

# We know to whom we belong? The drama of ministerial practice in a postcolonial African context

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We are busy celebrating 500 years of reformation and one of the basic convictions of the reformers was that we know to (W)whom we belong. During the student uprisings that we experienced in 2015 and 2016, it became clear that the notion of 'belonging' was deeply contested. Students still experience that black people are socially, economically and psychologically abused by the white systems, including university campuses.

In empirical research conducted in 2016 with colleagues from five other faculties, these feelings and experiences of exclusion, of not belonging and of injustice among theology students and even some lecturers, were confirmed. This led to the basic research question focused on the subject field for which I am responsible at the Faculty of Theology: how do we work together as lecturers and students to help create such spaces of human dignity in the training of students who are busy preparing for ministry practice in a postcolonial African context in which they experience belonging? This article endeavours to provide an answer to this question.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** The empirical part of the research was conducted by colleagues from five different faculties including Arts and Science, Engineering, Law, Education and Theology. In that sense, the research was not only intradisciplinary but also interdisciplinary.

## Behind the curtains

During the night of 04 April 2016 a small drama was enacted in the passages of the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. In the early hours of the morning, students removed the class photos of previous years in the passages of the building, placed them on the floor, and in some instances rearranged them. Those of us who arrived there early in the morning to lecture stopped dead in our tracks. I think most of us felt that what occurred behind the curtains in our passages was the beginning of a new chapter in the 150-year narrative (Mouton 2010) of theological training at Stellenbosch University.

Various activities related to the removal and rearrangement of the photos can serve as markers and may help to interpret these events. On the walls where the photos once were, posters were arranged with the following expressions: 'Black pain – White gender men – Violent space – Non-representation – Lack of transformation', these can all be regarded as examples of what Shay and Peseta (2016) call 'misrecognition and misrepresentation'. The following day, the dean received an e-mail from a group of students who introduced themselves as the 'Black Theologians Collective'. The e-mail was sent to all our colleagues, and I quote the following passage from it:

As the Black Theologians Collective, we want to make it clear that we have come together as Black students because we are tired of this place's attempt to silence the Black Poor Voice. The Theology Faculty of the University of Stellenbosch through the Dutch Reformed Church still harbours Apartheid memorabilia in the Name of God, through practices and physical material. We understand that Apartheid was a point of privilege for White people only, but it was a pinnacle point of horror and it is still to this day, as we see it in the fact that Black people are still socially, economically and psychologically abused by White people and White Systems. (p. 1)

These students, in no uncertain terms, are expressing their experience of the Faculty of Theology as a place where they do not feel at home, where they feel they do not 'belong' and where they experience injustice. Because of the memorabilia, which find expression not only in the physical appearance and content of the building but also, according to them, are strengthened by certain practices, their experience is that they are socially, economically and physically excluded and therefore are not treated fairly. In empirical research I conducted in 2016 with colleagues from five other faculties, these feelings and experiences of exclusion, of not belonging and of injustice

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among our theology students and even some lecturers, were confirmed. The section 'In a plot of action' of this article presents a more detailed discussion of the research of this project.

The title of this article ties in with one of the basic convictions of the reformation, namely, the point of departure that we know to (W)hom we belong (Burger 2001; Smit 2008). The question of 'belonging' is also the first question and answer of the Heidelberg Catechism. This year marks the 500-year anniversary of the reformation, which will be celebrated worldwide. The question mark in the title was placed purposefully to stimulate reflection on what it means 'to belong' in a postcolonial African context with specific focus on the experiences of students preparing themselves for ministry practice. Students preparing themselves for full-time ministry in churches and communities in the reformed tradition at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University still form the core group of students studying theology. The experience and actions of the students place the spotlight on a few questions that demand further reflection and thought: What does it mean to belong? Who is this 'we' who want to belong? To '(W)hom' do we belong? And how is justice done in a context in which there is a search for healing and human dignity? Focused on the subject field for which I am responsible at the Faculty of Theology, I would like to raise the question as follows: How do we, as practical theologians, work together as colleagues to help create such spaces of human dignity in the training of students who are busy preparing for ministry practice in a postcolonial African context in which they experience belonging? (The concept of 'ministry practice' is an extensive concept that includes different aspects of the theological training and practices of gospel ministry. Compare in this regard the work of Cahalan 2008 and 2010.)

