### The Contemporary Theological Project

“Taking the Wanting out of Waiting”: HIV, Transactional Sex, and #Blessed in the Context of Neo-liberal Christianity  
*Beverley Haddad*

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Editorial

This volume of JTSA represents rather well the diversity of scholarly work that relates to and resonates with African contexts. JTSA does not require an overtly African focus for the articles it publishes, but we do seek for scholarship that will be useful to African contexts.

Our opening article, located within ‘The Contemporary Theological Project’ slot, intersects theology, economics, gender, and sex within specifically African contexts. How has the biblical-theological concept of ‘blessed’ become the marker for these African intersections? Charting the intersections, Beverley Haddad, both maps the terrain of these intersections and calls for further theological reflection, particularly from within the trajectory of African women’s theology.

Hans Austnaberg’s article interrogates notions of church space, including gendered church space, in a Malagasy context. The trinity is interrogated by Ernst Conradie and Teddy Sakupapa from a decolonial African theological perspective. In his analysis of the Evangelical response to our global environmental crisis Peter Houston includes the contribution of South African Evangelical theological reflection. Chammah Kaunda and Mutale Kaunda’s article analyses how the concept of a ‘national day of prayer’ is contested within Zambian Pentecostalism. And though Marius Nel’s article is not specifically about African Pentecostalism, there is much that resonates with African engagements with the story of the rape of Tamar.

The books our Book Review Editor has selected for review are books we believe have resources to offer to African contexts.

As editors we want to be clear that we do not exclude articles that are not overtly African in their orientation. African contexts are our primary dialogue partners, but we recognise that there is a range of scholarship that resonates with the African context as the subject of biblical, theological, and religious reflection.

Gerald West & Helen Efthimiadis-Keith
Biographical Notes of Authors

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**Hans Austnaberg** lives and works in Norway. He is a former missionary of the Lutheran Church in Madagascar and his PhD thesis investigates exorcism as practised and understood by so-called ‘shepherds’ in this church. He has published a book on preaching in Madagascar, co-edited another on preaching to youth in Norway, and is currently researching the role of pastors in the Church Education Reform in Norway.

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**Peter Houston** is a Research Associate with Stellenbosch University. He is an Anglican priest and Canon theologian in the Diocese of Natal. He is intrigued by historical theology, which promotes the understanding that theology is something dynamic; that ideas are embedded in the experiences of people in particular cultural systems and historical situations. He has published several papers in this field with this latest paper being yet another venture in this regard.

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Teddy Chalwe Sakupapa is a Zambian national and teaches ecumenical studies and social ethics in the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. His research interests include ecumenical theology, decoloniality, the discourse on God in African Theology, and spirituality in Africa. He has published articles on ecclesiology and pneumatology in African theology. His current research focuses on the doctrine of the Trinity in African theology.
“Taking the Wanting out of Waiting”: 
HIV, Transactional Sex, and #Blessed in the Context of Neo-liberal Christianity

Beverley Haddad

ABSTRACT

There are 2000 new HIV infections amongst young women between the ages of 15 and 24 in South Africa each week. Research over the past fifteen years has shown that transactional sex with older men, traditionally known as “sugar daddies”, is a key driver in this vulnerability. Recently, these older men have been termed “blessers” on social media sites with a community of young urban women, #Blessed, seeking lifestyles that embrace the commodified goods of neoliberal capitalism. The article discusses the notion of “transactional sex” and positions young women as both victim and agent in the South African context of unemployment and poverty. Possible linkages between the “blesser” phenomenon and theologies that promote prosperity “as a blessing from God” are explored. The article argues that by naming these relationships #Blessed, young women choose to harness the tools of prosperity theology and link their desire for material wealth and consumer lifestyles with the unmediated power of God who intervenes and “takes the wanting out of waiting”.1 African women’s theologies must, the article contends, address women’s agency that does not destabilise unequal gender relations by engaging the intersections of economics, gender, and sexuality in the current South African context.

Introduction

South Africa continues to have the largest HIV epidemic in the world with 7.1 million people living with the virus and an estimated 270 000 new infections in 2016.2 While HIV incidence seems to be declining in the general population, the

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rate of new infections remains high among young women aged 15-24 years. In this age and gender group there are approximately 2000 new HIV infections weekly, more than double the number seen in young men the same age. Elsewhere I have detailed the ongoing research over the last decade showing that a prime driver fuelling these high rates of infection is the fact that young women in this age group are having sex with older men. Age disparate sex has been discussed extensively in social science literature over the past fifteen years, with a particular emphasis on “sugar daddy” relationships. However, the turn to the “blesser” phenomenon as a form of transactional sex is a recent development with nuanced analytical work yet to be done within the field of social science and certainly within the theological terrain.

“Blesser” is the new buzzword declared an online news report in 2016. The term emerged in 2015 on social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter when young women “claimed to be beneficiaries of a ‘blesser’ who has ‘blessed’ them with luxurious gifts” using the hashtag #Blessed. By May 2016 an online service that links women with “blessers” was started by 35 year-old Ditshego (who chooses to remain anonymous) prompted by, he claims, the fact that “a 22-year-old was shamed on social media for dating an older businessman”. High profile “blessers” themselves began to popularise their

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Taking the Wanting out of Waiting: HIV, Transactional Sex, and #Blessed lifestyle through popular media such as television, most notably extremely wealthy Congolese, Serge Cabonge, who appeared in the documentary, “MTV Shuga: In Real Life” in June 2017. Cabonge “flaunts the fact that he’s a blesser – on TV, in newspapers and on social media” and openly declares that “he has ten or twelve girlfriends at a time”. Cabonge was one of the first to name the woman he “blesses”, a “blessee”, as well as the one to develop the idea that there are different levels of blessing. “Blessing” at Level 1 includes airtime and data, and as the levels increase, so does the amount of blessing, from clothes and luxurious goods (Level 2), to cars and IPads (Level 3), to overseas trips (Level 4). This idea that “blossers” offered “levels” of blessing is picked up on the BlesserFinder site with a post, “We are looking for blossers on all levels to appear in our reality TV show”. To date the BlesserFinder site has almost 100 000 followers.

At about the same time as the BlesserFinder site went digitally live in May 2016, the South African Minister of Health, Aaron Motsoaledi, announced a new R3 billion programme targeting young women between the ages of 15-24 years over a three year period which aimed at “keeping girls in schools, weaning them off so-called ‘sugar daddies’, and reducing teenage pregnancy”. No sooner had the campaign been launched, than the hashtag #antiblesser began trending on social media sites with people criticising both “blossers” and “blessees”. A graduate, Nkamogeleng, posted a photo of her degree ceremony under the #AntiBlesser saying, “When young women are busy searching for blossers we out here graduating. Goal achieved!!! God be praised”. Responses to this post were mixed with some women suggesting that Nkamogeleng should be calling the “blossers” out and not putting other women down. But she also had much support with one man, @BantuThatBoiB, posting a picture of himself holding a


11 Garsd and Crossan, “What it Means in South Africa When You Are #Blessed”.
12 Garsd and Crossan, “What it Means in South Africa When You Are #Blessed”.
13 Garsd and Crossan, “What it Means in South Africa When You Are #Blessed”.
14 Garsd and Crossan, “What it Means in South Africa When You Are #Blessed”.
poster that read “real men don’t buy girls”.

What is yet to be defined in the debate is the distinction between a “sugar daddy” and a “blesser” or whether there is a distinction at all. In reading the popular literature on the subject, it seems that they are seen as one and the same except, perhaps, that when one speaks of “blesser” relationships it is thought that financial transactions are often much higher than is the case in traditional “sugar daddy” relationships. However, this hypothesis still needs to be tested and if these terms are understood differently in urban and rural contexts.

But, even more significant to this research, is the question as to why a theological notion such as “blessing” has been popularised to symbolise financial blessing acquired through transactional sex. To my knowledge, no systematic work has been carried out on the subject despite the fact that the theological connotation of the “blessee”/“blesser” relationship is obvious. Yet the church has been strangely silent on the matter. There has been little consternation in the public realm let alone prophetic witness and action by the church.

Feminist African women scholars of religion and theology are not surprised. The church has shown little interest in addressing gender concerns within its own patriarchal practice and has been mostly quiet in the South African context of high rates of intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and links between gender violence and HIV, an issue I addressed more than fifteen years ago in 2002. Little has changed since then. The church remains one of the most patriarchal institutions in society with a reluctance to transform its structures to reflect gender inclusive leadership and practice. Wider society too continues to portray women as helpless and subservient while men are active agents. Social commentator, Nosipho Mngomezulu argues that this is evident in the public “blesser-blessee” discourse. In order to address these relationships, she suggests, there needs to be a much more nuanced understanding of the agentive nature of the actions of the women involved. Studies have increasingly highlighted the fact that the nature of transactional sex is contested. If theological discourse is to address the implications of the “blesser” phenomenon and the subsequent implications for the church’s involvement with the HIV epidemic, the contested nature of transactional sex must be explored and understood.

20 Meadows, “Where’s the Sugar Daddy Shaming?”
**Transactional Sex Contested**

Kirsten Stoebenau and her colleagues, in a study “Revisiting the Understanding of ‘Transactional Sex’ in sub-Saharan Africa: A Review and Synthesis of the Literature”, explore ways in which transactional sex has been defined and understood over the past two decades. Anthropological studies, they argue, reveal the role of sexual exchange in relationships from the pre-colonial period onwards, and in-depth studies have increasingly drawn attention to how gendered social and economic inequalities have structured sexual exchange, rather than focussing on “African sexuality”, the focus of earlier work on this debate. In attempting to synthesise the findings of studies, Stoebenau *et al* have identified three broad paradigms: the vulnerable victim and sex for basic needs; the powerful agent and sex for social status; and sex and material expressions of love.

The “vulnerable victim and sex for basic needs” paradigm “stresses the importance of gendered poverty as constraining women’s options and forcing many to rely on transactional sex for their survival… [while emphasising] “women’s lack of power in intimate, heterosexual relationships and describes women as victims of men’s privileged status.”

Studies within the “sex for improved social status” paradigm critique the “vulnerable victim” approach to transactional sex. In this body of work it is argued that transactional sex is “not limited to the destitute and the substance of exchange often extends beyond basic needs”, highlighting the agency of women in many instances who also use transactional sex to gain social status. Thus, transactional sex is not just to gain economic, but also social capital. It is “growing economic inequality and the increasing importance placed on the ownership of material goods for social mobility [that] motivate women’s engagement in transactional sex,” proponents of this paradigm argue.

However, suggest Stoebenau *et al*, the above two paradigms “fail to address the extent to which transactions occur within emotionally intimate relationships”.

Some studies, they argue, show how transactional sex is often “rooted in the
gendered expectation that men provide material and financial support...[and] such provision is seen as being associated with, and/or deepening, emotional intimacy”.32 This body of work is conceptualised as the “sex and material expression of love” paradigm.

Stoebenau et al indicate that while these three broad paradigms are apparent in the literature, a closer analysis suggests that the boundaries of each are fluid. Therefore, they argue, “[t]he nuance and complexity of transactional sexual relationships and the myriad motivations for its practice may be better represented as continuas – of Deprivation, Agency and Instrumentality – rather than discrete paradigms.”33

The work of Mark Hunter is crucial to this debate.34 Hunter conducted extensive ethnographic research over a number of years in Mandeni, northern KwaZulu-Natal, during a period when HIV was spreading rapidly in the area. The significance of this work is that it is conducted in a rural area within two types of housing, an established township and an informal settlement. Studies conducted in rural areas have tended to argue for “survival sex”, positioning young women as victims. Hunter, however, shows that while the privileged economic position of men and the cultural masculine discourses that place a high value on men having multiple partnerships are both crucial to transactional sex, a third factor that needs to be recognised is the agency of young women in this community.35 For Hunter, “women approach transactional relations not as passive victims, but in order to access power and resources in ways that can both challenge and reproduce patriarchal structures.”36 “Women in the township invoke discourses of ‘rights’ to justify their freedom of movement, thus facilitating relations with men that include sugar daddies” who are able to provide consumption goods such as cell phones.37 He argues that with the rise of the urban economy in this area, marriage has become unaffordable and so men’s gifts to multiple women has become acceptable.38 This has led to a situation where “it is virtually taken for granted that sexual relationships will be cemented with gifts from men”.39 All too often, Hunter suggests, young men are ridiculed for proposing love (shela)

when they have little material goods to offer. The woman, it seems, see multiple boyfriends “as a means to gaining control of their lives, rather than simply acts of desperation”. But the two are linked. While sex is essential to survival for “structurally marginalised” women, it “coexists with sex linked to consumption”. What is important in this patriarchal cultural context of material inequality and acceptance of men having multiple sexual partners, Hunter argues, is the fact that women actively choose (qoma) men and “rarely see themselves as ‘victims’”. Studies throughout Southern Africa reveal how women assert agency in their transactional sexual relations. These studies document how women describe their ability to extract resources from their male partners such as “milking the cow” (Mozambique), “de-toothing” (Uganda), “skinning the goat” (Tanzania), “tearing open the pocket” (Madagascar), and “plucking the chicken” [uyamcutha] (South Africa).

It is this agency of young women and girls and their desire for consumer goods that leads to sex for consumption within contexts of survival. While “survival sex” hovers as part of their reality, access to consumer goods also brings social status amongst their peers. Deevia Bhana and Rob Pattman have carried out qualitative research amongst peri-urban high school students in Inanda, a township outside Durban. They argue similarly that young girl’s aspirations for love are tied to their aspirations towards middle-class consumerism. “Fashion and desire for consumption sustain ideologies of sexuality that reinscribe patterns of [gender] inequality, but girls do so through their own agency, against the backdrop of poverty…”. Hunter’s later and more comprehensive work further demonstrates the fluidity of the paradigms outlined above by Stoebenau et al. Here, he argues that while transactional sex is tied to the economic, political and gendered economy and involves women’s agency, it is also not devoid of love and intimacy. Bhana and Pattman argue similarly that research has downplayed the role of love in the

41 Hunter, “The Materiality of Everyday Sex”, 112.
47 Hunter, Love in the Time of AIDS.
aspirations of young people.\textsuperscript{48} For Bhana and Pattman, while material conditions are important, they “jostle” with ideologies of love that are “complexly related to power and resources in ways that both challenge and reproduce gender inequalities”.\textsuperscript{49} Ideologies of love have longstanding cultural antecedents, including age disparate sexual relationships, as Leclerc-Madlala reminds us.\textsuperscript{50} She argues that in older accounts of courtship in KwaZulu-Natal, young girls are encouraged to seek out older men for greater marital stability and thus same age marital relationships are discouraged.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, Leclerc-Madlala argues, age disparate sex has always assumed a “reciprocal/transactional” element maintained by two interlinked enduring cultural prescriptions. “One prescribes for men to redistribute wealth on a scale appropriate to their standing and demonstrate love, commitment or appreciation for sex through material giving. The other prescribes for women to expect and receive a material compensation for sexual favours as a validation of their worth and as a sign of a partner’s love, commitment or appreciation.”\textsuperscript{52}

Given this, Brouard and Crewe suggest that with modernity taking hold in the post-apartheid context of economic inequality, it is not surprising that younger women “will seek to imbue their relationships with older men with some form of material gain”.\textsuperscript{53} What the “blesser” phenomenon alerts us to, is the fact that this “material gain” is largely focused on the commodities of modern life. There is now a blurring between “survival needs” and the “need” for consumer goods. As early as 2003, Leclerc-Madlala argued that young urban women were representing in their discourse the “need” for designer clothes, cell phones, and being taken to beachfront hotels in a similar way to their need for food and shelter. She termed these the “new needs” of modernity.\textsuperscript{54}

Just over a decade later, young urban women have begun to see the gaining of these “new needs” – the commodities of modernity – as a “blessing” as they seek out one or more “blessers” who will provide these “needs”. The most obvious question raised by this reality and posed in the opening pages of this paper, relates to the use of the theological term “blessing” to symbolise financial blessing acquired through transactional sex.

\textsuperscript{48} Bhana and Pattman, “Girls Want Money, Boys Want Virgins”, 962.
\textsuperscript{49} Bhana and Pattman, “Girls Want Money, Boys Want Virgins”, 962.
\textsuperscript{50} Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa: The Dynamics of Hypervulnerability”, \textit{AIDS} 22, Suppl 4 (2008), S17-S25.
\textsuperscript{51} Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa”, S22.
\textsuperscript{52} Leclerc-Madlala, “Age-Disparate and Inter-Generational Sex in Southern Africa”, S23.
Shifting Theological Terrain

While not attempting to undertake a hermeneutical exploration of the notion of “blessing” in the biblical text, suffice it to say for purposes of this paper, texts such as Genesis 12:2 illustrate that while there is a material dimension to God’s blessing, such blessing comes so that the individual can be a blessing to others. “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.” (Genesis 12:2). Blessing comes to the individual for the primary purpose of being able to reach out to other people with whom we are in relationship and so bless them. Material blessing from God is thus communal rather than individual. In prosperity theology, however, the antithesis holds true. Material blessing comes to the individual as a reward for faith and (in many cases) financial donations to individual leaders and churches. This form of blessing, emphasised in prosperity theology, is offered to the individual without responsibility to the wider community.

Prosperity theology emerged and was popularised in the United States of America from the 1950s onwards through the media of mass communication in which poverty was de-spiritualised and “mammon” re-signified into “financial blessing”.55 Heuser argues that the rise of the prosperity gospel in large parts of Africa, including South Africa, from the 1970s-1990s tended to depend on the stature of individuals such as Benson Idahosa in Nigeria and Ray McCauley in South Africa.56 The increase in this teaching and the rise of mega-churches, particularly in large cities, continues unabated in post-apartheid South Africa where there has been “a sudden infusion of commodities, an explosion of new forms of wealth, and a simultaneous shrinking of the labor market”.57 John and Jean Comaroff refer to this phenomenon in our neoliberal context as “millennium capitalism” which has a strong focus on consumption rather than production.58 With the demise of the stable labour market, this form of capitalism elicits both “hope and hopelessness” as the world becomes a place “simultaneously of possibility and impossibility.”59 As the unemployed look on from the outside, prosperity theology “praises the immediacy of desire”, making material gain synonymous with the unmediated power of God. This impulse towards the accumulation of wealth represents an act of “sacral consumption”.60 This sacral consumption takes

58 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium”, 279.
59 Comaroff and Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium”, 306.
place in the context of neoliberalism where there is an erasure of family and community, a loss of human integrity, and growing commodification of persons and their bodies.\textsuperscript{61}

Much of the popular literature on “blesser” relationships allude to the fact that the spiritual connotations are obvious. Stephan de Beer, in a popular piece in the Mail and Guardian in early stages of the “blesser” phenomenon in 2016, stated that the similarities between the financial blessing of the prosperity gospel and the “blessing” enjoyed by women “blessees” was obvious. He suggested that “[i]n both cases relationships are reduced to transactions, in which integrity and morality are traded for instant blessing with success and gratification”.\textsuperscript{62}

However, it is important to acknowledge that the trading of “integrity and morality” in the case of transactional sex is usually within a context of unemployment and survival. What is particularly significant in the “blesser/blessee” relationship, however, is the fact that survival sex for basic necessities has shifted into commodified sex for the instant gratification of the desire for luxury goods and opulent lifestyles, the “new needs” of modernity. The extent to which commodified sex – sex for consumption – has a direct link with the rise of the prosperity gospel requires further exploration, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

In my early work during the 1990s, I argued that poor and marginalised women of faith adopted resistance strategies that were not necessarily overt in the public realm.\textsuperscript{63} These women were constantly under the surveillance of patriarchy, \textit{apartheid}, and culture, yet despite this, they were agentive in their resistance. Their resistance, however, was covert and less obvious than overt feminist action in the public realm. I further argued that for these marginalised women, their faith in God – their blessing from God – came through their daily struggles for survival that enabled them to live day by day. Their working theologies of struggle were “theologies of survival” which were liberative in the sense that they were theologies of resistance as God “taught them to make a way where there was no way”.\textsuperscript{64} The women that participated in this work were middle aged, mothers and wives, and lived through times of extreme political violence in their community outside Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal during 1980s and early 1990s. Their theologies were forged in the dark days of \textit{apartheid}. They would have had little

\textsuperscript{61} Comaroff and Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium”, 306.
\textsuperscript{64} Delores Williams, \textit{Sisters in the Wilderness} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993).
experience of the globalised world and not yet been affected by neoliberalism that grew exponentially in South Africa during the mid-late 1990s.

This early work did not explore the working theologies of younger women who were not yet married. Perhaps if it had, the notion of “survival” would have been less obvious in their expressions of faith, even though it was a part of their lived reality in the home. Since then, the work of Hunter and that of Leclerc-Madlala working with young women in KwaZulu-Natal, discussed above, demonstrates that literal “survival” for younger women remains a reality in post-apartheid South Africa. In many ways, literal survival is now even more pronounced given the havoc wreaked by the HIV epidemic in the province, the growing disparity between the rich and poor, and the shrinking labour market leading to high rates of unemployment. Unemployed young women observe the accumulation of wealth by a select few from the outside, with despair and little hope that they too will benefit from the “explosion of new forms of wealth”. Given their situation, the increase in age disparate sex – young women having sex with older men – is understandable.

As the work of both Hunter and Leclerc-Madlala has shown, these relationships are often infused with the agency of the young women as they seek to take control of their lives through their sexual bodies. Both scholars, writing in the period 2000-2009 indicate how young rural women had moved beyond “survival sex” to using their bodies to obtain “the new needs of modernity” such as cell phones and designer clothes. However, it seems that the agency of the #Blessed community of young urban women that has emerged recently, is exercised to seek a lifestyle that epitomises values of neoliberal capitalism in its extreme form. Young women of the #Blessed community have chosen to assert their agency with the explicit aim of satisfying their immediate desire for lifestyles of consumption. They choose to harness the potential of their commodified body to fulfil the immediacy of their desire and embrace patriarchal structures of inequality in order to gain these material ends. Employing a by-product of neoliberal capitalism, social media, they demonstrate a new form of sacral consumption that seems to embrace gender inequality and ignore potential vulnerability to HIV. By naming these relationships #Blessed, they choose to harness the tools of prosperity theology and link their desire for material wealth and consumer lifestyles with the unmediated power of God who intervenes and “takes the wanting out of waiting”.65 In so doing, they cover their actions with spiritual sanction.

Ordinary women of faith in their struggle for survival during apartheid revered a God who “makes a way where there is no way”. The survival struggle depended on their relationships with, and responsibilities to, one another. Women looked after each other. In the post-apartheid, neo-liberal context of consumption, young

65 See Footnote 1.
urban #Blessed women rather look after themselves, as they seek to gratify their material desires. Working theologies of survival, which in the past were acts of solidarity and resistance to forms of oppression, have given way to individual material gratification and been replaced with theologies of consumption. This new theological terrain poses particular challenges to African women’s theology.

#Blessed and African Women’s Theologies

African women’s theologies have been at the forefront of critiquing patriarchy, culture and the intersections of these systems in fuelling the HIV epidemic. They have asserted women’s agency and called for solidarity from male theologians in formulating alternative masculinities in order to renew culture and mitigate HIV infection. At the heart of this body of work lies three assumptions. First, that women seek to be in relationship with men in egalitarian relationships that bring them dignity and respect. Second, that women assert their agency to achieve this goal and in so doing bring healing and wholeness to both groups who are transformed through this process. Third, that women assert their agency in solidarity with other women as they build alternative communities free from HIV. However, the #Blessed community of young women calls into question these three assumptions. Their assertion of a particular form of agency does not seek to destabilise unequal gender relations, as I have already suggested. Their orientation is individualistic and opportunist and shows little concern for other women. Furthermore, as studies on “sugar daddy” relationships have ascertained, women feel that the benefits far outweigh the risks of HIV infection. This seems to be the case for the #Blessed community, although this still needs to be corroborated through primary research. These women use their agency to find economic emancipation and adopt lifestyles that would otherwise be unattainable.

Clearly, in contexts severely impacted by globalised neoliberal capitalism and where there are systems in place that perpetuate structural economic inequality,


67 Five male theologians were invited to the Pan-African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Cameroon, 2007 to participate in a discussion on the role of men in the HIV epidemic. A publication on “redemptive masculinities” in the HIV context was published five years later. See Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, eds., Redemptive Masculinities: Men, HIV and Religion (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2012).

such as South African society, African women’s theologies cannot ignore these economic dimensions in their theological reflection. While African women’s theologies have made an enormous contribution over the past three decades in critiquing patriarchy and culture, systematic reflection on how globalised neoliberal capitalism intersects with these oppressive systems has been less forthcoming. In the South African context, our work has not had much to say about the prosperity gospel or its impact on the values and ideologies of young women. We have perhaps not been bold enough in speaking out against false prophets who commodify Christianity and thus provide a conduit for “sacral consumption”.

Our bodies, our sexualities, and our need for intimacy remain in the realm of taboo. If our work is to be relevant in addressing the growing rates of HIV incidence in young African women, then we have this enormous agenda ahead of us.
Negotiating Church Space
The Relations between Pastors and Shepherds in the Malagasy Lutheran Church

Hans Austnaberg

ABSTRACT

The main question of this article is how the negotiations on church space enable us to better understand the relationship between pastors and shepherds, two groups of church workers in the Malagasy Lutheran Church and the so-called awakening movement ( fifohazana ). This is investigated through three characteristics of place: the historical development, the relationship between the two groups and their identity focusing on ritual and gender. The author challenges the hierarchical thinking which seems to be inherent in the relationship between the two groups, and calls into attention how women are disempowered in the church space related to pastoral ministry while, at the same time, being empowered as shepherds.

