Pluralisation and social change

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Pluralisation and social change

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Dynamics of lived religion
in South Africa and in Germany

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Table of Contents

Introduction

The pluralisation of the religious realm, being a particularly crucial indicator of the present processes of social change, can be considered as an enormous challenge for many actors within the church, civil society, the economy and politics. In Practical Theology the pluralisation of the religious realm as the diversification of lifestyles, religious styles and practices is often seen as being closely related to the theories of individualisation.[1] Merely regarding pluralisation *as* individualisation, however, neglects the social perspective as the focus is only on the religiosity of the individual. A de facto diversification of religion can be assumed for all times, but it was not until quite recently that it regained relevance as a religious-cultural and socio-political topic. The recent discourse not only indicates that pluralisation as a concept is apprehended in various ways, but also that it is linked to various phenomena.

Hence, the purpose of this volume is to sharpen the idea of religious pluralisation precisely *by* elucidating it against the backdrop of feasible religious phenomena and practices. The concepts and interpretations of religious praxis are correlated here in a way that has proven most fruitful in the field of Practical Theology. Considering the development of the subject, it is fair to say that Practical Theology is restricted in its perspective when it focuses exclusively on the religious-cultural situation in one regional or even national context, e. g. Germany. Accordingly, an international approach is highly desirable. However, discourses that are described as 'international' find themselves entangled in rather local perspectives, which run the risk of failing to make their own contextuality explicit. This problem is continuously addressed as a challenge and a problem in the *International Academy of Practical Theology* as well as in supra-regional, bilateral co-operations.

The topic of pluralisation will be elaborated on in this book against the background of only two different regionally determined perspectives. The political, historical and religious-cultural constellations in South Africa and Germany could hardly be more different from each other. However, in both countries religious pluralisation as an interpretative concept is of central significance within practical theological discourses. Additionally, there are already some discursive links that justify this selection. This volume seeks to contribute towards elucidating and intensifying these connections. Accordingly, the programmatic idea of

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1 E. g. Thomas Luckmann, *The invisible religion: The Problem of Religion in Modern Society* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 9.

'lived religion',[2] which partly stems from cultural studies, has been established as a paradigm in German-speaking as well as in South African Practical Theology.

In the light of these reflections, it is no surprise that pluralisation is the overarching topic of all the contributions in this book. Pluralisation, thus, offers a kind of framework for all issues and approaches, even if this is not entirely self-evident and the theoretical implications need to be explicitly unfolded. This volume contains contributions on eleven topics that are formative for practical theological discourses in South Africa and Germany, and which are currently regarded as being of high relevance (poverty and wealth, education, transitional rites and passages, health, religious community formation and the future of the Church, beginning and end of life, transformation of the media, migration and interculturality, religion and knowledge, coming to terms with the past, and living together). The structure of the volume has been planned as follows: one author from one of the two countries writes on a topic that appears especially decisive for their own cultural context as well as on individually and communally performed religious practices, religiously connoted cultural phenomena, and professional areas of action in Practical Theology; another author from the respective other country then writes a response to that contribution.[3] The contributions are considered as a conversation and as obviously stemming from the writers' specific perspectives, which will be made explicit as such and will be brought into dialogue with the respective other, the South African or German, context. This conversational procedure contributes to a contextual theology that understands theology essentially as a dialogue. Besides providing scientific clarification with wide-ranging inspirational potential, the book will be able to present important findings for ecclesiastical and socio-political actors. The topic of pluralisation and social change contains impulses for a creative-constructive design of diversity in the sense of a theologically reflected diversity that can be ground-breaking for the church and society in the 21st century.

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2 The concept was – so to say, explicitly – invented by Paul Drews on the occasion of an empirical shift in German Practical Theology as well as in cultural studies at the beginning of the 20th century. Cf. the subtitle of Wilhelm Gräb's study *Lebensgeschichten – Lebensentwürfe – Sinndeutungen. Eine Praktische Theologie gelebter Religion* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, [1]1998, [2]2000).

3 The responses are shorter because they emphasise another, respectively a different, perspective arranged in tandem. There is only one exception in terms of length: regarding the issue of migration and interculturality we provide two articles of equal length.

