, definitely, very much so. And also, but like I say the challenge is when you come back. You know people will have that high, say, "Well, I'm a new believer..." and then will, if there's no follow up on them they will, some will backslide. That is, so I think it's also, that is a challenge for the church, I believe. Because we also went to the stadiums, not Loftus, we went down to Kingspark. Because our wives said, no, they want to be there, and the children were all of that because they know Angus from Grassroots, from the programme, and they said, well, they feel it's a bit unfair, but they saw all of that... but we went down there. And also if I look at, there was lots of families. You know the whole spirit of peace that was there at Kingspark. It was just amazing to have everybody there and we were sitting where Morné Steyn kicked the winning goal at the same position where we were sitting on the grass at Kingspark, so it's all that is...

And maybe just in closing, have you ever heard of somebody called Richard Rohr?

Neil, I must say no.

That's fine. I just needed to hear that. He's actually a Catholic priest who also has a men's ministry and practices it from a different perspective.

Is he in South Africa?

He's from the States, but has been to South Africa a couple of times, but been more active in Cape Town.

I might have read the name, it looked, the name looks familiar but if I say I've... you know I we, one of the channels that we watch is TBN, and there's different guys like, John Hagee's got his style, but he said something very true the day before yesterday's talk. Heal the family and you'll heal the nation. So on the issue of family values. I think that's all part and parcel of what Angus comes to say, well, if you're a real man you will do the following, you'll respect your wife, you'll be the leader in your house, you know all of that and that makes it also a follow up with that is *Grassroots*, where women can

also experience, and your, the girls in your family can also experience the same message. And of what he's saying, this simple message of, that, he says, that's why they call is *Grassroots*, go back to the grassroots. But I think it's also family driven. And if you look at Loftus, you know when we were down there, what's this guy from *TopSport*? The tall guy with the almost like blonde hair? But he was there, a lot of that presenters was there, guys like Balie Swart. At this last one Pieter de Villiers was there. Sitting there with the crowd, there's, you know, and out of that there flows, like in Bloemfontein, those guys have got a *Lionspeak* or *Leeupraat*, and they've, there's a couple of hundred men that belongs to that, so they meet every second month. They go somewhere, you know and they've got a website, and they help each other and when there's a problem with somebody they will go and pray and do intercession and all of that and it's just grown.

So it's a support system?

It's a support system but what's so nice about it, it covers all the churches. There's not an issue of "well you come from that church, no, no, no..." You know, that sort of if I can call it "church apartheid".

I think men need a support system.

Oh they definitely, Neil. Neil that's one of the real things that... I think we find it in the Bible as well. If you go look at David and Jonathan, they were friends and the way discussed things with each other and even with Saul that wanted to kill David and all that. You know, I can just imagine his loneliness that he must have experienced. He didn't do anything wrong and all of a sudden he's the chief enemy, and that sort of thing, no there's a very big need for that. I think your guys did it very well with that breakfast you've had there. It was the highlight for me of my year.

Louis, thank you very much.

No, pleasure, Neil. I hope I...

That's been great.

8 Sample interview 2: Paul Oosthuizen

Things yet unseen: A critical analysis of how the teachings of Angus Buchan and Richard Rohr offer alternative messages of Christian hope.

Interview transcript

Interviewer:	Neil Michael Vels
Student No:	210506432
Interviewee:	Paul Oosthuizen
Dates:	30/12/2011
Place:	Edenvale Methodist Church Edenvale 072 617 9878
University:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
Supervisor:	Prof Tony Balcomb
Date completed:	14 March 2012

Paul Oosthuizen is an ordained minister in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa and is currently stationed at the Edenvale Methodist Church. He has spent time in New Mexico with Richard Rohr and he speaks about how that experience and time spent with Rohr's books has shaped him and resonated with his Methodist background. He also offers some thoughts on how Rohr's teaching can be relevant in South Africa.

30 December 2011

Persons present: Neil Vels (**bold**)
Paul Oosthuizen

Paul, thanks for agreeing to meet with me this morning, I appreciate that, to chat about Rohr. Just to begin, maybe give me some of your background, growing up, where you come from...

