



PRACTICAL THEOLOGY & MISSION STUDIES

Understand, contemplate and do!
South African Perspectives

Jacques W Beukes (Ed)



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UJ Press

*Practical Theology and Mission Studies:
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Abbreviations and acronyms

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AI	Artificial intelligence
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
DHA	Department of Home Affairs
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GHCRO	Gauteng City-Region Observatory
GHG	Greenhouse gas emissions
ICPCN	International Children's Palliative Care Network
IIAG	Ibrahim Index of African Governance
MDG	Millennium Development Goals)
MIF	Mo Ibrahim Foundation
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NPC	National Planning Commission
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAR	Participatory action research
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SADAG	South African Depression and Anxiety Group
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and medium enterprise
Stats SA	Statistics South Africa
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WEF	World Economic Forum

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Hannes Knoetze did his theological studies at the University of Pretoria and obtained a BA in theology (1988), BD in theology (1991), and DD in missiology (2002). From 1992–2009 he was a full-time minister in the Dutch Reformed Church of Southern Africa. Since 2009 he had a 50% teaching position at Kgolagano College in Gaborone (Botswana) up to 2011. In 2012 he was appointed as senior lecturer in the Department of Theology in the Faculty of Human and Social Sciences at the Mahikeng Campus of the North-West University (NWU). At the end of 2016, he was promoted to associate professor in the Faculty of Theology at NWU. In September 2020 he accepted a position at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria and in 2024 he was promoted to professor in mission studies. He

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Attie S. van Niekerk studied theology at the University of Pretoria. He was a minister of the (black) Dutch Reformed Church in Africa in Venda from 1978 to 1984, professor for the church's theological training at the University of the North from 1984 to 1993, and rector of the Theological School Stofberg from 1988 to February 1993. His book on four poets from Soweto and Alexandra in the seventies, *Dominee, Are You Listening to the Drums?*, was co-winner of the Sunday Times Literary Award for Political Writing in 1984. He has published several books and more than 50 academic articles. In 1994, he became a founding member of the NOVA Institute, a not-for-profit organisation that aims to enable poverty-stricken communities to improve their quality of life. He was a part-time lecturer in missiology from 1997 to 2016 at the Faculty of Religion and Theology, University of Pretoria and is still a research associate of the Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies of the Faculty of Religion and Theology, University of Pretoria.



Introduction and research justification

Jacques Beukes 

Introduction

This book is an academic book with theoretical contributions of staff members and research associates of the Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies at the Faculty of Theology and Religion, University of Pretoria (UP). The department represents an intellectual legacy that has evolved over 71 years from 1953 to 2024. It has similarities with other practical theology departments, but it also possesses distinct characteristics that set it apart. Established as a department at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria in 1953 (Büchner & Müller, 2009:1–2), the Department of Practical Theology has grown from its humble beginnings as a very small department to, by the time of writing this contribution, to being the largest of six departments in the Faculty of Theology. It makes a huge contribution with regard to teaching, research outputs and postgraduate-student supervision (cf. Wepener, 2013; Wepener et al., 2017:155). As such, the department is what it is today because of many factors, including its historical-theological background and also, importantly, its geographical context (cf. Wepener et al., 2017). In recent years, Practical Theology and Missiology combined to form a single department called Practical Theology and Mission Studies.

Research justification and rationale for chapter outline

There are many and diverse definitions of practical theology. Cahalan and Mikoski (2014:1–10) synthesised ideas from practical theologians like Richard Osmer and Don Browning to identify three key parts of a comprehensive practical



theological approach. The process starts with practical application, transitions to theoretical contemplation, and concludes with practical implementation. A practical theological approach therefore has three elements –it begins with a base in practice, moves towards theoretical reflection, and returns to practice. Therefore, practical theologians generally agree that there is no direct path from theory to practice (cf. Magezi, 2019:119).

Practical theology emphasises the significance of the context or specific circumstances in which it operates, seeking to recognise the presence of the divine and understand its calling within the complexities of everyday life. Practical theology remains contextual, thus this book focuses on the South African context since epistemology from a South African viewpoint involves comprehending the lived experiences and knowledge systems of individuals from this side of the world. The present-day experience, known as the context, influences individuals' perspectives and the development of theological beliefs through the interplay of culture, social position, and societal transformation within a specific setting. Epistemology is often conveyed via underlying beliefs that shape connections and guide how people and groups create significance from lived experiences. Epistemology is influenced by historical events like apartheid, colonialism, slavery, etc. It is for this reason that Magezi (2019:120) poses the question, 'Since all African theologies are about lived religion, why and how are African theologies relevant to Practical Theology?' To answer this, he uses the insightful response by Wepener et al. as they argue that practical theology should be understood and appreciated against the backdrop of historical developments in the particular areas on the continent where the discipline is being practised, taking particular note of political and theological developments (cf. Wepener et al. 2017:139; Magezi, 2019:120), again ... contextual!

Furthermore, for Ward (2017:3), practical theology is focused on the church's mission and ministry in both its methods and content. The continual existence of the church is practical theology, making it methodological.

Christian believers and clergy possess advanced skills and expertise in practical theology when they engage in the subject. Individuals who engage with the church community have naturally assimilated and engaged in advanced and successful methods of practising theology before entering a classroom or reading [a] book. Practical theology should begin by prompting students to acknowledge how they currently use practical theology in their daily lives to carry out their ministry and Christian practices. Everyday practical theology is not substituted by formal study; rather, it is improved by it. Practical theology should focus on developing existing methods and practices in church settings rather than solely aiming to criticise them. Practical theologians must closely connect with various churches and understand how persons in these churches typically think theologically.

Miller-McLemore (2011:5) lists four meanings of the word practical theology which also justify the chapter layout of the book.¹ Practical theology is an academic field studied by academics and practised by believers as an expression of religion. Practical theology serves as both a cognitive approach and a specific field of study within an academic programme. These several 'enterprises,' as she refers to them, are separate. Although they cater to distinct audiences and operate differently, they are also interrelated. Practical theology involves Christians maintaining a reflective faith in their daily lives within the church, and it also serves as a particular approach to comprehending theology in action. This technique influences the teaching of practical theology in theological education curricula. Each approach to practical theology indicates a distinct setting, ranging from the church and local community to everyday experiences, and from academic research to hands-on labour and educational settings. Miller-McLemore states that these four understandings should

1 For Miller-McLemore, each understanding points to different spatial locations, from *daily life* to *library* and *fieldwork* to *classroom*, *congregation*, and *community*, and, finally, to *academic guild* and *global context* (cf. (Miller-McLemore, 2011:5).

not be seen as mutually exclusive. They are interconnected and mutually dependent. Collectively, they demonstrate the breadth and intricacy of practical theology. Practical theology is multifaceted. It is present in a wide variety of locations and environments.

Having said that, Mangayi and Baron (2020:16) emphasise that there is a need to remain conscious that it is not in the nature of missiology to be idle or remain 'pie in the' sky. That even missiology or as in the case at the University of Pretoria, mission studies remains an applied practical theological discipline.

Therefore, we decided to collaborate on a publication from our respective fields of inquiry on South African issues and discourses. In this book, we approach the various issues as several academics who are engaged in teaching and research in our respective disciplines and who consequently view the pandemic through those lenses.

As a collective, the fields of inquiry that come into play are research methodology within practical theology, liturgy, homiletics, pastoral care and counselling, children's ministry, youth ministry, *diakonia*, community development, missional theology, missional diaconate, and missional leadership. In the various chapter contributions, different methodologies are discussed, which indicate the rich variety that exists within the field of practical theology and missiology. This variety constantly challenges us to look at each other's work with new appreciation, to learn from each other and to gain experience together.

This book not only aims to grapple with practical theological and missiological matters that come to the fore during lectures and with which students thus wrestle during classroom meetings, but it also relates to the South African context in general. The aim is, therefore, to inform the current practical theological and missiological curriculum, but the chapter contributions are not limited to only pedagogical settings. Teaching and research intentions are therefore combined in this edited volume.

Hence, the resultant literature possesses the potential to serve as a valuable resource in various educational environments, while simultaneously aiding in the pursuit of reforming religious communities outside of traditional academic settings. Also evident from the chapters in this volume is that the curriculum and research focus of the department relates to the transformation of society as well as the religious communities.

This book works on the methodology – practical theology – mission studies – rationale for this chapter outline.² In Chapter 1, Christo Lombaard discusses the true purpose of research (understanding) as it is placed in opposition to examples of misplaced expectations of research. In the second part of his chapter, he deals with methodology as it is considered the scholarly-controlled manner of attaining deeper understanding. The third part includes the contents of a (translated) debate on the purpose of the study.

In Chapter 2, Buhle Mpofo in a self-reflection manner draws on the notion of ‘locating regimes’ to discuss the complexities of learning spaces in theological education. He argues that disconnections deserve the same attention as connections which create networks for learning spaces and contends that paying attention to the power dynamics that shape the learning environment has the potential to configure dominant multiple forms of subordination and exclusion. He also draws on student experiences to reflect on a personal journey of theological studies and identifies opportunities for contextual engagement on challenges which present an epistemological crisis by creating disconnections.

Dieter de Bruin gives a brief overview in Chapter 3 of three ways of approaching liturgical research. The historical, ritual, and theological approaches are briefly outlined with

2 The methodology – practical theology – mission studies – chapter outline rationale of this book is linked to Miller-McLemore’s four understandings of the term ‘practical theology’, namely (1) from daily life to library and fieldwork to classroom, (2) congregation, and (3) community, and, finally, (4) to the academic guild and global context.

the help of two influential liturgical scholars at the University of Pretoria for the historical and ritual approach, and David Fagerberg and Gordon Lathrop set the scene for integrating the historical and ritual approaches as liturgical theology.

In Chapter 4, Christo Lombaard and Jacques Beukes start with a brief review of the relationship between technology and theology. After indicating how this contribution methodologically unfolds, two Bible texts are given from which a homiletical experiment is conducted. The exegetical background and Reformed-homiletical expectations on these texts in two resulting sermons are given. The texts of these two sermons, one written by a human being and one written by ChatGPT, are reprinted. The sermons are then evaluated, in outline, by these two authors.

Annelie Botha in Chapter 5, from a pastoral care perspective, argues that health and being healthy is the source of strength for life. She reasons that being healthy is more than just the absence of physical illness. Being healthy includes mental, social and spiritual well-being. The task of pastoral care and counselling includes meeting people in the spaces and places where they struggle to cope with the adversities that are part of life and make it difficult for them to live a healthy and whole life. Such pastoral care will include addressing lifestyle issues and environmental factors that affect people's health and well-being in the broadest sense.

In Chapter 6, Annemarie E. Oberholzer investigates a critical question in pastoral care and counselling, namely 'How the church can assist in addressing the needs of sick and hospitalised children'. She follows this up with Chapter 7, where she pastorally addresses the issue of walking with children in the shadow of death.

In Chapter 8, Maake Masango, engages with the process of education in Africa, especially in rural as well as the African village, centred on storytelling, idioms, proverbs and songs. Masango's chapter seeks to address the issue of violence and abuse, caused by men in South Africa, which the current

president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, refers to as the 'second pandemic' (the first being Covid-19).

In Chapter 9, Jacques Beukes investigates the role and influence that social media and 4IR have had and might have on the youths' environmental knowledge, awareness, conscience, and activism on and within the environmental discourse. Staying on the topic of the youth, Beukes, in the next chapter (Chapter 10), critically examines Aspiration 6 of the African development agenda, Agenda 2063, which is titled 'The Africa We Want' which leverages the potential of its citizens, particularly women and youth, while prioritising the well-being of children. The chapter investigates the potential of Agenda 2063 as a means of addressing the marginalisation of youth in Africa, or to determine if it can be considered a missed opportunity.

In Chapter 11, Stephan de Beer discusses how African theologians have largely failed to engage urbanisation and related challenges in systematic, comprehensive and well-considered ways. De Beer's chapter considers the urgent necessity for liberating faith practices in responses to African cities, namely, faith practices that contribute to integral liberation and freedom of African cities and African urban dwellers, but that presupposes the liberation of faith practices, and the discipline of practical theology, themselves. Departing from the lived experience of doing theology in an evolving African megacity – the Gauteng City-Region – De Beer then proposes the expansion of the scope of African practical theologies, if we are to take African cities seriously, being shaped by a spiritual and theological method of liberation. He considers practical theology scholarship as engaged scholarship and a liberating faith practice itself, fusing the elements of incarnation, imagination, innovation, impact and collaboration; doing theology in transdisciplinary ways; and practising the dual task of research as transformation, as well as liberative pedagogies. This chapter concludes by asserting the city as a classroom and locale for doing engaged practical theological scholarship.

Practical Theology and Mission Studies

In Chapter 12, Hannes Knoetze argues that when writing about missiology/mission studies within the African context, it is important to take cognisance of the fact that when Christian mission came to Africa at the beginning of the fifteenth century, 'there was no developed theology of mission'. He believes that we are currently writing and studying mission and missiology mainly from a post-Christendom perspective in the West, and in the global world with a mixed (syncretistic) perspective of traditional beliefs, Christendom, and post-Christendom societies. But mission is from everywhere to everywhere. In a post-Christendom society, mission and mission studies are scrutinised by society in general, and by many churches and academic institutions all over the world. In this chapter he attends to the following questions: Does mission studies still belong in theological education as one of the theological disciplines? How does the church in a post-Christendom society, and in an African society, relate to mission?

In Chapter 13, Attie van Niekerk reflects on the question: how can our theological curriculum equip future ministers to respond in a meaningful way to the large and complex problems of the country, such as poverty, joblessness, gender-based violence, crime, neglect and abuse of children, the consumer culture, ecological degradation? It suggests that theological students must get practical experience in learning to know themselves; seeing their community and context, and letting it touch them deeply; understanding the existential questions that hang over their cultures and the reasons why things are as they are; reflecting on what they have seen in the light of the Bible and theological tradition, and finding a meaningful response to what they have seen. Lastly, inspiration and dedication are needed. These steps are firstly taken by the student, as preparation for leading a congregation through the same procedure.

Jacques Beukes concludes with the final chapter of this book, Chapter 14, wherein he aims to define leadership, followed by a succinct analysis of the intersection between theological curricula and leadership, as well as practical

theology and leadership. The final section of this chapter delves into a comprehensive examination of diverse leadership styles that could potentially apply to the South African context.

Pedagogical approach of the University of Pretoria (Faculty of Theology and Religion)

In the Faculty of Theology and Religion and Department of Practical Theology and Mission Studies, staff embraced the University of Pretoria's hybrid teaching model. The university's online platforms such as the Blackboard Learn LMS (ClickUp), Blackboard Mobile, and Blackboard Collaborate technologies are used to enhance the student's learning experience. The hybrid teaching model has the potential to extend the classroom experience beyond the lecture period, both before, during and after class. It provides the opportunity for lecturers to mix the best of contact and online delivery to create a new learning environment for students. Hybrid learning makes teaching and learning more effective by shifting the instructional sequence. For modules, lecturers therefore, use the before-class, during/in-class and after-class approaches.

Before class

The 'before class' phase is also known as the 'preparation' phase. Lecturers make the reading material available on ClickUp (an online productivity platform) days or a week before the class. Lecturers provide students with activities and videos or alternative media and they are assessed by way of a small quiz on the pre-class reading material and or activities (also on ClickUp). By doing this lecturers make sure that students are therefore prepared for class.

During/in class

The 'during/in class' phase is also known as the 'engagement' phase. In class (mostly face-to-face but also sometimes online), lecturers use the first part of the lecture, to start with the lecture and module outcomes. Then lecturers lecture the

reading material in a summarised and understandable way. This is also done by way of questioning, listening, describing, answering, comparing and making examples. Sometimes lecturers use further illustrations (multimedia) and case studies for students to grasp the theory better in a practical way. As lecturers are aware of auditory learners, visual learners and kinaesthetic learners, lecturers try to use their time per class but also different periods/classes creatively. Because some learners prefer learning by listening, others by speaking, some by visual cues, and others by doing. Therefore, some lecturers have used teaching, seminary/lecturing mode, reverse classroom, group work, shifting the classroom to a practical place, student network portal, and linguistic, visual, and audio methods, such as using videos, music, drama, art, photography, debates, poems, role-playing, case studies and spiritual/formative exercises. Students are then encouraged to engage with the lecturer and other times engage with their peers, work in groups and give feedback to the class. During this time, students are encouraged to critically engage the current setting, understandings and or praxis after new information and understandings have developed. After the feedback and critical engagement, lecturers go back to the reading material of the week as well as the module and lecture outcomes and evaluate orally whether the outcomes were achieved.

After class

The 'after class' phase is also known as the 'consolidation' phase. Students are encouraged to revise and apply what they have learned. They can also go back to the ClickUp online portal and start with blogs and wikis which other students can engage in, or lecturers give them quizzes, homework or assignments on the coursework.

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Creating a book like this usually involves teamwork. I would like to express my gratitude to all those who contributed to the

planning process of the book. Thank you to all the writers for their diligent efforts in completing this project. I appreciate your dedication to using your time and academic abilities to engage in theological reflection on practical theology and mission studies, particularly in the context of the challenges and discussions related to research and teaching in South Africa as outlined in this book.

Behind the scenes, a significant amount of hard labour is necessary for the publication of every book. I wish to express heartfelt appreciation to all members of the publishing team. We appreciate the pleasant and professional services provided by all the UJ Press staff members we interacted with.

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Chapter 1

To understand: The purpose of research and of methodology

Christo Lombaard 

Abstract

In the first part of this contribution, the true purpose of research – understanding – is placed in opposition to examples of misplaced expectations of research. In the second part, methodology is considered as the scholarly-controlled manner of attaining deeper understanding. The third part includes the contents of a (translated) debate on the purpose of study.

The purpose of research (Or: *unfinished 'n onklaar'*)

In our intellectual history, the purpose of research in the wake of the Enlightenment of the 1600s (for an overview cf. Moyn & Sartori, 2016), from which scholarship as understood in our time springs, has always been to understand. Often an instrumentalised view of research however dominates in the public mind. Research, in that view, is something one does to obtain a Master's or Doctorate, in order to advance one's career. The social and professional status and the enhanced occupational prospects thus become the purpose of research. In a regrettable trend in academic life, the corporatisation of universities and the accompanying managerialist culture that easily dominate within modern universities (cf. e.g. Poutanen et al., 2020:419–442, Lombaard, 2006:71–84), reflect this instrumentalised view of research too. In such a context, research 'outputs' are counted and the uptake of that research in wider circles is measured (without exception, badly). Based on this, academics are then rewarded or reprimanded (the latter, despite oft-stated intentions to the contrary), thus

draining much of the joy from research. From political circles, in a perplexingly naïve reversal of how the positive effects of education naturally unfold in a society, Doctoral qualifications are at times encouraged for the sake of economic growth – as if increasing the number of *doctorandi* in a society would somehow magically solve problems created in the political economy of a country (cf. e.g. Muller, 2012).

These matters are of course more complex than a mere statement of these trends, as was done here, can give fair justice to; however, simply indicating these superficial views found, in different spheres of our society, on the nature and purpose of research, already serves to make the case strongly enough that research is often instrumentalised. Research is held to have other justifications than its only real purpose. It's only achievable goal, can really ever be to understand. Only by understanding ever more deeply whichever subject matter one studies, does one's research contribute to the wellbeing of humanity (locally and universally).

Irrespective of the field of investigation – Mathematics, History, Language, Chemistry, Law, Music, Theology, Economics, Literature, Medicine, etc. – research is about understanding well what one investigates. Keeping for the moment to the disciplines included in what has traditionally been known as the encyclopaedia of Theology (cf. e.g. Heyns & Jonker, 1977:274–311), and in more current idiom is called the subject areas or specialisations within theology, however:

1. Precisely what understanding is, has not always been clear – hence the essential, intellectually demanding field in theological studies of hermeneutics (cf. for an overview e.g. Thiselton, 1992);
2. How understanding unfolds, historically, has often been viewed quite naively as a linear process – hence the sobering and therefore rewarding field of Philosophy of Science (foundationally, Kuhn, 1962; applied to Theology more generally by Küng, 1994 and by Mouton, van Aarde & Vorster, 1988; applied to Mission Studies more specifically by Bosch, 1992);

3. What such understanding relates to, is framed directly by the implicitly accepted relationship of the (grasping possibilities of the) mind in relation to its surroundings (or ‘reality’, cf. Deist, 1994). This is no simple matter either.

Oversimplified, hence:

- Is understanding constituted by a comprehension of how matters correspond to higher ideals (e.g. God)?
 - (– This is the reflex outside of Modernism); or
- Is understanding constituted by a comprehension of how matters are in reality (e.g. nature)?
 - (– This is the reflex within Modernism); or
- Is understanding constituted by a comprehension of how matters relate to how other matters are understood (e.g. how humans can be understood as texts)?
 - (– This is the reflex within Post-Modernism); or
- Is understanding constituted by a comprehension of how matters correspond to all three of these possibilities – but with all of these evaluated critically?
 - (– This is the currently unfolding reflex, within what is uneasily termed Post-Secularism).

This matrix just outlined implies a complexity of referentialities involved when one tries *to understand*. The relationship between the mind and the subject matter one studies (cf. most recently Chomsky & Moro, 2022), is never simple. Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, the delicacy of this link has been paraphrased within humanity across millennia. Ecclesiastes 12:12 is often referred to in this regard, also tongue-in-cheek at academic public events, as an ancient instance of an educational warning, which — it is worth noting (and this is seldom indicated at such public events) — on its part quotes a by then already well-known wisdom adage.

Ecclesiastes 12:12 reads (here translated strongly literally; cf. however Shields, 2000:123–127):

עֲשׂוֹת סְפָרִים הַרְבֵּה אֵין קֵץ

To make many writings, no end.

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(On which follows an uncomfortably cynical remark:

וְלִמְדוּ הַרְבֵּה יָגֵעַת בְּפֶשֶׁר

And study much tires flesh.)

This complexity of referentialities in trying to understand can be illustrated by the process of watching a baby growing into a child, or by a person coming to a better sense of nature or of faith. We, for instance, often find it humorous when a five-year-old misapplies the thus far learnt logic of language (e.g. when the superlative ‘pitch black’ is extended to indicate other extremes, such as ‘pitch heavy’ or ‘pitch tasty’). We may all well recall the moment of confused surprise when realising in science class at school that a 1 kg-ball and a 10 kg-ball that are in all other respects identical, when dropped from the same height at the same time, against our expectations, reach the ground at the same instant. As a third example: Christianity repeatedly runs into the cultural barrier that this faith is especially meant for good people, whereas the opposite is centrally valid for Christianity: even someone who may be regarded as the worst possible person, can find forgiveness in God. In these examples, as in many aspects of scholarly understanding, a too naïve initial theory of how things work has to be adapted. A shift in comprehension is required to reach a more valid approximation of the actual state of affairs; that is: to understand better.

With all three examples, however, each of us can indicate that the complexities extend much further than was just stated above, hence requiring multiple further shifts in comprehension. Nothing is easily understood, *finish 'n' klaar*. Always, we continue to grow in our grasp; that is: to understand better.

This is true of all research. Final answers may well elude us, but better ones present themselves. More importantly, with good research (though somewhat counterintuitively for less experienced researchers), better ways of asking questions are found.

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Certainly, every research project cannot go into all of these aspects numbered A to C above. Most research undertakings have a very specific focus, and that is positive: the smaller the focal point of investigation is, the greater the depth of insight that can be attained, and hence the more valuable the contribution is that one can make. That is precisely the value of specialisation, in which university research ought to excel. (The distinction between primary research, applied research and transdisciplinary research does not diminish the unparalleled gain of specialisation.) However, all research is embedded in this broader framework (i.e. in numbers A to C above); inescapably so. Even when not explicitly acknowledging as much in one's academic writing, we should still always be aware that these are the flags under which our writings inevitably sail.

There is, for this and other reasons, a long tradition of writing on research topics under the rubric of the unity of all knowledge (cf. Cat, 2017). Already in the name *university* it is implied that 'the universe' – the total body of matters – is available to be studied (cf. Rossouw, 1993). Nothing is forbidden us to which to apply our minds, in seeking to understand — which principle resonates with intellectual as much as with theological validity. This does not imply that different matters are studied in the same way, in what would then amount to philosophical and methodological imperialism. For instance, as an extreme example: the superb ethereal quality of silence in a musical piece cannot be understood according to the same precepts as can the quality of road tarring (cf. respectively Harris, 2005:521–558 and Blades, Kearney & Nelson, 2018). 'Lysenkoism' was, during a phase of the then Soviet Union, an example of ideologically enforced methodological unity which, predictably, first suppressed and oppressed, then failed as an approach to scholarship, and is now part of academic laughing stock (cf. e.g. Gordin, 2022). Rather, the opposite is valid: the multitude of approaches, methods and models, in their diversity and even in their opposition, themselves already indicate the remarkable miscellany of what we find before us to study.

Therein lies another pleasing irony of specialisation: the deeper one specialises on an ever more finely focused area of study, the greater the realisation that great depths, and more, lie under the surface of every aspect of our lifeworld. Research specialisation thus contributes to our encounter with life in two ways: as we explore deeply one small facet of our existence, we cannot help realising (in tandem and instinctively) that such richness characterises every matter around us. Research thus counteracts superficiality. At once, research energises us in greater pursuit of the knowledge we seek *and* it elicits humility, as we realise that however great our contribution may be, its relative modesty within all that exists is even more overwhelming.

Such modesty in research is a virtue which serves as a practical corollary to the complexities of what it means to understand. It is therefore well worth our while, as humans and as researchers, to guard against some of the vagaries of our times that would be forced onto research.

‘Aha!’ or ‘Huh?’: The purpose of methodology

If the purpose of research is to understand, then the purpose of methodology is to understand well. By this is meant, that 1) how one approaches one’s subject matter; 2) how one analyses one’s subject matter; and 3) how one then draws conclusions on what has been studied, must be sound. In other words: 1) identifying the most suitable ‘tools’ with which to analyse what one intends to study; 2) how one then uses those tools; and 3) the conclusions one then draws, should all be appropriately related to the study, and should, moreover, be applied in logical coherence with one another.

As a banal example (and following the same numbering here as in the paragraph above): if you want to eat soup, 1) it is better to choose a spoon than a fork or a straw; 2) once the right approach or tool has been chosen, then use it well: do not put the handle of the spoon into the soup, but the spherical part (its ‘bowl’), and do not just dip this bowl of the spoon into the soup, but use the spoon’s bowl to scoop up some soup;

and 3) after enjoying some soup, do not conclude that spoons are bad for eating *boerewors* – as obvious as the latter may seem – since that is not what was indeed investigated, which means such a conclusion would be non-appropriate. On the latter, it remains surprising how inexperienced researchers at times like to defer to ‘applause clause’ generalities in research conclusions, with variations of ‘Jesus is the answer’, ‘*ubuntu* is the answer’ or ‘holism is the answer’, and similar broad explanations, presented as a catch-all conclusion on the problem under investigation.

The same three-fold integrity (numbers 1 to 3 above) holds for whichever methods one uses in Practical Theology.

These methods include, broadly:

- **Exegetical methodologies**, which are employed if one wants to draw on Bible texts in research writing. However, contrary to the expectations of especially younger researchers, drawing on the Bible is by no means a *sine qua non* requirement for research in Theology (except, naturally, in the Bible sciences).
- **Theological methods**, which are strongly interpretatively oriented, usually in the opening and closing sections of theological research writings that primarily employ other methods. Such methods of theological interpretation are strongly to be encouraged to qualify one’s research as indeed theological. However, such theologising can regrettably rely, though well-intentioned, on naïve appropriations of important aspects of Christian theology, such as, frequently, the *imago Dei* concept (cf. Lombaard, 2022:1–15).
- **Statistical methods**, which are employed if one wants to present numerical or mathematical interpretations of the subject matter under investigation – with the cautioning comments on both the previously listed methods above, that also apply here. Statistical processing of data is certainly not a *sine qua non* for research in Practical Theology, and is alas too easily poorly done. These highly technical research practises cannot be lightly mastered.

- **Interview methodologies**, though important and popular, and though they render valuable insights not obtainable in other ways, should also – like the Bible and statistics – not be regarded as the be-all and end-all of research in Practical Theology. Both the social-scientific research interview techniques and the processing of the resulting transcripts are exacting skills, which can easily be applied in a sub-standard manner (with theologians that have the additional danger of unreflectingly confusing the purposes and techniques of the pastoral discussion with those of the research interview).
- **Socio-theoretical methodologies**, which draw on strongly developed theoretical analyses of society or aspects thereof in academic fields such as Sociology, Philosophy, Anthropology, Education, Communication Studies, Political Studies and Psychology. The difficulty here is to master well the concepts, histories and nuances of these (at times rapidly developing) academic fields and their methods, and at the same time remain theologians, maintaining both these research orientations in mutual and critical interaction.
- With **surveys and questionnaires**, the art of the concise yet valid research question, whether such questions are circulated or administered in person and whether they are intended to garner anywhere on the continuum of a Yes/No response to deeply revealing disclosures, are scientific skills which are, equally, not easy to attain.
- **Philosophical-conceptual studies** are conducted by drawing on an already attained depth of knowledge in a particular scholarly field. The ideas, models and theories available on the subject matter are identified, characterised and critiqued, to arrive at a more thoroughgoing intellectual engagement with the subject matter.
- A **survey of literature** is one of the aspects without which research cannot be undertaken at all. The assertion found in surprisingly many postgraduate students' early versions of their research proposals, that 'nothing has yet been written on this topic', is always mistaken. What that

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assertion in reality means, is: 'I have not yet read widely enough'. As Connell (2019:19) states on this matter:

The process [of constructing new knowledge] starts, ironically, by looking at old knowledge. PhD students are usually told to write a 'literature review' at the start of their thesis, where they summarize earlier research. Many wonder why. It may seem a pointless ritual; in fact it is vital. What research does is transform an existing state of knowledge into a new state. The more deeply the existing knowledge is understood, the better.

Differently put, the long, drawn-out activity that research students are at times most loath to spend their valuable time on – to read, read, read – because they want to get to the 'real' research is, in reality, the most important pursuit that makes research possible. "If it does not take cognisance of the newest publications, trends, insights and debates, nor make a new contribution, it is per definition not research, but simply writing" (cf. Legodi, 2021).

The above paragraphs constitute an attempt at giving a different kind of overview than the usual distinctions that are drawn on research. These usual distinctions include those between empirical and interpretative research, inductive and deductive approaches, quantitative and qualitative analyses, experimental and non-experimental research designs, mixed methods or grounded theory approaches to conducting research (cf. e.g. Sheppard, 2020; Laher, Fynn & Kramer, 2019; Somekh & Lewin, 2005). These usual distinctions are by no means unimportant and are discussed in all standard works on research; they are therefore not restated here. Nor is what was related above exhaustive. The above understanding does however give a different, broad indication of some research methods that may be employed within Practical Theology.

A range of publications are available on each of the above approaches and distinctions, which must certainly be consulted to understand well what it is that we as researchers do. Such in-depth methodological preparatory work must be

done for the very sake of research: understanding better what we explore. The alternative – what may be called ‘deep-end in, sink-or-swim research’ or ‘quick-and-dirty research’, or, drawing on American expressions, ‘gung-ho research’ and perhaps ‘gonzo research’ – cannot render reliable results. Such implied haphazardness does not constitute research, nor good writing; such approaches render only words on paper, woefully, and not scholarship. The result on the part of informed readers will then not be ‘Aha!’, but ‘Huh?’.

Fruitful approaches should be an acquired and treasured part of the frame of reference of researchers, to come to an understanding of their subject matter to such a degree that their work meets the traditional criteria of *validity* and *reliability*. These are the two basic yardsticks which determine whether research has managed to help us to understand well; that is, soundly, reasonably and defensibly.

Differently formulated:

- Does the research study what it set out to understand better (validity)?;
- Does it do so in a way that, if others repeat the study along the same methodological lines, essentially the same conclusions would be reached (reliability)?

If research writing does not comply with these two standards, it is indeed writing, but it is not research: it does then not lead to understanding the subject matter better. That would be contrary to the nature and purpose of research.

A debate, to illustrate the above

In March 2023 a letter in the *Kerkbode* church newspaper asked a brief question on the purpose of post-graduate theological studies; specifically on research undertaken by serving church ministers. What follows is a translation of the response (Lombaard 2023) to that reader’s letter; this response also quotes the substance of the initial reader’s letter to the *Kerkbode*, to the extent that it is not necessary to repeat that initial letter here.

The purpose of including the material from that debate here, is that it relates well to at least some of the public misconceptions around research and it also illustrates how the purpose of post-graduate studies or research may be explained in a church-related forum. The name of the original letter writer is here replaced by 'Reader', in order not to treat the letter writer unfairly. Moreover, both the response and the quote from an earlier publication (Lombaard, 2010) included in the response, are here translated from the original Afrikaans versions.

Faith grounds research

In a recent *Kerkbode* Letters-from-Readers column, with the letter titled 'Pastors! Why so many degrees behind your names?', Mr Reader asks the question, crucially and succinctly:

'Why is every second church minister a doctor? Is it for status, a better salary or what? Why waste so much time on further reference work, research, etc., to obtain a doctorate?

Does a pastor have time for such things? Some even have two doctorates! No wonder the gospel doesn't get enough attention! Why don't these doctors like to undertake home visits?'

Perhaps Mr Reader intended his letter to be analysed in depth, or perhaps it was just a quick thought. Be that as it may, he articulates a sentiment that is aired every now and then, about which I had wanted for some time to write something for the *Kerkbode*. I therefore take the opportunity now to do so, with thanks to Mr Reader for raising this matter again as a topic of public discussion.

Mr Reader firstly asks, why study further? Let us start there.

The longest enduring institution in our world is the church – it has been in existence for, by now, a good two millennia. The second longest enduring institution in the world, which has been around for roughly a millennium, is the university. The university, it should be noted, originated

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directly from the church, with the aim of serving church and society. Therefore, pitting church and academia against one another ('wasting so much time for further reference work, research') does not work well: faith and reflection / research cannot, in principle, exist without one another. The one animates the other. Hence the similarly almost millennium-old wisdom of Anselm (which he in a way took over from Augustine, another six centuries or so earlier), *fides quaerens intellectum*: faith seeking understanding. Stated differently: 'I believe, Lord; help me understand'. This is what study is all about. This link, that faith inspires reason and that reason is at the service of faith and humanity, also has deep biblical grounds: that we love God fully with heart, soul and mind (the opening verses of Deuteronomy 6 and the closing verses of Matthew 22, among other Bible texts).

On the surface it may perhaps sound saintly, in a way, to ask: But why study more? However, a non-reasoning faith is neither biblical nor Christian – *in principle*; that is to say, on very basic faith grounds already.

The *practical demands* of pastors serving God, church and humanity also require that church ministers take seriously their vocation to study as, also, service with the mind. The Bible as Word of God was given to the Christian church in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. These are, 100% practically speaking, the languages of revelation. Such is Scripture. Would we now rather, practically speaking, want to keep the Bible at a distance by not taking these languages seriously?

Here and there in the world, there are some believers who advocate a Christian life without the Scriptures. For the vast majority of us, however, we simply cannot do without this Basic Source. The Reformed / Calvinist understanding of faith is the Christian tradition that places this aspect most centrally. That is why, for instance, the Afrikaans churches have always taken the basic languages of the Bible very seriously as an integral part of ministerial training. Therein lies, apart from the religious realism that the

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Bible speaks to us from those ancient languages, also plain human integrity, the value of which we must thoroughly appreciate. Which is: Would we take seriously someone who talks about Shakespeare's plays but cannot read English? Would we listen to someone who talks about a local poet but who cannot understand the language in which the poet wrote? We will probably laugh them out of the lecture hall. Should we then expect any less with the Bible?

(Try asking this type of question to a rabbi about Hebrew or to an imam about Arabic, and you will immediately see the surprise: But how could it *not* be?)

With 66 books in our Bible, would someone want to suggest, 'Oh, let's study only a portion of our canon; let's get by with just a little bit of Bible'? This would be a position fully devoid of integrity. That is why pastors' training requires years of study of the Old and New Testaments; with the Bible languages. Rather than 'No wonder the gospel doesn't get enough attention!', precisely the opposite is true: the gospel gets the greater part of the attention. The Bible and faith require study which, moreover, cannot be otherwise: it must continue throughout life. Unless someone would want to suggest that spiritual growth on the part of pastors is unnecessary...?

Now that we may have reached a solid understanding of the Bible, should we rather know nothing about how the church had developed over 2 000 years; until here, today with us? (– Church History / Historical Theology.) Should we leave 20 centuries of the central faith formulations of the church unstudied? (– Dogmatology / Systematic Theology.) Would we ignore the active calling of the church and believers throughout the ages, throughout the world? (– Mission Science / Missiology.) Should we simply leave unconsidered the formal organisation of congregations? (– Church Polity.) Or acting justly? (– Christian Ethics.) Or living along with other religions? (– Science of Religion.) Would we rather try to do the work of the church in an uninformed manner? (– Preaching, Diaconate, Youth

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Work, Congregational Development, Catechesis and more...) What part of this 'core encyclopaedia' of Theology does not require deep, long-term intellectual engagement to serve God, church and society responsibly (rather than in a knee-jerk manner)? Which of these subject areas should we rather neglect or abandon? Would someone make a suggestion to guide us down that path...?

Then ministers still have to deal with the people whom they serve in valid ways, in order to be relevant: their worlds of thought (Philosophy), their inner worlds (Psychology) and their worlds of living together (Sociology, Politics, Ethics, Economics). The alternative is a ministry that passes by people. Would anyone favour such an irrelevant type of gospel ministry, which ignores the lifeworld of people? (Trying to conduct ministerial training separately from the institution of the university, for which voices are raised every now and then, will therefore inevitably damage the church's vocation profoundly. In all directions.)

Theological training should rather put humanity-and-world into dialogue with faith-and-church in valid ways; doing so, for the sake of its vocation, on the basis of the best available international insights. That is why pastors' training, in addition to studying local languages and in addition to the foundational Bible languages, must also often rely directly on other scientific languages of our time. Also never forget the multilingual world in which we live daily.

Hence, traditionally, that the call to theological training at times includes study up to at least Master's degree level. By then, pastors often already know where their God-given academic talents lie, with the obvious next step, Doctoral study. Would one deny church ministers their calling also to make that advanced contribution in the service of God and neighbour? – Which would be: 'You now have the ability to render this intellectual service of love, so that church and humanity can be better, and you have the academic

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preparation for this; but no, you should rather not... Because specialist contributions within kingdom work are suspect.'

Worldwide, one finds within churches here and there people with what may be termed, an anti-intellectual inclination. The orientation of such an approach is always as if faith-without-reflection would somehow be better than faith-with-reflection. However, this is a false piety: it does not serve the gospel; on the contrary, it obstructs the gospel. As I put it once before (Lombaard, 2010):

If the same argument is applied to any other specialist area, its frightening nature becomes straightaway apparent – for example: 'I am no trained surgeon; I am just an ordinary person like you, who is moreover concerned about your health; so let me operate on you'; or: 'I am no trained engineer; I am just an ordinary person like you, who is moreover concerned about our transport system; so let me build the bridge over the main road.' Why is the absurdity of this type of power argument tolerated, even appreciated, when it comes to faith? Valid as it is that the faith of ordinary people is often of admirable depth, when that is however elevated as a claim to power, such religious hubris portrays precisely the opposite.

Lastly: Mr Reader asks, why then further study by pastors, 'for status, a better salary or what?'. Of course, he senses it correctly, that there are always secondary and even more matters that go along with specialist study. As there are related matters that go along with almost everything that we usually do. (I go to buy a loaf of bread, but I also run into a friend. Or I go on holiday to the coast, but I also take along a few books for my old neighbour.) However, the additional matters do not detract from the main matter. The main activity still remains, when it comes to specialist theological studies: *fides quaerens intellectum* – faith seeking understanding.

In Thy Service.

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Chapter 2

An epistemic death or wrong perceptions? Power dynamics and complexities in theological learning spaces

Buhle Mpopfu 

Abstract

This chapter is based on self-reflection and draws on the notion of ‘locating regimes’ and ‘moving methodologies’ to discuss the complexities of learning spaces in theological education. I argue that disconnections deserve the same attention as connections which create networks for learning spaces. I further contend that paying attention to the power dynamics that shape the learning environment has the potential to configure dominant multiple forms of subordination and exclusion. By reflecting on a personal journey of theological studies, the contribution identifies opportunities for contextual engagement on challenges which present an epistemological crisis by creating disconnections.

The study interrogates students’ perceptions and concludes by engaging with contextual challenges of migration, climate change and substance abuse to highlight how learners can use their personal experiences to critically engage in the learning spaces. As part of critical reflection on the interface of curriculum and pedagogy as presented at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria, the contribution highlights the significance of inclusive and non-hierarchical pedagogical relations in and beyond the classroom. It provides some theoretical considerations on power dynamics that take place in the classroom. In acknowledging that students come into learning spaces with

a wealth of experiences from their lives and communities, we disrupt power dynamics in those learning spaces and level the learning field so that status, power, gender and other complexities are no longer the determining factor for participation and thereby create a conducive environment for new knowledge.

Introduction

‘If they ask me to present something, I will die.’
(International Summer School, female student, 12 July
2022, Lesvos, Greece)

I started drafting this contribution while attending an international summer school on ‘Cultures, Migrations and Borders’ organised by the University of Aegean on the Greek Island of Plomari, Lesvos from 5 to 14 July 2022.¹ I presented a paper and decided to stay for the two weeks duration of the programme and this allowed me to engage with post-graduate students from different backgrounds. Most of the participants were drawn from Europe and the majority were students from the field of anthropology conducting research for master’s and PhD projects. There was one student from Portugal whose grandparents once lived in southern Africa and had an interest in learning more from me about the colonial past. She kept saying to me, ‘I am not an anthropologist and if I am asked to say anything, I will die’. During our conversations, I explained to her that I was also not an anthropologist and observed how she was actively engaging outside of the class because she was informed about global issues. However, I did not understand why she was not keen to talk during lecture lessons and later asked her why she thought she would die if she was asked to make any presentation in class.

1 For more details, see; <https://www.sah.aegean.gr/en/events/9th-international-postgraduate-summer-school-cultures-migrations-borders-plomari-lesvos-july-4-14-2022/>.

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Her explanation was simply that she was not an ‘anthropologist’. It became clear to me that when she heard some presenters state that they were ‘anthropologists’, she felt incompetent to engage in ‘such an academic space with learned people’. I had difficulty understanding how it is that we can all attend a summer school as learners and scholars from diverse and interdisciplinary backgrounds but discover that some of us feel incompetent to engage. Although this experience happened within the discipline of anthropology, this reminded me of some experiences in theological studies. Having been a student in theology, I remembered how I often felt incompetent and sometimes uncomfortable engaging with those who called themselves ‘theologians’ – I felt that I was not at the level of engaging with them. I then concluded that there were power dynamics that came with status or background and intersected with other complexities to distort the learning environment and I decided to interrogate ways in which these complexities could disrupt learning spaces.

Just as I did, the majority of students training for ministry often approach theological studies with misconceptions that are prevalent in society. People may ask you about Bible verses because they know you study the Bible, but after studying theology one realises that it is not all theological students who major in biblical studies. This is contrary to the perception that theological students know the Bible. Admitting that one does not know where to find Bible verses after graduating with a degree in theology does not present us as good theologians, so we often have to act like we know where to find scriptures – even if we have to google for some answers. Looks like this is one of our pedagogical dilemmas. Put simply – our missional theology is not as practical in class as lay people think. Practical theology is not practical during lectures, nor missiology all that missional – although we do study prayerfully. Missional and practical theology as an academic discipline needs to address pedagogical and theoretical considerations on power dynamics that take place in the classroom so that mission is ‘contextual and transformed’ (Bosch, 1991).

Bosch (1991) introduced us to the concept of ‘transforming mission’ and succinctly mentions ‘paradigm shifts in theology of mission’ as a reminder that contemporary churches and global missions should constantly be aware of the shifts which take place due to several contextual factors such as politics, conflict, modernity, globalisation and environmental crises induced by climate change. ‘These paradigm shifts challenge us to do things differently and to let a fresh generation of leaders and thinkers take new initiatives’ (Fagerli et al., 2012:8). This contribution is a critical reflection on the interface of curriculum and pedagogy as presented at the Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria and highlights the significance of inclusive and non-hierarchical pedagogical relations in and beyond the classroom.

Given that this volume aims to ‘inform the current practical theological and missiological curriculum,’ the chapter’s contributions focus on pedagogical settings within the curriculum and address how learners should engage with instructors through faculty research themes. Paying attention to learning and communication barriers should shift from traditional approaches to inspire transformative engagement with students and local communities. As such, theological education has a significant role to play in responding to these paradigm shifts.

The reflection on the encounter with a student in Greece is intended to highlight some of the misconceptions within the discipline of theological studies. Here is another reason: I still remember vividly the first days of my experiences in one of my first lectures during my undergraduate studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg years back. I had come from a spiritually vibrant youth ministry where we had learned and practised deep Christian spirituality in which we encouraged each other to pray without ceasing. Then boom! – when I was attending a theological class, I happened to be the only one who carried a Bible into the classroom (some may have brought electronic versions on laptops and phones). I also noticed that there was no prayer conducted

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to constitute and close the lecture – all these were wrong perceptions which I brought into the academic space. I had to deal with an epistemological crisis which arose from my initial experiences, especially after a lecture on African Traditional Religion (ATR) where the professor spoke on ‘How Africans worship Ancestors’. There was so much to learn about African spirituality and understanding the African context, but my misconceptions almost ruined the learning experiences.

Like the student I met in Greece, I felt like I would die! I had to deal with an epistemological crisis. It felt as if my faith was being tested and challenged. But as I look in retrospect, I am glad that I studied theology at a liberal university and not at a seminary. I needed to grow by engaging with other religions and not just defend the Christian faith outside the module in Christian apologetics. I needed to develop the skills of thinking critically and engaging constructively within the academic learning environment. I had come with wrong perceptions and nobody prepared me for theological studies at university. I brought the misconceptions into class with all the perceptions inherited from my community and this almost ruined an otherwise exciting fulfilling adventure. What if I withdrew before completing my studies? What if I defended my perceptions and convinced everybody that a theological class should be a ‘prayer room’? Maybe I would have died an epistemic death.

I have observed a similar trend with some of my students and they expect me to know everything and do not seem keen to engage in discussions on matters that affect them in society. It could be that they have wrong assumptions or are intimidated by my status as an academic or theologian and these wrong perceptions or power dynamics need to be interrogated.

