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WISE PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE LIFE: LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF DANIEL*

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Abstract

In Daniel 1, Daniel and his friends are depicted as figures of wisdom, and this wisdom from God is then exercised in the court tales. This article argues that the exercise of wisdom continues in the Hebrew visions of Daniel (8–12). This continuity may be described theologically as a participation in the divine life. As a result of this continuity, wise participation may be further described as a paradox around the hiddenness or otherwise of God. In the court tales the wisdom of God is evident; in the visions it is obscure. Wise participation in the divine life, it is argued, involves both the ethical clarity of the court tales and the eschatological mystery of the visions.

Keywords

Daniel, incarnation, participation, people of God, saints, son of man, wisdom

INTRODUCTION

The book of Daniel is about Daniel; that is why it is called the book of Daniel. That may sound trite, but in fact the book of Daniel is not often read as if it really were about Daniel. More often, it is read as a combination of disembodied life lessons from the court stories, and coded predictions of the future from the visions. With respect to the visions, even where there is caution about the visions as predictive for our own day, there is a strong focus on the emergence of the final kingdom with the accompanying message that God is in control. Very few writers look in depth at what is actually going on for Daniel himself as the book unfolds. Yet there is much to learn from doing so; and, in the process, much to learn about what it means for the believer to say that God is in control.

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In this essay I argue that the experience of Daniel, and occasionally also that of his three friends, throughout the book that bears his name has much to say about the wise participation of the people of God in the life of God. I will show that there is continuity in both the literary expression of participation and in wisdom terminology throughout the book. In the light of that, the nature of wise participation is illuminated by a theological consideration of the vision of the throne room scene and of the one like a son of man with respect to the saints of the Most High. This line of reasoning is reasonably evident in the court tales,¹ but I will argue it in more detail with respect to Daniel's experience of the visions. What emerges is a picture of wise participation in the divine life, comprising subtle interactions between temporal and eschatological understandings and between the availability and hiddenness of the wisdom of God.²

CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Rather than spending too much time discussing technical critical issues in the study of Daniel, of which there are many, two particular positions that undergird this article will be outlined. As is well known, Daniel 1–2 is in Hebrew until the text switches to Aramaic at 2:4 and remains in Aramaic until the end of chapter 7, before reverting again to Hebrew in chapters 8–12. There is a consensus among a considerable majority of scholars that the vision chapters are probably later than the court tales. The court tales probably emerge in the Persian period, not long after the events which they recount, while the vision material is probably best dated around the time of the crisis concerning the Greek kingdoms and the abomination of desola-

¹ For some the term “tale” implies non-historical. I use the term as a literary category, not in any sense to pass judgment on the historicity of the material. While there is little external evidence to tie Daniel to a known historical figure, from what we know of the period it is entirely plausible that Daniel is a remembered historical figure on the basis of the text of Daniel.

² Aspects of this article are distillations of more fully argued positions in T. Meadowcroft, “Beltshazzar, Chief of the Magicians’ (NRSV Daniel 4:9: Explorations in Identity and Context from the Career of Daniel,” *Mission Studies* 33 (2016): 26–48; idem, “‘One Like a Son of Man’ in the Court of the Foreign King: Daniel 7 as Pointer to Wise Participation in the Divine Life,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 10 (2016): 245–63; and idem, “Daniel’s Visionary Participation in the Divine Life: Dynamics of Participation in Daniel 8–12,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 11 (2017): 217–38.

tion in the 160s BC.³ Whether they are dated then or not, in the opinion of many commentators the vision texts themselves direct the reader to relate the visions to that period of the Jewish experience. My reading assumes that the visions have a particular applicability in the life of the people of God – those regularly referred to in the text as “the holy ones of the Most High”⁴ – to the Greek crisis of the second century BC.

Since that material is primarily in Hebrew, what does this say about Daniel 1, which, although set in the court with the other court tales, is written in Hebrew while the other court tales are in Aramaic? One possibility is that chapter 1 was written later as an introduction to the court stories.⁵ As if to say, this is how it came to be that Daniel and his friends are at the imperial court, and these are the lessons they learned to help them to be wise in those circumstances. Nobody is able to explain why the book of Daniel is written in two different languages, but the concept of Daniel 1 as introduction to the book as a whole is a helpful one. In reading that chapter as introductory, it can also be read as setting the wisdom agenda around which the rest of the book may be read. That is also assumed in my reading.

