

Dialectica reconciliae: Mazamisa's contribution to the historical development of New Testament Interpretation in South Africa

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This article attempts to position Prof Mazamisa's possible contribution to the historical development of New Testament interpretation in South Africa. This investigation is based mainly on his PhD dissertation project published in the Netherlands, Kampen University. This article attempts to navigate through New Testament interpretation in South Africa from the early 1970s until 1987, when Mazamisa attained his doctoral dissertation. This article argues that Mazamisa's approach to reading the New Testament text can be considered a possible bridge between the so-called 'white versus black hermeneutics', to bring reconciliation in this long-standing debate in South African hermeneutics. This could happen through what Mazamisa called 'Dialectica Reconciliae'.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: This article has intradisciplinary implications within the fields of New Testament studies and South African hermeneutics, while also opening up opportunities for interdisciplinary exploration at the intersections of theology, sociology, philosophy, education, cultural studies, and conflict resolution. It suggests that Mazamisa's approach may offer insights into resolving long-standing debates within South African hermeneutics.

Keywords: Dialectica Reconciliae; hermeneutics; historical development; New Testament in South Africa; Mazamisa; Bernard Lategan; Ferdinand Deist; Hennie Rossouw; Pieter de Villiers.

Introduction

South Africa has for a long time been characterised by an antithetical reading of the biblical text(s). To put it bluntly, one is white and the other is black. At the height of their academic sophistication, one was immanent (structuralist) and the other was Marxist (materialistic). Now there is talk of African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH), at variance with Biblical Hermeneutics, which could be Western Biblical Hermeneutics (WBH). In the light of this scholarly contention, perhaps it becomes necessary to contemplate the potential scholarly contribution that may have had transpired both interpreters (i.e. WBH & ABH) diligently taking into consideration Mazamisa's seminal work, first published in 1987. The nuanced examination of Mazamisa's contributions can profoundly shape and enrich the discourse within the academic domain, thereby augmenting the depth and comprehensiveness of their respective interpretations. The South African discourse on the interpretation of the biblical text can be over the idea of black and white; if not, at least the exchange would be more fruitful and meaningful. Botha (2015) comments that:

[D]uring the nineteen eighties numerous meaningful booklets were published by Christian groups on social analysis and against an apartheid society. Less known, but extremely powerful, four black Dutch Reformed theologians in South Africa (Doctors Govender, Mazamisa, Mofokeng and Ntoane) wrote similar sophisticated doctorate theses. (pp. 69–70)

These so-called 'extremely powerful, four black Dutch Reformed theologians' later became ministers of the so-called Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa 'URCSA'. The special interest of this article is to focus on the work of Prof. Lewellyn Welile Mazamisa, as the title of the article suggests.

This article aims to position Mazamisa's contribution to New Testament interpretation in South Africa. Sadly, his contribution has never been well received or known by his generation. In assessing his contribution to the development of the history of hermeneutics in South Africa, this article limits itself to the reading of Mazamisa's doctoral thesis, titled 'Beatific comradeship',

published in Kampen in 1987. This reading will proceed alongside a few selected articles that have shown interest in the development of hermeneutics in South Africa.

A brief biography of Welile Mazamisa, the erupting other and the Comrade of God

Welile Mazamisa, is among early South African theologians who have demonstrated a thorough going-comprehension of German philosophical hermeneutics, and has applied it effectively in this struggle of the trajectories of theological interpretation in South Africa. He was born on the 10th of August 1942 in Korsten, Port Elizabeth (Gqeberha). Raised mostly by his grandparents, he grew up in Kimberly, where he matriculated from Green Point High School. Subsequently, he moved to Umtata, where he did his initial 7-year theological training at the De Coligny Theological Institution. On the 14th of January 1967, he was ordained into the ministry of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) in Africa, fulfilling his grandfather's wishes that he becomes a minister. His first ministry following his ordination was in Worcester, Zwelethemba, in the Western Cape, near Cape Town. Having ministered for 10 years in Worcester, he was awarded a scholarship to further his studies in the Netherlands in 1977.

In the Netherlands, he studied with a focus on the New Testament. He was mentored by the outstanding Dutch New Testament scholar and theologian Heinrich Baarlink, a successor to Herman Ridderbos. The University of Cape Town appointed him as a lecturer while he was still engaged in his studies in the Netherlands. On his return, he engaged in ministry in Langa (Township in Cape Town) in 1988, where he ministered to a congregation while lecturing at University of Cape Town (UCT). He retired from his position as UCT professor in 2009. At the time of his passing in 2015, he was still serving on the editorial board of the *Scriptura*, a South African journal for biblical, theological, and contextual hermeneutics¹.

