


# The pillars of our faith

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The fourth revolution world turned our comfortable lives into a rollercoaster ride of challenges, changes and choices. Apart from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the Fourth Communication Revolution and the Fourth Self-awareness Revolution brought major disruptions to our world to which we were just coming to terms with when coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) struck and brought a firm halt to almost everything, including the way we were used to practice our faith. This confluence of circumstances has provided Christians in South Africa with an opportunity to do introspection and carve a new way forward for *being* followers of Christ and *doing* what their faith requires from them to be true to their religion and regain credibility in a time when the institutionalised churches are struggling to survive. The need to redefine what it means to be church, and the role Christians should play in society are on the table since the last decade of the previous century. This article identified four basics and, to a great extent, neglected pillars – two from the New Testament Scriptures and two from the Reformation movements – that could form the foundation for a transformed and alternative way of being *ecclesia* in the current fast-paced, demanding world. This article serves as an introduction and broad overview to stimulate debate and further development of the ideas presented to contribute towards positive reformation and transformation of South African Christianity. The study was conducted through historical research and document analysis.

**Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications:** A call to discuss the pillars of faith that could assist the traditional or mainstream institutional churches to do introspection at the current crossroads. Four pillars of faith are identified to assist in carving a new path forward for South African Christianity, drawing from the disciplines of Church History, Practical Theology and Missiology.

**Keywords:** pillars of faith; church; reformation; great commandment; great commission; *semper reformanda*; priesthood of all believers.

The church of God indeed,

is not so common a thing as this term, 'church of God'

(Luther *De Servo Arbitrio* [the bondage of will], Exordium 33; Luther n.d.:69)

## Introduction

Christianity used to play a key role in the history, politics and social development of South Africa. However, since the late 1980s, the Protestant Christian religion began to decline, finding itself at crossroads without clear indications on which direction to take, often resulting in in-fighting, schisms, identity crises and more unsolved issues (Hofmeyr 2009:601; Oosthuizen 2018; Rossouw 1993:894–907; Steyn 2005:551; Van der Merwe 2015:1). The traditional, mostly Afrikaans-speaking churches are struggling to survive because of, among other things, dogmatic differences, schisms and mixing religion with politics (cf. Oliver 2021). Membership numbers of most institutionalised churches are dwindling while the number of unaffiliated Christians is growing. When the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) struck the world, many feared that this could be the final nail in the coffin of some congregations and even denominations.

The COVID-19 era emphasises the urgent need to rethink and redefine what it means to be church, and the role Christians should play in a broken and suffering world and society. However, denial and stagnancy in comfort zones (as mentioned here and in the following sections) can no longer go unchallenged. The need to provide Christians with clear and direct guidelines regarding how to *be* and *do* what they are through Christ can no longer be pushed aside. One way to rediscover how to be and do what we are supposed to is to identify some clear pillars that can overcome the identity crisis among Christians and guide their actions and the way forward for Christians living in an unstable and unpredictable society.

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The concept of pillars of faith is not new. A literature search shows that depending on their perspective, Christians have already identified a wide variety of pillars as foundational anchors to indicate the most important aspects of faith. The Catholic Church identified four pillars of faith, namely creed, prayer, mass and sacraments, and Christian living and morality (Pope John Paul II 2016:53ff, 613ff, 277ff, 421ff; cf. Caschetta 2015). Individual churches and congregations also identified such pillars: The Christ Church Denver decided on stability, obedience, conversion of life and hospitality (McGugan n.d.). Buffaloe (2020), the pastor of Riverview Baptist Church, identified three pillars: faith, love and hope. In their book, titled *The Four Pillars of Christianity: Essential Knowledge for Every Christian* (2019), Smith and McKee referred to the following four pillars: The existence of the God of the Bible, Jesus is the divine Son of God, Jesus resurrected from the grave and the Christian perspective on suffering and evil is rational. The much older work of MacArthur, titled *The Pillars of Christian Character: The Essential Attitudes of a Living Faith* (1998), refers to pillars such as faith, obedience, selfless love, forgiveness, self-discipline, gratitude and worship.