Theological pedagogy can draw on the notion of ‘moving methodologies’ to inspire constructive engagement in class. For example, in a volume titled *Moving Methodologies. Doing Practical and Missional Theology in an African Context* (Cilliers, 2022) scholars highlight the need for changes in

the methodologies in practical and missional theology in the African context and have underscored the need to shift from exclusively working within a Western methodological paradigm towards including methodologies more relevant to an African context. The authors provide insights on the need for African scholars to develop moving methodologies for various African communities and settings 'because God is movement'.

Drawing on the related notion of 'methodologies on the move', Amelina, Faist and Nergiz map a new agenda for approaches to migration research to address the question of how empirical research can be contextualized 'and how to deal with national and ethnic categorizations within the empirical studies' (Amelina et al., 2016:2).

Methodologies on the Move outlines an emerging epistemological basis for migration research and is grounded on the multi-sited method of ethnography which provides detailed insights into qualitative and quantitative research designs by presenting 'innovative data collection methods on geographic and virtual mobility, and on cross-border social practices' (Amelina et al., 2016:8). This is another example of how 'moving methodologies' present a shift from exclusively working within a Western methodological paradigm towards including methodologies more relevant to an African context.

In the sections that follow, I use the notion of location regimes to discuss the factors which influence power dynamics in learning spaces and explore how we can draw from our experiences to create safe learning spaces. I will also explore the key interlocutors and complexities in the location or dislocation of learning space and draw on contextual challenges of migration, climate change and substance abuse to highlight how students can use their personal experiences to constructively engage and meaningfully contribute to the learning spaces and disrupt power dynamics on status, power, gender and other complexities.

These are the important questions to be answered:

- What are the factors which influence power dynamics in learning spaces and how can these create safe learning spaces?
- What are the key interlocutors and complexities in the location or dislocation of learning spaces?

Factors which influence power dynamics in learning spaces

There is a need for us to interrogate power dynamics in learning spaces as these are often a reflection of what happens in society. For example, in an article titled; ‘Inclusive Classrooms: Disrupting Power Dynamics’ Iesha Small observed the following:

Power dynamics ...could be limiting [to] learning potential ... [and] teachers ... may feel uncomfortable talking about equity; we don't want to be political; we just want to teach! But ... realised during ... 14 years in the classroom that education is inherently political. It can be withheld for political reasons, and educational access and outcomes have historically been, and still are, impacted by gender, sexuality, ethnicity, family income, disability and special educational needs ... Power dynamics in schools are similar to those in wider society, [and] in wider society there are a number of groups who automatically wield more power. (Small, 2022:1)

It is important to realise that power dynamics in learning spaces reflect a wider society. By implication, it is possible that African learning spaces can mirror the patriarchal nature of the African male-dominated communities. I have observed that there are more female students than male students in most classes within the Faculty of Theology and Religion. In contrast, we have more male teaching staff as compared to a few females. The same is also true when we look at racial representation, there are more black students and fewer black

teaching staff. Therefore, the impact of race, gender, sexuality, status and student backgrounds will have implications for the power dynamics at play. Small (2022:2) suggests two ways to disrupt differences in power and status within the classroom to ensure a more inclusive environment.

- Learning in pairs and small groups, for example, discussion boards and group exercises where there are clearly outlined ground rules for engaging. Such rules can disrupt power dynamics.
- Question and answer sessions where learners are encouraged to engage by simply asking, 'Who haven't I spoken to properly today?' or 'Who hasn't said anything today?'

Small's observations are in line with those from a 2006 study conducted by Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, which showed:

[The] many complex ways in which power relations based on race, class, gender, disability and sexual orientation played out...and how these dynamics directly influenced the teaching and learning process.

...The positionality of the teachers and learners, in particular the racial category of whiteness, emerged as a key power relationship mediating classroom dynamics. We suggest that the facilitation model of teaching does not account well for these dynamics and that further efforts are needed to better understand how societal power relations affect teaching and learning efforts and what responses... educators can make to negotiate these issues. (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2006:1)

The complexity of the ways in which power relations based on race, class, gender, disability and sexual orientation in learning spaces needs to be explored as a way to contextualise and decolonise education within the African context. This is particularly important in order to interrogate and disrupt the positionality of the teachers and learners, in particular the

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racial category of whiteness, which emerged as one of the key power relationships mediating classroom dynamics in this study. Given that power relations are based on race, class, gender, disability and sexual orientation in learning spaces, there is a need for us to explore more ways in which learners and learning facilitators can negotiate these intersecting issues. In some cases, power dynamics have to do with 'conformity to mainstream norms, which [can be] explained in terms of limitations in most teachers training in dealing with diversity' (Sidky, 2017:187).

Lee and Schaller (cited in Sidky, 2017:187) emphasise that 'it was not the teacher alone who could determine the quality of relationships she established with her students'; rather, these relationships are affected by 'the greater society and program context, the course, the teacher, and the students'. Is that notion of the teacher as the major source of power identical to that of being paternalistic? Being paternalistic was always justified on the teacher's part as being for the student's benefit. However, do teachers have the right to decide what is good for the students? Should it be a top-down decision or one that is negotiated (Bakhtin et al., cited in Sidky, 2017:187)?

There is a need for intentionality when it comes to establishing relationships and addressing the complexity of learning spaces so that the context is taken seriously and learners are involved in decisions that affect them. For example, some scholars, such as Townes (2015), have acknowledged the intersectionality which constitutes the complex aspects of factors that contribute to complexities surrounding the marginalisation of women. In the American context, womanist theologians have also highlighted issues of racism, classism, sexism, sexual orientation, and the various ways in which these trajectories impinge on African American women's lives (Weems, 2003).

Locations and epistemology in learning spaces

This contribution approaches location regimes as ‘knowledge systems or culture that calibrates the relative value, significance and meaning of locations’ (University of Helsinki, 2017:1) to argue that disconnections are as important as networks or connections which embody multiple forms of power, subordination and exclusion in learning spaces. By using these notions to reflect on student learning, the contribution highlights the significance of shifts in relative location and sheds light on power dynamics in relations, separations or disconnections that are established as people located in different contexts within the learning environment.

There are various themes and concepts which have informed responses to various contextual realities in which theology has an important role to play. For example, theological students can engage with themes on pressing global issues, such as poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence (GBV), and environmental awareness of climate change. These themes have taken a nuanced approach in dialogue with the prevailing concepts developed by academics in ‘specific social locations and political and theological persuasions’ (Werner et al., 2013:330). Humanity is at the centre of global knowledge accumulation and the development of academic and community-based responses to these realities will depend on the different contextual articulations and locations, but we are bound together in humanity. As the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu observed; ‘My humanity is bound up with yours, for we can only be human together’ (cited in Hong, n.d.:1).

Our world is diverse in many different ways, including interreligiously Learning to appropriately engage our neighbors of different religious traditions in ways that respect them and honor our differences is part of our Christian witness in our shared world. (Hong, n.d.:1)

Contextual realities in the learning spaces

In the following sections, I will draw on contextual challenges of migration, climate change and substance abuse to highlight how students can use their personal experiences to critically engage in the learning spaces. Acknowledging that students come into learning spaces with their experiences, disrupts power dynamics in those learning spaces and levels the field so that status, power, gender and other complexities are no longer the determining factors for participation. We all have encountered migrants, experienced the effects of climate change and have seen how substance abuse has destroyed lives and families. Therefore, we can all contribute by sharing our experiences.

Migration and the challenge of climate change

There are emerging issues which require urgent attention, such as the environment-induced movement of people due to floods, drought and extreme weather conditions. Students and young people can play an important role in addressing these challenges. There is a myriad of challenges which have created the global crisis in which we find ourselves and there is a need for theological students to further explore the relationship between the movement of people, religion and the environmental crisis and build on the work of scholars such as Anim (2019), Jenkins, Tucker and Grim (2016) and Korchide & Binay (2019), and some scholars are interested in the potential intersections in relationships between Christian or religious practices and environmental destruction, ecological and economic (in)justice and/or environmental sustainability (Oikos Study Group, 2006) and some have explored religion as a resource of ecological praxis and ethos (Altner, 1998), and the relationship between religion and anthropogenic climate change. These themes provide opportunities for students to engage in post-graduate research.

Migration is one area of research which continues to dominate global political and socio-economic debates as more migrants and refugees flee regions with political

instability, and locals are forced to move in search of safer living conditions for themselves and their families. The plight of displaced people has been escalated by the poor global responses to COVID-19 which affected lockdowns and restricted movement of people. Although these measures were intended to limit the spread of the virus, enforcing social distancing measures without considering the plight of the poor migrant communities tended to be inhuman. For example, Mpofu (2022) lamented political 'demagoguing' and the exploitation of poor families affected by the COVID-19 lockdown and observed how the mission of the church shifted to the margins and posited as follows:

[T]he post-COVID-19 church should emerge as a church whose mission is God's mission (*missio Dei*) not merely the activities of the church where the poor are marginalised and exploited by the rich and powerful. Solidarity with the poor should be the essence of being church. (Mpofu, 2020:4)

In South Africa, the government has moved to stifle migration, and since 2018 the government has located the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) within the security cluster alongside justice, police, military and correctional services. A white paper on international migration proposed that migration legislation and policy should be clustered together with national security. This came with stringent measures aimed at restricting migration to highly skilled people or capital and thereby criminalising certain forms of migration. In essence, the passing of the Border Management Agency Bill by Parliament led to the creation of a centralised authority with sweeping powers over South Africa's ports of entry, including policing and customs. This bill has now been implemented and there is a need for studies interrogating how these policies will facilitate transformation within the context of justice protecting the livelihoods of cross-border traders.

Theology has an important role to play in mitigating the impact of livelihoods for displaced families by mobilising communities through life-affirming practices and values. In southern Africa, migration studies have tended to be devoid

of engagement with the religious experiences of migrants and refugees and religion is often mentioned in passing (See Carmona, 2010 and Nyamazana et al., 2017). Political instability, wars, famine and environmental crisis create a range of socio-political, public policy, and ethical challenges for governments, relief organisations and faith communities concerned with the care of migrants and refugees as they 'seek to balance the needs of their indigent and settler-migrants' (Carens, 2013, Wellman & Cole, 2011).

The role of theology in mitigating substance use disorder

One of the growing challenges among young people in South Africa and the world is substance abuse. Substance abuse disorders hurt family members and we must understand the implications of these effects so that we can develop plans for effective interventions and treatment (Sarkar et al., 2016:7). As communities and researchers, we can 'motivate and catalyse action in response to this disaster, and we must do so' (Sarkar et. al., 2016:9).

Substance abuse has a wide range of consequences for the substance abusers, families and communities. Patterns of behaviour are generated and propagated through various locations and dislocations as families break apart and reunite under circumstances driven by substance abuse. Family systems often function as support networks that can be useful in addressing addiction to drugs and other substances.

Adolescent drug usage typically begins with nicotine from cigarettes, and it progresses to the usage of alcoholic beverages and illegal narcotics. Initially, the use of narcotics may be restricted to weekends only. However, later on, use may begin during the week, but only at night. Adolescents learn that if they use the drug, they will get the feeling they want every time. They learn to regulate the amount of medicine they consume to control the intensity of this feeling. They can either use the drug or leave it at this point and because drug usage is frequently done with friends, this stage is sometimes referred to as 'social use' (Milhorn,

1994:6). Alcohol's impact on individuals has a ripple effect on communities and has a wide range of serious consequences. For example, the depressive effect on drivers reduces reaction time and makes driving after drinking any amount of alcohol, regardless of the legal limit, very dangerous. At first, a person who has used alcohol may feel at ease, but the effects of the alcohol will impact aspects of life.

Alcohol abuse also leads to chronic brain conditions marked by neurobiological abnormalities that result in a compulsion to consume a substance and a loss of control over drug consumption. It is defined by the compulsive use of drugs and an inability to stop using them despite the negative consequences of doing so. Despite substantial health, economic, career, legal, spiritual, and social ramifications, a person with an addiction is unable to cease the behaviour, whether it is drinking, doing drugs, or anything else (Crowley et al., 2014:27).

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG)² has observed that alcohol, marijuana, nicotine, and *nyaope* or *whoonga* are among the most commonly consumed substances in this country. Although there is no such thing as magic when it comes to treating substance misuse and addiction, patients and their families can get support. Substance abuse is one of our generation's most pressing public health issues and students have an important role to play in addressing this scourge. The latest global data on substance abuse, misuse, and disorders shows that the problem is worsening, and the consequences are becoming more lethal than ever as there was an increased usage of substances during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., see Abramson, 2021). It is, therefore, critical that youth are involved in learning spaces seeking to find solutions and develop intervention strategies.

2 For more details see; https://www.sadag.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2918&Itemid=412 (Accessed 08 August 2022).

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Theological studies can equip students with skills to critically engage on challenges regarding substance abuse. They can do this by using analytical skills to identify substance abuse challenges in their local communities. They also can draw from their own experiences from peer interactions. When students know that their context, experiences and different localities constitute a wealthy pool of academic resources, they will not feel less important in lecture rooms. They will engage with confidence knowing that nobody is better placed and equipped to address the challenge of substance abuse among youth than they are. Their experiences make them experts in the field and they can make relevant contributions to academia to develop intervention strategies which are relevant and contextual. Students can help to equip community leaders with the skills to approach the challenges of substance abuse.

Epistemological crisis

One way in which learning spaces can be configured is when we are always ready to learn from each other and acknowledge that truth is relative. Baghramian et al. support this view and notes:

[R]elativism, is the view that truth and falsity, right and wrong, standards of reasoning, and procedures of justification are products of differing conventions and frameworks of assessment and that their authority is confined to the context giving rise to them. (Baghramian et al., 2020:1)

This observation underscores the idea that our contexts and experiences are critical components of the learning process. Therefore, it is the task of each student to listen and engage constructively, even with conflicting ideas, so that we learn and grow.

One of the reasons that I am writing this contribution is to clarify, in simple terms, that theological studies at a liberal academic institution shouldn't be confused as a discipline that has solutions for all societal challenges. This is why we

engage in interdisciplinary studies. Therefore, we need to address misconceptions regarding the intersections between theology as an academic discipline and the importance of interdisciplinarity as a way of enhancing contextual and relevant participation in the mission of God. Within the learning environment, this implies that people ought to be open to learning and building relationships which foster fellowship. As Breed and Semenya observed: learning spaces should facilitate ‘fellowship, sharing, partnership, participation, and communion’ in unison as the Holy Spirit unites us with God in ways that help us develop ‘sociological unity, theological and ontological unity’ (Breed & Semenya, 2015:6).

As we listen to each other, this becomes an expression of participation in the *missio Dei* and we also discern the work of the Holy Spirit and partner with God in responding to contextual challenges in the examples that I have highlighted. We do all this through a hermeneutical understanding that there is diversity and this diversity is an ‘asset that could enhance the well-being of everyone if every person or every group contributes their unique gifts for the good of all creation’ (Breed & Semenya, 2015:7).

Conclusion

This chapter was based on self-reflection and drew on the notion of ‘locating regimes’ and professional experience in theological education to highlight lessons for students engaged in Practical Theology and Mission Studies. The author also draws on student experiences to reflect on a personal journey of theological studies and identifies opportunities in the face of challenges which come with theological training particularly for students training for ministry. The study concluded by engaging with contextual challenges of migration, climate change and substance abuse to highlight how learners can use their personal experiences to critically engage in the learning spaces as a way to disrupt power dynamics and level the learning field so that status, gender

and other complexities are no longer the determining factors for participation in learning.

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Chapter 3

Betwixt and between (and beyond?) two Barnards: An invitation to liturgical research as synergistic assent

Dieter de Bruin 

Abstract

This chapter gives a brief overview of three ways of approaching liturgical research, namely, the historical, ritual, and theological approaches.

The historical and ritual approaches are briefly outlined with the help of two influential liturgical scholars at the University of Pretoria. David Fagerberg and Gordon Lathrop set the scene for integrating the historical and ritual approaches as liturgical theology.

The ABCs of liturgical studies at the University of Pretoria

What a privilege to be writing this chapter!

I would like to address you as a fellow traveller when it comes to the study of ... and here I should have inserted liturgy and homiletics, but I waiver, or perhaps I should say the liturgical study of ... God, but God is not an object to be studied.

So, how are we to describe this field?

The answer, for me, lies partially with Conor Cunningham's description of (practical) theology as not a

subject but a task.¹ For me, theology is a journey with – and to – the Infinite Beauty, Truth and Goodness that is God (Hart, 2013).

But let us take a step backwards.

As a green lecturer in the Practical Theology Department specialising in homiletics (the study of preaching) and especially liturgical studies, I attempt to stand in enormous shoes that have walked the road before me at the University of Pretoria. Wepener & Bartlett (2014:2) hail such scholars as, among others, A.C. Barnard, Cas Vos, Hennie Pieterse and Julian Müller (my doctoral supervisor). In this chapter, I aim to introduce three approaches to doing liturgical research: history, ritual studies, and the theological approach. It will be impossible to do justice to all the scholars mentioned here who contributed to this field.

With a predilection for alliteration and stretching a point or two, I will focus on two Barnards: A.C. Barnard (the historical approach) and Marcell Barnard (the ritual study approach).

To mention Marcel Barnard is to refer almost automatically to Cas Wepener (lecturer at the University of Pretoria from 2010 to 2019), who is an internationally renowned practical theologian specialising in liturgical studies. Cas Wepener, together with his friend and collaborator Marcel Barnard have had a massive influence through their writing and the supervision of students in South Africa and beyond (Barnard et al., 2014, 2022; Wepener & Barnard 2010). Of course, one should not throw the giant of homiletical and liturgical studies, Johan Cilliers, to one side!

In this chapter, I aim to take a leaf from the methodological overview of liturgical studies in South Africa of Wepener and Barnard by conveying how the legacy of liturgical

1 See the YouTube video, 'Why Study Theology with Conor Cunningham. Retrieved 22 March 2024 from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuZazV6MyGM&ab_channel=UniversityofNottingham

studies (and I will say something later on about homiletics) at the University of Pretoria specifically can help us to do fruitful research. I hope to make a small contribution by building on this legacy by introducing a hitherto relatively unexplored emphasis (liturgical theology) approach for liturgical research in the South African context.

What's in a name?

One of the conundrums we face when entering the field of the study of liturgy is what to call it. Is it liturgical studies, liturgics, or liturgical theology? The answer is yes, or in other words, it could be called all by three names, and my hunch is that each title carries a slightly different approach to the study, I will use liturgics, liturgical studies, and liturgical theology as the nomenclature for the three approaches to the field that I discuss briefly in this chapter.

Four ways of three approaches

As in many a field, there are various ways in which one could divide a (sub)discipline. Schattauer (2007) Identified three disciplinary approaches to liturgy: liturgical history (I will call liturgics), liturgical theology, and liturgy studied as ritual and symbol (which I will call here liturgical studies). Schattauer summarises the three approaches to liturgical study as follows: 'The aim or purpose of liturgical study turns toward the current practice of worship to understand where it came from (history), what it means (theology), and how it operates (ritual/symbol)' (Schattauer, 2007: 123).

Kimberly Hope Belcher also makes a threefold division for liturgical studies:

I see there being three main divisions to the field of liturgical studies, each of which can be approached according to multiple methods of its own. The three main divisions, as I see them are liturgical history (sometimes called liturgiology or 'study of the liturgy'), ritual studies, and sacramental theology. Each impinges on other fields of

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study, and there is also a considerable amount of overlap between these divisions; 'liturgical studies' is almost an interdisciplinary field. (Belcher, 2011)

It is important to note that Belcher recognises that the three approaches overlap and can be engaged in with various methodologies. Later on in her post, she speaks of sacramental or liturgical theology.

Martha H. Brundage (2018:166) reflects on her experience of the *Societas Liturgica* of 2017. In her estimation, three research methodologies were also employed:

- Ethnographic and practice studies that investigated the concrete questions of how churches engage in the liturgy.
- Social scientific methodologies were employed to help explain liturgy and help design worship.
- Historical methods that investigate the views of historical figures and how they would relate to current practice.

She calls for a fourth method, namely theology. What she means by 'theology' is elucidated by the kinds of questions she would like to have asked - by way of example:

- How does the Doctrine of the Trinity – the immanent and not just economic Trinity – inform our liturgical practices?
- What do the theological virtues have to do with Eucharistic practices?
- How does the Doctrine of the Incarnation – that mysterious coincidence of God and man – inform our baptismal rites?

One could translate what she means by stating that she is suggesting that systematic theology is also a primary research avenue into the Liturgy. If one combines Brundage's ethnographic and social science approaches, one would also have the threefold division of a focus on the anthropological/ social scientific study of ritual, historical studies of the development of Liturgy and a theological focus.

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In their overview of liturgical studies in South Africa, Barnard & Wepener (2022:210–220) discern three stages within liturgical studies:

- The Past ('looking back'): This stage could be equated with the historical method in liturgical studies (2022:210).
- The Present ('looking around'): This stage could be strongly associated with what Schattauer (2007) calls 'Liturgy studied as ritual and symbol' (In fact, this is exactly how Barnard (2000) formulated it in his inaugural address at the University of Amsterdam: *Liturgiek als wetenskap van christelike riten en symbolen*).
- The Future ('looking forward'): There is no easy parallel with the third leg of the stool constructed so far.

Arrestingly, they associate these three phases of liturgical research with the Three persons of the Trinity: The Past: 'Theopraxis', The Present, 'Christopraxis'; and the Future of liturgical studies (specifically in Africa) as 'Pneumapraxis'. Going forward with their liturgical research, they call for a deeper engagement with what they call the 'spiritual ontology' in the African context.

Wepener and Barnard verge on but do not venture far into trinitarian theology (and anthropology) when they call for 'an anamnestic liturgical research methodology in which Theo-, Christo-, and Pneumapraxis converge as a trinitarian liminal flow' (Wepener & Barnard, 2022:220).

Later, I will say something about the relationship between trinitarian and liturgical research. I will here confine myself to making a taxonomy of three dimensions of liturgical research that, in some ways, aligned with the project of Barnard and Wepener. Still, the categorisation here would slightly differ from theirs.

As can be surmised from the above short description of the approaches to liturgical studies that various liturgical studies scholars take, the engagement with this field of study can be approached in different ways, and these paths could be categorised according to other markers.

I do not deduce that these scholars intend to divide mutually exclusive categories of liturgical research or to try to indicate that one way of arranging various approaches is superior. Here, we have overlapping and intersecting components of liturgical research with a conglomeration of multiple possible combinations. It would seem, however, that a family of approaches centred around historical, empirical, and (systematic?) theological study could be discerned.

For this chapter, I will call the historical approach 'liturgics', the more empirical ritual approach 'liturgical studies' and the approach of theological meaning 'liturgical theology'.

Under each of these sections, I will very briefly discuss A.C. Barnard and Marcell Barnard with the very distinguished *et al.*'s understanding of what liturgy is. Flowing from that, what their preferred research methodology would be to accord with that understanding of liturgy, and what their understanding of the aim of the liturgy, and concomitant with that, liturgical research, should be?

Again, a threefold (trinitarian?) taxonomy

In many ways, my 'taxonomy' of the discipline accords with that of Wepener and Barnard (2022), but I will arrange them primarily according to the approaches' aim. I will categorise the three approaches of the broad schools of ethical theory: deontological, utilitarian and virtue ethics.

Literature and liturgy liturgics in a deontological frame

A.C. Barnard spent his academic career at the University of Pretoria. Perhaps the capstone of his work was the 1981 publication of *Die Erediens*, for which he was awarded the Andrew Murrey Prize. We will focus our discussion on that publication. Barnard and Wepener (2022:211) are spot on when they opine that 'For A.C. Barnard, liturgy refers only to worship services of churches such as Sunday worship, funerals and weddings'. But the 'only' is quite comprehensive! In the following section, I have translated what A.C. Barnard

considers to be the purview of liturgy and attempted to put it in a numbered list.

The object of research: The worship service

According to Barnard (1981:52), liturgy encompasses:

1. All the words and actions of the complete worship service, including the sermon (the sermon's content excluded) and the Lord's Supper.
2. Other actions such as baptism, confirmation, and ordination.
3. Other services, which include prayer services, bible studies in the congregation, and marriage and funeral services.
4. The design and composition of the worship service.
5. The prayers, liturgical formularies, and liturgical songs.
6. The different elements of the worship service in their own right but also in the way they cohere.
7. The liturgical year, the church building, and liturgical attire.
8. The dynamic of the worship service as it relates to daily life and the practice of faith.

On Barnard's first point, I must strongly demur (although there is not sufficient space here to argue the issue) that I see the homily and the content of the homily as part and parcel of the liturgy itself.²

2 Foley's (2016:161–162) reflection of the Homily being not only *in* but also *of* is an important reminder that I associate with: 'To suggest that the first and central characteristic of a homily is that it is liturgical may appear to be stating the obvious. On the other hand, there have been periods in the history recounted above when the preaching in the liturgy was not of the liturgy and appeared as a pause or parenthesis, especially in the Eucharist. The homily, however, is not only in *but essentially of the liturgy*, which means that such preaching itself is a liturgical event. There are multiple practical and theological consequences of this assertion. From a practical perspective, an authentic homily needs to be in dialogue with the whole of the liturgical context.' (Emphasis mine)

According to Barnard liturgics (what he calls *Liturgiek*) is the science of liturgy. The doctrine of the worship service in its totality studies scientifically the essence of the content and design of the complete worship service of the Christian congregation and everything that relates to it. Barnard maintains that this study is undertaken using the Scripture, historical sources, and how the liturgy is instantiated in the contemporary context and how it should take place. This study happens in a thetical, empirical and critical way employing the best scientific methods (Barnard, 1981:52–53).

Methodology of research: Textual study

Let it be said that studying all the dimensions of the worship service and all that relates to it could be an endlessly fascinating research endeavour. Much exciting work can be done from the most quotidian of questions, such as what clergy wear to conduct services in a particular tradition, to broad liturgical and historical questions, as Barnard & Wepener (2022:219) invite us to do. Studying ‘texts (biblical, confessional, historical) as research methodology’ (Wepener & Barnard, 2022:211) is still a valid and fruitful way of going about liturgical research in our day.

The aim of research: Liturgy as it should be done

The aim of research, according to the A.C. Barnard (1981:52–53) view of liturgical science is already implicit in his definition: ‘soos dit in die konkrete lewe vandag plaasvind en moet plaasvind.’ (the worship service is studied in the way it actually takes place and should take place.) Wepener and Barnard (2022:211) succinctly summarise the approach of A.C. Barnard as follows: ‘This text-based methodology was aimed at deriving liturgical principles from doctrine and Scripture in service of *solī Deo Gloria* in and for the Reformed tradition.’

One could translate A.C. Barnard’s aim into other liturgical traditions. The objective could be to research authoritative texts to derive principles there from to reform the concrete instantiations of liturgical celebration in the

current context. One could describe the aim of this approach as deontological.

Ethnography and empathy: Liturgical studies in a utilitarian frame

The second approach, which could be classified primarily by its research methodology, is the empirical turn in liturgical studies in which Cas Wepener played a significant part (cf. Barnard et al., 2022; Wepener, 2006; Wepener & Barnard, 2010; Wepener et al., 2011). Wepener and Barnard (2022) ably describe this second approach, and it is worth quoting in full:

The starting point is always the rite of liturgy *as it is performed*. In addition, liturgical ritual is understood to include much more than the church service and certainly more than the liturgy of the established churches. Online liturgy, events, life cycle rituals, and religious rituals-symbolic phenomena in culture, nature and at home are also the subject of research. (Author's emphasis)

The object of research: The liturgical ritual

It is clear from this approach that liturgy is defined much more broadly. Barnard et al. (2014:47) describe the research object as a 'liturgical ritual'. They explain: 'Liturgical' refers to the theological perspective of worship, 'ritual' to its cultural-anthropological aspects.'

A cursory glance at the research by Cas Wepener and his students gives ample evidence that we are out of the bounds of the formal church building and denominationally approved orders of service: Everything from service delivery protests (Wepener, 2015) to sporting events (Flynn & Wepener, 2016) are researched from a ritual-liturgical perspective.

The aim of the research: Liturgia Condenda

To classify Barnard et al.'s (2014) approach to liturgy and liturgical research as utilitarian would be a gross reduction and even unfair. They have, in fact, a very sophisticated and

nuanced view of the question of the functionality or utility of liturgy. On the one hand, they would fully concur with the wisdom they received: 'Liturgy is useless. Rituals have no end and serve no purpose; they have no function and are not productive' (Barnard et al., 2014:245).

Barnard et al. (2014) beautifully encapsulate in their typical both/and, theological-anthropological way, the non-utilitarian nature of liturgy with the metaphor of liturgical play:

God himself is a playing God. Play has theological dimensions. According to tradition, God created the world for his own pleasure, and our highest goal as creatures is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever...God would not play alone. He incorporates human beings into his joy. We may join the playing God, the *Deus ludens*, as playing men and woman, as *homo ludens*. (Barnard et al., 2014:255-256)

However, their understanding of a univocally non-utilitarian liturgy was deconstructed – 'Cracked open' (Barnard & Wepener, 2012). I will refer here to only one fruitful avenue of exploration that Barnard et al. opened up for us: Worship in the context of poverty (Barnard et al., 2014:263-265). One would be hard-pressed to argue that if the celebration of liturgy, which includes preaching and liturgical research, could contribute to the alleviation of poverty (Pieterse, 2009) and the increased well-being of people, would not be a valid pursuit because the received wisdom is that liturgical rituals 'have no end and serve no purpose; they have no function and are not productive' (Barnard et al., 2014:245).

On the contrary, It has to be said that Barnard et al. (2014:269-271) are at pains to stress that liturgy (and one could add liturgical research) serves a social function that would not entail a wholesale instrumentalisation of the liturgy.

The methodology: Being on 'PAR'

It has already been prefigured in various ways that the preferred research methodology for this approach is

participatory action research (PAR). Laudable in this approach is the fact that:

in PAR, *both problem-solving and active participation of the researcher are imperative, although it goes further by actively involving the respondents in all the phases of the research.* And all these qualities are essential to incorporate into a research methodology when rituals and their relation to social issues such as poverty are being researched. (Wepener, 2007:738; author's emphasis)

In line with this utilitarian view of liturgical research, and given pressing problems that need solving, one does not have the luxury of doing research for the sake of interest alone.

Theology and *theosis*: Liturgical theology and a virtuous frame

We arrive now, after a too-short amble with giants of the field, where I try to elucidate my understanding of the field of study. Saying 'my own' is self-serving and misleading, to say the least, and I should rather say the understanding that I resonate with and would like to pursue, to wit, sacramental liturgical research.

I hope to illustrate what I mean by 'sacramental' with two descriptions of what the field of liturgical studies entails by visiting two exceedingly eminent liturgical theologians. Please welcome David Fagerberg and David Lathrop into the conversation. Fagerberg stands in the tradition of what is called liturgical theology. Fagerberg gives the same three 'phases' of liturgical research proposed to some extent, by Barnard and Wepener. Academy took it upon itself to study the liturgy historically (as in our context, A.C. Barnard did). Then, Fagerberg notes it was but the work of an academic moment for ritual studies to take off as a way of studying the liturgy, and it is here where Marcel Barnard and Cas Wepener played no small part. The multidisciplinary of this approach bloomed with various lenses to study the liturgy. Fagerberg mentions, by way of example, music, architecture, art, and a plethora of methodologies that enriched the study of liturgy. He draws

attention to *inter alia* ethnography and inculturation, in which Barnard and Wepener are leading voices. One could add here aesthetics – part of the beautiful contribution that Johan Cilliers (2012) made to the field in South Africa.

Fagerberg then makes an exciting move. It ties into where we began this chapter by listening to the witty (Northern) Irishman Conor Cunningham: He (Fagerberg) invites us in our liturgical research to not look solely at liturgy but *through* the liturgy at theological topics, amongst other things, time, cosmos social renewal, deification, death, and resurrection. As he puts it: ‘The liturgy that arises from the Church-in-motion invites us to look through itself at the whole cosmos’ (Fagerberg, 2023:141). Note that Fagerberg is not pitting looking *at* liturgy against looking *through* liturgy. We are obliged to what he calls ‘liturgiology’, consisting for him of the historical and ritual approaches to liturgy, for the traditionally normative that the former engenders and the community-building contribution that the latter gifts (Fagerberg, 2023:121).

Fagerberg is, however, convinced that there is a reciprocal but hierarchical relationship between what he calls liturgiology and what I have been classifying here as liturgics and liturgical studies on the one hand and liturgical theology on the other. Analogous to how biblical criticism is a necessary but preliminary pursuit in service of biblical theology. Hence, the liturgy’s historical and multidisciplinary empirical investigation is ‘made for’ liturgical theology like the ‘Sabbath is made for man’ (Fagerberg, 2023:128).

I was tempted to suggest the addition of the at/through distinction to the ‘betwixt and between’ liminal juxtapositions of Barnard et al.’s (2014) excellent book. Still, it is precisely what hierarchical relationship between the ‘at’ and the ‘truth’ (the at being in service of the through) that Fagerberg propagates that gives me pause.

When Barnard et al. use the concept of liminal, for example, bricolage/particularity, language/silence, image/sound, embodiment/performance, play/function and time/

space, you do not get the sense that language is ordered to silence, that image is in service to sound, or that space, for example, is ordered to time.³ Instead, Kunin (1998, as cited in Barnard et al., 2014:69) proposes: ‘the liminal is neither fully one type of space (category) nor the other, it will take on aspects of both’. So rather than utilising the concept of ‘liminality’ to conceive of the relationship between the various approaches to liturgical research, the way that Fagerberg described the relationship between historical and ritual research and liturgical theology inspires me to use sacramental language, historical and ritual research participates⁴ in liturgical theology that transcends it but cannot do without it.

This brings us, in this section, to what exactly Fagerberg’s definition of liturgy would be. I also juxtapose his definition with a summary of another scholar, Gordon Lathrop, who stands in the same tradition as Fagerberg, and then, by implication, what liturgical research could entail if one takes on board these two scholar’s definitions of liturgy.

The object of study: Trinity, time, space, and more

‘Liturgy is the *perichoresis* of the Trinity kenotically extended to invite our synergistic ascent into deification’ (Fagerberg, 2023:205).

To unpack what Fagerberg means by this compact but almost infinitely generative definition, a few notes would have to suffice to give us a glimpse. However, the gloss that Fagerberg (2010) himself gives to this expansive definition could provide us with a meaningful portal into what is at stake:

The Trinity’s circulation of love turns itself outward, and in humility, the Son and the Spirit work for the Father’s good pleasure for all creation, which is to invite our ascent to

3 One could perhaps say that for Barnard et al. 2014, function is ordered to play.

4 I use the word ‘participate’ in the platonic sense of *methexis* as resourced by other thinkers in the radical orthodoxy movement of theology, as, for example, explained by Haynes (2011).

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participate in the very life of God; however, this cannot be forced, it must be done with our cooperation.

Clearly, we are not in 'Kansas anymore'; we have been taken up in a whirlwind into a deeper or higher dimension. Although it must be said that, speaking in an incarnational register, Kansas (or Kakamas) is taken up into the whirlwind of the Trinity's love.

In Fagerberg's rich conception, liturgy originates not in a human decision but in the life of the Trinity. Liturgy is not (only) the work of human beings but also part of the *Opus Dei*, the work of God; in fact, it is part of the 'massive work of God' that is the economy of salvation. (Fagerberg, 2023:141)

It is perhaps evident that if the 'Perichoresis of the Trinity' (the being of God – the Immanent Trinity), or even the 'Massive work of God' (the economic Trinity) would be the object of study, it could indeed, by no 'object' at all.

In this sense, liturgical theology shares the burden of all types of theology. As Graham Ward colourfully describes the privilege and predicament of theology:

[I]t's not just the queen of the sciences, but it's the whore of the sciences. Queen of the sciences in so far as it caps them all but whore in so far as it has to trade on them all. Theology has no language of its own because we have no object that can we just simply claim. God isn't an object in the world, so theology always has to borrow its language from other things. (Ward, cited in Warlick, 2012:334)

As we have seen in these few pages, liturgical theology has recourse to 'borrow' from a vast array of disciplines, in the tradition of the University of Pretoria, from the historical study (Barnard, 1981) to philosophy and art (Barnard, 1981), and ritual studies (Barnard et al., 2014).

If we were to bring it 'down to earth', one could relate to a summation of Gordon Lathrop's version of what the liturgy essentially is:

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This *Ordo* organizes a participating community together with its ministers gathered in song and prayer around the scriptures read and preached, around the baptismal washing, enacted or remembered, and around the holy supper. The *Ordo* is these things done together side by side. (Lathrop, cited in Moore-Keish, 2010:248)

Now, we are in a place where the ritual studies scholar, for example, can study and offer ritual criticism to a community that has assembled (Grimes, 2013). Echoing *the Lumen gentium* (Vatican Council II. 1964), Duba expands this meaning of the *Ordo* to include:

[A] burden for addressing justice issues in the world... *Ordo* represents the total ordering of the Christian life as it expresses itself in the assembly and as it leads to and flows from that assembly. (Duba, 2005:10)

From this broader definition of liturgy, one can also extend the scope of liturgical research to include *life* from the perspective of the liturgical assembly and how ‘life the universe and everything else’ relates to the worshipping assembly.

Methodology: Autoethnographic ascent

From the above, it should be clear that liturgical theology would have no one clear methodological or disciplinary preference – it is ‘intrinsically and necessarily interdisciplinary’ (Geldhof, 2015:6). For Geldhof, this could relate internally to the theological encyclopaedia of the subdisciplines, such as systematic theology and biblical theology, and externally to disciplines as diverse as performance studies and gender studies.

One could elucidate on any number of approaches that could be espoused in pursuance of this ‘object’ of study. Still, an exciting avenue to pursue would be a very intentional and rigorous juxtaposition of autoethnographic reflexive research with a deep appreciation of philosophical and systematic

theological approaches, as I tried to do in my doctoral work (De Bruin, 2016).

Aim: Pherichoretic participation

According to the Fagerberian conceptualisation, one could say that there is a confluence of the object, the aim, and the research methodology, or to use the metaphor that Wepener et al. use, there could be said that there exists a perichoretic relationship between them.

The aim of liturgy, but also the objective of liturgical research, would be deification – participation in the very life of God. The ‘object’ of research, although it cannot be said to be an object at all, and the way of research is synergistic assent – what Wepener (2009) and Barnard et al. (2014) would call, in line with Van Ruler (1973), theonomic reciprocity.

Conceptualising liturgy in this fashion has another implication.

Suppose the liturgy, as conceived by Lathrop as the juxtaposition of three core symbols, is the way through which we participate in the Trinity and, at the same time, experience well-being and flourishing; in that case, all other rituals and all other life forms could be studied in relation to the practice of the Eucharist. Focusing specifically on the Eucharistic life and the Eucharistic world, could be a significant focus in the next chapter of the University of Pretoria’s contribution.

Conclusion – The aim of liturgical theology: *Theosis*

As has been said before, these assemblies in various forms could be studied from a ritual perspective, historical, semiotic, or any number of other angles. Still, it is perhaps in the ‘directionality’ that liturgical theology as it is conceived here, could be distinguished from the historical and ritual studies approaches

If liturgy is the *perichoresis* of the Trinity that we are called to participate in, and as Wepener and Barnard (2022:215) would have it – and I agree wholeheartedly with them – that

liturgical research is a faith practice, and that 'liturgical-ritual study is a part of liturgical ritual,' then it could follow that to participate in liturgical research could be a way of participating into the 'synergistic assent into deification'.

In this way, participatory action research of the liturgy and life as liturgy could be a way of participating in the action of the Trinity that saves the world by incorporating us in his own life.

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Chapter 4

An experiment in ‘mediated’ homiletics: Can ChatGPT preach in a local, Reformed framework?

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Abstract

This contribution opens with a brief review of the relationship between technology and Theology. After indicating how the chapter will methodologically unfold, two Bible texts are given, from which a homiletical experiment is conducted. The exegetical background and Reformed-homiletical expectations on these texts are given in two resulting sermons. The texts of these two sermons, one written by a human being and one written by ChatGPT, are reprinted and evaluated, in outline, by the authors of this contribution. Further evaluations are invited.

Introduction: Can a sermon be media-free?

The entire history of Christianity, from the world in which the Bible came into being (Frevel, 2005:1–29) and throughout the Christian centuries, is characterised by, amongst other matters, faith and technological possibilities being in interaction. They affect one another. The three most important technological turning points in this regard, are the ancient Near Eastern developments of the instruments of writing (cf. e.g. Powell, 2009), the Gutenberg press in the mid-15th century and the internet since the 1980s (Wheeler, 2019).¹ The relationship between faith and technologically

1 The popular understanding of the earliest origins of the internet in South Africa, most recently again in Du Toit, 2023, is mistaken. (Hence, so is, for instance, the Wikipedia

is never straightforward, as either simply adoption or rejection – although such responses may always be found. Critical interaction and, over time, mutual steering usually characterise this enduring, unfolding relationship. This relates to all new technologies, whether that new invention had been the steam engine and railway system, newspapers, photography, the telephone, radio, motion pictures, nuclear power, space travel, and then, the internet. On the latter, the newest (though long-unfolding: from ancient thought, via science fiction literature and films, concretised in the newest technological developments) innovation related to the internet, is artificial intelligence (AI). Since November 2022, the AI version that has received the most public attention, by far and quite dramatically, is ChatGPT (in its various, fast-developing versions).

In each of these listed and many other instances of technological change, the to-and-fro of rejection and acceptance, of use and abuse, of review and a more considered reception, of direction-finding and direction-giving (always from and to assorted spheres of society), have played out variously, though not in unrelated ways. Stark alternatives and less dichotomous options hence now present themselves; from these past instances, we may of course learn, though not equally much (given the dissimilar technologies) nor always equally easily (given the diverse contexts). Perhaps it is easiest to state the two most directly contrasting views

article in this regard: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_in_South_Africa#cite_ref-3; viewed on 10 May 2023, which incorporates a reference to Du Toit, 2023.) Lawrie, 1997 already outlined these details (initially on the <http://apies.frd.ac.za/uninet/history> website, which is now defunct but has been archived on <http://archive.hmvh.net/txtfiles/interbbs/SAInternetHistory.pdf>). The somewhat earlier beginnings of the internet in South Africa than Du Toit 2023 indicates, had been related to – important for the topic of this chapter – specifically church pro-democratic activities in the late 1980s; cf. Lombaard, 2003:16–27 (which has now also been archived on www.tingchong.com/about/Birth%20of%20the%20Internet%20in%20SA.pdf).

on the relationship between the divine and technology, from which two outermost positions different alternatives can then be navigated. Interestingly, instances of each of these two divergent views can already be traced in antiquity, in the 5th to 4th centuries before the Christian era (BCE, which is often also understood as 'before the common era'), in the ancient Near East and in pre-Hellenistic Greece.

The account, famously known as the Tower of Babel narrative (Genesis 11:1–9, a composite text which reached its current form probably in early 5th century BCE Jerusalem; cf. e.g. Westermann 1984:531–557), includes thematically an early warning on the one-sidedly self-serving use of technology.

From a fully different kind of background, the ancient Greek world of drama techniques from the 4th century BCE onwards, we have the interesting theatrical example known as *ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεός*, or in its later and more well-known Latin formulation, *deus ex machina*, both of which formulations mean 'god from the machine/device'. In a theatre performance (cf. Mastrorade 1990:247–294), when the plot seemed unresolvable, a mechanical arm (or crane), understood by the audience to represent an act of divine intervention, could swing onto the stage and save the hero from all the troubles. In such a conception, different to the Genesis 11:1–9 instance, the divine could thus use technology to the benefit of humanity; symbolically, at least.

Interestingly, in both these instances, though from remarkably different cultures, there was no question on whether the divine and human inventions stood in some kind of relationship to one another. The idea that the physical and the metaphysical, which is to say: human design and the influence of the divine, were unrelated spheres of experience or existence, did not come up. Undeniably, all aspects of life were viewed as integrated with all other aspects of life. The idea that technology fell outside of the purview of the divine, or that the divine afforded no role to technology, was in that existential frame of reference an unrealistic trajectory of

thought. It was the much more recent influences, of the past half a millennium, which contrived such a conceptual divorce of the different spheres of life from one another. This was a mental separation which most religious people would never fully succumb to, as powerful as the cultural and scientific impulses towards such a split had been in the modern era (since ± 1500) and especially in the late modern era (since ± 1800), with their emphasis on a certain kind of rationalism, to the exclusion of other forms of rationality.

Not acceding to this ‘conceptual divorce of the different spheres of life from one another’ (as formulated in the previous paragraph), but rather keeping to the more realistic sense that ‘all aspects of life [are] integrated with all other aspects of life’, the theological and the technological are here considered to be in a reciprocally influential relationship. From this position, it is simply natural to reflect on the use of human innovations in the faith-full act of preaching. We can also draw on ancient culture – the two options indicated above – to form well-considered, influential beacons to guide our navigations in this regard. Hence, as a contemporary, loosely analogous parallel to those ageless dual possibilities (and, if perhaps understood as mutually exclusive options, duel possibilities), let us consider: Where could ChatGPT (and the various alternatives to it) be placed on such a continuum when it comes to preaching the word of God?² Between a firm ‘No, avoid’ and a resolute ‘Yes, utilise’ as the two outermost beacons, are sermons and ChatGPT (and its alternatives) compatible?

2 The fine distinction in formulation between preaching the word of God and preaching from the Word of God, should be carefully maintained. In the background here lies the classic Reformed formulation by Bullinger, *Praedicatio verbi dei est verbum dei*. This confession, that ‘The preaching of the Word of God is the word of God’, casts homiletics as a theologically deeply meaningful act (cf. Locher, 1954:47–57), which ought to fill one with trepidation, humility, courage and faith. Thorough exegesis, finely attuned contextual sensitivities and deep discernment characterise such sermons.

To concretise the questions:

- Is ChatGPT an instrument that will lead us to self-aggrandisement with the, now perhaps, superlative quality of our sermons?
- Is ChatGPT something that God could use to save us from the well-recognised difficulties of creating good sermons?
- Somewhere between these two ‘Beware’ and ‘Proceed’ options, are there perhaps fully different possibilities? Are there other reasonable, feasible, theologically fitting and positively human prospects?

