

Can we live a good life? Engaging Kretzschmar's social ethics

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Louise Kretzschmar has served society, the church and academia as a person who has shaped minds in the fields of Christian spirituality, leadership and ethics. This article seeks to celebrate Kretzschmar's work as she retires from full-time academia. This article describes Kretzschmar's notion of a good life, asks why Christians fail in following this good life and concludes by outlining the social-ethical contribution Kretzschmar's approach can make in society.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article addresses the question of social ethics and its relationship with the processes of spiritual formation and leadership. The argument is based in the Christian faith conviction, with specific reference to the theological position argued by Prof. Louise Kretzschmar.

Keywords: ethics; Louise Kretzschmar; Christian spirituality; Christian leadership; Christian ethics.

Introduction

The year 2021 marked the retirement from full-time academia of a dear friend and colleague, Professor Louise Kretzschmar. Her name is synonymous with the disciplines of Christian ethics, leadership and spiritual formation. One would imagine that the relationship between these disciplines is somewhat detached, specifically from an academic perspective, but Kretzschmar's approach has been inspiring and innovative. Having taught these disciplines at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, Kretzschmar maintains that these disciplines should not be seen as separate and independent entities, but while being distinct, ethics, leadership and spiritual formation fuse into each other in a somewhat 'trinitarian' manner. When incorporated into one's decision-making processes and personal conduct, these together make for what Kretzschmar terms *a good life*¹ – a life characterised by virtues and values such as integrity, honesty, justice, grace and, above all, the gift of love. In this article, I celebrate the work of Louise Kretzschmar by reflecting on her contribution to social ethics. This article will describe what Kretzschmar means by 'a good life', specifically within the context of a Christian faith conviction. Secondly, this article will interrogate reasons why poor expressions of 'a good life' manifest in Christian communities. Lastly, this article will propose what the effects of a Christian 'good life' may look like if it were to be more widely practised. Throughout the discussion, the reader may note how Kretzschmar integrates Christian ethics, leadership and spiritual formation in her work.

Before we embark on this discussion, it would be fitting to place Kretzschmar and her theological approach in context. From 'where does she speak?', to use the Ricoeurian axiom (Verhoef 2018). Kretzschmar is a South African theologian who has taught Christian ethics for the past three decades. She is the author of more than 85 publications in academic journals, book chapters and monographs. Kretzschmar hails from the Baptist tradition, specifically forming part of the Baptist Convention of South Africa, a Christian denomination with a strong social justice emphasis.² From this vantage point, Kretzschmar has extensive experience in cross-cultural ministry that has fed into her academic work, giving her a broad social perspective with a very clear passion for promoting the Christian life in such a manner that will affect change in society. As a friend and colleague, it is evident that, to Kretzschmar, the Christian life is not merely an academic or a compartmentalised spiritual exercise, but it is best expressed when it permeates every aspect of one's living and being.

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1.The phrase 'a good life' was for Kretzschmar the central idea as she led the writing, editing and publication of *What is a Good Life? An Introduction to Christian Ethics in 21st Century Africa* (eds. Kretzschmar, Bentley & Van Niekerk 2009). This publication became a textbook for Christian ethics students at several institutions of higher learning and served as valuable resource for those who share an interest in the field of Christian ethics.

2.See Kretzschmar (1989) for a brief history of the Baptist Convention's formation and social justice work.

The vision that she has for a Christian life is one that leads to real and significant social change, and this is the measure to which she holds herself – believing that one’s Christian conviction needs to impact positively in the life and life experiences of one’s immediate and broader community. Students often comment on Kretzschmar’s conduct and manner, indicating that she practises what she preaches and is therefore a credible role model as a tutor, minister and human being. She strives to live a *good life* and to convey this notion in the curriculum she taught and the research she continues to conduct. It is in the context of a young constitutional democracy that South Africans are on a journey of self-discovery, unwrapping what it means not only to be South African but to be human in a pluralistic society. Further than this, we are finding our feet in what it means to be a *good* human and a *good* citizen so that we may all share in the hope and promise of living a *good* life. Kretzschmar’s work speaks to this context and this social quest, encouraging the manifestation of people becoming good people and in turn promoting the existence of good communities and, ultimately, a good society. This leads us to the first question: what exactly is a *good life*?

What is a good life?