These types of questions are however not as new as one might think, as the church reformers in Europe grappled with similar contextual and existential questions 500 years ago (compare the work of Vosloo 2009). However, Martin Luther, John Calvin and their contemporaries lived in the golden era of the arts; it was also the era of Shakespeare, and for this reason Calvin often referred to the world as the 'theatre of God's glory', to articulate something about the dramatic nature of theology. Bouwsma (1989) also writes about this 'dramatic vision' of human existence by Calvin and his contemporaries. According to him, the theatrical nature of humans' existence was the oxygen breathed in by Calvin and his contemporaries. Also see my own reflections in this regard in Nell (2011). The drama metaphor was later used by various scholars to indicate that the gospel is not something that should only be believed, but also something that should be performed and lived, which is why reference is often made to Theo-drama. A Theo-dramatic paradigm works with dramatic categories to describe the God-human interaction. According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, it is an approach that has the potential to combine a number of theological methods by using of dramaturgical categories. So the world and the church become the stage on which

God's story is dramatically performed. Believers have the responsibility to perform this tale with integrity in a community of love and justice (Von Balthasar 1998). From various quarters there is new interest in the potential of drama, not only for practical theology but also for all the disciplines in theology. For contributions in this regard, see Quash (2005) and Vanhoozer (2010, 2014). I concur with the drama metaphor and use it as a structure of my reflection on what it means to belong by looking at the stage, the script, the plot and the characters from a number of perspectives. Let us open the curtains to enter the 'postcolonial African stage' together.

## On the stage

In one of Steve de Gruchy's last contributions to the academe before his untimely death, he and Sophie Chirongoma used four elements to describe the postcolonial African decor in an imaginative way (De Gruchy & Chirongoma 2007). These are the elements of earth, water, fire and wind. These elements all refer to an influence from the past that colours our understanding of the African stage and still has a great influence on the performance of the various ministry practices.

*Earth* refers to the long history of the Christian faith on the African continent as well as the important role of traditional African religions (Oden 2007). He shows the large role that the African continent played during the first centuries in the development of christian faith. *Water* relates to western influences that arrived at the shores of Africa on the ships of the colonialists and missionaries. *Fire* refers to the struggle of African believers to live as christians, but to still remain loyal to Africa and her various cultures amid the dehumanisation many believers experienced in a colonial cloak. *Wind* relates to the presence of the spirit in Africa in the form of Pentecostalism, revival movements and developing forms of being a church in reaction to what Bosch (1991) described as the *Missio Dei* (also refer to Nell 2016b).

Against the background of the multi-coloured decor of the four elements, Lartey (2013) developed a practical theology for Africa's postcolonial stage. In his book with the meaningful title *Postcolonializing God: New Perspectives on Pastoral and Practical Theology*, he indicates the different ways in which the term 'postcolonial' is used in the academic and general vernacular. According to him, in the field of religion and faith, the term is mainly used as a way of investigation, a specific perspective, even a new way of living that presupposes a critical mindset and that points out injustice. In this regard, he concurs with Said (1991:28), who articulates this mindset as 'life-enhancing and constitutively opposed to every form of tyranny, domination and abuse, its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom'. The latter is not a simple task and Lartey (2013) indicates convincingly how African scholars, especially in the field of religion and theology, still often uncritically adopt the accepted epistemologies from the north and the west.

In this regard, Mbembe (2016), in his reflection on the decolonisation of knowledge, discusses the role and influence of the western knowledge archives that still dominate scientific discourses. According to him, universities are 'large systems of authoritative control, standardiation, gradation, accountancy, classification, credits and penalties'. For this reason he pleads for the decolonisation of these systems that changed higher education into a marketable product that is bought and sold in standard units.

The postcolonial stage presents several challenges to the ministry practices of all the so-called mainstream churches in Africa, as well as the places where theological students are trained. According to Lartey (2013), the origin of most African Independent Churches can in fact be explained as counter-reaction to the colonial agenda. One of the biggest challenges in such a postcolonial context for theological training with a view to ministry practice is to guard against the formation of 'enclaves of belonging' where not everyone is treated fairly (Cilliers & Nell 2011 for research in which Mary Douglass's theory on 'enclavement' was used). The actions of the students through the removal of the photos were possibly one of the clearest signs of the extent to which the Faculty of Theology's building and even the conduct of lecturers and students are experienced as a foreign enclave of injustice by some.