It is not the editors' task to comment on the articles, but we would like to share some perceptions concerning the articles/the dialogue from the perspectives of our particular contexts.

The relevance of ambiguity or ambivalence as a concept of theoretical reflection seems to be becoming more important. In the light of increasing pluralisation, a "conscious dealing with heterogeneity" (Martina Kumlehn) is required, which is linked to the concept of ambiguity, and which, as Kumlehn writes, "contribute[s] to the blurred edges of the concept of religion and the concept of secularisation alike and remain[s] entangled in the dichotomous field between self- and external attribution". Jaco Dreyer also connects ambiguity to religion by raising questions concerning the role of religion in modern secular societies, especially regarding the relationship between religion and politics. Does religion contribute to social cohesion or is it – against the background of religious pluralisation – the source of social separation and conflict?

A theme that can be discerned in many contributions in this volume is the importance of recognising and taking seriously different ontologies. A more Western and secular worldview is to a large extent foreign to Africa and this should be acknowledged in practical theological research. Here one thinks specifically of what can be called the spiritual ontology of Africa and the consequent impact on academic research. In many chapters this basic point of departure is made explicit. This approach assists in working towards a pluriversalism that is beyond binary thinking in terms of Africa and the West.

In line with this spiritual ontology is the appreciation of various epistemologies that can be seen in the chapters. The well-known references to statistical data in Practical Theology remain an important source of knowledge; however, sources such as indigenous knowledge systems are also included. It is enlightening to see how insights gained from, for example, proverbs and rituals, as well as academic literature, all shed much light on the topics that are discussed.

With the challenges that varying ontologies and multiple epistemologies bring with them, it is thus also no surprise to find a variety of methodological approaches in the chapters. Some lean more towards a quantitative paradigm and others more towards qualitative approaches; however, in all the contributions the importance of acknowledging religion and religious practices in the methodologies employed in exploring our understanding of reality is taken into consideration. The notion of pluriversalism, which runs like a golden thread throughout the book, is also exemplified by the plurality of methodologies, not to mention form and style. At the literal level, different sensibilities and writing styles are evident, as well as variety in the usage of theological and aesthetic resources. And yet the book represents more than just a collection of essays; it is rather an attempt to speak with different voices, forms and styles about a topic

that unifies us, and has unified us as scholars and even friends, over many decades and through many shared experiences.

The paradoxical nature of both religion and culture is furthermore shown in many chapters. Religion and culture (not that the two can be neatly separated) are both sources of human flourishing as well as the flourishing of creation, but both are also sources for causing harm to humankind and creation. In this regard the simultaneously appreciative and critical approach in the chapters contributes to the richness of the diversity of the texts.

All the above named themes are intrinsically linked to issues of justice and power. This is apparent from several contributions. And these issues are again linked to themes such as development, poverty and healing. The appreciation of various ontologies, epistemologies and also methodologies mentioned above underlines the holistic approach to these themes throughout the volume.

Supermodernism, a network culture with liminality and flow, as well as the media, rites of passage (emphasis on birth and death), the past/memory and other themes all contribute towards weaving the rich tapestry of the book. In short: the book opens up a variety of windows into the house of "lived religion", shedding light on our abilities and inabilities to either remember or forget, or both; our continuous transformation(s) in an era of "timeless time and placeless space", as exemplified by the network culture; our constant (liminal) movement through the stages (the rooms in the house) of lived (or rather living) religion.

The value of this book lies inter alia in the fact that it is a collaborative enterprise between two continents, indeed two worlds. This collaboration has taught us that we need one another, not only as necessary correctives, but as enriching partners. Simply put: Europe needs Africa and Africa needs Europe. Or, on a global scale: the planet that we share is our common ground. Hopefully this book attempts a few steps forward on this ground, this shared soil beneath our feet.

Church of Berlin-Brandenburg-Silesian Upper Lusatia, the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Hanover and the Evangelical-Lutheran Church of Württemberg.