Kretzschmar does not pretend to provide a definitive answer to this question or to give a generic description that is a one-size-fits-all for the diversity of people, cultures and religions in South Africa. Instead, she sticks to her roots and attempts to answer this question from the perspective of the Christian faith. Her audience are those who identify as being Christian and who ask this question from their specific faith perspective. It is important to Kretzschmar that one should claim, own and celebrate one’s faith conviction and not to be apologetic about the religion with which one identifies (Kretzschmar 1997:313). Religious conviction in a person’s life is one of the foundational instruments through which one gains an understanding of personal morality and acceptable conduct and hence should be acknowledged and interrogated fully in the quest for attaining a *good life*. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa³ recognises this point and hence places a major emphasis on people’s freedom, not only to identify with a particular faith expression but to practise their religion as part of their social contribution (Bentley 2012:91; Republic of South Africa 1996). In this regard, two points stand out in Kretzschmar’s work.

The first is that, to Christians, a *good life* is inspired and infused by the Christian gospel. By this, Kretzschmar understands it to mean that Christians ought to primarily embark on a journey whereby they are formed into the likeness of Christ (Kretzschmar 2020:2). To *be* a Christian entails a process of *becoming* and cannot mean that a person merely adopts the Christian faith conviction as one would become a member of a social club. This process of *becoming* (more like Christ) is the journey of spiritual formation. Kretzschmar is specific in describing spiritual formation as the process whereby ‘... persons consciously and voluntarily

3. See the Preamble and section 15.

enter a God-initiated process of becoming like Christ’ (Kretzschmar 2006:344). This definition is important as it steers away from the idea that a *good life* is a form of salvation by works, a means of earning one’s redemption through the act of moral living. As this is a God-initiated process, Kretzschmar’s definition resonates with Wesley’s three forms of grace (Wesley 1765): prevenient grace (the grace which goes before us and invites us into fellowship with God), justifying grace (the grace which leads us to live a good and righteous life) and sanctifying grace (the grace which leads the person to holiness – a *good life*). The process of inner renewal, or in Kretzschmar’s words, spirituality or spiritual formation, has a direct impact on a person’s awareness of their role in becoming agents of change in their context (Kretzschmar 2006:343). To become Christlike is to adopt a life whereby the inner spiritual journey has a tangible outworking in one’s social context. To become like Jesus means that one must follow Jesus’ teaching, a teaching that directs his followers to a kind of faith that is not as concerned with religious piety as it is with the practical demonstration of ‘loving one’s neighbour’. Matthew 25:31–40 serves as a good example, where Jesus proclaimed a socially responsible faith that extended beyond the walls of the Temple or synagogue and reached into people’s homes, their communities and even the places designated for keeping one’s bad neighbour at bay. The motive for such works stems from the growing awareness that one’s existence is rooted in a greater reality (Kretzschmar 2008:66; Prozesky 2006:132–133), a reality which professes Jesus as Lord and makes one not only a good citizen of one’s society and country but a good citizen of the kingdom of God.⁴

This leads us to the second point raised in Kretzschmar’s work, posed in the form of a question: ‘What is essential to being a Christian: believing the right things or doing the right things?’ (Kretzschmar 1997:313). Where the first point proposed that the Christian life is a life in process but a life that is known by its fruit, this question proposes that Christians need to find the balance between belief and action, faith and works, and discipleship and social responsibility. The question is somewhat misleading as it may be assumed that Kretzschmar suggests a mutually exclusive dualism between the inner journey and the outer workings of one’s faith, but this is not the case. Both orthodoxy and orthopraxis are required to live a good life; the kind of faith journey we embark on determines the moral agency of the person in their immediate context. Kretzschmar (2010) words it like this:

For a Christian, moral agency is the desire to be a good person and, enabled by God, the growing ability to do what is right, both in one’s personal life and in one’s social interactions and responsibilities. (p. 585)

Kretzschmar unpacks this further in a later article. I summarise her argument as follows: Christian responsibility requires Christian spirituality, which entails the process of growing deeper in one’s relationship with God (Kretzschmar

4. This point is discussed in detail in Hauerwas’ (1991) book, ‘*The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*.’