Turning back to the South African context, Du Plessis (2012:2, 3) asked for reflection on three essential characteristics of being a church in the world. He identifies Jesus as the foundation and cornerstone, the believers as the temple and asks for growth. Growth within the church must come from preaching to build knowledge and outward growth should happen through the mission. The webpages of all three traditional Afrikaans-speaking churches include a heading 'Who are we?' Under this section heading, on all three webpages, there is a short overview of the South African history of the church. The Netherdutch Reformed Church of Africa includes a mission statement: To proclaim the good news, to share the community between believers, to provide service and to proclaim hope to all people (NHKA 2019). The Dutch Reformed Church (NGK) moves on to the confessions and a final sentence at the bottom of the page professes obedience to the Bible (Ngkerk 2019). The next menu item of the web page of the Reformed Churches of South Africa (GKSA) under this heading just adds links to the confessions of faith (GKSA 2022). It is therefore important to provide answers to important questions such as 'Who are we?' and 'What are we doing?' Pillars can provide important assistance in this regard, but before further expanding on the selected pillars, it is also important to show why the fourth revolution world is making these pillars even more important for Christians.

## The challenges of the fourth revolution world

Apart from the three major fourth revolutions, there are in fact a myriad of so-called fourth revolutions<sup>1</sup> currently active in the world, but here the focus will only be on the revolutions of communication, self-understanding and industry. It is important to note that these revolutions tend

1. A few examples are: The Fourth Food Revolution (D'odorico & Rulli 2013), the Fourth Revolution in the treatment of mental disorders (Magaro 1985), the Fourth Therapeutic Revolution (Levis 2017), and the Fourth Agricultural Revolution (Cape Business News 2020).

to complement and expand rather than replace their previous revolution results.

Regarding the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), there are two groundbreaking works, namely Klaus Schwab (2016) and Brynjolfsson and McAfee (2014). The World Economic Forum ([WEF] 2022) provides the following description:

The Fourth Industrial Revolution represents a fundamental change in the way we live, work and relate to one another. It is a new chapter in human development, enabled by extraordinary technology advances ... The speed, breadth and depth of this revolution is forcing us to rethink how countries develop, how organisations create value and even what it means to be human. The Fourth Industrial Revolution is about more than just technology-driven change; it is an opportunity to help everyone, including leaders, policymakers and people from all income groups and nations, to harness converging technologies in order to create an inclusive, human-centred future. The real opportunity is to look beyond technology and find ways to give the greatest number of people the ability to positively impact their families, organisations, and communities.

The 4IR is changing our way of living and of relating to one another. This revolution should bring us to a better understanding of who we are, who our fellow humans are and how we can find and use more and better ways to serve the Lord. In this way, we will grow into positive agents of change in society and in our commission as followers of Christ. Therefore, the 4IR links directly to both the 'who we are' and the 'what we do' pillars of faith.

The Fourth Communication Revolution (4CR) (cf. Harnad 1991) is defined by Warschauer and Matuchniak (2010; original emphasis) in the following words:

There is broad consensus among educators, communication scholars, sociologists, and economists that the development and diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICT) are having a profound effect on modern life. This is due to the affordances of new digital media, which bridge the interactive features of speech and the archival characteristics of writing; allow many-to-many communication among people without regard to time and space, including mass collaborative editing of texts; facilitate the creation of a global hyper-indexed multimodal information structure; and enable content production and distribution in both writing and multimedia on a scale previously unimaginable ... For all these reasons, computer-mediated communication can be considered a new *mode of information* ... or a 'fourth revolution in the means of production of knowledge ... following the three prior revolutions of language, writing, and print'. (p. 179)

Digital, multimodal global communication options can be used to proclaim the good news to the world and to support people and the environment with the key principle of Christianity: Love and care. 'On-line' is complementing 'in-person' borderless and has a potential global reach. Therefore, the pillars of faith can assist Christians to bring love, care and hope to the world by implementing the opportunities provided by the 4CR.