Okay! I grew up in Benoni in a family that didn't attend church I went to Sunday School for one year with my family and then they stopped going to church, and then I went one year by myself, and then in high school a friend invited me to a Methodist Church and I started worshipping there in Benoni and, ja, finished my schooling in Benoni, studied, initially some engineering, and then I did law and English and philosophy and then, I'd been involved in the youth leadership etc, etc and I started being a youth pastor; I intended to candidate for the ministry and then the youth pastor job was open so they asked me to take over. Was a youth pastor for nine years, four and half years in Benoni, four and a half years in Midrand, and then from there I candidate, got married just before that, and a year in Mitchell's Plain, a year at College in Pretoria and then Weltevreden Park for three years. I have got two children, three and our months, so ja, married to Helen, and ja, that's kinda the highlights, or low lights....

Coming from a family that weren't regular church goers, how did you come to faith in Christ?

As I said friend invited me and we ended up having a lift club so there was a general reliability to that. In std 5 my dad was quite severely ill and nearly passed away and I remember being in std 6 and reading *Footprints*, the poem, on the wall and being struck by God who was concerned and present, and two weeks later a friend invited me to the church and I went. Prior to that I was quite anti-faith. I got into trouble under apartheid Christian education, got sent to the office for ripping off Christians and things like that! And then kinda went intrigued and enjoyed it and enjoyed the community I think, and then in std 8 did confirmation, and that was particularly meaningful for me. I had a leader that was quite authentic and took his faith seriously and from there, ja, went into leadership. I think I made a commitment really in that year. So ja, that's how... My

parents are not really pro at all, you know, they were quite anti me going to church and quite anti when I started as a youth pastor. Now I think they're resigned to the fact. They get good reports from friends, so...

You haven't spoken much about making a commitment. Was it a big thing or not such a big thing?

Well I think the confirmation service itself was the commitment moment. I took that quite seriously, you know? And that was a serious moment of asking if Jesus, I think... I think there was also a moment at university when, really just asking the question, what to do with my life. And I think at that point taking discipleship really seriously. In some sense a second conversion, you know? And that was really saying, "put me to what you will..." kinda at that moment, and ja, I remember that quite clearly of making that decision to say, whatever, I'll go there. In some sense I think that's also connected to the call to ministry as well.

And you've been obedient to that call?

Not always! I've tried. I mean, I've certainly didn't plan to be a youth pastor, I didn't see myself as a youth pastor. I always saw myself as a pastor with a passion for young people, and kind of ran away from the ordained ministry for nine years, kind of thing. So ja. I think it has been a gift, those experiences.

In terms of your studies in the ordained ministry?

I've completed my Bachelor of Theology through TEEC, and that's what I've studied there.

Do you plan to do anything further?

I'm not a student. I'm a learner, I love reading and things like that, but, ja, I dunno. I would have liked to have done maybe Honours in philosophy, and I've thought about doing narrative therapy just as an upscale, in the beginning I did some certificate level courses and that, so I've wondered about doing that. And then I think at some point I'll probably want to do a bit more studies in Biblical studies, particularly.

And how would you describe your faith life now? Relationship with God?

Whatever language you'd like to use?

It's been, I've found I've almost felt I've regressed through the process of probation. It's been a tough experience, and so, I think I've come through a tough time and I think in that time God has been present and I know that. I haven't always felt that, I don't know if that makes sense? and at the moment I'm really feeling new life, excited about what God is doing in my life and through me and partnering God in doing that, so ja, so certainly that's my connection and ja, I think, I see God as shaping me and forming me and those things there. I think also just using spiritual disciplines to connect with God and those kinds of things.

As a result of your journey that you've personally undertaken, how do you understand the point of Christianity. What's Christianity all about?

For me I see it as engaging the Kingdom of God. I see that as Jesus's primary message and for me a life of faith is... Christianity is about becoming who we're meant to be, who we're created to be, and that requires surrendering and allowing God to shape us into who we're meant to be. And so for me the point of faith is to create a colony of heaven on earth.