Methodology of this contribution

From this brief review of the relationship between faith and technology, it is already clear that sermons and media have always been intertwined and continually will be. Homiletics has since the first sermon we know about from the Bible (Nehemiah 7:72b-8:18),³ been ‘mediated’; that is: to preach means to make use of the media of the time. Let us hence investigate the newest technological possibility and what it offers homiletics.

The following experiment was set up to compare a sermon by a person and a sermon by a machine. Simply formulated, the previous sentence means: a sermon written by a trained theologian and a sermon written by ChatGPT are reprinted below. These two sermons then form the basis for evaluation. That appraisal will be at the hand of the usual criteria set for good homiletics in the Reformed tradition. It should be noted that the valuation will not be exhaustive,

3 ‘In Nehemiah 7:72b-8:18 we see the beginnings of an expression of faith in which the reading of Scripture and its exposition is at once transposed back to a mythologically-idealised time of Moses *and* instituted as part of the festival culture of Israel, to be maintained in perpetuity. In the Torah, past and present, text explication and sense application are combined, in order to bestow on the faithful their (re)new(ed) religious identity (Lombaard, 2008:148).

but will indicate outlines of an appraisal; intentionally so. A fuller assessment is not offered, because the intent is that our readers here will enhance the value of this contribution, and further contextualise it, by conducting their evaluations in this regard. Moreover, the aspect of the delivery of the sermon falls outside of our scope here. As important as the quality of oral and symbolic communication and other matters are during the act of preaching, they cannot be evaluated here, on paper. Nor would that be useful for this experiment since this 'test drive' relates to the composition of a sermon.

Hence, what follows are the two chosen Bible texts – one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. This follows an indication of the key exegetical considerations required when these texts are studied. Then follows an overview of the usual criteria employed when considering the quality of a sermon in the Reformed church tradition. The latter focus, on the Reformed tradition, is not only because of the particular church backgrounds of the two authors here (respectively Dutch Reformed Church and Uniting Reformed Church) and of the Reformed, though thoroughly ecumenical, nature of the Faculty of Theology and Religion within which the two authors used to serve. More significant here are the diverse understandings of the nature of preaching, of what constitutes a good sermon, in the different Christian denominations. To name only the most well-known of these denominations: in the Roman Catholic Church (with its high ecclesiology), the Orthodox churches (with their foundationally symbolic orientations), the Reformation churches (with the prominence of the Bible within Lutheranism and Calvinism), the charismatic and Pentecostal churches (who hold the direct sensing of the Holy Spirit as primary) and African Instituted churches (with their culturally-grounded experiential emphases), what is viewed as a good sermon differs. In each of these denominations, deep theology and long history have found expression in distinctive senses of what ought to be found in a sermon for the preaching to be considered as good. To give fair expression to all of these and other denominations in this regard, will not be possible.

Already with the focus here on primarily the Reformed (i.e. Calvinist) views, much material has had to be condensed here. Doing so within the Reformed tradition, with which we are most familiar, has a redeeming value that such abridgment would not all too easily become reductionist. Moreover, this denominational focus once again invites readers to engage in their assessments of the two sermons shown.

A last methodological consideration here relates to the prompts used to create a sermon on ChatGPT. The importance of the prompts relates also to the validity of the experiment: setting up in a pre-determined manner this web service for either success or failure, when the quality of the sermons is later compared, would render this experiment inadequate. After all, the purpose of this exercise is not to play humans and machines off against one another, but rather to compare. We want to see what the similarities and differences are between the sermons rendered. To prove a human preacher or a ChatGPT sermon as either superior or inferior to the other is not the intent here; rather, we hope to understand better – the purpose of science.

That we already had an extant sermon, not written to be included in an experiment such as this, also helped to remove the possible, albeit perhaps unintended competitive dimension from such an experiment. Moreover, we could fairly design the different aspects of the ChatGPT prompt, so as later to compare what is indeed fairly comparable.

The art of writing ChatGPT prompts includes simplicity; on the other hand, not giving enough information in such prompts will naturally render an inadequate result. The authors here realise the balance required to navigate well this matter. Hence, because the first author was responsible for the text of the sermon, the second author undertook three pre-trial attempts at refining the aspects of the prompts eventually used.

The different aspects of the ChatGPT prompt for this experiment therefore were:

- a sermon of 1 300 to 1 400 words (= 20 to 25 minutes);

- written in British English;
- situated strongly in the Reformed church tradition;
- to be preached to an audience of well-educated university students;
- with the sermon on both Exodus 22 and John 8;
- with both those texts historically read and well exegeted;
- employing aspects of 'new hermeneutics' in homiletics;
- applying the meanings of those texts to a South African urban context, and
- where the denomination is in danger of splitting in two on the matter of Bible interpretation.

In what follows, the two Bible texts are reprinted, and the exegetically important aspects of these texts are summarised. After that, criteria within the Reformed church tradition of good homiletics are given, in brief. Then the two sermons are related and evaluated, upon which follows an invitation.

Texts: Exodus 21, Exodus 22 and John 8

The Bible texts used for this sermon experiment are from Exodus and John (New Revised Standard Version).

Exodus 21

18 When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant law, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.

Exodus 22

1 When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, 'Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'...

15 Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back.

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16 The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

17 When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, 'There is the sound of war in the camp.'

18 Moses replied:

'It is not the sound of victory,
it is not the sound of defeat;
it is the sound of singing that I hear.'

19 When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.

John 8

2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them.

3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them,

4 they said to him, 'Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.'

5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?'

6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.

7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, 'Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.'

8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.

9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.

Exegetical orientation

Because this contribution is not meant to illustrate exegetical technique, only the key insights are listed here. None of the insights listed here are controversial; only broad consensus matters are indicated.

The exegetical approach was historical (rather than for instance structuralist), analysing how these two texts had come into being: the underlying traditions, the textual and editorial developments, the contextual placements within the history of the texts and also the aspect of ancient intertextuality. Narratological insights were also employed: how the stories had been recounted. However, this narratological approach was not followed in its a-historical version (in which historical-analytical exegesis is avoided); rather, the editorial layers of the text were narratologically analysed. (This combination of the historical and narratological approaches works especially well with the Fourth Gospel, given its literary qualities.)

Key academic texts, which informed the theological framework of the sermon on these two particular Bible texts, are:

- Schmid, K. 2016. Christentum ohne Altes Testament? *Communio* 45, 443–456.
- Van Deventer, H. 2008. Did someone say ‘history’? In Africa we say, ‘His story’! A study in African biblical hermeneutics with reference to the book of Daniel. *Old Testament Essays* 21/3, 713–728.

These two academic texts had informed a text which had already by then been submitted for publication, and which has since been published:

- Lombaard, C. 2023. Proposal on the Bible and African Christian Spirituality, 2020 to 2050. In O.M. Lumanze (Ed.), *What is the Old Testament? Understanding the Hebrew Scriptures anew*, pp. 312–239. Aba, Nigeria: Centre of Biblical Studies, Research & Development [CBSRD] LIFE College of Theology.

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- Only two of the commentaries employed are listed here:
 - Houtman, C. 2000. Exodus (Vol. 3). Historical Commentary on the Old Testament. Leuven: Peeters.
 - Barrett, C.K. 1978. The Gospel according to St John. An introduction with commentary and notes on the Greek text (2nd ed.). London: SPCK.

Key insights

These are key insights to the text:

- Exodus 22 is a composite text, combining a few narrative strands, edited together.
- Post-exilic versions of this text (after 539 BCE) were an important unifying factor in the then-emerging Jewish identity around the decalogue.
- John 8 is a late addition (end 3rd century/early 4th century) to the earlier text of the Gospel of John (end 1st century).
- John 8 links theologically, and deliberately, to the surrounding texts in the Gospel of John.
- John 8 has word-play links, apparently deliberately, to the text of Exodus 22.

Reformed homiletical orientation: What are the characteristics of a sermon in the Reformed tradition?

According to Cilliers (2004:32), the act of preaching happens when the voice of God is heard via the voice of Scripture/ the text, in the voice of the time (congregation's context) and expressed through the distinctive voice of the preacher. When the convergence of these four distinct voices results in a unified 'speech', the sermon might be characterised as *viva vox evangelii* (the living Word of the Gospel). This implies four aspects, which are summarised in the sections that follow.

Biblical and current context

The Bible consists of accounts documenting encounters with the divine and believers' reflections on God's revelations and redemptive actions. The authors and editors of the Old Testament, as well as those who were followers of Jesus in the New Testament, documented the experiences pertaining to God's salvific words and actions. The Bible thus serves as a reflective representation of the diverse range of religious experiences documented by individuals throughout more than a millennium. The assertions made in the Bible have therefore undergone reflection across generations. It remains essential to approach the interpretation of the Bible from the perspective of the heart, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as much as, from the perspective of the mind, with reasoning consideration (at the same time, not keeping heart and mind, or faith and reason, apart).

A comprehensive collection of Bible commentaries on each book of the Bible is available, providing valuable and diverse, informed insights for readers seeking to comprehend the intended messages within the contexts of its biblical audiences. These commentaries should of course be approached with a critical mindset, as they serve as a useful tool for enhancing understanding and interpretation.

Christians, those who belong to the ecclesiastical community and gather on the designated day of Sundays, anticipate receiving divine communication, tailored specifically for them, via the medium of a sermon. The foundation of their religious beliefs stems from the Scriptures, which have deeply influenced their personal experiences, because the Bible is experienced as a transformative gift. The intimate interconnection between the understanding of the biblical text within its originating frameworks and its relevance to the community of faith, is always evident in the upcoming worship service scheduled for the following Sunday: the preacher's ability to deliver a sermon is contingent upon more than just offering an interpretation of the text. The incorporation of the listeners' backgrounds on that particular

Sunday is integrated into the sermon message, and the exegesis is presented in a manner that effectively conveys and maintains the listeners' engagement throughout the discourse (Pieterse & Wepener, 2021:3). Therefore, it is imperative that preaching be conducted within a specific, rather than widely generalised context. Accordingly, Cilliers (2013:2), in his reassessment of a prophetic sermon, provides a concise definition of preaching as 'the communication of the gospel in a manner that is comprehensible to individuals within a particular context'. It is crucial to note that, although there are more considerations for a sermon, vital aspects are its prophetic, situational and contextual natures.

The role of the preacher (or sermon maker)

Regarding the role of the preacher, we would like briefly to draw on the work of Pieterse and Wepener (2021:1–8). These two South African scholars of Liturgy and Homiletics assert that it is essential for the preacher to start the process of creating a sermon by addressing the current context. This includes the congregation's needs and the immediate environment: the town or urban centre, nation and the world in which the preacher and congregation live and operate (Pieterse & Wepener, 2021:8). Preachers dare not assume that the contents of their sermons are always predetermined solely by their thoughts. It is important to prioritise active engagement with individuals within the congregation, also using pastoral work, while also including the practice of reading diverse daily news sources (Lombaard, 1999:22–46). Additionally, it is crucial to monitor actively and to analyse the ongoing conversation within the particular setting.

Preachers initiate this process by drawing from their backgrounds and circumstances. By taking into consideration the specific circumstances and backgrounds of the audience, a preacher can more effectively engage with and interpret the selected biblical text, to discern parallel and analogous – identical is impossible – meanings for the sermon.

Moreover, it is necessary to analyse the historical and cultural backdrops in which the aforementioned Bible text came into being, as it related to its initial audiences. Additionally, a comprehensive examination of diverse informed comments about the text should be undertaken, as found in the scholarly (rather than only devotional) commentaries. When a preacher engages in the process of understanding the historical contexts and circumstances of the original audiences, who had hence experienced the divine interventions in their lives, this may well lead to a clash between the preacher's contemporary reality and the world depicted in the text. The act of comprehending the message from such a text serves to address the subject matter presented within the written discourse, so enabling the interpreter-preacher to explore often uncharted realms within that specific, current context. This process also facilitates the sharpening and refining, or the questioning and redefining, of the preacher's established notions or inclinations, ultimately leading to a re-evaluation of their perspectives, perhaps also inducing personal transformation (cf. Lombaard, 2015:1-6).

According to Pieterse and Wepener (2021:1-8), this aforementioned process, accompanying the act of interpreting biblical texts when approached with prayer and in reliance upon the Holy Spirit, leads to the message of a sermon. During the sermon, preachers could then primarily engage in testifying to the audience about their encounter with the text and the transformative impact it had on their spiritual journey.

Following the aforementioned encounter with the text, a further phase of introspection and spiritual contemplation ensues, during which the preacher attempts systematically to organise the concepts presented in the sermon. Preachers engage in introspection and deliberate over the content they want to convey in their sermons.

Additionally, it is crucial to consider the objectives they want to achieve with the delivery of the sermon. What is the primary emphasis and purpose of the sermon? What are the possible arrangements for the few pages of the sermon, or what

are the potential narrative structures that might be employed? A sermon may, to be sure, be understood as a narrative structure, consisting of an introduction, a development and a conclusion. It should be natural for preachers to keep this in mind throughout their preparation process.

Concurrently, the interpretation of a sermon by its listeners is influenced by several filters, shaped also by their accumulated comprehension of the Bible text over time. Individuals have their own, unique life worlds, including a distinct set of inquiries, problems and personal encounters. Individuals engage in the process of interpreting the message conveyed in a sermon, by constructing a concise version tailored to their unique circumstances. That is to say, people interpret and relate the message to their existential circumstances. This dynamic does not constitute a problem. When the sermon resonates with individuals, within their own lived experiences, it may be said that the message of the text has successfully reached them. The Holy Spirit thus manifests the divine presence and influence within the context of a worship session, where the proclamation of biblical teachings takes place. The Holy Spirit imparts the holy influence and effects onto the individuals who receive this message (Pieterse & Wepener, 2021:1–8).

Oral presentation

Preaching is not just about the sermon on the paper. The act of preaching extends beyond this, as the use of personal characteristics, such as bodily expressions, emotions, body language and vocal delivery, play a role in effectively presenting a sermon that is both impactful and sincere. Cilliers (2013:1–15) elaborates in this regard in his work on the role of the voice. According to him, the presence of a voice encompasses (theologically, philosophically and phenomenologically) a subjective component: the preacher generates an acoustic space that aids in the manifestation of the congregation's identity. It might be argued that without auditory perception of an individual's voice (except, of course, where this is not possible, such as when people have

impaired hearing), genuine contact and true communication with someone is often unattainable, or at the very least, compromised.

When discussing the concept of a voice, associations on the perception of sound and hearing often arise. Consequently, the consideration of sound and hearing also encompasses the field of acoustics. In this sense, preaching serves as a means of conveying not only knowledge related to God and faith, but as an oft-repeated activity, constitutes also as a manifestation of God's divine message beyond time, overcoming the barriers of historical context, limited understanding and resistance to listening. This is indeed about hearing – to allude to the famous 1898 Francis Barraud painting and the iconic 20th-century British gramophone company – 'His Master's Voice'.

A sermon encompasses more than the dissemination of religious knowledge; it goes beyond the simple representation of words from ancient parchments. The phenomenon of the sermon may therefore be described, in somewhat clinical and less 'warm' language than above, as a linguistic occurrence, specifically about the auditory perception of spoken language. The institution of the sermon is characterised by its singular nature, lacking repetition as a phenomenon; possessing distinctiveness. Indeed, even as a single occurrence, these features in some way apply to a sermon: it is not possible to replicate or deliver sermons again, since the voice of God comes across within a specific time and location. A sermon is, therefore, also characterised by its historical situatedness, its dependence on circumstances, its vitality and hence its contextual capacity for redemption. Sermons at the same time transcend conceptual or doctrinal accuracy and exegetical rigour – based as a sermon caringly is on these matters, it then builds further; it, as it were, moves beyond these aspects, extending their reach to the here and now. The words in question, the sermon text, require a process of acoustic reorganisation and, we confess, refinement by the Spirit, specifically in relation to auditory perception, to transform into vocal expression that effectively communicates the divine message (Cilliers, 2013:2).

Reformed worship service

Reformed preaching should not be considered in isolation from other aspects of being church. According to Wepener and Klomp (2015:1–8), the worship service should be seen as a whole entity, within which the act of preaching seamlessly integrates these other aspects. As Kloppers (2003:80–88) indicates, the liturgy may be conceptualised as a kind of artistic expression, akin to a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (a work of art as a whole range of combined art forms), such as an opera, where several components harmoniously converge. In a Reformed worship session, the local congregation convenes to engage in the act of attentive listening to the preaching. Every week, individuals participate in the liturgical worship service, which serves as an integral component of their religious practice.

Cilliers (2004:186–187) accurately asserts that there is a notable scarcity of homiletical literature that has prayer as its primary focus. Prayer is all-encompassing for liturgy, litany and preaching; as for life. The act of prayer alters one's preaching voice. The individual expresses a profound conviction on the matter at hand, which culminates in the assertion that sermons not only require prayer but may also be considered a kind of prayer. In summary, those who are unable to engage in prayer, are unable to engage in preaching (Cilliers, 2004:186–187).

According to Cilliers (2004:188) and Laubscher (2019:275), the preacher's involvement with the local congregation makes them an integral participant in the worship event. The individual who preaches is assigned the responsibility of bearing testimony in the sermon to the own encounter with the text over the week (based on the foregoing years of theological education), which has transformed the preacher's perspective on the prevailing issues and inquiries, in that specific milieu.

The act of delivering a sermon is the preaching event in the worship service, with the recipients intended to comprehend the intended message conveyed by the speaker. The act of speaking and listening, in unison, together

create the preaching event, which is therefore inherently participatory. According to Pieterse and Wepener (2021:4), the experiential manifestation of Christ in the worship service is seen as a fulfilment of divine promise. During the sermon, the divine presence is dynamically manifested via the agency of the Holy Spirit. The act of communicating in a worship service therefore involves a complicated interplay between inter-human discourse and heavenly speech (Pieterse & Wepener, 2021:4).

Given the above exegetical and homiletic orientations, we can now move on to the texts of the two sermons.

Two sermons

A sermon by a person

The writing's on the floor. (Faith seeking understanding?)⁴

'The writing's on the wall' – an expression we know rather well. And it means: things stop here. We have reached a negative point from which we cannot turn away.

We often forget that this expression – 'The writing's on the wall' – comes from the Bible, from the book of Daniel. But its meaning remains the same.

In the book of Daniel, a human hand magically writes a divine message, which may be restated as: 'Things fall apart' – as the famous Chinua Achebe novel was titled. That is: destruction.

So, if the writing is not on the wall, but on the floor, what would that mean?

Perhaps the opposite: that good things start here...?

Good things for the Bible; for faith; for the community of believers; for you.

4 Sermon at the Dutch Reformed Congregation
Universiteitsoord, Pretoria, 20 February 2022, at the Prayer
Day for Theology.

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That is: when the writing is on the ... floor.

Strange as this idea may sound, that the writing is on the floor, this is precisely what we read together a few moments ago from the Bible. Two texts about divine writing. Strange texts, in many ways – with almost mystical moments.

And yet, they write our story, in a way; your story...

These two Bible texts write the story of the faith practice of churches, and the story of the study of faith in universities.

How can I say *that*?

Well, as they say, have faith – Let's together follow the train of thought:

Believers have at various times confessed that for us the Bible *is* the Word of God, or that the Bible *contains* the Word of God, or that the Bible is words *about* God; or that the Bible *dialogues* with us on God – inviting, mystifying, satisfying, infuriating and more.

What we tend to forget with such competing confessions is that, within the Bible itself, we only twice see God writing. We read both of those texts this morning. Only in these two Bible texts do we find God actively scripting words; God's own hand lettering something.

In the Exodus description, we read that God writes the Ten Commandments on tablets; in John chapter 8, we see that Jesus writes in the sand.

In clever ways, the two accounts are related:

- The one quotes the other.
- In both cases, the writing is by divine finger.
- In both cases, to which end...?

We know, don't we, to which endings:

- Dramatically, in the Exodus text, Moses throws down the tablets of the Law. They break. At the foot of the mountain, the shards remain lying, in pieces. In time, imagine them covered by wind-blown sand; eventually,

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God's writing is weather-beaten into mere gravel, into the rough desert sand.

- John 8 shows us Jesus, twice etching something lightly into the ground. No one knows what Jesus writes.

In both cases, soon, God's words are blown away in the wind.

You can *picture* this: God's words, mere dust drifting away in that desert climate...

Twice, you could *see* in your mind's eye, here in Exodus 22 and in John 8, real Holy Writ.

Both times, presently, nothing is left of the tablets or the imprints in the sand.

The implications for our Christian faith seem frightening!:

- We do have faith, or perhaps: we want to have faith;
- For that, one way or another, we require something to hold on to. If not a remnant of the actual cross of Jesus, if not an icon as a painted symbol of the Trinity, if not a direct revelation in which my very being is taken up to God; if not any of those, then at least, at least – let me have the writings of God...
- But, as Bob Dylan almost sang, these writings, my friend, are blowing in the wind; the writings are blowing in the wind...

Exodus 22 and John 8 show us faith without Scriptures...

What? That's heresy! How can that be? – 'Faith without Scriptures' ...?

Of course, 'faith without scriptures' as non-faith is not true. In many, many ways, that is simply not true.

For one, here we have, in the Bible, these two accounts telling us something. The Bible itself relates for us these two... mystifying events: God's own words disappearing into dust.

What is more, both these texts are much like each of us: complex, composite beings, with a history in the

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background; if you get to know us, each of us may at first seem simple. Straightforward. But a closer look, if anyone dares, makes you *all the more engaging*. The same with these Scriptures we read together. Completely life-like, both of them have a history in the background. Both texts tell something that has already been told for a long time. Both of them are buttoned directly onto Bible texts that have already shaped faith. That is why we see here: already *in the Bible*, these two accounts take up earlier confessions and then tell them anew. With these two texts, as with each of us: there is a history in the background, and precisely therefore faith is again refreshed.

That has been the task of the Bible, already as it had come into being, and as it has since then been read and applied, always; and reread and applied again. Through years, decades, centuries, the Bible has been creating faith; reinventing or reinvigorating the experience with God; through the years, your experience *of God*.

The Bible does not intend to create faith *in its self*. Always, our faith is foremost *in God*.

Nor do *I* produce *my* faith in God; I cannot generate belief. It is in the encounter with the Bible that I find faith created within me.

Differently put:

- In our journey with God... no, in God's journey with us, it is, for *each* of us, not primarily I who read the Bible. It is the Bible that reads me.
- In being engaged with the Scriptures, it is not our *accomplishments* that bring us, in the first place, to understand the Bible. We merely find ourselves *understood* by the Bible. God touches you.

And that is how our faith has wandered through the centuries and has travelled the world. In this way we live with God; better said: in this way, God lives with us.

During all this time, the Bible speaks anew; Scripture asserts *itself*, in each time and place. Already *in the Bible*

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texts that happens – as we see from the two texts we consider together this morning. The Bible asserts itself, by showing *away* from itself, to God.

As should we. In each church's life; in each individual's life: we do not live, work believe to showcase ourselves. We live *away* from ourselves, for God, neighbour, world ...

That is why, for almost a thousand years now, Theology has been studied at universities – taught and investigated, with insights sought for new times, in different places, under changed circumstances. Always, *en route*. Properly, in humility. As we seek (see Luke 10:27) with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind, to love the Lord our God and those around us. Faith seeking understanding – as the thousand-year-old formulation summarises this.

Faith seeking understanding...

Such 'writing' of ours, our faith, is on the floor too: it keeps being blown away, like desert dust.

For two reasons:

- So that our faith remains primarily in God.
- So that we do not stagnate, but keep to God's journey in our time and place.

* * *

In confessing this, I speak from a denomination that is breaking in two.

To see the church to which one belongs split at its seams is a forsaken experience.

And why are we broken and breaking? Ironically: on the Bible. More accurately: on our understanding of the Bible. As is the case with quite a few other denominations across our continent, and in the rest of the world too.

It is not on God that we differ. We all find ourselves *overcome* by the same faith – in the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. We experience our given grace nowhere else.

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And then – how bizarre – we deploy the Bible as a weapon of faith destruction.

May God, whom we love, forgive us:

When we put the Bible between us;

When we, in doing so, lose the God of love for one another in our trench fights.

Amen

A sermon created by ChatGPT⁵

Embracing unity through the power of biblical interpretation

Introduction

Grace and peace to all of you, my beloved university students, who have gathered here today in search of wisdom, guidance, and a deeper understanding of our faith. As we delve into God's Word, let us open our hearts and minds to the powerful message that lies within the pages of Exodus 22 and John 8. These texts, rich in historical significance and well exegeted, carry profound meaning that is applicable to our current context as denizens of South African urban life. Today, we shall explore these passages and seek to find unity in the face of our denomination's struggle with Bible interpretation.

Exegesis of Exodus 22

In Exodus 22, we find ourselves immersed in a legal framework designed to promote justice and fairness within the Hebrew community. It covers various areas of human interaction, addressing issues such as theft, damage, and moral transgressions. Within this framework, we gain insights into the nature of God's character and our responsibility as his people.

5 The prompts employed to obtain this sermon, were discussed above.

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One particular verse that captivates our attention is Exodus 22:21, where God instructs His people to show compassion to the stranger, the widow, and the fatherless. Such teaching reveals God's heart for the marginalised and voiceless, compelling us to extend love, compassion, and justice to those in need. This commandment presents an opportunity to examine our own hearts and evaluate how we treat those who are vulnerable in our South African urban context.

In the face of our denomination's divisive struggle with Bible interpretation, we must apply the principles of Exodus 22. We are called to show compassion and love towards fellow believers who may embrace different understandings of Scripture. Instead of allowing division to consume our fellowship, let us extend grace, understanding, and a willingness to engage in humble dialogue.

Exegesis of John 8

John 8, a chapter filled with profound teaching and confrontation, begins with the story of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus' response challenges the religious leaders' legalistic mindset and exposes their hypocrisy. Instead of condemning the woman, Jesus extends forgiveness and, in doing so, reminds us of the transformative power of grace.

As educated university students, we are charged with embracing knowledge and utilising it for the betterment of society. However, we must not forget that true knowledge is not found solely in intellectual prowess but also in our understanding of the grace and love demonstrated by Christ. John 8:12 holds a powerful revelation: Jesus is the light of the world, guiding us out from the darkness of ignorance and into a life illuminated by his truth.

In a South African urban context where our denomination is in danger of splitting over Bible interpretation, Jesus' teachings in John 8 remind us to approach our differences with humility and love. Just as Christ extended forgiveness to the adulterous woman, so too must we extend grace to one another, recognising that none of us holds a monopoly

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on biblical understanding. Let us commit to engaging in respectful dialogue, seeking the wisdom of his Holy Spirit and the unity that comes from his truth.

Application to our South African urban context

In our South African urban context, the danger of splitting our denomination on matters of Bible interpretation looms ominously. It is evident that our diverse backgrounds, cultures, and experiences shape the way we understand and interpret Scripture. However, we must not allow these differences to lead to division and strife.

We find hope and guidance in the example set by our biblical texts. Just as Exodus 22 encourages us to show compassion towards the marginalised, we should extend the same spirit of compassion to our fellow believers who hold differing interpretations. Likewise, by embracing the transformative power of grace highlighted in John 8, we can approach our differences with humility and love.

Let us not forget that our unity as believers is of immense importance in a city that is marred by division and inequality. Our call is to stand united, using our diverse interpretations as a catalyst for growth, understanding, and a deeper appreciation for the richness of God's Word.

Closing

As we conclude this sermon, my dear university students, let us carry with us the reminder of our responsibility to be ambassadors of unity and love in the midst of divisive struggles. May we find solace in God's enduring truths, understanding that our love for one another supersedes our differences. Let us commit to engaging in respectful dialogue, seeking the wisdom that comes from the Scriptures and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As we do so, we will ensure the continued flourishing of our denomination and bear witness to the transformative power of biblical interpretation in our South African urban context.

Amen.

Outlines of an evaluation

Although the purpose of this section is to give only modest comparative remarks on the two sermons (one by a human being and one by ChatGPT), we would first like to consider again the purpose of preaching, as discussed earlier. The objective of preaching is to convey the gospel, the scriptural texts, to the audience within a particular setting (context and time) and circumstance. Furthermore, preaching entails the proclamation of the redemptive acts which have significance for humanity. Embracing this gospel, individuals experience transformative encounters, leading to the initiation of a renewed existence inside the realm of Christ. We also indicated that preaching includes the instructional practice in a religious community, aimed at fostering spiritual growth and deepening the faith of its members, while also facilitating a greater understanding of the principles and virtues associated with a life devoted to Christ. Additionally, the purpose of preaching is to motivate and empower the members of the congregation to engage in acts of compassion towards everyone.

Having said that, just to remind the reader that these two sermons of course stand loose from the broader liturgy and worship service; for this experiment, the emphasis is on the sermon itself. Secondly, the voice of the preacher is here also not audible, as we are working only with the texts provided. An evaluation of an audible sermon in both cases could have significantly altered the assessment of these two sermons. Thirdly, from the first (human) sermon it is evident that the preacher possesses exegetical knowledge, as the sermon was more textual/scriptural than the ChatGPT sermon. Fourthly, whereas in the first (human) sermon, the Old and New Testament texts are brought into discussion with one another in the sermon, there is no such clear link made in the AI (ChatGPT) sermon. Fifthly, the first (human) sermon was theologically sound, with the theological depth being evident. Perhaps because the preacher had a specific focus in mind; therefore the sermon was also more coherent. It might be possible that if we gave further specific prompts to ChatGPT, for example, the verses in central focus in both

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chosen Bible texts, the sermon might have been constituted differently. Lastly, it was clear that the human preacher had a better understanding of the audience and was familiar with the context; this cannot be said of the ChatGPT sermon, as there was only a general reference to context.

When employing appropriate prompts for ChatGPT, it is conceivable that it could generate sermons that are deemed satisfactory; also, in only written form. Nevertheless, several additional theological questions arise when considering and assessing an AI-generated ChatGPT sermon, including the significance of prayer and the Holy Spirit, the genuineness of the sermon maker/preacher, the emotional investment in the preached message and the transformative journey undergone by the preacher during the sermon creation process.

Further questions which can be asked:

- What does the sermon say about God?
- What does the sermon say about Jesus?
- What does the sermon say about the (role of the) Holy Spirit?
- What does the sermon say about the Bible contexts?
- What does the sermon say about the specific current context?
- How are these contexts – ancient and modern – brought into discussion with each other?
- What is the assignment/task set before the audience?
- Can hope be found in the sermon?
- Which/whose voices are being heard in the sermon?
- Does the listener in the congregation experience the living voice of the gospel (*viva vox evangelii*) in the preaching event?

We would like to invite readers, based on our orienting points (exegesis, criteria for Reformed preaching, etc.) and their insights, now to compare the two sermons themselves in greater detail, for further assessment and engagement.

Conclusion

Preaching is, *inter alia*, about what to say to whom, and when. It is about the art of connecting the gospel (what) to the audience (whom), at a specific moment in time (when). This is true of all preaching, but, we will contend: that it is particularly true of what could be called prophetic preaching. False prophecy could have good content, and even sound like the gospel (what); it could be seemingly addressed to the relevant people (whom) ... but it misses the time, i.e. on the timing (when). Therefore, false prophecy often sounds popular ... but it is still false: the 'right' content, delivered to the 'right' people, but it does not fit into the 'right' time. False prophecy might be correct, but it is still wrong; as a matter of fact, it can be so correct, that it is so wrong.

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Chapter 5

The art of asking and presence: Authentic pastoral hospitality

Annelie Botha 

Introduction

Health and being healthy is the source of strength for life. Being healthy is more than just the absence of physical illness. Being healthy includes mental, social and spiritual well-being. The task of pastoral care and counselling includes meeting people in the spaces and places where they struggle to cope with the adversities that are part of life and make it difficult for them to live a healthy and whole life. Such pastoral care will include addressing lifestyle issues and environmental factors that affect people's health and well-being in the broadest sense.

Theories on asking and presence

In faith communities, the pastor cares for and counsels those who seek guidance and help. The quality of care and counselling is often influenced by the cultural context of the pastor. One such cultural expectation in the South African context is that the pastor, as a person with knowledge and status in the community, should 'give advice' to counselees.

In most societies across the globe and in Africa, men tend to have a higher social status than women (Mombo, 2020:221). In the context of faith communities that means that women largely occupy the pews and men occupy the pulpits. Mombo explains this male leadership as follows: 'Male leadership often depends on the use of power over people rather than power with people' (Mombo, 2020:228). When the point of departure of pastoral care and counselling is this 'power over'

position rather than a relationship of equals, the pastor will be seen as the one with the power and knowledge to decide and give advice on the lives of others.

In my experience as a pastor doing counselling with learners in the school's system, taking on the role of 'advice-giver' would not have been conducive to the effective care of those who come for counselling. It is in the art of asking them about their lives and listening to their experiences, that access can be gained to their story. In this way, they can be facilitated to find their own truths and path to healing. They can choose the lifestyle that is healthy and healing for them. The main aim of pastoral care and counselling is to empower people to have a voice.

The various images of pastors in pastoral care in the existing literature aim to position pastors in relation to counselees in such a way that the care is not perceived as 'power over', but rather as care focusing on the person's ability to tell, interpret and reinterpret their life story.

In his book, *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings*, Robert Dykstra (2005) gives an overview, of pastoral models that describe this relationship. Dykstra distinguishes three types of care. The first type he calls the 'Classical Images of Care'. This includes Anton Boisen's 'The Living Human Document', Bonnie Miller McLemore's 'The Living Human Web', Seward Hiltner's metaphor of the 'Solicitous Shepherd', Alastair Campbell's 'Courageous Shepherd', and Jeanne Stevenson Moessner's 'Self-differentiated Samaritan' (Dykstra, 2005:15–68).

These models focus on the pastor as the one who listens to the story of the other. The pastor is a caretaker who is present and provides support. The pastor is not a dispassionate bystander and listener but becomes involved in the distress, pain, loss and confusion of the other. In these models, the pastor is not focused solely on the individual, but also in the broader cultural, social and religious context. Pastors are the ones who care, but in such a way that they do not neglect themselves in the caring of others. Pastors should be aware

of the need for self-care. They should carefully consider and evaluate their own story, in order not to project their presuppositions or own woundedness onto those to whom they are listening and for whom they are caring.

The second type of care identified by Dykstra is called the 'Paradoxical Images of Care'. This includes Henri Nouwen's image of the 'Wounded Healer', Heije Faber's image of 'The Circus Clown', Alastair Cambell's image of the 'Wise Fool', Donald Capps's image of the 'Wise Fool Reframed', Dykstra's image of the 'Intimate Stranger', and James Dittes's image of the 'Ascetic Witness' (Dykstra, 2005:69–150).

These models deal with the pastor's own story and woundedness. When pastors are comfortable in their own skin and their situation, their own house, it opens up a free and fearless space for the visitor who seeks care. The pastor can then become the host who pays attention to the guest. In this space, the hospitality of the pastor provides the healing space and community the visitor needs to heal and feel safe. The role of the pastor is to attentively witness the life experience of the care-seeker. The pastor attempts not 'to do', 'to save' or 'to resolve', but to regard the care-seekers, enabling them to become more (Dykstra, 2005:74–75)

The third type of care identified by Dykstra is the 'Contemporary and Contextual Images of Care'. These include Paul Pruyser's 'The Diagnostician', Gaylord Noyce's 'Moral Coach and Counselor', Edward Wimberly's 'Indigenous Storyteller', Donald Capps's 'Agent of Hope', Karen Hanson's 'Midwife', Margaret Kornfield's 'Gardener', and Brita Gill-Austern's 'The Midwife, Storyteller, and Reticent Outlaw' (Dykstra, 2005:151–227).

This type describes the pastor as a moral coach with a strong guiding function. The guiding function is understood as collaborative, noncoercive, non-judgmental moral exploration of an individual in need. It involves the mutual exploration of ideas, values and decisions that are free from coercion or compulsion. Edward Wimberly (1991) focuses specifically on the African-American pastor as an indigenous storyteller.

They use their own stories, stories from their ministry and stories from the Bible to help others to articulate their own stories. The pastor is not only a storyteller but also a story-listener – the one who listens to the stories of others.

Brita Gill-Auster (1999:159) uses the metaphor of a midwife in her feminist work on the role of a teacher in teaching pastoral theology. The main focus of the teacher is not to imprint her ideas on the minds of students, but in a co-creative relationship draw out what the students already have within them. With the metaphor of the pastor as midwife, the implication is that the pastor should ‘catch’ the ideas of the other and help to bring them to light. This is done by asking open-ended questions, without predetermined answers. It is not the task of pastors to ‘deliver’ their ideas, but rather to help others find their voice.

People approach a pastoral counsellor because they need someone to listen to their story. When pastors practise the art of asking, hearing and respecting others as people with their own language and integrity, a dialogical encounter can be facilitated from which a new and more hopeful story can be born. For this story of hope to be born, the pastor should focus on practising the art of listening.

The art of listening

To really listen to others is not something that comes naturally. It is an art that must be practised. It is a skill to be learned. Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger (2006:xi) points out that in pastoral counselling, pastoral caregivers ‘learn how to listen to people in crisis and discern their needs’. To be truly present to people, the spiritual practice of prayer and listening is needed. The connection between prayer and listening can be described as follows: ‘We listen to each other having first listened to God. Pastoral care for others begins with seeking God’ (Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:xiii). Caring for others requires compassionate presence and attentive listening.

Listening inwardly to one’s own heart is also essential. People succeed in listening to another’s needs only when they

are aware of their anxiety and fear. Van Deusen Hunsinger (2006:xiii) puts it as follows: 'Paradoxically, we are able to focus on another's need apart from our own pressing concerns only when we are most self-aware.' The listening of pastoral caregivers and counsellors is a 'three-dimensional listening': listening to God, listening to the other and listening to the pastoral caregiver's innermost self. Through prayer, the pastor and care-seeker are bound together with God and one another. It is the responsibility of the pastoral caregiver to listen for what God might be saying in each situation and, after listening to the care-seeker again, turn to God in prayer.

Prayer is an expression of the relationship with God. Pastoral caregivers' practices of devotional reading and meditation on Scripture form part of their relationship with God. It is in the reading of Scripture and meditation that pastoral caregivers find the strength to listen to God and to listen to others (Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:39; see also Zimmerman & Meier, 1999:72). This practice of devotional reading and meditation on Scripture is one of the most ancient and traditional approaches to Christian contemplation, known as *lectio divina* (Dysinger, 2009; see Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:45). It entails the movements of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation (see Dysinger, 2009:5–8). It is in this listening to God that pastoral caregivers find themselves comforted or challenged, changed by a heart-to-heart meeting with God. The aim of contemplation and listening for the voice of God is not to use it for lectures or sermons, but to enable pastoral caregivers to come to terms with their woundedness. Bonhoeffer (1986:33) put it as follows: 'Do not ask how you should tell it to others but ask what it tells you.' It is in the theological conviction that God demonstrates God's love for human beings by listening when they pray that pastoral caregivers realise that their listening to others mediate the love of the listening God (see Bonhoeffer, 1996:98). Thus, pastoral caregivers demonstrate their love for God by listening to others.

Listening to others requires pastoral caregivers to be undistracted and fully present. They should be able to put

aside their preoccupations. When pastors pay more attention to themselves than to the needs of the other, they are not present, they are not listening. They then fail to hear the significance of what the other wants to share (Van Deusen Hunsinger, 2006:52; see Justes, 2006). Pastoral caregivers should be able to listen in a life-giving way. This can only be if God is the centre of their lives.

Pastoral caregivers are called to empathic listening. Carl Rogers describes empathic listening as:

To sense the client's private world as if it were your own, but without ever losing the 'as if' quality – this is empathy, and this seems essential to therapy. To sense the client's anger, fear, or confusion as if it were your own, yet without your own anger, fear or confusion getting bound up with it. (Rogers, 1990:226)

For pastoral caregivers to be able to listen with empathy to others they must be aware of their anxieties and fears, which often prevent them from providing the care that care-seekers need. To deal with their fears and anxieties the 'Focusing Technique' developed by psychologist Eugene Gendlin (1981) can be useful for identifying their unresolved issues and embodied emotional responses. This technique entails relaxing, breathing and focusing on the feelings that are experienced in the body when they think of a specific situation they had to face. They sense how they feel and how their body reacts to the problem. They then identify a 'word handle' with which to describe the 'felt sense'. The next step is to keep the focus on the word handle that describes the felt sense and ensure that it matches the feeling. They then ask themselves questions about the feeling and the situation. In waiting for and welcoming the answers to these questions a sense of release can be experienced. This enables them to let go of their fears and anxieties. Understanding themselves and their fears can clear the space for pastoral caregivers to truly listen to the other (Gendlin, 1981:173–174).

It is in listening to and praying for care-seekers in a life-giving way that pastoral caregivers invite care-seekers in to experience their pastoral hospitality.

Pastoral hospitality

The art of asking and presence is rooted in authentic pastoral hospitality. In his book, *The Wounded Healer*, Henri Nouwen (1979) emphasises that pastors should deal intentionally and deliberately with their woundedness, struggles, and pain, to be and create a safe space for others to heal. Nouwen uses the concept of 'hospitality' to describe the compassion, understanding, forgiveness, fellowship and community that are crucial to the healing task of a pastor (Nouwen, 1979:88–89). Nouwen (1979:89; see Pohl, 2002:34–35) finds the roots of hospitality in the Judeo-Christian tradition, especially in the life and ministry of Jesus. For Nouwen, hospitality is the response to the human condition of loneliness. In following in Jesus' footsteps hospitality becomes a Christian virtue.

Hospitality is the virtue which allows us to break through the narrowness of our own fears and to open our houses to the stranger, with the intuition that salvation comes to us in the form of a tired traveller.... It requires first of all that the host feel at home in his[her] own house, and secondly that [s]he creates a free and fearless place for the unexpected visitor. (Nouwen, 1979:89)

Being the host (pastor) who practises hospitality as a Christian virtue, is about paying attention to the guest. This requires pastors to not be so preoccupied with their own needs and worries that it prevents them from being truly present to the other. In the practice of hospitality, concentration and community are relevant terms (Nouwen, 1979:89). Concentration entails that pastors discover the centre of life in their hearts. For Nouwen (1979:90), this concentration is about meditation and contemplation. Meditation and contemplation bring rest to the pastor's soul. It is in this coming to terms with one's own heart, that true hospitality flourishes. The self pulls

back to make room for the other. This is about pastors being at peace with themselves. This allows the other to enter freely into an open space, which is not cluttered with the pastor's expectations. The other can then enter on their own terms and find their own soul (Nouwen, 1979:91–92). For Christine Pohl (2002:37), hospitality is a way of life that should be learned and practised daily.

According to Nouwen, this practising of hospitality is healing,

because it takes away the false illusion that wholeness can be given by one to another. It is healing because it does not take away the loneliness and the pain of another but invites [them] to recognize [their] loneliness on a level where it can be shared. (Nouwen, 1979:92)

Nouwen (1979:93) encourages pastors to offer themselves to others as a guide. For Carrie Doehring, the guiding role of the pastor entails a caregiving relationship based on trust, respect, and compassion. She describes it as follows:

The process of stepping respectfully and compassionately into another's narrative world can be described with the metaphor of hospitality. We must embody compassionate respect as we step over the threshold and enter into another's religious or spiritual world, not knowing when we will encounter sacred images, meanings, and places within the narrative worlds of care-seekers. (Doehring, 2015:xvii)

When the metaphor of hospitality is used, the roles of the participants would be those of host and guest. However, to provide authentic pastoral hospitality in a contemporary context, the metaphor should also be approached critically. The early religious traditions from which this metaphor originated were patriarchal, with the host almost always male (McNulty 2007:xxvii). Ladislaus Bolchazy (1995) points out that the ancient Greek cultures with their strong codes of hospitality influenced Roman ideas of hospitality, both of which shaped Christian thinking on hospitality. This kind

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of hospitality is what Derrida (2001) (see also Hamington, 2010:23) calls a 'conditional hospitality', that is hospitality which maintains existing power hierarchies. In contrast to this conditional hospitality, Maurice Hamington proposes feminist hospitality:

Feminist hospitality drives at a nonhierarchical understanding of hospitality that mitigates the expression of power differential, while seeking greater connection and understanding for mutual benefit of both host and guest ...The feminist hospitality that I propose creates and strengthens relationships, but not at the risk that comes from the vulnerability of human sharing. (Hamington, 2010:23)

A pastoral approach that is critical of gender roles and the position of power assigned to pastors by culture, is needed. For this purpose, feminist insights will be utilised to develop authentic pastoral hospitality.

In his article, 'Toward a Theory of Feminist Hospitality', Hamington explains the implications of the socially prescribed roles of those who administer hospitality and those who receive hospitality as follows:

Too often women have been unwilling hosts and unwelcome guests ... Both men and women have played the role of host but, in the case of women, 'host' is not always a freely chosen role nor does it always entail [the] power of decision-making ability. Similarly, for women, 'guest' does not necessarily translate into the subject of authentic hospitality, as the host often has ulterior motives reflecting power differentials and social-role constraints. (Hamington, 2010:23)

A feminist perspective on hospitality emphasises inclusive and nonhierarchical host and guest relations. Feminist theoretical work on identity, inclusiveness, reciprocity, forgiveness and embodiment can be used to move towards a feminist hospitality. How people extend hospitality to others reflects

their identity. Hamington (2010:24) puts it as follows: 'Acts of hospitality actualize identity'. This becomes problematic in cultures and religious traditions where the hosts are always male. When women are denied the opportunity to be a host, they are denied the opportunity to extend hospitality to another and in the process actualise their identity. This in turn prevents them from acts of self-assertion.

Feminist hospitality resists the notion that a host can provide hospitality while exercising power over the other (guest). According to Judith Butler (1988:519), acts of gender formation are prescribed by social frameworks. The task is then to displace acts that maintain gender identity by changing the gender norms that enable the acts that form gender identity. The implication of this is a 'feminist host can remain cognizant of not recreating acts that constitute identity through positions of power over others, but instead attempt to foster the atmosphere for lateral exchanges' (Hamington, 2010:25). In this way, acts of feminist hospitality can contribute to an alternative identity, namely one that is more empowering and less controlling than traditional hospitality.

One of the other limitations of a traditional understanding of hospitality is the role that property plays in the formation of the identity of the host. The host is the one who has the resources to offer or share with the guest. Here gender again plays a role. Traditionally and historically male persons were the holders of property. Women and children were seen as part of this property. The host's property would be utilised in the act of extending hospitality to others. The implications of this for women are that they are treated as objects or property of the host that can be given to and serve others. Hamington proposes the following course of action:

I suggest that feminist hospitality should subvert hospitality-infused hierarchies and minimize the inferred power relations grounded in property to facilitate connections among people. In this manner, sharing is less instilled with hidden agendas and more directed toward the well-being of the guest. (Hamington, 2010:25)

An example of such caring with no hidden agendas is when women help other women with generosity, not to gain something or exercise power over the other, but because it will benefit the other.