THE WISDOM OF DANIEL IN THE COURT TALES

Daniel and, at times, his friends are wise participants in great events at the Babylonian and Persian courts in Daniel 2–6. The wisdom dynamic is set up in Daniel 1. We can see that by looking in particular at 1:4 and 1:17. The men selected, according to the account (1:4), were to be “versed in every branch of wisdom, endowed with knowledge and insight, and competent to serve in the king’s palace.” Each of the terms used is freighted with significance to a post-exilic Jewish audience familiar with the wisdom tradition. They were “versed in every branch of wisdom” (lit. “those who are insightful in every wisdom,” מְשֻׁכְּלִים בְּכָל־חִכְמָה). The word חִכְמָה might be described as the generic term for matters of skill, morality, attitude towards life experience and a response of fear and reverence towards God in the multifarious aspects of human existence.⁶ Of course, the call towards such חִכְמָה elicits a response of either wisdom or folly. In the case

³ See for example J.E. Goldingay, *Daniel* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 328–29.

⁴ Unless indicated otherwise, I am using the NRSV for scriptural quotations.

⁵ See for example C.-L. Seow, *Daniel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 7–8.

⁶ R.L. Harris, G.L. Archer Jr., and B.K. Waltke (eds.), *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 283–84.

of Daniel and his friends, their approach to the call to wisdom, on the evidence of this phrase, was that of the **משכילים**, those whose decisions are characterised by the sort of insight into and understanding of the great issues of life that makes success, as generally conceived, more likely. Once again this is a word that has strong biblical pedigree. With respect to the book of Daniel it is a recurring participle in the later chapters (11:33, 35; 12:3, 10), and it seems likely that it refers to a particular group of people deemed to be those who were faithful under the difficult circumstances occasioned by the invasion of “the Beautiful land” by Antioches IV Epiphanes (11:33, 41).⁷

The translation in the NRSV, “endowed with knowledge and insight” (**ידעי דעת ומביני מדע**) has been somewhat compressed, as a result of which the young men appear more like recipients of wisdom and less like agents of wisdom than is evident in the Hebrew. In fact, they are those who know (**ידעי**) and those who understand (**ומביני**). And the objects of the participles describe that which is known and understood by the young sages: knowledge (**דעת**) and thought or understanding (**מדע**). Each of those four words is used regularly within the Hebrew wisdom tradition. They may have had common currency with their Semitic surrounds (and this usage in Daniel suggests that to be the case), but they were also routine ways of speaking about Hebrew wisdom and would have been recognised as such. Together they speak of the range of abilities and qualities that we associate with intellectual achievement and ability under the wider rubric of Jewish wisdom (**חכמה**).⁸

What is interesting is that the same people who show these qualities are those who are “competent to serve in the king’s palace” and are to be “taught the literature and language of the Chaldeans” (1:4). The text thereby recognises that the wisdom sought by Nebuchadnezzar, that which would entail the formation of a Babylonian worldview and (subsequent) service in the imperial palace, has something in common with Hebrew ways of expressing wisdom. The wisdom of God is unwittingly being de-

⁷ See the summary of possibilities and the proposal by P.L. Redditt, “Daniel 11 and the Sociohistorical Setting of the Book of Daniel,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60 (1998): 463–74.

⁸ On this cluster of words, and including **משכילים**, see Harris, Archer and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, 282.

ployed by the King of Babylon in the service of his empire.⁹ Godly wisdom is, therefore, something placed in the service of all humanity, whether that wisdom is acknowledged as such or not. And Daniel, Hananiah, Mis-hael and Azariah qualify this wisdom by placing it in the service of God and not of the empire.