That's how you'd understand the Kingdom of God?

Ja and colony of heaven that will continue forever and that death won't be able to stop either. So to embrace it, engage it, live in it, surrender to it now for eternity, so that would be my view of the point of faith, you know.

And how does hope come into that?

Well for me the hope is that the kingdom of heaven is coming. It's around, it's present, it's available and consistently, constantly and there's a movement of God to restore and make whole that is unstoppable, that is continuing and the hope is that, that it's coming. Revelations, heaven is coming to earth. So for me that's Jesus's prayer, the Lord's prayer. So for me hope is the possibility of partnering God in what is going to happen, is happening, and has already in some areas happened. There are places or pockets of

heaven when people are faithful and they're available, that's the point of, that's hope for me.

Hope's quite a broad subject. Difficult to define, as we were saying earlier. You've spoken about what your own hope is. If we were to look at the broader South African context and say, what is hope for South Africa... what would it be?

My sense currently is that in 1994 there was this incredible hope of avoiding the darkness, violence, the war, those kind of things. And that was the hope, and I think particularly amongst oppressed people it was a hope of a new possibility of quality or dignity or restoration or those kind of things.

In South Africa currently I think, my sense is we've had a political liberation, but we haven't, well to some degree, but we haven't had an economic liberation. We haven't had meaning and purpose for people's daily lives, people live in squalor and are hopeless in that sense, you know, to live without a job for 15 years, or to leave school knowing that you'll never get a job, I think despair predominates, and I think, I think we are in a stage now where the hope was seen as the government delivering and the government has delivered amazing, amazing things in terms of housing, in terms of water, those kinds of things, but in terms of employment we've actually gone backwards, we regressed. And I think people long for a meaning and purpose in daily life, and so for me that hope has not been met. And I think among the affluent there's an increasing fear. You can't, no country in the world has ever survived peacefully with such diversity. Sooner or later the masses say, "Enough!" And so I think, I don't sense a huge amount of hope. I don't sense it from the poor that they see the political dispensation as giving them hope. Increasingly there's a riot pretty much weekly, a service delivery riots last year and this year, I think there's been one every week. So, and I think the emigration of the wealthy, you know a million people leave, and that is not just white. It's black, white, coloured, Indian, people who can have chosen a different context. So I think for me the hope of South Africa is to begin to take seriously what God would desire in this place. And what God wants to do and is doing. And for me there are amazing, amazing people doing amazing things in this country through NGOs, politicians who are faithful, church leaders, others, businessmen, and there's a hope. And I think also young people are just, the Arab spring recently. I think that's

impacted our own country and people are saying things can be different, and want them to be different, so I think that is the hope of... painting where we're not building a colony of heaven and where would God want us to and can we do about that, you know. So for me that is the need for hope, and that is the hope as well.

And we're going to also speak about Richard Rohr. Tell me a little of your experience with Richard, you've spent some time with him.

When he came out to South Africa not recently, the time before, I can't even remember whether it was 2003, maybe, I think? I dunno. I got to listen to him and he spoke about *Hope against Darkness*, that was the theme so it was a retreat for a couple of days, in Alberton, and then when he came out last year, I think it was, this year?

Last year.

Last year. I went down to Cape Town to spend some time with him predominantly around the men's work, those were the areas he was doing it. And then I went across to the States to do an internship at the Center for Acton and Contemplation.

Was that last year as well?