Mazamisa's coming into the history of hermeneutics in South Africa occurs within the context of the already-mentioned clashing trajectories of theological interpretation. By this time, the lines had been clearly drawn between the trajectories. The imperial trajectory had been firmly situated at Stellenbosch University (1858), the home of apartheid theology, a theology that would later spread across South African theological faculties. Vosloo's (2017:127–138) critical examination of biblical interpretations used to justify apartheid policies during the 1940s from within reformed circles is noteworthy. Notably, theologians who were advocates of such views were J.D. du Toit (Totius) and E.P. Groenewald. Contrasting perspectives from theologians such

as B.J. Marais and B.B. Keet, who opposed such justifications, were also from within the DRC. This historical fact created a theological and ideological tension within Reformed circles. The discourse also delves into the constructions of identity and otherness, shedding light on the complexities of theological justifications for apartheid during this period. It is in that article that Vosloo (2017) sounds an alarming warning:

Are we aware of our own ideological distortions as we appropriate the Bible for our seemingly good causes today? It remains important to grapple with these questions as we reflect on the uses and abuses of the Bible in public discourse today. (p. 138)

From 1963, the liberation trajectory found its own place of residence at the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa. The evangelical trajectory was spread around evangelical colleges and seminaries throughout South Africa. As institutions of theological training were associated with respective churches, churches also were related to these trajectories. Furthermore, a number of other church denominations were further divided by these trajectories within themselves. Having thoroughly absorbed this tension, Mazamisa engages the tension through his dissertation in his post-Schleiermacheran hermeneutical insight.

Mazamisa: A brief historical survey of New Testament interpretation in South Africa

In an attempt to understand historical developments in academic New Testament hermeneutics in South Africa, leading up to and beyond the publication of the 'Beatific comradeship', it may be helpful to consider at least five academic articles that I consider landmarks in leading up to Mazamisa's project 1987. These articles were published in 1973, 1978, 1980, 1984, and 2005, respectively. Two of these articles, the first and the fourth, are by Bernard Lategan, one written in 1973 and the other in 1984. The second article is by Ferdinand Deist, written in 1978. The third one is by Hennie Rossouw, written in 1980, and the last one is by Pieter de Villiers, written in 2005. The common theme of these five articles is the development of hermeneutics and interpretation of the New Testament in South Africa.

Lategan 1973

Written in Afrikaans, Lategan's article is titled 'Vereistes vir 'n Effektiewe NT Hermeneutiek'. It has been published in *Neotestamentica*, the journal for the New Testament Society of Southern Africa. In the article, he says that 'theology, and biblical studies, are in a crisis of method, which is marked by an instability of methodology'. Although not defined in this fashion, this 'crisis in method' is the outworking of the conflict among the trajectories over apartheid theology, with a further nuance of an anti-apartheid variant within the same trajectory that is responsible for apartheid. There was within Stellenbosch a dissenting academic voice, at variance with the hermeneutical basis of apartheid theology. In this mounting

1. Conradie (2020:1–10) recently published an article that digs into *Scriptura* long-standing focus on 'Biblical, Theological, and Hermeneutics' themes spanning four decades. It explores methodological tensions among these aspects, raising the question of whether the conjunction 'and' could be interpreted as 'or'. While not suggesting a resolution, the discussion commends *Scriptura* for providing a platform to further investigate these tensions within the South African context as well as questions related to hermeneutics in South Africa.

tension, method had fallen to a crisis point, and the hermeneutical question could not be postponed. Illustrating something of this quagmire in theological interpretation is perhaps Allan Boesak's phenomenal work, *Farewell to Innocence*, an unprecedented study in South African theology, published in 1976, drawing the line between the trajectories by distinguishing the trajectory of the black theology of liberation.