In light of the question in the title of this article, it is therefore important to reflect on how theology and theological training with a view to ministry practice should be practised at a faculty of a university without it becoming 'enclaves' for certain groups or denominations only. Venter (2016) (he was also recently the editor of a volume in which the theme was discussed in more detail: see Venter 2017) maps various important discourses that grapple with the challenges of theological training in a university context and which each uniquely challenges the preparation of students for ministry practice. Some of these discourses directly relate to what it means to belong and entail, among other issues, epistemic justice, the representation of knowledge and the ecology of student life, which should be a 'home for all'. My own thinking is also continuously challenged by these postcolonial discourse(s), perhaps most when it comes to self-critical reflection on the so-called settler perspectives. The latter entail, among others, the fact that white people may not speak on behalf of other people and groups, although one might modestly want to contribute to the recognition of colonial structures and the abuse of power to advance certain groups.

## Using texts

Dramas are performed on a stage, but they make use of texts, the so-called script. Luther and Calvin's emphasis on the reformation *Sola Scriptura* has for 500 years helped us to understand that one requires a certain set of lenses to read and understand life and humans as texts or living documents (for a discussion of the *Sola Scriptura*, see Welker 2003). Well-developed hermeneutics lies at the heart of practical-

theological reflection. Compare in this regard the works of Anderson (2001) and Healy (2000). Luther and Calvin use the Script as a special set of lenses that helps to give focus. One can of course also regard the students' actions as a text. One's lenses are however coloured by one's tradition and, in the case of practical theology, even further by the various approaches to the field.

As a practical theologian, I join my colleagues and students in reading the text of the world, the text of ministry practice and the text of the students' actions through the lenses of my tradition and my subject field. In my reflection and research, I relate to an aesthetic-dramatic approach to the field, as articulated by Swinton and Mowat (2006). (In terms of an aesthetic-dramatic approach to theology, the work of Von Balthasar 1998 probably had the most influence.) Osmer (2005) uses the work of Von Balthasar and applies it to the field of practical theology in his work. For an overview of various approaches and methods, (see Miller-McLemore 2011). Swinton and Mowat (2006) define practical theology as follows:

Practical Theology is critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world. (pp. 6-9)

## In a plot of action

The plot in a drama entails events or, as we like to refer to it in practical theology, practices that impact one another and are therefore interdependent. For an extensive discussion on the importance of 'practices' in practical theology, see the work of various theologians in the volume of Bass (2008). A plot usually begins with a crisis and then starts to unravel. The plot of ministry practice from an aesthetic-dramatic perspective relates to the performance of at least four practices, and in a specific order. For the division, I made use of the introductory chapter in the volume of Miller-McLemore (2011). The first practice relates to the ordinary *everyday activities* of people, where their faith often lands in a crisis requiring deeper reflection, related to my attempt to understand the students' actions. Some scholars refer in this regard to practical theology as a crisis science that is continuously under construction (compare the work of Pieterse 1986). The second practice focuses on the *methods* used by theologians, lecturers, students and religious practitioners to come to a deeper understanding and interpretation of these everyday practices. The third practice refers to the way in which *curricula* are developed for theological training in the field of ministry practice and related fields of specialisation. The last and most specialised practice is where academics work together to capture the contours of the specific *academic discipline* to support the first three activities.

## To participate and to observe

Similar to the plot in any good book, film or play, ministry practice begins with the details of the everyday

practices of people. The role played by the practical theologian here is that of an active participant and curious observer. In and through these ordinary activities the equilibrium is often disturbed and people's faith starts to waver, among others, because of the experience of injustice, often leading to hardship, suffering and crises, such as the perception that I do not belong. Practical theologians are interested in knowing what causes hurt, where the injustice lies, why it does not work and how we can and should react. Osmer (2008) asks four basic questions related to the tasks of practical theology: what is going on? (descriptive empirical task); why is this the case? (interpretative task); what ought to be going on? (normative task) and how are we going to change it? (pragmatic task).

