

# **African publics and the role of Christianity in fostering human-hood: a public pastoral care proposition within African pluralistic contexts**

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## **Abstract**

*Quality life is an aspiration for all human beings. Hence, promoting and upholding quality human-hood or personhood (quality life) is the ultimate goal that international institutions, continental and regional bodies, as well as nations strive to achieve. Theology and Christian religion, from a faith perspective, is one player that should make a contribution. To that end, pastoral care as a frontline ministry is positioned to take a lead in performing that role within church settings. As this task is located within the public domain, pastoral ministry should adopt a public pastoral care dimension. However, to perform public pastoral care within African contexts, the target publics should be identified and described within the pluralistic contexts that people exist. This paper reflects on the notion of public pastoral care that is positioned at the nexus of practical theology, public theology and pastoral care to foster quality of life denoted by the term human-hood. The paper establishes a case for public pastoral care, spells out presuppositions underlying the notion of public pastoral care, describes an additional public called traditional African forum, and suggests the markers of public pastoral care to note. It ends by highlighting the challenges that public pastoral care theologians should consider and overcome.*

## **1. Introduction and background**

Human-hood relates to who we are as human beings. The question of human-hood is posed to God in the Bible by the Psalmist in a thought provoking way "What is man that You think of him, And a son of man that You are concerned about him?" (Psalm 8:4 NASB). This is "a question raising wonder that God gives of the Divine mind to humanity, and a question recognizing in humanity a wondrous essential nature" (White 2013:74). For the Christian, the answer to 'what is a human being' "has always been the imago Dei" (White 2013:74). All human beings are created in the image of God (imago Dei) and deserve his care. Human-hood is about our humanity and personhood. Hence, human-hood and personhood are used interchangeably in this paper.

Promoting and upholding quality human-hood or personhood is the ultimate goal that international institutions, continental and regional bodies, as well as nations strive to achieve. For instance, the United Nation's (UN) seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an aspiration and "blueprint for peace and prosperity for people" (UNDESA 2022:np). The World Health Organisation's (WHO) vision is for people to "live healthy, productive lives, regardless of who they are or where they live" (WHO 2022:np). The World Bank's mission is to reduce poverty and promote prosperity (World Bank 2022). The African Union's 'Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want', which is Africa's guiding framework aims to foster "inclusive and sustainable development ... for unity, self-determination, freedom, progress and collective prosperity..." (AU 2022:np). The Southern African Development Community (SADC) objective is to achieve development resulting in enhancement of "the standard and quality of life of the peoples of Southern Africa". Within South Africa, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 "aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality by 2030" (National Planning Commission 2022:iii). Efforts to ensure people's prosperity, healthy lives, poverty reduction, inclusive development and people's collective prosperity, reduction of inequality indicate a desire to improve people's standard and quality of life. This attests to the aspiration for quality human-hood. Evidently, achieving quality human-hood is the goal that different national structures and formations strive for.

Notably, the vision and aspiration for quality human-hood is too vast in its scope and complex in its implementation to be achieved by a single or few institutions, bodies and national structures. For instance, the implementation of the NDP 2030 focuses on drawing on the energies of its people in South Africa across all sectors to contribute towards achieving this vision (National Planning Commission 2022). In other words, effective and meaningful contribution to achieve the aspirations for human-hood stated in global agendas such as SDGs and national frameworks like NDP require collaborative efforts from different players. As SDG 17 clearly states, there is need to “Revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development” (UN 2022:np). SDG elaborates that:

The SDGs can only be realized with strong global partnerships and cooperation. A successful development agenda requires inclusive partnerships — at the global, regional, national and local levels — built upon principles and values, and upon a shared vision and shared goals placing people and the planet at the centre.

To that end, civil society and faith based formations like churches can form critical partnerships to contribute to quality human-hood and development.

In this paper, I limit our discussion to church contribution to quality human-hood aspiration. The contribution of the Christian faith and churches to national good, quality life and development is evident across the world. Walker (2019:37-39) argued that theology and Christianity significantly influenced the foundations of the modern democratic state. He maintained that democracy in its origin and developments has deep roots in the Christian faith. For instance, the notion that all people are created in the image of God, that love is the inner spirit of a covenantal binding for communities, and that the state is the bulwark against sin understood as crime can be traced to Christian values. In Africa, churches have been a key player in health development, particularly health care delivery. Green, et al (2002) illustrated the role that churches have been playing in health care by showing that averagely, over 40% of health care services in African countries including Ghana, Lesotho,, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, among others, have been provided by church institutions. The traditional mission station included a church established school and hospital. In South Africa, churches were significantly involved in the struggle against apartheid as well as establishing hospitals and schools (Kiran 2008:39). Churches also provided pastoral care and hope amidst disillusionment through emergence of theologies such as black theology and liberation theology. To this day, other theologies are being advanced to make Christianity and theology more relevant as well as resist oppression and side-lining of other people such as feminist theology, women theology and more recently, public theology and white theology.

In view of the above, it is not coincidental but strategic intent that the World Economic Forum considers faith as a critical player in development. Brian Grim (2016), Chair of Global Council on the Role of Faith (2014-2016), in World Economic Forum publication “The Role of Faith in Systemic Global Challenges” stated that:

The World Economic Forum recognizes that faith plays a dynamic and evolving role in society. Demographic trends suggest the number of faith adherents will increase over the next two decades, while the secular population will decrease. People of faith therefore have profound impacts on community mobilizing – for both productive and damaging purposes. The power of faith to impact global issues and shape global perspectives is a fundamental reason why the Forum consistently engages faith leaders and perspectives in our work (Grim 2016:4).

Shamila Mahmood and Ashmawey Mohamed (2015), in their article “How faith can support the Sustainable Development Goals” featured also in World Economic Forum publication observed that:

FBOs have been making positive contributions towards poverty alleviation and have been remarkably effective in societies where religion is predominant. Citizens often

better relate to the moral and altruistic nexus fostered by these organisations. The grandeur of government institutions and the language of secular donor agencies and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are often out of sync with local exigencies, and reinforce a sense of alienation of values and language. FBOs are concerned with human values that are enshrined in social justice and meet both spiritual and development needs. Spirituality and faith perspectives tend to be absent from the work of secular organisations and their emphasis is on numbers, data and statistics rather than the more human elements that individuals can understand. This was no better exemplified than in the recent Ebola epidemic where the simple dignity of appropriate faith rituals in dealing with the deceased was often not afforded to people. The moral and cultural proximity FBOs represent in the communities they serve puts them at a distinct advantage over other CSOs in ensuring sustainable change.