2014b:7). As spirituality deepens, the effect is a personal ability to act justly and responsibly (Kretzschmar 2014b:8). To act justly and responsibly requires a person to develop courage to take a personal moral stand in one's context but also to expose moral evil in society (Kretzschmar 2014b:8). This capacity to affect change is what Kretzschmar then defines as *Christian leadership*. The term 'leadership' may be interpreted to refer to those who find themselves in structural leadership roles. Although Kretzschmar addresses this definition of leadership (Kretzschmar 2014b:2) and promotes the idea that those who find themselves occupying leadership positions should lead in accordance with the tenets of their Christian convictions, leadership is demonstrated in all strata of social interactions where people who hold to their beliefs become agents of change, morality and ethical behaviour. The indispensable relationship between spiritual formation and the exercise of Christian leadership is described by Kretzschmar (2006) as follows:

Spiritual formation is indispensable for Christian leaders first because it results in a wider vision of reality and a deepened engagement with society. Second, it enables leaders to live the spiritual and moral vision of the Christian gospel. Third, it helps them to avoid moral and other pitfalls. Fourth, it helps leaders to open the gate to truth, for example, within psychological and business management studies of leadership. Finally, spiritual formation enables leaders increasingly to discern good and evil in the world and to reflect on their own ministries with greater honesty and discernment. (p. 338)

Christians, whether in formal leadership positions or who become agents of change in their contexts, grow in their capacity to affect social change by committing themselves to a process of personal transformation in accordance with their Christian faith convictions. This said, Kretzschmar raises another important point, namely that Christian spirituality and leadership do not happen in individually vacuumed spaces. By this is meant that each person, if they practised a form of individualised and personalised faith with a correlating moral framework, would adhere to a faith and morality that would be subject only to the definition and scrutiny of the individual themselves, leaving the Christian faith open to interpretation and application. This cannot be. To be called a Christian, or to identify with the Christian faith, is to recognise that one forms part of a broader community which contributes to one's spiritual growth and hence is also the group that holds one accountable both for one's faith expression as well as one's moral conduct (Kretzschmar 2010:570). Although, as Kretzschmar states: 'A central locus of moral agency is the consciousness, character, choices and lifestyle of the individual' (Kretzschmar 2010:569), such an individual is accountable to the community of faith,⁵ the broader community⁶ and ultimately to God (Kretzschmar 2020:3).

5. In another link to the Methodist tradition, one may here refer to the practice of spiritual and moral accountability through the example of the Methodist class meeting. Here, Christians committed to regular fellowship for the purpose of spiritual support, encouragement and accountability (Maddox 2003:124).

6. The Christian is accountable to the wider community in the sense that their Christian faith convictions and moral agency should contribute towards the well-being of society. Their faith and moral code should not be used oppressively to impose these convictions and moral code on those who do not adhere to the Christian faith but

In summary, for the Christian, to live a *good life* is to live a life which:

- responds to God's gift of grace
- commits to a journey of becoming more Christlike (spiritual formation)
- is aware that one's faith finds expression through one's actions and conduct (ethical and moral awareness)
- dedicates one's efforts to affect positive change in one's context (showing leadership)
- shows accountability to the community of faith, the wider community and to God.

A *good life* should be such that it inspires hope, morality and Christlike living (Kessler & Kretzschmar 2015:3) in the contexts where Christians find themselves.

Why is it difficult for Christians to live a good life?

In theory, living a good life seems uncomplicated and a worthwhile way in which to devote one's life. Yet, Kretzschmar notes, Christians find it extremely difficult to commit to such a life. Speaking from her context, Kretzschmar raises the question of rife immorality, unethical and inhumane behaviour, especially among leaders on the African continent, where millions of people subscribe to the Christian faith (Kretzschmar 2006:341). If there are so many Christians on the African continent, then why do we witness so much suffering caused by corruption, greed, maladministration, and the abuse of social and political power? Surely, if most if not all Christians are committed to spiritual formation (seeking to grow in Christlikeness), dedicating their lives to living out their faith through their actions and conduct and accountable to one another, then sins like these should be exposed and contested, making for a more just and moral society that will benefit everyone. This is clearly not the case. Why is it then so difficult for Christians, not only in Africa, but right around the world to live a *good life*?

Kretzschmar (1998) offers several reasons. The first is captured in the focus of her study in her doctoral thesis, namely the tendency to privatise the Christian faith. By this Kretzschmar means that the Christian faith is stripped of its social emphasis and is replaced with a type of faith which serves to the benefit of the individual or a specific group (Kretzschmar 1997:318). She describes the privatised expression of the Christian faith as follows:

A privatised faith is based on a dualism which separates reality into different spheres: the physical and the spiritual; the secular and the sacred; the public and the private; the saving of souls and social involvement. Personal religious transformation is encouraged but the application of religion to social structures is frowned upon. (Kretzschmar 1997:314)

It is understandable that a privatised expression of the Christian faith is appealing, especially to those who find