If this perception of Hebrew wisdom is merely hinted at in the early verses of this introductory narrative, it becomes explicit once we get to the outcome of the training period. At the end of their training, the young men display the same sort of wisdom that was anticipated of them in v. 4 (1:17). They are given “knowledge and skill” (מִדְעָה וְהַשְׂכִּיל). Both terms reflect the earlier description and, again, they are both words that are familiar to those accustomed to the Hebrew wisdom tradition. Additionally, Daniel is given “insight” (הַבִּינָה), another word also appearing in v. 4 as part of a cluster of words descriptive of Hebrew wisdom. In addition, the object of this wisdom has a familiar ring to it: “every aspect of literature and wisdom” (כָּל-סֵפֶר וְחִכְמָה). This phrase is a kind of portmanteau of the evocative dual focus back in v. 4, namely, the portrait of wisdom in Hebrew terms, and yet a wisdom placed at the service of “the Chaldeans.” Now we find that wisdom, unmodified by any limiting adjectives, is linked, not to the literature (סֵפֶר) of the Chaldeans, but simply to “every aspect of literature.” What once looked like wisdom deployed in the service of the Chaldeans has become, by means of the grace of God and the young men’s faithfulness during the period of their training, the wisdom of God at work in Babylon.

Thus, chapter 1 sets up the terms in which the wise participation of Daniel and his young friends in the great events of their day are to be understood: as the wisdom of God both particular to the people of God and embracing all wisdom.

THE WISDOM OF GOD AND DANIEL IN THE HEBREW VISIONS

If this dynamic is programmatic for the book of Daniel as a whole, then we should expect to find wisdom language in the accounts of the visions, or at

⁹ J.J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 138.

least in the accounts of Daniel's participation in the visions, and that of Daniel's people in the visionary experiences.

The generic wisdom term חכמה does not appear at all in chapters 8–12. At first glance this is surprising, given the amount of other wisdom language that does appear. However, the narrative of chapter 1 uses the term in a generic sense; this level of generality simply does not exist in the vision accounts, which are, in general, more sharply focused on particular experiences and events in which the wise man is participant, rather than being concerned with general statements about wisdom.

That aside, however, it turns out that much of the language used to describe the wisdom of the young men at the beginning and end of their court training reappears in the accounts of Daniel's visionary experiences. This is best illustrated from the clusters of wisdom terms in 1:4 and 1:17. Daniel needs “understanding” (בִּינָה, 1:4, 17) for the vision of chapter 8 (8:16–17, 23, 27). The angelic interpreters offer this *understanding*, although Daniel routinely falls short of appropriating it. Nevertheless, the aspiration is there. Similarly, as one who has learned the wisdom of literature (1:17), Daniel seeks *understanding* of Jeremiah's prophecy (9:2), and once again is offered *understanding* by the interpreters (9:22–23). We are not told if *understanding* was actually achieved on this occasion, but 10:1 assures the reader that this time, in his third vision, Daniel *understands*. Again, it is with the help of heavenly interpreters (10:12, 14). Strangely, though, in the epilogue to the ensuing vision Daniel himself, in claiming that he does not *understand* (12:8), is less certain than the third person narrator. Once again, assurance of *understanding* comes from the heavenly figure (12:10).

The one to whom it is given to “know” (יָדַע, 1:4) is also on a quest for *knowledge* in each of the three visions. As he observes the goat and the ram of chapter 8, an interpreter comes to Daniel in order to cause him to *know* (8:19). Daniel is commanded by the interpreter of the seventy weeks to *know* (9:25), and in 10:20 the “one in human form” (10:18) asks Daniel if he *knows* why he has come (10:20).

The young Jewish men also exhibit skill or competence (שָׂכַל, 1:4, 17). Later, one of the failures on the part of his people mentioned by Daniel in prayer is a lack of this very *competence* or *insight* (9:13). But that same *insight* is urged upon Daniel by his interpreters (9:22, 25). Later, a reward is offered to these *skilled discerning* ones (12:3), and *understanding* is offered to those who are not among the wicked (12:10).

The links continue with the competencies that are endowed or later urged on the wise young men as outcomes of their wisdom. One of the results of Daniel's training, as expressed in 1:17, is unanticipated by 1:4, and it entails Daniel having insight into "visions" (רָזוּן) and dreams. This becomes part of the exercise of Daniel's wisdom in the court tales and continues on in the vision accounts. Given that chapters 8–12 are entirely devoted to the revelatory experiences of the wise Daniel, the one who has *visions*, this is not surprising. We are told that Daniel has a *vision* (8:1; 9:21; 10:14; etc.) as part of the introduction to each of the three vision accounts.