Deist 1978

The article, originally written in Afrikaans, with the title *Historiese Heuristiek, Teologiese Hermeneutiek en Skrifgesag*, was written by Ferdinand Deist, and appears in 1978 in English, translated *Heuristics, Hermeneutics and Authority in the Study of Scripture*. In the opening sentence of this article, Deist echoes Lategan with even more emphasis on the emergency of the situation. He says 'It is only too evident that theology and especially biblical studies are at present having to contend with difficult hermeneutic questions'. Up to the early 1970s, it seemed that South African theology was under the spell of pre-Schleiermacheran hermeneutics, philological at its very best, lacking in philosophical reflection on the problem of interpretation characteristic of the post-Schleiermacheran hermeneutics. Scholars with growing insights into the German development of hermeneutics (from Schleiermacher to Gadamer and beyond) during this period, like Lategan and Deist, were frantically sounding emergency alarms within the complex superstructures of imperialist trajectory. Such was the situation: the rise to importance of the critical academic discipline of hermeneutics in South African theology emanated from moral and intellectual struggles of reluctant beneficiaries of apartheid theology, who never could concede to this theology with a good conscience. And, Stellenbosch was at the centre of these developments for better or for worse.

Rossouw 1980

Another Afrikaans article of importance is Hennie Rossouw's *Wetenskap, Interpretasie, Wysheid* (Science, Interpretation, Wisdom). At the time of the publication (1980), the urgency for hermeneutics had reached a boiling point: pre-Schleiermacheran was collapsing. Through the efforts of those who felt that hermeneutical question had become the obviously huge hippopotamus in the proverbial room of theology in South Africa, *Scriptura* was established in 1980 as a journal for hermeneutics; Bernard Lategan was its founding editor. More poignantly in retrospect, *Scriptura* styled a journal of biblical, theological, and contextual hermeneutics in South Africa. Again, this was a development within Stellenbosch University; however, not as an initiative of the Faculty of Theology, but rather that of the Department of Biblical Studies in the Faculty of Arts.

Demonstrating his hermeneutical concern, Rossouw published in *Scriptura* that same year an article titled *Hoe Moet 'n Mens die Bybel Lees? Die Hermeneutiese Probleem*. Still in that year, this article was published elsewhere with a philosophical

reflection on the hermeneutical problem. *Wetenskap, Interpretasie, Wysheid* was the initial eclipse of the ensuing struggle of theological interpretation that continues to rage among the three trajectories of theological interpretation in South Africa. It is not easy to recall such an initial instance in South African academia, where post-Schleiermacheran hermeneutics is directly related to the hermeneutical tension. In this long-overdue philosophical appraisal of the hermeneutical problem in South Africa, Rossouw begins with Schleiermacher, goes through Dilthey, and stops with Heidegger. He deepens the problem of hermeneutics not only by shifting it to a philosophical problem but also by raising a warning flag with his emphasis on Heideggerian ontological hermeneutics, curbing exegetical enthusiasm and confidence in South African theological interpretation.

Lategan 1984

Lategan's *Current Issues in the Hermeneutical Debate*, was published in English in 1984. This article was also published later by *Neotestamentica* under the same title. That this one appears in English rather than in Afrikaans could suggest that hermeneutics as an academic subject had gained interest far beyond Stellenbosch University and its associations within South African academia. Somewhat supporting this assumption is an observation that it was in the 1980s that the word 'hermeneutics' surfaced with boldness in academic works by theologians from the black theology school of thought within the liberation trajectory. While Lategan in this article makes reference to Rossouw's *Wetenskap, Interpretasie, Wysheid*, Mazamisa repeatedly refers to Lategan's article in his dissertation, demonstrating a thorough comprehension of its observation of the state of the debate far beyond its limitations. In the article, Lategan acknowledges Rossouw's contribution of the philosophical appraisal of the hermeneutical debate in South Africa, which of course was already en vogue in the global west.

However, Lategan (1984:1–17) also observes how with the mediation of philosophical hermeneutics in this debate internationally, focus has gravitated from the author and the text to the reader. Without this serious consideration of philosophical hermeneutics, academic theological interpretation here in South Africa remained an immanent reading of the biblical texts. In line with philosophical hermeneutics, the reader was becoming the focus. While it was thought that these developments could ease the tension among the trajectories, such was not the case. Instead, immanent reading remains the stronghold of the imperialist trajectory, and readers' response became the armament of the black theology within the liberation trajectory. Often, these differences presented themselves in their extremes, with the imperial trajectory pulling towards objectivism and the liberation trajectory succumbing to subjectivism.