No, no. That was 2003 I think, somewhere round there. And the internship was a 10 day immersion and it was focussed on, they called it a "Prophet School," but really the focus is on contemplative lifestyle, helping one to deepen one's relationship with God, connect to God, draw strength from God, hope, joy and then from that to engage the world as a hopeful person and around that was to, as a hopeful person we believe in the gospel and God at work, but we also confront the reality of human sin and brokenness and so we did some social analysis techniques, we went across and stayed in the border in Al Paso in Texas and did... just encountered the bordered communities, highlighting the diversity of wealth, cross the border areas, Mexican versus American, and then we stayed in a, what we would call a squatter camp, on a rubbish tip in Juarez which is quite a violent area known for particularly the murders of drug lords and things like that. And that was ten days, and then obviously reflection upon those experiences. I mean in South Africa I think a similar thing would have been *The Pilgrimage of Pain and Hope*, you know, so I think that really was the reality, is that this is what God is

wanting to do, this is the dream, this is how we can connect to that God and this is the reality of society, now how do we build a bridge of hope, of change, and enable people to engage that. So that was the ten day experience there. And then, ja, I've regularly listened to his sermons, read his homilies, you know, download them, and then I've got a number of his tape series and some of his books.

Did you first hear about him before he was in South Africa?

No, no. When he was in South Africa a friend said he was coming out. I had no knowledge of who this person was and just heard he was worthwhile listening to and I went across to listen to him.

And what connected with you?

I think I connect with Wesleyanism which has always had a balance between evangelical thrust of the spiritual disciplines alongside of social justice, and in Richard I saw those things connecting as well where contemplative lifestyle based on encounter with God through the spiritual disciplines, alongside of social justice. So for me my own Methodist experience connected very strongly with Richard Rohr's, you know, he really sees action and contemplation, he says the most important word is "and". And I think for Methodists, I think Wesley would have said the same thing, you know. There was this evangelical thrust but if it, there can be no personal salvation without a social salvation, and so those kind of themes I think connected with me, and then just a very charismatic speaker as well, so ja, I think... And then I found, I find his coherence very very helpful. So his ability to see the great themes of scripture, I mean his series on those words, I found that very helpful of him pulling out those things. I also find helpful his particular exegetical tool of saying there's a prophetic and a priestly leaning and prophetic is more Jesus centred where the priestly is often about who's in and who's out, and how he unpacks that in scripture and contrasts those two, so ja. And just seeing the vision of God going forward. I also enjoyed, as a Franciscan, his incarnational theology, very strong on the idea of if Jesus enters into human life then there's hope, and that's unstoppable, you know? And I found that quite a helpful thing to be exposed to.

And in terms of your life, you mentioned some of the things, is there something specific or a specific way that he's spoken to you that was transformative in your life?

Well, I think part of it has obviously been asking, "What is my role as pastor?" You know, how do I live out my faith? and for me those two balances, to practice a contemplative life - to be a person of prayer, silence, meditation, retreat - and allow that to shape one, for the work of bringing hope to the world through Christ's vision. So for me that's been quite a radical influence, certainly in my ministry and my life. To lesser and greater degrees, obviously, but that's certainly shaped my vision of... Prior to ordination I did the Ignatian exercises, and certainly in reflecting on that process, some of Richard's teaching certainly has impacted how I understand my call in those things. So some of my, I think I often sense sometimes the church has runs charities, and we don't do justice. Not that we shouldn't do charity work, I think it's requires, I mean people are in desperate need. But my sense often is that we are not speaking prophetically to the structures that are hurting people resulting is us needing to do charity work, that old adage there's a factory that's wounding people and the churches build a hospital next door instead of fixing the factory. So I think that certainly shaped my theological view of what it means to do ministry and be a Christian, not just as a minister, is that the work we're called to do is the daily work of life and in which we partner God and we stand against unrighteousness, injustice and systems of oppression, marginalisation, exclusion. Certainly Richard's take that everything belongs, that all are welcomed and included, any system that excludes, I think, for me, now, immediately raises questions. So anytime there's a boundary drawn of who is in or out, I think some of his, and likewise, when I discover people who are out, the hope that comes from that is that that's not where history, humankind, God's vision is heading, God's heading towards an inclusive reality. So I think those, certainly in my call has shaped me quite strongly with a passion to help people connect to a God who wants to affect their daily life in such a way that they would partner God in bringing justice and doing justice and standing against injustice. So those things.

Which are all quite relevant when we speak about our country.

Absolutely.

And how do we have hope for our country. Would you like to say anything more about how Richard's message can transform our country?