Rethinking the role, position and relationship of the host towards the guest with insights from a feminist perspective, can facilitate the necessary shift in identity formation through acts of hospitality. The focus then shifts from acts that have the aim of *'self-valorizing* to acts of hospitality that value the Other in one's self' (Hamington, 2010:25). Feminist hospitality is about empathising with others. It is also attentive to inclusive definitions of who constitutes the guest.

Another dimension of hospitality that should be considered is that hospitality has a directional and hierarchical character. The host gives and the guest receives (Hamington, 2010:28). From this perspective, hospitality is a gift from the haves to the have-nots. Feminist hospitality resists this. Exchanges between host and guest are to be seen as reciprocal. Such reciprocal exchanges between host and guest make the shift to a reciprocal relationship that can be described as follows: 'Reciprocity implies a flattening of the relationship out of mutual respect and humility; the distinction between guest and host is blurred as both learn and grow together' (Hamington, 2010:28). Judith Green describes this reciprocal relationship between guest and host as mutual hospitality (Green, 2004:213). It places the host and the guest in a horizontal relationship. Both benefit from the other and treat each other with dignity.

This horizontal and equal relationship is important for authentic pastoral hospitality. Pastoral hospitality in which the pastor (host) and the care-seeker (guest) accept the ideology that the pastor has the power and right to give advice or decide on behalf of the care-seeker what they need and what will be good for them amounts to hegemonic pastoral hospitality.

Hegemony is about exercising power over others. Hegemony is a cultural reality that results from ideologies – the granting of permanent absolute normative authority to

the ideas and concepts according to which people understand their world (Gramsci, 1971; see Berger, 1967; Lears, 1985:568). Hegemony is a kind of indirect dominance, which determines the internal experience of subordinates.

Ideological hegemony is the result of a social process in which consensus between the dominant and subordinate groups gradually develops. Consensus is expressed in the approval by subordinate groups of the dominant values, symbols, beliefs and opinions (Lears, 1985:569). Social institutions, such as the educational system, religion and the mass media, contribute to producing the hegemonic culture and promoting the evolution of social consensus. To illustrate how embedded hegemony is in the way people think and act, Phillis Sheppard describes the following incident in her article, 'Hegemonic Imagination, Historical Ethos, and Colonized Minds in the Pedagogical Space: Pastoral Ethics and Teaching as if our Lives Depended on it:

A White male student once made the request that I, in our pastoral care and counseling class that involved discussion, community engagement, and pastoral counseling practice, teach more like the history professor. I asked, 'What would this look like here?' The student uncritically stated, 'You would tell us what the reading means and we would take notes. We would just learn from you.' (Sheppard, 2018:188)

Authentic pastoral hospitality should free itself from hegemonic pastoral hospitality where the pastor (host) has power over the care-seeker (quest).

Another aspect of hospitality that is of consequence, is how hospitality is embodied (Hamington, 2010:32). This pertains to acts of hospitality that are closely linked to attending to the body of the guest – giving food and drink and providing rest. Hospitality is shown by the host to the guest also through body language. Carrie Doehring emphasises the importance of being aware of the message conveyed by the body of the host (caregiver) to the guest (care-seeker). She puts it as follows:

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Our bodies convey a lived theology that may not be fully integrated with what we say we believe and value – our espoused theology. Our tone of voice, facial expressions, and posture all communicate our theology to care-seekers. Embedded values expressed through our bodies are shaped by our families, communities, and culture – often outside of our awareness. (Doehring, 2015:53)

An example is how the caregiver shakes the hand of the care-seeker at the end of the conversation. This one gesture can communicate a variety of messages. For some, it can feel like the closing of a business deal. For others, it can be reassuring. For elderly bedridden patients, it can feel as though they are being ‘handed off’ to the nursing staff (Doehring, 2015:54).

Authentic embodied hospitality requires that caregivers understand what they could be communicating through their tone of voice, how they listen, and their body language. Authentic embodied listening requires that caregivers be aware of how they and their bodies respond to the other’s pain, emotions and story. Crossed arms, furrowed brows, and pulling back, can confirm a care-seeker’s anticipation of judgement. Self-reflection on their communication skills can help caregivers to become aware of when they are ‘enacting values associated with social oppression and life-limiting theologies’ (Doehring, 2015:54). The self-reflexive work of caregivers can become a spiritual experience when they deal with their woundedness and, in the process, become more authentic in their personhood.

Authenticity

In moving towards authentic pastoral hospitality, what is understood under ‘authenticity’ should be clarified. ‘Authentic’ has the meaning of being true to oneself, trustworthy, and genuine. According to Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2019:133), authenticity is about behaviour and motives for behaviour. They suggest that: ‘Authenticity refers to the degree to which a particular behaviour is congruent with a person’s attitudes, beliefs, values, motives and other

dispositions.’ This means: to be who you are and includes being aware of one’s self-worth. Being authentic can also be described as a way of life. Dreyer maintains that an authentic life is a life without distortions in relationship with God, yourself and your neighbour (Dreyer, 1998:372).

An authentic life is a life lived as God created that life to be. Authentic life also involves being critical – self-critical of what one thinks and believes of oneself, critical of the world and the messages from outside that attempt to dictate who and what a person should be. Authentic life means that all people in the church and society will have equal freedom and space for choices and responsibilities (Dreyer, 1998:373).

Authentic pastoral counselling aims to enable people to live authentically in God’s presence and in relationships with others (see Dreyer, 1998:378). To achieve this, pastors should be authentic in their relationship with the care-seekers. Equality and relational authenticity are key. In their measurement tool, the *Authenticity Inventory*, Kernis and Goldman (2006) identify four aspects of authenticity, namely, awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour and relational orientation. Relational orientation pertains to relational authenticity, which is of great importance to the relationship between the pastor and the care-seeker. According to Gan and Chen (2017:466), relational authenticity can refer to subjective feelings of authenticity in the context of specific relationships, because people behave and experience themselves differently in different relationships. For example, people behave differently when they are with their parents, than when they are with their friends. People need to feel relationally authentic. They are relationally authentic when their relational self more or less concurs with their actual self – who they are in general, across most contexts (Gan & Chen 2016:466). This becomes possible in relationships of trust.

In the context of authentic pastoral counselling, the compassionate response and empathic connection of the pastor to the care-seeker’s life story is what creates a safe space for the care-seeker to be authentic. According to

Reinard Nauta (2003:427), pastors can find it challenging to be authentic in a counselling situation. They tend to withhold their views and fears for the sake of not disturbing the other. This is also partly due to what the care-seekers expect of the pastor. This can lead to the pastor feeling obligated to enact the role that is expected of them to please others. This can detract from the pastor's sense of authenticity in their relationships with others. As a solution, Nauta proposes that pastors should create some distance between themselves and their role as pastors and reflect on it. This reminds me of the meditation and contemplation of Nouwen (1979:90) that brings rest to the pastor's soul. Pastors who come to terms with their hearts, can be authentic and create the space for relational authenticity. Nancy Ramsey emphasises the importance of empathic connections when she avers that: 'Relational authenticity relies on the skillful practice of empathic connections' (Ramsey, 2000:269). For Ramsey, relational authenticity is part of the pastoral identity: 'Relational authenticity is a primary motivation and goal of pastoral identity.' When relational authenticity becomes part of pastoral identity, it 'involves a capacity for and commitment to full affective and cognitive connection in relationships' (Ramsey, 2000:277). This is authentic pastoral counselling that can focus on the total well-being of the other. The pastoral relationship is then subject-subject communication. Pastors know that they are not counselling an object (see Dreyer, 1998:378). Authentic pastoral counselling takes place where pastors and care-seekers meet as people who both have free and direct access to God's grace.

Authentic pastoral hospitality

Authentic pastoral hospitality creates a safe space for care-seekers to share their life story. Authentic pastoral hospitality empowers care-seekers to find their voice. It empowers care-seekers to interpret and reinterpret their life story in a healing space. Authentic pastoral hospitality requires compassionate presence and attentive listening from the pastoral caregiver. It requires the pastoral caregiver to be present for the other.

Authentic pastoral hospitality is sensitive to the role, position and relationship of the pastoral caregiver (host) and care-seeker (guest). Authentic pastoral hospitality enables people to live authentically in God's presence and in relationship with others.

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Chapter 6

How religious communities can assist in addressing the needs of sick and hospitalised children

Annemarie E. Oberholzer 

The sky of childhood is so quickly clouded over by what adults see as trivia, that what lies deeper may never be noticed. They will get over it, we say, and regard as signs of immaturity the child's inability to react 'sensibly' to everyday problems and disappointments, as well perhaps as those profounder questionings that we are no better able to come to terms with than they are (more often we have just stopped trying). (Robinson, 1977:107)

Introduction

A visitor from the church came to see the six-year-old in the children's intensive care unit, and I gave them some space. It was an open-plan unit, and from where I was standing at the nurse's station, there was an unobstructed view of the scared little face of the child. The visitor was praying, but, as seen so many times in a paediatric unit, the wording of the prayer was aimed at the adults around the bed, causing nothing more than confusion and misconceptions in the mind of the child.

Down the corridor, a church had an outreach and volunteers were entertaining the children in the oncology ward. The same happened the previous day, when employees from a consulting company came to play with the children, and there was no way of telling the difference between the two events. The purpose of this chapter therefore is to equip theology students with practical strategies to become involved

in healthcare ministry and to effectively address the needs of sick and hospitalised children in religious communities.

Hence, the learning outcomes would be:

- Students will be able to understand the background and rationale for the adequate emotional and spiritual support of children in the South African healthcare context.
- Students will be able to advocate for a holistic approach to the care of sick and hospitalised children, taking into consideration their physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual needs.
- Students will be able to facilitate initiatives in religious communities so that they can become involved in addressing the spiritual needs of children in healthcare.

Background

In ancient times, spiritual and religious leaders were responsible for the health and well-being of the people. Since the early days of Christianity, Christians saw it as their calling to care for the sick, and after Christianity was legalised in 313 AD, Christians established the first hospitals in the Western world (Ferngren, 2009:86) – a tradition that has been carried over through the ages. However, as scientific knowledge increased, people became more confident in their abilities to cure illness, and less emphasis was placed on the spiritual, leading to negligence of the spiritual needs of all people in healthcare.

Our healthcare system is overwhelmed and tends to focus on saving lives and treating bodies – there is not much time, energy or resources left to address the emotional and spiritual needs of patients. Where children are concerned, the need for emotional and spiritual support becomes even more important, as any healthcare encounter holds the potential of overwhelming a child. Children seldom have the experience and knowledge to be able to understand the complexities of illness, pain, and suffering, as well as the healthcare

interventions intended to alleviate these. Misconceptions are rampant, adding more confusion to the mix.

In some countries, hospital chaplains are part of the healthcare system, but this is not the case in South Africa. De la Porte (2016:4) states that there is not even any 'statutory requirement or official system in place for accreditation and certification of spiritual and pastoral workers in healthcare'. Children receive even less support, and adequate emotional and spiritual support for children rarely happens in healthcare. And it is not just a local problem. Across the world and through the years, authors pointed out the lack of such support for children (Farrel et al., 2008:262; Feudtner et al., 2003:67 Nash, Darby & Nash 2015:13).

In a study to determine the different viewpoints on illness, pain, and suffering of the Christian churches in South Africa and the way these viewpoints are communicated to children, Oberholzer (2019:10) questions 'whether the church is in fact talking to children about this subject, or whether it is being left to the secular world and fantasy'.

This is an area where religious communities can and should be equipped to take on this responsibility.

Holistic care of sick and hospitalised children according to their needs

When supporting children in healthcare and during illness – whether minor ailments or chronic, and even life-threatening, conditions – it is important to focus on the child as a whole. In healthcare, a patient's admission always starts with a needs assessment, and this discussion will therefore centre around the needs of the child with regard to the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual domains.

Children are often admitted to hospitals without parents, caregivers, or family members present and addressing the physical needs of a child can be a good starting point for religious communities to reach out and connect with a child.

Physical needs

This section discusses the various physical needs of sick and hospitalised children.

To be well nourished and protected from the elements

The high rates of poverty and unemployment in South Africa have a great impact on sick and hospitalised children. Not only are malnourished children, who must live in appalling conditions, more vulnerable and prone to getting ill, but when children are discharged from hospital or, for example, between cancer treatments, they need adequate food and protection to regain their strength. Religious communities can play a role in this regard and Beyers (2014:7) points out that our religion should motivate us to address poverty and restore human dignity, stating that 'religion not only becomes the moral consciousness reminding society of being generous to the poor but also seeing the poor as fellow human beings'. Ministering to sick and hospitalised children should therefore start with meeting their needs for food, clothing, and warm blankets.

To be touched, held and comforted

Clutter (2005:383) mentions that 'human touch can convey spiritual compassion in a way that words cannot'. In the earlier days, it was believed that a sterile environment where children were touched as little as possible, would prevent infections and contribute to children's speedy recovery. However, the death rate amongst children under the age of one remained high until Bakwin (1942) noted that when nurses were encouraged to pick up and cuddle these children, the mortality rate decreased significantly from more than 30% to less than 10%.

Unfortunately, the (real and legitimate) concern for inappropriate physical encounters with children led to the abstaining from any physical touch of children. However, children need reassuring physical touch to comfort them and help them to feel safe. Social touch (being touched effectively by someone else) is a vital aspect of childhood development and has been found to decrease stress, help children to feel

safe, and give them the courage to explore a new environment (Gliga et al., 2019). Even teenagers can benefit from being touched and Anderson and Steen (1995:15) mentioned that when someone offered to rub the back of a terminally ill 18-year-old, he commented that this ‘was the first person who had touched him since he had been in the hospital’.

A little girl from a rural area in one of our neighbouring countries was once flown in – all by herself – to receive open heart surgery. With non-existing emotional support at the time, the experience was overwhelming for the five-year-old, and she withdrew in a dark cloud of depression, not talking and not reacting to anyone or anything. When I, at some point, approached her with a little bottle of body lotion and started to rub her arms and legs, her whole demeanour changed, and she suddenly started to talk and took notice of what was happening around her. This simple act of affective touch also started to influence her vital data and bodily functions and assisted her on her road to recovery.

Children should be empowered to have control and agency over their bodies. Always ask permission from the child and parents (if they are present) before touching that child and be mindful of cultural differences. Any touch that makes a child uncomfortable is regarded as inappropriate touch. While some might see it as affection to ruffle a child’s hair, in another culture, it could be regarded as unacceptable and even rude to do this. If possible, it is safest to visit children in the hospital in pairs and to never close the door or bedside curtains when alone with a child.

To be able to play and be active

Play comes naturally to children, and they need to play as a way of coping, of expressing themselves, and of learning. In the healthcare setting, play also has added benefits as it allows children freedom of choice where they can manipulate objects and make their own choices in an environment where they usually don’t have any say or control. If children play with a medical play set, they can become the doctor or nurse,

calling the shots (pun intended). Play is a great way to connect with children, and any visitor to a children's hospital ward should be equipped with some toys, books, and activities for the children. However, always ask about safety and infection precautions, and follow the guidelines of the hospital staff.

Clutter (2005:390) also refers to 'spiritual play' as a way of understanding the child and addressing the spiritual domain through the child's natural way of communication. This author further mentions the value of something like finger puppets, allowing children to communicate through the puppets. During a research study exploring the way that churches render spiritual support to children in hospitals, only one of the churches mentioned that they would give children a picture related to a Bible story to colour in (Oberholzer, 2018:234). According to Nash et al. (2015:22), it is important to include religious activities that can be meaningful to the sick child.

Through the Godly Play programme,⁶ children can visualise the message of a Bible story and engage with the characters in a playful manner (Berryman 1991:xi). This approach is often used in hospitals in the US, and Farrel et al. (2008:261) explained that it had a 'significant effect on anxiety, depression, and spirituality' of chronically ill hospitalised children. It was also found useful to enable children with disabilities so that they can establish relationships and express spiritual concerns (Eddins et al., 2014:9).

To normalise the environment

Levine and Kline expressed the way children might react towards the hospital environment as follows:

6 Godly Play South Africa Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Godly-Play-South-Africa-437832309695128/>. The Godly Play International Website: <https://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/>

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Without appropriate support, children do not have the inner resources to comprehend the blinding lights, physical restraints, surgical instruments, masked monsters speaking in garbled language, and drug-induced altered states of consciousness. Nor are they able to make sense of waking up alone in a recovery room to the eerie tones of electronic equipment, the random visitations of strangers, and possibly moans of pain coming from a bed across the room. For infants and young children, events such as these can be as terrifying and traumatizing as being abducted and tortured by revolting alien giants. (Levine and Kline, 2007:184–185)

It is therefore vital to try and normalise the unfamiliar and scary healthcare environment for children as far as possible. Parents can be encouraged to bring the child's favourite toy and/or blanket from home, as this will help a child feel more at home in an unfamiliar environment. Bringing children some toys or a soft, colourful blanket that can stay with them, can also help – just remember to clear this with the staff.

A child's artwork can also help to brighten the walls around the bed. Pictures portraying the child's favourite Bible story, can remind him or her of the message and become an added source of comfort and support. We once had a volunteer who assisted some of the older children to paint a cross on a card with glo-in-the-dark paint. After lights out in the evening, the crosses became a visual reminder of the presence of God.

Music is another way of normalising the environment and supporting children in healthcare, especially if it is uplifting and familiar to the child. Children can even be included in making the music and singing along; however, it is important to first clarify this with the hospital staff and to keep sound levels at an acceptable level. Allen (2019:33–36) discusses the emotional impact of music, explaining that music holds religious or cultural meaning; it can assist with concentration; it is uplifting and has a strong emotional aspect that people find very rewarding; and it can

also improve emotional empathy. This author came to the following conclusion:

If emotional experiences with music involve areas of the brain that are important for empathizing with other people, then perhaps the purpose of music is to arouse emotional responses that resonate with other minds. Music, then, is a social artefact for empathy (Allen, 2019:36).

Needs of the mind (intellect and emotion)

This section discusses various intellectual and emotional needs of sick and hospitalised children.

To understand what is happening

Children are often traumatised more by what they think is happening to them, than by what is actually happening. It is difficult for children to understand the abstract concepts of illness and pain, and in our healthcare system, they typically don't have any say in what is happening to them and their bodies. Children usually see any pain or suffering as punishment for something they did wrong, and the limited life experience of children could further lead to a variety of misconceptions in the hospital. Aside from the misconceptions that children may have, there is also a very real threat to their bodies when they are faced with intrusive and often painful medical procedures. It is a protective instinct to fear mutilation of the body, and when children are exposed to these procedures without adequate preparation and support, they could develop phobias that might have an impact on their lives for many years to come. When children are prepared for a healthcare experience such as an operation, they tend to react with trust and confidence, but if they don't understand what is happening, they react with fear (Löf et al., 2019:1370).

Because of the magical thinking of children in the pre-school years, they have numerous fears that can be challenged in the hospital and that could lead to misconceptions. I once came across a boy who developed an abnormal fear that his ears would be cut off. Upon closer examination, we discovered

that someone once made a thoughtless remark, telling him that if he didn't want to listen, his ears could just as well be cut off. Unfortunately, this little boy had to be admitted to the hospital repeatedly for several operations to correct a defect that he was born with, and he was living in constant fear that the next time he went to the theatre, he would come out without his ears.

School-age children with their increased cognitive abilities are more aware of the extent of their treatment, and it is easier to explain medical diagnoses and treatment to them. However, they are still prone to misconceptions. I had to prepare an eight-year-old girl for an operation that involved a biopsy of a gland in her neck. She appeared terrified and when I started to talk to her, I realised that she thought the doctors were going to slash open her throat and leave it that way. I couldn't determine the exact cause of her misunderstanding, but comic books, television programmes and computer games could contribute to such detrimental thoughts. Siblings, classmates and even parents often made jokes and teasing remarks, creating unnecessary anxiety and fear.

Religious teachings could also contribute to misconceptions. When a doctor showed a little child an X-ray of her chest, explaining where her heart was, the last thing the doctor intended was to cause a spiritual crisis for the child. But that was exactly what happened when the child couldn't see Jesus inside her heart as she was taught in church.

Remember that children are not capable of abstract thought, and it is important to use pictures or other concrete examples when communicating with children or preparing them for healthcare experiences. Children will form images in their minds about what you tell them, so it is important to 'manipulate' these images through your words.

When interacting with children, always look for any odd behaviour or listen for any statements that don't make sense. Clarify this with the child by asking them what they think is going to happen and why, and if you detect any

misconceptions, don't overreact, but gently discuss it with the child.

To give expression of their emotions

Children can experience a range of negative emotions, including feelings of anger that can be directed towards the medical staff, parents or even God. They often hold themselves responsible for their illness and tend to regard the treatment as punishment for some wrongdoing. Even school-age children might blame the medical staff for their pain and suffering; however, they would seldom express any anger towards the adults as they could regard the open expression of anger as wrong and possibly leading to further pain and suffering.

Intense and overwhelming emotions could result in regression and developmental delays. Levine and Kline (2007:114) caution against suppressing emotions:

The body simply cannot contain the energy and – like a rainstorm breaching the banks of a river, or a bathtub tap that's been turned on and left unattended – an emotional flood spills its contents outside the container of the body. Those unable to modulate affect, whether it's a two-year-old's tantrum or an adult's rage, a literally 'beside themselves' rather than 'inside themselves'.

Being active and able to run around can help children to give expression to their feelings, but that is not always possible in hospitals. Visitors can therefore help children in other creative ways, such as playing with playdough or drawing pictures. When asked to draw pictures of their doctors, a ten-year-old boy once drew a red devil-like figure, complete with horns and a tail, but also with a stethoscope around his neck. Although never acting out or voicing his feelings in any other way, this was his way of expressing the feelings of anger and resentment that he had towards his treating doctor.

Social needs

This section discusses the various social needs of sick and hospitalised children.

To receive support from family and friends

Darby et al. (2014:34) concluded that the presence of the family of children with cancer provides much-needed reassurance for the young patients. However, children would usually look at the reactions of the adults around them as part of their appraisal of a situation. If the adults are calm and coping, children tend to assess the situation as less threatening than they would if the adults are anxious and not coping. If a situation causes discomfort or anxiety for an adult, children tend to pick it up very quickly and would often try to comfort the adult through comforting gestures, being extra good or avoiding the topic. If they can get the adult to feel better about the situation, the child will feel better as well.

When children are diagnosed with an illness, whether it requires a short stay in hospital or whether it is chronic and/or life-threatening, it requires an adjustment from everyone in the household. Someone once said that you can't have a funeral for normal. The life that was regarded as normal no longer exists, and families find it difficult to juggle all the priorities in life together with the extra demands of having to take care of a sick child. It is therefore vital to support parents, caregivers, and significant others and to empower them so that they can support the child more efficiently, and religious communities can play a critical role in this regard. Unfortunately, support from religious communities often stops here, focusing on the adults without reaching out to the child as well.

For school-age children, their peers start to play an important role in their lives, and they tend to base their self-esteem on the way others react towards them. It could, therefore, be detrimental to the self-esteem and social interaction of these children if friends start to treat them differently or make remarks about physical changes such as scars, hair loss, amputations, skeletal abnormalities and/

or weight gain or loss. Because relationships with friends are important, long periods of hospitalisation and/or a change or restriction on the social life of these children could put pressure on social relationships and lead to social isolation. It is therefore important to provide school-age children, suffering from a chronic condition, with the necessary information and skills so that they can explain their illness to their peers.

Siblings play an important role in the lives of children and they tend to rely a lot on their siblings for companionship, emotional support and help with their daily activities. It follows that support from the family should also include support for the siblings of the sick child.

To experience love and companionship

If you want to form a trusting relationship with children, start by checking your motives. Children are very perceptive, and if you don't want to be with them, they are quick to pick it up. However, if you see children as valuable and significant, and if you know that they are precious in the eyes of God, you are already halfway to forming a meaningful relationship with a child. Children are quickly drawn to people through small acts of kindness. When young children with cancer were asked 'What gave you strength?', the support from others topped the list as children referred to someone sitting with them, holding their hand, or saying a prayer (Nash et al., 2015:149).

Chapman and Campbell (2012:23) explained that we can truly meet a child's need for love by addressing the five love languages of children: tender touch; supporting words; quality time; gifts; and acts of service. As we've addressed the need to be touched, held, and comforted above, let's look at the rest and how we can communicate love to sick and hospitalised children.

Supporting words

Words have so much power, and we should use them wisely. If we pity, overly reassure children, or diminish what they are

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going through, it does not help at all. Children need to know that they are successful in what they are doing. Pointing out things that they did well while acknowledging the difficult situation they find themselves in can help them cope better in future. Giving children who can read a certificate of bravery can further drive home the fact that they did a great job of coping with a stressful situation.

Quality time

Taking the time to be with a child and to do something meaningful with him or her makes them feel special and loved. A five-year-old who was admitted to the hospital described her time in the hospital as follows: '[T]hey looked at my ears, they looked at my throat, they looked at my tummy, but they didn't look at me' (Jolly 1981:9). Spending quality time with a child starts by sitting down so that you can be at the same eye-level as the child to make eye contact, even if it means that you have to sit on the floor. Listen to children. You will be surprised at how much we can learn from them when we listen to what they have to say.

Gifts

Children love receiving gifts, and if the gift can carry a message, such as a booklet with a colourful Bible story, it can help them feel special and cared for. The child can even help to make the gift, such as the glo-in-the-dark crosses mentioned earlier.

Acts of service

Parents, families and even the staff tend to pity sick children and often do too much for these children. Children must be able to continue doing for themselves what they can so that they can be empowered, and their self-esteem boosted. However, sometimes children need help with a difficult task, such as with schoolwork, and assisting them can communicate love and support – but always ask first. It can also be meaningful for the sick child when the other children from the children's church or Sunday school class design and make get-well cards,

as it communicates to the child that others are willing to go the extra mile to encourage him.

Spiritual needs

Children intuitively know that they need spiritual support. When treated in the hospital for cancer, children in a research study were asked to rate 19 resources according to their importance for the child. First, they need their parents to be with them, and they need their siblings and friends. But before they want their pain assessed, being able to play or watch television, they expressed the need for religious engagement as a fourth priority (Oberholzer et al., 2011).

Children's spiritual perception of illness, pain and suffering can greatly impact their experience in hospital and during illness. Clutter (2005:368) mentions that children often have a distorted view of God that can negatively impact their road to recovery. Keep in mind that children might have encountered different viewpoints from teachers, other children at school, social media or from television programmes, and do not assume that a child will have the same beliefs as you. It can therefore be helpful to start a discussion by asking children about their spiritual experience and how they see God. Even if you know the child well, do not assume that you know how the child relates to God. Listen carefully to what a child is telling you, and never judge or make fun of the child's answers.

Clutter (2005:364) mentions a list of symptoms that could indicate spiritual distress in children. These are anger or resistant behaviour; resentment; exaggerated fear; self-blame; questions about meaning and purpose; crying; nightmares; asking numerous or repeated questions; and regressive behaviour.

However, children don't often express their spiritual distress in an observable way. One way of getting children to talk is by asking them to draw a picture of God and encourage them to tell you more about the picture. Robert et al. (2019:7) conducted a literature review and referenced thirty-nine

studies ‘that used a wide range of scales and tools to assess facets of spirituality’. They also referred to a study by Sposito et al. (2015), who incorporated the child’s handcrafted puppet through which the child could communicate.

The questions posed by Anderson and Steen (1995:5) cover three areas of spiritual concerns that children may have when in hospital and have been used widely in healthcare. If you want to use specific questions such as these, remember to keep the conversation light so that the child doesn’t feel like he or she is being interrogated.

- **Concept of God** – asking questions such as: ‘Have you thought about God during this time?’; ‘What is God like?’; ‘Do you believe God causes...?’; ‘Do you have a favourite Bible story or character?’; and ‘What do you like about this story?’.
- **Sources of strength and hope** – asking about the emotions children might experience and the support they have such as: ‘Who do you tell when you feel afraid (or sad, scared, alone, happy)?’; and ‘What helps you feel better?’.
- **Faith practices** – asking about the practices and rituals that can help the child feel closer to God.

The following sections consider a few important spiritual needs a child may have.

To have a relationship with God

James W. Fowler (1940–2015) proposed a framework with stages for the development of faith to illustrate how we understand God and how a belief in God will impact our values and beliefs (Fowler, 1991:17–18; Fowler & Dell, 2006:34–45). This framework has been greatly influenced by the stages proposed by Jean Piaget for cognitive development. Note that these stages are focused on the development of faith, which is different from spirituality. We cannot grade into stages the intimate relationship with and experience of God that children can have. Cognitive development is irrelevant when

considering the spiritual experience that children can have with God, without having a theological understanding of Him.

However, children's ability to have any spiritual experiences is often questioned. During a debate on religious education in the 1960s in Great Britain, Ronald Goldman was influential in arguing that children are not yet ready for religious teaching. He also claims that it is only from the age of 12 that children have developed the 'ability to conceive God in symbolic, abstract and spiritualised ideas' (Goldman, 1964:239, 1965).

In a research study that was done in the 1970s (Robinson, 1977), people were asked to write about their personal experiences with regard to God or a power greater than themselves and the impact this had had on their lives. Several people spontaneously related to meaningful experiences they had in childhood. Although this was not a Christian study as such, what was noteworthy about these stories, was that several participants mentioned a significant difference between how they experienced God, and what they were taught in school and church. Children can have a profound experience of God, and we can learn so much by giving children the space to share their experiences with us, without judging them according to what we think is the 'right way' to relate to God.

Children don't have to understand everything about religion. However, their concept of God will influence their relationship with God, and because children often harbour misconceptions about God, it is important to guide their religious and spiritual experiences to ensure that they have a realistic view of God and their relationship with Him. The child's concept of God will also influence experiences of illness, pain and suffering, and misconceptions are common. The following is a quote from one of the participants in the research study mentioned earlier:

I was influenced by religion to think of God as an awful parent, looking constantly to see what I was doing and condemning it anyway. 'The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good'. Since I expected

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constantly to be punished for my sins, I can't think how I ever got the idea that God had enough love in Him to help when I asked. As I usually had only God to talk to when troubled, I must have picked up an idea from somewhere that He would help me. Perhaps that idea is in all of us, without having to be implanted. (Robinson, 1977:100)

Because children are concrete thinkers, religious practices, rituals, and symbols can be meaningful to them and help them to connect with God. When asked what they did to feel closer to God, children with cancer mentioned the following: prayer/talking to God (64%); going to church (17%); other religious or spiritual acts (7%); reading Bible/devotions (7%). Five percent did nothing to feel closer to God (Kamper et al., 2010:304).

God created all people, including children, with the same spiritual needs and deep longing so that we can seek Him. Religious beliefs and rituals are meant to assist in connecting with God, but so often we tend to concentrate only on the rituals and the differences in our beliefs, that we lose focus of the bigger picture: the importance of connecting with a loving God.

To seek for meaning and purpose

In the beginning of his book, *Medicine and Health Care in Early Christianity*, Ferngren (2009) wrote: 'The purpose of medicine is to relieve suffering; of religion to explain suffering or to help us accept it'. Children also need to search for answers to certain life questions, such as the meaning of suffering when it seems as if nothing is going according to God's promises. Viktor Frankl (1984:98) well-known as a Holocaust survivor, cautioned that 'questions about the meaning of life can never be answered by sweeping statements,' and nowhere is it truer than when talking to children. Adults want to protect children from the harsh realities of life and often opt for quick and easy answers to set a child's mind at ease. However, children should be encouraged to reflect on the difficult issues in life. EAUDE (2009:190) explains that 'in failing to help children recognise that some questions do not have easy or definite answers, we

may discourage them from continuing to ask such questions'. If we listen to children, we will not only learn a lot about them, but you might be surprised to realise how much you might learn from them.

Nash et al. (2015: 25) explained that it could be meaningful for children to reflect on any positive and enriching aspects of the illness experience without disregarding the negative, and to explore 'both the light and dark within the hospital experience'. Helping children to identify and strengthen sources of support would not only benefit them in their current situation but could also assist in building resilience and help them overcome other challenges in the future.

To address guilt and sanctification

Children tend to see any pain or suffering as punishment for something they did wrong. I always casually reminded children that the illness or operation they were facing was not because they did something wrong, and often, you could see the relief on their faces as they believed that they were to blame.

Sometimes, whether intentional or not, children's behaviour could cause something bad to happen. It is not likely that children will mention this to anyone without being prompted, and adults are often hesitant to bring up the subject because they don't want to implicate the child. However, if children can feel guilty when they didn't do anything wrong, they are likely clouded in guilt and shame and compelled to carry this load on their own. If it was an accident, it should be explained to the child and if needed, children should be carefully guided to ask for and receive forgiveness from others as well as from God and to forgive themselves, as forgiveness is an important aspect of coping in children. Clutter (2005:389) explains the importance of forgiveness for children's well-being and adds that it can be powerful for children to experience forgiveness.

As mentioned above, children could have feelings of anger and resentment towards the healthcare staff, but they

will usually be very hesitant to reveal these feelings for fear of more punishment. These feelings are usually because of misconceptions and should be carefully explored and the intentions of the healthcare staff should be explained.

If children know that they didn't do anything wrong and that the staff will help and take care of them, it could also enable them to experience the goodness of God and the love of others in a difficult situation.

To find comfort and hope in biblical truths

Children are inclined to gravitate towards hope, and Yust (2004:18) concludes that children tend to 'dwell in states of hopefulness and imaginative possibilities'. Clutter (2005:387) explains that hope can contribute to healing and general well-being and prevent feelings of despair. Koenig (2012:4) agrees, pointing out that several studies showed a positive relationship between health and the degree of hope.

Bible stories emphasising comfort and hope should therefore form part of the spiritual support of children in healthcare. A colour-in picture on a postcard or bookmark can serve to remind children of the biblical truth discussed. It could even be beneficial to develop a small pocket-size booklet with Bible lessons that can be distributed to children during hospital visits. In a research study on the spiritual needs of young people with cancer, Darby et al. (2014:35) concluded that religious faith resulted in 'hope, resilience and a sense of connection with others and community'.

Knoetze (2015:6) urges religious communities to help children understand that God is involved in their lives in the same way He was involved in the lives of the characters they read about in the Bible. This author further explains:

The goal of spiritual transformation is not to 'solve' everything. Spiritual transformation is effective to the degree that African children and youth, through spiritual interactions with the living God of the Bible, are in a better position to manage their life situations

through participating in the use of spiritual resources and opportunities (the Bible and faith community) to live their lives more effectively. (Knoetze, 2015:7)

Conclusion

Clutter (2005:352) compares the spiritual support of children in healthcare with politics and states that the best strategy is usually regarded as 'the less said the better'. However, this strategy is often chosen due to a lack of knowledge and feelings of incompetence from the adults surrounding sick and hospitalised children. Religious communities can and should play a bigger role in the spiritual support of children in healthcare, and more focus should be placed on educating and equipping people to take on the important task of effectively ministering to and supporting sick and hospitalised children.

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Chapter 7

Walking with children in the shadow of death

Annemarie E Oberholzer 

These are the words of a seven-year-old boy:

My mum said she was sad because her friend was Pastor Way. I didn't know ... who was Pastor Way? I thought Pastor Way was a man, but her friend was a lady. I thought my mum [had] gone mad! (Drane & Fleming Drane, 2009:212).

Introduction

When I asked a mother whether anyone was discussing her son's imminent death with him, she got very upset with me and answered that we were not there yet and that she would talk to him when he is actually dying. He passed away less than 24 hours later.

Few adults are willing to discuss the difficult topic of death with children, especially when the child has a life-limiting condition. People should be able to live full lives until their golden years, and the diagnosis of a terminal illness in a child goes against everything we believe in. In her book, *The Private Worlds of Dying Children*, Myra Bluebond-Langner describes this as follows:

There they all were: children with futures to be moulded; parents charged with this responsibility; medical practitioners trained to cure. Leukaemia now threatened everyone's ability to fulfil their socially defined roles. Moreover, it threatened their ability to carry on social interaction. (Bluebond-Langner, 1978:321)

Although children would welcome opportunities to reflect on matters of life and death (Bates & Kearney, 2015), they will sense immediately if a topic is making an adult uncomfortable and will refrain from starting a discussion or asking questions about it. Damsma Bakker et al. (2018:e109) explain that children want to protect their parents from pain and suffering and that they tend to avoid difficult spiritual questions. For this reason, many children are often stuck with numerous unanswered questions, and theology students should be prepared to address these questions and support children in the religious communities where they are involved.

Therefore, the learning outcomes at the end of this module could be:

- Students will be able to understand the developmental stages of children and how their understanding of death changes at different ages.
- Students will be able to promote a supportive environment for children when a parent or significant other is terminally ill.
- Students will be able to facilitate open and honest communication with children about death and dying when they are critically ill.
- Students will be able to critically reflect on personal biases and fears about death and dying.

Children's understanding of death and dying

The limited life experience of children could lead to a variety of misconceptions. This was the case for a six-year-old boy who had to go for a minor operation. He was trembling with fear, and when I talked to him to explain what was going to happen, I realised that he thought he had come to the hospital to die. His mother then confirmed that a few months ago, his father had passed away in the same hospital where this little boy was now waiting to go for an operation. The same happened when a five-year-old girl thought she was going to be euthanised by her immunisation injection – just because

that was what happened to her dog a few weeks before her healthcare experience!

The way children understand death and dying is not only determined by their developmental age but also by their experience of the concepts of death and dying. If they've previously had to deal with the death of a pet or a loved one, they were exposed to the finality of death and had the chance to experience that once someone is dead, they will never return. Children in an oncology unit are often exposed to friends dying and have a different concept of death than their peers at the same age. Mdleleni-Bookholane, (2003:163) concludes that children who are exposed to an environment where it is distasteful to speak about death, are not on the same cognitive level as their peers with regards to their conceptualisation of death.

Although it is important not to generalise, a look at the different developmental stages of children will give a better understanding of the reasoning of children with regard to death and dying.

0–2 years

Object permanence is not yet developed in babies, and they can't understand that an object or person exists when out of sight. However, they know their parents or primary caregivers and can get very upset when separated from them. During this stage, they learn to trust other people and having their basic needs met is an important part of developing trust. Physical closeness is central for trust to develop, and abuse or insufficient caregiving can damage this process of learning to trust others. Trusting other people is the foundation of trust in God. When the parent is terminally ill, adequate loving care should be available for babies and small children and their routine should be kept as consistent as possible. From one year of age, the loss of a parent will be felt even more, but small children cannot give meaning to the loss and might get depressed.

When one of these small ones is dying, close physical contact with the parents or primary caregivers should be encouraged as much as possible. If that is not possible, someone else should stand in for the parents to ensure constant care.

2–3 years

One of the biggest fears of children during this early stage is separation from their parents or primary caregivers, and it is therefore very traumatic for these children when they are separated due to illness, hospitalisation (of either the child or one of the parents) or death. They have a natural fear of monsters, ghosts, and mutilation of the body, and all these fears have the potential to escalate when the child is faced with illness, hospitalisation, and/or death. Small children still don't understand the irreversibility and permanence of death and might confuse it with sleep. They might think that they've done something wrong to have caused the illness or death and that they are being punished. They are not able to understand abstract concepts and will form a literal picture in their minds of everything being said to them. We should, therefore, use concrete examples when talking to them.

3–7 years

Preschool children still fear separation from their parents and might become fearful of being separated from them. They have a vivid imagination and respond well to stories of good and evil, but some television programmes and animated movies might give them the wrong idea of dying. They might be interested in investigating a dead animal and talking about death, but they are still not able to fully grasp the permanence of death. They might still believe that they are being punished by negative events as they don't understand the relationship between cause and effect.

These children are still not capable of abstract reasoning, and when they don't understand certain concepts or wording, they will create their own images or words that they can

understand. This might lead to many misunderstandings such as in the example in the introductory quote, where the concept of ‘pass away’ is unfamiliar to the child, and he therefore assumed it to be a person, Pastor Way.

7–12 years

School-age children may start to grasp the finality of death and they tend to stress about details, such as that the process of dying might be scary or painful. Their peers are very important to them, and they value their newly found independence and may fear the loss of control or becoming disabled. Abstract thinking starts to develop, and they have a more mature thinking about cause and effect. They also start to understand the finality of death, however, they still tend to personify death and might associate it with monsters or the bogeyman. School-age children rarely verbally express negative emotions, and when they are diagnosed with a chronic or life-threatening illness, they usually want to protect their parents and not upset them more than they already are by expressing their emotions. When terminally ill, young people often want to ‘live life to the fullest,’ but this should not be interpreted as that they don’t understand what is happening to their bodies (Bates & Kearney, 2015:5).

At this stage, children have a strong sense of justice and believe that goodness is rewarded, and evil is punished. This could lead to a spiritual crisis when they realise that bad things can happen to good people. One of the teenagers in the oncology ward was a star student, captain of the rugby team, leader in his school and very caring towards the other children in the ward. When he died, one of the other patients, a 10-year-old boy, became very depressed and admitted that, if the teenager whom he admired so much couldn’t survive a cancer diagnosis, there was no way that he would survive it.

When a parent or significant other is terminally ill

Too often we want to shelter children from the harsh realities of life by withholding information from them. What we tend

to forget, is that children are very susceptible to the feelings and body language of the adults around them and will know intuitively that something is wrong. Children often overhear adult conversations or telephonic discussions and might arrive at their own conclusions, which may be far from the truth. Eade (2009:190) points out the very uncomfortable truth that 'in trying to protect them [the children], we as adults are often protecting ourselves'. We need to brace ourselves for uncomfortable discussions with children because they also deserve to know the truth.

The sections that follow mention the things that a child should be told when a loved one is terminally ill.

That the person is ill

Children will know something is wrong and should be kept in the loop from the beginning. If the situation is not explained to them, their imagination might start to run wild, and they could imagine all sorts of scenarios that are far from the truth. Always get permission from the family to disclose the name of the illness to the child, especially if it is a sensitive issue such as in the case of HIV and AIDS. Children should be told the name of the illness in a controlled setting before hearing it from someone else.

Parents once wanted to protect their child by not telling her that her brother has cancer. Back at school, a concerned classmate, who overheard one of the teachers talking, approached her and asked: 'I hear your brother has cancer. My grandpa also had cancer and he is dead now. When is your brother going to die?'

That the illness might lead to death

Although it is important to keep hope alive (as discussed later in this chapter), the topic of death should be discussed with the child according to that child's understanding of death. Children also deserve time to say goodbye, time to build special memories and time to make the most of being together. Because sometimes, all we have left, is just a little bit of time.

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Kathleen McCue and Ron Bonn highlight the following as 'Something to think about':

All life is terminal. Even if one's own timetable is tragically shortened by a medical diagnosis, the end is not yet. There is still time, time for children and parents who love each other to make the most of. Don't try to shield your children from making the most of that time. (McCue & Bonn, 1994:21)

Whether the illness is contagious or not

Explain to children whether an illness is contagious or not. After COVID-19, children might assume that all illnesses are contagious. If the sick person is not contagious, assure children that they can safely interact with the sick person. If the person is contagious, explain the steps being taken to ensure that the rest of the family will not get ill.

What will happen in the near future

Children are focused on the here and the now and need to know what will happen in the near future. They might get concerned about who will fetch them from school when a parent is in hospital, or where the money is going to come from when the breadwinner can't go to work. Keep their routine as normal as possible and explain to them how it is going to work.

What was the cause of the illness or injury?

Children might blame themselves for any illness, pain, and suffering, and should be ensured that they didn't do anything wrong to have caused the illness or injury. However, if the child did cause the accident, do not avoid the issue, and discuss it with the child, addressing intent and forgiveness where necessary.

Children and hospitals

Should children visit a loved one in a hospital? This is a controversial topic, and the answer depends on who you're asking. Often, hospitals don't allow children to visit the sick due to the risk of infection to both the child and the patient, or they are not equipped to deal with the preparation and support of children visiting. Sometimes, the patient might be severely disfigured or too unstable to tolerate a visit from children, or parents might prefer not to be visited by their children.

However, if possible and with the necessary permissions from all involved, I believe that a child should be allowed to visit his or her loved ones in the hospital or even in the ICU, but it is very important to prepare the child for such a visit. Never insist if the child doesn't want to visit but try to determine the reason for this. Children often envision a scenario much worse than reality, and it might be a good starting point to show a child a picture of the sick person (with the necessary permissions). Ask the staff to assist so that you can explain to the child the purpose of all the medical equipment, lines, and tubes on the photo so that they know what to expect when the visit.

Explain to children what is expected of them, what they should or shouldn't do, and give them a purpose for visiting by explaining what their visit will mean to the patient. They can be encouraged to tell their loved one about their day or take a picture that they can leave next to the bed. Make sure that you do a debriefing session according to the age of the child afterwards so that the child can get a chance to express emotions and make sense of the visit.

After the death of a loved one

Be mindful of how children could misinterpret your words. If you tell a child that God wanted the person, the child might get angry at God. Encourage open and answer the children's questions truthfully. If children were praying for healing, don't avoid the subject, thinking it will go away and the child

will get over it. Discuss it with the child and ask them what they are thinking. Remember, it is okay to tell children that you don't know the answer.

Children should also be included in the planning of a funeral and can even be involved in the service. They sometimes have great ideas of how to honour and remember the life of a loved one and their input and wishes should be respected. Because rituals are concrete, they can be very meaningful to children, such as sending helium balloons with a message to heaven. Burrell and Selman (2020:376) conclude that rituals after the death of a loved one can be valuable for both children and adults, but they should be able to plan it according to what is meaningful to them. They also pointed out the importance of social support during a funeral. After the funeral, explore ways in which children can still honour and remember the person, such as making a scrapbook or having a special corner in the house with photos and memorabilia of the deceased.

If possible, children should get professional help after the death of a loved one. Be on the lookout for signs that a child is not coping, such as sleeping and eating disturbances, fears and extreme anxiety, regression of developmental milestones, and/or behaviour problems, and make sure that the child gets the help needed.

When their days are numbered

Myra: 'Jeffery, why do you always yell at your mother?'