Introduction

This article focuses on two groups of church workers in the Malagasy Lutheran Church (MLC): Pastors and shepherds. They are both initiated into their ministry. Pastors go through ordination ( ordinasiona ), while shepherds are consecrated ( fanokanana ). The two initiation-rituals are similar but not identical. Pastors and shepherd-elders assist at the consecration of shepherds but only pastors assist at ordination. Pastors have a profound theological education, while shepherds have a two-year part-time instruction. Foreign missionaries started the education of pastors; shepherd is a specific Malagasy title, denoting persons who are part of an indigenous movement originating in 1894 ( fifohazana , meaning awakening). The MLC does not ordain women, therefore all pastors are men; the shepherds are both men and women. The former missionary and Malagasy researcher, Cynthia Holder Rich, asserts that over 80 % of the shepherds are women.1 Pastors are

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salaried by the church; shepherds are unsalaried voluntary workers. Pastors are occupied with preaching the word and administering the sacraments; shepherds take care of the sick, heal and do diaconal work. Pastors have the responsibility for all the church work in the parish, including the work of the shepherds. Pastors lead Sunday services dressed in their white pastoral robes with a stole; shepherds organise mid-week healing services, dressed in slightly different white robes, without any stole. It is not unusual that someone may first train to become a shepherd and, after having served as a shepherd for some years, can be called to continue their training to become ordained as a pastor.3

Both pastors and shepherds use the church buildings for their services. They occupy the same church space but their use of the space is different. How are the relations between the two groups of church workers? How do they negotiate church space? The main question of this article is how the negotiations on place in the church enable us to more clearly understand the relationship between pastors and shepherds. To the best of my knowledge, there has been little research regarding this relationship. This is surprising since there are ample possibilities for conflict between the two groups of church workers.4 The present article is a step towards remedying the situation. I delimit the investigation to the relation between these two groups of church workers, the context of the investigation is the MLC, and my perspective on the relation between pastors and shepherds is limited to negotiations on place.

The Importance of Place/Space

In the Malagasy context, place is very important. The place of origin (tanindrazana, lit. the land of the ancestors) is held in high esteem, and elderly people who have moved to another part of the island normally want to return to their ancestral land when they grow old. They want to be buried in the ancestral tomb (fasandrazana), a place which is of utmost importance to the extended family. The Canadian anthropologist, Andrew Walsh, talks about how the communities of the living are rooted in places: land, invocation sites and tombs or cemeteries.5 If

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2 The Malagasy name of what I call healing services is asa sy fampaherezana, which can be translated “work and strengthening”. These services consist of singing, preaching, prayer, casting out of demons and prayer with intercession, which together is considered to effect spiritual, mental and physical healing for people in need.


4 See Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons*, 72-76 on the pastors’ reserve to engage in casting out of demons, which is considered as the shepherds’ special occupation.

5 Andrew Walsh, “Preserving Bodies, Saving Souls: Religious Incongruity in a Northern Malagasy
I ask the Malagasy about directions, they will not answer by referring to right or left, but to the cardinal points (east, west, ...), the ordered spaces of the universe.\(^6\) Even in the interior of the houses there are designated places oriented according to the northeast corner, which is sacred. There prayers to God and the ancestors are said.\(^7\) Churchgoers in Madagascar often refer to churches as holy places (toerana masina), places which are especially imbued with sacred power (hasina).\(^8\)

All our church buildings are storied places. They tell the story of the Christian faith by various architectural means and ordering of the churches and, according to the Church of England bishop John Inge, they tell the stories of the community worshipping there, their character and history.\(^9\) The Chinese-American geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, claims that place and space are often taken for granted, but should be described and made explicit as a constitutive factor in meaning making, not only a context.\(^10\) Inge also argues against the downgrading of place in Western thought and practice but, he notes in passing, that place remains significant in “those primitive societies which survive in today’s world”.\(^11\)

I understand place and space to be different aspects of the same phenomenon. Place is about locality and actuality. Space denotes more possibility, where something may happen. This is in line with the thinking of Swedish Professor of Religious Studies and Systematic Theology, Ola Sigurdson.\(^12\) I will use place when referring to the actual place in the church and space when the possibilities of the actual church space is in question. Since my main interest is not place in itself, I do not enter into a scholarly discussion of place. I rather intend to use a few main perspectives from the literature of place/space as a guide to understand the relationship between pastors and shepherds.\(^13\) This is in line with what Professor of Mining Town”, *Journal of Religion in Africa* 32, no. 3 (2002), 382.


\(^7\) The visitors and the elderly people sit north of the fireplace, the family west of it, the servants sit to the south and cooking utensils are placed to the east. François Rakotonaivo, *Ny Riba Malagasy Eran’ny Nosy* (Fianarantsoa: Ambozontany, 1997), 345-46.


\(^13\) Doing this, I borrow concepts that are extensively used in disciplines other than my own (practical theology), focussing more on a “meaningful” than a “correct” use, knowing well that I have not
Religious and Secular Studies, Kim Knott, asserts, namely that it is not necessary to apply all elements of spatial methodology to gain interesting results. This may be yielded only by basing the analysis on some of the dimensions.\textsuperscript{14}

The paradox of place is that it is both given and socially constructed, according to the Canadian Adjunct professor and Baptist pastor, Leonard Hjalmarson. It is storied and contested because humans have different values, goals and desires.\textsuperscript{15} I will describe how the church space is given but, at the same time, constructed differently by pastors and shepherds due to their different use of the place. The Norwegian Professor of New Testament studies, Jorunn Økland, has shown how ancient public place was discursively established,\textsuperscript{16} and so a plurality of meanings is given to particular places.\textsuperscript{17} I have decided to use Økland because she focuses on space, ritual and gender, which are among my main interests in this article. In addition, one of my main observations in the use of church space by pastors and shepherds is their gendered construction, accentuated in Økland’s book. The work of religious historian and theologian, Philip Sheldrake, is useful to me because of his focus on the connection of space with multivocalities, multilocality, spatialisation, power and exclusion. I will also weave in elements from the spatial theories of Kim Knott as well as French philosopher and sociologist, Henri Lefebvre.

Sheldrake argues that there are three characteristics of place. It engages with our identity, relationships and history.\textsuperscript{18} I will use these characteristics in the unfolding of the article, in reverse order. The historical background of pastors and shepherds, respectively, will illuminate their different use of church space. Field material will highlight the relationships between the two groups of church workers and, regarding identity, I will show how ritual is central in constructing sacred places,\textsuperscript{19} and how the church space is contested with regard to disempowerment and empowerment of women.

\begin{itemize}
  \item Knott, “Spatial Theory”, 28.
  \item Sheldrake, \textit{Spaces}, 9.
  \item Økland, “Women”, 33.
\end{itemize}
Sampling and Data Collection

I will use written sources related to the church and culture in Madagascar. Of special importance is Skeie’s doctoral dissertation,20 material published by Holder Rich,21 and my own doctoral dissertation.22

In addition, I build on modest field material focussed on the relationship between pastors and shepherds. This will mostly be used when discussing the relationship between pastors and shepherds, and partly when investigating identity. While teaching at the Lutheran Graduate School of Theology (SALT) in Fianarantsoa in 2014, I handed out a questionnaire in class, asking about the relations between pastors and shepherds.23 I chose questionnaires and not in-depth interviews because I knew some of the respondents and I wanted to secure anonymity on a delicate issue. The respondents were seminarians studying for their bachelors’ or masters’ degrees. All of them had completed their basic theological education at a regional seminary. I did not include personal information in the questionnaire, but from my impression in class, I would suggest that 5-10 % were women theologians.24 I distributed about 100 questionnaires and received 69 back. It turned out that 49 of the pastors/theologians were also consecrated shepherds,25 two were in the training program to become shepherds (novices), and 18 were pastors/theologians who had not previously been consecrated as shepherds. The majority of the respondents thus had a double identity as shepherd and pastor/theologian.

In this case my selection of setting came first, as I was invited as a guest lecturer to SALT, and this gave me the opportunity to carry out a small-scale survey in a relatively large class of students.26 I knew from earlier research that several of the pastors were also consecrated as shepherds, and my purposeful sampling enabled me to gather information on a specific topic. My sampling of respondents may be criticised, however. Why did I choose students at a theological institution and not

22 Austnaberg, Shepherds and Demons.
23 The questions were open-ended: What are the differences between pastors and shepherds, between ordination and consecration, in what they emphasise in the Christian faith? How will you describe the theology of the shepherds? Do pastors exorcise demons? Why and why not?
24 Only after having received the answers to the questionnaires, I realised how useful it could have been to know the gender of the respondents.
25 Some of the respondents are women who are not ordained. I therefore write pastor/theologian.
ordinary shepherds? Part of the reason for the selection was convenience; these respondents were readily at hand. On the other hand, I did so because I supposed that the selected respondents had good knowledge of both professions, since many of them had worked as shepherds for years before heading for ordination. Due to their rather extensive education, they would also be able to express themselves theoretically/theologically. Be that as it may, it should be taken into account that the answers given and the reflections done by my respondents reflect the viewpoints of just this selection of respondents.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that I am not an external observer to the relationship between pastors and shepherds. Having served as a missionary pastor in the MLC for nine years, I cooperated closely with both groups and, furthermore, did extensive research on the awakening movement for many years. I speak Malagasy fluently and all the translations of the field material from Malagasy to English are my responsibility.

**Church Space: Ordering of the Interior**

The first Norwegian Lutheran missionaries arrived in Madagascar in 1866 and, in less than 10 years, several churches were built. Some of them could accommodate 1000 people. Most churches had a large rectangular room with a church tower at the one end. They were placed according to the cardinal directions, with the same symbolism as Norwegian and European churches: the altar to the east and the nave oriented westwards. Thus the building itself embodies the encounter between the rising sun and the altar to the east, and the mundane in the nave facing west.

After having entered the church through the main entrance at the opposite end of the altar, there are pews on each side of the aisle. There is normally some open space between the first pew and one or two stairs leading up to the chancel. The altar, with a decorated altarpiece and surrounded half-way by the communion rail, stands in the centre of the chancel. The pulpit, facing towards the pews, is normally placed at one of the sides, sometimes with an additional stair. The baptismal font is on the opposite side. The chancel is sometimes fenced off with a wooden rail at each side, having an opening only where the stairs are. The church is set up in this way during the Sunday service. The pastor leads the liturgy from the altar and preaches from the pulpit. The congregation sits in the pews and moves into the chancel during baptism, communion and, sometimes, during the collection should the latter take place around the altar.

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27 By “ordinary shepherds” I mean shepherds who were not also ordained as pastors.
28 For a more detailed presentation of the negotiations with the state (Merina) authorities and how the church buildings secured the Norwegian missionaries a large amount of control of what went on inside the buildings, see Skeie, *Building God’s Kingdom*, 138-44.
During a mid-week healing service with exorcism of demons and prayer with intercession, which is called “work and strengthening” (*asa sy fampaherezana*), the set-up in the church is different. The chancel with the altar, communion rail and pulpit is not used at all. In the open space between the first pew and the stairs leading up to the chancel a small table with a white cloth is placed. There is a chair for the leader of the service on one side of the table. The first pew is ordered in a semi-circle. Some of the shepherds organise this before the service starts. When the exorcism of demons and the prayer with intercession are about to start, straw mats are placed on the floor in front of the first pew, replacing the table and the chair. People with special needs move to the first pew or to the straw mats, and the leader of the service may walk around and advise some people to move forward. The people on the first pew and the straw mats are treated with exorcism of demons and, afterwards, they are prayed for with intercession together with the rest of the congregation who wish to be prayed for.29

Sigurdson asserts that place and space have existential importance. A space is not just there; it emerges and is created through its use, a process taking time. He continues: “We are shaped […] by the places that we inhabit in a thoroughgoing sense, as they influence our very embodied comportment”.30 Henri Lefebvre called the perceived aspect of space a “spatial practice”,31 denoting how space is “generated, used and perceived by people in everyday life”, often taken for granted.32 This process of using the place by pastors and shepherds respectively, building on a very different set-up in the same building, has had an existential influence on them. In order to better understand this influence, let us look at the historical background, as place engages our history.33

**Historical Background**

A preparatory course for educating Malagasy Lutheran pastors started in 1871,34 and the first 11 graduates finished seminary in 1876. Skeie states that the “missionaries carefully selected, thoroughly educated, closely supervised and scrutinised the Malagasy Lutheran pastors-to-be”.35 The missionaries wanted to lay a solid foundation for the future church, unlike the Malagasy London Missionary Society (LMS) teachers and evangelists, whom the Norwegian missionaries

29 Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons*, 97, 112.
30 Sigurdson, “The Parish”, 90, 92.
34 Only five years after the first Norwegian missionaries had arrived in Madagascar.
considered poorly educated and largely spiritual ignorant.\textsuperscript{36} The education was mirrored according to the one given at the mission school in Stavanger, Norway: a boarding school with five years of education fully supported by the mission. The subjects were about the same as in Stavanger and the students received a rather solid theological and general education. The missionaries at the different stations singled out the best students preparing at teachers’ schools and sent them to seminary to become pastors. Only after ordination did they receive the title “pastor”.\textsuperscript{37} Until now, the education of pastors to work in the MLC has been a priority. Since the Lutheran Graduate School of Theology (SALT) started in 1989, the basic theological education for pastors has been four years at a regional theological seminary (STPL), with the possibility of continuing to take a bachelors’ and masters’ degree at the SALT. To be admitted to the SALT an STPL graduate must have a high school diploma.

In 1894 a peasant called Rainisoalambo had a dream of a person dressed in white standing before him and ordering him to throw away all the remedies he used in traditional healing.\textsuperscript{38} This was a time of misery for him; he had lost his position as a prominent religious specialist as people ceased to trust his ability, and he had become severely ill. Rainisoalambo had earlier been baptised in an independent congregation but he continued his practice as a traditional religious specialist. After the dream, convinced that Jesus had appeared to him, he threw away the remedies and recovered from his illness. He immediately started to preach the gospel, and people were healed from their illnesses when Rainisoalambo laid his hands on them and prayed. The awakening spread quickly and Rainisoalambo organised his followers as “disciples of the Lord”, later shepherds (mpiandry). He ordered them not to model the preachers in the churches (missionaries and pastors) who preached the power of Jesus but did not dare to cast out illnesses and demons. The awakening (fifohazana) influenced more and more people, among them also Lutheran teachers and pastors. It gave the Christians a new fervour and sincerity in their faith, as well as a new type of authority, since it was generally acknowledged by the missionaries that this came from God.\textsuperscript{39} The awakening with Rainisoalambo was the first of four main branches, each with

\textsuperscript{36} Skeie, \textit{Building God’s Kingdom}, 166.
\textsuperscript{37} Skeie, \textit{Building God’s Kingdom}, 159, 167, 169.
\textsuperscript{38} This and the following from Skeie, \textit{Building God’s Kingdom}, 193-94 and Austnaberg, \textit{Shepherds and Demons}, 42-44, 61.
\textsuperscript{39} There were various responses to the awakening in the first years, including critique. Some missionaries considered the awakening a patchwork of bits and pieces of Christian faith, integrated into a pre- or non-Christian setting. Others critiqued the importance given to the expulsion of demons. See Kjetil Aano, “The Missions and the Fifohazana: Cultural Clashes and the Question of Power,” in \textit{The Fifohazana. Madagascar’s Indigenous Christian Movement}, edited by Cynthia Holder Rich (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008), 54-55.
an outstanding leader, the most widely known being Nenilava on the east coast. Two of four awakening leaders were women. The awakening, a vibrant movement even now, is also institutionalised as a department within the MLC, from the local church to the top level, and it is both under the jurisdiction of the church and has its obligation to the founders. The instruction of shepherds is a 2-year, part time program before consecration. According to the latest and most reliable statistics, there are today 42 216 shepherds in the MLC.40

Historically, the places where the founders were called and started their ministry are most significant for the shepherds, and there is a commemoration day every year with consecration of shepherds from all over the country at these sites.41 On the day-to-day level, however, the shepherds have their healing services in parish churches or churches in the special sites (toby) established to treat people the shepherds consider to be assaulted by demons (voan’ny demonia).42 That the shepherds from the very beginning have used the churches can be seen from a note in the book of the French Protestant missionary from the early twentieth century, Elisée Escande.43 He met with leaders of the awakening to persuade them to have healing services in more private settings and not in the church, due to his concern that the French authorities may consider the practice as sorcery.44

The diachronic aspect, what happened in the historical development, is inscribed in space. The past has left its traces. Yet, it is always a present space. “Thus production process and product present themselves as two inseparable aspects […],” according to Lefebvre.45 The history of the two groups of church workers, inscribed in the church space, represents very different traditions: The missionary-initiated pastor and the awakening movement, originating in Malagasy

40 Cornelius Munkvik, Madagaskar: Mennesker Og Menigheter Etter 150 År Med Norsk Misjon (Suldalsosen: Mosaikk forl., 2017), 9. In addition, there are many shepherds affiliated to the Reformed Church (FJKM). Holder Rich asserts that more than 100 000 shepherds are active all over Madagascar but I consider this number too high. Rich, Indigenous Christianity in Madagascar: The Power to Heal in Community, 47.
41 Shepherds may be consecrated also in other camps (toby).
42 Cf Austnaberg, Shepherds and Demons, 87-94, where the terminology shepherds use in relation to demons is discussed.
44 The professor of Liturgical Studies, James F. White, asserts that historically the healing of the sick was mainly performed in sickrooms or hospitals, and was moved away from the space of the worshipping congregation. He notes, however, that today both Pentecostals and many mainline churches have public healing during Sunday services. James F. White, “The Spatial Setting”, in The Oxford History of Christian Worship, edited by Geoffrey Wainwright and Karen B. Westerfield Tucker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 813-14).
45 Lefebvre, Production of Space, 37.
soil; the ordinary, education-based pastor and the charismatically practising shepherd; the pastor with a thorough theological education and the part-time, much shorter instruction of shepherds. Even the etymology of the inherited names of the two groups, pastors and shepherds, signal historical differences, although they basically have the same meaning.46 If the church space inhabited by pastors and shepherds respectively reflect the history, we may talk about multivocalities of place,47 many different voices being heard in the same place: voices of the educated and less educated, of men and women, of sacramentality and healing. This will be even more apparent when we proceed to how place engages relationships.

Relationships between Pastors and Shepherds

Lefebvre argues that there is a theoretical unity between physical, mental, and social space: “[S]ocial relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space” because their underpinning is spatial.48 The relationality of space is thus emphasised. When the respondents were asked about the differences between pastors and shepherds, some mainly emphasised the similarities between the two groups: They both preach the gospel and serve God (1, 13).49 Both have a calling for their ministry; they are chosen by God and the church and thus are given authority (5). Other respondents stated obvious differences concerning education (16, 51), salary or volunteer work (22, 36), ordination or consecration (59), and robe (28). However, there are possible tensions. The pastor is the one mainly responsible for all church work in the parish (19, 21). It is repeatedly said that the area of responsibility is larger for the pastor than the shepherd, and that the pastor is licenced to do all the shepherd work, while the contrary is not the case (32, 43). This response points to a hierarchy where the shepherds are under the supervision of the pastor (27, 42). It may thus be said that the shepherd is “his child” (35), a family metaphor with clear connotations of hierarchy but, also, of care. Another expression pointing to a hierarchical thinking is that the pastor may instruct, or direct (mibaiko), the shepherds (52). Pastors teach novices to become shepherds,50 and they are supposed to arrange regular teaching for working shepherds (35). The district pastor stamps the shepherds’


47 Sheldrake, Spaces, 21.


49 I have numbered the questionnaires at random from 1 to 69 and I furnish the number when referring to the respondents.

50 Together with awakening-elders, especially when the teaching is done in the sites (toby).
The most fanatical shepherds assert that the pastor does his work by leaning on his knowledge, while they do it through the Holy Spirit (2). Similar to this is the saying that pastors trust the intellect while shepherds are driven by passion (3). One respondent says that the pastor follows the liturgical prescriptions while the shepherd always shares the gospel of Jesus (29), and another asserts that the pastor boasts of his salaried position while the shepherds live a daily spiritual life (54).

The fieldwork suggests that the relationships between the two groups of church workers are multifaceted. The most extreme shepherds seem to negotiate their space by suggesting that they are more spiritual than the pastors, and they accuse pastors for being this-worldly. This may lead to disrespect and withdrawal from cooperation. One way I interpret these opinions is that the shepherds negotiate space in face of the hierarchical relationship existing between the two groups, which is one of the most prominent traits in the field material. Both pastors and shepherds kneel at the communion rail during ordination or consecration, but only the pastors stay in the chancel. After ordination pastors have access to the altar where they stand during the Sunday service liturgy. They go outside the communion rail when preaching but, even then, they stay on an elevated position in the chancel. The shepherds, on the other hand, descend from the chancel. They have negotiated their own space below the pastor’s space, between the men and the congregation, on the same level as the pews. The very place pastors and shepherds respectively inhabit expresses what the respondents repeatedly state: the pastor is above the shepherd. One respondent even says that some shepherds think that pastors have more sacred power (*tombom-pahamasinana*) than they have, and therefore they accept to be directed by the pastor (27). The hierarchy is inscribed in the place. What would happen if the shepherds ascend into the chancel, the altar, communion rail and pulpit, and renegotiate their space? Would this contribute towards levelling the relationship between the two groups? While the answer is uncertain, it still remains a challenge.

There may be disadvantages for the pastor in the hierarchical relationship. He is more remote and separated from the ordinary people. One respondent holds that ordinary people in difficult situations would rather approach shepherds because they are at the same level (10). This seems to point to distance, but there may also be other reasons why people consult shepherds, the most obvious being that they are in need of healing. However, one may wonder what would happen if pastors renegotiated their space and found ways to diminish the distance from ordinary

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51 Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons*, 45, footnote 125.
52 The root of the word used is *hasina*, which is difficult to translate into English. It may denote the power, holiness or unapproachable force that is imbued in certain places, people or rituals. Régis Rajemisa-Raolison, *Rakibolana Malagasy* (Fianarantsoa: Ambozontany, 1985), 417.
people. Would they be willing to do so, or are the accusations about their pride and unwillingness to degrade themselves true (2, 5, 11)? Would they prefer to stay in the place they have already negotiated through the historical development?53

It is generally acknowledged that the healing of the sick is the shepherds’ special responsibility in church life. A specific area highlighting the relationship between pastors and shepherds is whether pastors take part in the casting-out-of-demons ritual, an integrated part of every healing service, or not. When this issue causes conflict, however, it is because of the different reasons and interpretations, from both pastors and shepherds, on why pastors take part in this or not. Most pastors seem to cast out demons “from time to time” (62) when they deem it necessary, or when there are no/not enough shepherds (36, 38). The most common reason for pastors taking part in the casting out of demons is that they are consecrated as shepherds before ordination (1, 2, 10). However, it is also emphasised that the pastor is given the authority to do all the shepherds’ work through ordination (11, 41).54 The bottom line is that many pastors see casting out of demons as part of their job, since they have an overall responsibility in the parish (56, 57). One respondent turns this upside down, saying that this is the pastor’s responsibility and the shepherds assist him (50). Other reasons for pastors’ participation include: being a model for the shepherds and exercising their leadership (21, 22, 30). Since the Bible exhorts followers of Jesus to do so (Mark 16:15-20), and Jesus did so, pastors too will engage in this practice (5, 20). If the pastor is persuaded about the significance of the awakening for the vigour of the church, he will take part (8, 29), and to participate gives him strength to continue his ministry (15). One respondent even says that when the pastor casts out demons he “removes his own [demons?] too, and this gives him strength” (32). An interesting saying,

53 It should not go unnoticed, however, that the shepherds, too, make a distinction in the way they treat people coming to the healing services. Descending on the straw mats puts people in a subordinate position. In the traditional cultural context, to sit on the floor represents the lower position of the Malagasy world, here symbolised by the evil spirits, while to sit on chairs represents the European world, here symbolised by the gospel of Jesus coming from abroad (Gueunier, “Austnaberg, Hans”, 6). Adding to this, during the laying on of hands after exorcism of demons, people normally kneel down on the floor while the shepherds stand. The American anthropologist, Lesley A. Sharp, asserts that the touching of people’s head is a “highly charged, symbolic gesture, that violates Malagasy rules of status etiquette”. She holds that the head is sacred and should not be touched. In accepting this gesture, people submit to the authority of the shepherds, she asserts, and the relationship is only restored to an equal one when people convert and embrace Christianity. Lesley A. Sharp, “The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town” (Doctoral dissertation, University of California Press, 1993), 273. The relationship between shepherds and ordinary people is not commented on in the fieldwork material, since the purpose of the research was the relationship between pastors and shepherds.

54 The General Synod of the MLC and the statutes of the awakening movement have made clear that pastors may cast out demons owing to their ordination. Austnaberg, Shepherds and Demons, 72-73.
with regard to multilocality,\textsuperscript{55} is that when there is no communion at the Sunday services there may well be casting out of demons and prayer with intercession as part of the service. With many people gathered and fewer shepherds present, the pastor’s participation is therefore necessary (55). The same place is therefore used, as both a Sunday service and a healing service, at the same time.\textsuperscript{56}

The mentioned reasons for pastors not to take part in the casting out of demons are diverse. Most may be classified as rather ordinary: It is a question of division of labour. This is the shepherds’ work and when there are enough shepherds, the pastor does not need to participate (9, 14, 23). Pastors already have full working hours (9, 35) and their task is to oversee the shepherds’ work, not to actively take part (51); also, they do not wish to offend by intruding into the space of others (55). Some responses point to reluctance by the pastor to stand together with the shepherds in the casting-out-of-demons ritual because the people would rather stand in queue to be prayed for by the pastor at the time of intercessions; this may cause the shepherds to lose face or to become discouraged (41, 47, 68). In such cases the reluctance can be interpreted as caring and respect for the shepherds. Other reasons point to conflict, however, and my respondents mention several. The pastor sees ordination as a more elevated level (2) and to participate in the shepherds’ work is considered inferior (31, 35); he may even dislike the awakening (19), devalue the shepherd ministry (5, 13) or counteract their work (11).\textsuperscript{57} What contributes to this attitude may be his thinking that the awakening does not stem from God but from humans (37). He may think that the shepherds are dreaming and are on the wrong track, and that they emphasise the presence of the Holy Spirit by their crying, tongues and prophesying without really having contact with Jesus (62). Some say that the evil spirits are driven out through preaching and so there is no need for the casting-out-of-demons ritual (3, 51), and one respondent says that some pastors may not believe in the existence of demons (20). Others suggest that pastors do not dare to participate because they struggle with their own moral problems (61), or that they “fear that they will be shamed by the words of the persons who are assaulted by demons” (21). Respondent 21

\textsuperscript{55} Sheldrake, \textit{Spaces}, 21.