..... should speak a universal language which encourages and inspires general moral behaviour, irrespective of which faith convictions are practised in that context (Moll & Kretzschmar 2017).

themselves in the context of extreme poverty in Africa. The rapid growth of Pentecostal movements in Africa, specifically those that emphasise a prosperity gospel, cannot be ignored. The Christian faith is 'sold' to alleviate poverty and comes to the rescue of individuals caught in the trap of structural sin (Maxwell 1998). The message they proclaim is not one of addressing social and structural injustices, but it draws the individual into the belief that orthodoxy leads to personal well-being. The person should acknowledge their own sin, repent and find their way back to God, who in turn secures for them a life free of suffering. Gauging whether the prosperity movements have had any notable successes in this regard, Togarasei (Togarasei 2011:341–350) comments that this kind of gospel fails in affecting real and lasting social change. Pentecostal Christianity should, however, not be vilified. Where Pentecostal Christianity focuses on sustainable development (social) and not the prosperity gospel (individual), poverty reduction is indeed possible (Togarasei 2011:349). The emphasis is then on the larger social context and not only on the individual's spiritual standing.

Kakwata (2017) further notes that the rise of prosperity Christianity in Africa can be attributed to the fact that the traditional Western development theories and Western portrayals of the Christian faith have not succeeded in satisfactorily addressing the problems of poverty and development in the African context. Kretzschmar's understanding (Kretzschmar 1998:186–235) resonates with this view, stating that in the African context, Christianity has historically been used by the colonial powers to play to their own advantage. The privatisation of the Christian faith, whether it is to the benefit of individuals or structures (historical or political), does not consider the well-being of society. It is not a social gospel and errs on the side of making tangible needs trivial by the process of spiritualising existential problems. How does it benefit anyone to spiritualise the gospel to such an extent, where even Jesus' references to hunger and poverty are translated to mean 'purely spiritual needs' (Kretzschmar 1997:314)?

This leads us to Kretzschmar's second point. Besides the expansion of a privatised Christianity (for the benefit of individuals or structures), one also finds a lack of spiritual formation. As noted in the previous section of this article, Kretzschmar places high importance on the understanding that Christianity involves a journey of becoming Christlike, meaning that those who adhere to the faith are always in process of deepening their relationship with God and then living it out socially. Kretzschmar lays the blame for a lack of spiritual formation at the feet of the institutional church. Critiquing her own tradition, she comments that '[t]hey have adopted the evangelistic and church planting missionary model of the Apostle Paul at the expense of Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God' (Kretzschmar 1989:113). This is not to say that evangelism and church planting are counterproductive to the cause of the Christian gospel. Kretzschmar's critique of the church is on the quantitative emphasis of the question of 'how many souls have been

saved?' or 'how many churches have we established?' In contrast, churches should focus on the existential and lasting changes that have been affected in communities because of their evangelical and missionary work. Lasting change cannot happen when there is an absence or lack of spiritual journey of those who have been touched by the Christian gospel.

Therefore, the church has a responsibility to not only proclaim a gospel which entails a personal salvific journey that leads to transformation but also to accompany those who have embarked on the journey to become agents of change themselves within their contexts. The emphasis on personal salvation without spiritual growth inevitably leads to spiritual immaturity, which in turn promotes dysfunctional and selfish lifestyles that do harm to the Christian cause (Kretzschmar 2006:339). The lavish lifestyles of prosperity gospel preachers, who mainly acquire their income through the sacrificial giving of the poorest of the poor, paint a picture of a so-called *good life* which does nothing tangible in return for the multitudes who gather hungry, naked and ill. It is a life, nonetheless one that is aspired to, or shall we say that it is desired? This desired life, in effect, is a life free from the suffering experienced daily by many who adhere to the teaching of this brand of Christianity. If desire leads to the search for a faith which will miraculously solve our problems of suffering, then Kretzschmar argues, '... desire needs to be trained' (Kretzschmar 2015:7). It is the church's task to firstly portray a gospel which is true to the teachings of Christ (a teaching which is in solidarity with the poor and does not exploit them). Secondly, the church needs to embrace the responsibility of accompanying Christians on their spiritual journey, which emphasises love for one's neighbour in the same measure as love for self. This kind of Christian spiritual journey is never devoid of a social dynamic and becomes an act of protest against structural evils that exploit the most vulnerable (Kretzschmar 2006:343).