Wilhelm Gräb, to whom this volume is dedicated on the occasion of his 70th birthday on 21 August 2018, has continuously been explicating the close connection between religion and culture, and the diversity of their forms, as a central topic of Practical Theology. He has presented numerous works on this topic. He has been an Extraordinary Professor at the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch University, South Africa, since 2011. He has close ties to South Africa based on co-operation in research and teaching. Last but not least, the editors do not only appreciate the collegiality but also the friendship of Wilhelm Gräb. We would like to express our gratitude to him.

Nadine Bowers Du Toit

Health and Gender: key intersections in African 'Faith and Development' discourse

1 Introduction

Disease and disasters come and go like rain, but health is like the sun that illuminates the entire village. (African Proverb)

The renowned medical journal, *The Lancet*, recently highlighted the correlation between wealth inequality and health, and cited the WHO[1] Commission on Social Determinants of Health as recognizing "that societal inequalities skew the distribution of health and the poorest population groups in the poorest countries are left with the heaviest burden of health risks and disease".[2] It may also be argued that there is a close correlation between gender and health. In fact, the WHO Report of the Commission on Women's Health in the Africa Region notes that "a core contention of the report is that a range of adverse socioeconomic pressures including inadequate health care prevents African women from realizing their full potential"[3]. The centrality of wellbeing in any context is clear; however, on a continent that also has high levels of poverty, health and wellbeing are inextricably tied to issues of development and – as I will argue in this contribution – to gender and religion. Religion is key, because as the above report additionally points out, women's health in an African context demands a holistic approach.[4]

In this contribution, I begin by defining health as holistic wellbeing within an African context and also locate it within broader definitions of health and wellbeing. I then discuss the rise of the gender, religion and development discourse, and the way in which culture, gender and religion often intersect in an African context. The final part of this chapter explores the way in which intersections of faith, health, gender and development arise though the recent

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1 World Health Organisation.

2 Ole Petter Otterssen, "The political origins of health inequity: prospects for change," *The Lancet* (2014): 630 – 667, 630.

3 World Health Organisation, *Addressing the Challenge of Women's Health in Africa: Report of the Commission on Women's Health in the African Region* (city: World Health Organisation, 2012), xv.

4 Cf. ibid.

work of my Theology and Development students from the University of Stellenbosch's Gender and Health MTh programme. The thematic perspectives arising from their work includes: maternal health, FGM/Cutting, HIV/AIDs, harmful practices in AICs and LGBTIQ persons, and the studies range in context from Ethiopia to Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. The chapter concludes by providing recommendations, drawn from the findings of the student's work, for faith leaders seeking to improve not only the wellbeing of women, but also the wellbeing of their communities through interventions that place gender at the centre of wellbeing of all.

2 Defining health as holistic wellbeing in an African context

Perhaps the best-known definition of health is that of the WHO, which defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".[5] It is also important to note that the older WHO Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (1986) also links aspects such as "peace, shelter, education, food, income, a stable ecosystem, sustainable resources and social justice and equity" to health. Good health is therefore viewed as linked to social, economic and personal development and highlights the interlinkages between these dimensions.[6]

This definition was for its time quite radical as it perceived health in broader terms by including the social and mental aspects.[7] Despite critiques of this definition, it has gained widespread acceptance and has led some – such as James Larson – to question whether spiritual wellbeing should not be included in this definition.[8] While Larson highlights the various arguments both for and against the inclusion of spiritual wellbeing, he ultimately acknowledges that the issue at least warrants further study. This is affirmed by more recent statements on global health, which recognize the need for cross-disciplinary work in order to understand the various dimensions that intersect with health as well as the need for

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5 Anwar Velji and John Bryant, "Global Health: Evolving Meanings," *Infect Dis Clin N Am* (2011): 299 – 309, 303.

6 Cf. ibid.

7 Cf. James Larson, "The World Health Organization's Definition of Health: Social versus Spiritual Health," *Social Indicators Research 38* (1996): 181– 192, 181.