While the role of faith and faith based organisations such as churches and church organisations is valuable in development and improving people's quality of lives, it is important to note that theology is not economics, engineering or any other discipline. Hence, theology's contribution to human development and quality of life, which are elements of quality humanhood, should be carefully considered and understood. There are risks, challenges and limitations for theology in engagements aimed to foster humanhood. For instance, currently in South Africa, there are numerous challenges including racial tensions, xenophobic attacks, inequality, unemployment, floods in KZN, disillusionment on the state of the country, discord on national development priority issues, corruption, a sense of betrayal by politicians and public officials, just to name a few pressing challenges. The question that can be posed to a pastor or a theologian is: should one be involved? The answer is likely to be affirmative, yes! The next question is: can one intervene in all these areas? The answer is likely to be negative, no! At stake then, is the question: where should a pastor or a theologian intervene? On what basis should that choice be made?

In posing a related question within the context of pastoral care, Greider (2008:54) asked an insightful question about what pastors should do where the scope of pastoral ministry is ever expanding. She advised that "pastoral caregivers should make strategic decisions about where to focus depending on their social context and demand". She suggested that pastoral care providers should be articulate about their limits and how they triage (Greider 2008:54). Triage is a medical term that refers to "the process of determining the most important people or things from amongst a large number that require attention" (Oxford Dictionary 2022:np). Triage "helps in categorizing of emergency patients according to the disease severity and decide both priority and location of treatment" (Türleri and Elbaih 2017:441). Accordingly, theologians and pastoral caregivers need to make strategic choices and priorities on where to intervene. Therefore, this paper is a triaging proposition in three dimensions, namely (1) approach proposition, (2) the ensuing benefits from the approach, and (3) articulating an additional complementing public from African contextual realities. First, as an approach, it advocates for the notion of public pastoral care as a way of embracing and integrating the approach as both an object of reflection in theory formation and practical ministerial designs. Second, it attempts to illustratively delineate the possibilities, opportunities and benefits of engaging in public pastoral care in fostering quality humanhood. Third, it complements the already identified publics by adding an additional public to the existing publics to enhance African contextual relevancy.

## **2. Presuppositions for the paper**

"A presupposition is something that you assume to be true, especially something which you must assume is true in order to continue with what you are saying or thinking" (Collins Dictionary, n.d).

***Presupposition 1: The first presupposition is that public theology is contextual, hence the need to understand African publics.*** Thus, to ensure meaningful public pastoral care engagement, it is critical to understand the nature and dynamics of the African public issues and the publics that a pastor should confront and engage. To that end, African publics are considered with the intention of proposing possible public pastoral care approaches and options. In illustrating the contextual nature of public theology, John de Gruchy observed that Political theology, which is a strand of public theology, is about those theologians who gave legitimacy to the state and its claims within the context of Christendom (De Gruchy 2004:47). Day and Kim (2017) further illustrated the public theology contextuality by referring to the South African context. They stated that:

Another historical touchstone which exemplified and clarified public theology has been in the South African context in the move from apartheid to democracy. It might be argued that the apartheid theology that had been appropriated by Dutch Reformed Church theologians in South Africa, much like the oppressive theologies developed by slaveholders in the American South and Reich Theology in support of the Nazi regime, were forms of public theology. After all, they were all developed in response to their contexts and were concerned with particular visions of the common good. These theologies were developed in their respective academies and were not marginal in their historic contexts. They became mainstreamed, and as they supported state policies, so the state supported them (Day and Kim 2017:8).

The public theology that supported apartheid led to the development of black resistance theologies such as black theology.

***Presupposition 2: Public pastoral care is a human caring approach that is located at the intersection of practical and public theological understanding.*** To understand public pastoral care nexus within the intersection of practical and public theology, it is critical to understand the meaning of practical theology and public theology. Louw (2014) explained that the purpose of practical theology is the normative, hermeneutical and communicative praxis of faith as an expression of the praxis of God. In providing a basic descriptive definition of practical theology, Miller-McLemore (2012:20) explained that:

Practical theology is (1) an activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in the everyday life, (2) a method or way of analysing theology in practice used by religious leaders and by teachers and students across the theological curriculum, (3) a curricular area in theological education focused on ministerial practice and sub specialties, and (4) an academic discipline pursued by a smaller subset of scholars to support and sustain these first three enterprises.

However, the accepted framework of doing practical theology is that it employs an interactive theological approach that entails practice-theory-practice. That said, this line practice-theory-practice is not straight (Cahalan & Mikoski 2014; Browning 1991). Practical theologians are "bi-directional": As Stoddard (2014:14) stated:

Practical Theologians are congenitally more comfortable with the notion of two-way rather than one-way streets. Practical Theologians will ... hold that people's practice is informed, shaped, perhaps, by doctrine – or even dictated by it. But ... Practical Theologians want to keep asserting that doctrine is informed, shaped and even dictated by practice.

Therefore, as Graham (2017:4) explained, practical theology and practical theologians "need to see how practices are always theory-laden, and theory, or concepts, or doctrines, are themselves forms of meaning-making that serve practice".

Notably, practical theology is difficult to define, because its spectrum "is so large that it can accommodate many different contexts and challenges" (Ganzevoort 2009:2). Hermans and

Schweitzer (2014:88) commented that there are different understandings of practical theology:

There are different understandings or, as some would say, different paradigms in practical theology, depending on the question whether this discipline aim[s] at the praxis of the pastor; of every person (believer) in the Christian community; the Christian community within society as a whole and / or the Christian community in relationship to other religions and secular worldviews. Is practical theology about the praxis of faith, religious communication, spirituality, the sacred, or the experience of ultimate concern? Is it about the praxis of the past, the present, or the possible? What kind of theory do we build about this praxis? Who can profit from this theory or be supported by it?

Ganzevoort (2009:2) described the divergences in practical theology as “forks” in the road: the forks in the road regard how broad the object is defined, how praxis and theological theory are related, how the researcher is positioned vis-à-vis the object, and how the primary audience is understood.

Despite these divergencies, the notion of practice-theory-practice is widely accepted as a standard approach in doing practical theology (Graham 2017:4). Therefore, to capture normative, hermeneutical, and communicative praxis, as well as recognising the bi-directional (practice-theory-practice) nature of practical theology, Osmer (2008:4) usefully provided a guide on the elements that should be addressed in doing practical theology. He advised that practical theology has four tasks that are summarised by four questions that should be answered in executing it. These are: descriptive task (What is going on?); interpretation task (Why is this going on?); normative task (What ought to be going on?); and pragmatic task (What are the strategic steps that should be taken to respond to the situation?).

What then is public theology? Public theology is an attempt to correct irrelevant, distant and aloof theology in light of people’s daily realities. Public theology interrogates the role of theology in society. As a theological approach, public theology draws from many theological movements and social sciences. Differentiating public theology from practical theology, Kim (2017:40) explained that public theology is a “critical, reflective and reasoned engagement of theology in society to bring the kingdom of God, which is for the sake of the poor and marginalised”. He added that public theology is a theology that “arises out of the engagement of theology in the spheres of politics and economics, which was then expanded to civil societies and other areas of the public life” (ibid). Brietenberg (2003:66) argued that public theology is:

theologically informed public discourse about public issues, addressed to the church, synagogue, mosque, temple or other religious body, as well as the larger public or publics, argued in ways that can be evaluated and judged by publicly available warrants and criteria.