Jeffery: 'Then she won't miss me when I'm gone.'
(Bluebond-Langner, 1978)

Children will always try to protect their parents and loved ones, even if it implies that they must be mean to them or refrain from asking burning questions when they realise it makes the adults around them uncomfortable. However, we as adults are the ones losing out when we refrain from talking to children at the end of their lives. As Clutter (2005:365) states: 'Those who

are dying can have quite a different spiritual reality, especially if they are suffering'. We can learn so much from children if we are brave enough to join them on their journey.

Not all children express their awareness of the fact that they are going to die in the same way. Bluebond-Langner (1978:165) explains that some children may be very direct, stating that they know they are going to die, while others are more subtle, making statements such as that they will not be able to back to school or attend someone's birthday party in the future. A 12-year-old describes his struggle with accepting his terminal diagnosis as follows:

I started to think about whether I was going to die. But I never really thought I was going to die. I thought about it in my mind like a film, my brother going into my room and me not being there, and about my dog and someone else taking him for a walk, but inside I didn't think I was going to die. (Drane & Fleming Drane, 2009:215)

According to Bates and Kearney (2015:2) children's understanding of their terminal illness is a 'fluctuating process,' and research into this is limited and outdated. However, it might be worth mentioning that Bluebond-Langner (1978:169) identifies the following stages of awareness when children learn that they are terminally ill:

- I am well.
- I am seriously ill.
- I am seriously ill and will get better.
- I am always ill and will get better.
- I am always ill and will never get better.
- I am dying.

Children deserve to know that they could die so that they have time to come to terms with it and plan for it. It can be very comforting for children to be able to express their own needs, dreams and wishes. Children often want to have a say in who will get their earthly possessions and toys, and they also need reassurance that someone will take care of their pet, that their

loved ones will be okay, and that they will not be forgotten. Children might find it comforting to draw a picture or make a piece of artwork, such as a candle holder, to give to each of their loved ones, serving as a reminder so that they will not forget about them.

However, talking to children about their wishes shouldn't focus only on dying, but rather on living life to its fullest, with as much fun as possible, and as normal as possible till the end. Their wishes should, therefore, also include things they still want to do and how they want other people to treat them. If possible, children should attend school and other social activities for as long as possible, and Bates and Kearney (2015:1) concluded that children 'show remarkable resiliency in the face of death and want to get the most out of the remaining time they have'.

Discussions about death and dying

Children know when something is wrong, and they are very perceptive to the mood and body language of the adults around them. When a child is dying, they often know it before it can be discussed with them. As adults, we often think we need to have all the answers, but if you can accept that we will never have all the answers to the difficult questions in life, you can start exploring these questions together with a child, and you might be surprised at how much you will be able to learn. When their second child died, Drane and Fleming Drane (2009:206) made the following comment about their oldest, who was 4 1/2 years old: 'In the midst of tragedy we learned more from his intuitive spirituality than from all the professional attention of clergy, medics and therapists'.

When talking about death and dying, keep cultural differences in mind. For instance, in the African languages, it is very disrespectful to refer to a person as being 'dead', and phrases such as 'he has breathed his last', 'he is dry as if from yesterday', 'going home', 'to follow the company of one's grandfathers', or 'to empty out the soul' are common (Mdleleni-Bookholane, 2003:7-8). People often refer to

someone as sleeping, that they've lost someone or that they've passed away, and children could easily misinterpret any of these expressions if not explained to them.

All indications are that children would welcome the opportunity to talk about spiritual issues, especially at the end of life. According to Ferrell et al. (2016), discussions with children revealed that they 'question God and the reason for their illness, have a desire to talk about the afterlife as a way of understanding their limited lifespan, and to share descriptions of an afterlife.'

Terminally ill children often reflect with great insight and acceptance on their short lives and listening to them can be an enriching experience (Marston, 2011:5). However, people generally find it very difficult to talk to children about death and dying, and there are only a few caregivers who are willing to walk with children through their terminal illness.

Play is the language of children, and they should be encouraged to express their feelings in other ways than talking about it. It might be helpful for children to project their emotions on a soft toy or to use a puppet through which they can communicate. Drawing or playing with playdough can be a great way of expressing what they are going through, while bigger children may find journaling, scrapbooking, or writing poems comforting. Drane and Fleming Drane (2009:221) reflect on the life of Jesus and his view of children when they concluded:

He also was more likely to address life's big questions by telling stories, drawing pictures, and invoking the imagination about the nature of God – all things that seem to come naturally to children.

Godfrey Kalake (2011:92–93), then 12 years old, mentioned how sad he was when a friend of his died in the hospice centre. He then drew a picture of the hospice, of his friend, and of his fears of death. Father Keith then sat down with him and addressed all his fears. These are his words:

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Moo Sunflower kene ke utlwile dohloko hobane Sthembile o ne a kula haholo e bile a hlokafala. Re ile ra lla kaofela. Ke ile ka taka ditshwantsho tsa Sunflower House, Sthembi le hore hobaneng ke tshaba ho swa. Father Keith o ne a bua lenna, fa re qeta ho bua, ha kesa tshaba ho swa.

Children often harbour a lot of misconceptions, and their ideas about death and dying can be influenced by fiction. Think for a moment about the way death is depicted in comic books and animations – characters might be blown to pieces, or their heads chopped off, just to be miraculously restored to life in the next scene. Discussions should therefore start by clarifying misconceptions. Children’s artwork can tell us a lot about their fears and interpretations of a situation, but don’t make your own conclusions – always ask children to tell you more about the picture. Also, ask them what they think is going to happen and listen carefully for any comments that don’t make sense and may indicate some misconceptions.

Try to find out more about the history of the child with regards to any experiences of death and dying and how different situations were addressed. For instance, if the death of a pet was previously diminished and not discussed with the child, the child might think that their death is also not a big deal and that they will be treated in an equal manner.

Use concrete examples when talking to children. A colleague, Vera van Dalen, uses the physical example of a plastic bottle, filled with water when talking to children about the process of dying and the afterlife. She compares the nature or essence of the child to the water, and the body to the plastic bottle. When the plastic bottle gets damaged up to the point where it can’t contain the water any more, the water is poured out painlessly into another container such as a glass. She emphasises that the water stays the same, but that it is now contained in a glass or different body.

There are also many books available on the internet with stories explaining death and dying to children. One little book, *Water Bugs and Dragonflies* (Stickney, 1997), tells the story of a water bug that changes into a dragonfly and is, for the first

time, able to fly around and experience the wonderful world outside of the water. However, once out of the water, his new body will not allow him to go back under the water again.

Keeping hope alive

Because of their vivid imagination, children are drawn to the prospect of heaven. They can get very excited and creative in imagining what it would be like, and when the end draws near, they are comforted and at peace. When talking about heaven, get creative and fantasise with the child, visualising all possibilities. You can say something like ‘I don’t know what heaven is like, but what do you think? What do you want to do in heaven? How do you want it to look?’

The saying, ‘Where there is life, there is hope’, might sometimes be overused to create false hope, but I’ve experienced the truth of this saying too many times. Miracles are possible, and I have personally witnessed patients who have recovered against all odds. However, it is not to say that we should disregard reality. To hope is not to deny the facts, but to hope despite the facts. Milona (2020:29) explains that, while secular philosophers tend to refer to hope in the likelihood that, what is hoped for, will not happen, Christianity associates hope with faith and confidence that what is hoped for, will happen. This author refers to the work done by Jeffrey (2019) when stating that ‘it is the intellectual confidence supplied by faith that gives rise to the Christian virtue of hope’.

Children might be dying, but they still have some living to do before they die. Their awareness of being alive may increase, prompting them to make the most of the time they have left (Bates & Kearney, 2015:5). Discuss their dreams and what they still want to do and focus on what is important to them and what gives them meaning.

Before his death, Johan Nieuwenhuis wrote that he had fought against cancer for seven years and had been through many things. He said that he was really glad he got sick because it made him much closer to the Lord. He then testified about what God has done for him, concluding that God is real,

and urging everyone else to also believe in Him. Being able to give his testimony was what gave meaning to his illness (Nieuwenhuis, 2011:77).

The rights of terminally ill children

The International Children's Palliative Care Network (ICPCN) published a 'Charter of Rights for Life Limited and Life Threatened Children' (ICPCN, 2008) As stated in this charter, the aim of palliative care is 'to relieve suffering and promote quality of life'. Other articles of the charter relevant to this discussion state that parents, legal guardians, as well as the child should be involved in all aspects of the child's care; communication with the child and family should be open and honest; they should be treated with dignity; and they should have access to support systems, including a multi-disciplinary care team and appropriate community resources. The charter also states that:

Every child and family member, including siblings, shall receive culturally appropriate, clinical, emotional, psychosocial and spiritual support in order to meet their particular needs. Bereavement support for the child's family shall be available for as long as it is required. (ICPCN, 2008)

As healthcare systems are overwhelmed, religious communities could play a major part in taking on the responsibility of walking with the dying child and providing the required care to these children.

A note on childhood euthanasia

Most people choose to avoid the topic of childhood euthanasia. Aristotle encouraged it when he wrote in *Aristotle's Politics* that 'as to the exposure and rearing of children, let there be a law that no deformed child shall live' (Aristotle & Jowett, 2015:199). However, childhood euthanasia is as relevant today as it was when Aristotle commented on this. The

Netherlands was the first country to regulate child euthanasia and developed the Groningen protocol to assist medical staff with the decision-making process during infant euthanasia. However, the criterion of 'hopeless and unbearable suffering' led to many debates, and according to Lindeman and Verkerk (2008), this definition is unclear and wide open for interpretation. Meanwhile, Singer (2016:83), a professor in bioethics, admits that physicians have confessed to him that child euthanasia is a reality in the US although they will never admit it openly for fear of prosecution as it is not legalised in the US. One can only speculate whether it is happening in South Africa or not.

What about the adults, walking with children in the shadow of death?

As you read through this chapter, carefully consider the thoughts and fears that you are experiencing right now. It is difficult to talk to children about death and dying, and there might be different reasons for that, usually stemming from our fears about death and dying. Start by reflecting on these questions, and write down any other questions that come to mind:

- Have you made peace with the fact that you too will die someday – maybe even soon?
- Why do you think children die?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- What happens after death?

Only when you are at peace with your own death, will you feel comfortable to discuss this difficult topic with other people and be able to truly accompany them on their journey in the shadow of death. However, taking this journey does not come without challenges and sacrifices. When writing to healthcare professionals about children's palliative care, Amery et al. (2009:351) cautions that

dealing with dying children and their families means sharing a painful and heavy burden, and occasionally that

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burden can begin to affect us, our work and ultimately our happiness itself.

These authors further concluded that they found happiness in the work that they do because of three vital aspects: their work gives them an opportunity to be challenged, they work together in a team and support each other, and they find meaning and purpose in the work that they do (Amery et al., 2009:352). Taylor and Aldridge (2017:5) also mention the importance of 'making a difference' in the workplace as a reward for working with children in palliative care. However, they refer to the increased risk of burnout and discuss the difficulties of obtaining adequate support for staff members outside of work. Patient confidentiality, the nature of their work, as well as people who lack understanding of the work being done, were mentioned as reasons for not being able to discuss their work with outsiders (Taylor & Aldridge, 2017:8).

When a child that I worked with died, my way of honouring the child's short life was to focus on at least one positive aspect or lesson that the child had taught me – and believe me, there was more than one to choose from. Other authors also commented that working with terminally ill children can be very enriching and that one can learn so much from these children (Marston, 2011:5). On the inside cover of the book, *Littlest Suffering Souls: Children Whose Short Lives Point Us to Christ*, the author explains that 'everyone with whom they [the children] came into contact...was profoundly affected by the encounter' (Ruse, 2017).

Whether the death of a loved one or the impending death of the child in front of you, you will be deeply affected, and it is essential to know your strengths and limitations before you start to walk with children in the shadow of death.

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Chapter 8

Curriculum development with victims of violence and abuse

Maake J. Masango 

Abstract

The process of education in Africa, especially in rural areas, has always centred on storytelling, idioms, proverbs and songs. These are used as a way of educating young people in the community.

This chapter uses idioms and storytelling as a way of entering into the lives of those abused and violated by others. It concentrates on the process of developing a curriculum that will equip clergy students to address the problems associated with violence and abuse by men in South Africa

The major educational tool used in the chapter is based on Tshegofatso's story. Tshegofatso Pule, who had worked as a make-up artist and wanted to pursue studies in marketing, was eight months pregnant when she was found dead in Durban Deep in June 2020. Tshegofatso Pule's love for fashion and beauty will be brought to life in a new crime documentary that documents her murder. The focus of this chapter is to create a way of pastorally addressing violence and abuse.

The narrative and process of educating students

The problem of violence and abuse upon women and children has become a pandemic that needs pastoral intervention. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa refers to the problem as the second pandemic (the first being Covid-19). The teaching not only needs the development of a curriculum that will equip clergy students to deal with this epidemic, but

the Theological Department needs to develop a way of dealing with this issue pastorally.

During a master's and PhD class contact week, we heard news that a boyfriend had killed an eight-months pregnant woman, and finally hanged her. This news shocked all of us attending that class of trauma in counselling. This class was composed of a mixture of clergy women and men. These people are dealing with the issue of trauma in ministry. As the class was focused on trauma issues and counselling, I felt it was important to analyse the story of Tshegofatso (Blessings) Pule, the one murdered and burned. We started discussing how pastorally we can deal with this issue. The emotions were high and very volatile. In our general discussions, I saw students attacking each other with anger, in particular women clergy. They were more knowledgeable about men killing women. As discussions continued, I realised that we needed a process of how to enter into the space of this case study of Tshegofatso Pule.

The story of Tshegofatso Pule

A man has been sentenced to 20 years in jail for the brutal murder of a pregnant woman whose death galvanised protests in South Africa and prompted a speech by the state president. In June 2020, the body of 28-year-old Tshegofatso Pule was found hanging from a tree with multiple stab wounds. Mzikayise Malephane, 31, pleaded guilty at a court in Johannesburg. He accused her ex-boyfriend of paying him to carry out the killing. Police said that a man was now in custody. In a plea agreement read out in court by his lawyer, Malephane said he had been offered R7 000 by the ex-boyfriend to carry out the killing but had declined. The offer went up to R70 000 before he accepted. Tshegofatso Pule was 8 months pregnant when she went missing on 4 June. Her stabbed body was found four days later, hanging from a tree by a member of the public in the Johannesburg suburb of Roodepoort. Local police confirmed that they arrested a 32-year-old suspect on Thursday evening 'on suspicion of being an accomplice in

the murder'. They did not give his name but told local media that he was expected to appear in magistrate's court early the following week.

Murder suspect Muzikayise Malephane appeared in the Gauteng High Court on 22 January 2021 in Johannesburg, South Africa. Muzikayise Malephane implicated Ms Pule's ex-boyfriend as the one who asked to commit this murder. There was a wave of outrage in South Africa after Ms Pule's death and the hashtag #JusticeForTshego trended on Twitter. In response, President Cyril Ramaphosa released a statement denouncing gender-based violence, (GBV) saying the pandemic had made it more dangerous for women because 'violent men are taking advantage of the eased restrictions on movement to attack women and children'. The president's statement said that as many as 51% of women in South Africa had experienced violence at the hands of someone they were in a relationship with.

Gender-based violence in South Africa

The era of 2019–2020 saw the rate of gender-based violence (GBV) rise at a concerning rate worldwide. Botswana, a small country with a population of 2 441 162 people, was ranked second highest in the world with 92.9 rapes per 100 000 people per year. Botswana is rated second after South Africa on GBV, Lesotho is rated 3rd, and Eswatini is 4th (World Health Organization [WHO], 2013). This compares to Australia at 91.92 (population 26 068 792) Lesotho at 82.68 (population 2 175 699) and South Africa at 72.10 (population 60 756 135) (World Population Review, 2024).

Class discussions

After reading the story of Tshegofatso Pule, I asked the students to work individually on a treatment plan. Later they shared their thoughts with the rest of the class. I finally divided them into two groups to discuss how they would share their way forward. They had to focus on how they would tackle the issue of violence, as recounted in the story.

We then began with class discussions.

I read the story again to refresh the memory of the students. Anger, rage and shouting started in our analysis of this story. I asked the class to pause for a minute and then asked each one to share what they were feeling. After the process, I asked them to discuss the story again.

This is what followed:

One of the youngest women in the class posed a question to male clergy who were in the class: ‘Why do men kill the womb that has given birth to them?’ The discussions moved us in the direction of whom we pastorally care for amid the violence. Their response divided them further into two camps: Men vs Women. There was no progress until I asked them to follow a new system. I asked all the women to be in one group and all the men in another.

They then discussed:

- How they feel about the man who killed the womb that brought them to birth?
- The issue of the pregnancy of Pule.
- The issue of Tshegofatso’s parents.
- The issue of the community engagement about this story.
- How they felt about the man who killed Pule.

Report back

The women concentrated on not being safe in South Africa, while the men focused on the murderer. Again, women challenged the men not to protect the male. It was important to be reminded of this issue. The main question was, should we pastorally concentrate on those who violate alone? Note that the men reminded the women that they also have rights. The women reminded all that only few men are murdered, and, therefore, we should face the issue of femicide, which is a pandemic in South Africa. They also warned us that in this process we should avoid silencing women’s voices. I was reminded of the following words: ‘Death of a loved

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one disrupts usual patterns of interaction, resulting in a restlessness, an inability to remain in one place, an aimless moving, or a continued search for something to do' (Wimberly, 2008:34).

I understood what was happening in the class and had to be careful not to interrupt the process; my educational process at that moment was to help the class to produce knowledge that would help them pastorally to heal those violated. Nouwen captures this idea in the following way: 'The wounded healer is a person who must look after his (her) own wounds, but at the same time be prepared to heal the wounds of others' (Nouwen, 1972:84). In other words, as a healer you must use your wounded experience to enter into the space of the troubled souls. This space needs to be respected irrespective of whether you believe in what the living human is saying. It is also important to note that we live in a community of South Africa, which is violence.

This issue has become a painful wound, especially to women and children. The latter lived in fear in their own country, because of violent men. Therefore, as theologians (like our Lord Jesus Christ) we are called not only to care for our wounds but also the wounds of others. The central theme is to use our wounds to heal others. That is what the Lord did during his ministry in the world. The process leads us to enter the space of mourning. It also acknowledges and highlights that the interruption of death is part of our lives.

The class was divided into two groups: women who were feeling the pain of being killed by men daily in South Africa and men who were vulnerable and feeling the shame and guilt of being associated with killings. The women in the class were preoccupied with the image and memory of the death of Tshegofatso (as their own because they were also targeted as women). As a result, they observed men in the class as being in the denial stage of violence, hence – anger. The process in the class allowed them to start grieving, which in the end will lead them to deal with the issue of healing. At that point,

they will be able to care for those who have experienced the same violation.

Nouwen then guides us into a process by saying: 'the minister (or caregiver) is called to speak (or address) the ultimate concerns of life, birth and death, union and separation, love and hate' (Nouwen, 1972: 87). In short, theologians and caregivers are called to enter the space of those wounded in order to give meaning to their lives.

Back to the class. The men in the class were dealing with the issue of shame and guilt because the murderer (who is a male) represented them wrongly in a violent South Africa. Wimberly had this to say about the issue of shame and guilt: 'Psychologically, shame or guilt is an attempt to acknowledge that shame has occurred and to relieve it by going to others and telling them about it' (Wimberley, 1999:73). At this point, I was aware of the withdrawal of men in the discussions because these issues of shame and guilt affected them. Lewis developed the above concepts further by saying: 'The difference between shame and guilt is that shame involves global attributions of fault to the entire self, while guilt is attributed to a specific act' (Wimberly, 1999: 78).

A beautiful story came to mind recorded in the Gospel according to Luke 7. It shares the story of the woman anointing Jesus' feet with her tears and her precious ointment. She was also dealing with the issue of shame and guilt. I said to the class, what an excellent way in which Jesus responded graciously to another person's shame and guilt. I also reminded them about Jesus' pastoral approach, which was gentle, tender, and caring – in contrast to the host of that home. I asked them to apply the methodology difficulties that women go through in their struggles in life. The class began discussing the issue, focusing on the problem faced in that story of the Gospel. With this in mind, the reader will now realise why that Monday morning, was clouded with darkness and sadness, which led us anger. The class resettled in getting answers in this murder case of Pule.

I then introduced Gerkin's methodology of pastoral care and asked them to approach the issue with that method in mind.

Gerkin's method of pastoral care

The element of 'shepherding' was needed to help students pastorally care for troubled souls. Shepherding in Africa is common and a known method of caring for the flock. The common entry is shepherding, which will help pastors and pastoral caregivers connect with women who are violated in their lives. The main task was to help students to pastorally care for the broken souls in a violent world. Gerkin raises four concepts of pastoral care, discussed in the sections that follow, which will help students enter the space of those violated by misuse of power in their lives.

Priestly function

The priestly function relates to leading in worship as a process of healing. As Oduyoye rightly reminds us: 'The purpose of our worship is to make us healing agents in the world' (Oduyoye, 2018:72). In other words, when a priest stands in front of the congregation and shares the call to worship, healing has begun – pastoral care has started. Use your words carefully at this time because you are standing on holy grounds.

Prophetic pastoral care

Here the shepherd becomes the voice of the voiceless, and pastorally brings them back into the centre of life of the community that has isolated and rejected them. The circle of women theologians remind us of the stigmatisation that happens to barren women in marriage. They challenged us to be prophetic and speak on their behalf. We are therefore called to be prophetic in our approach to caring for such marriages. As Oduyoye declares:

Barrenness is a central negative factor in African women's lives that sends many into the hands of 'deliverers'. It is

important that a caregiver, who is male [note] that women are exploited, marginalised, and humiliated for being childless even though counselling and alternative fertility process is now available. (Mananzan et al., 2004:69)

In my counselling session, I realised how barren women still face threats to life of reproduction, ruled by patriarchal African culture. I have always heard men blaming their wives for being barren. Sending them to medical doctors because they are having a problem and not them. The result will point at the problematic husband. In other words, they have found a man to be the problem in the area of reproduction. We are, therefore, called to be prophetic in our pastoral care approach. I have also included the referral of a couple to medical doctors during pre-marital counselling. Therapy in this case should serve the purpose of giving hope and impetus to women so that they may re-imagine new possibilities in their new life.

Wisdom of wise men and women

Shepherds use the wisdom of their experience in journeying with troubled souls. An African idiom finely captures this. It says: '*La hloho ntsho le rutwa maano ke la hloho Tshweu*'. This simply means that a black hair learns and borrows experience from a white hair. This process allows us to enter into the educational process of mentorship.

Shepherding the flock

Shepherding the flock is a way of journeying with the flock, caring for and protecting them. This process allows for trust and helping each other along the way.

A shepherd is someone who cares for the flock leading them to graze in a good place, and providing security. A good shepherd is willing to die for the flock (Gerkin, 1997:117).

On that day, this pastoral model of Gerkin was applied to the study of Tshogofatso. The students began working and exploring ways of dealing with this method. Women chose prophetic pastoral care as their entry point into caring. They

focused on how they could pastorally become the voice of the voiceless. They were seeking a way of restoring their voice within the community. The men, on the other hand, chose shepherding the flock, caring for the troubled souls. These two methods brought new light to the story of Tshegofatso. Women questioned the journeying pastorally with abused women by men. Some men continue to be traumatised by these unresolved traumas of the past. The main question to ask is, was this process going to be helpful or hinder healing between women and men?

Having explored all avenues of shepherding I then introduced another method that would further develop ways of caring, namely, Pollard's model of positive deconstruction.

An introduction to Pollard's positive deconstruction model

Nick Pollard describes positive deconstruction as follows: 'The process of positive deconstruction is done in a positive way in order to replace parts that are old with something better' (Pollard, 1997:42).

He continues:

When I was an undergraduate, I bought my first car. It had a good chassis and most of the body works was Ok. However, that was about all that could be said in its favour. The engine was worn out, the gearbox crunched pathetically and the suspension was broken. It just about got me around, but it was not good. Sometime later, I heard about another car of the same make and model. It contained many new parts, which were in good condition, but unfortunately, it had been written off in an accident. I immediately bought it and set about taking both cars completely apart. I looked carefully at each part to see whether it was any good. If it was, I kept it. If it wasn't, I threw it away. Eventually, I put all the pieces together, started it up and found out that I now had a very good car. There wasn't actually much left of

my original car. Some parts were good enough to keep most of them were now replaced. (Pollard, 1997:44–45)

His methodology shares insights that will help students as well as caregivers enter the space of those violated with grace and dignity. It raises a positive way of working with those who are wounded. The women took over and shared some way of pastorally caring for Pule's family and those affected by violence.

The central question

The process of discussion brings out Bonolo's question, which started the discussion. We can now ask: 'What causes men to destroy the womb that brought life to them?' It also raises the question of how we nurture and raise African children in our village, especially the boy child. In some other ethnic groups, boys are raised to take over the life of the girl child. They see them as their property, in particular after marrying them through the process of 'lobola'. This process supports the theory of owning them. Girls, on the other hand, are governed by self-control, submission and yielding to be controlled by boys (men later on). The creation of this concept leads them to live their lives for men. In other words, they die emotionally in living their lives for themselves. A good example is when the husband of a wife dies, the patriarchal widow inheritance demands that she is passed on to the husband's brother to continue her wifely duties in the dead husband's family, and for 'her own good' to be taken care of by the deceased husband's brother who becomes her new husband. This process is observed as polygamy. If she refuses, she is asked to go back to her family of origin, with nothing, except the clothes she has. Oduyoye articulates this process and avers that patriarchy in African culture is a given, and any word against it is viewed as deviant. She maintains that hierarchies are taken for granted as 'natural' and often justified with the saying, 'all fingers are not equal' (Oduyoye, 2019:43). This idiom shares the concept of not expecting everything to be equal in life.

Feedback on the discussions held

The questions raised by the women in class not only challenged men (student's clergy) and the way they were struggling to answer them. They also struggled with how to grapple with the issue of violence and abuse. This is how the challenge led me to try to develop a way practical theology and mission can develop teaching tools for those involved in this issue. I realised that students (especially men) were struggling to address the issues. I also realised that pastoral caregivers need to be taught how to enter the space of victim abuse. There are several people who are traumatised daily, and some of them do not even report these violations, such as rape, physical and emotional abuse, to name a few of the issues. The question that leads us to discuss this issue is: 'Why do men kill the womb that has brought life to them?' We are forced to look at African cultural and custom practices that also perpetuate this violence. This scenario or narrative challenged me in such a way that I was forced to ask the question, 'How do I prepare students to deal with this pandemic?'

Concluding remarks

My concluding remarks made me listen carefully (in class) to what was said so that both my students and I may be able to reflect and analyse the process of caring for victims amid violence and abuse. I was also reminded of Fanon when he was analysing the systems of colonialism that oppressed human beings. He was sharing problems of misuse of power, in the world of slavery. He relates: 'It is a world without spaciousness; men live there on top of each other (Fanon, 1963:39). This quotation articulates my experience of living in apartheid South Africa. There was a time when I questioned whether God loved African people. I contemplated whether this affected men in such a way that they were misplacing their anger upon women and children. Looking back, I realise that I was losing my own identity as a black person, hating my own skin, which finally made me angry towards other

human beings. I also realised that I doubted whether God loves black folks.

No wonder men are now destroying the womb that has brought life to them. In short, we have internalised the hatred that was directed at us by colonialists. It is sad to read what Fanon says about people who have lost their dignity and identity. He says:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he [sic] represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of value. He [she] is, let us dare to admit, the enemy this sense he [sic] values, and in this sense he (she) is the absolute evil. (Fanon, 1963:41)⁷

This is true because we have become a corrosive element in our country destroying all that comes close to our lives. This corrosiveness has led us to destroy all that is good because we have internalised the irretrievable instrument of blind forces of apartheid. He concludes the above idea of bad internalisation by sharing that the process has dehumanised us in such a way that 'It turned him (us) into an animal' (bestiary as settlers call us) (Fanon, 1963:42).⁸

We (South Africans) face the violence and abuse of women in our country in this unfortunate situation. It is therefore not surprising that African men are misdirecting their anger to African women. The reader will now understand why this book is important. We (theologians) need to analyse our theology, and how it is misleading us to subjugate women into abuse of patriarchy. This analysis, when handled well, will offer us a way of addressing past traumatic memories resurfacing and affecting future generations that have become

7 Here, Fanon is dealing with the issue of the relationship between the French and Algerians.

8 Fanon is dealing here with conceptualisation and articulations of how in the world of oppression, people analysed others as objects, which is a typical way of abusing and violating the other. Then, the use of force and power becomes the order of the day.

violent. Our understanding of addressing theology of violence will help us in dealing meaningfully with the bad split that occurred among the oppressed during the apartheid years. Analysis of our theology will help caregivers to re-direct trauma into healing methods of caring. Vickroy highlights the role of trauma narrative to show how it affects that x violated: 'The effects of trauma on cognition and sense of self that goes to the heart of knowledge and existence is compromised when associated with wounding' (Vickroy, 2015:36). It is my wish and hope that this book will address the issue of violence and abuse, and thus honour the traumatic memories of those women who died at the hands of violent men.

This class is now working in solidarity with impacted communities that are struggling with violence against women and children. It is an essential part of pastoral care, seeking justice for isolated, rejected and marginalised women and children. These relationships inform and direct our steps as we work to change the systems that marginalise and oppress the most vulnerable among us. President Ramaphosa has shared an insight that is worth mentioning in the conclusion. He calls GBV a second pandemic that is affecting us just as Covid did. He also highlights that we live in a country that has been named the 'rape capital of the world' and is regarded as the 'most dangerous country for women'. We deserve leaders and caregivers who will uphold the rights of women and girls and address the violations that are happening around us.

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Chapter 9

Social media is in young people's nature: Environmental sustainability, awareness, consciousness and activism during the Fourth Industrial Revolution era

Jacques Beukes 

Abstract

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) can be defined as an integration of technologies that obscures the boundaries between the physical or real, biological and digital, domains, collectively known as cyber-physical systems. Furthermore, as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, several elements of the 4IR have been expedited, with social media and digital platforms being examples. Although there is growing recognition that the 4IR has the potential to worsen issues for people and the earth, it also has the ability to alter and realign societies. Several youth movements have emerged to address the environmental and climate change problem. The youth population is a focal point in the discourse surrounding ecological justice, environmental awareness, and initiatives related to climate change. Youth movements throughout the world, such as 'Extinction Rebellion' and 'Fridays for Future' show that young people are concerned about environmental issues and want to get involved in climate change activism. Their desire to act on their own behalf makes them one of the most essential and fascinating groups to learn more about when it comes to the problem of increasing environmental knowledge, consciousness, and action. This chapter aims to investigate the role and influence that social media and 4IR have had and might have on the youths' environmental

knowledge, awareness, conscience, and activism on and within the environmental discourse.

Introduction

The issues of environmental degradation and climate change pose significant threats to sustainable development and the well-being of humanity on a global scale. Beukes (2021) notes that climate change poses a threat to homes, health, and natural resources in South Africa, which are relied upon by many for survival.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) encompasses a range of technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), big data, and cloud computing systems. These technologies have the potential to be widely adopted and integrated throughout society, resulting in significant changes to human life (Saudi et al., 2019:363). The 4IR has arisen and presents a challenge to humanity, alongside the imperative to execute the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The Agenda 2030, as posited by Roblek et al. (2020), seeks to harmonise and interconnect the tripartite facets of sustainable development, namely the economic, social, and environmental dimensions. The Agenda 2030 further mandates that all nations across the globe must embrace and implement the SDGs by the year 2030. The 4IR aims to bring about a transformation in the quality of life, business operations, and management practices that will revolutionise human development and the environment (Saudi et al., 2019:363).

The 4IR is distinguished by the merging of technologies that results in a fusion of the digital, physical, and biological domains, commonly known as cyber-physical systems. Furthermore, as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic, several elements of 4IR have been expedited, with social media and digital platforms being examples. Although there is growing recognition that the 4IR has the potential to worsen issues for people and the earth, it also has the ability to alter and

realign societies, especially with regards to social media and the climate change discourse. Several youth movements have emerged to address the environmental and climate change problem. Young people are at the heart of conversations and acts about (in)justice in the environment, environmental awareness, and climate change.

Youth movements throughout the world, such as 'Extinction Rebellion' and 'Fridays for Future' show that young people are concerned about environmental issues and want to get involved in climate change activism. Their desire to act on their own behalf makes them one of the most essential and fascinating groups to learn more about when it comes to the problem of increasing environmental knowledge, consciousness, and action. This chapter aims to investigate the role and influence that social media and 4IR have had and might have on the youth's environmental knowledge, awareness, conscience, and activism on and within the environmental discourse.

Environmental Issues and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

South Africa has to deal with several natural issues and extreme weather events. In South Africa, the effects of climate change have been especially clear in the last few years (Beukes, 2021:2). Also, more and more people are realising that the 4IR could make problems worse for people and the planet, but it could also change and reshape societies (Herweijer, et al., 2018:2). These authors make a valuable case which I would like to put forward in this section of the chapter.

They (Herweijer et al., 2018:5) argue, for instance, that within AI, the implementation of automation has the potential to result in a decrease in employment opportunities within the service industry and other related sectors, which may contribute to the exacerbation of societal inequality. The rate at which automation is adopted affect the gross domestic product (GDP) share of different industries, potentially leading to increased economic fragility (Herweijer et al.,

2018:5). The utilisation of autonomous vehicles, commonly known as drones, has the potential to result in additional job displacement, particularly for taxi and lorry drivers, as conventional professions become progressively outdated. Moreover, propeller-based drones flying at low elevations can contribute to amplified noise pollution, as noted by Herweijer et al. (2018:7).

They continue with this line of argument when referring to the IoT and state that the proliferation of 23 billion interconnected energy-consuming devices at present is expected to rise to 50 billion by 2020, resulting in a substantial surge in energy consumption (Herweijer et al., 2018:6). To address this issue, energy efficiency must be integrated as a crucial common feature of this extensive network of devices, sensors, and appliances. Additionally, responsible disposal of the augmented number of devices must also be considered (Herweijer et al., 2018:6). Although this line of argument might sound all doom and gloom with regard to the impact the 4IR can have on the environment, Herweijer et al. (2018) still suggest that these factors can be minimised or contained with proper governance policies as the role of governments is crucial in mitigating unintended consequences and promoting responsible and sustainable outcomes in the context of the 4IR (Herweijer et al., 2018:8).

The 4IR aims to revolutionise the development of humanity and the environment by transforming the standards of living, business, and managerial practices. As already mentioned, the concept of 4IR is centred on a unique amalgamation of virtual, physical, and natural progressions (Saudi et al., 2019:363). If this is the case, the question arises, in what ways can we modify these transformations to effectively tackle the most urgent issues faced by society and the planet, without aggravating them?

Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenges, it is increasingly acknowledged that the 4IR possesses the potential to effectuate transformations and reorientations within societies. The Fourth Industrial Revolution, which

is facilitated by digital technology on a global scale, is presently the most rapidly evolving era of innovation. The aforementioned phenomenon is supported by swift advancements in various technologies such as AI, robotics, the IoT, nanotechnology, and biotechnology, among others. The ongoing process of disrupting numerous conventional markets and industries is presently in progress.

With regard to the energy debate within the climate change discourse, technology can contribute positively to a cleaner environment. In the context of the 4IR, the energy sector faces a significant innovation challenge. Specifically, there is a need for technological advancements that can facilitate the development of a modern, clean, and decentralised power grid. This entails the creation of virtual power plants that can aggregate millions, and eventually billions, of emerging renewable energy sources. These sources would be optimised through the use of AI and machine learning, while blockchain and IoT technologies would enable peer-to-peer trading. Advanced materials, such as graphene and nano-solutions, are nearing the point of supporting breakthroughs in battery technology for cost-effective, rapidly-charging, high-energy-density batteries in the field of transportation. The potential market disruption of carbon-intensive internal combustion engines could result in electric cars becoming both cost-competitive and performance-competitive (Herweijer et al., 2018:12–13).

On a similar positive note, the retail industry has the potential to undergo a significant transformation through the integration of technology. This transformation could involve the adoption of virtual shopping systems, point-of-use 3D printing, blockchain, AI and IoT-enabled supply chain transparency and accountability, as well as circular and sharing economy models. Fintech, encompassing technologies such as AI, blockchain, and IoT, has the potential to enhance financial inclusion and decentralisation, promote market integrity, and potentially serve as a precursor to identifying systemic financial pressures, particularly for the unbanked and underbanked populations within the finance industry

(Herweijer et al., 2018:13). Furthermore, Herweijer et al., (2018:13), argue that the urban areas can leverage the IoT and bioengineering to modify their surroundings and incorporate functional systems that optimise lighting, heating, waste collection, and deliveries in response to current demand. Blockchain and AI technologies have the potential to automate planning processes and property developments in various contexts. In addition, according to Herweijer et al. (2018:13), the utilisation of drones, 3D printing, and robots can facilitate the construction of novel multifaceted structures more efficiently and promptly. The aforementioned instances serve as mere demonstrations of the modifications that conventional industries can undergo with the aid of 4IR technologies, which may also result in favourable societal and ecological outcomes.

The concept of 4IR is a relatively new area in the literature and is primarily applied within the context of large corporations that possess significant resources. The importance of technological advancements, strategic operational enhancements, and process automation has been acknowledged, leading to the emergence of the notion of intelligent enterprises in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Saudi et al., 2019:364). The pursuit of a sustainable and value-driven economy is driving initiatives aimed at establishing sophisticated networks, implementing computerised innovative startup systems, utilising sensory techniques in agriculture, and introducing automation in physical products for small and medium-sized enterprises. According to Saudi et al. (2019:364), the incorporation of 4IR technologies into the operations of businesses within the nation has the potential to address challenges related to insufficient access to food, clean water, energy, environmental sustainability, and holistic healthcare.

According to Herweijer et al. (2018:2), the preceding industrial revolutions have propelled economic progress, albeit at the cost of environmental degradation. Presently, there is an increasing agreement among the scientific community that the various systems of the Earth are experiencing unparalleled levels of strain. According to Steffen

et al. (2015), researchers at the Stockholm Environment Institute have determined that four of the Earth's nine 'planetary boundaries' have been surpassed, specifically those related to climate, biodiversity, land-system change, and biogeochemical cycles. The escalation of population to an estimated 9 billion by 2050 is anticipated to amplify risks, particularly concerning the augmented demand for food, materials, and energy. Simultaneously, contemporary society is experiencing increasing social and economic pressure due to factors such as rising inequality, unemployment among young people, automation, geopolitical instability, and nationalism (Herweijer et al., 2018:2).

The contemporary global challenges are delineated by the United Nations (UN) 17 Global Goals for Sustainable Development (UN, 2017; cf. Beukes, 2021:3). The SDGs, which were ratified by 193 nations in 2015, offer a comprehensive plan of action for the betterment of humanity and the environment until 2030. At present, there exists a favourable opportunity to leverage the transformative capabilities of the 4IR to facilitate the attainment of societal, governmental, and commercial objectives, rather than impede their realisation. The establishment of enabling mechanisms is crucial for governments and policymakers to ensure the sustainability of the 4IR. According to Herweijer et al. (2018), the advances and financial benefits resulting from the 4IR must prioritise the promotion of favourable social and environmental outcomes while simultaneously preventing the exacerbation of current pressing issues.

Youth involved in environmental issues

Contemporary youth are situated at the forefront of discussions concerning ecological (in)equity, inter-generational environmental awareness, and climate change rhetoric and actions (Beukes, 2021:1). Comprehending the direct impact of the climate crisis on the youth population in South Africa is of utmost importance. The youth will be subject to a notable and tangible physical impact as a

result of variables such as increasing temperatures. This phenomenon has a significant impact on both water security and agriculture. The occurrence of floods and droughts can result in physical harm to infrastructure, such as buildings and roads, while also leading to food scarcity and hunger (Beukes, 2021:2). The contemporary context is marked by the adverse impact of climate change on children and young individuals. As a result, the conventional notion of children being relegated to a passive role has been challenged by the present-day youth (Beukes, 2021:1). The aforementioned statement posits that the younger generation is likely to bear the consequences of greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), pollution, and other environmental hazards, as per the findings of Chersich et al. (2019:615).

I have argued in various other publications that numerous youth movements worldwide, including but not limited to '*Fridays for Future*', '*Sunrise*' and '*Extinction Rebellion*' have begun to recognise this issue. Furthermore, they have taken measures to ensure that this pivotal challenge remains a prominent topic on the international agenda of diverse political figures, nations, religious institutions, and other relevant entities. Moreover, the younger generation has begun to take on proactive roles as agents of change. This is due to their recognition of the imperative to proactively tackle the climate crisis as agents of resolution rather than as passive recipients of its consequences. Drawing upon Han and Ahn's (2020:2) perspective, it can be argued that the younger generation can be considered as the future environmental caretakers.

There is a growing trend of youth movements and activism worldwide, particularly in relation to concerns surrounding ecology, climate change, and environmental injustice. Greta Thunberg, a youth activist from Sweden, is actively engaged in an ongoing campaign to address environmental injustice and climate change issues in Europe. According to Beukes (2021:4), the '*How dare you*' speech delivered by Greta Thunberg, was directed towards world leaders for their inaction during the United Nations climate

change summit in September 2019. The speech generated opposing viewpoints. The speech delivered by Greta had a significant impact on the worldwide conversation regarding the subject of climate change and its relation to youth, as evidenced by its widespread influence within a few months (Beukes 2021:4). Greta Thunberg's activism pertaining to environmental concerns and the resultant social movement it has generated is a subject of significant scholarly interest. At the age of 15, she made the decision to abstain from attending school on Fridays. She opted to spend Fridays outside the Swedish parliament (Stoecklin 2021:1). The objective of the demonstration was to advocate for more robust governmental measures concerning the issue of climate change. Subsequently, other students emulated her actions and proceeded to participate in the public demonstrations (Stoecklin 2021:1). They initiated a school climate protest movement called '*Fridays for Future*'.

What I further want to highlight is how digital media, social media, technology and the 4IR have played a crucial role in creating awareness and consciousness amongst young people worldwide. Due to this, how the movement has extended beyond the boundaries of a town, country and continent. Since Greta Thunberg's 2018 address at the UN's Climate Conference, there has been a rise in youth opposition globally (Stoecklin, 2021). According to Boulianne, Lalancette and Ilkiw (2020:208), there were multiple coordinated multi-city demonstrations in 2019, each involving over a million students. Such was the influence that a single youth advocate and the 4IR had, hence this chapter investigates the role and influence that social media and 4IR have had and might have on the youths' environmental knowledge, awareness, conscience, and activism on and within the environmental discourse.

Similarly, within South Africa, the South African Youth Climate Movement witnessed a substantial surge in participation and garnered substantial media attention in June 2019 (Mjiyakho et al., 2021). According to Postman and Hendricks (2019), on the 14th of June 2019, the youth took to

the streets in Pretoria and Cape Town, calling for immediate and urgent action from the government in response to the climate crises. The protest that ensued was a sequel to a march that took place on 15 March 2019 and was instigated by the African Climate Youth Alliance. Numerous youths from various regions of South Africa actively participated in advocating for environmental equity. Throughout history, the youth of South Africa have demonstrated a formidable capacity to advance a movement, as evidenced by the work of Booysen (2016).

Similar to the case of Greta Thunberg in Europe, Ayakha Melithafa, a youth climate activist hailing from the Western Cape region of South Africa, has garnered significant attention, as reported by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2020. Her contribution to raising awareness about the notable climate issues in South Africa has been noteworthy. She also gained attention for her participation alongside Greta Thunberg and other global teenagers in a petition to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The petition aimed to hold five of the world's most influential economic powers responsible for their lack of action in addressing the climate crisis, as documented by UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) in 2019. Ayakha Melithafa participated in the World Economic Forum held in Davos, Switzerland in January 2020, where she shared the platform with Greta Thunberg (cf. WEF, 2020:3). Melithafa together with the South African youth were calling for governmental recognition of the existence of a climate crisis. Additionally, they advocated for an abrupt termination of coal, oil, and gas extraction in South Africa.

The youth and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

The emergence of the 4IR ought not to be misconstrued as a complete negation of the significance of human labour but should rather be regarded as undergoing an evolutionary transformation (Saviotti & Metcalfe, 2018). A study conducted by Mhlongo and Ssemugabi (2020), investigated the readiness of South African youth (aged 18–35) in relation to the 4IR. The study revealed that a significant proportion of the youth

participants in the sample were able to operate a computer without requiring assistance. Furthermore, it has been determined that the digital literacy proficiency of young individuals is situated at a level of literacy that enables them to perform routine tasks utilising any type of computing device. Overall, the majority of participants in the survey exhibit proficiency in traversing websites with varying content and evaluating online information with a critical eye rather than accepting it at the surface level. According to Mhlongo and Ssemugabi (2020:138), the respondents demonstrated e-skills that were marginally higher than the average level. This implies that the younger generation has a moderate level of preparedness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution in terms of their digital literacy and e-skills.

Moreover, the utilisation of social media platforms appeared to be widely favoured among the youth participants. Participants were requested to indicate their frequency of use for 10 social media platforms, including WhatsApp, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Pinterest, Twitter (now called X), WeChat, Viber and YouTube, using a scale with three possible values ranging from 0 (Never) to 2 (Always). The findings of the study revealed that WhatsApp emerged as the most widely utilised social media platform, with all participants reporting having engaged with this particular platform. Moreover, the participants reported that they consistently utilise Facebook (72.2%) and WhatsApp (88%). Conversely, a significant proportion of participants reported that they do not utilise LinkedIn (69.4%), Pinterest (70.1%), WeChat (73.1%) or Viber (95.4%). The findings of Mhlongo and Ssemugabi's (2020) study reveal that a significant proportion of participants reported using YouTube (64.8%) and Twitter (73.1%) on an occasional basis. The findings derived from this segment of the research investigation suggest that the participants commonly integrate social media platforms into their daily routines. As a result, it can be inferred that social media usage is prevalent among the respondents.

The role of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and social media on environmental awareness

In general, social media platforms are effectively contributing towards the advocacy and implementation of diverse environmental concerns. Robelia et al. (2011) assert that social media platforms are highly active with regard to topics such as global warming, renewable energy, climate change and solid waste management news, with a significant number of individuals, particularly the younger generation, participating in these discussions. The advent of technology has enabled individuals to modify their actions and engage in environmentally sustainable practices. However, despite these advancements, individuals have failed to keep pace with the rapid environmental changes occurring both locally and globally due to the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources. The utilisation of social media has emerged as a significant mechanism for enabling public engagement in shaping or negating environmental policies implemented by governmental bodies and corporate entities that have far-reaching implications. Warner et al. (2014) have established a platform that enables individuals to engage with regional environmental issues and comprehend their implications on a global scale.