Well, for me it's exactly that. I think we have to find creative ways of helping people to, firstly do some social analysis. I find South Africans, we're not helpful in our thinking. Why are people poor? You know, the answer is 'cos they're lazy, or you know, they don't look for work, you know the inability to critique a society in which so many thousands and millions of people, the perception amongst the affluent that they are middle class, you know so the suburban context that I'm working now, people will say they're middle class, even though they're in the top one or two percent of the world, never mind this country. And so for me some of it is helping people to discover the reality, and part of that is helping just to meet people of a different context.

And secondly then to help them to understand that they are part of that system and then ask questions of, can we creatively begin to live differently? A friend, says you're on a train and it's travelling to death, running down the carriages doesn't help. You've got to actually get off the train! And so for me some of the work Richard, I think, and Jesus, calls us to in this country, is to ask, how can we get off the train... the growing racial boundaries, political framework is heightening those. Will we be churches that refuse to be separated racially, the massive, massive economic inequality? Will we have Zaccheus experiences where people have an encounter at a table of others, "the other," that leads them then to turn away from corruption and fraud, capitalism and begin to share resources in a way which means justice. And for me that is hopeful. And if we don't have that in this country we're in serious, serious trouble. We are heading for, for very, very dodgy circumstances, you know. And I think in some sense the prophetic voice of, certainly the minor and major prophets, is God's wanting to do something, there's possibility, there is hope, the question is whether we will allow it to happen or do we stand against it. And so for me the message of Richard needs to be engaged, taught, that I can partner God in doing life differently. That's more Christ-centred. And it's not just more of the same, the status quo, and Jesus.

My sense is we're idolaters. I'm intrigued in my count as a pastor with people's prayer requests. The three predominant prayer requests are, and that's probably 95% of the time, and that's for health, safety and wealth. Those are the overarching themes. I

almost never have somebody asking, “How do I become more like Jesus?” or “How does Jesus shape my values?” or “How do I get closer to God?” It’s often just, how do I manipulate God to get me what I want, and God is a tool in my hands. Versus the view of contemplative life which says that after encounter with God I will be changed and as a result of that change the world will be changed. And so for me it’s one, trying to help people experience the contemplative life, the life of the spiritual disciplines, and secondly helping them to have that experience of God to shape their history and their lives can be played out going forward. So I think there’s a massive, massive need for that message, you know, and it’s a hard messages, it’s not a comfortable message to bring to people.

Particularly for the wealthy, it’s about giving up.

Ja, you know, and even for the poor it’s hard to go to people in incredible poverty and say that the aspirations they hold are not of God, that if your aspiration is to become one of the wealthy elite, and switch roles, just change the tables around so that I’m on the other side, well, that’s not the gospel. I remember SAFM years ago, 10, 15 years ago, was interviewing some of the politicians at that stage and Peter Storey was on the panel and the guys, and he was bemoaning the Mercedes Benz and stuff already of the government at that stage, and people phoning and saying, “but it’s our turn.” And eventually Peter, in a lovely line, he said, “I thought we gave our lives so that we wouldn’t become like them.” And for me that message, and that’s also not a comfortable message to preach to those at the bottom. The Julius Malemas who has literally come from a domestic worker, a shack, who’s now arrived and now to say that the way you’ve arrived is wrong. Well, as a wealthy white with a privileged history how do I bring that across? Well, it’s not well received - if it’s received at all. So the message to the wealthy who are still privileged from the white and then those at the bottom, no it’s not a comfortable message to speak, you know. And my sense is preaching’s not always going to be the answer. Unless people have a meaningful encounter with God and the poor together, preaching will not be transformative. It’s God who needs to bring the Word. Preaching will help to educate, but not necessarily transform. That’s my thought. Maybe I’m wrong, I’ll see! [laughs].

So ja, I think preaching creates a space for people to move in, but it’s not the movement

itself, you know.

Maybe chat a little bit about Angus Buchan, our conversation earlier?