Mazamisa lived his entire life at the inhumane receiving end of apartheid theology. Acknowledging financial support from the Theologische Universiteit Kampen (ThUK) at the end of his studies for the benevolent scholarship that it afforded him to live and study in the Netherlands, he writes:

This institution has committed itself to side with the victims of oppression in South Africa, who have been beaten up and are lying on the side of the road, bleeding to death. Indeed, this is beatific comradeship. (Mazamisa 1987:7)

In South Africa, Mazamisa had lived through the practical day-to-day struggles of the conflicting trajectories of theological interpretation in South Africa. He received his initial theological training under the 1961 Theological Training Policy, which not only supported separate development of the races but also prescribed inferior education for black ministers, as well as a theology that was disagreeable to their own human experiences. He was ordained as a minister, and he ministered for approximately 10 years within the confines of a theology that was not his own, and that of his people.

From his student days as a trainee minister, Mazamisa had caught the wave of Stephen Bantu Biko's black consciousness, in those years, as Biko's contemporary. Following his ministerial studies, Mazamisa continued studying through University of South Africa (UNISA) leading up to his scholarship to study abroad. He was current and active within the developments of black theology throughout the 1970s. He witnessed the horror of 16 June 1976 and suffered the pain of the brutal murder of Biko in 1977. His opportunity to study in the Netherlands, afforded him the chance to engage in the struggle of theological interpretation in South Africa in his own right as a thoroughbred New Testament scholar and world-class theologian.

In the Netherlands in 1977, he arrived just as *Farewell to Innocence* was newly published, as Boesak had just completed his doctoral dissertation the previous year at the same institution in 1976. At the same institution, he worked closely with Daan Cloete, who would complete his dissertation, *Hemelse Solidariteit*, in 1980. Takatso Mofokeng, the systematic theologian, was there too, and in 1983 published his dissertation on Christology, *The crucified among the crossbearers*. Ntoane, who was also among them, published his work *A cry for life: An interpretation of 'Calvinism' and Calvin* in 1983. In his dissertation, Mazamisa also references Maimela, Mosala, Tlhagale and others, demonstrating his depth of black consciousness and black theology that undergirded his scholarly cloak. Not only was he an expert exegete and literary scholar, his fluency in philosophic hermeneutics was also demonstrably far ahead of that of his academic peers. To illustrate the point even more vividly, during the mid- to late 1980s, the battle of interpretation in South Africa was becoming more serious and robust from every side, to the point that it could be called 'white versus black hermeneutics'. For instance, this time another interesting volume by Allan Boesak came out in 1984, entitled 'Black and reformed: Apartheid, liberation and the Calvinist tradition'. This piece of work is one among the works that clearly illustrate the struggle of hermeneutics in South Africa. Even though this book does not directly address the hermeneutical questions, it does clearly prove what Lategan had observed and defined as the crisis. Two years later in 1986, Mosala published an

article, 'Social scientific approaches to the Bible: One step forward, two steps backwards'. Within that very same context, another momentous volume came out in 1989, 2 years apart from Mazamisa's publication, again from the pen of Itumileng Mosala, entitled 'Biblical hermeneutics and black theology in South Africa'. In this volume, Mosala (1989) makes the bold assertion that:

[B]iblical appropriations and interpretations are always framed by the social and cultural locations and commitments of those who do them. For black theology the relevant base is in the historical, cultural and ideological struggles of black people. The category of 'struggle' at all levels and through various phases of black history should be taken as the key hermeneutical factor. (p. 6)

This illustrates clearly that what Lategan had observed early in the 1970s was correct, and that the issue demands serious attention.

Through his dissertation, 'beatific comradeship', Mazamisa steps into the hermeneutical debate, which Lategan suggests had been mainly characterised by two competing extremes. It was the structuralist objectivism of the imperialist trajectory on one hand, and the materialist subjectivism of the liberationist trajectory on the other.

Pieter de Villiers

In his article, entitled 'Methodology and hermeneutics in a challenging socio-political context: The first 25 years of the New Testament of South Africa (1965–1990)–Part Two', published in 2005 by Neotestamentica, Pieter de Villiers surveys the history of the New Testament Society of South Africa's study endeavours over its first 25 years. It also examined the position and role of the Society's research in relation to a wider range of South African politics and global academic endeavours. It is in this study that de Villiers concludes that the first 25 years of the Society's history have unquestionably been marked by a consistent and unwavering opposition to such retrograde ideas. Its most redeeming contribution to the future of the discipline, local theology, and, for that matter, the future of South African society as a whole, may be its fundamental and important rejection of exclusivity and a closed mind, and its clear policy of promoting inclusiveness, openness, and critical thinking. We can only hope that as we continue on this difficult road into the future, the strength of past victories and the sadness of errors and omissions will serve as our inspiration and guides.