The recurrence of the word *'amad* (עָמַד) is also relevant. Because it is a stock verb with a wide semantic range, care is needed. Nevertheless, its occurrence in the visions is in harmony with the evidence adduced above. The king was in search of candidates who would be competent and qualified to *stand* (NRSV "serve", 1:4) in the king's palace. There is a sense of taking a place and by implication fulfilling a role.¹⁰ There is also just a hint of resistance about the term; it might in certain contexts have the sense present in the English idiom, "to take a stand."¹¹ In standing in the king's court these wise men undertake a work of significance, a work that both meets resistance and provides resistance. The verb also occurs a number of times in the vision narratives, often simply as descriptive of a physical action, but occasionally with this sense of "taking a stand." In 8:4 the other beasts are powerless to *stand* against the ram, as the ram subsequently cannot *stand* against the goat (8:7). In chapter 11 the verb occurs regularly to describe the ability or inability of one of the warring parties – the kingdoms of the North and the South – to *resist* the other.¹² Later, one of the angelic beings speaks of his own *standing* (11:1) in support of the prince, Michael, who himself *stands* as the protector of Daniel's people (12:1). However, during that first vision Daniel does not distinguish himself by *standing* in response; quite the opposite, in fact. Later in the prologue to the final vision, though, Daniel is told to *stand* (10:11) by those attending him. In doing so he confronts the portentous vision that is being explained to him; and then promptly collapses with the declaration, literally, that "there is no strength *standing* in me" (10:17). Only at the end does he hear

¹⁰ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 5

¹¹ See among many examples Judg 2:14; 1 Chr 21:1; Esth 9:2; Jer 49:19.

¹² 11:1–4, 6–8, 11, 13–17, 20–21, 25, 31.

the promise that he will *stand* to receive his allotment at the end of days. But the narrative ends there and we do not know what ensued for Daniel.

In any case, we see that the role of wisdom continues to be crucial throughout the visions of Daniel 8–12, just as it was in the earlier court tales. Before considering the further significance of that, another significant continuity between the tales and the visions should be considered.

DANIEL AND DANIEL'S PEOPLE AS PARTICIPANTS

That continuity concerns the participation of Daniel in the narrative. At this point, I do not use the term “participation” in any special or theological sense, but simply to indicate the engagement of Daniel with what is happening. As far as the court tales are concerned, there is little that needs to be said. Daniel and/or his friends are evidently participants in the stories which concern them and their engagement with the king and his empire. What is not so evident is that Daniel continues to be a participant as we move into the visions. For the visions are not merely visions; they are narratives about a man having visions. And this ongoing participation contains an important aspect of the message of the book of Daniel. An analysis of the contents of chapters 8–12 makes this evident.

Some aspect of Daniel's visionary experience is recounted in the following verses: 8:1–7, 13–20, 26–27; 9:2–23, 25; 10:1–12, 14–20; and 12:4–9, 13. Thus 81 verses out of a possible total of 143 verses, or 57 percent of those verses, entail the participation of Daniel in the visions described. However, within that we can treat chapter 11 as a special case, in that it is an extended account of one particular vision, and by virtue of its focus on a series of identifiable temporal events develops its own narrative momentum while the vision context tends to drop away. If the 45 verses of Daniel 11 are excluded from the calculations, then the percentage of the narrative concerned with participation rises to 83 percent.

Furthermore, as will be shown below in discussion of the context of the throne room scene of Daniel 7, the participation of Daniel in these visionary experiences is in some respects undertaken on behalf of the people. Not surprisingly, then, in addition to the participation of the visionary himself, the people of God (variously described) appear in some sense as participants, or at least the affected party, in the following 24 verses of Daniel 8–

12: 8:10–13, 25; 9:24–27; 11:30–35, 41–45; and 12:1–3, 10–12.¹³ Allowing for the fact that two of these verses overlap with the list above of those concerning Daniel, 103 of the 143 total verses in Daniel 8–12 are about Daniel or Daniel’s people: that is, 72 percent of the total. Thus, the raw data asks us to take seriously the fact of participation in the visions and, therefore, to consider that participatory experience.