I have never met him personally, I've only viewed some of his input. The congregation I worked at for the last three years, he was quite popular, certainly among the male, white males. I've been quite intrigued at the lack of diversity in the group that he's drawn. It's predominantly been white males, privileged, at that. My sense is that some of it, I think there's an authenticity about Angus which you cannot, cannot speak against. He honestly believes God's called him to this and I think God maybe has. But I have some questions about what people hear, take from it. My sense from my encounter from those who've been involved is the predominant take from it is that it's a reassertion of roles and particularly for white males in South Africa its discovering that I'm head of the house again, the feminist movement that's kind of influenced our society, and the racial challenges in the workplace. I have a role in my home and the role is leadership, and I think that's been deeply affirming to wounded psyches. I don't always think it's the most helpful thing to hear, though. So ja.

[Leaves to answer door]

I also think the, he's seen as an insider, one of us that's certainly accessible, simple, and take things at face value. There's not a huge amount of depth or exposition. It's what it says is what it is, so certainly that, ja not having to go into the complexity of our life. I think South Africa's been through an incredibly life-shattering, paradigm-shifting 15, 20 years, and I think for many white males it's been deeply, deeply wounding, and their sense of who they are, what it means to be a male, their sense of power, status, all those things have been challenged, undermined, shaken up and what they believed in completely turned out to be a lie.

Even if you go back to the whole National Service thing

Absolutely! And I sense, and so being able to take stuff at face value again is just such a relief, where for most of the last 15 years, everything I've believed I've had to question and go deeper. And when I go deeper all hell breaks loose! Where Angus is saying, "No, no, you don't have to go deeper, it's simple. Trust Jesus, be the head of your

home, be a Christian in your workplace, be honest, truthful...” basic morality, and I don’t see it as a message of transformation, in terms of your ego is transformed. Rather I think your ego is affirmed and given permission to climb up, to become more powerful, more in control, more leadership versus a path of surrender and brokenness and woundedness, and going to the cross. This is rather an ascendant role, and again that is Rohr language in critiquing it

Rohr often uses the words power, prestige and possession.

Ja, so my sense is there’s an affirmation of that. Although, the message of, some of the messages around what it means to be a man I find, there is a, I don’t quite buy that I have to control though, the family, that kind of thing. But being honest, I think, is a Jesus value, but there’s... I find it intriguing that in a context of such diversity and inequality that it’s never on the agenda. The race issues don’t seem to be hugely on the agenda either, you know? Well I haven’t heard them, and I haven’t heard those who have attended his workshops regularly come back with that as a... when I ask, “What was meaningful for you...?” it was “back to basics” which I’ve translated as simplicity, inability to go deeper, not wanting grey, a world of black and white again, which I think people long for, who’ve been, you know, turned upside down. And secondly that, “as a male I have a role to play, and that role is of power and leadership,” that’s what I hear. Whether he always preaches that, I’m not familiar with his actually speaking to know that. So for me the life of faith is a role of letting go of one’s ego, of assuming the role of the servant rather than a controlling leader. The role of transformation rather than the role of me controlling, influencing, is quite strong in contrast. So ja...

There’s a sense for me of Buchan’s message being to the men, “if you want to be a man, God will help you to assume the power, to assume the position...”

Absolutely! God wants you to have it.

it’s that message of God wants you to take what is rightfully yours.

Absolutely, it’s exactly that message, ja

Whereas Rohr is the opposite. He’s saying to encounter God you need to give up

your power...