Sadly, the difficult road that has been encapsulated by past victories and mistakes has indeed proved to be real in today's New Testament scholarship. The reality of biblical hermeneutics has been a challenging one in South African landscape. The increasing, or rather widening, of the gap between black and white hermeneutics is a very concerning issue. The call to inclusiveness in society also implies inclusiveness in all endeavours of society, especially in this regard of interpretative approaches of the New Testament. The issue spotted by de Villiers is clearly demonstrated in the

recent publication from faculty of New Testament at University of Pretoria during the celebration of the 100 years of existence of the institution. Janse van Resnsburg (2017:87–88) makes the very same call in what she calls ‘embodied hermeneutics’ as a fresh approach to African hermeneutics. In her endeavour to advocate this fresh approach, she critically pushes away other forms of interpretation from within the spectrum of ABH, which is cognisant of the negative effects of globalisation and multiculturalism. She claims that her supposed approach is theoretically built from UBUNTU philosophy and advances from Gabriel Marcel’s idea of non-objectification and participation. She argues that her proposed hermeneutical tool emerges from what she identifies as a void in recent African research, further identifying this emptiness from African hermeneutical perspectives (e.g. black liberation, womanism, bosadi etc.). Her critic of these forms of African hermeneutics fail to participate in the global arena. This criticism sounds innocent but in actual fact it is very unfair and unfounded, largely because the author seems to confuse decolonisation with denationalisation, which are significantly different. African hermeneutics is another means to call for Eurocentric epistemologies not to remain the order of the day, as is Deist’s call for abandonment of the Eurocentric station. This is by no means to suggest exclusion but rather to respond to the cry to take seriously the African epistemologies in our endeavour to interpret the biblical text, so as to inform the ways and forms of knowledge as we strive not to overlook the conditions of the African reader. This exemplifies exactly what de Villiers has warned us about. Again, should they consider the work of Mazamisa, perhaps the debate would be on another level, or rather have taken a different turn.

Mazamisa: Aim

Remarkably, on stating the aim of his dissertation, Mazamisa begins not with his title, but his subtitle. ‘The aim of the present study is revealed by its subtitle: An exegetical-hermeneutical study on Lk. 10:25–37’ (Mazamisa 1987:9). He goes on to imply that in this subtitle, the problem of his study is also disclosed, as he declares his title to be a ‘narrowing of the focus of this problem’ articulated by the subtitle. The problem he refers to here is the problem of considering a text both exegetically and hermeneutically within an academic context where the two perceptibly different approaches to the text are thought to be in competition, and even irreconcilable in some instances. This is the case to which Lategan refers in his own analysis of the debate in hermeneutics at that time. The structuralists were demanding exegesis, while the liberationists were placing more emphasis on reader-response approaches that were loosely clubbed, along with the rise of the centrality of hermeneutics over exegesis. More about this problem shall be unfolded below, under discussion of the research problem of this dissertation. For now, Mazamisa further suggests that also in the title ‘Beatific comradeship’ is something of the anticipation of the outcomes or hypothesis of the study (Mazamisa 1987:9). That shall be observed later under the discussion of his hypothesis or rather synthesis, and outcomes.

Mazamisa: Background and/or rationale

It is my grandparents who encouraged me to study theology. My grandfather once told me that theology has to play a role in the liberation of the people. He once preached on Lk 10:25–37. That sermon is still fresh in my memory. (Mazamisa 1987:8)

In these words, for Mazamisa, the subject matter of his dissertation is deep-seated and complex, the extent of which may not have been totally comprehensible to him, let alone to his readers. However, Michel Foucault, cited by Carrette (2011), brings such complexity into perspective when he says:

The key to a personal poetic attitude of a philosopher is not to be sought in his ideas, as if it could be deduced from them, but rather in his philosophy-as-life, in his philosophical life, his ethos. (pp. 89–90)

Whatever can be made of this observation in relation to Mazamisa’s indebtedness to George John Mazamisa and Garenathata Emily Mazamisa-Molema, it speaks of some lifelong impression they have made on him, which now underscores his theology and constitutes background to his fundamental thought in this dissertation. There is a strong case to be made that this fundamental thought was UBUNTU, a value for which Mazamisa is best known to those who knew him in person.