However, it is important to note that the word ‘public’ in ‘public theology’ does not simply refer to the opposite of private as in our daily usage. Morton (2004:25-36) explained that publics are different from communities in that the emphasis is not on commonalities as in communities, but on differences. The publics are social spaces where dialogue occurs. Day and Kim (2017:2) noted that the publics “cohere in the midst of, and because of, the difference and even conflict they accommodate. ‘It is indeed a forum or agora, a space which allows and indeed encourages encounter with that which is different’”. Day and Kim (2017:2) added that the publics are characterised by “questioning, doubting and challenging, as well as asserting, confirming and agreeing”.

How do practical theology, public theology and pastoral care converge? Pastoral care is a subdiscipline of practical theology. In view of public theology and its parameters, when

pastoral care takes an explicit public dimension, it becomes public pastoral care. Practical theology and public theology have overlaps that assist us in establishing convergence points for public pastoral care. Dreyer (2004:919-920) explained that practical theology takes a public dimension when it focuses on the broader everyday issues of people, including vexing global issues, than merely church and clergy. Osmer and Schweitzer (2003:218) advised that public practical theology entails ensuring that the public is one of the audiences of practical theology; it includes everyday concerns and issues in its reflection, and should facilitate a dialogue between theology and contemporary culture. The convergence of public theology and practical theology is evident in some public theology methods such as integrationist and dialogical approaches that are followed in doing public theology. Furthermore, some public theology typologies such as incarnational, interdisciplinary, dialogical and performance have similarities with practical theology. Pastoral care, as a practical theology discipline, is anchored in such dialectic and spiral approaches.

Louw (2014), citing scholars such as Burkhart (1983:56) and Heitink (1993:18), argued that practical theology is the art of overcoming the distance between human life and what it is meant to be. In terms of recent developments, practical theology is viewed as an action science trying to connect the Christian faith to the praxis and context of our modern or postmodern society. Pastoral care (*cura animarum – cure of souls*), which is a branch of practical theology:

implies a ministry that is directed not merely to a human being's inner life, but also to the spiritual care of the total person in all the psycho-physical and psycho-social dimensions (spiritual wholeness). 'Spiritual' thus encompasses more than a person's innermost ego or personality. Soul (*psuché, animā*) signifies the centre of human life (Hebrew: *nēphēsh*) as it is directed to God, and as it manifests itself in dynamic relationships of *agapē*-love (Louw 2014:60).

In performing pastoral ministry, pastoral care metaphors provide a paradigm and a theological rationale for the pastoral caring task (Louw 1998). God is the ultimate caregiver; pastors, church leaders or any other person is an under-shepherd. In pastoral care, the *paraklesis* metaphor function entails advocacy and speaking on behalf of people (Louw 1998). "The word 'Paraclete' denotes the Holy Spirit as our advocate, our counsellor" (Christian Library, n.d:1). According to John 14:16-17, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the "other Comforter" (John 14:16). Jesus indicates that he himself is the first Paraclete. That is also how John identifies him in his first letter (1 John 2:1).

The function of the Paraclete in the church differs from his task in the world. For the believers the Paraclete is truly the Comforter, the Guide, but in the world he will act as the great Accuser, the Prosecutor. "And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:8) (Christian Library, n.d:1).

Thus, the pastor as an under-shepherd should be the voice of the voiceless (Louw 2014; McClure 2012). Therefore, in linking public theology and pastoral care as a practical theological discipline, the proposal for the public theology task, namely, giving people a voice to enable them to express themselves on what things ought to be, providing an opportunity for correction of things that are going wrong, and giving people hope in the midst of degenerating state systems, finds resonance with pastoral care.

***Presupposition 3: The overlap in public theology, broader practical theology, and pastoral care make public pastoral care fuzzy and confusing but it can be distinguished.*** Leslie (2008:96-97) experienced that, at one level, public pastoral care appears to be practical theology and, at times, sounds like public theology. Leslie thus clarified that it is pastoral care, not practical theology or public theology, because it is the practice of

pastoral care in a public setting. Perhaps the clearest distinction between public theology and public pastoral care as a practical theology subdiscipline is that public pastoral care always ends with a reformation of practices or practical strategies to improve ministerial approaches. Louw (2014) noted that, in terms of recent developments, practical theology is viewed as an action science. In this sense, Louw (2014) added that practical theology is, therefore, the science of the theological, critical and hermeneutical reflection on the intention and meaning of human actions, as expressed in the practice of ministry and the art of faithful daily living. Public pastoral care is about addressing diverse vexing challenges of daily life in all spheres. Elsdörfer (2019:105) rightly stated that:

Christian spirituality and its foundational theology are not to separate from daily life practice. Christian spirituality has to be rooted in theological reflection; it has to be accountable for everyday encounters and actions in daily life.

Despite the confusion on the understanding, there are clear discernible markers of public pastoral care that can be adopted.

Public pastoral care is (1) caring for people from a Christian spiritual perspective whereby (2) the care is provided to people in different public spaces and contexts (3) to address holistic issues affecting people such as spiritual, social, emotional, cultural, economic, political and others (4) to enable them to meaningfully cope with life (Magezi 2020a:69).

***Presupposition 4: To engage in public pastoral care there is need to have clarity on the notion of pastoral care, associated aspects and the unique approach of pastoral care as caregiving and going to where people are located at the public square for engagement.***

(1) The pastoral person and role – the pastor is the representative person in the church who performs the caring ministry. (2) Ministerial dimension – pastoral care is the church ministry that connects or links the church and the person of the pastor internally with various church ministries and the outside world. Thus, pastoral ministry relates to the embodiment of pastoral care as a link that connects the church with society and public spaces where “the rubber meets the road” (Magezi 2016:5). (3) Pastoral embodiment and representation – at a basic or popular level, the pastoral role is embodied by the person of the pastor who is taken as a default representative of the church. (4) Pastoral care practice or execution or expression – pastoral care is conceptualised in four levels, namely, “mutual care, pastoral care, pastoral counselling and pastoral therapy” (Van Arkel 2000:160).

Mutual care is the first level of care, and it is concerned with supporting and sustaining individuals by the community of believers. Pastoral care is the second level, and it specialises in building up a community of believers through dialogical caring action. Pastoral counselling is the third level of care. It includes some kind of contract or agreement over a fixed time and place. It functions on entry level where other professions such as psychology counselling function. Pastoral therapy, which is the fourth level of care, uses longer term reconstructive therapeutic methods to heal deep, chronic problems. The distinction between pastoral counselling and pastoral therapy is that pastoral counselling is part of a larger ministerial function while pastoral therapy is specialised and uses therapeutic activities (Magezi 2016:2).