Why is it that Christians and the church do not follow this path in the Christian faith and rather opt for a version of Christianity that makes the false promise of personal prosperity? Here, too, Kretzschmar shares some thoughts. Perhaps the biggest dilemma Christians face is that they are quite accepting of the notion of justification, but the process of sanctification poses a huge personal problem (Kretzschmar 1997:312). A salvation that focuses on justification but neglects the process of sanctification is a privatised faith, which leads us back to Kretzschmar's first point. Is it that Christians are ignorant of the implications for one's daily life when accepting the invitation to form part of the Christian faith (Kretzschmar 1997:314)? It may very well be as Christianity, especially the prosperity gospel, tends to place a greater emphasis on *turning* to Jesus than it does in accompanying adherents to *follow* Jesus. Further to this, Kretzschmar (1997) argues that:

For many people, belief implies merely intellectual acquiescence, that is, a theoretical affirmation of a certain doctrine without any intention to live in such a way as to give expression to this belief. (p. 311)

A lack of spiritual formation is once again a culprit in this case. Kretzschmar rightly argues that spiritual formation requires a morality that is costly to self and is hence not a road often explored (Kretzschmar 2015:2) by Christians or the institutional church. Who wants to join a religion where one is asked to deny yourself, to pick up your cross and follow Jesus (Mt 16:24)? This is particularly true for those who already find themselves in the context of poverty, illness and suffering. A prosperity gospel will gain much more traction and will benefit the numerical game churches play in the drive to get a greater membership base, especially among the most vulnerable in society. The church's proclamation and motive then come into question. To whose benefit is it for the poor to be saved? Let us take it a step further: to whose benefit is it for the poor to be saved through the proclamation of a prosperity gospel?

Where a gospel is proclaimed which is in solidarity with the poor and marginalised, and adherents are accompanied on a journey of affecting social change because of their faith, then the exploitative practices of political, economic and ecclesiastical leaders cannot remain unchallenged. Where spiritual formation is taken seriously, moral formation follows, and evil is exposed while justice is demanded (Kretzschmar 2015:4). Christian spirituality is an embodied spirituality, needing an outward manifestation of an inner transformation taking place in each person who professes to be a disciple of Christ (Kretzschmar 2006:343). Any form of Christianity that denies this embodied approach is rendered a privatised and intellectual spirituality which only benefits the self and/or their group.

Kretzschmar's third point in response to the question of why Christians struggle to live a *good life* is that Christian morality is often relativised. It needs to be said, and Kretzschmar agrees with this point, that using Christianity as a measure for morality, especially in the African context is problematic. Christianity has been the front through which colonialism made its imprint in various contexts (not only Africa) and hence the question whether Christianity and its moral code can be trusted (Kretzschmar 2015:9–10). To this question, the response that Christianity which only serves the individual and/or a specific group should not be deemed to be true to the s(S)pirit of Jesus' good news. The Christianity to which Jesus calls his followers is a faith which stems from a moral vision, revealed by God in the person of Jesus Christ, which leads to the formation of moral character in the individual to the benefit of the community and society, leading to action which promotes a *good life* for all (Kretzschmar 2012:127). The inclusive nature of Christ's message is important, as Kretzschmar (2014b) defines moral evil or sin as follows:

Moral evil or sin begins with alienation from God, leads to self-deceit and results in destructive actions in social relationships and towards creation. Evil perverts and distorts what is good. (p. 9)

Where sin and evil break down relationships, it is the nature of the gospel to seek reconciliation. Reconciliation is not

possible where there is injustice. In turn, justice is only possible where there is a communal social contract which ensures dignity and the well-being of all, especially those who find themselves on the margins.

'Christian ethics is concerned with good, right, true and loving relationships with other people, just interactions within society and the appropriate utilisation of the natural environment' (Kretzschmar 2012:127). The uncomfortable nature of the Christian gospel is that in its call to Christians to love their neighbours, it requires Christ-followers to move beyond the parameters of a gospel which is self-seeking and self-gratifying. Taking a step in another's shoes, engaging with the sins (structural and personal) that facilitate marginalisation, requires a level of empathy which can only be attained once one opens oneself to the vulnerability of being exposed to different contexts and perspectives (Kretzschmar 1997:315–316). Privatised faith will shape and mould Christian morality to fit the interests of self. An engaging and embodied faith that dares to take a walk in uncomfortable places and situations is part of the person's spiritual journey, the formation of a moral and ethical consciousness and should lead to just action. Such a person becomes a Christian leader in that context, being an agent of change in the name of the One whom they profess to follow (Kretzschmar 2006:339). Spiritual formation is hence essential for moral formation (Kretzschmar 2006:339), which in turn leads to the practice of ethical and moral behaviour (Christian leadership) (Kretzschmar 2015:2).