The Fourth Revolution of Self-understanding (4SU) was started by Alan Turing. Floridi (2014) narrated:

Previous revolutions have made us realise that we are not immobile, at the centre of the universe (Copernican revolution), that we are not unnaturally separate and diverse from the rest of the animal kingdom (Darwinian revolution), and that we are very far from being Cartesianly transparent to ourselves (Freudian revolution). We are now slowly accepting the idea that we might be informational organisms among many others, inforgs that are going to live and interact with other smart, engineered artefacts often not so different from biological agents (Turing revolution).

Turing displaced us from our privileged and unique position in the realm of logical reasoning, information processing and smart behaviour. We are no longer the undisputed masters of the infosphere. Our digital devices carry out more and more tasks that would require some thinking from us if we were in charge. We have been forced to abandon once again a position that we thought was 'unique'. (pp. 231, 232)

As followers of Christ, we are unique, both as a group and as individuals, but we also need to be humble and in service of others and the environment. To succeed, self-understanding plays a major role and basic pillars of faith can assist Christians to promote their self-understanding that will flow into positive actions.

Hopefully, more people, including the followers of Christ, will identify and implement the opportunities and developments that the 4IR, 4CR and the 4SU provide us with to rethink our Christian identity and strengthen our faith and the impact thereof within our specific circumstances (see Table 2). The four pillars that speak to our identity and actions as Christians are discussed next.

## Four basic pillars of faith

As already discussed, pillars of faith can be identified and tagged through the use of an array of biblical texts, dogmas, actions and ideas, linked to the Christian faith. Each individual and each congregation, denomination and church would probably identify unique and overlapping pillars. The aim here is not to select the most important or most popular pillars but to provide a few possible pillars that can be used to assist Christians in a fast-changing and demanding world to be and do what their faith requires of them. The pillars chosen are not final or unnegotiable. By identifying these pillars and showing their links to the challenges and opportunities provided by society, the aim is to stimulate debate and further development of the ideas presented to contribute towards positive reformation and transformation of South African Christianity.

The four basic pillars of faith identified and shortly discussed here were selected to provide a usable and relatable answer to the questions 'Who are we?', 'What are we doing?' and 'How do we function?' To a large extent neglected by South African Christianity, the selected pillars – two from the New Testament Scriptures and two from the Reformation movements, link Christian identity and life with real-world challenges.

The two pillars upon which Jesus founded the kingdom of God, namely the Great Commandment (cf. Mt 22:37–40) and the Great Commission (Mt 28:18–20), ensured that the search

is commenced first by focusing on the Bible and not on institutions or structures. From a reformed point of view, through history and with the current situation of the church and society in mind, the author wants to add two pillars, emanating from and building on these two foundational pillars – therefore not on the same level as the two biblical pillars – which are *Semper reformanda* and the *priesthood of all believers* (cf. Oliver 2021:2).

Building upon these pillars, the followers of Christ can think from a different starting point (away from the institutionalised church structures) and maybe build a 'new' and different movement of being 'church' that could also serve and assist the 'Churchless Christianity' (Oosthuizen 2018:153) or 'post-institutional Christianity' (Meylahn 2011:137) who are seeking different ways of proclaiming their faith and serving the Lord. Combining the four pillars of faith with the opportunities provided by the major revolutions and linking them to provide answers to the 'be' and 'do' questions regarding Christianity in South Africa, a rebuilding process should be initiated.

## God's Great Commandment

To be a follower of Christ – to receive eternal life – is a gift from God. In grateful response to God, we want to obey and serve him (Carlson-Thies 2021:200) – and the best way to act according to his will is to obey the Great Commandment, that is to love and to care. In Ephesians 4:22–24, the author states clearly what this implies: *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness* (emphasis added). The Great Commandment requires a mindset focused on God, on how to best love and serve him, then on our neighbours, on how to best love and serve them and then ourselves, on how to best equip ourselves to be faithful followers of Christ.

Crowther (2020) distinguished between what we are called to *be* and what we are called to *do*. The former<sup>2</sup> refers to Christlikeness, indicating the heart of our calling (Crowther 2020:3), always looking up to our Father and crying out, 'Abba, Father' (cf. Rm 8:15), living in total dependency on God. Through the Holy Spirit, this builds one's character in Christ, in line with Galatians 5:22–23 – being supplemented by the anointing that one has received (cf. Crowther 2020:4). The *do* part of a follower of Christ is generally called the priesthood of all believers.