(5) Pastoral care (*cura animarum* – cure of souls) – is care provided from a religious perspective, which in our case is from a Christians perspective (McClure 2012; Louw 2014). It endeavours to help people cope with life issues in a manner that enhances their spirituality and fosters meaning. It is provided by people whose motive derives from their Christian convictions. (6) Pastoral care is shifting from individual intrapsychic focus to addressing public issues (Louw 2014; McClure 2012; Miller-McLemore 2004, 2005, 2018; Ramsay 2004, 2014).

Accordingly, as Koppel (2015:151) noted “practising public theology asks that pastoral care practitioners and theologians take seriously and engage mindfully with issues that concern

groups of people and whole populations, rather than individual persons in isolation". (7) It is important to emphasise the unique dimension of pastoral care in executing it from just pastoral care to pastoral caregiving due to the confusion that may arise in referring to pastoral care as counselling.

'Caregiving' is also a more inclusive approach within the tradition of *cura animarum* because it includes both religious content, actions of communication and verbalising, events of human encounter, conversational interaction (talk-therapy), structured procedures of intervention and professional help (counselling), the fostering of possible change and healing (therapy), and actions of service/outreach in communities irrespective of belief systems (*diakonia*). Pastoral caregiving will be thus the preferred option (Louw 2014: 29).

The notion of caregiving is particularly critical because it entails going to where people are (outreach), which is particularly important in public pastoral care where it entails the caregiver to journey or travel to where people are, i.e., the public square. "The African notion of care is about reaching out to the other. An individual's *Ubuntu* is judged by the strength of the vector towards other people" (Magezi 2020:7).

***Presupposition 5: South Africa comprises diverse people and the public square is pluralistic but quality human-hood is of common interest.*** There is racial categories (i.e., Black, Coloured, Indian and White) (South Africa History, n.d.); a country of two worlds one – world class developed cities and typical developing world cities; difference between rich and poor with a Gini-coefficient of 0,65 by 2015 (Statistics South Africa, n.d.); different people groups – Xhosa, Zulu, Afrikaans speaking, etc; strong traditional leadership, among many other differentiating features. Certainly, the interests of these people differ but the need for quality human-hood is a common interest to all (Gaibie and Davids, n.d.). Hence, we need to focus on ensuring quality human-hood.

***Presupposition 6: To address the issue of quality human-hood we need to have clarity on the notion of human-hood or personhood within an African context and Christian framework to foster inclusive human care.*** Within Africa, conception of human-hood, a person is understood within the context of other human beings. This is denoted by the idea of *Ubuntu*, which is summed up in the maxim "I am because we are" or "a person is a person through other persons" (Tutu 2009, Magezi 2017). This means our relationships with other people make a person fully human. Tutu (1999: 34-35) further elaborated that *Ubuntu* speaks to the very essence of being human. It means my humanity is inextricably bound up with others. We belong in a bundle of life. Thus, harmony, friendliness, and community are great goods that should be valued. Metz (2007) summarised the African conception of personhood presented by Tutu and others in two main aspects, namely, identity and solidarity. Individuals conceive of themselves as part of a 'we' not just an 'I'. We understand ourselves to be in this business of life together with others. As it goes with others, so it goes with me. Thus, "an action is right just insofar as it respects a person's dignity; an act is wrong to the extent that it degrades humanity" (Metz 2007:328). Nabudere (n.d:1), Tutu (1999:31-13), Nussbaum (2003:1) and many other African scholars view *Ubuntu* as a unique African gift to the world regarding African humanity. Nabudere (n.d:1) advised that during TRC in South Africa, while Bishop Tutu was guided by the constitution, it is clear that he firmly believed that the *Ubuntu* philosophy can exist alongside Christianity and could play a role in reconciling the people of South Africa.

However, the question that arises is: if Africans and the *Ubuntu* philosophy values respect for other people, why is corruption, murders and theft high in African countries such as South Africa. Magezi (2017) explained that:

It is not uncommon that when one is appointed to a senior government position looks

back to the community he/she comes from and recruit family and community members. While this is viewed as nepotism, to the community where the person hails from, he is a hero. He is a person who truly practices Ubuntu. Thus, traditional Ubuntu and largely in its current practice, ubuntu is exclusive to 'your people'. Benevolence and acts of good and bad are determined by the family and community. Philosopher Turaki of Nigeria commented in his unpublished lecture at North-West University that going to work in government of public office is like going to hunt. You kill a gazelle and return home to share with your relatives and community. This practice dates back to old village wars where one is a warrior if he defeats and wipes out the other village and take their stock as plunder. Upon arriving to his home village, the entire village welcomes the individual as a hero. Therefore, sometimes government officials compete to take plunder back to their villages. In all these practices, the people would be viewed as practicing true Ubuntu. Ubuntu is narrowly limited to friends, relatives and close geographical community. No one criticises the individual for corruption but rather the individual is praised for 'thinking of his/her people back home in the village' (Magezi 2017:111-112).

Therefore Magezi (2017) reasoned that to address this gap, there is need to shift the traditional African notion of Ubuntu to a transformed Ubuntu. He proposed a liminal Ubuntu which attempts to contribute to addressing the threat of social ills affecting society despite the claims of Ubuntu. He rightly argued that:

Practical theology as life science (Kumlehn 2011; Louw 2014) should explore creative ways of engaging contemporary challenges. A shift from traditional Ubuntu above to liminal ubuntu implies that people are bound by "Christ bond" and *imago dei*<sup>1</sup> principle. Jesus radically transformed our view of neighbour (Luke 10) and family (Luke 9). Jesus himself redefined family (Luke 8; Matthew 12) as people who do the will of God. From an *imago dei* theology perspective, the proposed focus is not to dwell on the tainted image because of sin but rather positively view all humanity as people bearing the image of God and deserving our care, respect and to be treated with dignity and personhood (Magezi 2017:116-117).

Our understanding of human-hood has implications for our actions and interventions. If we view ourselves as better humans than others then we are likely to treat other human beings as subhuman or of less deserving of quality human-hood. A human being is intrinsically human not because of their connection to other human beings but because of the image of God (*imago Dei*) they possess (White 2013:74). Hence, they deserve dignity. In the last few months in South Africa, there has been a public outcry when Sibanye-Stillwater was awarded R300 million (R28 million cash and R270 million worth of shares). In defence of the payment:

"Mr Froneman told the Sunday Times that Sibanye outperformed top companies including Impala Platinum, Gold Fields, and Anglo American Platinum, adding that he has taken the company's market cap to R150 billion, from R15 billion when he joined in 2013" (Businesstech, 2022:np).

Commenting on the issue, Professor Imraan Valodia, stated that:

"the gap between top and bottom earners in South Africa is so huge that it is not reasonable. In many other countries, the ratio is around 50 to one". Therefore, he finds no reasonable justification when someone earns R300 million in a year (Businesstech, 2022:np).