\textsuperscript{56} The National Church Council (KMSL) in November 2001 turned down a proposal from the Awakening head office (FIFIL) that every service without Holy Communion should have exorcism and prayer with intercession as part of the liturgy. Each congregation was free to implement this or not (Rolf Ekenes, “Rapport Fra KMSL-107 I Betioky Atsimo 31. Okt - 6. Nov 2001,” Antananarivo 2001), 4). Niellsen and Skeie, “Christian Revivalism”, 201 say that the exorcism-ritual has been incorporated in some churches’ services during the last two decades. The question whether this ritual replaces the Holy Communion and is considered a sacrament in the church will not be dealt with in this article.

\textsuperscript{57} The respondent does not mention in what way the pastor may counteract the shepherds’ work. One way of doing so may be to not encourage people in need to attend healing services.
does not elaborate on this but one interpretation may be that the treated person reveals sins or unsettled matters in the pastor’s life.\textsuperscript{58}

What are the negotiations at play here? Since there are differing viewpoints in the field material, we may talk about multivocalities or differing voices rather than clear-cut lines. Do some pastors want to take more part in the exorcism of demons, and consequently attempt to negotiate space within the healing services? Do some shepherds want the pastors to become more active in the ritual or do they rather negotiate to keep this area as their own special responsibility? The field material does not answer these questions, but there are probably a number of various opinions on these matters among pastors and shepherds.

That systems of spatialisation are historically conditioned does not only concern the physical arrangement but also social actions and patterns, according to Sheldrake.\textsuperscript{59} To define place and space is power. According to Knott, the French philosopher Michel Foucault “assumed a direct and necessary relationship between space and power”.\textsuperscript{60} The field work shows some of the power relations between pastors and shepherds and I think this aspect has to be taken into account when trying to understand the relationship between the two groups. Since there are so many different viewpoints related to the relationship, it seems to me that how they look at themselves and the others is not fixed but open for negotiation.

Another relation, also apparent in the field material, is the relation between God and humans in the church. Pastors and shepherds consider themselves as being called and authorised by God to perform their work: to facilitate the people’s encounter with the living God through word and sacrament, the casting out of demons, and prayer with intercession. The respondents talk about pastors and shepherds distributing forgiveness (37, 40). Maybe it is the relationship/encounter with God that causes people to call the church a holy place (toerana masina). Inge describes the centrality of place in the Old Testament, concluding that the relationship between God, people and place is crucial.\textsuperscript{61} This threefold relationship is seen in the fieldwork material. A parallel to this may be found in the traditional Malagasy thinking about place, especially connected to the cultivated land, like rice fields. It gives life (aina) and is thus an absolute prerequisite for life.\textsuperscript{62} In a similar way, one may say that being in the church (the specific place where there is relationship with God) feeds life, because the spiritual aspect of life is of utmost importance in a Malagasy worldview.

\textsuperscript{58} Cf the New Testament stories where persons possessed by demons have access to truths and may reveal secrets. In Luke 4:34, for example, the demon-possessed reveals truth about who Jesus is.


\textsuperscript{60} Knott, “Spatial theory”, 9.

\textsuperscript{61} Inge, \textit{A Christian Theology}, 46-47. In chapter 2 Inge, following the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann, comes to this conclusion by sketching the main lines in Israel’s story.

\textsuperscript{62} Dubois, \textit{Olombelona}, 91-92.
Place Engages with the Identity of Pastors and Shepherds

In this subsection, I have deliberately delimited the presentation of how place engages with identity to the significance of ritual and the disempowerment/empowerment of women.63 Økland asserts that ritual constructs sanctuary space. Ritual is not something people do when coming to a sacred place but an activity that creates and defines place,64 and Knott refers to Jonathan Z. Smith who holds that human beings bring sacred places into being through ritual.65 Let us see how the Sunday service liturgy and the healing service ritual, respectively, have contributed to this.

In a section of her book discussing how “Norwegian” or “Malagasy” the church in Madagascar should be, Skeie mentions that the Norwegian Lutheran liturgy from the very beginning was translated into Malagasy and used in the “Norwegian” churches.66 To the majority of missionaries this seemed unproblematic. When the Lutheran Church in Norway introduced a new altar book, the missionaries had this translated and introduced it in the churches.67 This seems to have been the case ever since, and the liturgy in use now is very close to the Norwegian altar book used until 1977. The pastor, in his long white robe with stole, goes to the altar during the prelude. When the prelude is finished, he starts by invoking the triune God and then, while the pastor kneels at the corner of the altar, the catechist says a prayer. After a hymn the confession of sins is said, followed by the Kyrie and the pronunciation of forgiveness. This is followed by the Gloria, the prayer for the day and readings from the Old and New Testaments. The gospel text for the day is read before the Apostles Creed is said and, before and after the sermon from the pulpit, a hymn is sung. The Church prayer precedes the announcements and collection. If there is baptism or Holy Communion in the service, they would take place at this moment. The service ends with the blessing, a final hymn and a final prayer before the postlude.68 This general pattern of worship is in accordance with Christian churches all over the globe.

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63 For example, the identity of pastors and shepherds is intimately connected to ordination and consecration respectively but, due to limited space, I do not comment on this here.
64 Økland, “Women”, 4, 34.
66 These labels of the church (“Norwegian”, “Malagasy”), used by Skeie, denotes the discussion among the missionaries whether the goal was to build a Norwegian Lutheran church in Madagascar or a Malagasy Lutheran church. It concerned music style, ways of conversion, what was considered proper Christian practice, etc. Skeie, Building God’s Kingdom, 144-145. “Norwegian” churches refer to churches founded by Norwegian missionaries, in contrast to the churches founded by other missions.
67 Skeie, Building God’s Kingdom, 144, footnote 512.
Healing services born out of the Malagasy context, on the other hand, take place in the open space in front of the first pew. The first 15-20 minutes is free prayer and then people, mainly shepherds and novices, give their testimonies and preach. It is customary that three to six people do so in each service. Testimonies may last from 2 - 15 minutes, in addition to one or two sermons, each lasting around 20 minutes. All of the healing service is interspersed with the singing of hymns, sung mostly by heart. Then the shepherds, until now seated among the congregation, go to the sacristy to put on their long, white robes while hymns invoking the Holy Spirit are sung. The shepherds line up on the floor, in front of the first pew and the straw mats. They read four fixed Bible passages, say a prayer, and start casting out evil spirits with loud voices, shouting: “Leave in the name of Jesus.” All of them carry Bibles, which they press to the chest with the left arm, while they move the right arm forcefully in the air. Some shepherds move throughout the nave exorcising the congregation and then they rotate from person to person sitting on the straw mats and the first pew. After a while, they again line up in front of the congregation and then the prayer with the laying on of hands starts (fampaherezana, which means “strengthening”). They first pray for each of the persons in the front of the church and, then, all who wish may come forward to be prayed for. In ordinary healing services, most of the people present do so. Thereafter the shepherds line up again and one of them says a prayer of thanks. There may be a hymn and some words of encouragement. The Lord’s Prayer closes the healing service where after the shepherds go to the sacristy, remove their robes, say a prayer, and leave.

We can see here how the ritual defines the place. The Sunday service liturgy makes extensive use of the chancel, the altar, the communion rail, the pulpit, and the place is defined by its use in the liturgy. This definition of place engages with the identity of the pastor. He is occupied with word and sacrament, needing the altar space, the communion rail, the baptismal font and the pulpit to perform these identity-creating actions. The place of the pulpit may signal his longer and more profound theological education. He is the teacher of the congregation, afforded a special place from which to perform this role.

In the same manner, the healing service-ritual defines the church space. The people attending are in need of treatment, they sit on the straw mats or in the

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69 The following is taken from Austnaberg, *Shepherds and Demons*, 97-143, where the ritual is explained in detail.

70 Jn 14:12-17, Mk 16:14-20, Mt 18:18-20, Jn 20:21-23.

71 The comportments of bodies in the two rituals could have been interesting to investigate further. Lefebvre writes that “The whole of (social) space proceeds from the body […]” (Lefebvre, *Production of Space*, 405), and Knott emphasises the foundational role of the body for our experience of space (Knott, “Spatial theory”, 5-7). Limitations of space in this article prevent me from entering into this theme.
first pew, and the shepherds stand in front of them. The ritual does not need altar, communion rail, baptismal font or pulpit. During prayers and preaching, the shepherds never use the chancel or the pulpit. They stand on the floor, on the same level as the congregation. It seems as if the shepherds accept their place; they need to be close to the people to perform the ritual. The place engages with their identity: the shepherds are supposed to take care of the sick, to heal and to do diaconal work. They cast out evil spirits and lay their hands on people, promising forgiveness of sins. When I asked my respondents to define the theology of the awakening, the reiterating theme was a strong emphasis on God’s ability to heal and God’s power, through the shepherds, to set people free from the bonds of the devil (6, 11, 22).

When respondents say that pastors are characterised by word and sacraments, this does not exclude preaching from the shepherds’ obligations. Both shepherds and pastors have their identity in preaching. They do so from different places and several respondents say that they preach differently. Shepherds underline conversion, their preaching is close to people’s experiences of life, and it is emphasised that they preach guided by the Holy Spirit (3, 8, 31). The pastors, on the other hand, underline theology, the context of the biblical text and, sometimes it is said, their preaching does not relate to ordinary people (2, 66, 8).72

When talking about pastors I have consistently used “he” because the MLC does not ordain women. Thus, women are excluded from the church space inhabited by pastors. To define place is power, and place is occupied with some people’s stories but not with others. Place is connected to exclusion, and systems of spatialisation are historically conditioned, according to Sheldrake.73 Økland shows how “ancient public men legitimized the exclusion of women from public discourse and processes of decision-making” through gendering the spaces and conferring value and power on one space over another.74 The missionaries who founded the MLC came from a church which did not ordain women as pastors. This pattern seems to have been overtaken and, perhaps, reinforced in the cultural context of the MLC.75

73 Sheldrake, Spaces, 20-21.
74 Økland, “Women”, 60. See also Knott, who refers to Gerardus van der Leeuw, asserting that because sacred place is appropriated and owned by some, it excludes other (Knott, “Spatial theory”, 19).
75 Cf Holder Rich, “Women’s Power and Authority in Madagascar”, 142, however, who asserts that the prominent place of women in the awakening movement is culturally coherent, but that “women lost spiritual, personal, and social power as Europeans and the Merina monarch [the ethnic group around the capital] sought to gain it” in the beginning of the nineteenth century.
However, one of the most prominent founders of the awakening, Nenilava, was a woman and, subsequently, women have had a prominent place in the movement. According to the former missionary and missions’ leader, Kjetil Aano, her female leadership and the leadership of women shepherds were never questioned. While women are disempowered in the pastoral spaces in the church, they are empowered as shepherds and shepherd leaders. Holder Rich asserts that women’s voices and authority are celebrated and valued in the awakening movement, while Nielssen and Skeie state that the awakening empowers people and, furthermore, that their informants emphasised that to become a shepherd gives special power and authority. This has been especially true for many well-educated women. The second part of the exorcism-ritual, the prayer with the laying on of hands, is in the Malagasy language called *fampaherezana*, which means empowerment or strengthening. The ritual therefore can be said to empower all people. Holder Rich wondered why her interview material did not answer the question why the awakening empowers women. The only answer she could discern was that it was *fomba*, a term used for ways, culture and customs which people hold in common.

Although Rich does not consider this an answer, I think it shows how important historical conditioning is for identity building and questions of empowerment and disempowerment. I find it striking that, since the overall purpose of the research was the relationship between pastors and shepherds, only two of my respondents mention gender. Only one respondent notes that the MLC does not ordain women while both men and women may become shepherds (4). The other notices that, up until now, the number of women theologians has been increasing. This exemplifies how the preaching of the gospel draws people to different kinds of services in the church (35). To me, one of the most notable differences between pastors and shepherds is gender. Only men are pastors, while a majority of shepherds are women. Why do my respondents not comment on this fact? One way of interpreting this silence is to ascribe it to *fomba*, the historically accepted way of how things are. Related to this is that the position of women in the awakening is stated as a fact and never questioned. Another way of interpretation is that the silence is a lack of attention to the fact the women are excluded from the church space of pastors and thus disempowered. Sheldrake talks of constructing a “narrative beyond ease narrative” to make space for those whose stories are not heard. This may be compared to Lefebvre’s “space of representation”, which is “space as directly
lived through its associated images and symbols”,81 opening the possibility to resist a dominant order.82 There should be opportunities to do so, especially since the fruits of women’s leadership in the awakening have been proved to be “just as effective as and, at times, more effective and visionary than their brothers in the movement”, as Holder Rich expresses herself.83 The awakening shows that women, since ordination to become a pastor is denied them, have found other ways of serving God and the people. Nevertheless, the current situation raises questions regarding the power relations within the MLC which keep the pastoral space closed for women. If place is negotiated for women in all areas of church leadership, would this not lead to a greater richness in church life?

Conclusion

The main question of this article has been how negotiations on church space enable us to better understand the relationship between pastors and shepherds. As place engages our history, relationships and identity, I have shown how these factors have profoundly influenced the two groups of church workers. Through the historical development, the church space has been negotiated and divided as it is today. The sharing of place in the church may count for a diversity of relationships from complementarity, to hierarchy, to conflict. The liturgy of the Sunday service and the ritual of the healing service, respectively, have defined the spaces and contributed to the different identities of pastors and shepherds. Furthermore, I have shown how women, while empowered as shepherds, are disempowered in the church space related to pastoral ministry.

What I want to challenge with this article is the hierarchical thinking which seems to be inherent in the relationships between the two groups. A renegotiation of place from each of the two groups may contribute to ameliorate the relationship between pastors and shepherds. Second, I want to call into attention the silence about gender, and the exclusion of women as pastors, while women leaders are undisputed in the awakening.

81 Lefebvre, Production of Space, 39.
83 Holder Rich, “Women’s Power and Authority in Madagascar”, 146-147. It should be noted that she also proposes her own reasons why the awakening empowers women: cultural coherence, ancestor reverence culture, women missionaries, women’s experiences and following the calling of the Holy Spirit (Rich, 145-148).
“Decolonising the Doctrine of the Trinity” or “The Decolonising Doctrine of the Trinity”?

Ernst M. Conradie and Teddy C. Sakupapa

ABSTRACT

The doctrine of the Trinity is often regarded as the inherent weakness of African Christian theology. This has to be understood in the light of African resistance against the colonising doctrine of the Trinity and thus the need to either affirm the continuity with African notions of the Supreme Being and the God of Israel or to reject Christianity altogether as the religion of colonisers. Nevertheless, this contribution will retrieve a decolonial impulse in the Trinitarian confession. Even if the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed may be regarded as an imperial compromise, the symbols of Spirit, cross and father are anti-imperial in origin. We argue that apophatic theology may offer a corrective, through resistance against any tendency to take God for granted.

Posing an Intriguing Question

This contribution emerges from a postgraduate course in theological hermeneutics that we offered at the University of the Western Cape in 2018. It was entitled “Theology and Decoloniality”. Together with six Honours students we read some classic texts by Franz Fanon, Steven Bantu Biko, Kwame Bediako and Willie Jennings, as well as various introductory texts on theological hermeneutics (e.g. on translation, inculturation, localisation and contextualisation), postcolonialism

1 We wish to express our gratitude to Zolile Albany, Pervencia Farmer, Tsobotsi Koloti, Mkhangeli Konza, Raymond Petersen and Zanele Sokatsha for digging deep into these texts with us.


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and decoloniality. The students were required to write a research essay and we opted to set an example with an essay that focuses on the doctrine of the Trinity.

The question raised in the title of this contribution is an intriguing one. Does the doctrine of the Trinity remain trapped in the categories of Greek metaphysics that have been maintained in Western Christianity so that it is in need of thorough decolonising in Christian discourse in the contemporary African context? Or worse, is it an imperial construct that served hegemonic purposes in the Roman Empire and is still used to marginalise other religious traditions, following the pattern of the unholy alliance between Western missionaries and (neo-) colonial forces of occupation and exploitation? Or is faith in the Triune God itself born from a critique against Empire so that it tends to destabilise religious legitimations of colonial power? In short: Can the doctrine of the Trinity still be retrieved in the context of contemporary debates on postcolonialism and decoloniality?

This question is addressed in several steps where each next section engages critically with the argument of the previous section. These steps are sketched here only in broad parameters in order to set an agenda for further research:

First, it is necessary to understand why there is an apparent lack of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in contemporary African Christian theology. This, we argue, is clearly related to the wish to maintain continuity between the identity of the God professed in Christianity and the Supreme Being of African Traditional Religion (ATR). This continuity was assumed in early Bible translations where personal names for “God” were readily adopted from African languages. The obvious strategy, then, was to emphasise the continuity between the Supreme Being in ATR, Yahweh / Elohim in the Hebrew Bible, and God as Father in the New Testament. However, the African Christological reflections that followed these debates on continuity tended to underplay the Christian confession of Jesus Christ as “truly divine and of the Holy Spirit as One “to be worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son”, as expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 CE.

Understandably, this prompted the critique from outside Africa and from evangelicals inside Africa that African Christian theology is not sufficiently Trinitarian in orientation, perhaps because of a subordianist Christology. Some African theologians acknowledged this critique and responded by seeking to retrieve the doctrine of the Trinity or by adopting an African metaphysics to explain the Trinity in other than Greek categories.3

Second, in light of contemporary debates on decoloniality, African theologians also need to respond to the quite different critique by African philosophers such as Okot p’Bitek that Christian reinterpretations of the concept of God merely serve

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to ameliorate and legitimise the colonial marginalisation of African languages, cultures and religions. If so, the *discontinuity* between the God of Christianity and the Supreme Being as understood in ATR needs to be stressed for the sake of decolonial ways of thinking. The God of Christianity and therefore the doctrine of the Trinity have to be resisted since it operates in the service of colonisation. Accordingly, ecumenical efforts to impose a Trinitarian logic on African Christianity can only undermine religious diversity and the need for tolerance amidst religiously infused conflicts across the African continent.

Third, we reverse the critique by suggesting that the emphasis on the doctrine of the Trinity in Western Christianity should not be taken for granted, despite the contemporary Trinitarian renaissance as if Western theology can set a Trinitarian standard for African theology. Following a famous essay by Arnold van Ruler, we raise the question whether a deeply Trinitarian theology may be found in Western Christianity – if a number of long-standing problems pertaining to the economic Trinity are not addressed.

Fourth, this critique of Trinitarian theology in Western theology is extended to Eastern Orthodox theology. It is clear that the Trinitarian renaissance in Western theology is inspired by ecumenical dialogue with Eastern Orthodox theologians. This typically leads to a short-cut to inner-Trinitarian speculation on the communion between Father, Son and Spirit in the immanent Trinity. Such speculation does not preserve the apophatic dimension of the Mystery and does not address the problems related to the economic Trinity either.

In two further sections we hint at a constructive way of addressing the question in the title of this contribution. Even if the Trinitarian confession may be superficially critiqued as an imperial compromise for the sake of preserving religious peace in the Roman Empire, the symbols of Spirit, cross and seeing God as Father (and not King or Emperor) are anti-imperialistic in origin. This decolonial impulse is strengthened, not weakened, when such symbols are combined. We then argue that apophatic theology offers resistance against any tendency to take God for granted. The Jewish-Christian tradition is best regarded not as one which seeks to preserve God’s identity so that it remains uncontaminated by foreign influences. It remembers the past for the sake of projecting the future. Indeed, the triune God always seems to be moving ahead of God’s people, challenging them not to domesticate any concept of God, in order to create a different society, one that has never been before. Discontinuity in the understanding of God is deeply embedded in the tradition itself, while an emphasis on continuity may easily become sterile. A God of life, of history, of Exodus, of resurrection, of Pentecost, of mission and of transfiguration can never be taken for granted. This necessarily calls for an ongoing self-critique of all branches of Christian theology.
The Trinity as the Inherent Weakness of African Christian Theology?

Given the universalising insistence of Western missionary theologies through Eurocentric metanarratives about God and the denigration of African Traditional Religion, African theologians such as John Mbiti and Bolaji Idowu asserted the legitimacy of African traditional religions. However, the contribution of such African theologians and church leaders to a new discourse on ATR was nothing more than a Christian theological reinterpretation – and appropriation – of the pre-Christian African past. An outcome of such endeavour was the portrayal of ATR as preparatio evangelica, a notion that was palpably articulated by the Kenyan theologian John Mbiti and most notably affirmed by Kwame Bediako amongst others.

By arguing that Africans worshipped the God of creation [the Supreme Being] long before the arrival of Christian missionaries, first generation African theologians, especially, asserted a universal notion of God. In his classic Concepts of God in Africa, Mbiti attempted to demonstrate that God as creator is “the commonest attribute of the works or activities of God” amongst the African peoples whose concepts and names of God he compiled. Similarly, Bolaji Idowu attempted to show that African names for God were “not mere labels” but rather descriptive of God’s nature and most significantly of “the experience of Africans about [him], and their belief in [him].” Thus the need to stress continuity between the African understandings of God captured in the various African names of God and the God of Christian proclamation. Both Mbiti and Idowu affirmed that there is only one God while acknowledging that the African concepts of God varied according to diverse peoples’ spiritual perception. This notwithstanding, the description of ATR as polytheist by Western scholars who articulated the concept of God in Africa in terms of the high god was rejected. Instead, both Idowu and Mbiti, emphasised a monotheistic continuity between African traditional religion

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7 Idowu further suggests that the monotheism of ATR (among the Yoruba in particular), may be best described in terms of diffused monotheism. See Bolaji Idowu, African Traditional Religion, 136. However, other African scholars (e.g. Ogbonnaya) oppose both polytheism and monotheism as proper depictions of God in ATR but instead argue for an understanding of the divine in terms of divine communalism; i.e. as communotheistic. See Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, On Communitarian Divinity an African Interpretation of the Trinity (New York: Paragon House, 1994), 14-23.
and Christianity. The degree of continuity was nevertheless articulated variously. The Kenyan theologian Samuel Kibicho for instance posited a radical continuity and further stressed that ATR possessed a saving knowledge of God in ATR. The South African theologian Gabriel Setiloane endorsed Kibicho’s view in his reflections on the Sotho-Tswana concept of God (Modimo), a view he portrayed as being superior to the western Christian notion. If so, the Christianisation of the African concept of God was for Setiloane a diminution. For the Ghanaian theologian Kwesi Dickson, there is both continuity and discontinuity between Israel’s and Africa’s conceptions of God. In Mbiti’s work on African concepts of God, the continuity was expressed in his idea of Africa’s pre-Christian religious heritage, namely ATR as preparatio evangelica. Such theological reinterpretation of Africa’s pre-Christian religious heritage necessarily begged the question whether the Supreme Being of ATR has the same divine identity as the God of redemption proclaimed in Christian tradition.

Answering the question in the affirmative, African theologians were faced with the need to account for the new element that Christianity introduced into the African religious experience, namely, Jesus Christ. This conviction is succinctly expressed in Mbiti’s remark that the “final test for the validity and usefulness of any theological contribution is Jesus Christ”. For Mbiti, Christian theology ought properly to be Christology. These considerations suggested the inevitability of an African articulation of who Jesus Christ is. This soon became the burden of numerous Christological reflections that issued into, amongst others, the depiction of Christ as ancestor (Bediako; Bujo; Ezeh; Nyamiti), Christus Victor (Mbiti), divine conqueror (Agyarko), elder brother (Kabesélé, Sawyyer), guest (Udoh), great chief (Pobee), healer (Kolié, Shorter), king (Manus), liberator (Ela), master of initiation (Sanon), and revealer (Ezigbo). A cross-cutting assumption in many of these reflections is an affirmation of Christianity’s central claims regarding

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8 Initial academic claims of such a theology of continuity were laid out in the respective works of missionary academics Edwin Smith and Geoffrey Parrinder namely, African Ideas of God (1950) and African Traditional Religion (1954). Parrinder was in fact the first to introduce the African Traditional Religion as a separate category of study during his tenure at the University College Ibadan in Nigeria.


the divinity and humanity of Jesus. However, the implications of such reflections for a Trinitarian doctrine of God received only tentative attention. The specific challenge that needed to be addressed in African Christological thought had to do with a proper account of Jesus Christ as being “fully divine” with respect to the African spirit-world.14

Related to this concern is the insufficient attention paid in African theology to an understanding of the Holy Spirit as one of the divine “persons”. Some African theologians have recently begun to explore this through a retrieval of some African notions such as ancestor15 and vital force.16 Similarly, the burden of some of these contributions has been to articulate a pneumatology that reflects the place of the Spirit as member of the Trinity. Others like David Ngong attempt a reconstructive articulation of an African pneumatology in light of the Pentecostalisation of Christianity in much of Africa by means of a critique of essentialising tendencies in the dominant forms of African theology.17

From the foregoing, it can be argued that, given the need to stress the continuity of God, African theologians have seldom noted divergences between the African and Christian notions of God. James Kombo captures this concern succinctly in his observation that the African views of God articulated by the early generation of African theologians were conceived within the confines of the African concepts of God as Modimo, Nyasaye, or Mulungu amongst others and did not therefore presuppose an understanding of God in terms of the Trinity.18 Nevertheless, African theological reflections on revelation buttressed the need for continuity. Idowu for instance, who was one of the earliest African theologians to ponder the question whether the God known in ATR is the same God as the God of the whole universe, rejected any claim that God has revealed himself ultimately in a single religion. In this way, he inferred a universal possibility of revelation. Therefore, although the history of African theology is not short of reflections on revelation, such discourse did not go far enough to address the Trinity.19 A crucial question in this regard is whether it is “possible to have a revelation of God outside Jesus Christ or even the Judeo-Christian tradition”.20 Does the desire to affirm the continuity

19 See for instance papers presented at the Ibadan consultation organised by the All Africa Conference of Churches in 1966 which were subsequently published as *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* (1969).
between the God of Christianity and the Supreme Being of African Traditional Religion undermine the ability to maintain a Trinitarian understanding of God?