## Jesus' Great Commission

The second biblical pillar is taken from the well-known words of the Great Commission in Matthew 28:[18]19–20 (also Mk 16:15–16; Lk 14:47–48; Jn 20:21; Ac 1:6). To 'proclaim' forms part of every believer's ministry, in the sense that we should live our Christian life in such a way that it would

<sup>2</sup> Many followers of Jesus wrongly think that obedience to God implies a task-oriented life above all (Crowther 2020:3).



become a proclamation, a form of witness to all who we come into contact with.

In Matthew 28:19–20, the focus is on ‘making disciples,’ as the latter (μαθητεύσατε) is the main verb (command) of the first sentence, with ‘go out,’ ‘baptise’ and ‘teach’ as participles, referring back to the main verb (cf. also Hesselgrave 2018:73). Therefore, a more interpretive translation of these two verses would be *Wherever you are, lead everyone you encounter to become a follower of Christ; then baptise them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them everything I taught you.* Here the focus is very much on proclaiming the word of God, on bearing witness and living a life like the example Jesus provided. John 20:21 captures Jesus’ words to his followers as follows: *As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.* Here it seems as if Jesus has transferred his *earthly mission* to his followers – and his mission was mainly to serve others, to love and to care (cf. Mt 20:28; Hesselgrave 2018:74). David Hesselgrave (2018) applied this on a wide range of activities:

The mission encompasses all that the church is sent into the world to do, including humanitarian service, and the quest for better social structures. In short, according to this view, social and political activities are partners of evangelism and church growth in the Christian mission. (p. 74)

Interestingly, Luther and Calvin, to some extent, did not apply the Great Commission of Jesus to anyone else than the early apostles. Could this be why the strong Calvinistic protestant Afrikaner churches that came to South Africa, for so long did not show a missionary spirit? (cf. Oliver 2011). In his *Career of the Reformer 1* (Vol 31 – Luther [1897] 1961), Luther argued:

That the apostles entered strange houses and preached was because they had a command and were for this purpose appointed, called, and sent, namely that they should preach everywhere, as Christ had said, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature’. After that, however, no one again received such a general apostolic command, but every bishop or pastor has his own particular parish. (pp. 201–211)

Calvin, in his *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* 12:28–31 (Calvin n.d.; original emphasis), added to that, also with specific reference to pastors (therefore, in fact not including missionaries):

[F]or the Lord created the Apostles, that they might spread the gospel throughout the entire world, and he did not assign to each of them certain limits or parishes, but would have them, wherever they went, to discharge the office of ambassadors among all nations and languages. In this respect there is a difference between them and *Pastors*, who are, in a manner, tied to their specific churches. For the *Pastor* has not a commission to preach the gospel over the whole world, but to take care of the Church that has been committed to his charge. (p. 347)

However, the Great Commission of God can also be understood in the sense of *missio Dei*<sup>3</sup> – the *mission of God* in which there is a close cooperation between the divine

3. *Missio Dei* has been expanded to missiological paradigms such as *missio Christos*, *missio Spiritus*, *missio hominum* and *missio ecclesiae* (cf. Thinane 2021:2 of 17). These paradigms obviously ‘receive their identities and are in essence organised towards accomplishing the goal of *Missio Dei*’ (Thinane 2021:2 of 17).

agency and the human response to it or actions because of it (cf. Konz 2018:1). The Great Commission as it is put forward in the Synoptic Gospels is more focused on witnessing, while the Commission of Jesus to his disciples-becoming-apostles in the Gospel of John is more on the level of the *missio Dei*, focusing more on love and care (cf. Cilliers 2021:23). This should be never done from an elevated position but with humility in our hearts and our actions. Luther allegedly wrote two days before his death: ‘We are indeed only beggars, telling other beggars where we found bread’ (cf. Cilliers 2021:25).