Well, you'll be wounded if you meet Jesus, meet God. You will not be the same person, you will be stripped, you will be stripped, I mean you'll follow the path to the cross. So very much for... In some sense for me the Buchan message for me is in many ways the gospel from a capitalist point of view, where you take control, you take ownership and you utilise things. There's a utility to faith, so faith is, I'm not used by God, I use God for my, and the end God happens to agree with my desires. And my desires for power and status and control, and, and, and... I've just had somebody preach to me and tell me that's also what God wants for me, so there's a deep affirmation of those realities. And when I try to engage with people after the event, deeply, deeply unhappy. And just at questions, you know, simple questions like, "What do you make of the fact that there almost no black people there?" And failing to understand, "Well, why's that an issue?" What is the question, you know? The gender roles, you know, "How would this affirm women?" "Well, now you're taking us backwards again," those kinds of response, "The problem with society is that women have had too much power, and that's why society's gone wrong, because boys don't know who to follow any more." Those kinds of messages, inputs ideas, you know. And so particularly, many of the men in the congregation took their sons with, as, cause they saw that the role was almost to, which I find quite intriguing in terms of Richard Rohr's male initiation rites, for many of them it was a male initiation rite for the boys. And the rite was to assume power and responsibility and take take up your rightful heirship, versus the gospel: kind of becoming a servant, so for me there was a deep contrast with that. And that message.

Challenging question for you! How would you think we could take Rohr's message of servanthood and communicate it simply?

Well I think the gospels themselves, I think we need to take Jesus far more seriously certainly in preaching and in our preaching allow Jesus to critique our society. So my sense is that unless we can preach a Jesus who, in the sermon we actually mention the context of South Africa. I'm amazed how many churches I can go an listen to the sermon and you'd swear we were living in California. Or somewhere like that, you know what I mean? Or Switzerland, you know, where there's no issues of inequality and poverty etc. And Jesus's message is primarily an affirmation of my status quo. So

somehow helping people to unpack the gospels as well as they can. So there I think socio-political rhetoric, analysis is important, and that not only analyses the text but also analyses the context now and how the text speaks to the context.

I think secondly we have to find ways of creating spaces where people can encounter the other. Where the poor can meet the rich and the rich can meet the poor, and the power does not lie with the wealthy. So somehow creating a space where the people can work, play, share a meal together... My sense is often when the poor in the Christian community, and when the wealthy in the Christian community encounter the poor it's from a position of control. We are going to save them, fix them, feed them, those kinds of things. So for me some of the ideas of pilgrimage of pain and hope, where people are given hospitality by the poor, without being able to repay and find the power shifted

And that is really a weekend when privileged people go and stay with less privileged.

Ja. privileged people stay in the poverty stricken areas, and then the hope is the next weekend the poverty stricken come and stay... and it's amazing how many people are actually embarrassed about how much they have. And that begins the question, should they have so much.

The other thing is exposing people to people who have made different decisions. So try and find people who because of their faith have chosen to live simply or differently or cross boundaries. And helping those people to be given a voice in churches where often they're not given voice, often they have left the church because they've just found that it's not a place of authenticity, and engaging the kingdom. So to bring those who are on the outside to the centre, and give them a voice based on "I am actually doing this" 'cos many people will say, "You're idealistic" or "it can't be done," or "it won't work," "how can we live with the poor?" "they're them, they..." And when you simply say I can encounter some people who are living in this context and reality of daily life differently, and who are making different choices about, for their children, those things. I think those are key.

And then obviously helping people to become contemplative. Creating people the space

for God to encounter where they are not in control. Most, when I encounter and try to teach around prayer, my experience is that most Christians spend most of their prayer time ordering God around.

How can I get God to give me what I want.

Well I'm telling God give me what I want. I believe he wants to and will do it and if he doesn't it's a bit disappointing, versus - and it's a helpful place to start, but if it ends there then it's not helpful - so then to allow people to get to a space where maybe I can be silent, or I can allow the scriptures to read me, rather than I read them, that kind of framework.

So for me it's one of preaching and teaching which analyses our society and analyses what scripture would say to our society, and that we are not living in heaven on earth and therefore we need to partner God in bringing heaven, secondly it's taking them to the point where they encounter the other, as those relationship are built and that needs to be in worship, play, in all aspects, and where power is stripped from those who normally have power and instead replaced with a mutuality. Where we account for each other honestly. And then some kind of a framework where people can learn the spiritual disciplines, and learn that the life of faith is a life of surrender and transformation, not a life of ego building or assertion. So for me those are, certainly my hope is to be, as a pastor, to enable those in people's lives and to create spaces where people can do that. So ja.

Paul, thank you so much.

Pleasure.