For African evangelical theologians, the views of the African theologians discussed above were interpreted as undermining the definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ. For African Evangelical theologians thus argued that ATR offered no or only distorted revelation and salvation. A classic example in this regard is the Nigerian evangelical theologian Byang Kato who was concerned that “Biblical Christianity in Africa is being threatened by syncretism, universalism and christopaganism.” In his critique of the African Christian theology advocated by the likes of Mbiti, Kato pleaded for a radical “uniqueness and finality” of Jesus Christ. Another evangelical, Lenard Nyirongo, argued that there were radical differences between the Supreme Being of ATR and the God of the Bible. Despite the efforts of African theologians to argue for continuity in understanding God’s identity, their largely unclear treatment of the Trinity revealed an inherent weakness of African theology, according to such evangelicals.

African Resistance to the Colonising Doctrine of the Trinity

Alongside the evangelical critique of African theological discourse stressing the discontinuity in God’s identity for the sake of alleged doctrinal orthodoxy, there is the rather different critique of African Christian theology also stressing such discontinuity but for the sake of decolonisation. This second critique is represented by non-Christian African scholars, most conspicuously the Ugandan poet and scholar Okot p’Bitek. He portrayed African Christian theologians as “intellectual smugglers” who have Hellenised the African concepts of God. In p’Bitek’s view,

24 This concern formed the gist of his argument in The Gods of Africa or the God of the Bible.
these African theologians sought to make the colonial religion palatable for the colonised through an emphasis on continuity. Quite blatantly, p’Bitek averred that African theologians robed African deities with Hellenistic garbs. Such a view, we argue, may well serve as a launch pad for an even more radical decolonial critique of Christianity as a colonising religion. Something of this concern is echoed in the nuanced critiques of Christianity by Steve Biko26 and Frantz Fanon. In his *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon observed: “The church in the colonies is a white man’s Church, a foreigners’ Church. It does not call the colonised to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor.”27 Unlike Fanon who was generally ambivalent to religion, Biko’s critique included at the same time an invitation from black Christians to construct a black theology of liberation understood as “a situational interpretation of Christianity”.28 In his discussion of the definition of black consciousness, Biko was perceptive of the “terrible role” played by colonial education and religion in creating a “false understanding” of the black self and of God.29 Drawing on Biko’s hermeneutics of black consciousness and the experience of oppression, South African black theologians offered a critique and reconstruction of the racialised concept of God the Father and of Jesus Christ.30 While Biko’s challenge to theology may have been taken up by some South African black theologians, p’Bitek’s critique of Christianity – highlighted above – is yet to be thoroughly engaged by African theologians.31 The force of p’Bitek’s critique notwithstanding, we argue that he himself did not escape the influence of the western academy in his reflections on ATR in general and on the divine in particular. Further, his critique that African theologians like Mbiti were “more Christian than African” essentialises African identity. Nevertheless, his critique is significant for a decolonial analysis of African Christian discourse on God.

If the African evangelical critique discussed in the previous section stands for radical discontinuity, the African theologians who argued for the continuity of God in ATR significantly contributed towards Africanising discourse on God, albeit in ways that retain the dominance of the western epistemological order.

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26 Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 49, 64.
27 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 69.
29 Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 57.
31 See Bediako, *Theology and Identity*, 10, 438-439. This concern is partly illustrated in Maluleke’s sub-title of an article on p’Bitek’s critique namely, “Re-opening a Debate that Never Started”.
How then, may the African discourse on God be understood with respect to the doctrine of the Trinity?

A survey of African theological publications suggests that the Trinity remains one of the most problematic aspects of African theology. A number of tendencies may be captured in this regard. Some African theologians such as Setiloane ignored the doctrine of the Trinity on the assumption that it is tailored in western and eastern metaphysical categories. Others, such as Jesse Mugambi, argue that Christian teachings about God are not identical to African concepts. He contends that missionaries superimposed Christian teachings about God on traditional African concepts. Mugambi argues that the notion of “person” in the Trinity is misleading and must be discarded. Mugambi is here wrestling with the problem regarding the relationship between language and thought. As the Ghanaian philosopher Kwesi Wiredu cautions, taking “cross-cultural equivalences” to western concepts of God and person for granted may lead to conceptual superimposition. In light of such considerations, some African philosophers argue that the identification of the Supreme Being in ATR with the Christian God may be seen as an instance of conceptual superimposition. Wiredu thus suggests a number of concepts that cry for conceptual decolonisation and some of these are crucial in the African discourse on God (e.g. person, Spirit and substance to name a few). These views notwithstanding, a few monographs and articles by a number of African theologians devote specific attention to the doctrine of the Trinity. In what follows, we offer a discussion of the salient aspects of the recent African discourse on the Trinity.

The earliest of these was Charles Nyamiti, who believes that the Supreme Being of ATR is the same God who reveals himself in the Bible. He argues that the difference between the African concept and the Christian one is Christocentric. As such he proceeds by attributing the title ancestor to Christ based on an understanding of the mediatory role of Christ between God and humanity. By utilising the notion of ancestor analogically, Nyamiti develops a doctrine of the Trinity based on ancestrology and accordingly argues that there are ancestral relations in the Trinity. Although such an ancestral Christology is widely adopted, the question remains whether this does not lead to subordinanism

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33 Gabriel Molehe Setiloane, “Where are We in African Theology?”, 64.
that can only undermine a fully Trinitarian notion of God in African theology. Other contributions such as Kombo’s *The Doctrine of God* employ an African metaphysics of being (ntu) to reinterpret the Trinity. Kombo’s conceptual framework is based on Bantu notions of being previously articulated by the Rwandese priest Alexis Kagame who developed a theory of Bantu categories of being derived from Kinyarwanda. The Nigerian Jesuit priest and theologian Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator appropriates an African maternal symbol *Obirin meta* which is derived from the Yoruba language and literary means “a woman with many sides, a many sided character”. Orobator suggests that this symbol offers a pragmatic and gender sensitive approach to understanding how the Triune God relates with us. However, he does not unpack how the symbol of *Obirim meta* explains divinity.

In his contribution to the Trinitarian discourse in African theology, Nigerian theologian Okechukwu Ogbonnaya attempts a revision of the tendency to dismiss peculiar African influences on the North African theologian Tertullian. Describing Tertullian’s theology of the Trinity as divine community, Ogbonnaya posits a link between community and Trinity: “Communality is the essence of the gods”. He contends that the concept of divine communality is both logical and necessary for the African context, given the communal and relational orientation of African communities. This leads him to a nuanced critique of dominant concepts of the monotheistic nature of the Supreme Being in ATR, arguing that the “One in African thought should be understood in terms of communal oneness”. It is however unclear how Ogbannaya construes the African community of gods as identical with Trinitarian communion.

Other African theologians have appropriated the reinterpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity, particularly following the so-called social analogy in the Eastern tradition. Such approaches employ the language of the Trinity as a socio-political critique. Nigerian theologian Ibrahim Bitrus is pioneering an approach to the

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38 For such a critique of ancestral Christology, see Chapter 4 of Robert Agyarko’s thesis, “God’s Unique Priest (*Nyamesofopreko*): Christology in the Akan Context” (Ph.D. thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2010), 69-100.


40 In his English translation of Tertullian’s *Adversus Praxeum Liber*, Ernst Evans, for example, uses the appellation African in reference to Tertullian yet states that “designation Africa is applied in its ancient sense, denoting the provinces now called Tunisia, Tripolitania, Algeria, and Morocco, but excluding Egypt and Libya which in language and in general interest were more closely related to the Levant than to the West”. See Ernest Evans, *Tertullian’s Treatise against Praxeas: The Text Edited, with an Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 1.

41 Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity*, 201.


43 See for example, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1986), 141-144
Trinity in African theology that projects the Trinity as a model for community. He argues that thus understood, the Trinitarian communion of God is a critique to patriarchal domination inherent in African communalism as well as ethnic and religious exclusivism. Bitrus attempts to recast the African tradition of community on the basis of a particular understanding of Trinitarian communion. He thus argues, “an authentic African tradition of community is that which lives out the just, egalitarian, and inclusive life of the Triune God”. However, the tendency in social doctrines of the Trinity to model societies on the Trinity has limitations as we will argue below.

The Trinity as an Inherent Weakness in Western Christian Theologies?

The previous sections noted ecumenical concerns over the commitment of African Christian theologies to a fully Trinitarian confession, given the commitment to a sense of continuity between the Supreme Being of African Traditional Religion and a Christian understanding of God. Given the 20th century renaissance of Trinitarian theology (following the earlier work of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner), this may create the impression that western theology is able to set Trinitarian standards that may be employed to assess the orthodoxy of African theology. Is this not a colonising strategy that would reinforce the dependence of theological education in Africa on tertiary institutions aligned to colonial powers?

We suggest that the confidence that western theology is able to do justice to the Trinitarian heart of the Christian faith may well be misplaced. The underlying problem here is the failure to attend to problems related to the so-called economic Trinity by taking a theological short-cut to an emphasis on relationships within the immanent Trinity.

In a famous essay on “The Necessity of a Trinitarian Theology” Arnold van Ruler observes that “Simply recognizing the necessity of a trinitarian theology does not mean that one succeeds in the project”. He adds that he has not found such a theology in the entire Christian theological tradition, suggests that Calvin approached that ideal most closely, and admits that he is not able to offer anything approximating that either. This comment may sound odd given the renaissance of Trinitarian theology in the last century and the astonishing flourishing of books on the doctrine of the Trinity over the last three decades. Yet, a “fully Trinitarian” theology remains more elusive than a mere affirmation of its significance may suggest.

In an earlier contribution, Ernst Conradie identified three core problems related to the economic Trinity that have to be addressed before claims for a “fully” Trinitarian theology can be sustained. First, there is the need to do justice to both God’s work of creation and salvation (the first and the second articles of the Christian creed). This problem is acutely formulated by Mercy Amba Oduyoye: “Is the God of our redemption the same God of our creation?” While eschatology is the key to maintain an adequate interplay, this remains elusive to say the least.

Second, world Christianity remains deeply divided over the relationship between the work of Christ and the relative independence of the work of the Spirit. So-called mainline churches typically insist that the work of the Spirit is closely tied to (and indeed proceed from) the work of Christ, while many others resist that in order not to “control the Spirit.” Third, the relationship between the work of the Father and the work of the Spirit also calls for clarification, especially in the context of multi-faith dialogue. Yes, the Spirit is confessed to proceed from the Father but with what instructions? Is the Spirit present amongst other religious traditions, long before the message about Christ arrived or not?

Each of these theological questions remains far from resolved in contemporary Christian theology – and not only in the West. The need to address such questions remains crucial for African theologians too. We argue that to suggest that western Christianity is able to do justice to the Trinitarian confession merely on the basis of the Trinitarian renaissance is misguided.

The Trinity as an Inherent Weakness in Eastern Christian Theologies?

The distinction between the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity is usually traced back to St Irenaeus of Lyons – who probably came from Smyrna in Asia Minor but lived and taught at Lugdunum (now Lyons) and thus holds together

48 Oduyoye, Hearing and Knowing, 75.
49 See the following contributions that seek to fathom the depths of this disastrous inability to do justice to both God’s work of creation and of salvation: Ernst M. Conradie, ed., Creation and Salvation, Volume 1: A Mosaic of Essays on Selected Classic Christian Theologians (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2011); Ernst M. Conradie, ed., Creation and Salvation, Volume 2: A Companion on Recent Theological Movements (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2012); Ernst M. Conradie, Saving the Earth? The Legacy of Reformed Views on “Re-creation” (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013); and Ernst M. Conradie, The Earth in God’s Economy: Creation, Salvation and Consummation in Ecological Perspective (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2015).
50 For reflections on the contemporary ecumenical significance of the filioque controversy, see Ernst M. Conradie, ed., South African Perspectives on Notions and Forms of Ecumenicity (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2013).
the Eastern and Western traditions of Christianity. This distinction remains as necessary now as it was then, mainly to resist modalist views of God. According to modalism, one may assume an underlying monotheism, albeit that this one God is revealed in different ways at different times so that God has “many names”. In response, Christian orthodoxy has rightly insisted that there can be no tension between who God is and whom God is revealed to be. In short, God’s revelation in Jesus Christ is fully authentic. If God is revealed to us as “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit”, then this is who God truly is, from “all eternity” (i.e. the immanent Trinity).

At the same time, apophatic theology has rightly insisted that God’s self-disclosure does not imply “full disclosure”. We can at best be witnesses to what has been revealed to us – and are not called to be the judge in the context of multi-faith conversations. This implies that our knowledge of God as Triune has to be based on how God has been revealed in history, in the economy of salvation (i.e. the economic Trinity). In 20th century Western theology, this recognition is best understood with reference to “Rahner’s rule”, stating that discourse on the immanent Trinity has to be based on the economic Trinity.

Arguably, the history of Christian theology (in the East and the West, the North and the South) may be sketched in terms of failed attempts to hold onto this dual insight. Learned theologians all too hastily rush in where the proverbial angels fear to tread by penetrating into the inner-Trinitarian mystery, for example by reflecting on the perichoretic relationships between the three divine persons. This constitutes a theological short-cut that fails to be disciplined by the longer route of coming to terms with the economic Trinity. If this applies to contemporary African theologies, it may well apply to Western theologies and indeed to Eastern theologies as well.

It is not possible to argue the case with detailed references here as the literature is overwhelming. One generalisation may suffice. The recent renaissance of Trinitarian theology in the global North is prompted partly by ecumenical dialogue between eastern theologians such as John Zizioulas and Dumitru

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51 One reference may suffice here, namely to the textbook developed by our former UWC colleague Jaap Durand in *The Many Faces of God: Highways and Byways on the Route Towards an Orthodox Image of God in the History of Christianity from the First to the Seventeenth Century* (Stellenbosch: African Sun Press, 2007).


53 In oral feedback on the original paper, Robert Vosloo reminded us of especially three factors that prompted the renaissance of Trinitarian theology in the West, namely the crisis in (mono)theism following theological reflections on “the death of God”, ecumenical conversations between East and West in the context of the Cold War, and the need to name God in a pluralist post-Christian context, also in conversation with Judaism and Islam.
Stâniloae and western-trained theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Colin Gunton, Elizabeth Johnson, Catherine La Cugna, Jürgen Moltmann and Robert Jenson, to mention only a few influential figures. The main thrust of this dialogue may be understood in terms of a retrieval of the so-called “social analogy” for understanding the Trinity as a perichoretic communion of three persons, instead of the “psychological analogy” adopted within western Christianity as influenced by Augustine of Hippo. The social analogy suggests a relational ontology where being is understood as communion. The argument is that relationships have an ontological priority over individuals that are related with each other and that this emphasis is epitomised by the notion of the Triune communion. There can be little doubt that this approach is highly attractive, also in the African context wherever the significance of “ubuntu” is recognised. Nevertheless, we remain unconvinced that such a theological short-cut to the immanent Trinity has resolved the problems pertaining to the economic Trinity as outlined above. In fact, the temptation to engage in inner-Trinitarian mysticism offers a facile excuse to neglect such problems.

Moreover, the danger is that the argument becomes circular in the sense that the social implications derived from such an emphasis on communion are read into an understanding of communion without due cognisance of hierarchical relationships in terms of gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation and being able-bodied. Even where the full divinity of “Father”, “Son” and “Spirit” is confessed, there is some ordering: The Son is “eternally begotten” from the Father (and not vice-versa), while the Spirit “proceeds” from the Father (and not vice-versa), while procession “also from the Son” is disputed in a critique of hierarchical thinking. Should such traditional orderings be avoided for the sake of egalitarian notions of communion? Contemporary theological debates on the gendered nature of naming the three persons suffice to indicate that such issues are far from resolved, not only but certainly also in Eastern theologies. Again, theological short-cuts to the immanent Trinity cannot resolve such problems.

54 See the influential study by John Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1985), 86-89.
57 This challenge may also be framed in terms of a projection of an idealised form of community onto the divine. This is echoed in the famous phrase “The Trinity is our social program”. For a critique of social Trinitarianism as projection, see Karen Kilby, “Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity”, New Blackfriars 81, no. 957 (2000), 432-445; See also, Alan Torrance. Persons in Communion: Trinitarian Description and Human Participation (Edinburgh: A&C Black, 1996), 249.
The Decolonial Impulse in the Trinitarian Confession

The second and third sections above discussed the critique of African Christian theology as being either not Trinitarian enough, on the one hand, or being in service of a colonising agenda on the other. The fourth and fifth sections extended this twofold critique to western and eastern theologies with a *tu quoque* argument. The question then remains whether Trinitarian theology (in Africa or elsewhere in the world) is inextricably tied to a colonial agenda. In this and the next sections we address this question constructively.

From within the contemporary African context and given discourse on postcolonialism and decoloniality, it has become rather facile to critique the doctrine of the Trinity as a hegemonic notion that serves a colonising agenda. Such a critique has been reiterated in the literature. Accordingly, the Council of Nicaea served the purpose of unity in the Roman Empire. The Trinity is an ecclesial compromise that seeks to preserve continuity between the Jewish heritage and Christian commitments under Roman rule. For some thinkers, such as von Harnack, the doctrine of the Trinity as expressed in the Nicene Creed is interpreted as dogma. Defining dogma “as the work of the Greek spirit on the soil of the Gospel”, Harnack portrays the doctrine of the Trinity as an outcome of the “Hellenisation of the gospel”. Throughout the history of the Atlantic slavery and colonialism, the doctrine of the Trinity has been readily employed to legitimise colonial rule and to suppress indigenous spirituality. Particularist views on the Trinity can only undermine multi-faith dialogue; monotheism allows more room for dialogue with Judaism, Islam and ATR, while the liberal assumption is that it is secularism that creates such common ground.

It is impossible to address such a critique here in any detail. That a different reading of such history is possible is suggested by the counter-hegemonic connotations attached to the three core symbols of spirit, cross and father. In short, wherever “spirit” is invoked, this can more readily be employed to call for social transformation than to legitimise the status quo. If the “created order” underlies


the social order, then creation through the Spirit cannot be domesticated and allows for an evolving (social) order. The cross is of course an imperial symbol of brutal oppression but the way that this has been adopted by Christian communities persecuted by Roman authorities epitomises resistance against imperial forces. To suggest that God is best known as “our father” is to domesticate an understanding of God in every locality and to resist homogenising forces where God is portrayed as King or Emperor.

It is evidently possible to colonise these very symbols in order to legitimise a patriarchal ecclesiastics, to militarise crusaders for Christ and to entrench the dominant spirit of capitalism. However, given the contexts within which they emerged, these symbols retain the potential to disrupt such attempts to control their power. For African theologians, it remains a question whether such symbols remain viable to convey an understanding of the God of life.

Apophatic Resistance to any Tendency to Take God for Granted

The rhetoric of “decolonising the doctrine of the Trinity” may well provoke a misconstrued polemic. The one side of the polemic (calling for decolonial theology) seems to assume a cultural and religious identity lying in a pristine precolonial past that has been disrupted by colonialism and that prompts the need in contemporary African theology to ensure a persuasive continuity between the God traditionally known as Creator and the Saviour proclaimed and confessed within African Christianity. More significantly, it seeks a different epistemology from the dominant ones of western theology. The other side of the polemic (presumably resisting decolonial theology) seems to assume a stable doctrinal identity in ecumenical Christianity derived from the Christian creeds that has to be safeguarded against heretical distortions wherever Christianity becomes rooted throughout the “whole inhabited world”.

The need for continuity is thus emphasised on both sides of the polemic. God’s identity is known from the past and this has to be protected amidst contemporary challenges. The way in which such a polemic is construed does not reckon with apophatic resistance against any tendency to take God’s identity for granted. Arguably, this is one of the core characteristics of the engagement with God’s identity and character throughout the Jewish-Christian tradition. The identity of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (and Sarah/Hagar, Rebecca and Leah/Rachel) does not lie in the ancestral past but in a destabilising journey towards a promised future. Every time that God’s identity and character is taken for granted, prophets have helped their people to discern where this God is heading towards. This is especially evident from six major transitions described in the biblical roots of Christianity – from Ur of the Chaldees to the wandering God of
Abraham, from the Israelite slaves in Egypt to the God of the exodus, from the fertility cults in Canaan to trust in Yahweh alone, from the royal God of David to the suffering servant in Isaiah, from loyalty to God’s law amongst the hasidim to God’s solidarity with the marginalised in the ministry of Jesus, and from the God of Israel to the inclusion of gentiles in God’s household as epitomised by the apostle Paul’s ministry. In each case there is some continuity with a more traditional understanding of God, but the emphasis is on a surprisingly novel understanding of God’s identity and character.

In the subsequent history of Christianity, one may detect a similar tendency to disrupt past assumptions about God’s identity and character. It seems that in many cases the new recipients of the gospel have understood the message better than the messengers themselves. A few examples may suffice to illustrate the ironies of history: Gentiles have understood the message better than those insisting on Jewish cultural identity. Black slaves have welcomed the inclusive message that white slave owners have resisted. The colonised have embraced the decolonising message that colonisers carried with them. Untouchable Dalits have been touched by the message that neither imperial landlords nor the higher castes would be willing to touch. One may readily extrapolate this tendency towards the inclusion of the LGBQTIA, other animals and (who knows) extra-terrestrial forms of life in God’s household. This pattern allows for the vehement critique of religion, including civil religion and religious oppression, that is so typical of prophetic theology. This is a destabilising force that threatens any form of traditionalism, whether Eastern, Western or African in location.

Put cryptically, the doctrine of the Trinity demonstrates this decolonising movement wherever it is not too readily stabilised as doctrine. This is only possible where Rahner’s rule is adhered to, where theological short-cuts to the immanent Trinity are resisted, where the focus remains on the economic Trinity, where past narratives of God decolonising engagements in history are retold for the sake of a promised future, an emerging social order that has never been, a new world that is promised and envisaged.

The key here is perhaps the arcane discipline of the liturgy through which the people of God slowly learn to see the dominant powers of the world through God’s eyes – as colonising powers that cannot and will not withstand the test of mercy and therefore of justice. They may learn to see the world in the light of the Light of the world. They may begin the see that it is actually not money, the spirit of capitalism, that makes the world go round, but a more hidden, sanctifying Spirit.60 At best, the confession of God as Triune serves as the doxological conclusion of the liturgy.

The Long Road to Cape Town 2010 and an Evangelical Response to Global Environmental Crisis

Peter Houston

ABSTRACT

The Lausanne Congress in Cape Town in 2010 brought together four thousand Christian leaders, representing 198 countries, and resulted in the issuing of the Cape Town Commitment. The Cape Town Commitment stands in the historic line of the Lausanne Covenant from the first Lausanne Congress (on World Evangelization) in 1974 and the Manila Manifesto from the second Lausanne Congress in 1989. The Cape Town Commitment expresses an evangelical theology that is no longer dualistic and sees the breadth of the redemptive work of Christ applying to all of the cosmos. There is a commitment to God’s world, not because of its value to humanity, but because of its intrinsic worth, a departure from the anthropocentric view of previous centuries. This marks a significant milestone within evangelicalism, a stream of Christianity long associated with a form of dualism and a focus on pietistic holiness, which has inhibited a timely evangelical theological response to the global environmental crisis, or more accurately, multiple interrelated crises, and the development of a praxis of ‘creation care’. This paper charts and examines the socio-political and environmental events that were formative in the early Lausanne Congresses and the fruition of these dynamics in Cape Town 2010.

Introduction

William (Billy) Franklin Graham Jr died on 21 February 2018, aged 99. Graham was an American evangelist and a prominent evangelical Christian. When news of his death broke, two quotes attributed to Graham went viral: “My home is in Heaven. I’m just travelling through this world” as well as “Someday you will

1 ‘Creation care’ is a bit of a cliché. It falls into the discourse trap of using ‘creation’ for what goes on in the natural world of our local planet, and that is far from what is attributed to the full scope of the cosmos. ‘Care’ is also disingenuous because certain aspects of creation are the valid focus of destruction, think schemes to eradicate small pox and polio viruses or mosquitoes where malaria is a problem. However, the term ‘creation care’ will be used hereafter in its simplistic application found in Christian literature.