Students' removing of photos from a wall during the night tells a story of trauma and alienation, an experience of injustice and of 'not belonging'. Of course, their actions do not stand in isolation from what happened on the rest of the campuses in South Africa since October 2015 (such as #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and many other activities related to student protests) – practices that brought the functioning of some campuses to a standstill, caused politicians to fumble about and made the management of universities nearly impossible. According to the famous sociologist Manuel Castells (1997), these movements gained momentum worldwide, and with the aid of technology it is possible to mobilise masses of people within hours. This leaves one with the question of whether that which the students performed as a mini drama in the dark night possibly confronts us with the clear truth of a greater crisis on the postcolonial stage of Africa.

## To investigate

The second phase in the development of the plot is where practical theologians, through the use of *scientific methods*, aim to gain a deeper understanding of phenomena and specific practices through thorough investigation. Here practical theologians play the role of active researchers. In light of the questions I stated at the beginning, relating to the 'who, what and where of belonging', the aim is to use research in order to come to a deeper understanding of this problem than merely superficial opinions. In practical theology this is referred to as practice-orientated research (see, among others, the work of Hermans & Schoeman 2015).

The 2015 and 2016 student protests marked watershed moments in the history of South Africa's higher education landscape. The following is a summary of the findings from a research project by the Critical Citizenship (CC) group at the Stellenbosch University Conference on Teaching and Learning held in October 2016. Four questions were posed to the audience, and the discussion at each faculty group was facilitated by members of the CC group:

- What is your reaction to the student protest page? (Participants were asked to respond to a photo prompt depicting Stellenbosch University student protest action in 2015.)

- How do you think the protests affected student–lecturer interactions?
- How do we decolonise higher education structures?
- How do we take the conversation further?

Responses to pictures of the 2015 photographs were overwhelmingly emotive. Feelings of anger, frustration, anxiety and chaos were expressed. However, members of staff also expressed conflicted feelings, mostly of simultaneous anger and sympathy. The general consensus was that, although there were even feelings of solidarity with the issues students were raising, violence associated with the protests was unacceptable. Despite the reported intensity of anger, chaos and hopelessness, statements of empathy and sympathy for students and their plight were most prevalent.

Some colleagues found associations between the 2015 protest and past experiences, either at other universities (e.g. University of the Western Cape) or in other countries (e.g. Zimbabwe) or in the historical national narrative (e.g. Mandela-led negotiations with the National Party). Self-identified white colleagues, and white male colleagues in particular, expressed feelings of exclusion, wanting to respond in a way that was empathetic, but feeling disenfranchised from the populist discourse, and failing to find an acceptable response. The same cohort, it seems, also expressed fear, shame and guilt, hopelessness and powerlessness. Other responses included acts of distancing, unwillingness to deal with the collective trauma and surprise over the fact and the intensity of the students' anger. However, these responses of distancing were marginal.

Views were expressed that issues raised by students indicated systemic disparities at the institution, that the complex nature of these issues and the emotions they evoked rendered them difficult to resolve and that in many ways they were intensified iterations of unresolved injustices at the institution, and in broader society. There was a sense that we had left the problem too long, and that we had missed opportunities for addressing them properly. By extension, failure to pay attention now would probably lead to further and more volatile disruptions in future.

Several ideas were exchanged about how to decolonise higher education structures. Questions about whether to remove symbols of the university's oppressive past, whether to retain and re-interpret them, or whether to replace them with new artefacts (e.g. photographs) opened the discussion. The deficit of safe spaces, in both the physical and the abstract sense, was a dominant theme. Points were raised about university architecture, and design and use of physical spaces on campus, and the latent messages that physical spaces hold for students and staff.

With regard to an abstract interpretation of 'safe spaces', the participants felt that while students had safe spaces to express themselves, staff did not have. Safe spaces are compromised by an abiding sense of mistrust among staff members, and between staff and faculty management. This is further



exacerbated by silos in the university – clusters of people operating in closed systems by themselves, or entirely dissociated with others in the faculty or department. Feelings of mistrust and exclusion were linked to several requests for anonymous platforms of communication and expression for members of staff. Responsibility for the creation of safe spaces was frequently placed with faculty and faculty management. Some called for a culture of debate at faculty level, citing the lack of courageous conversations and the broaching of difficult topics as the very reasons for issues remaining unresolved.