### ***Semper reformanda***<sup>4</sup>

Just like *Sola Scriptura* (cf. Oliver & Oliver 2020), *semper reformanda*<sup>5</sup> is wrongfully ascribed to the Reformation or even directly to Luther (Bush 1998; Koffeman 2015:1 of 5). Although the idea or notion of both these terms were present in the Reformation, the terms were hardly used (in the case of *Sola Scriptura*) or not used at all (in the case of *semper reformanda* – Atherstone 2010:31). Having its origin with Johannes Hornbeek in the 17th-century Netherlands during the Further Reformation<sup>6</sup> (Brienen, Exalto & Van Genderen 1986:93), the term *semper reformanda* refers to a continual reformation (Van Lodenstein 1674:241; cf. Douci & Douci 1729:65; Dreyer 2017:62) – a continual changing of the world to the good while spreading the Christian principles. Hoornbeek has pinpointed it as follows:

We must want to be called Reforming, and not simply Reformed, so that we must always be reforming if we want to be Reformed [i.e. if we want God to reform us]<sup>7</sup> and deserve the name. Otherwise we do not make the effort. (Koelman 1678:619; original emphasis)

Reformation, in the sense of *semper reformanda*, is therefore always in line with and according to the word of God (cf. Bush 1998). This kind of reformation constantly involves our faith and practice within the church and ourselves, which will never end, with the good reason given by Calvin in his *Institutes* 1.11.8: ‘[T]he mind of man[kind] is, if I may be allowed the expression, a perpetual manufactory of idols’ (*hominis ingenium perpetuam, ut ita loquar, esse idolorum fabricam*) (Calvin 2014:125; Calvino 1559:16). In his *Pauli ad Galatas* (Luther 1556:411), Luther puts it in a more balanced way when he states: *Simul ergo iustus, simul peccator* (*Therefore [one is] both righteous and a sinner*).

Faith (*be*) and practice (*do*) in the church should therefore constantly be reformed *back* to God, implying a constant repentance and commitment. Bush (1998) puts it in perspective:

4. For many churches *semper reformanda* wrongly refers to the words of Hermann Hill (2010:115): ‘*Verschiedene Kirchen beschäftigen sich mit Qualitätsmanagement und evaluieren ihre Organisationsentwicklung*’ [Many churches are busy with quality management and evaluating the development of their organisation].

5. The full phrase is *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* [the reformed church should always be reformed] (cf. Koffeman 2015:1 of 5). Van Ruler (1965:29) stated that a reformation contains a turbulent something.

6. This movement is called Pietism in Europe and Puritanism in England and America (Bush 1998).

7. The part between brackets is the (correct) interpretation made by Bush (1998).

[C]ontinual reformation is the result of the illuminating work of the Lord God through careful, clear-minded and prayerful attention to the words of Scripture applied to the faith and life of the church. Though it is necessary that the church be willing to be reformed according to the Word of God, such reformation is God's work, not ours.

The church's confidence should therefore always be in God, and not in its dogma, its 'forms, traditions and habits' (cf. Bush 1998). It should be neither dictated by current events, popular topics nor social and personal agendas.

*Semper reformanda* is built on a fixed principle, which is the Bible (*Sola Scriptura*),<sup>8</sup> complemented by an inconsistent principle, which is our *interpretation* of the Bible that needs continuous scrutiny (Vorster 2020:1 of 8; cf. Oliver & Oliver 2020), as how we understand God has implications for how we understand ourselves – who we actually are (Hauerwas 2015:70). Here, Wright (2005:46–47; cf. 2006:263) correctly argued:

We are bound to read the New Testament in its own first-century context ... The more we know about first-century Judaism, about the Greco-Roman world of the day, about archaeology, the Dead Sea Scrolls and so on, the more, in principle, we can be on firm ground in anchoring exegesis that might otherwise remain speculative, and at the mercy of massively anachronistic exegesis, into the solid historical context where – if we believe in inspired Scripture in the first place – that inspiration occurred.