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read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don’t you believe a word of it! I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God”.\footnote{This quote went viral and at one point was shared every 15 seconds on Twitter. Billy Graham actually adapted it from Dwight L. Moody, who first used it in his autobiography from 1900. Caleb Kindgren, “Someday You Will Read or Hear That Billy Graham Didn’t Really Say That”, 	extit{Christianity Today}, \url{https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/february-web-only/billy-graham-viral-quote-on-death-not-his-d-l-moody.html} [Accessed 5 March 2018].} From Dwight L. Moody, one of the most prominent preachers and evangelists of the nineteenth century to Billy Graham, Moody’s successor in the twentieth century, evangelicalism is defined by the sentiment captured by these two statements that went viral in the twenty-first century.\footnote{It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a more in-depth definition or discussion concerning evangelicalism.}

A more definitive statement on “evangelicalism” would be theologically arrogant or academically trite and is perhaps best left as an embodied sentiment, a window viewed through contemporary social media. Notwithstanding this, evangelicals traditionally claim belief in “the historic truths of the Christian faith, as set out in the Bible” and are people who are committed to “living out the implications of this truth”.\footnote{Bill Houston, \textit{Theological Models of Biblical Holism with Reference to Theological Colleges in Africa} (unpublished D.Min thesis, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, May 2008), 9.} The argument used by evangelicals in defining evangelicalism begins with the \textit{a priori} statement that the word evangelical comes from the \textit{evangel}, or gospel or good news. Evangelicals, “prize the classic good news of God being in Christ, reconciling the world to himself”.\footnote{John G. Stackhouse, Jr. \textit{Evangelical Landscapes: Facing Critical Issues of the Day} (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 48.} It is thus linked as follows: “In seeking to define what it means to be evangelical, it is inevitable that we begin with the gospel. For both our theology (evangelicalism) and our activity (evangelicalism) derive their meaning from the good news (the evangel)”.\footnote{John Stott, \textit{Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity} (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 29.} This sounds very concise but the evangelical label has limitations. Looking at the history of evangelicalism, the label provides too “loose a designation ever to have produced a tidy historical record”.\footnote{Mark Noll, \textit{The Rise of Evangelicalism} (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 17.} Yet an interrogation of contemporary evangelicalism proves to be even more untidy.

Evangelicalism is now a worldwide movement within Christianity that is diverse and contested within itself. White American evangelicalism with its pro-Trump stance is very different to, for example, British evangelicalism or Kenyan evangelicalism. Evangelicalism is also shaped and expressed differently across denominations such that Anglican evangelicalism (the home of John Stott) is distinct to that of the Southern Baptists (the home of Billy Graham). Evangelicalism has developed a distinctly problematic brand reputation. Personally, I am at home
within evangelicalism yet am not comfortable with the contemporary associations of the label evangelical. If pressed, I would say I lean towards John Stott’s form of evangelicalism and to him we now turn.

Bill Graham’s counterpart and contemporary in the United Kingdom (UK) was John Stott. Stott urged the development of an evangelicalism that actively participated in church life at every level that was in touch with the scholarship and culture of the day, that dialogued with other Christians from differing theological streams and that was determined to engage in action that responded to contemporary social problems. As Graham started preaching internationally, he sought to unite all evangelicals in the common task of the total evangelization of the world. To this end Graham organized the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization in 1974. Graham played host while Stott was the chief architect of the Lausanne Covenant. The social problems of what was then called the ‘Two Thirds World’ were seen to occupy by right a high position on the agenda. Affirming the importance and centrality of personal evangelism, but also expressing penitence for regarding evangelism and social concerns as being mutually exclusive, the resultant Lausanne Covenant shaped evangelical thinking for the rest of the century. The Lausanne Congress would give rise to an overarching evangelical movement called the Lausanne Movement. Yet despite the growing socio-political awareness of a crisis of global proportions, the Lausanne Covenant failed to acknowledge the emergence of an environmental critique. It would only be on the back of the third Lausanne Congress hosted by Cape Town in 2010 that an evangelical response would gain widespread momentum.

An Emerging Trend Ignored

In the two decades preceding the first Lausanne Congress, seminal works and papers were published that raised concerns over humanity’s exploitation of the earth’s resources and the danger of ways of thinking that were anthropocentric.

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10 Edwards and Stott, Essentials, 3.
11 Edwards and Stott, Essentials, 4.
12 The use of the terms ‘environment’ and ‘environmental’ are not limited simply to a notion of a so-called natural environment or ecological order. As a most basic concept, an ‘environment’ means the conditions by which one is surrounded. This includes the complex interplay of physical, chemical, and biotic factors that act upon an organism or an ecological community and determine its form and survival. De facto, the term environment can be used equally to describe an urban space or a wilderness but when associated with conservation narratives, it usually refers to wilderness.
Aldo Leopold, founder of Wildlife Management in the USA, published *Sand County Almanac* in 1949. He wrote that “Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief”. He also said that “It cannot be right, in the ecological sense, for a farmer to canalize his creek or pasture his steep slopes, because in so doing he passes flood trouble to his neighbours below, just as his neighbours above have passed it on to him”. He viewed the degradation of land as being wrong in principle and not simply because at a human level it is inexpedient. Similarly, he argued that the canalising of a river is wrong, both in terms of harm to the ecological life of the river and the human neighbour downstream.

In 1962, Rachel Caron published *Silent Spring*. She told the story of how bird populations across North America were declining as a result of the widespread application of the pesticide DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane). She wrote that “as crude a weapon as the cave man’s club, the chemical barrage has been hurled against the fabric of life – a fabric on the one hand delicate and destructible, on the other miraculously tough and resilient, and capable of striking back in unexpected ways”. Several species, including the iconic bald eagles as well as peregrine falcons, were brought to the edge of extinction.

In 1963, Ian McHarg articulated a link between religious beliefs and the potential destruction of the earth:

> Judaism, Christianity, Humanism tend to assert outrageously the separateness and dominance of man over nature, while animism and nature worship tend to assert total submission to an arbitrary nature. These attitudes are not urgent when human societies lack the power to make any serious impact on the environment. These same attitudes become of first importance when man holds the power to cause evolutionary regressions of unimaginable effect or even to destroy life.

A number of international events brought home the vulnerability of the environment. The super-tanker, SS Torrey Canyon, ran aground on a reef off

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17 Ian McHarg is to the discipline of Landscape Architecture and Planning what Aldo Leopold was to the discipline of Wildlife Management.
the south-west coast of the United Kingdom (UK) in 1967, resulting in what to date is still one of the world’s most serious oil spills.\textsuperscript{19} This prompted the first big rush of environmental volunteering seen in the UK.\textsuperscript{20} Lynn White published an article in 1967 in \textit{Science}, one that is often, along with McHarg’s views, seen as a touchstone in eco-theology – or at least one that fashioned early theological rebuttals. White argued that Christian arrogance was responsible for the worsening ecological crisis and the crisis would continue until the Christian axiom that ‘nature has no reason for existence but to serve humans’ is rejected.\textsuperscript{21} In 1968, the earth was photographed from the orbiting Apollo 8 capsule and this image, nick-named ‘Earth Rise’, captured the popular imagination as it communicated the finiteness of the planet on which humanity depends utterly for life. \textit{Design with Nature} was published in 1969, which established McHarg as one of the most significant, early purveyors of ecological wisdom.\textsuperscript{22}

It was not until 1968 that environmental issues received serious attention by the United Nations (UN), with the Economic and Social Council, on 29 May 1968, being the first major UN organ to include environmental issues on its agenda as a specific item.\textsuperscript{23} As a result of this, world leaders met in Stockholm from 5-16 June 1972 at the UN Conference on the Human Environment to discuss human interactions with the environment. The summit caused the global awareness of environmental issues to increase dramatically. No country in the world had a ministry of the environment before Stockholm.\textsuperscript{24} The resulting Stockholm Declaration provided broad environmental policy goals rather than specific targets for nations. The Declaration raised the issue of climate change for the first time, warning governments to be mindful of activities that could lead to climate change.\textsuperscript{25}

Notwithstanding the failure of the first Lausanne Congress in 1974 to note this global trend, there were a handful of evangelicals who had begun to engage with this emerging theological context. Francis Schaeffer, in 1970, in the first significant

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Torrey Canyon Oil Spill, \textit{Wikipedia}, \url{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torrey_Canyon_oil_spill} [Accessed 5 March 2018].
\item \textsuperscript{21} Lynn White Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”, \textit{Science} 155 (1967), 1203-1207.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ian L. McHarg, \textit{Design with Nature} (New York: Natural History Press, 1969).
\item \textsuperscript{23} Peter Jackson, “From Stockholm to Kyoto: A Brief History of Climate Change”, \textit{UN Chronicle}, XLIV no. 2, (June 2007), \url{https://unchronicle.un.org/article/stockholm-kyoto-brief-history-climate-change} [Accessed 10 April 2017].
\item \textsuperscript{25} Jackson, “From Stockholm to Kyoto: A Brief History of Climate Change”, \url{https://unchronicle.un.org/article/stockholm-kyoto-brief-history-climate-change} [Accessed 10 April 2017].
\end{itemize}
contribution to the environmental debate, had lauded White’s earlier essay.\textsuperscript{26} In 1977, Klaus Bockmühl wrote that “the awareness of the crisis is perceived not only from the constant new reports in the daily papers, but above all through the recent and vast series of books which have been published”.\textsuperscript{27} He specifically references Rachel Carson’s \textit{Silent Spring} as having triggered vigorous literary debate on the subject. He too referenced the assertions of White. Bockmühl went on to advance an understanding of humanity’s dominion being that of a steward and a shepherd.\textsuperscript{28} But deeper than that, “loyalty to the creator is the most reliable motive for a caring relationship with the creation”.\textsuperscript{29} He concluded that “the theoretical challenge is to set the global emergency of the time in relationship with the centre of Christianity. This means a fundamental revision of our theological-ethical tradition”.\textsuperscript{30} But this fundamental revision would require engaging critically with an anthropocentric view of the world.

In South Africa, the University Christian Movement (UCM) had picked up on an environmental theme in the 1970’s when discussing the nature of freedom. A background paper written by Colin Collins, \textit{Freedom Means Development}, for a national conference in 1971, described freedom as the ability to choose alternatives in all matters.\textsuperscript{31} Collins related freedom to an environmental freedom, a dispositional freedom and a developmental freedom.\textsuperscript{32} With respect to an environmental freedom, he framed it in two dimensions. The first, environmental freedom, consists of the basic freedom ‘to have’ nutrition, health and shelter. The second is freedom ‘from’ cultural and socio-economic oppression where food and water form the very basis of every freedom.\textsuperscript{33} According to Collins, the freedom ‘to have’ is “the ability to be able to use nature in order that nature may serve man”.\textsuperscript{34} This is the Christian view that White railed against.

The Student Christian Association (SCA), a movement contemporary with UCM, focused on running Student Christian Association’s Mission Programme (SCAMP) and Campus-by-the-Sea, which sought to help young people engage

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} Klaus Bockmühl, “Conservation and Lifestyle”, \textit{Grove Booklet on Ethics}, no. 20 (1977), 3.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Bockmühl, “Conservation and Lifestyle”, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{29} Bockmühl, “Conservation and Lifestyle”, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{30} Bockmühl, “Conservation and Lifestyle”, 24.
\item \textsuperscript{31} Colin Collins, \textit{Freedom Means Development}, occasional paper, 7 April 1971 (Bill Houston personal archives), 4.
\item \textsuperscript{32} Collins, \textit{Freedom Means Development}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Collins, \textit{Freedom Means Development}, 6.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Collins, \textit{Freedom Means Development}, 6.
\end{itemize}
with developing a ‘Christian world view’. This involved trips into Khayelitsha informal settlement, critiques of movies and bible studies on topical issues, but the emerging consciousness of the environmental crisis was not one such issue. There were more pressing concerns. The student movement scene was segregated largely along race and language lines and formal reunification was a major issue. Against the backdrop of apartheid South Africa, and liberation theology, environmental concerns were not on the radar of most Christians, evangelical or otherwise. When the church was actively engaged in the struggle against apartheid, it had little interest in environmental concerns.

But the critique of evangelicalism runs deeper still. The evangelical church by and large had nothing to say to the apartheid regime. This was not limited to South African evangelicals alone. In 1970 Francis Schaeffer wrote,

I have seen white evangelicals sit and clap their hands off when black evangelicals get up to talk at conference times. How they clap! That’s nice, because six years ago the evangelicals would not have been clapping. But I want to ask you something, if you are white. In the past year how many blacks have you fed at your dinner table? How many blacks have felt at home in your home?

Many evangelicals operated with an extremely weak ecclesiology, one that displayed ongoing confusion between the personal and social dimensions of human life and had a very limited understanding of the scope of redemption. Evangelicalism had become strongly dualistic and had a strong pietistic holiness which was confined to private morality. This dualism resulted in a deep contradiction in the mission of the church. A form of cultural imperialism also characterized evangelicalism in its more socially aggressive forms. Many evangelicals refused to consider the real possibility that apartheid was itself a

35 Bill Houston, personal interview (5 April 2017).
36 Houston, personal interview (5 April 2017).
37 Houston, personal interview (5 April 2017).
38 Andrew Warmback, “Bread and Butter Issues: Some Resources for the Church’s Response to Climate Change”, JTSA 142 (March 2012), 23.
42 Houston, Theological Models of Biblical Holism, 27.
theological heresy. John de Gruchy, Calvin Cook, David Walker, Anthony Balcomb, among others, critically contested this dualistic narrative both from within and without evangelicalism. The rise of Christian fundamentalism and its war against modernity had for decades shaped evangelicalism, resulting in a form of anti-intellectualism, anti-science bias in some quarters. This widespread dualism and anti-intellectualism has, until quite recently, inhibited the establishment of environmental theology.

Evangelical engagement with the notion of stewardship continued into the 1980’s outside of apartheid South Africa. Earthkeeping in the ‘90’s by Loren Wilkinson became an iconic resource for evangelicals concerned with the relationship between their faith and the planet’s health. Others, such as David Atkinson, were arguing that “man’s place in the created order is ambiguous: he is part of nature, and is yet transformer of nature: he is ‘from the dust’, yet ‘a little lower than the angels.’ He is worshipper as well as steward – indeed his stewardship is part of his worship”. Along with environmental stewardship came a greater appreciation within evangelicalism of the finite nature of world resources. Peter Hodgson, writing about the premise that unlimited technological development requires unlimited natural resources, noted that

until quite recently no-one gave a thought to this…A series of nasty shocks has reminded us that this cannot go on without serious trouble. In many parts of the world rivers are so polluted that they are little more than open sewers and nothing can live in them. Inland lakes have been killed by the polluted rivers flowing into them.

Maybe sensing the spectre of dualism, he concluded that there is a “need to re-discover a sense of continuity with our material roots. At present we tend too

52 Houston, Theological Models of Biblical Holism, 30.
often to regard the earth and its products as given for us to use, to dominate, and to exploit in the service of our needs and desires”.

While seeking to stress a more holistic understanding of mission from the very first Lausanne Congress and affirming, in iterative measures, at subsequent gatherings the call to social action (while always committing to personal evangelism), the language of environmental concern only emerged six years after the Lausanne Congress in “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle” (1980). This statement came from the International Consultation on Simple Lifestyle, held at Hoddesdon, England, from March 17 to 21, 1980. The Consultation was sponsored by the Lausanne Committee on World Evangelization’s Theology and Education Working Group and the World Evangelical Fellowship’s Theological Commission’s Unit on Ethics and Society. The goodness of God’s creation is affirmed and environmental destruction, wastefulness and hoarding denounced. A clear principle of stewardship of the earth was articulated, affirmed and related to both environmental justice and social justice – recognizing that the environmental crisis should rightly be understood as not just an ecological crisis, but a crisis of values, of lifestyle aspirations and of competing political systems.

A significant international milestone was reached when the General Assembly of the UN met in 1983 and resolved (38/161 of 19 December 1983) to establish a special commission that would make available a report on the environment, including strategies for sustainable development, a concept that was increasingly entering the environmental narrative. The commission later adopted the name World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). That same year, A Rocha – an evangelical environmental advocacy group – was formed. This explicitly Christian conservation agency adopted a theology that strongly affirms that their work is not only biblically mandated but also a legitimate and essential dimension of Christian mission. It would be several decades before A Rocha in 2002 grew to be established in South Africa. Expanding to have works on every continent, A Rocha would come to play a significant role in advocating for creation care being recognized as a gospel issue within evangelicalism.

A Coming of Age within Evangelicalism

The first International Congress on World Evangelization that met in Lausanne in 1974 made no mention of creation care in the resulting Lausanne Covenant. As noted previously, a statement by a subsequent Lausanne working group in 1980, “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle” first advanced the language of creation care. God was framed as the Creator of all things and that God’s creation is marked by rich abundance and diversity. Environmental destruction, wastefulness and hoarding were denounced as well as the ‘misery of the poor who suffer as a result of these evils’.60 The Commitment opens with a paragraph about God as Creator because of the rationale that “Creation Ethics are becoming an important part of how the church is thinking about mankind’s [sic] responsibility to the world we live in”.61 The concept of right relationship was broadened to include land, “authentic human fulfilment depends on a right relationship to God, neighbour and the earth with all its resources.” An important link was made between economics and the exploitation of the earth and the question posed, “will accelerated economic growth place an intolerable burden on the earth’s entire ecosystem and cause irreversible damage to the entire human environment?”

However, the underpinning theology is anthropocentric, that the earth primarily exists to resource humanity and its value is thereby so derived. Consequently, the restoration of all things in Christ (Acts 3:21) is focused on humans and not the entire created order or cosmos.

Between the first and second Lausanne Congresses, a number of international evangelicals gave voice to environmental concerns.

In the late 1980s, Keith Innes wrote about the ecological crisis and the intrinsic value of the environment and duties to future generations.62 He said that the ethical imperative for sustainable development is rooted in an understanding that the eternal life which God gives is to be expressed in earthly, physical ways.63 Edward Echlin looked to the writings of early Christians to add weight to an argument for biblical holism. He asserted that their lives “reflect the cosmic covenant of God with his creation … a recognition of the cosmic scope of Christ, a cosmic order, rightness and justice which is forever the Christian ideal”.64 He was careful to note that “faithfulness to the Bible by the Christian community prevents pantheism

60 “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-style”, https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-20#1 [Accessed 5 March 2018].

61 “An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-style”, https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-20#1


63 Innes, “Caring for the Earth”, 21.

and the confusions of what is sometimes called green spirituality”. This was an important claim for somebody trying to advance and justify an environmental theology within evangelicalism at the time, especially as Echlin goes as far as arguing that Christianity should be biocentric rather than anthropocentric, referencing Aldo Leopold’s philosophy of created life. Lawrence Osborn as well as John V. Taylor added energy to the debate. Osborn addressed a range of issues, but spoke of environmental stewardship having had a long and chequered career in the history of Christian spirituality.

The Second International Congress on World Evangelization (or second Lausanne Congress) met in Manila in 1989. The resultant Manila Declaration introduced a saying that would have profound ramifications later for understanding the gospel to apply to creation care – “God is calling the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole world”. Alienation of humanity from God was linked to sin that “frequently erupts in anti-social behavior, in violent exploitation of others, and in a depletion of the earth’s resources of which God has made men and women his stewards”. Mention is made that “to those who repent and believe in Christ, God grants a share in the new creation.” However, concerning the extent of that new creation, to include all of creation, there is only silence, except that one day “nature will be redeemed”. The sentiment remains that earth is merely a resource to be used, albeit justly, by humanity.

Between the second and third Lausanne Congresses stand several summits of international significance, not least the Earth Summit. The second global summit, the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (nicknamed the Earth Summit or, simply, Rio), met in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil from 3-14 June 1992. The Earth Summit reaffirmed that “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature”. Thus Rio continued with the human-centric approach established at Stockholm, which was in contrast to the biocentric approach being called for in some theological circles.

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68 The Manila Declaration, https://www.lausanne.org/content/manifesto/the-manila-manifesto
69 The Manila Declaration, https://www.lausanne.org/content/manifesto/the-manila-manifesto
70 For a pertinent discussion on sustainable development, see Steve de Gruchy, “Introducing The United Nations Millennium Declaration: A Brief Commentary”, JTSA 110 (July 2001), 57-76.
Sustainable development, gaining momentum within environmental discourse and international policy, was a stronger thread running through Rio. Principle 15 introduced, what has been termed the Precautionary Principle, for the first time: “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.”

An attempt was made, on the back of Stockholm and Rio, to establish a human right to a healthy environment but, to date, has not garnered international support across all regions. However, these two principles were recognized and enshrined as an environmental right in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa:

Everyone has the right –
(a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or wellbeing; and
(b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that –
(i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;
(ii) promote conservation; and
(iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.

Given that the Constitution emerged out of and after the long struggle against apartheid with its focus on social justice, the inclusion of these two principles was farsighted, yet something the prominent South African theologian, John de Gruchy, had seen the need for when he argued:

It is equally shortsighted to argue that we must work for justice now and then later we turn our attention to the environment. By then it will be too late. If we do not deal with the environmental crises of today then the victory of justice in our land will become a hollow victory – no matter who governs, the earth will not be able to sustain meaningful life in our new creation.

De Gruchy’s observation in 1990 about social justice and environmental justice needing to stand together was a profound one. There has been a coming of age of environmentalism that intersects all spheres of society whether grass-roots advocacy, economics, politics, management, justice, science or theology. Consequently, by the end of the twentieth century, environmental and ecological issues were engaging the broadest, most diverse theological voices

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and have become both a context and subtext for doing theology, not only within evangelicalism. Environmental theology is now more readily recognized than in the case of other forms of contextual theology.\(^{75}\) Kenneth Ross has compared the Lausanne Movement’s *Cape Town Commitment* (2010), the World Council of Churches’ *Together Towards Life* (2012) and Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) and noted that what is most striking when you read them is the convergence in terms of content.\(^{76}\) Where previously, evangelicals viewed statements (including earlier ones on the growing environmental crisis) from the World Council of Churches with suspicion, there is now a clear convergence between the attitudes of a wide array of Christians.\(^{77}\) Like never before there is an awareness that mission has to be understood in relation to the natural order.\(^{78}\) But this process within evangelicalism has not been without some resistance.

Two years after the Rio Earth Summit, the Evangelical Environmental Network in the United States in 1994 issued an “Evangelical Declaration for the Care of Creation.” In a context where pre-millennialism remains common among evangelicals, the declaration precipitated a strong reaction in the form of the “Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship,” which called for greater human dominion to improve human conditions, the very activity that White had condemned decades earlier.\(^{79}\) The Cornwall Declaration has subsequently received considerable support from conservative politicians in North America. Yet despite this resistance and apparent conservative evangelical reversal, a creation care ethic has nonetheless gradually become more mainstream.

Towards the end of his life, John Stott noted that “creation care is neither a selfish interest of the developed North, nor a minority enthusiasm peculiar to bird-watchers or flower-lovers, but an increasingly mainline Christian concern”.\(^{80}\) His concern was that evangelicals were slow to recognize this: “Christians have been

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78 Ross, “Understanding Mission Today”, 263.

79 R. J. Berry, *Creation Care: A Brief Overview of Christian Involvement*, 108.

slow to respond to the imperatives of creation care, and we evangelical believers in particular have been even more laggardly”\textsuperscript{81} More than evangelicals just being laggardly, the notion of creation care has continued to appear exotic, eccentric and even erroneous.\textsuperscript{82} Dave Bookless, international director of theology for A Rocha, writes that “those few evangelicals who have been on the journey of creation care for many years have become familiar with being ignored, marginalized or regarded with bemusement by their fellows”.\textsuperscript{83} This dynamic is not limited to evangelicalism alone. Peet van Dyk has pointed out that “many ‘mainstream’ theologians have either refused to take eco-theology seriously, or at least have declined to participate in it”.\textsuperscript{84} However, an increasing number of writers are seeking to address this matter from a variety of angles.\textsuperscript{85}

Tom Wright, and others, have critiqued the dualistic ‘rapture’ reading of 1 Thessalonians 4, popularized in the right-wing American \textit{Left Behind} series.\textsuperscript{86} Moreover, in what would seem to contradict the viral Billy Graham statement, Wright says, “Despite what many people think, within the Christian family and outside it, the point of it all is not ‘to go to heaven when you die’. … The great drama will end, not with ‘saved souls’ being snatched up to heaven, away from the wicked earth and the mortal bodies which have dragged them down to into sin, but with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, so that ‘the dwelling of God is with humans’ (Revelation 21.3)”.\textsuperscript{87} This is an important emphasis because “if we are not to collapse into Platonism, denying the goodness

\textsuperscript{81} John R. W. Stott, Foreword to \textit{The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action}, edited by R. J. Berry (Leicester: IVP, 2000), 7.

\textsuperscript{82} Dave Bookless, “How Does Creation Care Belong within an Evangelical Understanding of Mission?” in C. Bell and R.S. White (eds), \textit{Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of the Church}, 86.

\textsuperscript{83} Bookless, “How Does Creation Care Belong within an Evangelical Understanding of Mission?”, 86.

\textsuperscript{84} Peet van Dyk, Eco-Theology: In and Out of the Wilderness, \textit{Old Testament Essays} 30 no. 3 (2017), 836.


\textsuperscript{86} N. T. Wright, \textit{Scripture and the Authority of God} (London: SPCK, 2005), 77.

of creation, it is crucial to recapture both the bodily incarnation and resurrection of Jesus and the promise that creation itself will be renewed, liberated from death and decay”. Wright remarks on this shift, “What mattered, and what Jesus taught his followers to pray, was that God’s kingdom would come on earth as in heaven”. “God intends, in the end, to fill all creation with his own presence and love”. Although what this quite looks like in praxis is up for debate.

Christopher Wright took over from John Stott as international director of Langham Partnership International. He led the group that produced the Cape Town Commitment, which affirmed creation care as a gospel imperative. He framed mission to include the ecological sphere and also linked it to the restoration of humanity. He argues that a much broader view of salvation be held within evangelicalism, one that encompasses the whole of creation: “God’s plan of salvation included bringing the whole of creation to a new, restored, unity in Christ (Ephesians 1:9-10). This is the cosmic mission of God”.