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<sup>1</sup> *Imago dei* (image of God) comes from the Hebrew words *tselem* ("image") and *demuth* ("likeness"). The words describe the image and likeness of God. Human beings are created in the image of God.

In view of such situations, Shamila Mahmood and Ashmawey Mohamed (2015) argument is apt that faith communities play a critical role due to their proximity to people's needs and situations. Furthermore, they provide moderation on personal wealth accumulation despite other people's circumstances. Faith communities can provide checks and balances through instilling 'wealth morality', among other things.

The presuppositions formulated above provides a foundational basis for public pastoral care. It reveals that public theology is contextual, which informs public pastoral care as a human caring approach that is conducted in the African context. In the design of the caregiving approach, public pastoral care enterprise is fuzzy and confusing, and yet it is distinguishable as a caring approach whose target audience is non-ecclesial but the wider public. Notably, public pastoral care performs a unique caregiving role by pastoral caregiver journeying (outreach) from the traditional ecclesial setting to the public spaces where diverse people are located. This pastoral care effort is aimed to address the holistic human being to enhance quality human-hood.

Considering the above background and presuppositions, how then does one proceed from the above presuppositions to develop a public pastoral care ministry within pluralistic contexts?

### **3. Towards African publics and its complementary dimension to notion of publics**

In order to proceed in proposing a public pastoral care ministerial proposition, it is critical to understand the targeted public square. But why is it important to identify the target publics? Public theology is contextual, so where public discourses and happenings occur is also diverse. The publics need to be mapped and identified to understand their nature and dynamics.

Day and Kim (2017:11) in their introduction to *A Companion to Public Theology*, rightly advised that the process of theological engagement with public issues begins with defining public. It is important to note that the word 'public' in 'public theology' does not simply refer to the opposite of private as in our daily usage but to 'social sectors'. Publics are social spaces where dialogue occurs. Morton (2004:25-36) explained that publics are different from communities in that the emphasis is not on commonalities as in communities, but on differences. The publics are social spaces where dialogue occurs. Day and Kim (2017:2) noted that the publics:

cohere in the midst of, and because of, the difference and even conflict they accommodate. 'It is indeed a forum or agora, a space which allows and indeed encourages encounter with that which is different'.

Day and Kim (2017:12) added that the publics is characterised by "questioning, doubting and challenging, as well as asserting, confirming and agreeing". The following publics have been identified by different public theologians (Day and Kim 2017:12).

- Tracy (1981:5) identified three publics, namely, the academy, the wider society and the church.
- Stackhouse (1997) – identified academic, economic, religious and political sectors.
- Benne (1995) added law as another public to Tracy and Stackhouse's publics.
- Dirkie Smit (2013) identified four publics – namely political, economic, civil society, and public opinion.

Smit's publics clearly reflect the dynamics of South Africa. Day and Kim (2017:12) rightly observed that the suggested publics and the approach of questioning, doubting and challenging indicates democratic participation (whether media, economy, politics, academy, religion, etc.). Thus, it is evident from the above articulation of publics that, these publics are informed by the individual scholar's context. These publics are not rigid positions, but social spaces that are constantly changing. Tshaka cynically questioned what public theology brings to the table in South Africa that black theology has not brought up in Africa. If public theology

is contextual, what then is the task of public theology that should inform the identification of publics?

Walker (2019:37-39) opined that public theology has three tasks. First, to be a reminder both as an academic discipline and a voice in the public square that the modern democratic state has a theological foundation. Democracy, in its origin and developments, has deep roots in the Christian faith. This foundation is that all people are created in the image of God, that love is the inner spirit of a covenantal binding for communities, and that the state is the bulwark against sin understood as crime. Secondly, public theology is to be an instrument that the theological values of image of God, love and protection from sin should flourish. These three theological motifs provide a systematic and doctrinal agenda for public theology. Thirdly, public theology has a responsibility to name the ways in which the democratic state itself is sinful. Walker (2019:39) usefully suggested that public theology functions as a voice for people's expression of what things ought to be; provides opportunity for correction of things that are going wrong, and gives people hope in the midst of degenerating state systems. Considering the already identified different social spaces, which other publics should be included within an African context?

#### **4. African public – African traditional community forums and fostering humanhood**

The publics identified, namely academy, the wider society and the church (Tracy 1985); academic, religious and political sectors, and economic (Stackhouse 1997); law (Benne 1995); and political, economic, civil society, and public opinion (Smit 2013) resonate with South Africa's public conversational social spaces. Hence, I will not discuss these publics. However, a public space that is conspicuous by its absence in African contexts and particularly in South Africa is traditional forums. It is to this public that I will devote my attention.

The word traditional does not suggest primitive but historical indigenous cultural patterns and ways of living whereupon communities were governed before Western democracy. These traditional forums have continued to exist albeit with moderation in some respects particularly the checks, balances and restraints brought by country laws. Within South Africa, traditional community forums are governed by *Act No. 41 of 2003: Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Amendment Act, 2003*. Among other things, the Act provides "for the recognition of traditional communities; to provide for the establishment and recognition of traditional councils..." (Government Gazette no: 1838, 2003:2). The African traditional forums as a social public are not isolated from the other publics but integrated. Issues discussed at the forums are often subjects of conversations in other publics such as civil society, like gender-based violence. The images of traditional courts and civil society activists are shown below.

What is the (1) structure, (2) features, (3) its value or benefit, (4) the role and position of Christianity, and (5) the opportunity of Christianity on this space?



**Figure 1: The Kgotla traditional court in session in Kanye in 1979.**

<https://www.dreamstime.com/kgotla-traditional-court-session-kanye-anyone-free-to-attend-sessions-any-way-being-directly-involved-image196175824>



**Figure 2: More recent traditional court**

<https://www.google.co.za/imgres?imgurl=https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/wp-content/uploads/merten-traditional-courts->



**Figure 3: Activists protesting Traditional Bill**

<https://nam12.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fimages-theconversation-com.cdn.ampproject.org%2Fi%2Fs%2Fimages.theconversation.com%2Ffiles%2F405653%2Foriginal%2Ffile-20210610-27-mjjid3.jpg%3Fixlib%3Drb->

**Structure features and value of traditional community forums:** The traditional community forums comprise different categories of stakeholders depending on the country. The participants include (1) traditional authorities like chiefs, headmen and other related people, (2) religious leaders such as local pastors and indigenous religious leaders, (3) representatives of public officials present in communities such as teachers/principals, healthcare heads/nurses/doctors, (4) political leaders – councillors or village/ward leaders, and (5) local Non-governmental organisations (NGO)/Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).