In conversations about how to decolonise the classroom (the physical and abstract space), how to deal with ‘difficult topics’ became a point of discussion. Some expressed a desire to talk about the difficult issues raised by the protests but cited not knowing how to broach the subject, feeling inadequate to facilitate such a discussion, protest-induced time constraints and added pressure to cover prescribed content as reasons for not doing so. Concern with being misunderstood, misjudged for their perceived loyalties, for being representatives of the elite (Afrikaans) or bureaucratic establishment, was pervasive for a number of lecturers. Several other lecturers went ahead and set aside the course content in favour of these discussions, taking it as an opportunity to gain insight into and raise awareness with students about historical contexts of which they may not otherwise be aware.

Ideas were exchanged about ways to bring about structural change by changes to curricula, course content and degree structures. Cross-pollination of courses in the humanities to disciplines not usually associated with socio-political content was suggested. Next to *what* we teach, *how* we teach emerged as a dominant theme. Field trips, for instance, were suggested as a teaching medium through which students are exposed to the diverse lived experiences of other students, who, like themselves, make up the citizenry of the country. There was also a suggestion that existing funding instruments (e.g. the National Research Foundation Indigenous Knowledge Systems funding call) should be used to advance knowledge about indigenous knowledge systems to inform curriculum content and epistemology.

Relationships between students and lecturers were reported to have changed in several ways. One interesting response was that lecturers or supervisors were shocked by the revelation of who their students ‘really’ are, where they come from, their homes, their contexts, their realities, etc. Some came to the realisation that we do not know the personal backgrounds of our students, and that it may be important to take this into account in how and what we teach. Few references were made to broken trust and feelings of betrayal, and there were even fewer remarks about relationships between students and lecturers remaining unchanged. For others, the protests evoked feelings of sympathy and care, not only for staff towards students, but also for students towards staff. One lecturer gave an account of how her class had been disrupted by protestors, and how

students rallied round in a bid to protect her. Another lecturer mentioned feeling helpless, but still feeling compelled to protect their students in the classroom during class disruptions.

An enduring theme throughout the session was the need for different members of the university campus community to talk. Calls for ‘debate’, ‘dialogue’, ‘engagement’, discussion of ‘difficult topics’ and ‘conversation’ were repeatedly made. However, barriers to effective communication were described as follows: lack of common understanding and common language (e.g. definitions) of decolonisation; lack of awareness (on the part of students and staff) on where different parties are coming from; lack of will, but mostly, lack of skill, to facilitate difficult discussions with students and other members of staff; a trust deficit that leads to feelings of exclusion or threat; not enough time, not the right space, not the right context for courageous conversations; and not the right skills to bring up these important topics, and then hold them in a way that expresses empathy and safety.

These are some of the major themes captured in the analysis carried out in April 2017. It would be useful to keep in mind that although the frequency of coded items attracts attention, expressions of dissidence, avoidance, exclusion and depression may be infrequent, but are perhaps especially important to note.

## To teach and to educate

A third phase in the plot development is where practical theologians reflect on what they want to teach and learn to and with students and how this should be done. (For a sound research in this regard, compare the work of Naidoo 2015.) Curriculum and pedagogy go hand in hand and pose unique challenges on a stage where the decor continuously changes. For the dramatic changes in the field of higher education, see the works of Bitzer (2009) and Costandius, Bitzer and Waghid (2015). The role of the practical theologian in this regard is that of an educator, and at the Faculty of Theology we have already been working with a pedagogy of hope for the past decade, following our previous rector, late Professor Russel Botman’s commitment to a new pedagogic framework: the pedagogy of hope. He concurred with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire’s ideas, who maintained that pedagogy should be understood against the background of suppression, poverty and injustice in Brazil. During Professor Botman’s term, the HOPE Project was launched, which also had a great impact on the activities of the Faculty of Theology.