The use of social media has become a crucial means of marketing and communication for various entities such as government bodies, youth movements, public and private organisations, NGOs, autonomous bodies and other institutes, worldwide. This platform serves as a tool for promoting their organisational mission, vision, publications, events, actions, and initiatives. Individuals frequently utilise social media platforms to disseminate real-time photographs of diverse environmental concerns, including but not limited to water, air, soil, noise, solid waste pollution, chemical or oil spills in waterways, forest fires, plastic pollution, illegal dumping, and the impact on flora and fauna. The expeditious detection of an environmental occurrence and the timely intervention of relevant environmental agencies can be facilitated by

a straightforward, yet efficacious measure (Arbatani et al., 2016).

The younger generation demonstrates an aptitude towards technology. Therefore, the significance of modern technology and social media platforms should not be underestimated. Social media serves as a valuable platform for the youth to exchange information and promote awareness of pertinent issues. In South Africa, it has been effectively leveraged to advance the climate justice movement. Numerous adolescents have gained knowledge and awareness regarding the environmental crisis and its ramifications through online browsing and engagement on social media platforms. Social media platforms are utilised more frequently by young activists to exert influence on other disengaged youth (Beukes, 2021:6).

Conclusion

In my prior publications, I have posited that while there has been a surge in youth advocacy, it is imperative to recognise the lack of youth representation in global politics. However, despite their significant representation in the population of several nations, particularly in Africa, the youth are frequently excluded from environmental and climate change policy formulation and implementation. The individual exhibits a growing sense of social and environmental consciousness and possesses the capacity and vigour to significantly transform our communities towards a future that is both low-carbon and resilient to climate change. This chapter bolsters my prior contention to a greater extent, as the 4IR is advancing at an accelerated pace propelled by exponential computational capabilities, the internet, mobile infrastructure, and worldwide competition. In contrast, it is common for governance structures to operate at a slower pace, utilising more traditional and manual methods. Hence, there exists a possibility for the delay of governance, policy, and regulation in keeping up with emerging systems, industries, and solutions within the context of the 4IR. However, while

government delays, the climate crises increase. The younger generation, possessing advanced technological expertise and proficiencies, is optimally situated to contribute to governance, leadership frameworks, and communities.

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Chapter 10

Towards the demarginalisation of African youth: Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want – a golden opportunity or a pie in the sky?

Jacques Beukes 

Abstract

The phrase ‘*pie in the sky*’ is commonly employed to denote an appealing concept or idea that is unlikely to come to fruition. This chapter undertakes a critical examination of Aspiration 6 of the African development agenda, Agenda 2063, which is titled ‘The Africa We Want’. Aspiration 6 outlines the vision of a people-centred Africa, which leverages the potential of its citizens, particularly women and youth, while prioritising the well-being of children. The aforementioned schedule incorporates a strategic plan, an implementation plan, and a framework for monitoring and assessing progress, with the initial evaluation milestone set for 2023. This chapter investigates the potential of Agenda 2063 as a means of addressing the marginalisation of youth in Africa, or to determine if it can be considered a missed opportunity.

Introduction

The Pan-African movement is a socio-political movement aimed at achieving self-governance for African nations and fostering solidarity among individuals of African descent globally. During the 20th century, the Pan-African movement initiated the pursuit of African inclusion (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018:142). The movement advocated for the liberation and restoration of the dignity of both Africans and those of

African heritage, standing against injustices such as racial exploitation, colonialism, and slavery (Britannica, 2003).

Agenda 2063 is founded on the principles of Pan-Africanism and the African Renaissance, with the aim being to establish a comprehensive structure for effectively addressing historical injustices. Agenda 2063 reflects the Pan-African imperative that the African continent must consolidate its efforts towards achieving its rebirth. The present Agenda is a product of the evolution of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) and posits that Africa is anticipating the forthcoming half-century. Known as 'The Africa We Want', the Agenda 2063 document encapsulates the collective aspirations for the continent.

Furthermore, Agenda 2063 represents an internally derived, collaborative strategic framework aimed at fostering equitable economic expansion and environmentally conscious progress towards African transformation. It builds upon the historical Pan-African movement that advocated for self-governance, liberation, progress, and communal well-being. The objective is to mobilise and unify individuals of African descent, both within the continent and in the diaspora, utilising Africa's inherent resources such as its historical and cultural background, as well as its strategic geographical location, to achieve fair and community-focused progress and advancement. This includes the elimination of poverty; the establishment of social resources, infrastructure, and public services; the solidification of long-lasting peace, harmony and safety; the creation of operative and robust developing states, participating and responsible institutes; and the empowerment of young people and women. These initiatives collectively pave the way for fostering an African renaissance (African Union Commission [AUC], 2015a:17–19). The Agenda not only encompasses the Pan-African vision but also delineates seven pivotal objectives that will facilitate Africa's advancement to the subsequent stage. In consideration of the restricted purview of this chapter, my attention will be exclusively devoted to Aspiration 6, which envisages 'an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential

of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children’.

Over the last two decades, there has been a noticeable increase in international apprehension over the prospects of the younger generation, with special attention directed toward the African continent. The United Nations has consistently advocated for the involvement and expression of young individuals. Nonetheless, a significant milestone came with the World Programme of Action for Youth, which marked a crucial turning point in creating a framework that highlighted 15 key areas of focus. This framework functions as a comprehensive guide for implementing policies both at national and global levels, all to enhance the overall well-being of young people. The emphasis on the youth demographic has been consistently highlighted across numerous United Nations gatherings and endeavours. These include the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September 2015; Youth-SWAP in 2013, which expands on the World Programme of Action for Youth and is supervised by the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development; the Secretary-General’s declaration of a Five-Year Action Agenda in 2012; and the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development in 2010, which further underscores the significance of youth, positioning them as a pivotal component of the new worldwide development plan.

Aligned with its global perspective, the African Union (AU), functioning as a regional organisation, announced the Year of the African Youth in 2008. Subsequently, the announcement was amended as it was prolonged to become the African Youth Decade (2009–2018) with the objective of expediting the process of empowering young people for the purpose of sustainable development. The aforementioned statements are supported by various policies of the AU. These include the African Youth Charter which became effective in 2009, the African Youth Declaration on the Post-2015 Development Agenda from 2012, the African Union Commission Strategic Plan 2014–2017 from 2013, and Agenda 2063 which was introduced in 2015.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this chapter is to determine whether Agenda 2063 could be proposed as a tool or whether it is already a missed chance – ‘a pie in the sky’ – for the demarginalisation of youth in Africa.

A Concise Summary of Agenda 2063

The concept of Agenda 2063 was introduced at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Organisation of African Unity/African Union in 2013. It was later officially ratified during the ‘24th Ordinary Session of the African Heads of State and Government’ in 2015, held in Addis Ababa (Tella, 2018). Tella highlights that Agenda 2063 acknowledges both the historical accomplishments and challenges of the African continent while underscoring the importance of Africa’s rightful position in the larger worldwide framework. The framework aims to utilise the knowledge gained from the previous five decades to steer Africa towards a trajectory of development in the subsequent five decades, with the overarching goal of establishing a flourishing and prosperous Africa by the year 2063 (Tella, 2018:716). DeGhetto et al. (2016:94) assert that the strategic plan has the objective of bringing about a change in Africa’s approach, shifting it to being more people-centred. This involves expanding its scope and scale, while also improving its governance, performance outcomes, and its ability to positively influence its citizens.

As described by Tella (2018:716), Agenda 2063 operates as a prescriptive and tactical structure meticulously designed to steer Africa towards progress and advancement, with the ultimate goal of establishing a global presence within the next fifty years. The statement highlights a call to individuals of African origin and descent, urging them to embrace personal responsibility for the continent’s future, serving as the principal catalysts for progress and development (AUC 2015a:13). The statement underscores the importance of dedication from individuals, authoritative figures, governing bodies, and establishments at national, regional, and

continental levels. Their collective action, collaboration, and synchronised efforts are crucial for achieving this goal.

Tella (2018:716) points out that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were formulated without sufficient input from the African population. In contrast, Agenda 2063 provides the people of Africa with the chance to take responsibility for their own developmental agenda. The formulation of this agenda has been shaped through extensive consultations with influential African role-players and previous development agendas, such as the Lagos Plan of Action (1980), the Abuja Treaty (1991), and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (AUC, 2015c) The participation of various beneficiaries and interested parties, such as the youth, women, civil society organisations, research institutions, governmental bodies, private enterprises, religious figures, media outlets, and other relevant parties, cultivates a sense of ownership and endorsement for the initiative.

Utilising previous development agendas mitigates the risk of duplicating prior errors. DeGhetto et al. (2016) delineate the roadmap into three distinct components: 'the strategic plan, the implementation plan, and the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework'. It is designed to achieve goals in the short-term (within 10 years), medium-term (within 10–25 years), and long-term (within 25–50 years).

The primary emphasis during the initial decade comprises:

- sustainable and inclusive economic growth;
- human capital development;
- agriculture and value-added agro-business;
- industrialization/manufacturing and value additions to natural resources;
- employment generation;
- social protection;
- gender/women's development and youth empowerment;
- good governance, including capable institutions;
- infrastructural development;

- science, technology and innovation;
- peace and security; and
- culture, arts and sports (AUC 2015b:n.p.).

Agenda 2063 incorporates an evaluation and monitoring mechanism to incentivise efficient supervision of development outcomes, foster accountability, facilitate complete integration, and promote active engagement and ownership by states (AUC, 2015b). The plan seeks to galvanise the African populace and foster a sense of ownership over the initiatives. It also endeavours to promote self-sufficiency and self-funding of developmental endeavours; guarantee conscientious, receptive, and answerable states and establishments in the region; and underscore the importance of regional economic communities in expediting the process of continental unification.

To summarise, Agenda 2063 outlines the following factors as facilitators of African transformation:

- The people's ownership and mobilisation;
- African resources to finance its development;
- Accountable leadership and responsive institutions;
- Capable and democratic developmental states and institutions;
- Changed attitudes and mindsets;
- A Pan-African perspective;
- Ownership of the African narrative and brand; and
- An African approach to development and transformation (AUC, 2015a:19–20.)

The comprehensiveness of the blueprint is apparent in its consideration of various issues. These include, but are not limited to, youth, gender, education, technology, climate, agriculture, and the environment.

The Agenda recognises the need for a profound shift in Africa's perspective to achieve its envisioned future outcomes. The elements mentioned above encompass crucial aspects, such as the involvement of citizens, the unification of communication, global matters, and responsibility for

outcomes (AUC, 2015a:50; DeGhetto et al., 2016:94). The Agenda further emphasises the need for accelerating regional integration to facilitate the empowerment of individuals of African descent to have control over their own future. The attainment of this objective can be realised through the revival of African endeavours and political leadership, which include solidarity, determination, and sacrifice – qualities that were once prominent. This revival, especially among the youth of Africa, will empower the continent to confront the contemporary challenges it faces (AUC, 2015a:49).

The Agenda is guided by the overarching vision of the AU and encompasses distinct aspirations. The statement advocates for the Pan-African perspective of a unified, thriving, and harmonious Africa. This vision is driven by its own people and positions the continent as a dynamic and prominent entity in the global arena (AUC, 2015a:1). Furthermore, Agenda 2063 comprises seven key aspirations, namely:

1. A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development.
2. An integrated continent, politically united and based on the ideals of Pan-Africanism and the vision of Africa's Renaissance.
3. An Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice, and the rule of law.
4. An Africa that is peaceful and secure.
5. An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values, and ethics.
6. An Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential of African people, especially its women and youth, and caring for children.
7. Africa as a unified, powerful, and influential global player and partner.

A snapshot of Aspiration 6

The sixth aspiration of Agenda 2063 envisions a future Africa in which African women are granted complete empowerment across all domains, including equal political, social, and

economic rights. This includes the right to own and pass down assets and belongings, execute agreements, and establish and operate commercial enterprises. Furthermore, the aspiration aims to ensure that productive resources such as land, loans, inputs, and financial services are readily accessible to women in rural areas. The core objective is the complete eradication of discrimination and violence based on gender, spanning economics, social, and political spheres, and directed towards women and girls. This commitment will enable them to exercise their fundamental human rights without any hindrance. The elimination of detrimental social customs, for example, female genital mutilation (FGM), underage marriages, and obstacles to the provision of quality healthcare and education for females, is also a focal point (AUC, 2015a:10–11). The overarching aim is to create a future in which African women are empowered, protected, and free to fully contribute to and benefit from their societies.

The Agenda postulates that by the year 2063, complete gender parity will be achieved, with women holding a minimum of half of the selected and appointed public posts at all levels of society, as well as fifty percent of management roles in both the private and public sectors. Such measures will effectively break down the economic and political obstacles that hinder the advancement of women. Additionally, the Agenda recognises that achieving the complete involvement of women in all facets of human endeavours and the empowerment of both women and youth are fundamental prerequisites for any society to reach its utmost potential. This vision reflects a commitment to creating a society where women and youth are not only equal partners but also active contributors in shaping the future (AUC, 2015a:14).

African youth and the current context

The definition of ‘youth’ in an African context poses a challenge due to the diverse national policies implemented across various African nations. Table 10.1 illustrates the

different definitions of youth, which complicates how to define African youth.

Table 10.1: Illustration of various definitions of ‘youth’

Country or organisation	Defining ‘youth’	As in/per source:
World Health Organisation (organisation)	10–29	World Report on Violence and Health: Youth Violence
World Bank (organisation)	15–24	African Development Indicators 2008/2009: Youth and Employment in Africa
United Nations (organisation)	15–24	UNFPA Framework for Action on Adolescents and Youth
The Commonwealth (organisation)	15–29	Commonwealth Youth Programme
South Africa (country)	14–35	National Youth Policy
Sierra Leone (country)	15–35	National Youth Policy
Nigeria (country)	18–35	National Youth Policy
Mozambique (country)	15–35	National Youth Policy
Morocco (country)	15–29	Ministry of Youth and Sports
Kenya (country)	15–30	National Youth Policy
African Union (organisation)	15–35	African Youth Charter

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) (2017:1), Africa’s estimated population of individuals aged between 15 and 24 years old was approximately 229.6 million, constituting about 19.4% of the total population. Additionally, children under the age of 15 years accounted for 40.9% of the overall population, with a recorded figure of around 486 million.

What sets Africa apart is its distinctive demographic trend compared to other global regions. While many regions have witnessed stabilisation or decline in the percentage of young individuals within the population, Africa's youth demographic is on the rise. Projections indicate that by 2030, the population of individuals aged 15 to 24 years old will increase to around 331.4 million, making up about 19.7% of the continent's population.

Africa boasts the most youthful population globally, and this demographic is expanding at a significant pace. The size of the youth population in Africa is set to have a substantial impact on the trajectory of the continent's development. It will determine the array of opportunities, possibilities, and constraints available to this demographic cohort.

Another concern that arises with Agenda 2063, as with many other policy discourses, is the inclination to the tendency to see the 'youth' as a uniform entity (homogenous group), disregarding the significant variation and diversity this cohort is characterised by (Anyidoho et al., 2012; Sumberg et al., 2012). Age categories exhibit variations in that the term 'youth' encompasses diverse phases of maturation, such as the latter part of childhood, teenage years, and initial adulthood, which also imply distinct obstacles concerning education, employment, and familial responsibilities. Gender is a significant factor that distinguishes the experiences of young individuals, particularly in relation to their educational and financial circumstances. Hence, the task of referring to the demographic of young individuals and females, while addressing their respective needs, presents an additional level of difficulty.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 emphasise the significance of advancing the rights and fulfilling the requirements of young people, in all their heterogeneity. The effective execution of the transformative agenda in Africa is contingent upon the active involvement of the youth demographic. Attaining these

ambitions necessitates comprehending the requirements, inclinations, obstacles, and capabilities of the youth in Africa.

NEET and youth marginalisation in Africa

The acronym NEET represents the category of young individuals who are ‘**N**ot in **E**mployment, **E**ducation or **T**raining’, which significantly contributes to the marginalisation of youth. The situation of young people who are marginalised is a matter of universal concern and impact. The topic in question was addressed at an international conference organised by the Columbia Global Policy Initiative (Offerdahl et al., 2014:16). Attendees at the conference observed that the youth demographic has a heightened susceptibility to economic upheavals, societal unrest, and hostilities, and despite the widespread progress made in other age cohorts, the youth often find themselves marginalised.

Offerdahl et al. (2014:17) highlight that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) contends that a percentage of young individuals, specifically one out of ten, face developmental obstacles as they are no longer enrolled in educational institutions. Furthermore, as noted by Offerdahl et al. (2014:9), despite the increasing emphasis on youth rights, their representation in decision-making forums where they should be valued and engaged members of society is limited. This aspect can be understood through the lens that adolescents are in a transitional phase towards adulthood, which can limit their capacity to actively participate in efforts aimed at reducing marginalisation. Additionally, adolescents often face societal labelling as disorderly, defiant, and undependable members of their respective societies.

Likewise, Beukes and Van der Westhuizen (2018:1) point out that present-day society tends to view African youth as a disadvantaged and marginalised group. This perception stems from several underlying factors, with poverty, unemployment, and exclusion standing out as the three main contributors. The perspective mentioned above is substantiated by diverse research discoveries and statistical data pertaining to the

marginalisation of young individuals from educational, occupational, and/or vocational prospects, commonly referred to as NEET (Beukes & Van der Westhuizen, 2018:1; cf. Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2017).

The RSA National Youth Policy reports various societal issues that result in the marginalisation of the country's youth. These issues include elevated incidence of attrition ('dropouts') seen inside educational establishments, insufficient fostering of skill development, inadequate provision of youth employment opportunities and services, substandard health and medical conditions and treatments, a significant rate of HIV infection and or AIDS, elevated levels of addiction to substances, criminal activities and misconduct, gangsterism and violence, restricted availability to cultural and sporting activities, deficient social integration and cohesion, low engagement in volunteer work, and discrimination, exclusion and marginalisation of individuals with disabilities (RSA, 2015).

Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) (2015:7) highlights that the youth in South Africa are facing escalating levels of uncertainty and disillusionment concerning their potential to secure fulfilling employment prospects. This atmosphere of uncertainty and disillusionment may lead to adverse consequences for people, neighbourhoods (or townships), economies, and the community at large, as underscored by Offerdahl et al. (2014:6). Concerning employment, employers frequently display hesitancy in hiring young individuals without experience, and especially those hailing from underprivileged and disadvantage backgrounds face additional discrimination and preconception (Kousiakis, 2015:2). This tendency persists despite the recognition that young people are in a developmental phase where they hold the potential to act as catalysts for transformation, as indicated by RSA (2015:25). Individuals possess the ability to introduce novel concepts with a unique perspective and are poised to assume leadership roles in the communities they inhabit. In the present challenging scenario faced by underprivileged youth who are striving to secure employment, the objective

is not solely to attain a job, but also to foster hope for a brighter future.

It is noteworthy that young individuals who are without employment are comparatively less capable of making significant contributions towards the progress of their country and have limited avenues of exercising their civic rights and privileges. According to StatsSA (2015:3), individuals belonging to this demographic possess reduced consumer spending power, limited savings investment opportunities, and frequently lack the ability to effect change within their personal and communal spheres. This depiction of the negligible impact of youth unemployment is a cause for concern, given that South Africa is ranked alongside Greece and Spain as one of the three nations grappling with the highest youth unemployment rates globally (Kousiakis, 2015:1; World Economic Forum [WEF], 2014:14). Two factors that contribute to the elevated unemployment rates are socio-economic inequality and insufficient education.

Delving further into the current NEET statistics of African youth, it becomes apparent that approximately 20.8% of the African youth population did not participate in education, employment, or training during the year 2021. The prevalence of NEET has shown a modest rise across the African continent. In 2012, about 20.4% of individuals aged 15–24 years were not involved in employment, education, or training. This percentage had increased to 20.8% by 2021.

Furthermore, a noticeable gender disparity of around 10 percentage points in the prevalence of NEET status among young women has emerged since 2018. It is apparent that despite the implementation of Agenda 2063 in 2013 and its evaluation in terms of both women and youth empowerment and development (Aspiration 6), the annual increase in NEET statistics remains conspicuous.

The National Planning Commission (NPC) (2012:26) has identified that social and economic stability and development are at risk due to education challenges, poverty, youth unemployment, and social unrest. The categorisation of

unemployed youths as marginalised youths is a result of the various social issues that are associated with unemployment. These issues include 'poverty, crime, gangsterism, drug and alcohol abuse, poor health, exclusion, loss of self-esteem, and confidence' (Rankin et al., 2012:5). A considerable proportion of the youth population has experienced demotivation in their pursuit of employment opportunities. Unemployment and limited opportunities can result in long-term marginalisation, particularly for young individuals residing in underprivileged environments. Rankin et al. (2012) made a concerning statement regarding the impact of long-term unemployment on individuals. The authors suggest that prolonged unemployment, coupled with poverty and social challenges, can further hinder the ability of young people to escape poverty and integrate into mainstream society. This is particularly evident when individuals remain unemployed for a period exceeding three years.

Acknowledging the marginalising factors previously discussed and underscoring the importance of addressing youth marginalisation, the National Youth Policy (RSA, 2015:3) recognises youth as an essential component of social development, with the potential to act as essential agents for economic expansion, innovation, and social change.

An evaluative analysis of Agenda 2063 and its current progress

Agenda 2063 underwent a thorough consultation process that engaged a diverse array of stakeholders. The stakeholders involved in the development of Africa include the private sector, African academics and think tanks, civil society organisations, planning experts and development specialists, the African diaspora, youth, women, media representatives, faith-based organisations, former heads of state and government, the web-based general public at the continental level, sector ministries, regional economic communities, and other relevant entities. The commendable attribute of the Agenda lies in its incorporation of the perspectives

and contributions of these stakeholders during the formulation process.

It is probable that ownership of the aforementioned entity is shared among individuals of African descent from diverse backgrounds, residing both within the African continent and beyond its borders. Moreover, Agenda 2063 encompasses a wide range of diverse operational areas. From a geographical perspective, the matter pertains to the entire African continent, encompassing all 54 African nations and constituents of the African Union. Despite an extensive consultation process involving diverse stakeholders and widespread support from all countries, the realisation of Aspiration 6, in particular, remains a challenge. This challenge is evident in the escalating figures of gender-based violence, which have surged over the years and were aggravated during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly during the more stringent lockdown phases (levels 5 and 4).

The persistent increase in the number of African NEETs is a cause for concern, and the emphasis on youth integration is a trend that raises apprehension. Goal 18 of Agenda 2063 encompasses various targets that pertain to the establishment of socio-economic prospects for the youth. As per the Mo Ibrahim Foundation's (MIF) African Governance Report (2019), the indicator for Promoting Socio-economic Integration of Youth (2018) within the Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) (MIF, 2018) informs governmental endeavours towards establishing accessible programmes for the youth in the domains of education, housing, and/or employment.

As highlighted in the African Governance Report (MIF, 2019), the continent is currently experiencing a negative trajectory, with an average loss of -1.4% points since 2014. This phenomenon is characterised by a notable decrease in the economic performance of a group of nations, specifically those recorded in 2013, during the period spanning from 2014 to 2017. Out of the total number of countries under consideration, merely 11 have exhibited progress, whereas

the remaining 30 nations have not undergone any discernible transformation. The socio-economic integration of youth is of paramount importance for the future of Africa, given that approximately 60% of its populace was under the age of 25 in 2019. The African Governance Report (MIF, 2019) indicates that the prominent concern emphasised by the foundation in 2017 underscores the need for dedicated leadership and strong governance in Africa. These factors are essential to pave the way for a prosperous and peaceful future for the continent's youth.

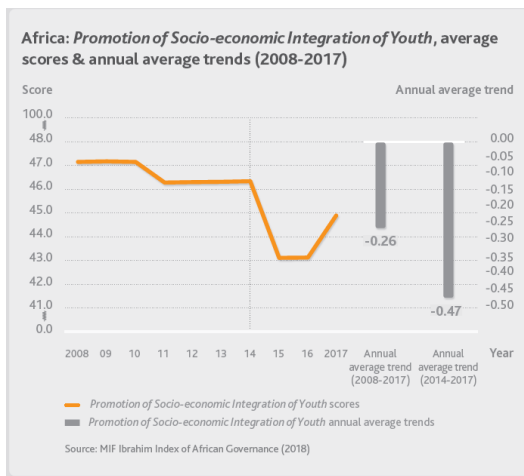


Figure 10.1: Promotion of socio-economic integration of youth. (Source: MIF – Ibrahim Index of African Governance 2018)

As noted by the AUC (2015b:92), the advancement of women's representation in parliament in Africa is inadequate. This deficiency arises from the fact that in several African nations, women typically constitute a minority in crucial parliamentary committees responsible for drafting bills that eventually become law. In relation to the MDGs and the reduction of poverty, the African continent displays a shortfall in one of the most crucial metrics, namely gender parity. The restricted control of authority by the male political establishment, insufficient political determination, socio-

economic challenges, the lack of recognition for unpaid care and household labour, and entrenched patriarchal customs and beliefs continue to impede the meaningful and official participation of women in governance, peace, security, and development processes. The Agenda aims to address this phenomenon as it recognises that the continent’s ambitious objectives cannot be achieved while hindering the progress of a dynamic segment of the populace, namely women, from attaining their full potential (AUC, 2015a:93). Notwithstanding, empirical data and numerical values indicate that the youth and female demographic remain inadequately represented within decision-making frameworks.

Another significant concern lies in the age and length of service of government leaders, which will be explored and discussed in more detail.

Table 10.2 lists the top 20 oldest leaders in Africa in 2017.

Table 10.2: Top 20 oldest leaders in Africa, 2017

Name	Country	Age
Abselaziz Bouteflika	Algeria	80
Akufo Addo	Ghana	73
Alassane Ouattara	Cote d’Ivoire	75
Alpha Conde	Guinea	79
Beji Caid Essebsi	Tunisia	91
Denis Ngueso	Congo	74
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	Liberia	79
Hage Geingob	Namibia	76
Ibrahim Boubacar Keita	Mali	72
Ismail Omar Guelleh	Djibouti	71
Jacob Zuma (Until 2018)	South Africa	75
Jose Eduardo dos Santos	Angola	75
Mohammadu Buhari	Nigeria	74

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Name	Country	Age
Omar Al-Bashir	Sudan	73
Pakalitha Mosilili	Lesotho	73
Paul Biya	Cameroon	84
Peter Mutharika	Malawi	77
Robert Mugabe (Until 2018)	Zimbabwe	93
Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo	Equatorial Guinea	75
Yoweri Museveni	Uganda	73

(Source: Amupanda, 2018:57–58)

The African continent offers numerous instances that demonstrate how leaders of African liberation movements viewed post-independence Africa as a personal achievement, earned through their heroic efforts. It was emphasised that the populace, particularly the younger generation, should express gratitude towards and commemorate the efforts of the individuals who fought for independence, and refrain from disrupting their governance. As of 2017, it remains a fact that Africa is home to the world's most aged political leaders (cf. Amupanda, 2018:56–59). In order to provide appropriate context and demonstrate the self-perceived suitability of African liberation leaders for governance in Africa, it is imperative to conduct a comparative analysis between the aforementioned information presented in Table 10.2 and the data presented in Table 10.3, which pertains to the leaders with the most extensive tenures (Amupanda, 2018:57–58). According to Table 10.3, it can be observed that a significant number of Africa's most senior leaders are also the ones who have held their positions for the longest periods.

Table 10.3: Africa's longest-serving leaders

Name	Country	Years in office
Denis Sassou Nguesso	Congo	20
Idris Deby	Chad	27
Isaias Afwerki	Eritrea	26
Jose Eduardo dos Santos	Angola	38
Omar Al-Bashir	Sudan	28
Paul Biya	Cameroon	42
Paul Kagame	Rwanda	23
Robert Mugabe	Zimbabwe	37
Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo	Equatoria Guinea	38
Yoweri Museveni	Uganda	31

(Source: Amupanda, 2018:58)

Throughout history, African political leaders have often sidelined discussions and considerations related to youth issues. Consequently, if matters concerning the youth are marginalised, it is plausible that the engagement of young individuals in politics would be further diminished in the eyes of African political leaders. A closer examination of how African governments have established ministries dedicated to youth affairs can offer insights into these leaders' attitudes towards the youth. Therefore, it is imperative to provide a brief illustration (Table 10.4).

Table 10.4: Youth ministries in different African countries

Country	Youth ministry
Angola	Youth and Sports
Burkina Faso	Youth, Professional Education and Employment
Cameroon	Youth Affairs and Civic Education
DRC	Youth and Sports
Ethiopia	Youth and Sports
Gabon	Youth and Sports
Kenya	Public Service, Youth and Gender Affairs
Lesotho	Gender and Youth, Sports and Recreation
Liberia	Youth and Sports
Mali	Youth and Citizenship building
Namibia	Youth, Sports and National Service
Nigeria	Youth Development
Rwanda	Youth and ICT
Senegal	Youth, Employment and Promotion of Civic Values
South Africa	Women, the Youth and Persons with Disabilities
Sudan	Youth and Sports
The Gambia	Youth and Sports
Togo	Basic Development, Crafts, Youth and Youth Employment
Tunisia	Youth, Sports, Women and Families
Uganda	Youth and Children Affairs
Zimbabwe	Youth, Indigenization and Economic Empowerment

(Source: Amupanda, 2018:68)

The selected examples of African nations outlined above suggest a prevailing perception among many African leaders

that views youth primarily as entertainers, engaging in activities like football, dance, and musical performances during national events (Amupanda, 2018:69–69). In numerous African nations, youth ministries are commonly integrated with recreational activities, sports, national service, or civic education due to this rationale. With only a few exceptions, this illustrates that young individuals are often seen as a peripheral concern. Therefore, it is clear that the younger generation is excluded from the process of shaping the continental agenda. The marginalisation of young people and its ensuing consequences can be attributed to unresponsive policy environments and the exclusion of youth from mainstream political participation.

Conclusion

Agenda 2063 functions as a comprehensive strategic framework designed to bring about a profound transformation in Africa. Its overarching goal is to facilitate the continent's growth and development, ultimately positioning it to match its global stature by the year 2063. The document outlines the future objectives and targets that the African continent is expected to achieve by the year 2063. Furthermore, Agenda 2063 incorporates a monitoring and evaluation framework to mitigate the potential for repeating past mistakes, even though a comprehensive assessment of the initiative is planned for the year 2063. To ensure effective monitoring and evaluation, a framework comprising short-term (10 years), medium-term (10–25 years), and long-term (25–50 years) objectives has been established. Consequently, the first round of monitoring and evaluation was scheduled to take place in the year 2023.

Moreover, this chapter emphasises the contemporary circumstances in which African youth are situated. It highlighted the absence of female and youth representation in government or decision-making structures, along with the continued marginalisation of young people, despite the emphasis on people-driven development envisioned by

Aspiration 6, which relies on the potential of African people, particularly women and children.

Although Agenda 2063 has been proposed as a potential instrument or strategy to facilitate youth inclusion, given its prioritisation of gender advancement and youth empowerment, this chapter argues that despite well-intentioned policies, young people remain largely on the fringes and consequently, are still regarded as marginalised. While Agenda 2063 could have been positioned as a tool or policy to aid in the endeavour to demarginalise youth, considering its focus on gender and youth empowerment, a pivotal question remains: Is Agenda 2063 an opportunity missed, a mere aspiration without concrete results, or is it premature to draw such conclusions?

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Chapter 11

Liberating faith practices in an evolving African megacity: On transdisciplinarity, engaged scholarship and liberative pedagogies

Stephan de Beer 

Abstract

The explosion and complexity of African cities demand urgent and innovative action. Not only are urban dwellers across the continent challenged in terms of urban infrastructure, but policymakers and urbanists need to respond innovatively if Africa's urban futures are not all to be doomed.

African theologians have largely failed to engage urbanisation and related challenges in systematic, comprehensive and well-considered ways. This chapter considers the urgent necessity for liberating faith practices in responses to African cities, namely, faith practices that contribute to integral liberation and freedom of African cities and African urban dwellers, but that presupposes the liberation of faith practices, and the discipline of practical theology, themselves.

Departing from the lived experience of doing theology in an evolving African megacity – the Gauteng City-Region – it then proposes the expansion of the scope of African practical theologies, if we are to take African cities seriously, being shaped by a spiritual and theological method of liberation. It considers practical theology scholarship as engaged scholarship, and a liberating faith practice itself, fusing the elements of incarnation, imagination, innovation, impact

and collaboration; doing theology in transdisciplinary ways and practising the dual task of research as transformation, as well as liberative pedagogies. It concludes by asserting the city as a classroom and locale for doing engaged practical theological scholarship.

On liberation and freedom

In doing our theological work, I hold as a central motif, Paul's insistence in Galatians 5 verse 1, that it was for freedom that Christ has set us free.

The ministry of God's people should therefore align itself to this intention of Christ – for all people to be free, and, indeed, for all creation to be free from its bondage to decay (Romans 8:21).

Through his incarnate life, solidarity of suffering and death, and resurrection as rebellion against death, Christ sought to mediate the comprehensive liberation both of humankind and all of creation.

Gutierrez (1988:103) speaks of this as integral liberation – personal freedom from sin and communion with God; interpersonal freedom from dehumanisation; and systemic freedom from socio-economic-environmental and political shackles that subdue – indeed, enslave – us, our neighbourhoods and the entire creation to forces of death.

In all our theological commitments, theory-making, and actions, we have to measure our work in terms of how it facilitates liberating processes and spaces that could result in multiple freedoms for people, neighbourhoods and God's creation.

Further, our socio-pastoral accompaniment of people and communities, both inside and outside the faith community, should support and strengthen people, in the way Paul encourages us to 'not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery' (Galatians 5:1, New International Version).

Whatever enslaves a people (individuals, families or groups), a neighbourhood, a system, an institution, or a city, should be discerned and engaged in liberative ways that will cast down yokes of slavery or disablement. Only then can we think of our theological work as life-affirming, and death-protesting.

In African cities, we have our work cut out for us. Every imaginable form of mental, physical, psycho-social, economic, political, environmental, or spiritual enslavement, has squeezed the life out of people, cities, countries and regions for centuries – the result of colonial expansion and enslavement; paralysing international debt; successive forms of military dictatorship; postcolonial statism, privatising liberation for a small elite; famine and war; and, currently, urban migratory patterns far exceeding the capacity of local governments to provide appropriate infrastructure and services.

Yet, it is from every form of slavery or bondage to decay that Christ seeks to set us free. And upon freedom, the hard work of reconstructing us into a new people – with new psychology and new patterns of societal and inter-relational engagement – only starts. What are the theologies we need to foster to respond to centuries of enslavement, inscribed upon the psyche of a people, and landscapes across the continent? Do we have theologies potent enough to respond bravely, innovatively and convincingly to Africa's (urban) cry, or are we – upon the frankest of assessments – to be found bankrupt theologically?

Exploring faith in an evolving African megacity

How we do theology at the University of Pretoria should resist seeing our location as accidental. We are an African school of theology in what is part of an evolving African megacity, and both the gift of our locatedness, and the responsibility we have to steward it well, should be incorporated rather intentionally in how we do our theological work.

African cities today grow faster than cities on any other continent in the world (Parnell & Pieterse, 2014). Historically

being the slowest continent to urbanise, this has now changed, and by 2050, five of the world's largest twenty cities – Kinshasa, Lagos, Cairo, Dar es Salaam and Khartoum – will be on the African continent (Hoornweg & Pope, 2016:107).

Lagos only had a population of 200 000 in the early 1960s but today has more than 15 million people, and urban observers suggest that the growth of the past 60 years is nothing compared to what will occur in Lagos in the next 60 years (Vidal, 2018). The planning regime of the city of Kinshasa is the size of a city like George in South Africa with no more than 160 000 people, yet Kinshasa's population already stands at 14.3 million and is fast-growing. Its infrastructure is simply not keeping up with the vast rates of immigration. Long Africa's largest city, Cairo now has a population of 21 million and is projected to have 24 million inhabitants by 2030, with Lagos soon to surpass it (cf. Istanbul Africa Trade Company, 2018).

In all these cities, religion plays a critical role, and whereas in Kinshasa and Lagos the prominence of neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic churches – in conjunction with traditional mainstream Christianity and African-initiated churches – are dominant, in Cairo and Khartoum, Islam is the dominant religious expression, with a minority of Coptic Christians and Christians from other traditions in Cairo, and about 5% of the population in Khartoum belonging to Christian churches. Dar es Salaam has sizable Christian and Muslim populations, as well as adherents of animism. Whether and how faith engages the African city and its future – from a planning and policy perspective – not only accidentally but intentionally, is a matter for critical appreciation and reflection.

Considering the current limited planning capacity of many such exploding African cities, one holds one's breath as to the staggering effects, and challenges, such rapid urbanisation holds for the continent. Cities could be places of promise in which the dream of realised Sustainable Development Goals could be made true. Cities could also increasingly be cesspools

of enslavement, decay, marginalisation and complete human and environmental collapse.

The City of Tshwane (and Pretoria in it) forms part of an evolving African megacity, known as the Gauteng City-Region. Encompassing three metropolitan municipalities and several smaller municipalities, all fluidly meshing into each other, the Gauteng City-Region already has 15.8 million people and it is still evolving (Gauteng City-Region Observatory [GCRO], 2022).

It is in this city region that our Faculty of Theology and Religion at the University of Pretoria finds itself. Once one of the authors of apartheid theology, we now have an opportunity to contribute to the flourishing of communities in South Africa and on the continent, as part of our restitutive and transformative responsibilities.

If we are to be committed to the African continent, and the ongoing liberation of its people and ecosystems, African urban futures should be one of our key priorities, as soon the majority of Africans will reside in growing African cities.

This is a critical theological, moral and political imperative, which we will only ignore at our peril. If African cities are not attended to boldly, generously, innovatively and sufficiently, they might present large-scale risks to Africa's entire populace and future. Currently, theological schools at large lack such foresight and fail to reimagine themselves for the urban futures Africa is facing. We continue to peddle theological curricula that work(ed) for us and our traditions, without acknowledging that much of what we focus on today concerns a church that no longer (or hardly) exists.

Our theological work should discern the unfolding expressions of Christian faith that are mushrooming across the African urban landscape, often far removed from the theological emphases of mainstream theological education. Not only should these expressions be acknowledged and engaged with, both critically and constructively, but we should also ask how far we can offer theological support to them.

The content of our theological work should be to participate in various platforms where people reflect on African urbanism; seek to construct life-affirming, inclusive and just local urban alternatives; and build collaboratives and movements that resist death-dealing urban practices. This will be, by definition, political or public theology, deeply committed to the shalom of the African city, and participating as an equal partner in the scholarship around African urbanism.

Implicit to such theological engagement should be to explore faith in an African city. This might be several things:

- Theologically it is our task to engage in faith formation, of students and theologians alike, that will set people free to engage freely and joyfully with African urban realities.
- It will be descriptive of the multiplicity of faith responses and expressions in the African city, often in disjointed and non-networked ways.
- It will reflect critically on dominant faith practices in African cities, and identify, document and amplify liberative faith practices that demonstrate the good news of Christ's liberation in very concrete terms.
- It will not only consider faith practices that are liberating, but will also support the liberation of faith practices that are stale, at best, or oppressive and exclusivist, at worst.
- It will serve as an incubator for innovative and liberating city-making practices, accompanied by theory-making, critical reflection and continuous documentation. Theological engagement in city-making processes is a profoundly ethical and moral vocation, to discern and uproot the undergirding gods of the city that spell death, and to foster a spirit of inclusion, humanity, dignity and justice, instead.

Whereas the preceding focused on the practices of religious faith in relation to African cities, we also need to ask whether we as a collective indeed have faith in the city:

- 'Is there faith in the futures of African cities?'

- 'Where can faith in the (potential of the) African city be found?'
- 'What kind of faith is required?'
- 'How can such an urban faith be fostered and sustained?'

Centring African cities in our theological education is not to deny the vast reality of rural Africa. In fact, on this continent, the urban-rural umbilical cord has not yet been cut in ways similar to North America or Europe, and we cannot focus on African cities without attending to the debilitating conditions in many rural African places that result in people's flocking to African cities. In the UK, urban-rural mission was used for a long time, and this continuum needs to be acknowledged in Africa today, as we consider Africa's socio-economic-environmental well-being, much more deliberately, and theologically.

Liberating faith practices

What distinguishes practical theology from other theological disciplines, is its focus on faith practices (Viau, 1999:xv). Here, I speak of 'liberating faith practices' (cf. Ackerman & Bons-Storm 1998), both as faith practices that liberate, but also the task of liberating faith practices if they are characterised by being insular, sectarian, exclusivist, introverted, anti-urban, dated, life-denying or outright oppressive.

In the African city, large percentages of urban dwellers are incredibly marginalised, vulnerable or resource-poor. The realities of urban informal settlements, in which 62% of Africa's urban populations reside (cf. Pieterse & Simone, 2013:19–35), present enormous challenges to how we conceive appropriate faith practices, life-affirming and liberating.

In a context where the majority of the population lives precariously, how and where we locate ourselves and our theological engagement is of particular importance. Unless we remain committed only to serving a small middle-class or elite population at the top of the urban ladder.

If our theological work is committed to integral liberation, it might require us to reconsider the priorities of the sub-disciplines in practical theology, or, at least, where and how we practice them, and with whom. How do we practice practical theology in the (South) African city today, in a way that will contribute towards psycho-spiritual, social, economic, spatial, environmental, and political freedoms?

Historically, in my own faculty, the sub-disciplines of homiletics and liturgy, pastoral care and counselling, congregational development, youth ministry, and the diaconate, were always centred. At times, we were slightly forgetful of the diaconal, centring the inward disciplines that are not as focused on the world beyond our ecclesial walls.

Whereas these might remain important disciplinary foci, the content we give to these sub-disciplines is crucial, as well as the interrelatedness between and among sub-disciplines, and across disciplinary fields.

I would propose pre-empting these, and other emphases, with a focus on theological method, and also spirituality. These are sorely missing elements in our theological formation, with theological method not intentionally presented, and spirituality being taught as part of systematic theology and ethics, but not as an important formational faith practice, or, even more, as the soil from which all our faith practices and disciplinary work should flow.

In my theological education, after six years of studies, I spent some time in Chicago as part of my postgraduate work. In one of my very first assignments, I was asked to describe my theological method in two pages. With shock, I realised that I did not have a theological method. We were offered the 'theological encyclopedia' which pretty much conditioned us into a particular way of theological thinking, instead of encouraging the embrace of our own theological method, through which we will develop independent and innovative theological constructs in engagement with our contexts. Over time, I developed a deliberately praxeological methodology

for doing theology, shaped by the work of Holland and Henriot (1983), and various liberation theologies.

Spirituality was never part of our intellectual endeavour, either as a subject to be considered in a systematic theological way, or as a faith practice, or – least of all – as the soil from which our theological work grows. It is the insistence of liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez, that theological reflection is only the second step of our theological work. The first step, or moment, in our theological work, is our ‘lived faith’: how we seek to embody our faith in real-life contexts and practice our faith as ‘flesh-and-bone’ humans. Such ‘lived faith’ is the content of our spiritualities, and, for Gutierrez (1988:xxxiii–xxxiv) the first step – and ground – of our theological work. In much of Reformed theology, a preoccupation with Western rational thought has hindered us from the depths of immersion in imaginative theologies that are embodied, creative and Pentecostal in how the Spirit shapes our constructs contextually.

The different sub-disciplines within practical theology need to be revisited, enlarged, remixed or replaced.

The kerygmatic functions might now still include homiletics as the art of preaching (yet, whose preaching for which audiences?), but also the importance of evangelism, popular culture, faith formation and discipleship, complemented by being comfortable with the use of digital technologies. Mwenda Ntarangwi (2016) speaks of how hip-hop has claimed the ‘street as pulpit’ in the cities of Kenya, remaking the kerygmatic function in a way that connects to particular sections of contemporary urban youth culture.

The assertion of Moss Ntlha, General Secretary of The Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA), is important in this regard. He states: ‘Good news is only good news when it is good news’. We have to consider the kerygmatic functions contextually, by asking whether what we present as good news is in fact good news in contexts where girls are raped trying to go to pit toilets in the middle of the night, or where housing is

perpetually precarious, or a simple plate of food once a day a huge luxury.

The liturgical aspect should include congregational worship, but also the ability to create public liturgies to be practiced outside of ecclesial spaces. In addition, the importance of inter-religious dialogue and collaboration in diverse urban contexts, needs to be addressed by curricula that want to be faithful to our contexts.

The content of theological work on youth ministry needs to expand in several ways. Much of youth ministry in mainstream theological formation focuses on young people inside ecclesial spaces but lacks a strong focus on large percentages of young people being perpetually precarious: an entire generation of young people who have little hope of gaining formal employment ever, who dropped out of school at a young age, and who lack basic infrastructure to support sustainable lives. Also lacking in much of our curricula is a much more specific focus on children and African child theologies. We remain largely silent, theologically, on the pre-adolescent. More than 70% of the urban populations of sub-Saharan Africa are under the age of 30 (Banks et al., 2022), often living in precarious contexts, and often socialised from a young age into a consciousness of victimhood. This needs to be broken. At the same time, such a youthful African urban population holds the promise of new perspectives, refusing to be beholden to dated and oppressive paradigms.

Diaconal aspects should develop a sensitivity for all four generations of David Korten's (1991:113–132) development paradigm, including ministries of relief and compassion, but also community development and community organising; political ministries of advocacy, justice and policymaking; and global movement building (cf. also De Beer, 2019:95–101). Instead of a human-centred focus, the totality of God's *oikos* needs to be the locale for our theological work, which implies that our diaconal formation also needs to centre the care of creation much more vigilantly.

Social entrepreneurship, centring African cities in our theological work, and a focus on the art of city-making, are all important aspects to be integrated into our theological work if we are to make incisive contributions to African futures. These should not be seen as sub-sub-disciplines of practical theology, but as different expressions of the diaconate, thinking collaboratively with other disciplines, whilst providing all these elements with theological foundations, content and rigour.