The third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization was held in Cape Town in 2010. Four thousand Christian leaders representing 198 countries were in attendance. The resultant Cape Town Commitment marks a significant milestone within evangelicalism. It expresses an evangelical theology that seeks to overcome a dualistic worldview and sees the breadth of the redemptive work of Christ to apply to all of God’s creation, including humanity: “The biblical covenants, old and new, are the expression of God’s redeeming love and grace reaching out to lost humanity and spoiled creation”. An entire section is a commitment to loving God’s world, not because of its value to humanity, but because of its intrinsic worth to God, a departure from the anthropocentric view of previous centuries. Cornelius Niemandt clarifies that this love is not “sentimental affection for nature”, but is a logical outworking of caring for what belongs to

90 Wright, Surprised by Hope, 113.
91 There has to be more to the new heaven and new earth motif than simply the primacy of God’s loving presence. The old order where, for example, death is necessary for life, decay for re-growth and gravity for a hydrological cycle to exist must pass away in its entirety. The very concept of earth, as we know it, will cease.
93 Chris Wright, Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible’s Central Story (Nottingham: IVP, 2008), 195.
95 Bookless, ‘How Does Creation Care Belong within an Evangelical Understanding of Mission?’, 86.
96 Cape Town Commitment, https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment [Accessed 5 March 2018].
God.\textsuperscript{97} Thus the gospel imperative in the \textit{Cape Town Commitment} were broadened beyond personal salvation:

If Jesus is Lord of all the earth, we cannot separate our relationship to Christ from how we act in relation to the earth. For to proclaim the gospel that says ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to proclaim the gospel that includes the earth, since Christ’s Lordship is over all creation. Creation care is thus a gospel issue within the Lordship of Christ.

Yet despite this shift writers, such as René Padilla, have maintained that the Lausanne Movement continues to reflect the “dichotomy that influences large segments of evangelicalism, especially in the West: the dichotomy between evangelism and social responsibility”.\textsuperscript{98} A case in point is that no official mention was ever made that the congress was taking place in a country that not too long ago was under apartheid and is still deeply affected by socioeconomic injustice.\textsuperscript{99} Nevertheless, a road has been travelled. Robert Schreiter notes that the \textit{Cape Town Commitment} has shown a distinct move away from a preference for a dichotomous expression that the earlier Lausanne Covenant displayed.\textsuperscript{100} A more comprehensive theology is evident and allows for a more nuanced engagement with the world.\textsuperscript{101} By comparison to earlier Lausanne Congress statements, “Cape Town takes a different approach by framing the biblical narrative of God’s action in the world with the theme of love”, an emphasis that Schreiter as a Roman Catholic scholar – an outside observer to evangelicalism – thinks may be a striking departure to Reformed theological anthropology and bears further thought and discussion.\textsuperscript{102}

\section*{Conclusion}

Environmental theology has emerged as a vast field of academic study. This paper is important from an historical theological and contextual point of view, demonstrating how theology, in this instance within evangelicalism, has journeyed, reacted, interacted and adapted to the growing consciousness of an environmental crisis of global proportions; a crisis that is more accurately understood as multiple crises of ecological, social, economic and political proportions that

\textsuperscript{97} Cornelius Niemandt, “Ecodomy in Mission: The Ecological Crisis in the Light of Recent Ecumenical Statements”, \textit{Verbum et Ecclesia} 36, no. 3 (July. 2015), https://doaj.org/article/1a1c3cc2709449ddb77725f9dcb0e65a [Accessed 14 May 2018].
\textsuperscript{101} Schreiter, “From the Lausanne Covenant to the Cape Town Commitment”, 89.
\textsuperscript{102} Schreiter, “From the Lausanne Covenant to the Cape Town Commitment”, 90.
have converged in the late twentieth century. Consequently, we have followed
the thread from the emergence of environmental concerns and activism mid-last-
century to the widespread recognition these issues garner today. The response
within evangelicalism has been both positive and negative with the early Lausanne
Conference statements in 1974 and 1989 being slow to pick up on and engage
with international trends. Yet, of all the creation care statements in recent times,
few have been as important to evangelicalism as those found in the Lausanne
Conference Cape Town 2010 Commitment.\footnote{Colin Bell and Robert S. White (eds.), \textit{Creation Care and the Gospel: Reconsidering the Mission of
the Church} (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, 2016), 1.}

The Cape Town 2010 Commitment provided impetus for the convening of
the Lausanne Global Consultation of Creation Care and the Gospel that met in
Jamaica from 29 October to 2 November 2012. Two primary conclusions were
reached in Jamaica: i) that creation care is indeed a gospel issue within the
lordship of Christ, and, ii) that we are facing a crisis that is pressing and must be
resolved in this generation. Similar Lausanne Creation Care Consultations have
since then taken place in almost every region of the world.\footnote{Ed Brown from “Care of Creation” and Dave Bookless from “A Rocha”, working together under
the umbrella of the Lausanne Creation Care Network, are the co-convenors of these conferences
worldwide.} Most recently the
one for Southern Africa was hosted by African Enterprise in Pietermaritzburg
from 19-23 February 2018. It was evident at this gathering that a clear evangelical
theology and praxis of creation care is finally being developed and articulated,
challenging stereotypical evangelical dualism and general disregard for being
stewards of planet earth.

However, this remains a contested theological space and narrative, one that, at
times, leans towards a sentimental, even romanticized, critique of the environment.
‘Loving God’s world’ and being advocates of ‘creation care’ sounds noble but there
is much to not love and care for, not least mosquitoes and killer viruses. Having
established that environmental theology has a valid voice within evangelicalism,
it will need to be grounded in an earthier reality in the coming decade.
“...An Announcement of a New Spiritual Dispensation...” Pentecostalism and Nationalisation of Prayer in Zambia

Chammah J. Kaunda
Mutale M. Kaunda

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the response of Zambian Pentecostalism to the Declaration of the National Day of Prayer and Fasting. Empirical data was gathered through interviews, collection of prayers, blogs, personal communications and interviews, and analysed through a missio-political approach. The findings show that there are a number of Pentecostals seeking to engage in the Day of Prayer through activism, in order to impact the nation in concrete ways. They are seeking a paradigm shift from empty-talk prayer to a socio-politically engaged prayer that demands an alternative political vision for the nation.

Introduction

Prayer is foundational to Pentecostal spirituality. Most Pentecostals believe that prayer alone has efficacious power to change everything, including the prayers themselves.¹ Praying for the political spheres is often understood as a biblical obligation because of the Pentecostal belief that only through prayer can God bring transformation into the nation. Hence, some scholars insist that the Pentecostal act of public praying is a form of “political action”.² They underline that public


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prayer should not only be viewed as a technique for political praxis, but also as a form or act of speech that can expose evil in the nation. Therefore, Zambian Pentecostals have employed public prayer as a strategy in their quest to create Pentecostal nationalism.\textsuperscript{3} The creation of a spiritual nationalism is perceived as an obligation that can only be achieved through prayer. Thus, most Zambian Pentecostals have given unswerving support to the nationalisation of prayer.\textsuperscript{4} The nationalisation of prayer is understood as the means by which prayer is utilised as a religio-cultural tool through which to articulate and enact political interests within the public spheres through state initiatives.\textsuperscript{5}

This article seeks to interrogate how the National Day of Prayer and Fasting (hereafter, the Day of Prayer) discourses are shrouded in a religio-nationalistic character that blurs the distinction between religion and politics. This results in sacralisation of the reigning political system and elevates it beyond human critique. They operate as powerful religio-political instruments that are harnessed and deployed by particular social classes and religious groups to advance their religious and nationalistic interests. As such, most Zambian politicians are increasingly seeking to leverage the influence of Pentecostalism to create an elite system of control conforming to Pentecostal ideo-theologies about the ultimate source of power and authority.\textsuperscript{6} In keeping with this orientation, the article begins by evaluating how scholars in various disciplines have engaged the notion of prayer in relation to socio-political transformation. Second, it presents the missio-political approach used to analyse data gathered on the Pentecostal response to the Day of Prayer. The third section outlines the historical background to the call for the Day of Prayer. The final section investigates responses and contestations to the Day of Prayer within Pentecostal communities.


\textsuperscript{4} In this article we have used national prayer and public prayer interchangeably.


\textsuperscript{6} In the context of the Day of Prayer, the President of Zambia, Edgar Chagwa Lungu, appears to have a preferential option for Pentecostalism, even in the method of prayers. This is a direct development from the Second Republican President Frederick Chiluba’s Declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation (hereafter, the Declaration) in which he excluded mainstream churches and non-Christian faith communities in favour of Pentecostalism.
On Prayer and Socio-political Transformation

Existing literature shows that Pentecostals interpret public spheres as terrains of contestation between good and evil. Richard Burgess argues that given the African Pentecostal preoccupation with spiritual warfare “and restricted access to the corridors of power, there is an inner logic to Pentecostal preferences for prayer as the principle tool for political engagement, which belies the movement’s acquiescent image”. However, not all Pentecostals have limited access to political power, as they relate differently to national politics in various African countries. In some countries, such as Zambia, Pentecostals have enjoyed access to the corridors of political power, starting with Chiluba in the 1990s, and their influence has re-emerged with the current President. Despite this access to power, most Pentecostals would still argue that prayer is an indispensable aspect of their political action. The challenge many scholars face is how to measure the impact of prayer on national politics. Some, such as Ruth Marshall, argue that spiritual warfare contributes to social transformation in some African countries. However, she cautions against essentialism as there are some Charismatic political activists who have articulated socially informed Pentecostal theologies of liberation. In contrast, scholars such as Paul Gifford do not see how prayers of spiritual warfare could have any meaningful impact on Africa’s development in modern society. He argues that Pentecostalism functions within an enchanted worldview which perpetuates spiritualisation of national politics. For him, this worldview hinders the development of scientific rationality which is essential for effective governance in modern societies.

However, scholars approaching prayer from the context of ritual demonstrate the indirect impact of prayer in transforming the political landscape. They argue

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that prayer can easily be applied to new purposes and hidden socio-political agendas. Marcin Pomarański, for instance, stresses that prayer presents a paradox in political science. It is utilised as both a strategic tool in political struggle, and also as means to legitimise political powers. Politicians tap into prayer as a social ritual to position themselves as generating their political authority from a divine source.\(^{13}\) Anthropologists argue that ritual power is a factor in the politics of legitimisation.\(^{14}\) They demonstrate how political leaders use rituals to insert and justify their own political authority and agendas.\(^{15}\) These scholars argue that many politicians seek to incorporate socially acceptable principles of legitimation. They generate and legitimise their power by appealing to the strongest rituals within society which integrate familiar beliefs and practices to popularise their hidden agenda.\(^{16}\) Lisa Lucero noted that political association with religio-socially acceptable rituals could result in sacralisation and uncritical acceptance of political powers, as subjects increasingly believe that their politicians have been appointed by the Supernatural Being.\(^{17}\)

The foregoing discussion could potentially lead someone to conclude that the ritual does not enshrine any subversive power of resistance against political manipulation. It is important to underline that the ritual is not in itself susceptible to political manipulation; rather, it becomes vulnerable when self-interest of the custodians overpower the will to watch over the interests of masses. Beyond the views of political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists, theologians argue that prayer, like all other religious rituals, is embedded in subversive spirituality against evil forces.\(^{18}\) They stress that if approached from a social analytical perspective, prayer situated in the public spaces has the potential to challenge the status quo and promote the rearrangement of social norms, love-driven politics, and the religious, economic and cultural values of a particular community. In

13 Marcin Pomarański, “‘God Bless America’: Prayer as a Political Ritual in the USA”, Annales UMCS, Sectio K (Politologia) 20, no. 1 (2013), 139-150.
15 Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power; 42.
other words, prayer has the potential to be utilised as “the power of the weak”. This means there are some public prayers that have the potential to occasion a spirituality of resistance that could bring about a new social consciousness and lead to authentic political transformation.

**On a Missio-Political Prayer Approach**

The article is based on a wider project that sought to capture Zambian Pentecostal culture and identity that embodies its understanding of God’s mission in the context of national politics. The data was gathered from over 350 Pentecostal ministers, leaders and ordinary church members through a multidirectional approach which included face-to-face interviews, group discussions, surveys, and blogs in Lusaka and Ndola from March 2016 to October 2017. This article specifically focuses on the link between Pentecostalism and political praxis in relation to the Day of Prayer. The findings show that there is a division within Pentecostal communities. On the one hand, there are some Pentecostals, especially the elites, which have uncritically accepted the Day of Prayer to the extent of legitimising and justifying political power and authority. On the other hand, there are also voices of dissent from among the margins arguing for a critical approach to the Day of Prayer for the sake of advancing social justice and economic equality.

This article takes a missio-political approach to prayer. It argues that the phenomenon of prayer is empirical by nature because it is embedded within the faith communities’ ongoing participation in God’s missional activity in the world within a particular socio-cultural context. In this study, missio-political prayer refers to the public missional praxis of the church where the action of the state is put under God’s eye. Missio-political prayer does not separate the act of

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praying from political commitment to total liberation and social transformation. Missio-political prayer does not depend on Christians having or exercising political authority by any means, rather it seeks to create a critical safe space for the church to promote social healing and reconciliation indispensable for national building and social cohesion, justice and equality, human rights and good governance, resistance against corruption and socio-political and economic injustice, and unapologetic promotion of abundant life for all.

Since prayer is an aspect of practical theology, scholars suggest empirical theology as a methodological approach. Jan Jongeneel and Tobias Faix affirm that empirical research is a methodological foundation for missiology as well. In this approach, the study focuses on a particular religious phenomenon rather than the congregations. Within an empirical missiological approach, the study is underpinned by Harvey Sindima’s twofold model of missio-political prayer analysis. The first is a type of prayer he calls “empty talk”. This is a form of prayer with no socio-political impact. Sindima argues that:

…a prayer that does not initiate one into some kind of action, a transformation, a conversion, is empty talk. At best such prayer is therapy, an emotional catharsis that makes one feel good because deep inner feelings have been verbalized. That cannot be talking to and listening to God, but a need to hear oneself.

The ‘empty talk’ prayer does not integrate prayer and political commitment with concrete social transformation through acts of resistance against political injustice and corruption. There are three characteristics of ‘empty talk’ prayer. First, it is shaped by status-seeking motives which affect the church’s ability to distinguish between the mission of God in politics and politics themselves, and as such, fails to challenge status quo. Second, it has a tendency to spiritualise politics and individualise social problems. Third, there is also very little theology of advocacy for the excluded and marginalized. Although empty-talk prayer is done in public, it has little concern for social transformation; rather it unwittingly legitimises political powers.

The second approach in Sindima’s twofold model of missio-political prayer analysis is prayer as socio-political action. The approach seeks God’s missional possibilities from countercultural and marginal spaces. It perceives public prayer as a critical space for contesting the unquestioned neo-colonial construction of

dominant political imaginations, and for subverting the politics of corruption and repression inherent in the contemporary political order. This is a form of prayer that seeks to shape political struggle for justice and human liberation. As Sindima describes it:

 Prayer is a silent revolution against evil in all its manifestations, individual and structural. To pray is to say the world is not as God intended it to be; it is no longer as good as it was at creation. To pray is to acknowledge that people have corrupted the world and that the whole creation groans as it awaits liberation. Prayer is ushering the rule of God into one’s life and the world.

Sindima perceives missio-political prayer as multidirectional in its orientation. It places emphasis on the constant interaction between words spoken to God, with concrete social actions aimed at transformation in relational, social, structural, economic, political and cultural configurations of the national landscape. In other words, prayer as socio-political action is based on a vigorous and passionate search for the reign of God in the nation, as it is in heaven. Sindima believes that the authenticity of prayer as socio-political action is based on enactment of God’s mission through political struggle and includes resistance, public witness, speech acts and redemptive social actions. Through this model, it became clear that there are contestations among Zambian Pentecostals in their ways of engaging in the Day of Prayer.

Zambia’s Lungu and Nationalisation of Prayer

The current President of Zambia, Edgar Chagwa Lungu, began as a Defence and Justice Minister in the late Michael Sata’s Patriotic Front (PF) political party. Sata became the President of Zambia in 2011 and died in the office in 2014. Lungu took up the office on 28 October 2014 until presidential elections in January 2015. Sata did not groom a successor, and after his death, political factions and rivalry broke out over who should be the presidential candidate of PF. Lungu was finally adopted as the candidate and won the election in January 2015 to finish Sata’s term. While Lungu won the election, “tribalism” in voting patterns was more pronounced than in all the previous presidential elections.

In addition to these, Lungu’s few months in office were also riddled with overwhelming economic challenges. The copper prices on which the nation’s 70 percent of export earnings is derived declined and the currency plunged down to over 45 percent against the United States Dollar. The nation was experiencing

falling water levels at hydropower plants, which triggered the most severe load shedding the nation has even seen. Alarmed, Lungu resolved to seek divine intervention. He declared 18th October 2015 a public holiday for a National Day of Prayer and Fasting, which included prayers for national repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. He instructed all bars, nightclubs and entertainment places, including restaurants and fast-food outlets, to be closed on the day, and the Football Association of Zambia to cancel all domestic games. The church leaders were encouraged to organise their members for prayer and fasting. On this particular day, the people of Zambia came together to seek help from the Lord. As illustrated in the two figures below, every stadium in the nation and place of worship was filled with worshippers.

Left: Zambians reaching out to God in prayer

Right: Lungu releases a Dove as sign of peace on Day of Prayer.

On that day, Lungu first reaffirmed Chiluba’s 1991 declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, and added his own declaration: “Zambia set free from the dark forces of evil.” Second, he declared 18th October as an Annual National Day of Prayer and Fasting, which was also gazetted as a National Public Holiday. Third, in the same month, on 25th October 2015, Lungu conducted a ceremony for the construction of the National House of Prayer (NHoP) to help actualise Zambia as a Christian nation. The mission statement of the NHoP is to “establish prayer as a foundation for righteousness and justice, peace and prosperity and co-existence in Love”. The construction is still underway in a government reserved area in Lusaka. It is a ten thousand seat auditorium which is estimated to cost $10 million (USD). Lungu has also appointed twelve members of the advisory board, fundraising and technical committee, chaired by a Pentecostal Bishop, Dr Joshua Banda of the Northmead Assembly of God, to spearhead the construction of NHoP. Most members in the advisory board represent Pentecostal forms of Christianity. Lungu’s subtle association with Pentecostalism appears to have contributed to his winning the 2016 presidential election.

In an almost appreciative manner for support Lungu received from some Pentecostals during the presidential campaign, he introduced the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Guidance (hereafter, the Ministry). He also appointed a Pentecostal female Pastor, Godfridah Sumaili, as its head. The introduction of this Ministry came while the opposition party’s petition over perceived electoral fraud during the presidential election on 11th August 2016 was still pending in the Constitutional Court. Before Lungu was even inaugurated, he promised to introduce the Ministry, arguing that it was imperative in the process of reaffirmation and actualisation of the Declaration. The elections were regarded as manipulated, and the main opposition – The United Party for National Development (UPND) – demanded a recount of the votes. Lungu won the election with 50.3 percent to defeat Hichilema who got 47.6 percent. These political issues make it significant to analyse how Zambian Pentecostalism has responded to the Day of Prayer.

National House of Prayer, National House of Prayer, 3.
Rev Sumaili is a pastor at Bread of Life Church International (BLCI), under Bishop Joe Imakando. This is the largest single congregation in Zambia, with over 12,000 members.
Variety of Zambian Pentecostal Responses

This section interrogates the responses of Zambian Pentecostalism to the Declaration of the Day of Prayer. The responses are developed into three sections, as Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ), Pentecostal elites, and Pentecostals on the margins.

The Response of EFZ

The response of EFZ can only be fully appreciated in comparison to the responses of its two counterpart church mother bodies in Zambia – the Council of Churches in Zambia (CCZ), and The Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB). The CCZ, ZCCB and EFZ, classified as three church mother bodies, have played a critical role in issues related to national politics and religio-social cohesion. They have often worked closely on many issues affecting the nation. In the late 1980s through to the early 1990s, the expression of ecumenism by these church mother bodies was increasingly described as “genuine ecumenism”.

Nonetheless, the change in leadership has meant that the focus on the activities that seek to promote the common good have been overlooked. The fundamental quest appears to be nationalisation of Pentecostal-oriented morality in the nation. The demographic explosion of Pentecostalism and its increasing in participation in EFZ has brought a paradigm shift in the organisation’s theological emphasis and missional orientation. The EFZ is now principally Pentecostal in character with 90 percent of its Executive Board members identified as Pentecostals.

Thus, the three church mother bodies no longer see eye-to-eye on many national issues. Even on the question of nationalisation of prayer, they have responded in different ways. The two church mother bodies which house mainline churches – CCZ and ZCCB – have rejected the politicisation of prayer. These two mother bodies foresee the possibility of the process resulting in religionisation of politics. They also rejected the introduction of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and National Guidance. They argued that the introduction was both “unwise and unnecessary … in view of the various financial and economic challenges our country is currently facing”.

country to be a democracy rather than a theocracy”. The two mother bodies had also rejected Chiluba’s declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation, as it was done without any formal consultation with the wider church but only one sector of the church, Pentecostalism. The two mother bodies have always sought for more constructive engagement with social issues rather than using prayer as an excuse.

However, the introduction received indiscriminate support and was uncritically defended by EFZ. Despite the fact that it was the political context that gave rise to the Day of Prayer, some in the EFZ maintained that it has no political implications. In response to the Day of Prayer, some Pentecostals who describe themselves as prayer warriors have created a WhatsApp Blog under the group name “One nation under Christ”. This Blog was created to coordinate the activities of the Day of Prayer and promote ongoing prayer for the nation. The group consists of over 92 participants across the nation and some from the diaspora. Participation includes some notable Pentecostal clergy and the General Secretary of EFZ, Rev Pukuta Mwanza, and some of the prominent Pentecostal politicians such as Honourable Rev Godfridah Sumaili and Honourable Dr Liya Mutale.

There are at least two diverging political theological ideas operating within the three church mother bodies. The first is the ecumenical political theology from the CCZ and ZCCB. These two mother bodies have well-developed theological ideals of social order and justice, and a long history and tradition of practical engagement with the state. The second is an Evangelical/Pentecostal political theology which informs EFZ’s ideo-theological orientation. The EFZ political theology is shaped by theocratic politics rather than liberatory politics. This theocratic imagination has little or no focus on authentic Christian faith shaped by missional activism. It seeks to impose a Pentecostal nationalism with a morality dictated by Pentecostal beliefs and practices. It is grounded on the triumph of Pentecostalism over other church denominations and religions and political parties not approved by a sect of Pentecostal leadership. It is not informed by the search for socio-political justice from the margins and by the marginalized, but rather a spiritual struggle to be addressed only through prayer and fasting. They believe that the root of political corruption, injustice and human right violations are spiritual problems which are to be identified and dealt with in the spiritual realm. Once this is done, the positive effects will be evident in the natural through divine intervention or

42 Vatican News, “Catholics and Protestant Churches in Zambia against new Ministry of Religion”.
miracle. For instance, Rev Pukuta Mwanza of EFZ argues that “if we prioritize
God, the material needs of our country will be taken care of by God’s supernatural
provision and blessings. First Things first.” He believes that prayer cannot be
politicked as it is in continuation with biblical tradition and the history of Zambia.

Since Chiluba’s declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation in 1991, there
has been ongoing theological conflict and confusion as to the role of the church
in politics and society. The boundaries between religion and politics have
become increasingly fluid and confused, especially by EFZ. In some cases, the
church has allowed the state to set the agenda for its mission in the nation. The
identity of the church is often confused; its missional mandate is confused with
promoting the interests of the reigning government. The church appears to have
religionised the concept of political power, which is often placed in mystical
dimensions. This approach to political power makes the President withdraw his
political accountability from the voters and relocate it in the mystical realm as its
authentic source. This also robs the church of the political mandate to call the state
to account. In this context, the church is always seen as the servant of the state
rather than a community with a mandate to call the state to divine accountability.
This is an ancient problem in the history of the church and EFZ continues to
demonstrate ignorance of history.

The Response of Pentecostal Elites

The second response emerges from some Pentecostal elites who have uncritically
affirmed the call for prayer in a way that appears to legitimise the status quo.
Some Pentecostal elites are persuaded that only prayer can liberate the nation
from neo-colonial challenges. In the speech on the first official commemoration
of the Day of Prayer on 18th October 2016, The National House of Prayer Advisory
Chairperson, Bishop Joshua Banda, stressed that Lungu’s Declaration “is an
announcement of a new spiritual dispensation in Zambia”. He underlined that
“we are determined to raise a praying Christian nation ... for without prayer, the
life of the nation will be taken away”. Many Zambian Pentecostals would agree
with his assertion as they perceive prayer as critical for political transformation,
and transformation is impossible without prayer, especially spiritual warfare.

46 Pukuta N. Mwanza, “Justification for the Construction of the National House of Prayer – An Evangelical
48 Chammah J Kaunda, “Christianising Edgar Chagwa Lungu: the Christian nation, social media
presidential photography and 2016 election campaign”, Stellenbosch Theological Journal. 4(1): 215-
www.youtube.com/watch?v=xLs2234nopQ (accessed 28 October 2016).
But as Sindima argues, it is not every form of prayer that can bring about social transformation. Banda also does not explain what “life of the nation” he is talking about. Thus, while Banda’s optimism about prayer has political implications in relation to social challenges, it is inadequate in that it does not promote prophetic criticism that can help in creating new political structures. This form of prayer is what Sindima classifies as empty discourse which legitimises the political status quo and has no clear agenda for concrete political transformation.

