**The Amazing Spider-man and the Peter Park of Antiquity: [spoiler[[1]](#footnote-1)]**

**By Rev. James Coleman**

The 2012 Marc Webb directed movie The Amazing Spider-man is a classic of its genre. Peter Parker, otherwise known as Spider-man is played by Andrew Garfield, whobattles a mad scientist played by Rhys Ifans. Rhys Ifan’s character is Dr Curt Connors, who motivated by a desire to find a way of replacing a severed arm is engaging in a clandestine project swapping genes between species. By experimenting on himself with gene splicing he ends up as a mutant hell bent on spreading a biological agent over the entire city.

What is gripping about the film is the way Peter Parker takes on of extra physical capacity when he is bitten by a spider and the genes of the spider mix with his own to endower him with new abilities. The   
“new” Peter Parker is stronger and more agile with lightening fast reflexes. It is this theme of humans gaining extra physical capacity, which is part of the enduring appeal of the super hero genre.

We tend to notice and become a little envious of the additional capacities in Peter Parker precisely because they are beyond what we have. But it is intriguing to look at the capacities that we do have from the other end of the telescope so to speak – from the imaginary perspective of an object say a chair or a clock or a car.

From that perspective ordinary humans look like super heroes, replete with extraordinary capacities and staggering abilities.

Firstly, for things like cars and clocks the individual components exist prior to them being assembled into the car or the clock or what have you. By contrast with us the parts are literally gathered together and formed by the body itself. The body builds the heart and the brain and the circulation system. In a body the parts receive their identity and their existence by being assembled and incorporated into the entity as a whole – the living creature.[[2]](#footnote-2) The “parts” have no independent identity beforehand. For example a hand did not independently exist before the person and will not independently exist if removed from the person. If a tire is removed from a car it continues to exist as a tire but if a hand for example is removed from a body it will not continue to exist. It will decay and rot.

Secondly, with an object like a clock the assembled whole has no new properties not already inherent in the parts.[[3]](#footnote-3) The clock’s spring is still a spring releasing stored mechanical energy and all the clock does is release that energy in a controlled way to turn hands on a dial. But in our bodies the “parts” have new properties which are beyond what is there in the component parts. For example we have this capacity to reproduce, to assimilate knowledge, to grow, and to experience consciousness.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Philosophers James Moreland and William Craig note that these new properties, which are true of the whole but not of the parts cannot be accounted for by the laws of physics or chemistry.[[5]](#footnote-5) You will search in vane through physics and chemistry text books to find any description of consciousness.

Thirdly, a body can only perform its amazing feat of collecting its parts and building itself in the context of a cell. There is this intriguing conundrum about the point of origin of these cells. It is called bio genesis. There must be a first cell. This is because modern cosmology provides for a specific starting point for the universe and hence denies us the vague hope of infinite past regression as an explanation. Thus the first cell commenced at a point in history and that first cell must have been built in a manner completely different to the way in which bodies are built now- because that first cell did not have a cell to grow in.

Interestingly the opening pages of scripture are consistent with this logic. Genesis says that the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.[[6]](#footnote-6) We are indeed made of atoms, particles of carbon, hydrogen, oxygen etc. We are constructed from inanimate particles, aptly described collectively as dust. This inanimate collection of particles has had life breathed into it. Thus the particles now have extraordinary properties including consciousness. How can this be? We are indeed fearfully and wonderfully made.

A clock is to a body like Louise Lane is to Superman. Compared to objects or things living bodies are extraordinary.

There is also a deeper appeal in this super hero genre and that is the actuality of extra capacities beyond what we experience in ordinary life. This theme could come straight from the pages of scripture. In Acts we have the Peter Parker of the New Testament – Peter the fisherman, receiving God’s Holy Spirit and being endowed with capacities he did not formally have[[7]](#footnote-7).

Following his endowment with the Holy Spirit Peter prays for a crippled man outside the Temple and he is healed.[[8]](#footnote-8) He has visions directly from God.[[9]](#footnote-9) And when he prays for people to be filled with the Holy Spirit they are filled with the Holy Spirit and speak in other tongues.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The general theme of the super hero comic genre is the use of the special powers for the good of others. That too is taken from the pages of scripture. The whole point of the Holy Spirit is the blessing of others. The plot lines in the more modern super hero movies often have the super hero battling with temptations and exhibiting negative human emotions that threaten to derail the proper use of their special powers. That too is true of our real life hero St Peter and of our experiences as Christian’s filled with the Holy Spirit.

The differences between the make believe world of the super hero genre and the reality of the Holy Spirit is that we cannot control the Holy Spirit. He does what He pleases. We can’t turn him off and on at will. The other difference is that the extra capacity endowed by the Holy Spirit can be and is intended to be given away to everyone who wants Him. That attribute of the real life “capacity builder” would be a complete spoiler in the comic book genre as all pretence at dramatic suspense would be lost.

Peter Parker did not plan on being bitten by a spider, the spider bit him. Intriguingly the Bible says that it is the Grace of God that in fact first bites us so to speak?

1. Don’t read this article if you have not seen The Amazing Spider-man and don’t want to have surprise ruined. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. James P Moreland and William L Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldvew* (InterVasity Press, Downers Grove, 2003) page 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid p 222. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Genesis 2:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Acts 2:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Acts 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Acts 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Acts 10:44. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)