These forums constitute discussions and debates, among other things, to resolve local community issues including disputes, community transgressions and crimes, and community pressing challenges, and others. They are a space for both problem resolution and social mobilisation. These forums sanction social and community deviant individuals. They are further characterised by plurality of religious practices, awareness building of what is going on including updates, social values gatekeeping and preservation of traditional cultural values, propagation and assertion of social values, setting of community tone on what is acceptable or tolerable and unacceptable, resistance or promotion of ideas as well as practices and political agendas, utilisation for political persuasion, conflict and tensions between democratic institutions and laws, and structure for community assertion; however, they can serve as a space where certain voices are silenced. While chiefs generally tend to hold sway in traditional forums, these spaces are also characterised by contradictions particularly where country laws and cultural traditions clash. They are also spaces for negotiation and exploring middle grounds as some community people increasingly exert their constitutional rights over the traditional forum structures. Thus, these traditional forums are spaces for both toxic and health of life giving practices.

The structure, setup, interactions and some outcomes that are both positive and negative to the individual and community of such traditional forums is aptly captured by the African Novelist Chinua Achebe (1920-2013) in *Things Fall Apart* (published in 1958). Augustyn (2022) summarised that the story thus: it

concerns traditional Igbo life of a man called Okonkwo at the time of the advent of missionaries and colonial government in his homeland. His principal character cannot accept the new order, even though the old has already collapsed. Okonkwo, the leader of an Igbo community, from the events leading up to his banishment from the community for accidentally killing a clansman, through the seven years of his exile, to his return, and it addresses a particular problem of emergent Africa—the intrusion in the 1890s of white missionaries and colonial government into tribal Igbo society. Traditionally structured, and peppered with Igbo proverbs, it describes the simultaneous disintegration of its protagonist Okonkwo and of his village. The novel was praised for its intelligent and realistic treatment of tribal beliefs and of psychological disintegration coincident with social unravelling (Augustyn 2022:np).

In South Africa, the scenes in *Things Fall Apart* seemed to be vividly played when the amaXhosa King, King Dalindyebo's was imprisoned in 2015 after:

He had kidnapped a woman and her six children, set their home on fire and beaten up four youths, one of whom died, because one of their relatives had failed to present himself before the king's traditional court (Harding 2020:n.p).

The clash of views, ideas, practices, worldviews and perspectives are characteristic of traditional forums. It clearly qualifies as a public, a social "space which allows and encourages encounter with that which is different" (Day and Kim 2017:12).

But what is the **value of traditional forums** in fostering quality human-hood? Traditional forums constitute a vital social space within African communities despite their weaknesses. They are accessible and in proximity to people to be able to address their challenges and

public pressing issues. These forums are community people centred, which enables them to detect community needs and intervene appropriately. More importantly, the forums provide people with a sense of respect and dignity, as they are grounded on people's cultures, customs and norms.

**Role and position of Christianity and opportunity of Christianity to foster human-hood in traditional forums:** Christianity has no special treatment or privilege in the traditional forums. As a religion, it competes for influence and recognition with religious pluralism that characterise traditional forums. At best, Christianity is integrated within the existing religious pluralism. Christianity is cynically and sceptically integrated by such forums. Christianity is associated with cultural destruction due to its demonisation rhetoric of syncretism that disparages indigenous religious practices. The critical question then is: what opportunity exists for Christianity to foster human-hood in this space?

The opportunities for Christianity to contribute to enhance quality human-hood in such spaces is discernible. Churches are strategically positioned due to their proximity to communities. This enables pastors or any other church leaders to be involved from a vantage point of being informed. The historically developed and written resources on theology and ethics assist pastors to influence and infuse positive values. In many communities, some churches have developed a track record of engaging community structures, which gives pastors credibility. Also, Christianity and theology have historically taken a liberatory stance to assist people to be free and pursue flourishing and human-hood pathways in life. Different theologies such as Liberation, Feminist, Womanist, Black and White have emerged to address social experiences of people. Furthermore, faith-based groups such as South Africa Council of Churches (SACC) have also been actively advocating for social good. By its very nature, theology and churches discourage lawlessness and violence. This foundational principle encourages people to uphold law and order, spread and uphold positive message and life-giving values. However, while church and theological message encourages law and order, in situations of evil and community ill, it also carries a message of confrontation and healing. Thus, there is co-existence and a dual message of confrontation and peace.

Christianity provides a message that provides possibilities of fostering quality life through effective, meaningful and wise engagement within traditional forums in numerous ways. These possibilities are summarised in the diagram (figure 1) below.



**Figure 4: Possibilities of Christianity to foster quality life**

Quality human-hood is an aspiration for all religions, people and social actors. Louw (2022:3) argued that there is need to have interreligious encounters. He maintained that:

interreligious encounters bring about questions regarding the spiritual realm, meaning and purposefulness of life. In one way or another, it deals with the transcendent realm of life and connections to the God-factor in human events (Louw 2022:3).

In this sense, Christianity should explore partnering with other religions in the public space to foster quality life. In the process of pursuing activities that promote and contribute to life and flourishing in different ways, there are blockages and hindrances. For instance, a pastor may be denied entrance or audience in a poorly performing municipality as a public figure to voice social issues. In such cases, non-violence loving confrontation for change could be adopted. There are also times when public efforts to influence change are snubbed by those in leadership. In such cases, churches could perform social mobilisation for change in partnership with community people. This entails “leveraging the civic power of citizens” (Magezi 2019:118). Churches play a critical role in influencing positive moral values through engagement with those in leadership positions. For instance, in view of high gender-based violence in South Africa, church leaders can engage traditional culture custodians by having non confrontation life-giving conversations to change views and perceptions (Setswe, Nkomo, Friedman, Magezi, Nyuswa, & Majola 2009). Churches are also a beacon of hope. Community healing refers to community stability restoration, peace and flourishing. The healing roles that could be performed include mediating and fostering community peace in times of community conflict (Magezi 2021). In such situations, churches could perform an advocacy, standing in the gap to insulate those being affected, and perform a mediation role. The practical dimension of healing includes creating practical safe spaces for refuges, abused women and children. In contexts where churches are marginalised, they can effect change through modelling what is good and right for society.

### **5. Public pastoral care markers**

The considered role and position of Christianity, the opportunity that Christianity has to foster human-hood in traditional forums and the possibilities that exist to that end provide a

motivation for public pastoral care design. Therefore, the following markers for public pastoral care proposition are stated.

***Proposition 1: Public pastoral care is Christian incarnation from the distant and private space of our associations such as church spaces to where people who hold different faiths, values, norms and persuasions are located.*** Christian incarnation entails an embodiment of God who is the caregiver to his entire creation to which our Christianity finds expression as exemplified by Jesus Christ. Incarnation *modus operandi* of God's care is expressed in his eternal limitless love and concern whereby he chose to dwell and identify with humanity (John 3:16). We have a high priest who shared in water and blood as well as sympathised with us (Hebrews 4:14-16). Through the mystery of incarnation, God in Jesus Christ became a human being to share with humanity in its experiences, challenges and complexities of living life in the different spaces (publics). Thus, an incarnational perspective implies that our Christianity should be an embodiment of God that finds expression of our identity in the publics. We are letters written (2 Corinthians 3:2-3). It entails witness of that which is intrinsically good to humanity, an embodiment of hope, and being vision casters.