Whereas pastoral care had traditionally focused much on the individual or nuclear family, we live in societies where families are wounded, differently structured, and often not found in the nuclear unit. Pastoral care and counselling need to be aware of the complexities of African urban communities and tailored in accordance. The reality of homelessness, refugees and migration, and a generation of isolated, abandoned older persons, need also to be considered as part of our pastoral care. In addition, peacebuilding and reconciliation need to be emphasised, in contexts where violence, conflict, (post-) war and trauma are rife. A focus on gender and sexualities is particularly important in African cities today, as these are now contested terrains and in many African cities the tools – theologically and otherwise – simply do not exist to accompany people and society at large, responsibly and in healing-liberating ways, in terms of issues of gender and sexualities.

The focus on congregational development needs to be expanded to include the diversity of the ecumenical church in its continuous emergence. The majority church today in the African city is Pentecostal-Charismatic and African-initiated, and, again, without shifting gears to understand, support and reflect theologically with those in these traditions participating in our theological formation, also as academic leaders, we are out of depth, and we do not serve justice to those studying in schools like ours. In addition, the disciplines of church planting and emerging faith communities need to be studied and introduced, as well as the church's role in fostering *koinonia* inside the church, but also beyond

ecclesial boundaries, in solidarity with the totality of the human community.

An immediate response to the reflections I offered above, would be that the time and space simply do not exist in curricula to cater for all the themes I raise. That might very well be true, yet what I am raising is something deeper than a list of items to be addressed: I argue that we should simply be stopped in our tracks completely, by the multiple cries erupting from the African (urban) soil. These cries should inform our discernment of what we need to keep ourselves busy with theologically in decades to come. These cries should also inform our pedagogical approaches, which, if practised inside and with communities, might automatically surface many of the themes, and more, that I have raised here. The context is the best classroom and should deeply subvert and transform the classroom of the suburban theological campus.

Shaped by a spiritual and theological method of liberation

Informed by Robert McAfee Brown (1988), Donal Dorr (1988), Dorothee Soelle (2001), Vuyani Vellem (2007), and others, the importance of a spirituality that is intentionally liberative, and of a theological method oriented towards integral liberation in all aspects of life, undergird the theological engagements I opt for, and the work in our Centre for Faith and Community at the University of Pretoria. We rather err on the side of not being conventionally orthodox theologically, whilst discerning the ‘right practices’ in response to societal fractures and injustices.

In both our course work and pedagogical approaches, as well as our engaged research in and with communities, our commitment is towards multiple freedoms in the city – of people, places, neighbourhoods and creation – facilitated either through the presence and actions of faith communities or through solidarity with various other communities and movements. We seek to write our content in ways that prepare

students for liberative/transformational actions that can ensure a deep change in the forms of healing and justice.

At the same time, we hope that faith communities themselves will experience an increased sense of freedom – from structural impediments, doctrinal rigidities, and institutional inflexibilities, to discern the wineskins appropriate for them in relation to contemporary urban-rural contexts in Africa.

Practical theological scholarship as a liberating faith practice

In this section I present practical theological scholarship itself as a liberating faith practice, encompassing several key elements, namely; being grounded in a spirituality of liberation; engaged in practical theological scholarship, fusing incarnation, imagination, innovation, impact and collaboration; doing theology in transdisciplinary ways; and practising the dual task of research as transformation, as well as liberative pedagogies.

Grounded in a spirituality of liberation

The enterprise of doing theology at a university can easily be understood as a purely intellectual endeavour void of spirituality. The notion of foregrounding the practice of spirituality, or of considering the spirituality of theological education, has some accuse one of wanting to turn a university-based theology school into a seminary.

This is a mistaken accusation, as what is at stake here is something much deeper – what is at stake is the very way in which we understand and practice theology. Shaped by liberation theological paradigms, the neat dichotomies between spirituality, reflection and action, do not exist, as they are fused into a coherent theological method. We do action-reflection, grounded in a spirituality of liberation and oriented towards integral liberation transformation of individuals, spaces, institutions, and society as a whole.

The intellectual rigour is similar, but it requires a kind of humility that is only possible if grounding one's intellectual pursuit in a spirituality that acknowledges imperfection, brokenness, and complicity with a status quo that often denies the other. Doing theology from such a place of humble repentance, and accountability to the same other who have been denied, becomes liberating both to those of us doing theology, as well as those who serve as our interlocutors and companions on the journey, and those with whom we do theology in communities.

Engaged practical theological scholarship

Genevieve James (2022) provides compelling and fresh perspectives on the task of engaged scholarship. For James, engaged scholarship, practised at an engaged university, is integrative, collaborative scholarship, transforming how we teach, do research or engage with communities. She insists on an open university which connects internal and external ecosystems or communities for mutual gain. It is a scholarship practised in the community and through ethical, communal accountability. Drawing from the cues she provides, I unpack engaged practical theological scholarship here below, rather tentatively, using five critical elements of incarnation, imagination, innovation, impact, and collaboration.

Incarnation

Our theological work is often discarnate. It takes people out of their contexts into sanitised spaces, insulated from the urban cry. An incarnational approach to doing theology would include professors of theology asking more self-critical questions about their locatedness – where they stay, shop, socialise, teach, preach, contribute, or do their research. It would also include helping students to think critically about their self-location, whilst at the same time, through our pedagogical approaches, requiring and enabling incarnations into new and unknown territories. It would consider shifting the classroom into the city, where the precarity of the majority will disrupt our theological comfortabilities.

Liberating theologies can be fostered in multiple local communities of practice – where deep reflection, committed action, and lived faith are brought into conversation. This could be deliberately fostered in local congregations; base ecclesial communities; groups of social activists; shelter managers of homeless communities; LGBTIQ+ support groups; art collectives; support groups for survivors of trauma, violence or abuse; social movements; housing cooperatives, and so forth.

Incarnation combines deep immersion and robust socio-ecclesial analysis, which are the first two steps in Holland and Henriot's praxis cycle.

Imagination

Old Testament theologian Walter Brueggemann (1978; 1986) has gifted us beautiful and prophetic language on the imagination. In protesting the dominant consciousness or imagination with its enslavements and exclusionary practices, it is our ongoing theological vocation to discern and foster a hopeful, prophetic and alternative imagination, which is to name death, to foster new imaginaries of life, to plan for translating such imaginaries into sustainable actions, to implement and sustain such actions, and to ground the process in a spirituality of liberation or freedom. These are not illusionary, disembodied or 'pie-in-the-sky' imaginaries, but concrete and realistic (even if daring and audacious) imaginaries, crafted with and in communities and about real-life challenges.

The communities of practice I mentioned above, or the theological classroom, should be spaces of incarnation – namely, immersion and robust analysis – but should never be paralysing. It should at once also be spaces where our theological reflection on our immersions and analyses, should break open imaginative possibilities that could break cycles of death and exclusion. The work of imagination, for me, corresponds with the third step in Holland and Henriot's praxis cycle, namely the task of theological reflection.

Innovation

Nothing can leave us as defeated as imagination without action. We simply need to find ways, spaces and people, who can help translate brave visions into sustainable actions. Innovation speaks of the translation of imaginaries into brave new actions that transform the old into the new. It speaks of new ways for tackling old problems; imaginative ways that change the narrative; radical ways that uproot oppressive systems, replacing them with inclusive, life-affirming systems; changing hierarchical institutional culture for optimal participation; and breaking cycles of poverty, exclusion or abuse through new ways of being together in neighbourhoods or society (cf. Baregheh et al., 2009; Morgan, 2015; Schumpeter, 1983).

Innovative faith practices are at once critical (of that which does not work), constructive (in crafting new possibilities) and contextually appropriate and responsive. Innovative faith practices would explore how to do church differently, where the church has failed to be good news; how to do community development differently, where our diaconal responses fail to break cycles of systemic exclusion; doing worship and Christian religious education differently if these disciplines sanction the status quo instead of forming us into communities of radical compassion and brave justice; doing youth and children's ministry differently, through broadening the base to include children and young people traditionally falling outside the church's catch-nets; and doing prophetic action differently, by refusing to wait for hierarchical structures to speak on behalf of all of us, but, instead, fostering local faith-based agency that can organise, act, resist, and speak in a collective fashion.

If our (practical) theological education fails to foster incarnate, imaginative and innovative people of faith, faith communities and faith practices, our (practical) theological education fails. Such people, communities and practices will only be fostered if our (practical) theological education itself – in where and how it locates itself, in its pedagogical approach

and research commitments, and in the commitments and modelling of those who teach it – is incarnate, imaginative and innovative.

Impact

It becomes important to ask hard questions about the impact, not only of the church in society, in relation to society's hardest questions, but also about the impact of (practical) theological education in preparing the church to ask the hard questions and to engage society in numerous liberative and transformative ways.

We have to continuously assess our curricular content and commitments, as well as how our research contributes ethically to society in terms of measurable goals, making ourselves accountable to the church at large but also to the communities in which, and for which, we do research.

Ethical research should not only be a way to protect the research institution or the individual being interviewed. Ethical research should be asking how far our research contributes to the long-term freedoms, viability and sustainability of local neighbourhoods and vulnerable populations. The commitment of many universities to support the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), despite valid critique against the SDGs, provides a good framework and point of orientation for measuring impact. Part of measuring impact would be to support local communities towards attaining the SDGs, but, at the same time, to engage critically with the paradigms that gave birth to the SDGs, especially in its persistent and uncritical focus on economic growth, and the prominence of technocratic approaches as driver of change, instead of an ethic of change at the core of the SDGs, as proposed by Pope Francis (2015).

If practical theology is about the study of faith practice, we have to insist that we cannot simply recycle religious practices without clear intent. The impact of our engaged scholarship – both our research and pedagogy – as well as

the faith practices incubated, accompanied or critiqued by our scholarship, needs to be assessed in measurable ways.

Are there fewer homeless persons on the street, or more sustainable pathways out of homelessness for people in our city, because of the work we do around homelessness?

Are faith communities and non-profit organisations better equipped to deal with matters of social justice and reconciliation, with patriarchal inclinations and race-based exclusions, because of the formational work we do?

Are we seeing city-wide change in terms of access to primary healthcare, because of the collaborative approaches between health sciences, theology, geography, local faith communities and non-profit organisations, and the residents of the city?

Is violence in all its forms on the decline in the spaces where our students of theology find themselves being peacebuilders in comprehensive, shalom-like, ways?

Collaboration

Engaged scholarship generally, and engaged practical theological scholarship in particular, require collaborative approaches of engagement, both in research and in pedagogy. Such collaboration is often in the first place with church denominations or local faith communities but can also be with faith-based organisations and religious institutions of different faiths.

Doing theology in transdisciplinary ways

Such collaboration should also be with a range of disciplines at the university and other universities, all committed separately and together, to imagining and co-constructing flourishing African cities. In the case of our centre at the University of Pretoria, we work closely with departments as diverse as geography, architecture, town and regional planning and archaeology, anthropology and development studies, but also

with health sciences, occupational therapy, music therapy, and education.

In seeking to make urban change, academic research alone cannot achieve that without depth of relationships with local communities and community organisations, civil society and the non-profit sector, government at different levels, as well as others committed to the project of urban change-making.

I subscribe to a form of practical theology that is deliberately transdisciplinary in how it understands itself. What I described here above is captured in the work of people like Klein, Pieterse and others who describe trans-disciplinarity as different disciplines, working with communities and practitioners, to find solutions for real-life problems (cf. Klein 2001). Their definition of trans-disciplinarity provided me with language that described and interpreted our approach to practical theological action.

Those who assert the complexity of systems would perhaps struggle with such a solution-driven approach. However, my understanding of trans-disciplinarity is not in the least to deny complexity but, to the contrary, an assertion of the importance of different knowledge to be hosted equally and hospitably, precisely because singular approaches fail to engage complexity well.

Collaborative approaches are very deliberate about breaking down disciplinary, hierarchical and institutional silos, embracing the insights of 'the other' in their diverse expressions. In my mind, nothing might contribute as significantly to liberating faith practices, as well as how we practise the discipline of practical theology, than transdisciplinary work in close collaboration with communities, practitioners and a range of people from diverse disciplines.

In our work on homelessness, people with lived experience of homelessness as well as practitioners who engage homelessness and housing, city officials and politicians tasked with homelessness, as well as researchers

from diverse disciplines, all participate to construct new knowledge, and recommendations for new interventions, together. In the process, how we think about faith practices are altered and own faith practices get informed in ways that could help mediate more liberating outcomes for those served by them.

Research as transformation

Drawing from the assertion of Conti (2005), ‘the goal of research is not the interpretation of the world, but the organisation of transformation’. Too often (so-called) critical theological work only serves to deconstruct, without helping to shape new imaginaries and without contributing to constructing new paradigms, practices and ways of being together.

As suggested above, the very notion of ethical research should be revisited, and framed beyond technocratic tick-boxes, by asking how far our research truly contributes not only to liberation from deadly forces but also to processes of societal, community and personal transformation.

Again, in our Centre for Faith and Community, we opted for the approach of Chatterton, Hodkinson and Pickerill (2010), speaking of solidarity action research as their preferred approach to being in and with communities. Their critique of participatory action research is that it could allow for engaging communities on our terms, almost ‘faking’ participation, but only for as long as it is required to generate data or produce publications, after which we withdraw again. Solidarity action research locates itself in communities for the long haul, serving from below and from within, and allows for the agenda of the community to shape our research agenda.

A solidarity action research approach is consistent with an incarnational theological posture, which I suggest should be the task of engaged scholarship. Instead of aloof, disembodied rhetoric, a society like ours – with its deep inequalities, fragmentations and sicknesses – needs a new kind of proximate, embodied scholarship.

The kind of research flowing from such an approach would document local processes and narratives, retrieve untold stories and unmask oppressive stories, capacitate local communities through skills transfer and collaborative knowledge generation, and participate in advocating for transformation that is also deeply systemic.

Over the past few years, one of the exciting discoveries for us was how becoming a research partner of local communities and activist groups – such as Lawyers for Human Rights, the Tshwane Homelessness Forum, the Tshwane Leadership Foundation, the Eersterust Housing Association, the Woodlane Village Community Leaders, and a host of local churches and community-based organisations, not only serve to support their on-going work for the city's shalom, but also provide vocational depth to how we understand liberative theological work.

Liberative pedagogies

If our theological education only serves to lead people out of communities of poverty and into middle-class numbness, we have failed dismally in terms of the mandate of Christ. If we are to equip (urban) faith-based leaders who can design and implement liberative faith practices in complex and broken contexts, our pedagogies need to be disruptive of the status quo, transgressive in design, and subversive in impact. Florence (1998) writes of Bell Hooks' pedagogy as follows:

Bell Hooks' (1994c) engaged pedagogy, explicated in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, goes beyond developing students to achieve a prescribed level of literacy, the development of professional skills and/or conformity to the status quo, to nurture a reflective and critical stance to social realities. (Florence, 1998)

Transgressive pedagogies are designed to challenge to disrupt patriarchal, class-based and neoliberal capitalist norms; the exclusivist city that guarantees rights only to some; and a profit-driven, human-centred society that subdued God's

good creation in its own interests. Instead, transgressive pedagogies allow for ‘the incorporation of passion’ (Florence, 1998) – both in the sense of deep solidarity with the passion/suffering of the world, but also of a deep commitment to the healing and wholeness of this world, replacing an oppressive consciousness with a life-affirming, liberating consciousness, and replacing profit-driven, human-centred imaginaries, with imaginaries that will celebrate the entirety of God’s new household (cf. Russell, 1987).

What our pedagogies should be doing, in line with gospel imperatives, is to consistently deconstruct the dominant consciousness – that is out to ‘kill, steal and destroy’, and foster an alternative consciousness – that is hell-bent on mediating ‘life in abundance’, for all people and creation (John 10:10). Theologising that is not about being disciplined into the mind, heart, commitments and passion of Christ – confronting vestiges of power that are life-denying – is a purely rational exercise, contributing to the death of the city.

It is almost impossible to foster such engaged pedagogy (Florence, 1998), without rooting it in a praxeological approach that insists on ongoing incarnational immersion; continuous, critical socio-ecclesial analysis; theological reflection that names death and imagines life; and proposals for how alternative theological (and urban) imaginaries can be translated through concrete socio-ecclesial practices, public policies, and collaborative city-making processes. At the core of a praxeological approach, however, both rooting it, but also propelling it beyond rigidities and orthodoxies, are vibrant spiritualities of life and justice.

Liberative pedagogies grounded in a spirituality of the resurrection will always see the possibility of justice beyond oppression, a voice beyond repression, dignity beyond violence or shame, and regeneration beyond decay. Liberative pedagogies grounded in a spirituality of the cross will help us remain humble, aware of our imperfections and complicities with death at work; indeed, with our own frail and dying selves; offering ourselves humbly as servants of processes

much larger than ourselves. Liberative pedagogies will continuously liberative all of us engaged in the classroom – students, teachers and communities alike – in awe of the grace that holds us, despite ourselves.

The city as our classroom

It is almost unthinkable that liberating faith practices in evolving African cities can be fostered away from the demands, cries and intensities of the city itself. It is in the city as a classroom that engaged scholarship, transdisciplinary creativity, and liberative pedagogy, can best be practised (cf. De Beer & Hugo, 2022:23–37).

We have to subvert the suburban classroom – and all it represents – by ‘shifting the geography of reason’ quite literally into contested urban spaces. What we fail to convey through our many words and gestures, the city can do in powerful ways, if we only allow her.

Mobile classrooms, urban studios and CityLabs, relocating ourselves and our families, relocating our theological institutions and research hubs, will all speak of a commitment to the majority populations of the African city – who are not the small suburban elites shaping urban futures, but the 62% living in urban slums and informal settlements.

Unless we do theology from within – and radically with – the spaces where the majority carves out lives, resiliently, yet against the odds, the futures of African cities might indeed be bleak. The disconnectedness of the urban elite, and elitist theological enterprises, can only insulate itself for so long. At some point, Africa’s urban revolution might not only be in terms of the swelling numbers of urban migrants, or the abundance of creative and exciting urban responses, but also in the anger of the dispossessed who have simply had enough and have nothing to lose.

Now is the time to act. Because tomorrow might be late.

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Chapter 12

Mission studies: The inevitable for theological studies

Hannes Knoetze 

Introduction

When writing about missiology/mission studies within the African context, it is important to take cognisance of the fact that when Christian mission came to Africa at the beginning of the fifteenth century, ‘there was no developed theology of mission’ (Oborji, 2020:6). Currently, we are writing and studying mission and missiology mainly from a post-Christendom perspective in the West, and in the global world with a mixed (syncretistic) perspective of traditional beliefs, Christendom, and post-Christendom societies. But mission is from everywhere to everywhere.

In a post-Christendom society, mission and mission studies are scrutinised by society in general, and by many churches and academic institutions all over the world (cf. Mashau, 2012). Bosch (2012:2) describes it as an attack on mission from the inside and the outside. This chapter attends to the following questions: Does mission studies still belong in theological education as one of the theological disciplines? How does the church in a post-Christendom society, and in an African society, relate to mission? To answer these questions, we first need to understand what mission and whose mission?

Background

The content of mission is always contextually determined since it is God’s engagement with people living in a specific context and in a specific time in history. In this sense, mission is about God’s continuous story of engagement with his

creation. Considering this, we find various descriptions and motivations of mission from different times and persons. John Bavinck writes:

The history in mission shows a great diversity in motivation. Some missionaries were motivated by an ascetic view of life and chose missions as a form of self-denial; others were stimulated by a desire to hasten the return of Christ; and frequently missionary work has been connected with a tendency to spread Western culture, regarded as far more superior to all other forms of life. At times missionary activity became part of colonialism, a task of the government more than of the church (Bavinck, 1960:3).

From this extract, it is clear why in our time, especially in the global world and Africa, mission is scrutinised from the 'inside' and the 'outside'. According to Bavinck (1960:6–7), Dutch Calvinist theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) may be viewed as the father of Reformed mission. Voetius understands the goal of mission, namely the conversion of the heathen, as subordinate to the planting of the church (*plantation ecclesiae*), which in turn is subsidiary to the highest aim – the glory of God. He then also views God alone as the sender of people. In Bavinck's view, Warneck understands the basis of mission not only as biblical but also as historical and ethnological. As such, mission has a twofold basis: first, we are sent by God, and second, heathenism also desires the gospel. Warneck agrees with Voetius 'that God himself must be viewed as the *auctor primaries*, the unique sender'. He differs from Voetius, however, in that he does not view the church as the instrument of God, but rather *Die Gemeinde*, a circle within the church, an *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, which is driven to a love of missions by the Holy Spirit (cited in Bavinck, 1960:6, italics in the original).

Anderson (1961:3–16) identifies three trends of theology of mission amongst Protestants in the twentieth century. The first trend is a deepening thrust toward the reformulation of mission theology, which he ascribes to the following two

characteristics: 'the progressively deepening confrontation of church and mission with theology', and 'the progressive narrowing of the gulf between Church and mission from 1900' (Anderson, 1961:4).

The second trend in the developing theology of mission in the twentieth century was the diversity of Protestant attitudes toward people of other faiths. Under the influence of D.L. Moody, at the beginning of the century, we find a passion for souls and emphasis on the approaching judgement day, with the obligation to save people from eternal damnation. In 1932 we see a change when the Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry issued a report entitled *Re-Thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry after One Hundred Years*, which stated:

[T]he aim of mission is 'to seek with people of other lands a true knowledge and love of God, expressing in life and word what we have learned through Jesus Christ'; that 'the Christian will regard himself as co-worker with the forces which are making for righteousness within every religious system'; that 'the relation between religions must take increasingly hereafter the form of a common search for truth'; and that the missionary 'will look forward, not to the destruction of these [non-Christian] religions, but to their continued co-existence with Christianity, each stimulating the other in growth toward the ultimate goal, unity in the completest religious truth'. (Anderson, 1961:9)

Dr Hendrik Kraemer acknowledged that God is known through his creation and the conscience of human beings; however, he emphasised that the 'general revelation' can only be discovered in light of the 'special revelation' (Jesus Christ) and, as such, is an object of faith (cited in Anderson, 1961:11).

The third trend Anderson refers to is the development of a theocentric point of departure with a trinitarian perspective of mission theology (we will attend to this later).

There have been attempts from the culture-centered, man-centered, revelation-centered, eschatology-centered,

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kingdom-centered, Bible-centered, Church-centered, and Christ-centered points of view. ... when any one of them has been made the central point of focus and orientation for the theology of mission, it has proven inadequate for the task, tending to narrow the scope of the mission, and causing it to go astray. (Anderson, 1961:15)

Mission in general, but more specifically the traditional understanding of mission, came under heavy attack particularly from the 'mission field' when decolonisation in Africa started in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In one year alone, 1964, four books attacking mission and missionaries appeared, all written by missiologists or mission executives: R.K. Orchard, *Mission in a Time of Testing*; James A. Scherer, *Missionary, Go Home!*; Ralph Dodge, *The Unpopular Missionary*; and John Garden, *The Ugly Missionary*. More recently, James Heissig (1981), ..., has even characterised Christian mission as 'the selfish war'. (Bosch, 2012:2)

However, without going into much detail, the paradigm shift to the theocentric and trinitarian understanding of mission by Barth and others that developed into what is known today as the *missio Dei* (mission of God), brought some important corrections to mission and mission studies.

Whose mission?

When we need to answer the question of whose mission, we, as Christians, are obliged to answer the question about mission and missiology from a *missio Dei* perspective. The discussion does not start with the church (what she should do), or with the missionary (what she or he must believe or do), but with God – with who God is, what God has done, and what God is doing. An important perspective for understanding the mission of God from a trinitarian perspective is provided next. Although there are also other important insights from the trinitarian perspective, these will not be discussed here.

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To think and talk about mission from a trinitarian perspective helps us to escape the danger of thinking about mission only in soteriological or ecclesiological terms. *Missio Dei* was not a crisis response from God to the fall of humanity and therefore does not start with the incarnation of Christ. *Missio Dei* starts with creation – when God sent God’s Word to create everything that is and will be (Gen 1 and Jn 1). Cilliers quotes the following translation of Luther:

God the Father began and accomplished creation through His Word, and He also sustains it through the same Word. He abides in His handiwork ... How long could the sun, the moon and the whole sky continue to move as it has had done so for many thousands of years, how long would the Sun have been able to rise and set at its fixed time and place year after year – if God, who made it, did not sustain it daily? If God withdrew His hand, would home and earth and all things not soon fall apart in a heap? All the power and wisdom of all the angels and men would not have been able to sustain the creation for one moment. The Sun would not have shone in the sky for long, no child would be born, no grain of wheat, grass or anything else would sprout from the earth or be renewed, if God did not keep it. If the Creator withdrew His hand for a moment, everything would soon break apart and perish. Therefore, we confess: I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth...If God, who created us, also not sustained us, then we would have died and perished long ago, even in the cradle and in birth (Cilliers, 2021:22).

In this light, we understand that ‘God’s mission is creation, and God’s creation is God’s mission’ (Cilliers 2021:22, italics in the original). It is clear from Scripture that God’s Word is not only focused or directed at humans and sin but also creation, the wind, snow, rain, etc. (examples in the Book of Psalms). Understanding God’s mission as creation prevents us from understanding the *missio Dei* only as spiritual or heavenly; it is about everyday life in this world with all its brokenness.

The incarnation of Christ does not contradict God's mission as creation, but rather underlines or even fulfils it. The Word became flesh; it became human for the sake of creation, humans, and human bodies.

The incarnation could be called a 'supernatural' event, that is, an event 'above and beyond' nature; but it could also be called a 'natural' event – Jesus being born as a baby, a real baby. This baby is not 'above and beyond' nature, not supra-natural, but rather 'with and within' nature, rather intra-natural. (Cilliers, 2021:23)

This implies that the *missio Dei* is about being and becoming human. 'We are not human in order to become Christians, rather Christians to become human' (Cilliers, 2021:23). In Christ we are recreated/reconciled to the image of God, as we were originally created by God. The *missio Dei* is about people – people living on the edge, suffering, and trying to survive life. But the *missio Dei* is also about inhumane people, self-directed people, living *incurvatus in se* (turned inward on oneself). However, Christ did not only come for the sake of human beings but all of creation. The apostle Paul reminds us that the whole of creation is suffering and yearns for the fullness and final unification of all creation under Christ (Rom 8; Col 1).

Pentecost is a further underlining and fulfilment of God's creational mission. Although the outpouring of the Spirit might be viewed as a supernatural event, the Spirit is not poured out on the supernatural, but the natural.

'Spirit' here does not indicate a type of 'spirituality' that hovers above and beyond humanity or contradicts our bodily existence. It rather sanctifies our bodies, indeed sanctifies life, or better reminds us of the sanctity granted us on the grounds of our being-created-by-God. (Cilliers, 2021:24)

God's Word had one body, but the Spirit expands this one body. Through the Spirit, God sends his Word into all flesh. As

believers, we have the privilege to participate in the *missio Dei*, when the Spirit speaks, like Jesus did, in human words.

The Spirit now speaks in a *polyphonic* manner, with a variety of (human) voices, and in a *pluriform* array of spaces and places. This means that it can be misunderstood and misused, as proven by history. (Cilliers, 2021:24)

Missio Trinitatis Dei is about this life, this earth, and these people; it is about the Alpha and the Omega; it is about a relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, here and now and forever.

What mission?

In attending to the question, 'What mission?' this section will provide some definitions of missiology and mission to elucidate the theme to assist the reader in forming an understanding of these concepts.

According to Oborji (2020:3) and Verkuyl (1981:19), missiology studies the salvation acts of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit focussed on the whole world to bring the existence of the Kingdom of God into being. It studies God's command to the church throughout the world, to preach the whole gospel, in word and deed, in dependence on the Holy Spirit to all mankind.

Sunquist describes missiology as follows:

Missiology is then a major dimension of theological study. It is a study that moves toward an understanding of God; it's a study of God's nature and activity in sending to his creation prophets, priests, kings, and even his own Son to bring about and then announce the redemption of his world (Sunquist, 2013:8).

Ott, Strauss & Tennent propose the following:

In a sense, all theology is mission theology in that nearly all biblical-oriented theology will, or should, in one way

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or another relate to God's missional purposes in the world and the missionary character of God. In the words of Martin Kahler, 'The earliest mission became the mother of theology because it attacked the contemporary culture.' (Ott et al., 2010:xviii)

Kirk describes the theology of mission as follows:

The theology of mission is a disciplined study which deals with the questions that arise when people seek to understand and fulfil God's purposes in the world, as these are demonstrated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is a critical reflection on attitudes and actions adopted by Christians in pursuit of the missionary mandate. Its task is to validate, correct and establish on better foundations the entire practice of mission. (Kirk, 1999:21)

The following extracts give further definitions of missiology/mission:

So, to be 'missional' has everything to do with the sense of having a 'mission', to be 'sent' or 'commissioned'. It points towards attempts to establish meaningful contact with other people with the purpose of influencing their lives. (Paas, 2019:5)

Still, what God has provided for us in Jesus Christ and what the church proclaims and embodies in its mission and evangelism is not simply an affirmation of the best people can expect in this world by way of health, liberty, peace, and freedom from want. God's reign is more than human progress on the horizontal plane. So, if on the one hand, we assert God's 'yes' to the world as expression of the Christian's solidarity with society, we also have to affirm mission and evangelism as God's 'no', as an expression of our opposition to and engagement with the world. (Bosch, 2012:11)

Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as

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God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation. (Wright, 2006:22-23)

Mission is part of life; as humans, we cannot not 'missionize'. Moreover, mission is intrinsically connected with the Christian core experience of Jesus and his story. (Paas, 2019:8)

Missions is the term usually given to those undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel are sent by the Church and go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ ... The special purpose of this missionary activity is evangelization and the planting of the Church among those peoples and groups where she has not yet taken root (*Ad Gentes* [AG 6], in Oborji, 2020:135)¹

Thus, we can summarize 'mission' as everything the Church is called to say, do and be in this world, as a witness to what God has done in Christ with a view to the coming of his kingdom. (Paas, 2019:13)

We must acknowledge that there is still only one mission, the *missio Dei*. *Missio Dei* can be described as the outreach of the trinitarian God to his creation, to sustain, liberate and save his creation. As the church, we have the privilege of being elected to participate in this mission. 'A missionary is an apostle, one who is sent from the heart of God to proclaim the present and coming Kingdom of God to all the nations of the earth' (Sunquist 2013:8). The church, the congregation, is also sent as a missionary into this world, and not only a few individuals.

1 It is important to notice the difference in understanding between the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Protestant churches in the current understanding of mission. Where the protestants focus on God as the sender, the RCC focuses on the church as the sender. While the purpose, according to AG6, is the planting of the church, Voetius goes further and says the purpose is the glory of God.

However, in a post-Christendom society, mission and missiology are more complex; being incarnated in different contexts and cultures asks for a multidimensional and pluriverse understanding of mission and missiology (Saayman, 2013:135). It is in this regard that Bosch (2012) referred in his ecumenical paradigm to mission as ‘mission as’ adding an applicable ‘action word’ for the context, for example, as liberation, as a quest for justice, as contextualisation, and as liberation. From these examples, it is clear that mission has to do with the transformation of societies so that people may experience the fullness of life.

Salvation

Although creation and salvation are the head and tail of the same coin, salvation is a fundamental concept of every religion. However, if we understand the *missio Dei* as God’s creating, sustaining, liberating, and saving actions in creation, as argued above, then missiology is the studying of these actions of God, and mission is participating in these actions. Paas (2019:197) states that experiencing God and knowing about God is not the same as receiving salvation. Salvation entails a forgiving and healing relationship with God and the participation in the local, national, and international community of believers in restoring relationships in society. The essence of salvation is the restoration of relations and community.

We are created *imago Dei*, which implies that we are relational beings since the trinitarian God is a relational God. Therefore, salvation is not an end in itself, but salvation to participate in the *missio Dei* as a member of the community of believers. As Christians, we believe that God has brought salvation for all of creation in and through Jesus Christ. It is this conviction that has motivated Christian mission throughout history to mediate salvation for all. Bosch (2012:402) sees the soteriological motif of the gospel as the ‘throbbing heart of missiology’. Therefore, the scope of salvation, however we define salvation, will determine the scope of our missiology.

When we think and talk about evangelism and salvation, Christians should do it from a trinitarian and *missio Dei* perspective. Sunquist (2013:335–339) discusses this perspective by mentioning the following important points.

- It is important not to get caught up in conversations and questions for which we do not have the answers, for example: What is the actual state, place, or condition of heaven or hell? We do not know, and we will never know, but we must not get sidetracked by these and other unanswerable questions. What we do not know may not prevent us from faithfulness in what we do know.
- Salvation is much more than only spiritual.
- Salvation involves a redeemed life lived now, in Christ, as well as our life of suffering faithfulness for others, and our eternal life in Christ. Salvation ‘wholeness’ comes through confession of sin and repentance, but it has physical, emotional, social, and spiritual implications (Ps 32). Salvation divides us from some people and unites us to others ... Salvation has comprehensiveness ... It relates to all of a person ... A person or culture cannot be redeemed quietly, on the side with no one noticing. (Sunquist, 2013:337)
- All salvation is in and through Jesus Christ.
- We must be clear about what salvation is from. We are saved from something and to something. ‘Whether people realise it, acknowledge it, or avoid it, sin is the ever-present enemy of every human being, dragging us down to sickness, death, and separation from God. We are saved from our sins and the results of sin’ (Sunquist, 2013:337).
- Paul preached that all people will be resurrected, but not all people will be resurrected to the same place. Therefore, resurrection is a key term in both salvation and judgement.
- God uses people to bring other people to salvation. Although God can and might use other means to save people, his normal way is through human relations.
- Salvation is part of God’s calling. Salvation is never an end in itself, but for the purpose of declaring God’s glory and living fully in and for Jesus Christ.

Ott et al. (2010:318) ask three important questions regarding mission, namely:

- Is it too narrow and intolerant to advocate that Christ is the only way to salvation?
- How could a good and righteous God under any circumstances condemn people to eternal conscious punishment in hell?
- Is it not unfair of God to condemn people who have never had the opportunity to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ?

From these questions, it is clear that from the modern and postmodern paradigm, the idea of salvation from the outside, from God, and totally out of reach and control of humans, became problematic. This led to questions like the above as well as to different views on salvation. However, these questions and views are misleading because they are based on an abstract concept of 'truth' and a modern concept of 'religion', instead of on the Saviour, the person of Jesus Christ. In relation to this we need to take cognisance of the following positions regarding religion and its implications for our understanding of salvation as described by Sunquist (2013:334):

- The atheists' position: No religion is true, or all religions are equally untrue.
- The absolutists' position: Only one religion is uniquely true. One form of this is the earlier Roman Catholic theology of *extra ecclesia, nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church).
- The relativist's position: Each religion is true, or all religions are equally true.
- The inclusivists' position: One religion is true for all, or all religions have some part of the truth of the one religion.

In a post-Christendom era, we must rethink the meaning of salvation guided by the trinitarian understanding of God. Bosch (2012:405) argues that salvation remained the motivation in the lives of modern people, but it was radically redefined. There were mainly two reactions to modernity and

postmodernity. The first reaction was to ignore the challenges of modernism and postmodernism and continue defining salvation in traditional terms. The second reaction was responding to the challenges of modernity and postmodernity:

By rejecting the view according to which Jesus died a substitutionary death for humankind and thereby propitiated God. ... Here not the person of Jesus was at the center but the *cause* of Jesus; the *ideal*, not the One who embodied the ideal ... In this paradigm, sin is defined pre-eminently as *ignorance*. People only had to be *informed* about what was in their own interest. The Western mission was the great educator, which would mediate salvation to the unenlightened. (Bosch, 2012:405)

Yet a third reaction is the view of salvation as 'shalom', and the establishment of the kingdom of God, which is more comprehensive. Diverse contexts and various cultures bring to the fore different understandings of salvation. It is important to realise that a 'pure' supracultural Christianity is impossible; Christianity only exists as an ever-increasing variety of cultural expressions (Paas, 2019:17). Thus, all paradigms – traditional, modern, and postmodern, and all cultures and contexts, need salvation. As such, in a modern industrialised and secularised West with all its technological processes, salvation would look different to the majority world where many struggle with poverty. In the majority world, salvation 'manifests itself in the struggle for (1) economic justice against exploitation; (2) human dignity against oppression; (3) solidarity against alienation; and (4) hope against despair in personal life' (Bosch, 2012:406). Therefore, we may and cannot limit salvation to an individual's relationship with God; relationship influencers like secularisation, hatred, injustice, oppression, war, and other forms of violence all represent evil. For this reason, 'concern for humaneness, for conquering of famine, illness, and meaninglessness is part of the salvation for which we hope and labour' (Bosch, 2012:406).

The crisis in a modern society like the West is the understanding of salvation when the world's needs and

solutions are presented as independent of Jesus Christ. Paas (2019:xv) describes it as follows:

[It] hit[s] you with double strength when you notice that people can be really happy without religion, and that they do not need God either to care deeply about fellow humans, or to give to charity. In most of them you do find this sense of emptiness, or the vague sense of guilt that can be found among non-believers or ex-churchgoers in more religious areas. ... but it is purely a matter of individual appeal.

The modern and postmodern culture, which no longer accepts the reality of the spiritual world as experienced and believed in most global world countries, working with an abstract concept of 'truth' and a modern concept of 'religion', also experiences and creates a (spiritual and salvation) crisis in and for the global world. I am referring here to what people like Myers (2011) and Moon (2017) refer to as the missing/excluded middle. The missing/excluded middle refers to the West's non-recognition of the spiritual world, the world of 'curses, amulets, charms, etcetera'. It is easy for the West and the North to ignore the 'spiritual world' because in modernism and postmodernism, we live with a dualism between the spiritual and the physical world. Myers gives the following example: 'Loving God is spiritual work, and loving neighbours takes place in the material world. So, evangelism (restoring people's relationship with God) is spiritual work, while social action (restoring just economic, social, and political relationships among people) is not.' While in the Bible and the majority world there is no division between the spiritual and the physical, they have a holistic worldview, 'with the spiritual and the material worlds interrelated in a seamless whole' (Myers, 2011:7).

The dualistic worldview also creates some controversial arguments in the West and post-Christendom about what is mission and what is not, as is clear from the example given by Myers.

Salvation may never be seen as salvation out of this world, but always the salvation of this world. Salvation is also always in and through Christ, and in the human community focused on the whole and healed world. This brings us to another challenge described by Paas (2019:187), that modern Christians, particularly Protestants, tend to separate their Christian identity from participation in a local faith community here and now.

Church

As disciples of Christ, the church, and individual members of the church, have the privilege to obediently participate in God's mission with gratitude and joy. Thus, mission belongs to God. God's church does not have a mission, but God's mission has a church (cf. Bosch, 2012; Wright, 2006). The church, the congregation, is sent as a missionary into this world.

Salvation is impossible apart from the church, not because the church has received salvation as a possession and is now in the position to dispense it or withhold it from others. *It is instead because salvation is, in the first place, a distinct form of social existence.* To be saved is to be made part of a new people and a new politics, the body of Christ. (Paas, 2019:192, italics in the original)

Just as salvation is impossible apart from the church, so is mission impossible apart from the church, because the church is the 'visible and present' body of Christ in this world. We have already argued that mission is the restoration and/or the renewal of relationships. The church is not just any group of people coming together, sharing their lives and experiences as a sort of 'therapeutic group' focussing on the individual needs of the participants. Thus, the church or faith community must have a positive and definite missional vision to participate in what God is doing not only in their faith community but more especially in society, to qualify as a church. For this reason, *'The church is seen as essentially missionary: [...]* Its mission is not secondary to its being; the church exists in being sent

and in building up itself for the sake of its mission' (Bosch, 2011:381).

As such, Christian identity is received through participation in the church. 'God has first and foremost a relationship with the Church and through the Church he builds relationships with individuals. To be a Christian means to belong to the Church, and so belong to God' (Paas 2019:191). Our Christian identity is found in our participation in the *missio Dei*.

Conclusion

This chapter argued that mission can only be understood as *missio Trinitatis Dei*. Mission comes from the being of the trinitarian God, and theological study is studies about God. Then it becomes clear, according to the understandings of missiology mentioned in this study, for example, as the study of God's nature and salvation acts in creation, that all theological study must have a mission intention and dimension. As was stated, mission is the mother of all theology. Missiology is a major dimension of all theological study; thus, any theological curriculum without missiology would be incomplete. This chapter therefore concludes that missiology or mission studies is essential to the theological curriculum, even more so in a postmodern, post-Christendom, and global world.

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Chapter 13

The missional congregation in the local context

Attie van Niekerk 

Abstract

In this chapter, I reflect on the question: how can our theological curriculum equip future ministers to respond in a meaningful way to the large and complex problems of the country, such as poverty, joblessness, gender-based violence, crime, neglect and abuse of children, the consumer culture, ecological degradation? It suggests that theological students must get practical experience in: learning to know themselves; seeing their community and context, and letting it touch them deeply; understanding the existential questions that hang over their culture and the reasons why things are as they are; reflecting on what they have seen in the light of the Bible and theological tradition, and finding a meaningful response to what they have seen. Lastly, inspiration and dedication are needed. These steps are firstly taken by the students, as preparation for leading a congregation through the same procedure.

Introduction

In this chapter, I reflect on the question: How can our theological curriculum equip future ministers to respond in a meaningful way to the large and complex problems of the country, such as poverty, joblessness, gender-based violence, crime, neglect and abuse of children, the consumer culture, ecological degradation? The focus will be on the local congregation and the community in which it finds itself. It links up with the previous chapter, specifically regarding aspects such as 'context'. ('The content of mission is always

contextually determined since it is God's engagement with people living in a specific context and in a specific time in history.) and 'salvation wholeness'. ('Salvation 'wholeness' comes through confession of sin and repentance, but it has physical, emotional, social, and spiritual implications.') Salvation has comprehensiveness ... It relates to all of a person (Ps 32).

This chapter does not reflect on the questions if or why the church should be involved in such issues. These questions have been dealt with in the previous chapter. Neither do we look at ways in which a congregation can be mobilised to take ownership of the vision of being a missional church – that is dealt with in courses such as a Missional Leadership. The question that is dealt with here is how a congregation, once it has taken ownership of the vision and begins thinking about engaging with a specific issue, can approach it, given the identity and capacity of the given congregation and the nature of the given issue.

Attention will be given to a few key factors that are pertinent to the question of how to engage with complex problems in your community:

- The nature of theology – how we think.
- The lifestyle of the church and its members – how we live.
- The role of the church member in his or her community – what we do.
- What is needed for a church member to play a role in the community – what we need.

The nature of theology

The tradition of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria is to see the study of theology as the study of theological theories that can be found in books and libraries. In this tradition, the study of theology is based on the study of social sciences in general, and the biblical languages in particular, in order to learn basic principles that are supposed to be applied in different contexts afterwards. The

theological studies must be accompanied by the spiritual care of the students, to ensure their maturity as believers. For this, some periods are set aside every week. The students are also supposed to take an active part in their local congregations.

In the 1970s, when I studied theology at this faculty, this view of theology was expressed in the following structure: We first had to attain a BA degree, with Greek 2 and Hebrew 2 as compulsory subjects while Latin 1 was recommended. For the rest, we were free to choose. Philosophy, psychology and sociology were the most popular subjects. The BA degree was followed by three years of theological study, rounded off with one year of working part-time in a congregation, while still studying. This last year was meant as a transition, a bridge, from the study of theology to the application of theological theories and principles in practice.

In this approach, theology is a first-order activity. You first learn theology and then you go out to apply it in practice.

Years later, when I was lecturing part-time at the faculty, I realised how strong this idea still was in the minds of many. An event was organised for the lecturers of the church and the ministers of one of the synods to meet each other. The meeting took place in a nearby church hall. We were asked to sit on the stage; the ministers sat down in the hall. One of the ministers stood up and said that he was very glad for this opportunity, because he is in a rural congregation, far away from what is going on, but the lecturers are in the centre of things, they know what is going on, and he was there to learn from us. The whole event made me very uncomfortable.

Dirkie Smit (2002:99) defends an approach that involves both theology and practice. He maintains that theology is the reflection of faith that wants to understand. It is therefore not mere talk, not mere repetition, but thinking, free, critical thinking, but still afterthought. He also believes that theology is a second-order activity. The primary, first-order activity is the life of the community and tradition, but because the community self-critically wonders if they believe right, speak right, and live right, theological thinking is born.

If the traditional order at the faculty can be described as think- do, Smit proposes the opposite order: do-think.

In his encyclical *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis follows the methodical practice of seeing, judging, and acting. In No. 15 of his encyclical letter, he explains the steps he follows (I have inserted the words 'see', 'judge' and 'act'):

I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows [see]. I will then consider some principles drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition which can render our commitment to the environment more coherent. I will then attempt to get to the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes. This will help to provide an approach to ecology which respects our unique place as human beings in this world and our relationship to our surroundings [judge]. In light of this reflection, I will advance some broader proposals for dialogue and action which would involve each of us as individuals, and also affect international policy [act]. (*Laudato si'*, 15)

Francis closes off with 'some inspired guidelines for human development to be found in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience', which can be seen as part of the activity of Christian life. Without such sincere conviction, we should not expect much activity.

How can this be implemented in a theological course?

Andrew Kirk, a theologian who devoted a lifetime to theological training in South America and England, proposes a model that contains four learning stages that are implemented in a circular process so that one could begin with any one of them. The second, third and fourth stages are more or less the same as Pope Francis' three steps.

Kirk calls the first stage pilgrimage:

The first consists of an initial analysis of what the participants believe, know, understand, and have experienced – that is, their pilgrimage up to the point of embarking on formal theological education ... They will be encouraged to recall and reflect upon their own family life, both past and present, their experience of education, the formation of their values and convictions, likes and dislikes, their attitude toward and involvement in paid work, the process by which they came to Christian faith, and their experience of the church. In this way, they will spend time looking at their individual journeys as human beings and as Christian disciples. The rationale for this first stage is quite simple: it is based on the educational principle that learning best takes place within a consciously recognized process of growth, development, change, and new horizons. (Kirk, 1997:53–56)

This stage could be part of the formal curriculum, but it should be a normal part of every Christian's way of living, to understand yourself and what has made you what you are. And it is of special value for a theological student.

Kirk's second stage is a broadening of the scope of the first stage. He calls it 'cultural and social analysis.' It coincides with Pope Francis' first phase, namely 'drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today'. Formal science is certainly an important resource for the church. But for a local congregation's involvement with its community, an informal type of qualitative research is as important: to see, to be aware, to engage with what is going on, to be present. The congregation and its members are part of the local community, it is also *their* community. They must also interpret their own experience of and relationship with their community.

To get into the habit, theological students can analyse the student culture that prevails at the university and how it influences them, such as focusing on passing the examination rather than on preparing themselves for their calling.