It will be noted that I have not accounted at all for the prayer of Daniel in 9:2–19. Without necessarily assuming the form-critical implication that the prayer is out of place in the context in which it appears, Daniel’s prayer is anomalous in several respects: it is a prayer; it looks back to what has been, rather than forward; it entails both Daniel and the people together; and the response of Gabriel assumes a vision, although none has been recounted. While such ambiguities of categorization make it difficult to account for the prayer of Daniel in the statistical analysis above, if anything it reinforces the participatory nature of these chapters. It does so in that the prayer focuses strongly on the experience of Daniel and his people, and in that, although he prays alone, Daniel implicitly prays on behalf of his people.

Staying with Daniel and his people as participants in these visions, there are some clear links from chapter 7 into subsequent visions around the saints of the Most High. Note in particular 8:23–27, which evokes the interpretation of the court room scene in the previous chapter, albeit without exact linguistic correspondence.¹⁴ Just as the people of the holy ones of the Most High will be worn down by the horn of the fourth kingdom that makes war on them (7:25), so will “the king of bold countenance” destroy the people of the holy ones (8:23–24). Just as the horn of the fourth kingdom, or at least its dominion, will be utterly destroyed (7:26), so will the king of bold countenance be broken (8:25). Furthermore, the destruction of this king will be “not by human hands” (8:25), thus evoking the quarried granite that destroys the great statue of Daniel 2 (8:25, cf. 2:34). Again, the vocabulary is not exact, but the allusion to “not by human hands” creates a link between the destruction of the statue and that of the “king of bold countenance.” Thus, the vision of Daniel 8 has links to the vision of Daniel 2 in the court tales. Moreover, Daniel 7 and 8 are bound together by a

¹³ The verses of editorial framing have not entered into my calculations.

¹⁴ J.J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Vision of the Book of Daniel* (Ann Arbor: Scholars Press, 1977), 132.

common linking with Daniel 2, and by the echo in chapter 8 of the fate and destiny of the holy ones of the Most High. In this way, the reader is encouraged to read what we have seen of the life of the saints in chapter 7 into chapter 8 and beyond.

At a technical level, beyond chapter 8 the interests in the life of the saints may be expressed in several ways: first of all, in the relationships between Daniel 8 and 9. In an intriguing analysis, André Lacocque proposes that Daniel 8 and 9 are linked together in a structural schema for what he calls the “future facing” Hebrew chapters of visions (8–12). He begins with comment on the occurrence of the root שכל, which is used in 8:25 with respect to the skills (NRSV, “cunning”) of the destructive king. In chapter 9, the same root is used three times with a similar, but differently applied usage (9:13, 22, 25).¹⁵ It is used negatively in the prayer of Daniel to speak of the people’s failure to exercise understanding. Then it is used twice in the introduction to the interpretation of the vision to express the process of inducing understanding in Daniel. Lacocque sees a further link in that the “desolator” on whom a “decreed end is poured out” (9:27) is a further reflection of the destructive king who eventually is “broken, and not by human hands” (8:25).

Additionally, once the link is made between the experience of the saints in the court room scene and the saints who encounter the king of Greece in chapter 8, and the experience of the saints of chapter 8 is further linked to the prayer and interpretation of chapter 9, subsequent mentions of the people, enumerated above, most naturally refer back to the same people who are implicated in the throne room vision. These are they on whose behalf Daniel confesses in his prayer (9:15–16), and with whom he associates himself (9:20). From chapter 10 onwards the visionary experience is Daniel’s, but his people are regularly kept in view as somehow implicated in what Daniel sees and how he reacts. So Daniel hears from his interpreter (presumably angelic) that the vision of chapter 11 is about “what is to happen to your people” (10:14). Then Daniel is reminded of his people’s implication in the great events alluded to by chapter 11 (11:14, 32–33), with the tantalising glimpse of dissension and failure amongst those people. Finally, as the vision comes to an end, the angel promises that Daniel’s people would eventually and finally be delivered (12:1). In the epilogue that

¹⁵ A. Lacocque, *Daniel in His Time* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 10.

follows, Daniel asks how long all this is to be and receives an enigmatic reply relating to the “holy people” (12:7). Thus, this final mention of Daniel’s people evokes the initial description of them as the people of the holy ones of the Most High back in 7:27, who themselves appear in the vision of chapter 8.¹⁶

With respect to the participation of the people of God in the visions, it has become evident that Daniel is thoroughly immersed as both participant and observer within the visions which he has also been recounting.¹⁷ As a consequence, the temporal context of Daniel – and hence of his people – is intertwined with that which he is observing. This is experienced acutely in Daniel’s person.