As our actions, perceptions and worldviews are built on our interpretation of God's word, it must therefore be biblically shaped (Vorster 2020:5 of 8). This creates the space where we could shape our Christian character through justification and sanctification (cf. Calvin's *Institutes* 3.2.8; ed. McNeil, Vol. 1, 1960:552–553; cf. also Eph 4:24). Justification refers to a life being lived closer to God on a constant basis, striving to fully please God every day of our life, therefore always living responsibly before God. To do this, sanctification and holiness are required, referring to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us to shape us with his 'regenerative and transformative power' (Vorster 2020:5 of 8). This does not bring us to perfection because we as humans can only strive for perfection, never reaching it, but we must actively keep on striving (Bonhoeffer 2015:212; cf. Tanner 2019:374) – 'being a *praxis*' (Vorster 2020:5 of 8; original emphasis). This requires us to become God's prophets, priests and kings on Earth (cf. Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* 1.3.8 – ed. Schaff 1885a:123; Chrysostom *Third Homily 4 on 2 Cor 7 vs 21–22* – ed. Schaff 1885b:509; Calvin *Institutes* 2.15 – Calvin [1536] 1816:529–539<sup>9</sup>). Vorster (2020) summarises this as follows:

As Christ is its Head, justification its source and sanctification its goal, the church presents the main location for the formation of a Christian lifestyle. [The followers of Christ therefore become the] body of Christ, God's flock, God's family, the elect people of God, a royal priesthood, holy people, people of the way, priesthood of God, God's temple, God's vineyard, letter of

8.For a recent discussion on the inerrancy of Scripture (outside the scope of this article), read Biesbrouck (2020).

9.Here the three offices are called *prophetical, regal* and *sacerdotal*.

Christ, salt of the earth, people of God who proclaims his mighty deeds, etc. (pp. 5–6)

The followers of Christ should have public relationships – like Jesus had – and not only private ones (Adams 2019:232). Although Jesus was a Jew, he engaged with Gentiles, women and the ostracised people of society (Van der Kooi & Van den Brink 2017:473), sharing his 'empathy, hospitality ... respect, recognition, honesty and self-sacrifice' with them (Vorster 2020:7). Another action – like Jesus – is to have the courage of one's conviction and the bravery not to try to please the 'world', but, in all circumstances, to act in line with our faith. Jesus displayed the courage to take on the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were in fact the theologians of his time and He was brave enough to die on the cross for us. We must have the courage to face and address injustices (cf. Vorster 2020:7) or to protest it in a responsible way and always by starting with ourselves. We must have the courage to change our minds, turn away from heresies and self-made securities and train ourselves to always act in love and care – the pure love that God wants us to constantly display, emanating from his Great Command.

In many church institutions, stagnancy was the order of the day during the old normal – the pre-COVID-19 era – and when changes did take place, it was at a slow pace and normally accompanied by great resistance. This resulted in the current death spiral that is threatening the Afrikaans-speaking churches (Oliver 2019). Over against stagnation, Atherstone (2010:37) gave three good reasons why constant reformation is imperative:

- 'When reformation stops, deformation sets in ... this is a basic biblical principle'.
- 'Reassertion is reactive, reformation is proactive'. If a church stops reforming, it loses its initiative.
- 'Reassertion locks us into the past, reformation connects us with the present'.

*Semper reformanda* requires constant responsible change, back to the word of God. However, change does not mean innovation *per se* (Atherstone 2010:32) and it must be in line with divine guidelines. The church must constantly retranslate the word of God to herself and to society, constantly speaking the language of the day (the fourth revolution world and its consequences for our lives) to stay relevant and useful. According to Atherstone (2010:40, original emphasis), '*semper reformanda* means the rigorous reapplication of reformation principles to the theological questions of today'. *Semper reformanda* therefore requires a reformed identity for believers (Vorster 2020).<sup>10</sup> Barth (1956) adds the following to this:

*Semper reformari* ... does not mean always to go with the time, to let the current spirit of the age be the judge of what is true and false, but in every age, and in controversy with the spirit of the age, to ask concerning the form and doctrine and order and ministry which is in accordance with the unalterable essence of

10.Wright (2009:22–23) made this comment: 'The greatest honour we can pay the Reformers is not to treat them as infallible – they would be horrified at that – but to do as they did'.

the Church ... It means never to grow tired of returning not to the origin in time, but to the origin in substance of the community. (p. 705)