The concern of Christianity and Christian people should be intricately connected with God's concern. We care because God cares. God's care is expressed differently in diverse situations: shepherd of my soul, mother who cares for the chicks, confronting oppressors (oppressive nations and kings), comforting concerned and anxious people, disciplining and dethroning the proud and arrogant (Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar), going before us (Joshua), being a prophetic voice (i.e., what should be done and not done in society), etc. Thus, the imperative to be incarnational and operate at the publics comes with suggestive models, paradigms and frameworks in Scripture that we can employ for shrewd, versatile and meaningful mediation of God. A public pastoral care theologian should be conscious and alert to the challenges of claiming space at the public square. De Villiers (2005:530) noted that it is imperative to translate Christian vision to a wider society. The public requires a language that is understood by all (De Gruchy 2007:39).

***Proposition 2. Public pastoral care entails journeying from private Christian space to where people are.*** Journeying denotes both literal and metaphorical caring approach at the publics. Different to counselling where the counselling 'expert' sits in a consultation room waiting for emotionally, socially and spiritually sick people to come for help, public pastoral care, which is pastoral caregiving entails going where the sick are. It entails journeying to where the hurting, anxious, despairing, and hopeless people are. Thus, literally it involves moving to public spaces where debates, discussions, engagements and all kinds of conversations are conducted and public policies formulated. This is particularly critical in democratic states such as South Africa where constitutional issues are continuously raised and debated, policies reviewed and evaluated, etc – land issue, making public statements (e.g., former Chief Justice's apology), State capture - Zondo commission, floods in KZN, etc. Metaphorically, journeying to the public entails a tedious 'interspection' process of Christians travelling and shifting from their mindsets to the mindsets of those who are not Christians in order to understand and effectively relate with them. The metaphoric journeying process attempts to bridge the long-standing challenge of giving Christianity a public language (De Villiers 2005). The 'interspection' process assists pastoral care to cross from the Christian mindset to the minds of different players at the publics round table in order to understand their philosophies, mindset, motivations and interests. We should have the kenotic mind of Christ who transplanted himself from a different (heavenly context) to our human context (Philippians 2:5ff). Thus, public pastoral is characterised by moving to where the rubber meets the road (public spaces/publics) (Magezi 2016), and at the same time, shifting cognitive

mental processes to understand and develop a language that the public can relate and understand for change and transformation.

***Proposition 3: Public pastoral care has a substantive and functional message to the publics.*** The publics is characterised by plurality of messages informed by the different interests of the participants. The common message thread and goal upon which everything hangs is the notion of common good (Day and Kim 2017). The question is: what is common good? The question of what is good is particularly vexing in constitutional states like South Africa where the constitutional framework seems to be in conflict with some publics. For instance, some traditional leaders (e.g., King Dalindyebo), the AmaXhosa king who was imprisoned for burning people's houses in the village for their relatives who refused to attend the traditional court in the name of community social good; Church leaders like Omotoso, Bishop Zondo, etc are facing criminal charges; fights and tensions in civic Democratic groups, e.g., Afriforum and EFF over different views on land, crime, public expression, etc.

In this situation where the publics are characterised by discord, conflicts, contradictions, disagreements, the question of what is common good (good for humanity) is extremely urgent. One would argue that this discord is a typical distinctive feature and defining aspect of the notion of publics (Day and Kim (2017:12). However, to reach an agreement on the publics, there is need to have common understanding on basic aspects such as the notion of good for society otherwise debates become the ultimate ends in themselves without pursuing and ushering the substance and object being debated. It should be understood that on the one hand, debates and conversations are public means and processes for common good, but on the other hand, they are an end as well. They are a means and process in so far as they facilitate space for fostering common and shared views while they are an end when people find common grounds and understand each other's perspectives to become accommodative of the other in diverse contexts of the publics. However, this is one aspect of the debates. Debates in the publics have objects and substance which should be pursued and realised for true common good. Thus, the debates centre on the notion of common good, which should be the ideal aspiration and vision for society. At stake then, is the question of common good that can be posed as: what is common good and who is the arbiter of common good in publics characterised by contradictions and disagreements? This question was addressed by Jesus in one of his conversations with the religious society of his day.

*4. The Rich Young Ruler (Mark 10): 17 As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do so that I may inherit eternal life?" 18 But Jesus said to him, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone. 19 You know the commandments: 'DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT GIVE FALSE TESTIMONY, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER.'" 20 And he said to Him, "Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth." 21 Looking at him, Jesus showed love to him and said to him, "One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." 22 But he [i]was deeply dismayed by [j]these words, and he went away grieving; for he was one who owned much property.*

First, it seems that common good for the publics and society cannot be known and understood outside the Creator God who is good. Only God is good and his nature and essence of being good should guide and inform society. The next question is: where and how do we know the goodness of God? For theology and pastoral care, goodness is revealed to us in the sacred Biblical writings. After addressing the question of source of good (God) and the

epistemological question of knowing what is good (Scriptural revelation), which are substantive issues, the next question is a functional one.

The next question relates to the how common good is delivered to people (publics). Drawing from Jesus' address, it seems good is not shown or demonstrated through living and maintaining the status quo. Our status quo maintains our historical and social practices and traditions – of the things we have been doing throughout our lives starting from our youth. Jonathan Jansen (2009) in his book, *Knowledge in the Blood: Confronting Race and the Apartheid Past*, asks the question:

How is it that young Afrikaners, born at the time of Mandela's release from prison, hold firm views about a past they never lived, rigid ideas about black people, and fatalistic thoughts about the future? (Jansen 2009:iii)

However, knowledge in the blood is more than just viewing yourself as privileged and always deserving than other people. It can project itself as a perpetual inferiority view of oneself. As a black person you always feel you deserve less in life. Contrary to these perspectives, the ushering of common good is characterised by painful alterations to our preferred norms. It entails practically engaging in painful actions that touch us at the core of where it pains us. It entails painful stepping out, painful distribution, painful co-existence, painful togetherness, painful listening, painful introspection, painful togetherness. In a nutshell, it is characterised by sacrifice. Hearing painful actions of what common good looks like sends us away grieving because we struggle with changes demanded of us at the public roundtable. A traditional leader may find it difficult to assert the equality of a woman in a patriarchal society much as a multimillion businessperson may find it difficult to part with his/her wealth.