To summarise

Christians struggle to live a *good life* because:

- Christians tend to choose a privatised version of their faith.
- The church has neglected its duty to assist with spiritual formation.
- Christian morality is relativised for the sake of benefitting the individual and/or their group and therefore lacks a communal structure.

If the Christian *good life* were to be practised, what would the effect be?

What effects will a good life have on society?

It needs to be reiterated that Kretzschmar does not seek to promote the idea of a 'Christian society' but speaks prophetically to the church and to Christians, reminding them of the moral imperative which is required of those who follow the Christian gospel. Christians make up most of the population on the African continent, and, when taking their calling seriously, they should not refrain from standing up against evil which persists in communities. In the same measure as everyone is affected by immoral and unethical behaviour, so too can everyone benefit from moral and ethical behaviour (Kretzschmar 2014:5); Christian morality is not

only for Christians but is communal in nature and should seek to promote life for all, irrespective of divergent faith traditions and other reasons for segregation.

To the Christian, the vision of a *good life* serves as an 'interpretive framework ... within which reality is perceived' (Kretzschmar 2006:346). The world is seen in a new light, and the kingdom of God is not seen as an external entity descending from heaven but a movement within this lived reality in which justice, compassion, love and healing can be facilitated. This makes the gospel of Christ political, as it needs to distinguish between good and evil, resist evil and promote that which is just, loving and good (Kretzschmar 1989:104–105). The church therefore cannot serve as a silent partner in society, allowing politics, economics or any other narrative to break and destroy the harmony in which God intended for life to flourish. The church's voice starts with the individual. It requires the individual to seek a deeper relationship with God and, through the process of spiritual formation, become increasingly aware of their moral responsibility in society to become an agent of positive and healing change (Kretzschmar 2010:574–575).

This life moves the focus of the Christian expression away from a hedonistic lifestyle and towards a life in service to the greater whole (Moll & Kretzschmar 2017). Where a self-centred Christianity leads to narcissism, patronage and greed (Kretzschmar 2020:7), the communal nature of the gospel nurtures a society which is accountable and responsible to one another (Kretzschmar 2020:6). In such a society, every voice is heard, and it is the community's responsibility to seek justice, especially for those who find themselves alienated and marginalised. Communal needs become the focus of ministry (Kretzschmar 2012:137), because as Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 12:26, suffering is never to be individualised, for suffering in its very nature affects the entire community. Christians, the church or Christian communities can take hands with other stakeholders such as business and political structures and affect real and meaningful change where it really matters (Kretzschmar 2014a:9–10). This is the expression of Christian leadership.

On a smaller scale, individual Christians need to be agents of change in their families, in their places of work (Kretzschmar 2012) and other social contexts, for where Christian leadership is shown and ethical and moral behaviour follow, the small seeds of the kingdom of God eventually make a big and tangible difference in society. It can be said that Kretzschmar's vision of Christianity resonates well with the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. This is true, but Kretzschmar levels a challenge to both the African philosophy of *ubuntu* as well as Christianity: for real change to take place in society, we cannot only adopt the theory of *ubuntu* or Christianity, but we need to put in practice the ethics of *ubuntu* and/or Christianity (Kretzschmar 2008:90). Then, and only then, will we see tangible changes taking place for the benefit of society.

Conclusion

Kretzschmar's interplay between spiritual formation, Christian leadership and ethics provides a strong theoretical and practical basis for the Christian faith to become transformative in society. The adage 'to be so spiritually minded that one is of no earthly good' is exactly the kind of Christianity which Kretzschmar seeks to challenge. As people who adhere to the Christian faith, people who make up most of the population on the African continent, the mandate and power is within our grasp to affect change that is beneficial for all, all people and all of nature. The communal nature of the *good life* is not self-seeking but is a life which is a good life for everyone. This requires an understanding of self, an awareness of needs that exist around us and a commitment in the name of Jesus to make a difference.

I hereby celebrate Kretzschmar's work and wish to thank her for her Christian witness, shaping the hearts, minds and hands of numerous students through the years. Hers is an understanding of the Christian faith which makes Christians uncomfortable. More so, when Christians dare to take a step into the field of discomfort, those who perpetuate evil, even if they hold power, come face-to-face with a movement which demands accountability, justice, community and love.

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Author's contribution

W.B. is the sole author of this article.

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