Elsewhere within his work, Mazamisa (1987) says that:

The interpretation of a biblical text calls for a theological self-understanding of the reader. Theological self-understanding is not intended to operate as a methodological detour in order to subvert a text-oriented methodology, but it is a recognition of the fact that the biblical text has a theological agenda which has to be acknowledged. Instead, the dialectic theological self-understanding and scientific methodology must for once coincide in the interpretation. (p. 81)

It is probably within the framework of this self-understanding that Mazamisa justifies his reading of Luke 10:25–37. In a rather ideologically charged description, he refers to other readers as theologians from the North, with him being a reader and theologian from the South. South is not merely a geographical location, but more an ideological presupposition that is significantly different from that of the so-called reader from the North. In his further explanation, the Northern reader readily identifies with the charitable Samaritan in the parable, when the Southern reader identifies with the wounded stranger, bleeding to death by the side of the road. This radical difference suggests Mazamisa’s rationale: that this parable has yet to be critically read in the South, by a Southern reader who shares in the wounds of the wounded stranger in the text (1987:9).

Mazamisa: Theoretical framework

Mazamisa’s literature review is decidedly brief and concise. In his own words, he says ‘The intention of this sub-section is not to give a detailed historical account on the interpretation of Luke 10:25–37’. In his brevity, he nonetheless proves to be

extensively informed of developments in the history of interpretation of parables in general, and of the parable of his study in particular. He acknowledges Adolf Jülicher (1910) and his tripartite classification of the parables in general. Jülicher divides parables into *Gleichnis* [similitudes], *Parabel* (parables), and *Beispielerszählung* [exemplary stories]. Where the parable under consideration can be regarded as an exemplary story, Mazamisa reserves his consent, and rather feels that such a classification would be inadequate. Thus, Luke 10:25–37 is not totally encompassed by Jülicher's classification.

From the more extensive histories of interpretation of this parable, by Werner Monselewski (1967) and Hans Gunther Klemm (1973), Mazamisa notices a wider and more resilient conception of this parable as allegory in scholarship of that time. Therefore, he gives it some consideration as a possible case in the classification of this parable. Here is what he says:

Our intention is to focus on two phenomena of perennial interest and vast dimensions in the general interpretation of parables, but in particular the parable of our study. They are allegorical and allegorical-Christological interpretations of Scripture.

In his process of this consideration of allegory, he contrasts Briger Gerhardsoson (1958), an exegete, and Karl Barth (1970), a systematic theologian, in their respective readings of this parable.

In the underlying juxtaposition of exegesis and hermeneutics of this overall study, the contrast between the two interpreters is to some extent indicative of this dichotomy. The one probably imagines itself more objective in its exegesis of the allegory than the other, and the other approaches the allegory with a deliberately subjective Christological hermeneutical interest. Mazamisa takes a step forward with this contrast, and takes two steps backwards and rather settles for this parable as a literary sociological text with a theological meaning.

Research problem

Notably, Mazamisa does not reject the diversity of conceptions and approaches to this parable within its *Wirkungsgeschichte*. He says that 'our stance is that all these interpretations must be taken seriously in their attempts to render for their particular audiences the meaning of the parable which lay before them' (1987:85). However, in his observation, the text is characterised by unmistakable presence of profanity, which he also refers to as 'skandalon', and neither of these exegetical and hermeneutical readings of the ideological North account for this seemingly deliberate and pervasive profanity within this parable. Profanity, therefore becomes the focus research problem of this study because of its conspicuousness that remains virtually unaccounted for by other interpretations.

He says that 'What is specific in this pericope, is the role played by profanity' (1987:85–86). The dramatis persona in the parable is Samaritan, which is profane to the Jew. However, the profane fulfils the sacred Law when he extends

his *ἔλεος* [mercy] and proves himself to be a man of *σπλαγχνίζειν* [compassion] towards a Jew beaten up and left for dead, forsaken by his very own. On the literary level of meaning, therefore' says Mazamisa 'we are confronted with the problem of the role of profanity, without which it is possible to decipher the tropical level of meaning'. Then his research question is 'What is profanity in this context' (1987:86)?