In all this, the public pastoral message is clear: *our essence and being should mirror God who was shown to us by Jesus Christ*. He (Jesus) when you have seen me, you have seen the Father – John 14:9). The message and values of common good are communicated and lived. The substance of our message is God, the incarnate Jesus Christ whose teaching, ethics and life we follow and infuse in all the publics. This means public pastoral care goes to the publics with a clear framework and message. People expect a pastor to deal with them when they go to the public not a politician. If we lose this message, we are to be pitied and we have nothing to offer. We become empty with nothing to offer!

***Proposition 4: Public pastoral care is about hope and healing in situations where there is anxiety, uncertainty, political betrayal, moral failure, abuse of resources meant for the poor, a sense of despair.*** Indeed, how could one not despair in such situations? Pastoral care provides a candlelight in darkness to bring hope. Pastoral hope to people is not just about coining a 'rainbow' nation project language only. It is characterised by confronting, engaging, debating, challenging, relentless knocking on doors for the good of people. It embodies kenotic advocacy interventions where we leave our comfort zones and be with the people. Through Christ's love for humanity, Jesus left and put aside the heavenly benefits to be with humanity (Philippians 2:5). Thus, public pastoral care entails embodying and fostering liberation as well as helping people to imagine new ways of living. Can the courts resolve the xenophobic challenges of burning foreigners alive by sentencing people to go to prison or we need a nation's healing project infused with love for other human beings? Can we resolve poverty by looting and burning buildings? Can we stand aloof when flood disasters, due to global warming, are ravaging our neighbours in KZN? Can we go to bed and peacefully sleep when our neighbours are hungry? What has all this got to do with theology and Christianity? Christianity as the midwife of common good should embody and share values of hope. To some, hope and healing come through giving them direction (mentoring), to others sharing material resources (assistance to achieve a life goal), to others political reforms, to

some it is through getting a job, etc. In all this, Christianity needs to claim and find its space at the public table to infuse this hopeful reality.

## **6. Challenges for public pastoral care – going forward**

The promise of public pastoral care is significant. However, there are challenges or hurdles on the path. These challenges are considered below.

**a. Theological education and curriculum:** It is imperative to ensure our graduates are prepared to face the complexity of the real world. The question is: what are our graduate attributes in relation to engaging social and public issues? How are we preparing graduates for citizen theological public engagement when there is limited space and competition for space by different theological subjects on the timetable? How do the subjects we offer help in preparing our graduates for doing theology in South African publics?

**b. Identity and contribution:** How do we remain authentically theological but meaningfully engaging at the public square? A theologian's contribution should be from a theological perspective otherwise the essence of the conversation will be missed, subdued or would disappear at the public. At stake is the question: what can theology or religion contribute to public discourse, public moral formation and shaping public policy? Examples include approaching Zuma for pastoral care, Zondo commission, former Chief Justice Mogoeng Mogoeng, Floods in Durban – Gift of the Givers, Xenophobia, racial tensions, COVID-19, dilemma of trendy and populist theology conversations (Jansen about decolonisation, e.g., COVID-19).

At one level is: theological theory formation. Theory formation is critical to inform how we interpret issues and view the world. The question is: What theological theories can we formulate to inform us to 'check in' the debates, conversations? At another level, is praxis: how can we practically engage in this fluid pluralistic context? What nodes of engagement in public theological engagement with the public can we annex for contribution? When public theology is located or considered from a public practical theological stance, its target audience is the public and publics. Considered from a public pastoral care framework, it is midwife of public hope. It delivers hope. However, what and how is this hope? To a Christian, this hope is based on a substance – our belief on a faith transformation objective that has implications for all humanity. We believe in God who vividly reveals himself to us in a person of Jesus Christ (incarnation) so that we can connect, relate and be participants in the world now and another imagined world to come in the eschaton. This means we live, practice and express our faith in the world. However, to the public, this faith (belief) is of no consequence or effect or meaning unless it can vividly impact public issues. The essence and role of faith should be assessed by publicly agreeable warrants. Brietenberg (2003:66) argued that public theology is:

theologically informed public discourse about public issues, addressed to the church, synagogue, mosque, temple or other religious body, as well as the larger public or publics, argued in ways that can be **evaluated and judged by publicly available warrants and criteria.**

The impact of our faith and church involvements in society should be felt. Our ideas, debates, public good, governance, etc should be noted – this is non-negotiable. But this arises from, and is motivated by, a clear life giving and public good message.

**c. Integrity and role of Christianity and theology in the public:** The story of Christianity and Church in Africa is double edged and full of historic and present contradictions. Unfortunately, that is its baggage. For instance (1) broadly in Africa and other parts of the world - Christianity has been complicit with colonisation; (2) in South Africa it was complicit

with apartheid (DRC); (3) it covertly destroyed traditional African indigenous capabilities (indigenous values, e.g. respect for ancestry); (4) it created a person with two souls resulting in identity confusion (afternoon/day life is different from evening/night time activities); (5) GBV and women abuses, e.g. Omotoso, Bishop Zondo; (6) swindling church members and using church platforms for illegal activities, e.g. Bushiri; (7) discord during COVID-19 – some churches partnering with government while others oppose – calling it anti-Christ movement resulting in internal fighting and confusion with established structures like SACC with others saying SACC can represent or speak on our behalf; (8) lack of an enforced framework to manage and control church leaders – Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities (CRL Rights Commission); (9) decline of academic or well taught theology and rise of self-taught, subjective and uncritical popular theology, e.g., eating grass, spraying doom, drinking petrol; (10) churchpreneurship and migrant and illegal migrant social hubs.

The above issues and others result in churches not considered or viewed with integrity. This may cause suspicion, distrust, cynicism, resistance and rejection at the public square. This implies that the Christian spot/seat on the public square is mired in negative historical baggage and muddled in ongoing murky conversations. Therefore, the churches' influence is compromised.

**d. Language translation challenge and transparency:** Our doctrines such as depravity and fallenness are not understood in the publics. How do we communicate these ideas and encourage them to influence high moral standards and certain ethical living standards? What option do we have? Should we disengage or retreat because of our own internal challenges and problems? The answer is no! The publics are characterised by critical examination. Church and churches are one public that should be critical of itself just like the other publics. For instance, much as we are expected to challenge some practices that may be fanned by traditional African practices, e.g., women oppression and human rights violation, our church spaces should be health spaces where human flourishing is promoted. The double burden for the church, however, is to preach morals and demonstrate high moral ground that it is failing. However, the values and message contained and communicated by Christianity are timeless in fostering social good – loving neighbour, dispelling bad and evil (these values have clear roots and resonate with Christian values).

**e. Religious pluralism:** Religions generally come from different frameworks (faiths). Privileging one religion at the public square e.g., in policy formation, such as what has been the case in SA where there are faculties of theology in the midst of many other religions has been increasingly questioned by government and other political figures. This means speaking from a religious perspective might be a competition exercise. This begs the question: what does Christianity uniquely have/contribute to the publics that is different from other religions? Is it because of numbers? Is it because of our democratic values where all voices in society should be heard? These questions need to be worked out in our contexts.

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