PARTICIPATION IN THE DIVINE LIFE

Having established the continuities in wisdom and participation across the book of Daniel, the question of the nature of this participation now needs to be considered. Daniel 1 has been seen as programmatic for the wisdom dynamic at play throughout the book, but now Daniel 7 will be discussed as potentially programmatic for understanding the nature of Daniel’s participation in the narrative. It is uncontroversial that Daniel 7 has been regarded as the *literary* hinge on which the book of Daniel swings, concluding as it does the Aramaic court tales and anticipating as it does the visions ascribed to Daniel. I suggest that Daniel 7 may also be read as the *theological* hinge in the book of Daniel:¹⁸ that what we discover arising theologically from the throne room vision and its interpretation is the clue to a

¹⁶ In making this case, I am accepting the view of many commentators that there is an equivalence of some sort between the holy ones of the Most High and the people themselves. See L.F. Hartman and A.A. Di Lella, *The Book of Daniel* (New York: Doubleday, 1978), 100–102.

¹⁷ The related discussion on the interaction of observation and participation as constitutive of the wisdom enterprise, implicit in the title of P.S. Fiddes’ monograph, *Seeing the World and Knowing God: Hebrew Wisdom and Christian Doctrine in a Late-Modern Context* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), is beyond the scope of this article.

¹⁸ See the argument of G. Sumner, “Daniel,” in *Esther & Daniel* (S. Wells and G. Sumner; Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013), 111–14, for discussion of Daniel 7 as “the interpretive centre of the book” and, in particular, the comment: “The thematic center (and almost the actual center of the text) of Daniel is the coming of the ‘one like a Son of Man’ to the Ancient of Days in Dan. 7.”

fuller appreciation of the theological significance of the wise participation evident before, in, and after chapter 7.

Therefore, we see that the multivalence of the throne room vision of Daniel permits the possibility – perhaps even invites the possibility – of some sort of identification between the one like a son of man and the holy ones of the Most High. At the same time, the one like a son of man and the holy ones of the Most High remain differentiated from each other. Nevertheless, while the differentiation is preserved, the identification is so close that it is possible to describe it in terms of participation. The holy ones of the Most High participate in that into which the one like a son of man has entered as he comes before the Ancient of Days; that is, the people of God participate in the life of God as encountered in that throne room scene. In short, the faithful in Daniel arguably “become participants in the divine nature,” as 2 Peter 1:4 describes the experience of believers in Jesus Christ.¹⁹

Much more could be said about this from a Christian and New Testament perspective, but suffice it to say that this dynamic of participation in the divine life hinted at by the throne room vision in Daniel 7 has been explored by means of the significance of the incarnation and of the life and significance of the one who himself points to a fulfilment of the vision of the one like a son of man.²⁰ The dynamic of the incarnation is much richer than simply saying that God has become one with humanity and in the process become caught up with all that it means to be human. It turns out that humanity too is caught up into the very life of God. To reprise 2 Peter 1:4, humanity participates in the divine life.²¹ Others who have expressed the implications of this include T.F. Torrance, who speaks of the “deification” of humanity as the obverse of God’s “inhominization” in Christ.²²

¹⁹ For a fuller argument to this effect see Meadowcroft, “‘One Like a Son of Man’ in the Court of the Foreign King.”

²⁰ For a full exposition of this position, see Meadowcroft, “‘One Like a Son of Man’ in the Court of the Foreign King.”

²¹ See N. Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 55–71, for a survey of other biblical material relating to the theme of participation in the divine life, which Russell explores by using the vocabulary of theosis.

²² T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith: The Evangelical Theology of the Ancient Catholic Church* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995), 189, cited in M. Habets, “‘Reformed Theosis?’ A Response to Gannon Murphy,” *Theology Today* 65 (2009): 491–92 (489–98).

At the same time, this participation in God, who has become one with us in Christ, has an ethical outcome. As Habets has expressed it, in this intermingling of God and humanity “Christ occupies the central stage in a Christian ethic; ethics is the life of Christ lived out in those savingly united to him.”²³ Or, less technically, our participation in the divine nature begs of us the question: how then shall we live? And the answer comes: as those who are caught up with Christ into the very life of God.