## The priesthood of all believers

This is (should be) faith in practice *par excellence*. Luther has already referred to this in his *Epistle of St. Peter and St. Jude*, arguing: '[W]e are all priests before God if we are Christians' (Luther 1859:106). Just as the priesthood of all believers is built upon *semper reformanda*, the *be* (discussed above) and the *do* (discussed here) are inseparable. The term 'priesthood of all believers' claims that *every follower of Christ is a priest*. Every follower displays their ministry of priesthood in a unique way with Colossians 3:23 in mind: *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord* (cf. also Eph 6:7). To be a follower of Christ is not a voluntary action and the *ecclesia* of Jesus is not a voluntary association (Johnson 2020). When one becomes a believer, the Holy Spirit supplies that person with a spiritual gift to be used in service of God and society, as a ministry, forming a part of the 'body of Christ' (1 Cor 12:27), with Christ as our head (Eph 4:15–16), becoming a branch of the living and life-giving vine of God (Jn 15:1–17).

The *do* part of faith starts at home where husbands and wives mutually love and respect each other (Eph 5:21–33), including a mutual love and respect between parents and children in the house (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:4). It extends to everybody who crosses our paths – the 'neighbour' to whom we, following the example of Jesus, show love and respect and provide with care and hope (cf. the Great Commandment). It also includes our subjection to earthly authorities and praying for them – especially our own government (Rm 13; 1 Tim 2:2).

In order for us to do all these things, God has gifted each of us with a spiritual gift<sup>11</sup> to live our Christian lives to the full (cf. Rm 12:6–20; 1 Cor 12). A spiritual gift is a 'newly augmented' natural ability given by God, through his Holy Spirit, to believers in Christ, with one purpose: To serve God and the neighbour. It is not done to be praised by others around us, but for us to praise God with what we do. Thus, everyone in the church or congregation has a special task: Therefore, *[i]f your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully* (Rm 12:6–8). 1 Corinthians 12:7–11 refers to the gifts of the Spirit as follows: *To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues and to still another the interpretation of tongues.*

11. It is imperative to notice that God has gifted each follower with one gift. The passages quoted here do not state that one can be gifted with two gifts or what one should do when being gifted with more than one of these gifts (in stark contrast to the popular 'Discover your spiritual gifts' course).

In addition to these and other Scriptures that can serve the basic pillars of faith (like living the fruit of the Holy Spirit – Ga 5:22–25), there are numerous other things that we as Christians need to do regularly or constantly. Most of these, including most of the actions mentioned earlier, such as prayer, obedience, selfless love, forgiveness, self-discipline, gratitude and worship, can be attached to the pillar of our priesthood.

## Who, what and where is the church in these turbulent times?

Finally, a few words on the ontology of the church. In this article, the author has mostly referred to the followers of Christ or believers who are God's people. Other scholars refer to them as 'Christians' or 'church'. Per implication, the church of God is not a specific church institution with specific dogmatic instructions or a church building or a place where we attend worship services, but in fact it is an *ecclesia* with Jesus as the heartbeat of the movement. Joubert (2009) made it clear:

The church is capable of existing without formal public worship, clergymen, offices and buildings, even though people may think it impossible. *Ecclesia* is common people with a living breathing profession of Jesus. (p. 129)

Hunt (2015) added to it:

These are people rich and poor, black and white and every shade in between who were estranged from God and one another, but who now share something profound in common: The Lord Jesus Christ. (p. 2)

All the followers of Christ need to increasingly become like and display Jesus in their lives (Jesus-centred), in the way he revealed God to us (Dever 2007:40).

Currently, we are living between the COVID-19 and the so-called post-COVID-19 era. What people need most during these troubling times are love and care and hope. Bishop Maoponga correctly argued:

The very form of church is the individual, and without a church in your heart you are wasting your time in a building. Right now we have been told that churches are a holy place, but I am so glad churches have finally been closed. People can finally look for God for themselves. (Mathe 2020)

His conviction is that digital ministry will prosper in the future, with pastors who have a real relationship with their congregants and with vibrant cell groups. The building will fall away and people will contribute to specific programmes of the church.