The development of a curriculum for theological training on the postcolonial African stage requires that a complex number of aspects should be kept in mind. These include the challenges of interculturality and inclusivity, processes of decolonisation that place Africa at the core, the question as to the ways in which and places where knowledge is produced, the importance of computer and information skills and

students' experiences and feedback. Furthermore, this also includes the search for social justice in teaching and learning, which was also the focus of our research project. In various contributions scholars show how challenging each of these processes is and how they are interdependent (see in this regard the contribution of Msila & Gumbo 2016).

From the above, it is clear that interculturality and co-existence are central practical theological challenges to curriculum development. Lartey (2013) articulated this as follows:

Crossing boundaries and helping others do so has been the main activity of much of my professional life and ministry. Over the years I have gained the conceptual framework and the philosophical apparatus to understand cultural and systemic differences. (p. 7)

His argument is that we are dealing here with more than mere multiculturalism that is a static description of multiple cultures and that we should move in the direction of an intercultural community in which there is dynamic acknowledgement of interaction, mutual influence and interdependence. In this regard, the African concept of *Ubuntu* offers important philosophical points of departure for the development of a curriculum in which coexistence and interculturality demand attention (Naidoo 2016; Dames 2012).

One of the greatest challenges to curriculum development remains the integration of knowledge. At the Faculty of Theology we work with three discipline groups to help the students see how the *sources* (Biblical Sciences), the *beliefs* (Systematic Theology and Ethics) and the *practices* (Practical Theology and Missiology) not only complement one another but also stimulate creative and innovative thought. This brings us to the last phase of the plot.

### To specialise

In the last phase of the plot of practical theology, the spotlight falls on specialisation. The role of the practical theologian in this part of the plot is that of an expert. There is a rich variety of specialisation fields in the discipline group Practical Theology and Missiology. The research of my colleagues and the projects in which we collaborate serve as sources of inspiration for my work. The focus of my own research is on, among others, congregational studies (Nell 2009, 2015c), leadership (Nell 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2016a, 2016b; Nell & Nell 2014) and curriculum development, and I build on the foundation of local and international predecessors. In light of my involvement with students who are preparing themselves as thought leaders for ministry, I aim, in my research, to look at leadership from different perspectives. As agents of transformation in faith communities, I try to determine what leadership characterised by justice, healing, empathy, *Ubuntu* and (virtual) innovation looks like. This focus brings us to the characters who perform the drama of ministry practice.

## Through vulnerable characters

The characters in a drama often serve as interpreting guides who lead one through the storyline of the plot to understand the meaning of the plot and come to the deeper nuances of humanity. Therefore, we identify with characters to develop greater insight into the reciprocity of the relationships between God, people and the world. The characters in the plot of ministry practice include a variety of vulnerable people. Newbigin (1989) convincingly shows that the faith community or congregation is the primary hermeneutist (interpreter) of the gospel. However, in this article, the focus is on people who give guidance in ministry practice, and therefore on leadership roles of lecturers and students who in service focus on the creation of spaces for healing, justice and freedom.

The Reformers were convinced that it starts with a person's calling [*vocation*] (McGrath 2008). According to them, God calls people not only to faith but also to fulfil specific roles in life. Where the monastic lifestyle in the Catholic Church was a calling from the world to the monastery or the desert, Luther and Calvin viewed *vocatio* as a calling to the everyday world. Therefore, the idea of *vocation* was for them God's calling to serve him in the world despite our vulnerability, anxiety and uncertainty. The fulfilment of this role motivated and directed by the Christian faith was the primary way in which a believer could prove his or her commitment and gratitude to God. To fulfil this role with commitment is one of the fundamental characteristics of an authentic Christian faith. Our search 'to know to whom we belong' therefore starts with reflection on our calling and role clarification, which is a characteristic of reformed spirituality (Smit 1988). In this regard, the calling to fulfil roles of leadership is in essence a spiritual matter, which means that there is an openness to the leadership of the Holy Spirit. Spirituality is therefore the formation and transformation through the Spirit to the image of Christ in service of the *Missio Dei*.

Calvin's Christocentric approach, with his emphasis on the threefold office of priest, prophet and king, helps with role clarification for practical theological guidance. Osmer (2008) uses the three positions and complements them with a fourth one (wisdom) as structure in his introduction to practical theology – a work that greatly influenced practical theology during the past decade. Various scholars use this classification, and I would like to concur with their insights by highlighting three interdependent perspectives on the spirituality of Christian leadership. In light of the research question mentioned at the beginning, the focus here is specifically on the way in which spaces are created through these forms of spirituality where lecturers and students experience that justice, healing and freedom are experienced.