The Declaration of the Day of Prayer made some Pentecostals believe that Lungu is a right president for Zambia. A Pentecostal clergy and politician, Rev Danny Pule argues:

I am supporting president Lungu because I believe he is the right man at the time that God has put in the national leadership. Of all the candidates, I can’t see anyone who can help us advance Christian leadership. Lungu has shown it by declaring the Day of Prayer and reconciliation and annual holiday on which we’ll remember to thank God and dedicate ourselves and our nation to the Lord. As a result we are building a National House of Prayer which Chiluba did not do.50

Declaring the Day of Prayer was kind of Lungu’s presidential debut among some Pentecostals. It made him a national religious celebrity, such that some Pentecostals even formed a Christian campaign wing called Christians for Lungu (vote for Edgar Lungu).51 In an interview, the chairperson for the movement, who is also Pentecostal, Dr Liya Mutale,52 argued that Lungu is a “God ordained leader” for Zambia. She emphatically argued that the 11th August 2016 presidential election was

…a spiritual election, a battle for the soul of Zambia. So we have to ensure that Zambian Christian heritage is sustained, it’s secured. And to keep it secure, we keep the man that God has called for the season. And we believe that Edgar Chagwa Lungu is that man, so as far as we are concerned he is winning the election anyway.53

The spiritualisation of elections emerging from Mutale affirms Sindima’s argument that empty prayer tends to spiritualise the political realm. In fact, the two main presidential candidates – Lungu and the opposition UPND led by Hakainde Hichilema (HH) – were categorised in terms of the struggle between good and evil. On the one hand, HH was categorised as a Satanist.54 This already made him

50 Dr Danny Pule, Interview with the author, Pule residential house in Lusaka 11th June 2016.
52 At the time of the interview, Dr Mutale was unemployed but immediately after Lungu won the August 2016 elections, she was appointed Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism and Arts.
an agent of darkness that some Pentecostals had to fight against in order to secure Lungu’s winning. On the other hand, Lungu’s declaration made him an angel of light – “God ordained leader” – as Dr Mutale underlines. On the inauguration of the Day of Prayer, Lungu argued, “I have done my part to reconcile the church and the state”. It appears that Lungu enacted the Day of Prayer as a political ritual through which he has won the favour of many Pentecostals. There is little prophetic criticism in the Day of Prayer. There has not been any engagement in authentic prophetic resistance against political corruption and nepotism; rather, it has helped reconstruct the image of Lungu as a Christian President. The Day of Prayer is not open to criticism and anyone who dares challenge the action is deemed an enemy of God and therefore an enemy of the nation and equated to being a Satanist. The fact that the Day of Prayer precludes intellectual discussions reinforces Lungu’s sacralisation. It functions as a vehicle for political legitimacy.

There are some Pentecostals who are against those who question the legitimacy of the Day of Prayer. They have argued that the Day of Prayer and politics are not related. For instance, a participant on the ‘One Nation under Christ’ WhatsApp blog stressed:

Let’s keep this page [Blog] for our specific purpose of ‘One nation under Christ’. There is a myriad of things in the Kingdom. We must understand our portion. Please know the difference to keep our focus on our calling even for such a time as this. We cannot be in everything.

Another affirms:

“I agree entirely. When I look at the ministry of our Saviour, he was focused on what the Father sent him to do. It is important for us to develop this discipline. We have limited time, strength, resources etc. We cannot focus on everything. Our efforts will be spread and we will not achieve our mandate.”

Another participant insists:

Corruption is all over the world, never mind the indexes. There are very few countries that are pure. Dwelling on politics is wasted energy. In Jesus’ days Rome and the Herod were very unjust and corrupt. But Jesus stayed focussed on His mission and didn’t remove the Herod etc. Let’s stay focussed and let politics be handled (or mishandled) by politicians. There is one who is the god of this world. But we belong to the world whose ruler is the King of Kings and Lord of all.

These Pentecostals advocate for prayer that promotes a radical flight from reality. While prayer is the soul and breath of authentic Christianity, prayer which does

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56 Blogger, “One nation under Christ”, WhatsApp Blog (2017, 14/10). The rest of references are from this page unless indicated.
57 Blogger (2017, 19/10).
58 Blogger (2017, 24/10).
not translate into concrete political action cannot bring about social change. They promote empty-talk prayer based on personal repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation as sufficient for the realisation of peace and a transformed society. But prayer without political activism is “faith without works”, which James 2:14 classifies as “dead”. However, there is a brand of Pentecostalism that is dissatisfied with prayer which does not translate into concrete actions. For instance, Rev Elias Munshya categorises prayer without action as good rhetoric which does not transcend emotional therapy.

The Response of the Margins

The third response emerges from Pentecostals who are mostly from the margins. These have responded in ways that have the potential to promote a transformative political agenda. Perhaps one of the values of the call for the Day of Prayer lies in the fact that it has engendered critical discussions among Pentecostals themselves. The discussants are seeking to understand how a movement grounded in such unparalleled theological diversity, inconsistency and competition for public recognition can engage constructively in national politics. The scope of this article does not allow for engagement with such a broad question. Rather, this section is limited to analysis of the debates seeking to strike a balance between prayer and concrete political action. As already demonstrated above, some Pentecostal elites argue that the Day of Prayer should not be interpreted in political terms, rather as a spiritual activity. However, this has not deterred participants on the ‘One Nation under Christ’ WhatsApp blog from analyzing the Day of Prayer from a political perspective. For instance, one participant posted a lamentation:

My heart is heavy, my spirit is low because of levels of corruption in my country, the country I love so dearly, the country of my fathers, the country that I will leave for my children. But what sort of country are we going to leave for our children? With these levels of corruption, our country’s future outlook does not look bright. Something must be done, and must be done now.

This blogger is calling for prayer that can contribute concretely to human struggle in Zambia. Another participant questions: “You people of this group surprise me how do you want to pray for Zambia and yet you want to avoid discussing politics. The bible [is] 80 percent politics and wars. I can’t pray for the nation without talking about its politics and economics.” The blog creator, Rev Derek

61 Blogger, (2017, 14/10).
62 Blogger (2017, 24/10).
Mutungu, posted prayer points under the heading “Prayer for the President is an urgent RED ALERT”. He argued:

I’ve heard an outcry at the throne of heaven concerning his Excellency and his cabinet. The main issue is for him to come into line with Psalm 72. This is the prime scripture in the Bible concerning the calling, mandate, influence and legacy of a godly king. He is a royal son meaning one who is positioned as a vice regent on earth to the eternal king in heaven. S/he operates in the Office of Jesus as king of kings and Yahweh regent in the entire universe. 63

The use of the word ‘outcry’ is of interest for rarely would a Pentecostal use such a term on a social space accessible to politicians. Rev Mutungu appears to position himself as a prophet revealing the mind and the feelings of God concerning the president of Zambia. This outcry is itself both confirmation that the president has not carried out the mandate of God in the nation and the seriousness of such disobedience. Rev Mutungu clarifies: “We don’t use the word king to mean that Zambia is a monarchy, but in the simple sense of a HEAD OF STATE.” 64 This is a radical departure from the common Zambian Pentecostal theology that tends to regard the president in monarchical terms. He quoted Psalm 72:1-4 65 where he underlined what he terms a ‘six specific prayer point’ focus for praying for the president, as follows:

1. ECL [Edgar Chagwa Lungu] to understand his relation to Yahweh as a ROYAL SON (v.1b). With that conviction, for him to pursue righteousness in his own life and demand it of his entire cabinet (v.2).

2. ECL to appreciate his calling as chief vice regent to Christ in Zambia for this brief moment. (Note the children ‘your people... your afflicted ones’ in v. 2). Since the nation is covenanted to the Lamb, ECL is there to establish the purposes of Christ.

3. In that role HE [His Excellence] to demand justice (v.2) in his personal dealings and establish a godly standard of distributive justice in the entire government and of retributive justice in the judicial system.

4. True prosperity to burst upon Zambia (v.3), and his own legacy before God and men hangs on the twin virtues of righteousness and justice from top to bottom and up again.

5. A preferential bias to the poor (v.4). That HE will truly “defend the afflicted... save the children of the needy and crush Zambians or foreigners who oppress the needy”.

Saints please understand that heaven is in a hurry to carve a righteous nation out of Zambia so she can be an outstanding sign and a beacon to other nations. 66

63 Blogger (2017, 24/10).
64 Blogger (2017, 24/10).
65 “Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor” (Psalm 72:1-4 NIV).
While Rev Mutungu still uses terminologies such as “chief vice regent of Christ in Zambia” that could easily be misinterpreted as the president in a democratic society draws the mandate and power to rule from the voters, he is rather calling for a presidency shaped by the struggles of the marginalized and excluded. He is calling for the presidency of the marginalized. In this form of presidency, the margins should become key actors in shaping how the president governs the nation and shapes public policies. This type of presidency could be classified as an incarnational presidency. The president of Zambia must fulfill its mandate by opting to be with the marginalized people of Zambia, “not out of paternalistic charity but because their situations testify to [structural wickedness of the nation] and their yearnings for life pointed to God’s purposes”. Rev Mutungu argues that the presidency must be reshaped in the encounter with the margins. This will help all politicians to resist the forces of corruption, nepotism, and globalisation, and reposition politics anew in response to human struggles.

In other words, the margins should inform the process of presiding over the nation, for “transformation never genuinely happens at the centre but at the margins where the reality of people seeking ‘fullness of life’ … becomes a ‘new creative core’”. They are challenging Pentecostalism to resist assimilation by the state and the loss of its missional identity and prophetic responsibility to the marginalized. They see socio-political prayer as a liberation, a movement from prayer as engaging God to prayer as engaged social action in concrete terms. Prayer is God’s design for engaging the world through speech acts, which materialises in the application of the redemptive and emancipatory mind of God in human struggles. Sindima classifies this form of prayer as multidirectional as it constantly interacts with God’s redemptive and justice mind, with concrete social and political actions aimed at transformation in the political realm. This form of prayer finds its place in political and social practice. It exalts people to develop an oppositional lifestyle that subverts the dominant political culture of corruption and injustice, in daily activities of thinking, feeling and acting. An oppositional lifestyle is a means to engage in powerful resistance against a dominant political culture. It fosters questioning of the legitimacy of nationalisation of prayer and has the potential to lead to understanding on how poor governance is reflected within the wider society and among the margins through violence, institutionalisation of corruption.

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injustice, human rights abuse and so on. It is still too early to demonstrate how the emerging prayer as socio-political action will contribute to the Day of Prayer and transformation of the political agenda. As Roderick Hewitt observes in the Jamaican context, missio-political prayer “suggests that the complex global and local factors that are negatively impacting on the contemporary nation’s wellbeing, necessitates that other missional tools that can embody the spirituality of prayer but are more practically engaged in offering alternative models of national development must be explored by the churches and shared with the political and civil leaders for national implementation.”

Conclusion

The article demonstrates the centrality of faith assumptions in Pentecostal notions of the Zambian national state. These assumptions are critical in understanding their responses to the Declaration of the Prayer Day in Zambia which was called by President Lungu. For most Pentecostals, prayer embodies the spiritual phenomena of power and political influence because its fundamental objective is to converse with God. The challenge is that their reverence and unquestioning approach to their faith assumptions has meant they give little attention to seeking rational understanding of their missional identity in relation to political praxis. However, as the article argues, the Day of Prayer has provided an opportunity for some members of Pentecostal communities to start asking uncomfortable contextual questions and to reflect on what it means to engage in public prayer in the context of economic crisis and political corruption, nepotism, human rights abuses and veritable poverty. What is God’s vision for Zambia? What is the missional role of Pentecostalism in bringing about God’s kingdom in Zambia? In what ways can prayer help to bring about transformation of power structures? How can public leaders, both religious and politicians, be made fully accountable to the margins? There are some Pentecostals who are increasingly recognising that God has a preferential option to work with, within, from and through the people on the margins. They believe that missio-political prayer should move Pentecostalism to see, analyse and denounce in concrete ways the systems of evil compromising the humanity and dignity of the majority of the Zambian people.

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A Pentecostalist Reads Tamar’s Story of Rape and Humiliation with a Hermeneutical Awareness

Marius Nel

ABSTRACT

Early Pentecostals came from the ranks of the disenfranchised and marginalised. When they read biblical texts that describe violence against those who are weaker, such as gender-based violence, they readily acknowledged that the Bible’s apparent approval of such violence demonstrates the human tendency to sin. In later Pentecostal hermeneutics the Bible was read in a literalist manner as though each passage contains a word from God. It is argued at the hand of Amnon’s rape of Tamar in 2 Samuel 13 that a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic linked to the way early Pentecostals read the Bible is necessary to ensure that in Tamar’s narrative a ‘Spirit-Word’ would challenge readers’ ideologies and perceptions rather than reinforce notions of violence. While Tamar’s narrative does not provide comfort or any ethical role models to modern readers, a Spirit-filled hermeneutic with a feminist sensitivity will emphasize that narratives of terror want readers to feel what God feels because the Bible is not only meant to shape and transform minds and actions but also affections. A Spirit-Word creates meaning within the context of the Bible as a whole, revealing the God who grieves over victims of violence and gets angry with the violent.

Introduction

For the average Bible reader, it is disconcerting to find that the most prominent anthropological theme in the Hebrew Bible is that of violence.¹ No other human activity or experience is mentioned so frequently as the act of violence, neither the world of labour and economy, nor that of family and sexuality, nor that of LK,„also to God while human violence is at times actively promoted as God’s will, representing what Lüdemann calls the dark side of the Bible.² Schwager states


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that approximately a thousand passages in the Hebrew Bible describe God’s anger about the sins of people in violent terms, with punishment consisting of destruction and death.\(^3\) YHWH takes revenge and annihilates people like a sweeping fire: ‘No other topic is as often mentioned as God’s bloody works’. Another hundred passages state that YHWH explicitly commands people to kill.\(^4\) This leads Reid and Longman to state, ‘…we wince at the R-rated scenes of violence cast upon our mental screens. Was this annihilation truly God’s will? Perhaps Israel misheard God. If God required this of Israel, how can followers of the Prince of Peace condone these stories and teach them to our children? What comfort and moral direction can we find in a God of warfare?’\(^5\)

The question to be answered in the article is, how should a believer evaluate these descriptions? Does it serve as normative for their behaviour? Or should it be relegated to a description of sinful human behaviour, as early Pentecostals seemed to have done?

It must be admitted that there are also other voices in the Hebrew Bible. Violence is not the only model of behaviour on offer in the Bible. At the same time, however, it is not an incidental or peripheral feature, and it cannot be glossed over. The Bible witnesses not only to the innocent victim and to the God of victims but, also, to the hungry God (as Shulman typifies descriptions of God demonstrating violent behaviour) who devours victims and to the zeal of the human agents who execute God’s will.\(^6\) Fact is, there is much in the Bible that is not worthy of imitation, or perhaps even worthy of humanity.

The problem statement is: How do Pentecostals interpret passages that seemingly approve violence? The question is discussed in terms of 2 Samuel 13 which describes David’s son Amnon’s rape of Tamar, his sister. The necessity of attending to the interpretation of violent texts is linked to the observation that the history of the Christian church contains many examples of violence, with believers justifying and ratifying their violent genocides with reference to examples provided in the Bible.

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3 Schwager, *Brauchen Wir einen Sündenbock?*, 60.
4 Schwager, *Brauchen Wir einen Sündenbock?*, 60.
Gruesome Narrative of Tamar’s Rape

The narrative about Amnon’s violent rape and rejection of Tamar is found in 2 Samuel 13:1–22, followed by Absalom’s murder of Amnon (13:23–39). Absalom, the son of David, has a lovely sister, whose name is Tamar. Their mother is Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur (2 Samuel 3:3). Amnon is David’s first born son from his wife Ahinoam, the Jezreelitess (2 Sam 3:2). He is the crown prince, first in line for the throne of Israel. Amnon becomes infatuated, (or ‘felt a desire for her’, ‘wanted to embrace her’,9) with Tamar but he is frustrated to the point of illness because he knows that although she is a virgin, and hence marriageable, such a union between half-brother and half-sister is forbidden in Israel (cf. Lev 18:9, 11; 20:17; cf. Deut 22:13–21; 27:22).10

Jonadab is a cousin to Amnon, being the son of David’s brother (2 Sam 13:32). As a friend and ‘very wise, crafty or clever man’ (13:3 אִישׁ חָכָם מְאֹד) he advises Amnon how to realize his ‘love’ for Tamar which Amnon apologetically identifies as ‘my brother Absalom’s sister’ (13:4 אֶת תָּמָר אֲחֹת אָבְשָׁלֹם אָחִי אֹהֵב). Jonadab’s advice comprises that Amnon pretend to be ill in order to deceitfully arrange a meeting with Tamar. When his father visits the sick son he is asked to send Tamar with two (or a couple of) cakes to serve him (eat out of her hand; 13:6 הּ וְאֶבְרֶה מִיָּדָֽ).11 The indulgent father allows his child to mislead him and he sends for Tamar. By complying with Amnon’s childish request, David becomes partly responsible for Amnon’s misbehaviour toward Tamar.

7 R. D. Bergen, 1, 2 Samuel (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers; The New American Commentary 7, 1996), 379, writes, ‘This carefully constructed narrative seems intended to demonstrate at least two truths: first, that God’s prophetic word is true; second, that the sins of one generation imprint the next generation. Each sin not only fosters more sin, it also fashions it by providing precedents for others to follow.’ In this way the author avoids the most important issues in the text related to the inherent violence in the behaviour of all the characters, even the victim of the violence who suggests that the rape continues on condition that her rapist asks the father’s permission.

8 So translated by TANAKH, the New Jewish Publication Society Version, 609.


10 The name Tamar means ‘palm tree’ and signifies fruitfulness (D. R. Acosta, ‘Tamar’, in The Lexham Bible Dictionary, edited by J. D. Barry, et al (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016) while Amnon means ‘faithful, stable’ (Acosta, ‘Amnon’, 2016). They did not live up to their names. Bergen (1, 2 Samuel, 380) argues that the biblical narrator deliberately patterns the portrayal of Amnon’s actions and emotions after Shechem who, like Amnon, was the firstborn son of a ruler and who also raped the daughter of an Israelite leader and ended up dead (cf. Gen 34:2-3, 26). Amnon is portrayed as one who chose the way of the Canaanite; thus, readers are prepared to accept the fact that he will suffer the fate of the Canaanite.

11 ‘Cakes’ can refer to ‘fried cakes’, ‘mouthfuls of gruel’ or ‘dumplings’. The Hebrew term does not occur elsewhere in the Old Testament except for vv. 8, 10 and it is not possible to be certain of its meaning. Omanson & Ellington (A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel, 871) thinks it seems reasonable that a person pretending to be sick would request something boiled rather than fried or baked.
With Tamar alone with him in his bedroom,\(^\text{12}\) he takes hold of her (4:11 forces himself on her: \(וַיִּחֲזֶֽק־בָּהּ\)) and invites her to have sex with him (cf. Gen 39:7, 12). It however turns out that his love has more to do with lust. Tamar pleads with him not to do it (the verb \(אַל־תְּעַנֵּ֔ני\) is also found in vv. 14, 22, 32 and can be translated as ‘oppress, humble, abuse, rape’; cf. 4:12) because ‘this is not how it is done (such a thing is not done) in Israel’.\(^\text{13}\) She calls his proposal senselessness (\(אֶת־הַנְּבָלָ֥ה\)).\(^\text{14}\) It would cause her shame that she would never be able to get rid of,\(^\text{15}\) and he would be counted among the wicked fools or scoundrels (13:30 \(כְּאַחַ֥ד הַנְּבָלִ֖ים\).\(^\text{16}\) She tries to argue with her rapist that he should rather follow the correct route and ask their father to marry her. Perhaps Tamar’s argument is simply a ploy to win some time.\(^\text{17}\)

However, Amnon’s lust overrules any rationality and he forces himself on her. It is clear that the narrator does not assign any guilt to Tamar in the rape episode. And when the brute is finished he hates his victim (13:15 \(וַיִּשְׂנָאֶ֣הָ אַמְנ֗וֹן שִׂנְאָה֙ גְּדוֹלָ֣הּ מְאֹ֔ד\); the repetitious use of a noun and a verb having the same root serves to make the statement more emphatic).\(^\text{18}\) ‘The winds of “love” (v. 1) which had propelled

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\(^\text{12}\) ‘Room’ (דָּרוּחַ) translates a Hebrew noun meaning a ‘dark inner room’ that was often used for a bedroom, since it was away from the sunlight (Omanson & Ellington, *A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel*, 874).

\(^\text{13}\) The words may refer to a comparison between the people of Israel in distinction from their Canaanite neighbours who took incestuous relationships less seriously (Omanson & Ellington, *A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel*, 875). Tamar’s use of ‘should not be done’ together with ‘wicked thing’ is, in the opinion of Bergen (*1, 2 Samuel*, 381), an unmistakable allusion to the Torah’s account of Shechem’s rape of Dinah (cf. Gen 34:7).

\(^\text{14}\) Also translated as ‘a disgrace, folly or wicked thing’ by F. Brown, S. R. Driver & C. A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 615. The two words normally carry the idea of foolishness, but Omanson & Ellington (*A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel*, 875) argue that such a translation may be too weak. The word refers rather to a violation of basic principles of society; it is often used of wrong behaviour related to sex such as prostitution (Deut 22:14), homosexuality (Judg 19:23), rape (Judg 20:5-10) and adultery (Jer 29:23). Such acts are considered ‘folly’. Cf. 1 Sam 25:25 with its play on words between the name ‘Nabal’ and the term ‘folly’.


\(^\text{16}\) E. Jenni & C. Westermann, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 710–711. It can also be translated as ‘one of the social outcasts in Israel’, ‘all Israel will condemn your disgraceful behavior’ or ‘you will be considered the laughing-stock of the people of Israel because of your outrageous conduct’ (Omanson & Ellington, *A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel*, 876). The Contemporary English Version renders it in idiomatic English as ‘Everyone in Israel will say you’re nothing but trash!’


\(^\text{18}\) Literally, ‘the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her’
him so forcefully proved to be nothing more than gusts of lust’. It seems he was attracted to Tamar for what he could get from her, not out of concern for her. He chases her away and when she argues that his rejection of her is a greater sin even than his raping of her, he calls his personal servant to put (or throw) her out and bolt the door after her. Amnon could have redeemed the situation somewhat by either marrying her or paying her bride-price (as prescribed by the Torah in Ex 22:16-17; Deut 22:28–29) as compensation for Tamar’s damage; she is no longer a virgin, her value has decreased in Israelite society and she is disqualified from active consideration for any royal marriage contracts. Tamar calls her rapist ‘my brother’ but he refers to her disparagingly as ‘this one, object (feminine)’ (13:17 אֶת־זֹאת). Now Tamar puts ashes on her head (cf. Est 5:3; Jon 3:6; Ezek 27:30), rips her richly ornamented robe that has identified her as a virgin daughter of the king (13:18; cf. Gen 37:3, 23, 32), lays her hand on her head, and cries or weeps aloud.

Absalom perceives immediately what has happened and invites Tamar, now a desolate woman (13:20 זֹאת וְשֹׁ֣מֵמָ֔ה), into his home. Although her father is angry or furious with what Amnon did, he does nothing about it. Absalom does not discuss means that ‘his love for her had been very strong. But now his hatred for her was even stronger’, or as suggested by Omanson & Ellington (A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel, 877): ‘the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her’.

Bergen (1, 2 Samuel, 382).


New Century Translation translates correctly, ‘Sending me away would be an even greater evil. That would be worse than what you’ve already done’. Bergen (1, 2 Samuel, 382) refers to the phrase הָרָעָ֤ה הַגְּדוֹלָה֙ הַזֹּ֔את as ‘this unintelligible phrase’.

Moffatt translates it effectively as ‘this wench’.

The placing of both hands on the top of the head is a sign of grief in many parts in the world. Cf. Jer 2:37 which uses the plural ‘hands’ (Omanson & Ellington, A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel, 880).

The Hebrew עלָמוּת אֶחָד comes from the verb ‘to be numb’. Tamar is awestruck and silenced. Absalom advises her to hold her peace, and she complies; her voice is not heard again in the passage. The Contemporary English Version translates with, ‘but she was always sad and lonely’, but it does not effectively reflect the enormity of grief and pain she must have experienced (C. S. Cole, ‘Taking Hermeneutics to Heart: Proposing an Orthopathic Reading for Texts of Terror Via the Rape of Tamar Narrative’, Pneuma 39 [2017], 269).

Bergen (1, 2 Samuel, 383) argues that there is little that the king could have done in response to the situation. He could have fined Ammon with fifty shekels of silver (Deut 22:29) or forced Amnon to marry Tamar (cf. Ex 22:16; Deut 22:29). The problem is that the Torah, however, prohibits such a marriage. Thus David finds himself in a posture of weakness in the matter. However, I think that David could and should have punished his son severely for raping his half-sister, by inflicting the legal penalty of a death sentence as prescribed by Lev 20:17 (as Lange, Schaff, et al, A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: 1 & 2 Samuel, 485) suggests, or even banishing him from his presence either for a period or permanently.
it with his brother and treats him as though nothing had happened but, two years later, he kills him because of what he had done to his sister (13:22). Then Absalom flees and hides with his mother’s father. Eventually he would lead a rebellion against his weak father and lose his life (2 Sam 15).

**Pentecostal Hermeneutics**

From its initiation, Pentecostalism was a diverse movement representing various viewpoints. However, it is possible to draw some lines when one speaks about its hermeneutical perspectives since these perspectives form one of the movement’s characteristics.

Early Pentecostals came from the ranks of the marginalised and disenfranchised people who felt excluded from, and disinheritcd by, the established churches. In most cases, they were either illiterate or theologically illiterate since peasants, artisans and labourers, along with other poor people, constituted the members of the new movement and its leaders. They argued that Protestant churches were defined by formalism and deadlines due to their captivity to ‘theologians’ and ‘theology’, contra Pentecostals’ belief that all believers had received the Spirit that inspired them when they read the Bible to understand its message as a word from God. They justified their existence in primitivistic and restorationist terms; their movement was supposed to continue the (idealised) experience of the early church that was interrupted when church and state joined forces in the fourth century CE, as explained in the Pentecostal view of church history.