Transposing this back to the throne room vision of the book of Daniel, which foreshadows a developed theology of participation in the divine life, those to whom that vision was addressed are called to live wisely as the people of God who are caught up with the son of man into the very throne room of God. Such wisdom works itself out in the court tales and in the participation of Daniel in the visions that were sent to him.

THE VISIONARY PARTICIPANT

We have looked at some of the literary and theological continuities that bind the tales and the visions together. However, if the nature of participation in the divine life that emerges in the book of Daniel is to be appreciated adequately, the discontinuities are also important. For there are some key differences between Daniel’s participation in the divine life through these visionary encounters, and his participation in the divine life as expressed in his courtly conduct.

At court, Daniel’s participation was revelatory to the participant, the intentions of God were evident and reasonable, the resulting wise (and hence ethical) actions achieved a resolution, and the inner life of Daniel (to the extent that it was implied) was characterised by a serene confidence. The only example of a lack of confidence could be Daniel’s initial response to Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great tree (4:19). Despite the cryptic response to Daniel’s terror, he responds assertively to what he has been shown, and the scene culminates with some direct counsel for his employer (4:27). The picture that emerges is of a man confident in his relationship with the king whom he serves, and with the God on whose behalf he serves.

²³ M. Habets, “‘In Him We Live and Move and Have Our Being’: A Theotic Account of Ethics,” in *Third Article Theology: A Pneumatological Dogmatics* (ed. M. Habets; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 417 (395–417).

In the visions, Daniel's participation in the divine life enables him to see much but apparently to understand little, the intentions of God are obscure, there is no temporal resolution, the ethical issues relate less to faithfulness within and with respect to a hostile Gentile environment and more to faithfulness in the struggle for control of the life of the people of God, and the inner life of Daniel that emerges is characterised by uncertainty and fragility. In sum, instead of the certainty of contextually specific divine guidance, there appears to be less certainty and a shift of focus towards the future. The locus of hope is now different. Where hope was once focused on the behaviour of the king, it now shifts towards a more uncertain but more all-embracing eschatological perspective. To put it another way, hope entails a commitment to that which cannot always be comprehended or predicted. This too is part of what it means to be amongst the saints of the Most High drawn alongside the throne of the Ancient of Days with the one like a son of man.

THE PARADOX OF WISE PARTICIPATION

As a result, there is a shift of emphases in the visions with respect to the court tales: a change from present to future; from success to uncertainty; from temporal location to future possibility; from confidence to fear; from history to eschatology with an accompanying allusion to the resurrection (12:3). And we also see a shift in ethical focus from wise action to faithful living.

At the same time a quest to see how the discontinuities might talk to each other is validated and encouraged by the continuities that have been identified: wisdom terminology; continuity of participation; and a focus on the people of God. One way to discuss the continuity of divine participation across the discontinuities is by means of paradox.

The paradox occurs around the notion of the hiddenness or otherwise of the wisdom of God. In the court tales the results of the young men's wise participation in the divine life are evident and certain. Key ethical decisions are made at key moments and the outcome is decisive in some way. The will of God prevails, lives are preserved, or in some cases judged and destroyed. The king recognizes, albeit usually in his own terms, the activity and reasonableness of "the holy gods" (4:18; 5:11). The hand of God is evident and assumed throughout. From alongside the throne of the Ancient of Days, the saints, represented by Daniel and his friends, have exercised

the dominion given to them by the fact of their participation. This clarity is refreshing and encouraging, as it has been for many who have read the book of Daniel through the centuries. But it is also mysterious to those who read it, for the clarity and experience of dominion is in the context of an incomplete process. The end is not yet; there is always the potential for another crisis; and, from the perspective of readers, the lived experience of faith is seldom so clear cut. Yet the possibilities within history and the call to ethical responses to life's various contexts are crystal clear.