### A spirituality of priestly listening

In recent hermeneutical approaches to the office of the priest, it is clear that Christ as Priest vicariously takes our pain and

suffering upon him. (Compare in this regard the insights of Wainwright 1997. For the development of the insights in our own context, see the contributions of Burger & Wepener 2004.) This pain and suffering often find expression in the experiencing of alienation, as articulated by some of our students. This alienation, which takes on political, economic, physical and specifically also psychological forms, diminishes the human dignity of all role players.

If, however, we work with the conviction that Christ's incarnation heals and repairs our mutual connection with one another, there is the challenge to acquire and practise a spirituality of priestly listening. This form of listening is based on a spirit of attendance with full attention to people's experience of pain and suffering in the presence of God. Therefore, it also urges us to investigate all forms of alienation and to work together for social cohesion. As practical theologians we are on the way to *fides quaerens vivendi* [faith in search of living together], which includes the embodiment of practices of empathic sympathy with the need and crisis of others (Louw 2011; Louw & Elsdörfer 2012). This is the living embodiment of the fruit of the Spirit in which the *Passio Dei* finds expression in various everyday experiences.

### A spirituality of prophetic discernment

In modern communities there is an explosion of information and it is necessary to develop *sapientia* [wisdom] amidst so much *scientia* [information]. In a context where many people struggle to find meaning and purpose in life, the ongoing discernment of God's will is an important aid to gain clarity regarding our *telos*. Participation in the life of Christ as prophet helps us to discover the truth, among others, in our search for justice.

Koopman (2011), with reference to James Gustafson, developed five interdependent and complementary modi of prophetic action. They include action by way of visioning, critique, storytelling, technical analysis and participation in policy formation. Each of these modi can be used in a meaningful way in reflections on how lecturers and students can look at practices and systems of injustice together in a critical (also self-critical) way, while there is room to tell the stories of pain and oppression, but with the view to the creation of an alternative story that opens up new possibilities in a visionary way and may even help to formulate new policy. This activity of prophetic action is embedded in a spirituality of discernment where we help one another to hear and do God's Word in specific circumstances of life and the world.

### A spirituality of servant leadership

According to Wainwright (1997), the royal office of Christ teaches us how authority, freedom, power and hope relate to one another. This is specifically an office that calls for recognition of my fellow human beings and their rights. In this regard, it opposes all forms of imperialistic power

and the words 'ministry' and 'minister' gain new meaning. Through Christ's self-emptying on the cross (kenosis) we learn what it means to be ministers of the Word of God (*Verbi Dei Ministri*) who also know how power must be overturned. At the same time this office calls on us as disciples of Christ to realise our calling in the world as citizens in a responsible way.

Leadership, seen in this way, cannot but be transformative leadership; it is a leadership that is embedded in a spirituality of service and that is therefore willing to take risks on behalf of others. Here is mention of 'deep changes' with regard to identity, culture and processes. In this way, it is a sign and embodiment of God's self-giving love for the world. Therefore, leadership stands in service of a moral community with the aim of forming disciples and citizens – people with character and virtue who in time develop into fellowship with God and fellow humans.

## The curtain closes

In the introduction of this article, I mentioned that the actions of the students a year ago brought us to a new chapter in the story of theological training at the Faculty of Theology at Stellenbosch University. The text for this chapter must still be completed and we owe it to one another to write and perform this text together. However, unfortunately there are no perfect models and strategies for the embodiment of the spiritual leadership required to this end. It is a case of stumbling, falling and getting up through vulnerable characters, but then not without hope – specifically christian hope. For Martin Luther and John Calvin this hope was grounded in God's promises (Sauter 1999). According to them, hope is what we receive when we are justified by God, it resides in the hope of faith – in what Paul describes as 'hope against hope' (Rm 4:18). This hope lives from the resurrection of the crucified Christ and strives for the promises of the universal future in Christ. This hope is our only comfort in life and death because we know to Whom we belong.

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