Pentecostals believed that they did not need any specialised training to interpret the Bible because Jesus promised that the Spirit would give believers the words they might need to defend themselves (Matt 10:19; many Pentecostals experienced discrimination and persecution for their Pentecostal beliefs). They only needed the Bible and the anointing of the Spirit that enabled them to understand Scriptures; they allowed for the Spirit to inform their interpretation of passages by way

26 The implication can be that Absalom says nothing about this matter to Amnon or that he says nothing at all to his half-brother. In the last instance, he is so angry with him that he would not talk to him about anything. This seems to be the more likely meaning of the text, in the opinion of Omanson & Ellington, *A Handbook on Second Book of Samuel*, 882.


of ‘special revelation’. They argued that theological knowledge was mostly dangerous for a Spirit-filled Christian because in their experience theology undermined many believers’ (naïve) belief in God.

A next phase dawned when Pentecostal leaders from the 1940s found that their lack of theological training caused their rejection by government structures and agencies and mainline churches, leading to the establishment of Bible schools that provided basic training for prospective pastors. Here the Bible was the only textbook and it was studied in a (Scottish realist) literal sense; the Old Testament was interpreted as prototypes for New Testament events, and the New Testament as prototypes of what contemporary believers experienced. Pentecostals now strove to earn acceptance and respectability, leading to decisive shifts, inter alia in its hermeneutical viewpoints. In alliance with Evangelicals, Pentecostals also accepted their biblicist-fundamentalist hermeneutical viewpoint.

From the 1970s, more and more Pentecostals qualified at Reformed theological schools and faculties and some of them revisited Pentecostal hermeneutics in light of its origins. They connect with the perspective of early Pentecostals who readily acknowledged that the Bible contains some approval of violent behaviour by believers, as well as supposed violent behaviour by God and injunctions by God to God’s people to act violently toward their enemies. They discounted their Bible reading practices by allowing that such passages do not represent normative description and ethical prescription but should be read and interpreted in

conjunction with the Spirit working in them to reveal Jesus’ words.\textsuperscript{36} They argued that because they have been anointed by the Spirit that abides in them, as 1 John 2:20 states, and do not need anyone to teach them (1 John 2:27).\textsuperscript{37}

Contemporary Pentecostals’ acceptance that the Bible might contain passages that do not comply with acceptable ethical sentiments can be explained in terms of their hermeneutical viewpoint, that the Bible is not to be read as infallible, but that it is characterized by many limitations, tensions, complexities, dissonances, incoherencies, contradictions, obscurities, ethical difficulties and so forth.\textsuperscript{38} The Bible introduces contemporary readers to the ways God acted with people in the past, as an indication of how he wants to encounter them today. What is of primary importance is not what the Bible witnesses to, but what the contemporary believer experiences in the resultant encounter with God, based on the biblical witness and its examples of encounters with God. The Bible is read with a clear, experiential goal to experience God in ways likewise as people in biblical times experienced God’s presence, love, power and wrath about their sins.

\textbf{Tamar and a Pentecostal Awareness}

What can Pentecostals learn from 2 Samuel 13 when they study the passage? Where do they find the ‘word of God’ in a passage of such terrible violence? The royal daughter’s sisterly love lands her in a situation where rape is enforced on her, robbing her of a future. In order to save her social status she pleads with her rapist to marry her, an offer he refuses when he forces himself on her. Her social life ends and she is obliged to live a desolate life in her brother’s house. This brother eventually kills the abuser-brother, leading to a chain of events that would eventually kill him as well.

It is argued that the narrative is in no way instructional or explanatory and it does not contain any characters that readers may plausibly use as their role models.\textsuperscript{39} The Tamar narrative provides only examples of how not to act. This is especially true for feminine readers with the rape victim arguing with her abuser to rather marry her and the authority figures in her patriarchal world ignoring her plight, including her father who serves as her legal representative in a context where she has no legal rights. What should Pentecostal hermeneutics do with the text?

\textsuperscript{36} K. J. Archer, \textit{A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community} (Cleveland: CPT, 2009), 16; C. J. Cadoux, \textit{The Early Christian Attitude to War} (San Francisco: Seabury, 2009), 244-5.
\textsuperscript{39} Cole, ‘Taking Hermeneutics to Heart’, 265.
Should they disregard and ignore it, as happens in the prayer books of several denominations that leave out texts of violence?40

It is argued here that biblical narratives which describe violence without any condemnation should not be disregarded, for it is at least as revelatory as the more edifying parts of the biblical witness. The power of the Bible is largely that it gives an unvarnished picture of human nature and of the dynamics of history, and of religion and the things that people do in its name.41 Collins,42 for instance, argues that the biblical portrayal of human reality becomes pernicious only when it is vested with authority and assumed to reflect, without qualification or differentiation, the wisdom or the will of God. The Bible does not claim to tell stories that are supposed to be paradigms for human action in all times and places. Some passages are morally offensive, as the command of consecration to destruction (herem).43 An appeal to the Bible cannot be determinative in each case,44 even though historically believers assumed its divine authority. Formerly the Bible was endowed with an aura of certitude to any position it can be shown to support; arguments were met with ‘God-like certainty that stops all discussion’.45 In this way, the Bible has contributed to violence in the world precisely because it has been taken to confer a degree of certitude that transcends human discussion and argumentation; the most constructive thing a biblical critic can do toward lessening the Bible’s contribution to violence is, in the opinion of Collins,46 to show that such certitude is an illusion.

Instead of asking, ‘What does this text teach us about God and God’s ways with humankind?’ we should rather ask, ‘What does this text mean for us?’ Moore describes the Bible as the altar where God encounters the contemporary believing reader;47 the implication is that the reader is being shaped and transformed by the text. In the process readers’ opinions may even die because they are sacrificed! Pentecostals speak of the Spirit inspiring them to interpret the text but also to experience what the text describes in a first-hand manner. When the Spirit inspires the reader of the Tamar narrative it would probably lead to responses

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42 Collins, Does the Bible Justify Violence?, 31.
46 Collins, Does the Bible Justify Violence?, 33.
of horror when one views the destruction caused by sinful people like us. When Pentecostals open themselves to the Spirit through the text they must not try to rationalize the text or the characters but, rather, experience them in their full impact of violence, horror and heartache. Otherwise, they will be using the Bible for their own epistemological ends and they will become trapped in a hermeneutical process that is required when one tries to explain away the Bible’s limitations, dissonances, obscurities and ethical difficulties. One must realize that the Bible is not inherently safe for its readers, that it contains a risk in reading it. What is necessary is that the Bible is not read in a fundamentalist-literalist way, with the mindset that one can find God’s word in each passage, but that it is rather read as a mirror, reflecting ourselves back to us and exposing our sins and failures, pains and fears, that is the precondition that growth will occur. Scripture becomes a ‘Spirit-Word’ when the reader encounters God who challenges our ideologies and perceptions. Green warns that it may wound and even kill the reader!

Tamar’s narrative does not provide comfort to modern readers who are overwhelmed with daily reports of gender-based violence. However, a Spirit-filled hermeneutic with a feminist sensitivity does not abandon women to grief. It emphasises that narratives of terror want readers to feel something, not as an emotionalist or emotivist act, but by learning what is right to feel, what God feels. Scripture is not meant to shape and transform minds and actions only, but also believers’ affections.

YHWH is not a character in 2 Samuel 13. The author does not reveal how YHWH feels and reacts to the events except to state implicitly that YHWH remains silent. Can the silence be interpreted as a lack of concern, or even condonement, for what happens? How can one learn to feel what is right to feel about the Tamar narrative when God is silent? A merely pragmatic reading of the text would not find God in the text; a Pentecostal awareness while reading the text would find the Spirit brooding in us, grieving over the heartache of a victim of sin. The passage invites the Spirit-filled believer to participate in the revelation of God, to enter into the story as God’s story, as the Spirit illuminates their minds and affections, and transforms them into Christlikeness.

50 C. Green, Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness and Scripture (Cleveland: CPT, 2015), 126.
Instead of ‘sanitizing’ the text by wiping it clean of all dirtiness of violence and hurt and covering its brutality with a blanket of exegetical arguments that muffles Tamar’s desolate cries, one should read it as a Spirit-Word that allows the Spirit to create meaning within the context of the Bible as a whole, revealing the God who is moved by what happens on earth, who grieves over victims of sin and gets angry with sinners (cf. e.g., Ps. 78:40; Deut 9:22; Ex 34:14; Isa 62:5; Judg 2:18). By pulling readers into the text they would weep with Tamar and rend their clothes in empathy with her. In experiencing these affections believers are transformed into agents of change with a heart filled with empathy for the marginalized, disenfranchised and abused who are still many times trapped in a legal system, without any legal representation or rights, which muffles their voices. Then the narrative shines light on truth and enforces an ethic of compassion because readers state with conviction that this should never happen again.

Synthesis

Patriarchal texts of terror may not be ignored by Pentecostal readers. A problem does not go away when one ignores it long enough. At times Pentecostal believers participate in gender based violence; the voice of God about such violence may not be silenced. The fact that such violence occurs in the Bible can never be used to justify believers’ behaviour towards the opposite gender. By reading Tamar’s story and allowing the Spirit of God to reveal the affective power of not only Amnon, Jonadab, Tamar, David and Absalom but, also, God as a subject in the story, Pentecostals would experience how virtuous emotions and affections develop into a Christ-centered ethic of compassion for marginalized and abused people. In this way they become agents of restorative justice, illustrating that the Bible does not only form our doctrine and ethics but, also, sculpts our desires and affections, forming our character.

The Spirit who inspired the biblical text is at work not only in believers through the text but, also, in the text through the believers, creating meaning that transforms lives to become more and more Christlike. In this way they can participate in the story of God that took place more than two and a half millennia ago and now, still, takes place when the Spirit achieves God’s goal with the Bible. By giving us the Bible, God invites us to partner with the Spirit in establishing the kingdom of God where the Tamar’s of this world would be safe from gender-based violence.


What does it mean to talk of a “living God” in a world where God no longer lives in the lives of people living in 21st century Europe? What has happened to the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jesus, the apostles and the living church to the present age to cause this God to have no influence in their lives? How are we to understand the experience of the fullness of God’s life in a secular world? Where and how is this life to be manifest?

For Moltmann, we need first to revisit and revise our entire understanding of the metaphysical legacy left by the Greeks. The attributes of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence leave no space for the human experience of God’s life. God’s knowledge is open rather than complete, God’s presence liberating rather than constricting, and God’s power limited (by God) rather than absolute. God’s transcendence needs to be rediscovered as immediate rather than absent, God’s eternity as realized rather than remote.

These are all familiar themes not only in Moltmann’s theology, but in recent times of many others seeking to rediscover the empathy of God. But he has insights more surprising than familiar in his search for the living God and the fullness of life. His take on idolatry, for example, produces a swipe at the modern obsession with picture taking which, he says, freezes images of people, locks them into the past, and prevents love’s unfolding journey of discovery of each other. Likewise, it is impossible to fix an image of God when love demands that our relationship with the divine needs to be one of constant new discovery. We must also get away from numbers when thinking about God. The Trinity is significant because it is to do with the sharing of the life of God in the history of God’s life in Christ, which absorbs into the Godhead our mortal and finite selves.

But perhaps more interesting than Moltmann’s reflections around God are his musings around the more human aspects of the fullness of life and the living God such as joy, love, freedom, and friendship. Joy, he says, is more primal than grief just as life is more primal than pain, existence more primal than non-existence and religion, rather than being the opium of the people, is born out of the festival of life. Friendship arises out of freedom because we become free when somebody likes us. It does not thrust itself upon us but is waiting to be discovered and provides the space for us to grow. Jesus, the friend of sinners, shows the way of true friendship which is based not on liking people because they are like you but
on simple acceptance, forgiveness, and compassion.

Moltmann’s insights on love, however, are the most fascinating. He expounds at some length on the mutuality principle and the notions of similarity, dissimilarity and correspondence. Aristotle taught that love cannot exist where it is not reciprocated and it cannot be reciprocated between persons that are vastly unequal or dissimilar, for example between God and humans. Yet, it is precisely the unrequited love of God towards human beings that is at the heart of the Christian gospel. Moltmann then compares the Buddhist doctrine of suffering with the Pauline doctrine of love. These, he says, are polar opposites when it comes to seeking the fullness of life. The Buddha taught that suffering could only be extinguished through the extinction of desire, of the thirst for life, of the fondness of life. Paul on the other hand suggests that it is love for life that makes people come alive. Mutual love “makes both those engaged in it happy, and the love that runs ahead to encounter the other sparks generosity and begins something new”. Moreover, contra the Buddha and many of the Christian mystics, Moltmann advocates a spirituality of the senses; a spirituality that does not attempt to withdraw from the world and is hostile to the body, but in the spirit of Christ’s resurrection, embraces life in its fullness, sanctifies the earth, and awakens all the senses.

On the back cover of this book Moltmann is called one of the greatest living theologians – an assertion that is difficult to gainsay. My own spiritual journey was profoundly influenced by him when discovering *The Crucified God*, which formed the basis of my Master’s thesis in which I explored his use of the crucifixion motif throughout his early writings. This proved to be as thorough a cure for the heady triumphalism of my early Christian experience as one could hope for! He has the ability to take a particular theme and expound on it, drawing not only from the Bible but from the social, political, and cultural contexts, finding resonances and comparisons in philosophy and history, mining its significance in terms of prevailing *zeitgeists*, and, in the process, transport the reader into a realm from which he or she cannot emerge untouched. But returning to Moltmann after years of excursing around my own African context makes me realize how influenced he is by his European context. It is significant, for example, that he feels the need to outline the secular background for his reflections about a living God by describing the “diminished life of a modern world” with the profoundly atheistic influences of a Feuerbach, a Lessing, a Kant, and, dare I say it, of an Enlightenment. To talk of their relevance where these influences may as well belong to another planet is strange to say the least. It is not that this book is not relevant to a context that is not European. It is, perhaps. But there must surely be irony in the fact that the “diminished life” that Moltmann talks about is a life lived in the most affluent parts of the world, and that in spite of this affluence, life there remains diminished! So
what of the lives lived in the least affluent parts of the world? Where is the living God in the midst of poverty? What, indeed, is the meaning of the word “fullness” for such lives? Herein lies the mystery – the fullness of life that Moltmann talks about does indeed exist among the poor, for it is with them that we probably find, more than anywhere else, the crucified and risen Christ.

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Through the lens of applied ethics and theology, this collection of diverse essays have painstakingly sought to establish points of convergence and divergence between African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Western Knowledge Systems. Most of the authors, all of whom are Africans or from African descent, have been trained in Western Knowledge Systems. Together they provide perspectives from a variety of contexts such as Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Jamaica. Issues dealt with include food security, ecology, education, health and well-being, democracy and leadership, communication systems, marijuana/ganja, and marriage.

There is a strong emphasis on the value of community over the individual, which is at the heart of the *Ubuntu* worldview. The non-dichotomous *Ubuntu* worldview is seen by many of the authors as a panacea for African socio-economic-religio-political issues. There is substantial discussion around the broader discourse of the contentious Western superiority complex which deems Africans and their way of life as inferior, evil, and uncivilised. The links between colonialism and Christianity are noted and many argue that both these systems are intrinsically linked to the Western superiority complex narrative. The Western value of science and reason versus the African value of “belief in divine authority” features strongly in the essays in this book. Proponents of the former undermine the latter, and argue that the value of “belief in divine authority” is loaded with myths rather than facts that are inappropriate when addressing the current global socio-economic-religio-political context. Proponents of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (most
of the authors) argue that valuable lessons and truths can be learned from this knowledge system and then applied to socio-economic-religio-political issues, particularly on the African continent.

The essays focusing on ecology, food security, indigenous education, and health and well-being argue for the use of consequentialism and deontology in revisiting African Indigenous Knowledge Systems so that what is valuable can be critically applied to Western Knowledge Systems. The essay on marijuana/ganja posits that a Western bio-medical agenda is the actual driving force behind the criminilisation of marijuana/ganja in Jamaica. The two essays focusing on democracy and leadership, and child marriage, analyse African Indigenous Knowledge Systems by using deontology, utilitarianism, and relativism. The former argues that democracy as practiced in Zimbabwean politics and political leadership during the presidency of Robert Mugabe (and by extension other African countries) is unethical. The latter essay dismisses a Zimbabwean child marriage practice, also practiced in other African countries, as unethical. Both these essays posit that, in the age of globalisation, African Indigenous Knowledge Systems are not compatible with global human ethics and do not enhance human development.

This book will appeal to academics and those in the governmental and the non-governmental sector grappling with global and continental socio-economic-religio-political issues that affect the African continent and its inhabitants. It is written in a clear style that is accessible to both academics and non-academics alike. With its strong African-centred analysis of African Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Western Knowledge Systems, it makes a contribution to the contentious debate of knowledge systems on the African continent and around the globe.

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_Atola Longkumer, Jørgen Skov Sørensen and Michael Biehl (eds), Mission and Power: History, Relevance and Perils._

Regnum Edinburgh Centenary Series, Volume 33.


The centenary of the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh 1910 is marked by the publication of this book. It is a collection of twenty essays written by authors representing various theological backgrounds and church traditions and
spanning five continents. The authors are scholars who teach and publish on Christian mission in diverse parts of the world, including a number of theologians working in the South African context such as Nico Botha, Chammah Kaunda, and Henry Mbaya.

The editors note the ambiguity in the understanding and practice of power in Christian mission and evangelism. While contemporary social analyses uncovers the way the missionary movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was inextricably embedded in the structures of power, the question continues to haunt contemporary missionary practice. The uncomfortable truth is that there are Christians who experience marginalisation and suffering in the same context as other Christians who “have the experience of striving for and being in power”. (1)

The book is categorised into four parts:

**Part One: Mission and Power – Scripture(s) and Spirit(s).** This section offers comment on the interpretation of the Bible in mission. It is argued that classical Biblical translations “were not the result of innocent endeavours by pious missionaries” but often resulted in “destroying a given culture and replacing them by western cultural and religious values”. (42)

**Part Two: Mission and Power – Moments, Regions, Contexts.** This section asks questions about mission in contexts as varied as Myanmar, Japan, Latin America and Germany. There is an emphasis on grounding mission contextually in local communities.

**Part Three: Mission and Power and Global Themes.** The themes in this section include education, gender and eco-justice, health and healing, and global migration. In this latter theme the reader is invited to discover, in the global movement of people, a possibility that migrants are “not simply objects or recipients of mission but (are) missionaries themselves”. (260)

**Part Four: Mission and Power: Potential and Pitfalls.** The final essay in this section offers an analysis of the Presbyterian Mission Agency using Philippians 2 as the lens for critique. This case study is a useful tool for self-reflection, not just for Presbyterians, but for all denominational mission agencies.

The book offers ideas on being involved in Christian mission both globally and locally. While written in an academic style, it is not technical and therefore accessible to a wider audience. It is a useful book to those seeking to develop their theology of Christian mission, as well as those who are directly involved. Long held assumptions about mission are challenged and the book provides helpful insights that can assist in developing new ways of being involved in Christian mission. As noted by Nico Botha, there is a shift from thinking of a “sending” church in the global north and a “receiving” church in the global south to understanding that the whole church is missionary. “The objects of mission are no longer the ‘pagans’ in foreign countries, but rather everybody, including
secular, post-Christian societies”. (144) This book is therefore particularly helpful to readers who are in the global South, especially southern Africa, as new and contextually relevant ways of sharing the Christian faith need to be developed.

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Christa Foster Crawford, Glenn Miles, with Gundelina Velazco, G. (eds), Finding Our Way Through the Traffick: Navigating the Complexities of a Christian Response to Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking.

Over the last ten years, child trafficking has received increasing attention by Christian organisations in the Anglo-speaking west. In the United Kingdom, a campaign was launched in 2006 to ‘stop the traffic’ and a raft of United States-based trafficking legislation has emerged. This ‘abolitionist’ approach makes missional links to anti-slavery campaigns of the past and seems to offer evangelical Christian organisations in the west, many floundering to reconceptualise ‘mission’ in a multi-religious, post-colonial world, a new agenda of moral indignation. The issue is clearly important but its wider symbolic role for an evangelical Western Christian imaginary in 21st century times may need some critical interrogation.

This edited collection of essays forms the second of two books by the same editors (the first was published in 2014). It aims to move from planning to action and to draw attention to complexities and challenges related to the subject. The substantial volume of forty three essays is ordered into eight parts. Each part is based on a key question, with a helpful overview of each part by the editors, discussion questions, and recommended resources.

The volume is aimed at practitioners (3), and I would qualify it as focused on evangelical Christian practitioners mainly operating within churches or faith-based organisations. Its authors all come from this space and represent decades of hands-on experience, which is to be commended. It is written in an accessible style to appeal to practitioners, drawing on personal testimony, storytelling, case studies and practical experience yet is also an academic resource. The quality
of contributions vary and the focus is clearly on Asia and the west (4). While it aspires to be a ‘textbook’ on trafficking and to have relevance for all audiences, its evangelical assumptions may at times reinforce a problematic binary disconnect between so-called secular and Christian approaches to trafficking.

I found much of practical value in the questions raised in this collection especially around interrogating terminology around trafficking, stigma and the need to look carefully at practices of volunteering, aftercare, burnout, motivation, trauma and self-care. However, I have two main concerns. First, in the light of a book that seeks to engage with complexity, its use of theology often falls into a ‘the Bible says’ conservative evangelical model of literalism. This needs to be treated with suspicion by African contextual theologians well aware of the dangers of an over-simplistic use of the Bible. Despite claiming complexity, the volume is ideologically loaded and dismissive of alternative arguments. Most contributions collapse prostitution and trafficking as forms of sexual exploitation and mix up articles on children and adults. In light of longstanding debates on linking sex work and trafficking, adults and children, terminology and moral values, contributions that presented practitioners from other paradigms would have avoided the impression that this is ‘the Christian perspective’ (4). It can leave the aware reader with a sense of being manipulated and the unaware reader believing there is only one Christian approach. Despite claims of complexity, its abolitionist religious fervour is clear and verges, at times, on self-righteousness.

Second, there is an oversubscription by white, western female authors involved in anti-trafficking projects in countries not of their origin. This creates a lack of cultural nuance, and can reinforce a missionising ‘rescuer’ paradigm. I would have liked more contributions from those writing from within their own contexts, rather than having local stories only visible in emotional, curated ‘survivor vignettes’, told primarily through the lens of a western author.

Reading from within the African continent, some resonances with the Asian context are obvious. The African continent faces a range of complex phenomenon with regard to transactional sex, ‘blessers’, traditional practices of initiation, child marriage and labour and patterns of orphanhood that need critical contextual engagement. In South Africa, similar abolitionist arguments do exist but calls for decriminalisation of sex work have also been argued theologically. Phenomenon such as older male ‘blessers’ are being explored by biblical scholars with an awareness of their complex dynamics. South African readers must remain suspicious of rescuer narratives or an oversimplification of one Christian perspective that tends towards a model where ‘we’ rescue ‘them’. Africa struggles with sexual abuse of children within churches. The book’s tendency to turn outwards and reposition Christians as the solution can mean that it remains silent on many endemic ways in which churches remain complicit in child sexual abuse.
At times, the contributions show a worrying resonance with a right-wing USA Christian moral agenda. The church has a history of pontificating problematically about sex and gender. Some contributors hold to a ‘no sex before marriage’ paradigm. Others feel that anti-trafficking offers an opportunity for evangelism as a development solution such as child prayer movements (253-268). As a feminist theologian, these alliances concern me. People are also trafficked for many forms of work and not just for sex. A focus just on children would make the arguments more compelling.

Many of the essays offer important insights for Christian practitioners and raise good questions. However, they do not represent the sole Christian position on commercial sexual exploitation and require a hermeneutic of suspicion as to the embedded imaginaries of sex, trafficking and religion.

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To prospective authors

• Unsolicited previously unpublished manuscripts are welcomed by the editor.
• The word count is normally between 5,000 and 7,500 words, including footnotes.
• Articles should be submitted in the following fonts: Text in Times New Roman 12, Block quotations in Times New Roman 12, Footnotes in Times New Roman 10.
• An abstract of approximately 100 words needs to be provided at the start of the article.
• The name, surname, job title (eg. Professor of Old Testament, University of Stellenbosch), and an email address of the author should be provided at the start of the article.
• Biographical note: JTSA authors are presented to our readers by way of a short introduction. We request that you furnish us with this introduction in which you note how the article submitted for publication fits in the overall context of your work and how it relates to the context in which you live and work. The introduction should not be more than 100 words long. For example: Andile Mbata lives and works in Nigeria. She is concerned with the environmental impact of oil drilling and how one might challenge this in a predominantly Christian part of the country. She has written one book on the topic and is presently researching the particular contribution of women theologians to this area. No article will be included for publication until such an introduction is received by the Administrator.
• All manuscripts are to be in MSWord, and sent electronically to the administrator at jtsa@ukzn.ac.za
• Manuscripts are blind peer reviewed by at least two referees. The peer review process takes between 6-8 weeks. This however depends on how quickly we receive back the peer review reports. A final decision will only be made by the editors once JTSA have received back two peer review reports. If the two reports are contradictory the editors may ask for a third review before a decision is made.
• A decision to publish is taken in the light of the reports and the space available in the Journal.
• Not all manuscripts received or positively refereed will be published, and no guarantee can be provided about which issue of the journal an article will appear in.

Style

In general, we follow the Chicago Manual of Style with some minor differences. We require all citations to be in the form of numbered footnotes (not endnotes, not in-text references), with the full bibliographic reference in the first citation, and the ‘short form’ for any further citation to the same source (not ibid. or op. cit.).

Please note that this is not a comprehensive style guide; for that we refer authors to reference works on the Chicago Manual of Style. See <www.chicagomanualofstyle.org>.

Footnote Citations

No bibliography will be included. All references must appear in the footnotes. All footnote numbers appear in the text after punctuation.

The first citation of a work should give complete information for the work, including the author’s first name or initial. Complete publication information should also be given. For books this includes the place