In the Hebrew visions, although there is considerable continuity, the paradox reverses. Things take a turn to the eschatological; in the light of the present situation, a final resolution is sought and offered. And yet the question of behaviour recedes into the background. Instead of leading to wise action, participation in the divine life now leads to wise affiliation, to loyalty and to faithfulness. But the certain outcome offered by the eschatological vision does not lead to clarity or certainty on the part of the participant. There is no visible resolution.²⁴ Instead there is uncertainty, and lack of direct access to understanding. The more certain the visions become of the final rule of God, a rule into which the saints themselves are invited to participate, the harder it becomes for the participant to function. At the same time, the more certain the vision, the more that suffering begins to impinge on the participant in the divine life.²⁵ At the point where the reader expects to find relief from the complexities of historical context and the pain of suffering, and to begin to find a final certainty and resolution, uncertainty increases, suffering continues, and the hidden or sealed nature of the resolution becomes more explicit (12:9).

²⁴ D.N. Fewell, *Circle of Sovereignty: Plotting Politics in the Book of Daniel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 135: "The ultimate irony in the book of Daniel, then, is that the kingdom as Daniel envisions it – whether mediated or otherwise – never manifests itself." Fewell describes the "irony" well, but does not consider the aspect of participation in her attribution of the vision of the kingdom to Daniel. The point is that Daniel is never quite able to envision that which remains hidden.

²⁵ Although the themes of this article have not been considered explicitly in missiological terms, see, with respect to suffering and participation in the mission of God and hence in the life of God, S.W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission: Participation in Suffering and Glory* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 18: "Christian missionary involvement must not be bound to what is popular, popularly known, or even what seems like 'viable' mission. All of the suffering world is the concern of the *missio Dei*, and therefore of our missiology."

Whatever else may be intended by the inflation of the time between the “regular burnt offering [being] taken away and the abomination that desolates [being] set up” in 12:11–12, it compounds the effects noted above. It offers no certainty for the future, and implies that just when a resolution is in sight, the period of uncertainty may be stretched further. This is a regular facet of human experience, inescapable despite the human yearning for certainty. That is perhaps why so many readings of this material in every age have been determined to bring this final hope and define it in terms of contemporary dates and events. But such certainty is simply not available.²⁶ The more the end is glimpsed, the more hidden that end becomes. Thus, the paradox of participation encountered in the court tales is turned on its head by the visionary experience of participation.

This is the hinge around which the participation of the saints in the life of God swings in the book of Daniel.²⁷ As the saints we are not God and God to some extent is hidden from us, so the wisdom of God is correspondingly not fully in view. There is suffering and uncertainty and anguish. The call in the face of an uncertain future is to loyalty and faithfulness to the one who has promised the resolution of history, just as the “end” of the King of the South foreshadows “the end” (11:39-45).²⁸ At the same time the court tales remind us that, even in the midst of uncertainty, there is a clarion call to wise ethical decision-making for action and identification, drawing on the fact that the wisdom of God is available to humanity even where the end may not be fully known. When there is resolution of temporal crises, when the hand of God is seen at work in contemporary

²⁶ P.S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2000), 141–42, exploring this in slightly different terms (“an openness about the nature of the world”), comments that “God leaves things open, making space for our contribution to the creative project. This is surely why the predominant note of the Old Testament Scriptures is that of Yahweh’s promises for the future, rather than exact predictions.”

²⁷ Goldingay, *Daniel*, 333, notes that this paradox, what he calls “two different overall thrusts,” manifests itself “by [the book of Daniel] being located by the synagogue among the Writings and by the church among the Prophets ... That encourages two alternative readings of Daniel, as wisdom or as prophecy, as pedagogics or as eschatology, as halakah or as haggadah.” That both are comprehended within Daniel indicates that each “alternative reading” must be asked to interpret the other.

²⁸ For further see T. Meadowcroft, “Who are the Princes of Persia and Greece (Daniel 10)? Pointers towards the Danielic Vision of Earth and Heaven,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29 (2004): 99-113.

events, two things should be remembered. The first is that this resolution and action foreshadow the promised resolution of all things. The second is to have humility in the face of temporal success, and ongoing loyalty and faithfulness. For there is yet more to come. And that “more” could entail suffering and mystery.

IN THE MEANTIME

In the meantime, like Daniel the reader is enjoined, in whatever way the paradox of wise participation is being experienced, to “go [his or her] way and rest” (12:13). For the story is not yet told, but God knows its ending. And Daniel and Daniel’s people with him are participants in whatever that will be.