Through the grace of God, we have the right to be called and identify ourselves as 'children of God' (Jn 1:12). Therefore, we can live our lives in grateful obedience to do God's will, giving love and care and proclaiming hope. The basic pillars of faith provide answers to our Christian identity and how we should put our faith into action.



**TABLE 1:** The four basic pillars of faith on who we are and what we do as Christians.

| The four pillars                     | Christian implementation of the pillars   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| <b>The Great Commandment</b>         |   |
| Who we are?                          | What we do?   |
| Children of God                      | Love and care   |
| Christ-like through the grace of God |   |
| <b>The Great Commission</b>          |   |
| Who we are?                          | What we do?   |
| Witnesses of God's grace             | Proclaim the good news through service of love and care   |
| <b>Semper reformanda</b>             |   |
| Who we are?                          | What we do?   |
| Christ-like believers                | Agents of positive change and continuous transformation under God's guidance<br>Reapplying principles of faith to current circumstances |
| <b>Priesthood of all believers</b>   |   |
| Who we are?                          | What we do?   |
| Priests<br>People of the way         | Apply our ministry and gifts in service of God, to others and the environment   |

**TABLE 2:** The fourth revolution world and COVID-19 pandemic environment.

| Require a response from Christians | Challenges   | Which pillar does it connect to?                 |
|------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>4IR</b>                         |  |  |
| Who we are?                        | Change what it means to be human   | The Great Commandment                            |
| What we do?                        | Change the way we live, work and relate to others<br>Opportunities   | Semper reformanda<br>Priesthood of believers     |
| What we do?                        | To get the greatest amount of people to make a positive impact   | The Great Commission<br>Priesthood of believers  |
| <b>4CR</b>                         |  |  |
|                                    | Challenges/Opportunities   |  |
| What we do?                        | Borderless communication has potential global reach, without time and space limits   | The Great Commission                             |
| <b>4SU</b>                         |  |  |
|                                    | Challenges   |  |
| Who we are?                        | Humans are not the undisputed masters of the infosphere<br>Opportunities   | The Great Commandment                            |
| What we do?                        | Humble service to others and the environment   | Semper reformanda<br>Priesthood of believers     |
| <b>COVID-19</b>                    |  |  |
|                                    | Challenges   |  |
| Who we are?                        | Stay true to our faith in difficult times  | The Great Commandment                            |
| What we do?                        | Show and give love and care and hope<br>Opportunities  | Priesthood of believers                          |
| What we do?                        | Stay true to who we are by serving God and others in a borderless environment (without buildings and dogmas and other church limitations) in turbulent times | The Great Commission<br><i>semper reformanda</i> |

Table 1 and Table 2 bring together and show the links between the challenges and opportunities of the world we are living in with the four pillars of faith.

## Conclusion

The fourth revolution world has already changed the way in which we live and relate to others, what it means to be human, our self-understanding, how we communicate and how we impact others and the environment. These changes and challenges provide us with opportunities to change our minds and adjust our attitudes in order to become active

bearers of God's Great Commandment and his Great Commission and bring positive change, love and care as his priests through our ministries and gifts.

The four basic pillars, identified here, relate to our identity and actions as Christians. The pillars also provide guidelines about who we should *be* and what we should *do* to be the light and salt to the fast-changing, revolutionary society.

God provided the first pillar or guideline through his Great Commandment to love and to care, to love and serve him primarily and also to love and care for one another. The second pillar complements the first. This is Jesus' Great Commission – to witness to everybody that we encounter in a Jesus-like manner through love and care. These two pillars imply that the believers will have to constantly turn their entire life and ministry to focus on God, to constantly reform themselves and their actions according to the third pillar of *semper reformanda*, to stay true to God's word and will. The last pillar, like the third, requires from the followers of Jesus to act in accordance with their faith by implementing (do) their spiritual gift and ministry to the full. This is faith in action; this is where God wants the followers of Christ to be – 24/7. These four pillars can provide a functional foundation upon which God's *ecclesia* and a renewed Christianity in South Africa can be built and maintained despite the challenges and changes it needs to withstand.

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