At this juncture in Mazamisa's observation of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* of the parable, this question had not been addressed adequately, not even within the ensuing debate between those who emphasised exegesis and those who were more comfortable with hermeneutics. For Mazamisa, the inadequacy of both exegesis and hermeneutics (as they were seemingly conceived at that time in the South African debate) to sufficiently account for the obvious in the text was problematic, in that a third way was desperately necessary to move beyond this stalemate.

In understanding Mazamisa' methodology

This dissertation is divided into three parts, the lengthiest part being the first part. It is devoted to methodology, at a stretch of 84 pages in total. This is understandable because in this work Mazamisa addresses himself to the problematic theoretical battle between exegesis and hermeneutics in South Africa. Therefore, much of his attention is given to methodology, so that his eventual dealing with the text can exemplify something of the practical resolution to this theoretical tension.

Hans-Georg Gadamer

As it is Mazamisa's perspective that methodology is generally motivated by some philosophy or other, considering the philosophy behind his own methodology may be just as important in understanding him. Without a doubt, Mazamisa is Gadamerian. Not only is his demonstrated grasp of Gadamer arguably unrivalled at that time in South Africa, but he is also rather too comfortable with Gadamer, to the point of challenging other scholar's reading of him. He is at home in Gadamer and the spirit of Gadamer's philosophy permeates his dissertation.

If it be granted that learning is in some respects an analogical exercise on the part of the learner, it seems that Mazamisa has some analogical advantage in his grasp of Gadamer, probably more readily than some other readers. In arguing for this advantage, one could consider Gadamer's *Bildung*² ([1960] 1989). It could be said to be analogous to Mazamisa's conception of UBUNTU. In much of Mazamisa's oral discourses on UBUNTU, one cannot easily tell where UBUNTU begins and where *Bildung* ends. Gadamer's *Bildung* is self-consciousness of one's own limitation in relation to the other, whereby one feels the responsibility to step into the shoes of the other and to see the world from that

2. See also, in Humboldt's fragment titled 'Theory of Bildung' from either 1793 or 1794, the central concept is elucidated in various ways, with unclear internal relations among them (Humboldt 1793/1794/2000). Humboldt appears to equate 'Bildung, wisdom, and virtue'.

perspective of the other. Mazamisa characteristically conceptualised UBUNTU as the other person being the other side of self, emphasising self's responsibility to conceive self as the other, under different circumstances.

Among some of his illustrations of this Buntucal self-understanding, he would say of the beggar by the side of the road at the traffic lights that people are often quick to drop a coin on the hand of the man or woman begging by the side of the road. He maintained that this is probably a mistake, as it usually delays the holistic redress of the predicament facing the person by the side of the road. His suggestion was that, rather than merely dropping a coin in the beggar's hand, each one of us should in our reflection step into the destitute beggar's shoes and allow ourselves in our thoughts to be the other, mindful of the other as the other side of self. In that manner, he believed a more sustainable solution to the problem would emerge.

That is typical of Mazamisa's UBUNTU, but that could just as well be Gadamer's *Bildung*. UBUNTU is the profound and everlasting virtue that Mazamisa learned from his grandparents. That same idea stood out to him when, many years back, his grandfather preached from Luke 10:25–37 and that value he carried with him throughout his theoretical development. And in his wrestling with Gadamer, he discovered a concept more readily analogical to UBUNTU, thereby falling at Gadamer's feet and rising to master his philosophy more easily. True to its sense of self-consciousness, Gadamer's *Bildung* is affected dialogically, in a dialectic, and Mazamisa's approach is similar to this discussion. He is not for debate, but for progressive dialogical discussion, where all parties win with the progression of the discussion.

Literary sociological text with a theological meaning

In order to balance his own philosophy and theology with his methodology, Mazamisa settles for a text that is literal, sociological, and theological. Before he does, he affirms the locus of the meaning of the text to be the text itself without neglecting its production and reception in the process of uncovering its meaning. It is a necessary step in the interpretation process to determine and define the nature of the text under consideration for a better understanding of the text. That his text is literal implies at least four elements about it: (1) It is grammatical, in that it pertains language. (2) It is logical, because in order for words to have meaning, they have to follow a deliberate sequence. (3) It is rhetorical, as its intention is one way or the other to persuade the reader. (4) It is aesthetical, in that as a complete text with the preceding elements, it is coherent in its efficient integration of its grammar, logic and rhetoric. While there is seemingly a disagreement between Jauss and Boucher on whether the aesthetical element is internal or external to the text, the first three elements are adequate in their obviously external nature to suggest that the text is also sociological,

in addition to being literal. The rhetorical element within this sociological nature of the text further suggests that this text is also theological. Therefore, reading of this text must account for the literal, the sociological, and the theological aspects of the text. This collective nature of the text, requires scientific methodology to decipher. Hence, Mazamisa argues (1987:162) that 'the task of the theologian is to employ scientific tools in the dynamic and ever-changing process of biblical interpretation in the ever-changing everyday reality'.