We can call it participatory research, where church leaders and members participate in the life of their local civil society or community, sharing their experiences and reflecting on what it means.

In the traditional theological curriculum of the faculty, there was an element of Kirk's 'cultural and social analysis' in the subjects we took for the BA degree, such as anthropology and philosophy. However, most students did not attach much meaning to these courses. We said we were still in the desert, on our way to the 'Promised Land' of theological study. And when we arrived there, many students also did not see the value of theological studies itself, because they did not see its relevance for the great existential questions that hung over our cultures at the time: maybe because they did not make the effort to penetrate as deeply as possible into these questions. Our theological studies did not expect us to do that: we were there to study theology so that we would be able to apply it to any given context. However, we were not made fluent in interpreting any given context. The result was that many did not see the relevance of theology. What remained was to study to pass the exam, get the degree and be admitted to the ministry. For many, theology did not become an existential journey.

Kirk correctly observes that 'authentic cultural and social analysis is quite a sophisticated procedure', but for everybody, it is part of the art of living to understand what is going on in your own life and context. The theological student, even more than others, must become proficient in interpreting the context, not only the deep existential questions that people struggle with, but also how they try to answer those questions, where all of this comes from, and what that means in the light of the Word of God. This is a life-long journey.

Kirk's third stage is reflection, based on the study of the sources of Christian faith. It is similar to Pope Francis' second step, which we call 'judge'. Francis begins with a survey of the sources of Christian faith and, also, attempts 'to get to

the roots of the present situation, to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes’.

That reminds us of Wilbert R Shenk (1995:71), who maintains that the theological task is always to penetrate as deeply as possible into the great existential question that hangs over a culture. At the same time, a parallel movement must be made into God’s Word.

The fourth and final stage is action. The students should, based on their reflection on the prevailing student culture, ask themselves what they can and should do about it.

The whole process of missional engagement, in which the stages discussed above become one process, has been formulated well in liberation theology, which originated in Latin America in the 1970s. This theology stated that, at least since the time of Constantine, knowledge was seen as the mind’s conformity to a given object, something that is fixed and can be obtained by studying the already acquired knowledge. Liberation theologians, on the other hand, saw knowledge as dialectic: the mind’s immersion in the process of transforming and constructing a world that is still an unfinished project. In this approach, the theologian can no longer, as Barth said in 1933, be a ‘lonely bird on the rooftop’ who surveys its world and its agony from some detached position – the theologian must be involved with people in their daily affairs. At the same time, the main source of theology, apart from Scripture and tradition, was not philosophy anymore but the social sciences, and its main interlocutor was not the educated non-believer but the poor and the culturally marginalised (Bosch, 1994:423–424).

We will have to go one step further than the liberation theologians. With serious threats to the future of life on the planet, it is not enough to have an informed understanding of the social sciences, we also need to understand the role of the natural sciences and the impact of technology on our world. In *Laudato si’*, for example, Francis focuses on the dominant technocratic paradigm and the place of human beings and human action in the world (*LS*, 101). In No. 112 he says:

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We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral. Liberation from the dominant technocratic paradigm does in fact happen sometimes, for example, when cooperatives of small producers adopt less polluting means of production, and opt for a non-consumerist model of life, recreation and community. Or when technology is directed primarily to resolving people's concrete problems, truly helping them live with more dignity and less suffering. (LS, 112)

Not only philosophers and sociologists, but engineers, agricultural scientists and economists have become important for the mission of the church, together with those who live in a given context and know it from the inside.

The lifestyle of the church and its members

Over the past few centuries, modern missions have believed that modern culture is the fruit of the gospel, it is the way a Christian should live. It was seen as a better lifestyle than that of other cultures.

The mood was:

It was the gospel which had made the Western nations strong and great; it would do the same for other nations In the period following the First World War, one of the most popular missionary texts were the words of Jesus in John 10:10, 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly' and, says Newbigin ... 'abundant life' was interpreted as the abundance of good things that modern education, healing, and agriculture would provide for the deprived peoples of the world. (Bosch, 1994:293)

One of the important figures in the history of this faculty, Professor Johan Heyns, developed such an optimistic view of technology. He said that in technology (and other activities, such as art), a human person is not only a creature

but a co-creator with God. In technology, the person confirms his calling to rule over God's creation and rises above nature. In technology, nature is carried into the future, as processed, refined nature. The future form of the kingdom of God is a city, the eternal city of God. The city of God lies somewhere in the extension of the cities in which we live. Our cities are built through technology. Through technology, something of the eternal City of God can already become manifest. Heyns said civilization is a culture that responds to its God-ordained vocation, to rule over nature. In a primitive culture, on the other hand, interaction with nature is still flawed (Heyns, 1972:55; 1974:112, 114, 118, 119–120, 123; 1977:16, 17).

This belief in modernity has lost its power, despite all the good things that modern culture provides. Modernism has also brought fear and alienation. Pope Francis talks of ways in which we can be liberated from the dominant modern technocratic paradigm. There are different reasons for this, such as growing concern about the unsustainable rate at which modern development is using up natural resources and polluting the ecology, to the extent that it becomes a threat to life on the planet. Brian McLaren argues that the United States model of modern society and of development that has developed into the corporate global economy, is not the ideal society but the biggest problem in the world – a global suicide machine (McLaren, 2007:5, 11–12, 52–53).

The second reason is that mental health in the modern world is declining, despite economic growth. In the Introduction to their book (*Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty Isn't the American Dream*, Brian Fikkert and Kelly M. Kavic 2019) argue that while real income per capita tripled in the US between 1946 and 2014, the self-reported happiness of the average American stayed the same, while measures of physical, social, and psychological health are on the decline. From the late 1930s to the present, a period of sustained economic growth, depression, anxiety, and other mental health problems among America's youth have markedly increased. The suicide rate for Americans under age 24 increased by 137 percent from 1950 to 1999 and by an

additional 24 percent from 1999 to 2014 for all age groups combined. The authors conclude:

Research tells us that modern life is not good for mental health,' and yet Americans implicitly believe that they have exactly what the poor need. That is a mistake, warn Fikkert and Kacic: 'The American Dream' is the wrong story, for both poor people and ourselves. (Fikkert & LS, 15 Kacic, 2019)

The mood of the past, as described by Newbiggin (see the previous quotation from Bosch above), that the biblical 'fulness of life' can be reached through all the benefits of the modern world, cannot be maintained any longer. Besides, the fullness of life is something more than a good quality of life that is measured by the extent to which fundamental needs are satisfied. The theologian Christopher Wright (2010:93–94) adds the ethical aspect, specifically the Christian ethical aspect. He talks of an ethical quality of life. This addition changes the meaning of the term. Quality of life is not measured only in terms of human needs anymore, even if these needs remain very important. Quality of life is now measured in terms of certain values that cannot be derived only from what we need or want but from what is expected from us – most of all, from what God expects from us.

That was how God intended to reach the nations in the Old Testament, namely for Israel to be a community where all affairs are marked by righteousness and justice in a world of oppression and injustice, and so attract the nations to God. This now applies to the church as the people of God. Wright emphasises:

[T]he ethical quality of life of the people of God is the vital link between their calling and their mission. God's intention to bless the nations is inseparable from God's ethical demand on the people he has created to be the agent of that blessing. There is no biblical mission without biblical ethics. (Wright, 2010:93, 94)

The Christian's own lifestyle has become a key issue in the church's mission. And we do not uncritically believe that modernity provides the required lifestyle of the Christian anymore.

The calling of the Christian includes the calling of all people to take responsibility for all living creatures and the world as a whole. The biblical message is that humans were made in the image of God: 'In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' (Gen 1:27) and they were given the task of ruling over creation and caring for it, following God's way of ruling: with justice, kindness and wisdom. It is a calling focused on the natural or secular world. Science and technology can play a role in obeying this call, depending on how it is used and for what purpose.

We conclude this section with the statement in the World Council of Churches document, *Together Towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*:

Mission is the overflow of the infinite love of the Triune God. God's mission begins with the act of creation ... We are therefore called to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all of life. (Keum, 2013:9)

We need practices and lifestyles that do not destroy God's creation and harm other people, but that 'express our reconciled relationship with all of life'. Finding a lifestyle that expresses our reconciled relationships has become a key issue in the church's mission. Christians should actively participate in efforts to develop such practices in and around our own homes, our communities and our work.

The role of the church member in his or her own context

In a given community, also our working community, people of all backgrounds and religions have certain common concerns, and in crucial respects, we share a common destiny. We are all

affected by issues such as crime, pollution, climate change, war, pandemics, service delivery, driving behaviour, noise, domestic violence and social unrest. We depend on each other to effectively deal with these issues. That, and not our deepest convictions or values, is what we have in common. (see also Van Niekerk, 2022)

In communities and workplaces where people of different backgrounds are present, co-existence requires some level of interaction between groups. Bevans and Schroeder (2009:353, 383) give useful guidelines for Christians' conduct in such contexts: 'First of all, and perhaps most basic, witness is about individuals of faith living their lives in the light of that faith'. And where that includes being involved in your local community and meeting people of other faiths in the process, one could think of the 'dialogue of life' as a fundamental kind of dialogue.

The dialogue of life means that common solutions must be discovered, and developed, pragmatically in an ad hoc way, case by case, where we work together to solve a given common problem or learn to live with it. In such a context, the Christian believer can find a meaningful role as a member of society like anyone else.

In the missionary era, the church did pure church work: it sent missionaries to preach the gospel, win souls and plant churches. The present missional era is based on the insight that the local church itself is sent, not necessarily to go somewhere else, but definitely to its community, its context and networks to work for the reconciliation and reparation of all relationships in and around the local context. The message of the Kingdom of Christ must, like salt and yeast, become an active ingredient in the specific combination of things and thoughts that make each context what it is.

The Christians cannot work for the renewal of all relations on their own; it is not pure church work in the same way in which the formal preaching of the gospel is pure church work. When working for the renewal of all relations, the Christian must work with non-church and non-Christian

people and institutions to engage with the fundamental issues and existential questions of a given context. We will need insights, resources and skills that are not available in the church. We often have to work with people who have different values and aims.

We must learn to do so in a way that is effective and true to our own identity and calling as a church. Working with people of other orientations makes things more complicated, but on the other hand, it allows us to bridge the gap between faith and life. It enables us to meet people who do not know or understand Christianity or the message of the church and provide them with the opportunity to gain such understanding within a relationship of trust, by demonstrating our ethical quality of life – in which we often fail, as Israel did and Christianity has done repeatedly. In the process, we also get an opportunity to talk about Christ.

An interesting feature of our present context is that it is not only Christianity that is changing its understanding of the way it should function in the broader social context. The same is happening in many businesses and industries.

This is an example of an approach where Christianity may find significant common ground with a large business:

In about 2013 the South African insurance giant Santam Group and partners, with partners such as the WWF, proposed a way to deal with the unprecedented and dramatic increases in global environmental risk ‘caused by the interaction of a number of systemic factors, including climate change which was identified as the top risk by likelihood and impact combined’ (Shearing, 2011:5).

The Eden District Municipality in the Southern Cape was taken as a case study. It was found that the number of extreme events such as wildfires and flooding had increased in recent years, possibly caused by higher winter and spring temperatures in this area. This has led to huge costs for residents and the insurance industry. The second major finding was that local human-induced changes, such as the density of invasive alien trees and ‘changes to land cover and

the buffering capacity of ecosystems were of equal or greater importance in driving increasing risks, when compared to climate change' (Shearing, 2011:5).

The assessment of future risk has been the industry's main way of managing risk, but that has become more and more impossible to do due to the instability of the global system, including the impact of climate change. The study concludes that the insurance industry should complement its assessment of future risk with effective proactive risk management, targeted at the drivers of risk. To do proactive risk management effectively, the industry would have to convince the authorities, businesses and civil society to acknowledge the existence of shared risk and to move towards shared response or creating 'shared value' (Shearing, 2011:12). Reducing risk would benefit all parties involved, be it clients, communities, the insurance industry or governments.

This policy document has not been implemented so far, but in June 2017, bushfires destroyed huge areas of land and large parts of the scenic town Knysna, one of the towns in the municipal area that the Santam document dealt with; 600 families lost their homes, seven people were killed. Some 28 fires were reported in the area on 8 June alone. One resident remarked that it was like a war zone. The resident reported that there was no life left there, just death – no butterflies, no birds, no nothing. The fire took many people's livelihoods away – people who were once employed by the big hotels in the area that had burned down. Such events have become more frequent in this part of the world.

It would be instructive to make a calculation of what the implementation of the Santam policy would have cost, and what all stakeholders could have saved in this fire and several others in the area. A paper that was published in *Science*, 'How to Pay for Saving Biodiversity', states that globally, coastal wetland protection could lower annual flood damage, saving the insurance industry up to US\$52bn (Barbier et al., 2018).

Taking part in partnerships with a business like Santam, if they should implement the guidelines in their document,

to promote the common good or shared value can be a way in which the church can execute its missional calling. And it will make our involvement much more effective than trying to achieve something on our own, with our limited capacity.

This restored life, the life of the Kingdom, is only possible if the destruction brought about by sin is healed.

The congregation, with each church member, are called to find ways to express our reconciled relationship with all of life: good relationships with God, other people and creation, within the congregation and its surroundings.

How can a congregation play a role in the community?

Theological students must be equipped to guide their particular congregations through the same stages: see, judge, and act. It is good, like Kirk, to add another stage at the beginning: Getting to know yourself. And to end, like Pope Francis, with finding inspiration in the treasure of Christian spiritual experience and the Bible.

Kirk's first stage, pilgrimage, is very relevant for a congregation. A congregation, like an individual believer, must recall and reflect upon their past and present, how they have become what they are, the formation of their values and convictions, likes and dislikes, their attitude toward and involvement in the life and work of the congregation and their community, in their homes and at work. The members, individually and together, must reflect on their journeys as human beings and as Christian disciples. In this way, they will be better able to discern what choices have to be made for the way forward.

Are they caught up in the dominant technocratic paradigm of modern culture? Do they cherish elements of an African culture that are not reconcilable with their Christian faith? Have they submitted to the consumer culture, or perhaps to a culture of chronic poverty? Or are they just withdrawing into themselves, out of fear or out of an unhealthy

individualism, just pursuing their dreams, expecting God to provide them with what they want? Or perhaps allowed some or other collective to determine their identity?

Have they pinned their hopes on fickle powers?

Do they see their faith as something that is exercised in church on Sunday, or are they immersed in the process of transforming and constructing a local community that is still an unfinished project?

Kirk's second stage is to see. Francis started with the best insights of scientific research available today, letting them touch us deeply. Using science is vital. As important is being alert to our local context, to see, not merely those things that fit into our frame of thinking, and that confirm our existing opinions, wishes and insights, as happens with confirmation bias, a tendency that has been described as 'fooling ourselves and others' (McSweeney, 2021). It would be characteristic of a missional congregation to be interested in her context, in those who are not involved in the church, who are not interested, or maybe are angry at the church. This congregation would be eager to develop new insights into how its community functions, what is important for them, what they fear, what problems they struggle with, what answers they give, and what keeps them going. Does the congregation have different solutions for the same problems?

In the area where I live, some residents have no idea who their neighbours are, after they have lived next to them for twenty or thirty years. For active church members who have succumbed to this culture, the church is the community they belong to, not their local civil community. This culture must be changed before a congregation can have any value for its civil community.

In the process of penetrating as deeply as possible into the great existential question that hangs over the culture of their community and wider context, a congregation can, over time, develop the habit of discussing and interpreting the affairs of everyday life as they play out in their community, in

the news and the broader church family, and to reflect on it in the light of God's Word – to become a learning community.

A missional congregation will also be interested in other nearby communities. There is hardly a congregation in South Africa that does not have poor communities nearby. We must also see those communities, letting them touch us deeply.

By 2011, 2.01 million children were orphaned as a result of AIDS-related deaths (Breckenridge et al., 2017:503). Things have improved due to anti-retroviral treatment, but the Covid pandemic, and measures to curb it, have added an extra burden. And that isn't all. The Healthy Active Kids South Africa 2018 Report Card reports that 9.1% of 3 to 5-year-old children in South Africa are overweight (this percentage rises sharply in later age groups), while the prevalence of stunting in this age group was particularly high (21.5% stunted, 5.3% severely stunted). Both under and over-nutrition hamper healthy activity and learning (Draper, 2019:134).

Given that the plight of widows and orphans is repeatedly emphasised in the Bible as an issue that must be attended to, for example, in James 1:27. Considering what the future impact would be of large numbers of children who grow up lacking proper care, one would have expected that the churches and Christians in the country would have responded very diligently to the plight of millions of vulnerable children in the country. There is, however, a frightening lack of concern in large sectors of the church and society as a whole.

We only see what we want to see, what fits into our wishes and our framework, while we avoid information that makes us uncomfortable.

The same applies to other issues such as climate change and the growing gap between rich and poor.

The aim of seeing is not to overload our minds with dark and heavy information, which leaves us despondent. The aim is to identify an issue that the congregation can do something about, something that is important and meaningful. Pope Francis formulated it well, to repeat:

Practical Theology and Mission Studies

I will begin by briefly reviewing several aspects of the present ecological crisis, with the aim of drawing on the results of the best scientific research available today, *letting them touch us deeply and provide a concrete foundation for the ethical and spiritual itinerary that follows.* (LS, 15, author's emphasis)

Pope Francis drew some principles from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and he attempted to get to the roots of the present situation, to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes.

Shenk proposes a parallel movement: to penetrate as deeply as possible into the great existential questions that hang over a culture, with, at the same time, a parallel movement into God's Word. The congregation should reflect on what they have seen in and of their community, in the light of the Word of God – in their Bible study groups, and the church service on Sunday. In this way, the Bible will help them to see their community in a new light, and their involvement with the community will help them to see the relevance of their faith in a new light.

The last stage is 'doing'. The World Council of Churches, *Together Towards Life. Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Keum, 2013:9) formulated it well: We are called 'to move beyond a narrowly human-centred approach and to embrace forms of mission which express our reconciled relationship with all of life.'

That means that we have to search for practices and patterns of culture that express healthy relations with God, with other people and with the ecology.

Such practices are needed on all levels: globally, regionally and in local communities and households. It needs the involvement of all people: politicians, businesses and industries, NGOs and churches, schools and universities, corporations, households and individuals.

The local church and the community can identify and support initiatives in their own context that are trying to

break free of the dominant technocratic paradigm of our times, or of any similar force that keeps people away from a meaningful life: materialism, the consumer culture, ways of living and doing that contribute to climate change and ecological degradation, and a culture of chronic poverty and hopelessness. Christians can support fair trade organisations that promote products that do not abuse child labour, other workers or nature. Or Christians can take the initiative themselves by developing a culture of producing fruit in your garden and so reducing hunger and malnutrition, and/or the need to transport food over long distances, which further increases the emission of greenhouse gasses. There are many possibilities: finding ways to reduce and reuse waste, finding joy and fulfilment in good relations, simplicity rather than luxury, and engaging in constructive activity rather than curling into yourself like a hedgehog.

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Chapter 14

Raising action-oriented leaders relevant to the time

Jacques Beukes 

Introduction

There exist several instances of dysfunctional institutions, communities, individuals, and leaders in contemporary African contexts. Leadership entails the responsibility of fostering a sustainable impact of existential, ethical, and spiritual transformation within a given community (Mwambazambi, 2013:154). Mwambazambi argues that a fundamental ethical obligation exists to effectuate a comprehensive transformation of Africa's political, economic, and societal structures (Mwambazambi 2013:155; cf. Dames, 2017). Adhiambo (2012:157, 162) argues that African leaders are responsible for their own misfortunes, which may be a contributing factor. According to Adhiambo (2012:157), the concept of servant leadership could potentially provide a remedy for the self-perceived attitudes of superiority. It can be asserted that the absence of servant leadership and the resulting adversities experienced by African leaders are inadequate.

[T]he inability of leaders to maintain sustainable solutions to hunger, poverty and unemployment; mismanagement of resources in Africa; and flaws in systems that encourage favouritism, nepotism, tribalism, political differences, ideological and religious discrimination; a lack of capacity to manage society; poor leadership, poor planning, greed and worship of material things lack or failure to professional ethics; poor delivery of services and rampant human capital flight; as well as negative ethnicity culminating in wars and ethnic clashes. (Adhiambo, 2012:157–158, 164)

The chapter aims to define leadership, followed by a succinct analysis of the intersection between theological curricula and leadership, as well as practical theology and leadership. The final section of this chapter will delve into a comprehensive examination of diverse leadership styles that could potentially apply to our given context.

Defining leadership

The concept of leadership can be defined as a combination of art and skill, involving the collaborative efforts of one or more individuals to establish a common understanding aimed at achieving beneficial results (Elkington, 2013:3; Joynt, 2017:3). The definition encompasses a recognised leadership model known as spiritual-based values leadership. This model posits that leaders attain their leadership status by establishing a set of fundamental spiritual values that define their core character, irrespective of its nature (Fairholm, 2015:13; Joynt, 2017:3). Culture creation is a crucial component of spiritual leadership, wherein the leader replaces the work values of their colleagues with core spirit values that have a significant impact on their behaviour (Fairholm, 2015:19). According to Fairholm (2015:20–22), leaders who operate from their spiritual selves integrate their culture into their work community by fostering unity, building a culture of mutual trust, establishing a work community, cultivating harmonious relationships, constructing broad corporate structures, emphasising transformation, focusing on their co-workers' spirits, exercising spiritual intelligence, and fostering innovation (cf. Joynt, 2017). The implementation of changes necessitates leadership practises such as ethical conduct, service-oriented behaviour towards colleagues, facilitation of leadership development among workers, preservation of profitability, dissemination of information, consideration of colleagues' sensitivities, provision of mentorship and inspiration, as well as empowerment and nurturing of followers (Fairholm, 2015). Additionally, fostering creativity, developing self-control, establishing group purpose, and

replacing follower values from undesirable and destructive to desirable and constructive are also crucial leadership practices.

As Malphurs (2003:63), asserts, the pastoral leadership of a sizable church ranks among the top three most challenging professions globally. Hence, it would be advantageous for church leaders to acquire a more profound comprehension of the intricate adaptive characteristics of the church (cf. Joynt, 2017). The aforementioned awareness will enable the pastor to transcend the limited scope of localised factors that give rise to hardship and instead consider the broader macrocosmic phenomena that intersect, interrelate, and ultimately mould the diverse individuals and families comprising the church community (Elkington, 2013:9).

Leadership theories in general

There are numerous leadership theories present in various literature (Dinh et al. 2014). The comprehensive history and diverse range of leadership philosophies, theories, models, and styles are not within the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, a (very) brief summary will be provided.

Scholars have developed theories that encompass both micro-level processes, such as perceptions, emotions, and cognitions, and macro-level processes, such as the social-relational context (Joynt, 2012, 2017). Additionally, researchers have explored the leader's role in initiating organisational change and managing dynamic social networks within complex systems (Dinh et al., 2014:36–37). Theories have been classified into four fundamental categories, namely trait, behaviour, contingency, and power and influence (Mind Tools, 2017). Various theories have been formulated over time to explain leadership. These include leader trait theories that were developed before 1940, behavioural theories that were formulated between 1940 and 1960, and situational theories that have been developed since 1960 (April et al., 2013:1–6). Various leadership styles have been identified in the literature, such as situational, transformational, visionary, collaborative, servant, host, agile, adaptive, and resilient leadership (cf. April

et al., 2013). Additionally, other styles have been proposed, including pragmatic, idealist, diplomat, and steward (Murphy, 2015). Although it is important to take note of all these various models and theories, for the sake of this chapter though, it will be impossible to discuss every theory or model in detail. Therefore, I have decided to selectively address some of these (cf. Joynt, 2012, 2017).

Toxic leadership

Rainer (2014) delineates a set of 14 symptoms that are indicative of toxic church leaders. These symptoms include a lack of demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit, a preference for a minimalist structure of accountability, an expectation of behaviour from others that they do not adhere to themselves, a tendency to view almost everyone else as inferior, a display of favouritism, frequent anger outbursts, inconsistency in communication with different individuals, a proclivity to dismiss or marginalise individuals before attempting to develop them, manipulative behaviour, a lack of transparency, an unwillingness to accept pushback or disagreement, a tendency to surround themselves with sycophants, poor communication skills, and self-absorption (Joynt, 2012, 2017). According to Rainer (2014), leaders who exhibit toxic behaviour may be able to evade consequences for an extended period due to their charismatic and affable demeanour. The phrase ‘charming like a snake’ is often used to describe someone who can manipulate others through their charm and charisma.

The inquiry arises as to why leaders who exhibit toxic behaviour are elevated to higher positions within an organisation. As per the assertion made by Murphy and Cecil (2014:14), individuals who exhibit such tendencies are proficient in concealing their actions from higher authorities, thereby enabling them to ascend the organisational hierarchy. Additionally, these individuals are known to accomplish their objectives, albeit at the cost of causing significant damage in their wake. Toxic leaders often exhibit toxic behaviour

without deliberate intent and may not possess self-awareness regarding their toxicity. It is noteworthy that their toxicity is not constant.

Practical theology and leadership

It is imperative to engage in a comprehensive practical-theological interpretation, as suggested by Osmer (2008:11) and Heitink (1999:163–170, 178–179). According to Swinton and Mowat (2016:4), practical theology can be viewed from a theological perspective, whereby it involves the act of ‘performing the faith’ through the practical application of the gospel (cf. Joynt 2017). Osmer’s model of practical theological interpretation comprises four tasks, each with corresponding questions and functions, aimed at reflecting both practically and theologically. These four tasks are: (1) a descriptive [empirical] task that asks ‘what is going on?’ and it requires a posture of priestly listening; (2) an interpretive task that asks ‘why is it going on?’ and it requires a posture of sage wisdom; (3) a normative task that asks ‘what ought to be going on?’ and it requires a posture of prophetic discernment; and (4) a strategic task that asks ‘how might we respond?’ and it requires a posture of servant leadership (Smith, 2010:99–101). Joynt (2012, 2017) in his research, helps us to address the four questions asked by Osmer with regard to the context of leadership in the church or congregation. They are the following:

- What is going on: Is there a trend of clergy members departing from full-time pastoral ministry? Does leadership have an impact on employee turnover? There are several reasons why individuals are transitioning away from full-time pastoral ministry, and inadequate leadership is a contributing factor for those who are leaving despite their calling.
- Why is it going on: What are the leadership factors that are contributing to the departure of clergy members? Joynt (2012) in his research found in his empirical research, in addressing this question, that clergymen

discontinue their full-time pastoral duties due to various reasons. These reasons include their realisation that they were not initially called for the role, having a dual call (either concurrently or sequentially, such as being called as both a pastor and a businessman), or leaving despite being called due to factors such as the leadership style they experienced (Joynt, 2012:217). Furthermore, the phenomenon of clergy attrition is partly attributed to the presence of toxic leadership within religious institutions. According to scholarly discourse, leaders who exhibit toxic behaviour have a significant and long-lasting detrimental impact on the individuals, families, organisations, communities, and even entire societies under their leadership (Lipman-Blumen, 2005:2).

- What ought to be going on: What kind of leadership, whether it be person-based, trait-based, situation-based, or otherwise, is necessary to facilitate clergy retention? Joynt (2012) posits that the implementation of a steward leadership paradigm could potentially enhance clergy retention rates. This is because leaders who adopt this approach prioritise the welfare of each member within the organisation, foster positive team dynamics, and ensure that the organisation's values and objectives remain relevant (Geleta, 2017).
- How might we respond: Robert Elkington poses the question of how to alleviate the present departure from pastoral ministry. Can the development of strategies and mechanisms aid churches and pastors in achieving longevity and health in the context of pastoral leadership? Recommendations comprise providing leadership training in mentoring and coaching, alongside the adoption of six shifts to counteract the departure of pastors who abandon pastoral ministry as a vocation and profession (Elkington, 2013:11). Elkington's proposed shifts in church life include transitioning from a Christendom model to a missional mode, achieving a balanced and harmonious lifestyle instead of high intensity, incorporating resiliency training in ministry preparation, implementing a more effective system of care through denominational resources,

recognising the value of adversity in shaping pastors for more profound ministry outcomes and educating congregations on the significant cost of pastoral attrition (Elkington, 2013:11–12). The aforementioned changes have the potential to serve as crucial factors in the preservation of the clergy.

Raising action leaders

A case for praxis – go and do the following

Leadership can be perceived as an action rather than a specific role or an individual possessing certain leadership traits (Carrol, 2006:129). The practice of servant leadership is deeply ingrained in the practical experiences of various communities. Therefore, the perception of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ within society is that of an institution that embodies servitude, characterised by leaders who prioritise serving others. According to Bam (1984), the purpose of the church is to facilitate the realisation of Jesus Christ in the hearts of individuals and the church as a whole, with the ultimate goal of bringing about the Kingdom (Dames, 2017). Osmer (2008:183) posits that Jesus embodies God's royal rule in the form of a servant, thereby redefining the nature of power and authority. Christ's decision to take on the role of a servant is significant in this regard. The concept of servanthood holds a fundamental position in the mission of the community of disciples and leadership within said community (Dames, 2017:7).

Embodiment of faith

According to Osmer (2008:183–184), the profession in question ought to be viewed as a vocation, one that is firmly rooted in both divine spirituality and humanity. This inquiry raises fundamental questions, such as: What is the primary purpose or vocation of the human species? In what ways does this profession manifest itself in present-day circumstances? What is the function of practical theology in informing and

moulding communities to embody their calling? Dames (2017:1-9), in dealing with the servant leadership topic, specifically the existential service delivery challenge in South Africa and the embodiment of faith and servant leadership, also grapples with these questions mentioned in this section above, which leads me to the next section of this chapter.

Current curricula? Pedagogy? Faith formation? How do we train/equip Christian leaders?

We cannot seek to build ... leadership for a morally transformed society through [for instance] our education system unless we transform the political, economic and social relations. (Howell, 2009:148)

What strategies can be employed to provide leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge across the three public spheres of academia, church, and community? It is necessary to implement a pedagogy of leadership that involves a transformative process, known as agogical, which involves critical thinking to develop suitable theories that serve the entirety of our practices.

Dames and Dames (2014:3) deal with the same question in this regard, namely, what is the appropriate approach to tackling socio-political challenges and driving social transformation within the market, when viewed through the lens of public theology, with consideration for the broader society, academic institutions, and the church? Particularly concerning the domains of leadership and spirituality, as stated by Tracy (1981:5). The discourse thus far highlights the notion that the human concerns presented in this chapter necessitate theological contemplation and intervention regarding the intersectionality among the three spheres of public life. The significance of spirituality in leadership has garnered momentum on a global scale across all societal domains, as evidenced by the works of Gibbs (2005), Nell (2011), Roxburgh (2005) and Dames and Dames (2014). The recent focus on leadership can be traced back to a sense

of disappointment with capitalist markets, hierarchical structures, and enclave ideologies (Crossman, 2010:597; Dames & Dames, 2014:4). Undoubtedly, the ancient church boasts a lengthy chronicle of spiritual practises and beliefs. One example to be considered is the scholarly and monastic legacy of the desert fathers and mothers, as well as the ancient scholars (Hermans & Koerts 2013:2). The pursuit of scientific legitimacy for theology has led to the emergence of a division between the cognitive and the spiritual domains. Presently, spirituality is regarded as an autonomous field of study, distinct from theology. According to Wolfeich (2009:133), the crucial responsibility of practical theology is to provide normative structures for specific spiritual practices. Spirituality plays a significant role in practical theology by invigorating the interplay between theoretical concepts and their practical application.

Both spirituality and practical theology share a common goal of pursuing social transformation (Bell, 2008). The significance of spirituality lies in its potential to facilitate social transformation and political advancement. According to Hermans and Koerts (2013:5), the concept of spirituality can be defined as a means of developing one's ability to distinguish and make sound judgements. Discernment is perceived as the absent conceptual connection that enlightens leadership, particularly in the context of transformational and multicultural leadership (Dames & Dames, 2014:4). The notion of 'growing in discernment' suggests that spirituality is not a fixed construct, but rather a fluid and evolving concept (Doohan, 2007:107). The focus lies not on the act of prayer itself, but rather on the development and advancement of one's prayerful practises. Similarly, the emphasis is not solely on charitable actions, but rather on the progression and enhancement of one's charitable endeavours. Furthermore, the emphasis is not solely on the concept of social justice, but rather on the augmentation of one's dedication and involvement in promoting social justice. An essential element of Doohan's philosophy is the notion that spiritual fulfilment cannot be attained in solitude, but rather through communal

engagement with others. Hoppe (2005:85) integrates comparable notions in her spirituality framework to denote progression towards completeness, specifically: significance, associations, coherence and situational comprehension, and acceptance.

The discussion hitherto indicates that spirituality cannot be relegated to personalised, isolated, and theoretical manifestations of belief, but rather it is evident in communal expressions of faith. The nexus between spirituality and theology, particularly practical and public theology, can be established at this juncture (Dames & Dames, 2014:4). The concept of practical theology involves the application of faith in tangible ways, while public theology pertains to the outward expression of the Christian faith in various spheres, including the church, society, and academia (Tracy, 1981:5; cf. Dames & Dames, 2014:4).

At this juncture, the interrelated fields of spirituality and theology assume significance in effecting societal change within the frameworks of cultural diversity and social inequity. Prominent public theologians, including Beyers Naudé, exemplified their spirituality through public demonstrations against social injustice and oppression. Naudé's decision to resign from the DRC was motivated by his spiritual and moral convictions, which conflicted with the DRC's refusal to heed the call of three black Dutch Reformed family churches to join forces (Naudé, 1985:5–15). The relevance of spirituality lies in its ability to guide both sacred and secular leaders regarding issues of social inequality, ineffective leadership, and the complexities of multicultural societies, as observed in South Africa (Kovacs, 2011:167; cf. Dames & Dames 2014:4).

According to Lingenfelter (2008:16; cf. Dames & Dames, 2014:5), the gospel possesses a transcultural quality, and the teachings and life of Jesus offer Christian leaders the necessary spiritual resources to confront intricate and varied challenges of interpersonal conflicts. These conflicts often arise when teams and followers adopt opposing worldviews. The present situation necessitates the development of a novel leadership

pedagogy that can effectively address the intricate task of constructing a community from a multitude of culturally distinct groups (Lingenfelter, 2008:20; Roxburgh, 2005:20ff.). There is a requirement for a pedagogy of leadership that is transformational, with the ability to surpass social, cultural, racial, and ethnic barriers, thereby facilitating the development of novel habits and identities.

As per Roxburgh's (2005:1–20) findings, the transversal action of leaders involves the aptitude and willingness to acquire knowledge from diverse cultures, establish new trustworthy relationships, abandon obsolete habits and perspectives, and acquire new skills to create a new interracial, intercultural, and ultimately, multicultural society. This society is characterised by cooperation between one's own cultural or ethnic community and that of others (Dames & Dames, 2014:5).

Firet's (1968) work is beneficial for developing an agogical (transformational) leadership methodology. The subject matter pertains to the dynamic and mutually influential connection that exists between leaders, their followers, and the environment in which they operate. The leaders are tasked with the responsibility of embodying and fostering humanity and accountability within this relationship. According to Firet (1968), the development of leadership skills is an ongoing pedagogical process that aims to achieve spiritual growth and maturity. At this juncture, there arises a need for a pedagogical framework that can facilitate the development and alteration of worldviews, and subsequently, the experiences and social interactions of leaders.

The process theology proposed by Epperly (1989:324) sheds light on this particular case. The text presents a mystical perspective on the connection between God and humanity, which can be utilised as a fundamental framework for the development of a systematic and morally sound spiritual growth process. According to Ploeger's (1995:113) theory of human spirituality, this mystical action is a fundamental aspect of it. Process theology is a reflective and formational

approach that aligns with a pedagogy of leadership. It enables individuals to experience and comprehend multicultural, neo-colonial, or racialized realities through their most profound spiritual insights and values, including accountability, responsibility, and solidarity. The implementation of an agogical leadership process could potentially be advantageous in this context. Firet's (1968) pedagogical theory, which centres on spiritual development, emphasises three interconnected dimensions: openness to learning, the ability to make wise choices and judgements, and the capacity for innovation. Effective leaders ought to evaluate their openness to others based on genuineness, exercise reliable judgement or perception in intricate circumstances, and demonstrate ingenuity in establishing opportunities and practical applications for others. According to Firet (1968:290), the most elevated manifestation of human creativity, responsibility, and liberty is the spiritual action of leaders. The subject matter pertains to the development of human nature or the emergence of a genuine spiritual guide through an ongoing process of transformation within a wider framework of life perspective (Firet, 1968:246).

Ploeger's hermeneutic inquiry pertains to how leaders construe or construe their contextual and historical circumstances, as well as their present-day existence as lived encounters. This inquiry operates on three levels: personal, interpersonal, and public, as expounded by Dorr (1990). The aforementioned approach is an integrative spiritual hermeneutical approach that intersects and coincides with a comprehensive anthropology and worldview, resulting in the emergence of Ploeger's (1995) hermeneutical communicative action theory, as expounded upon earlier (Dames & Dames, 2014:5).

According to Adhiambo (2012:159), the intricate nature of leadership difficulties in Africa necessitates a multifaceted educational or interdisciplinary strategy. According to Adhiambo (2012:173), religious organisations are expected to cultivate servant leadership by enhancing the physical, intellectual, social, cultural, economic, and moral

development of individuals. Leaders are required to adopt an interdisciplinary, interactive, and contextual approach that incorporates the human, social, and natural sciences to address the present political, social, and economic challenges facing the African continent (Dames, 2017:5). To achieve this objective, it is imperative to foster a novel mindset for servant leadership through the process of informing, forming, and transforming leaders. The church plays a significant role in promoting servant leadership, which could be implemented in Africa to bolster development efforts and ensure that the development strategies formulated by African leaders uphold the dignity of the human person (cf. Dames, 2017:5).

Servant leadership

The term 'servant leadership' was first introduced by Robert Greenleaf in 1970 and is commonly employed in the field of management literature (Magezi, 2015:6). As this chapter primarily centred on the Christian viewpoint, it leads me to a discussion on the concept of biblical servant leadership. The biblical accounts of Matthew 20:20–28 and Mark 10:35–45 depict Jesus Christ as a servant leader. According to Kgatle (2018:3), Jesus discussed the topics of servanthood and leadership in a broad sense during the aforementioned discussion. Given the aforementioned, it is imperative for churches, especially those at the community level, to embrace servant leadership as their preferred leadership approach to effectuate transformations that exemplify the servitude of Jesus Christ (Osmer 2008:192). The concept of servant leadership was initially presented by the author in conjunction with the fourth task of theological interpretation, which pertains to practical considerations. Osmer (2008:176) highlights the significance of developing and implementing effective action strategies that yield desired outcomes in this practical undertaking. In accordance with the aforementioned, Kgatle (2018:3) concurs that the effective implementation of servant leadership is likely to enhance the performance of the organisation. According to Du Plessis and Nkambule (2020:5), effective organisational performance requires the

incorporation of servant leadership principles into managerial practises. This approach enables leaders to make informed decisions when addressing management issues, including strategic management.

In addition, the concept of servant leadership necessitates the presence of various attributes such as bravery, understanding, wisdom, honesty, and benevolence, among others. These traits must be accompanied by a steadfast reliance on and adherence to the divine. Du Plessis and Nkambule (2020) augment the aforementioned traits by highlighting that the foremost attribute of servant leadership is the capacity to induce a transformation of mindset in others. In a similar vein, the participants indicated that they refer to themselves as individuals who provide services to others. According to their perspective, servant leaders must possess divine qualities, and display empathy and compassion towards individuals from all walks of life, including those who are marginalised. In light of the aforementioned, Ottuh (2020:11) posits that it would be prudent for leaders to heed the teachings of John 13 in the Scriptures, as this particular chapter provides a noteworthy illustration of the concept of servant leadership. The Scriptures delineate that the master or leader is anticipated to assume the vanguard position as the servant leader for all and demonstrate leadership through personal conduct. Moreover, the aforementioned passage instils the characteristic of modesty and altruism within ecclesiastical figures, encompassing those who lead the members of the congregation. With regard to the participants, it is anticipated that leaders will assume a crucial function in reforming the mindset of self-centredness, authoritarianism, conceit, and other similar attitudes within the confines of the church and the wider community. According to Osmer (2008:192) and Stenschke (2017:10), for church leaders to embody the qualities of servant leadership, they must prioritise the needs of their followers, and also empower and aid them in the cultivation of their capacities and talents.

The concept of servant leadership involves prioritising the development and well-being of individuals, fostering

a sense of community, and promoting authenticity. This approach emphasises the importance of providing leadership that benefits both followers and the organisation as a whole and involves sharing power and status for the greater good of all involved parties. The servant leadership model places great emphasis on the leader's conduct, specifically in terms of serving, caring, sharing, and developing.

Religious groups in Africa have a responsibility to provide care and protection for impoverished and vulnerable communities, particularly in situations where individuals are marginalised by prevailing social and political structures, resulting in a loss of agency to resist various forms of oppression. The viewpoint of servant churches or religious institutions presents a challenge to the prevailing behaviours of political leaders in Africa who perceive themselves as 'kings and chiefs', as previously mentioned. Religious communities bear a moral obligation to provide education and inspiration, particularly in situations where human dignity is being denied, to empower individuals to advocate for their fundamental human rights (cf. Dames, 2017).

The ethical responsibility of religious communities lies in promoting genuine human and community development or service delivery, which can be viewed as an authentic form of liberation or cultural revolution for African individuals and peoples (Rwiza, 2008:246). According to Van der Ven (1998), development refers to the process of incorporating, expanding, and fulfilling the physical and psycho-spiritual requirements of individuals, communities, and nations within their distinctive historical and geographical context, while also prioritising ecological preservation. Hence, it is evident that any religious community or leadership position in Africa must not engage in a limited spiritual ministry aimed solely at sustaining religious institutions or leadership customs. According to Dreyer (2008), it is imperative for religious communities and their leaders to adopt a comprehensive, all-encompassing, and multidisciplinary approach to address various societal, financial, governmental, psychological, and spiritual concerns simultaneously.

Mobilising educational leaders to promote a novel vision of service ethics. The reconfiguration of theological perspectives on diaconia can also be facilitated for religious leaders through this approach. The field of practical theology has the potential to reform both religious and public practices to promote a novel service ethic that embodies a fresh perspective and sense of responsibility.

Steward leadership

As suggested by Wilson (2016:28), the concept of steward leadership has been in existence since the 1980s and is regarded as a forerunner to the study of ethical leadership (Bachmann 2008:30). Wilson (2016) defines steward leadership as the effective administration and expansion of resources within an organisation, accomplished through the guidance of personnel and activities while serving as a steward-servant who does not own the organisation (cf. Joynt, 2017). The ultimate goal is to fulfil the mission following the owners' objectives (Wilson, 2016:86).

According to Peters (2013), steward leaders are individuals who are driven by principles of justice and dignity and possess the ability to perceive the broader perspective (cf. Joynt, 2017:4). Individuals can transcend conventional self-centred and egotistical tendencies, and instead adopt a leadership style that prioritises the well-being of others (Joynt, 2017:4). The author highlights the importance of achieving outcomes in collaboration with others and notes the individual's proficiency in mobilising networks and resources towards a shared objective.

Joynt (2017:4) posits that involving all stakeholders in the economy and decentralising leadership, with a particular focus on engaging the younger generation, are two pivotal concepts in the realm of stewardship. Due to various factors, steward leaders possess certain characteristics such as recognising that their lives are not solely their own, prioritising their relationship with God as their primary pursuit, having a strong sense of self-identity, viewing those they lead and

serve as fellow travellers, considering all resources as divine endowments, acknowledging the spiritual conflict they face while striving to lead as faithful stewards in a world where others assume the role of master and understanding that triumph commences with surrender (Barnabas Foundation, 2015:3–5; cf. Rich, 2012:9).

According to Rich (2012:iii), a leader's self-identification as a steward leader can serve as an indicator of their attitude towards responsibility, authority, accountability, organisational ownership, and concern for the impoverished. Geleta (2017) posits that steward leadership commences with leaders acknowledging the transitory nature of their role in the broader context and recognising the necessity to function on three levels: personal, team, and global (cf. Joynt, 2012, 2017). At the individual level, it is imperative to promote the well-being of each member within the organisation. At the team level, it is crucial to ensure constructive interaction among team members. At a broader level, it is necessary to ensure that organisational values and missions remain appropriate, as stated by Geleta (2017).

Scholars have drawn comparisons between servant and steward leadership. A commonality between the two models is their shared emphasis on the replacement of self-interest with a focus on serving others as the fundamental basis for exercising power (Kaul 2014:5). The comparison between servant and steward leadership suggests that the former necessitates leaders to prioritise the expectations of others over their interests or benefits. This involves identifying and appropriately placing talent, fostering trust among leaders of different levels, attentively considering feedback and other input, and promoting employee involvement and engagement. On the other hand, the latter requires leaders to assume accountability and delegate responsibilities to employees and/or lower-level managers. This includes providing opportunities for learning and development to employees at all levels and ensuring equity in the work environment (Stewardship Asia Centre, 2016:3).

The concept of servant-steward leadership is exemplified by Jesus Christ, who fulfilled his divine mission by serving both his followers and God's will. This approach is discussed in the International Graduate School of Leadership (2016). The notion is emphasised by John in his recording of Jesus' statement, 'for I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me' (Jn 6:38, New International Version), and by Mark in his recording of Jesus' statement, 'For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:45).

Conclusion

An examination of leadership in South Africa through the lens of biblical and practical theological perspectives is well-suited for addressing the intricate interplay between the church, theology, and cultural challenges. Theology in South Africa ought to adopt a mindset of creativity and modesty in addressing issues of racial and cultural discord, while simultaneously cultivating a novel prophetic approach to multicultural leadership. The issue of religious and political leadership not adhering to God's message and fulfilling the needs of the populace should not be juxtaposed. The primary apprehension arises from the leaders' innate inclination, bestowed by a divine entity, to exhibit humbleness while catering to the needs of others. Through normative research, practical theology has the potential to construct a fresh perspective on service delivery. This can be achieved by analysing the history of service provision in South Africa and mobilising educational leaders to instil a renewed vision of service ethics. Religious leaders could potentially benefit from revising their theology of diaconia. The field of practical theology has the potential to modify both religious and public practices to cultivate a novel perspective and a heightened sense of societal responsibility. To achieve the intended objective, it is imperative to address the current void and disjointed nature of South Africa's service ethic.

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