Dialectica reconciliae

According to Mazamisa (1987), a *dialectica reconciliae* (dialectic of reconciliation) is a combination of exegesis and hermeneutics, which is characterised by the progression of the hermeneutical circle or the completion of the spiral movement. This movement therefore:

[I]s the incessant pendular motion from the whole to its parts and from the parts to the whole which, if consistently executed, can prevent one-sidedness and cure us from becoming fixated upon one particular view the way. (pp. 156–157)

Exegesis without hermeneutics, or vice versa, leads to alienating one-sidedness. While the materialistic literary theory approaches literature from the primacy of production, it is nonetheless reader-oriented, because of the fact that the productive function of reception is constitutive of Marx's dialectic of production-consumption. Jauss (1984:153), as cited by Mazamisa, is spot on when he argues that the social constitutive function of this approach is identical to the productivity of the reader. Moreover, this approach enquires into the identity of the original as well as the modern reader: their type of society, class affiliation, and their interests.

Synthesis and final remarks

Mazamisa's 'bantufic' reading of the parable of the good Samaritan lends two main conclusions. Firstly, the Samaritan is the irrupting 'Other' and the comrade of God. He argues that although God is invisible, he is nonetheless personal, and his presence in history is actualised by human presence. No covenantal relationship with him takes place outside human relationship. No single human except his only begotten Son reveals him; neither the Samaritan nor the priest nor the Levite is a privileged locus of God's revelation because God is incarnate in human form. The incarnation of human in human is epiphanized in interhuman comradeship: a comradeship that is an irreducible structure upon which love of the neighbour is anchored. The Samaritan becomes the comrade of the man who lies on the side of the road. On the one hand, the wounded man is the recipient of mercy; on the other hand, he gives mercy to the Samaritan, for he is the bearer of God's eternal mercy. The question then is this: how does God relate to human beings? By becoming flesh, he participates in the human existence and essence, as well as the historicity we have. Boesak (1977:21) emphatically claims, 'he is truly God who sides with the

weak and needy and who liberates the oppressed. Who cannot do that is not God'. Secondly, Mazamisa concludes that Jesus is the parable of God par excellence and the comrade of humanity. The word 'parable' should appropriately be regarded as dialectical because of the fact that Jesus is the parable within the parable, while he simultaneously transcends it and does not allow himself to be detained by its language-event. It is he who dynamizes and actualises it; otherwise, as literary genre, it would have been lost in the mists of antiquity, through which, mingled as it were with the dust of the Palestinian desert, we could dimly perceive its relevancy. Jesus in a sense is the parable in a way no human parable can be, he tells the parable in a way no human person can tell it. He is a parabolic revealer par excellence.

Conclusion

The intention of this article is to bring to the conversation the works of Mazamisa as another piece of work to be considered in the South African landscape. This dialectical reconciliae approach in essence seeks to foster a conversation among various approaches to the interpretation of the text, with a view to reconcile the differences, for a more holistic understanding of the biblical text. If the likes of Nelson Mandela, Bishop Tutu among others, are known or perceived as the fathers of reconciliation in South African politics, then Professor Welile Mazamisa should be counted too as such in the course of New Testament interpretation. He is one among the few who have attempted to contribute to the whole hermeneutical discourse in South African landscape to bridge the gap between white and black hermeneutics. This is how I position him: to me, his work is such a remarkable contribution, which I think remains relevant to this day. When most black theologians of his day were focussed more on the context-oriented reading of the hermeneutical premise, while most white South African biblical scholars focused more on an imminent, structuralist reading of the biblical text, Mazamisa came with the philosophical hermeneutical approach – the dialectical reconciliae. He never claimed that this method originated with him, but he learned and adopted it as the tool to unlock the New Testament as it is clearly exemplified in his book published in 1987.

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