8 Cf. op. cit., 187.

North-South and South-South sharing of knowledge and problem-solving skills.[9] This is nowhere more clear than in WHO's Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030), which highlights the need for cross-sectoral and global approaches and which highlights in particular the centrality of women's social, political and economic participation with regards to better health outcomes for both women and children.[10]

African notions of wellbeing are decidedly holistic and have no mind-body-spirit dichotomies. In fact, De Gruchy clearly argues that this is a Northern notion perpetuated by the academies in the North, which ignore the central role of spirituality in issues such as health.[11] Schmidt et al. make the point that in the "African context, balance or harmony within the body, as well as within the social web of relationships that includes the living and the ancestors, have to be incorporated in the discussion of health or well-being".[12] They note that:

> In this essentially relational view of what constitutes life and well-being it is not possible to separate religion and health any more than it is possible to separate the health of individuals from the well-being of their community, their environment or their ancestors. The individual is understood to be at the core of a set of concentric entities: the family and homestead, the village, the nation and its land, the realm of the ancestors and the earth. [...] the lack of health in any of these realms affects health in all others, and limits the potential for well-being. With relationships so central, it is not surprising that trust is a second essential element without which health is not possible.[13]

Arising from their ARHARP study, academics such as De Gruchy and Schmidt et al. argue for both dialogue and action with regards to religious leadership's role in public health issues. While they acknowledge that religion "may not always be good or beneficial", there is much to be learned from religious practitioners as leaders who are extremely concerned with African wellbeing and actors in the

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9 Cf. Anwar Velji and John Bryant, "Global Health: Evolving Meanings," *Infect Dis Clin N Am* (2011): 299–309, 308.

10 Cf. Shyama Kuruvilla, "The Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health (2016–2030): a roadmap based on evidence and country experience," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization 94* (2016): 398–400, 399.

11 Cf. Steve De Gruchy, "Re-learning our Mother Tongue? Theology in Dialogue with Public Health," in *Keeping Body and Soul Together: Reflections by Steve De Gruchy on Theology and Development,* ed. Beverly Haddad (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2015), 257–265, 257.

12 Barbara Schmidt, James Cochrane and Jill Oliver, "Understanding Religious Health Assets – Health as a lens on religion and development," in *Religion and Development in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, eds. Ignatius Swart, Hermann Rocher, Sulina Green and Johannes Erasmus (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2010), 137–152, 138.

13 Ibid.

sphere of healing perhaps outside of the traditional medical definitions.[14] In an African context some have argued that wellbeing may even be viewed as akin to development. African Independent/Initiated Churches, for example, place healing as a focal point at the centre of their activities. In these activities healing is understood in a much broader manner – a "process to support and encourage their members to overcome conditions in their lives perceived as a deficit".[15]

3 The rise of the gender, religion and development discourse

Gender is currently fully recognised as a development issue. The reason for this is because gender biases as a result of patriarchy prevent people from attaining their full potential – from flourishing. These hindrances to women reaching their full potential, or as Nussbaum puts it "functioning as full human beings",[16] comes in many forms such as being denied good nutrition, vulnerability to physical and sexual violence, and obstacles to literacy and professional training and vocational skills. Momsen indeed argues that gender discrimination can even be directly linked to increased poverty and the slowing of development growth, while gender equality enhances development.[17] In fact "without gender equality – where women are empowered and allowed to participate equally in development projects – sustainable development is unachievable".[18] What then is the role of religion in the intersection between gender and development? Tomlin notes that "religious attitudes towards women have had an impact upon their social status in society more broadly and [...] in addressing women's social disadvantage it is also important to examine and to attempt to transform religious

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14 Cf. Steve De Gruchy, "Re-learning our Mother Tongue? Theology in Dialogue with Public Health," in *Keeping Body and Soul Together: Reflections by Steve De Gruchy on Theology and Development,* ed. Beverly Haddad (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2015), 257–265, 260–262.

15 Phillip Öhlmann, Marie-Luise Frost and Wilhelm Gräb, "African Initiated Churches' Potential as Development Actors," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies 72(4)* (2016): 15, https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3825.

16 Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (New York: Cambridge Press, 2000), 1.

17 Cf. Henshall Momsen, *Gender and Development*, 2nd Edition (New York: Routledge, 2010), 9–10.

18 Mwawi Chilongozi, *The Role of the Church with Regards to Maternal Health: A Case Study of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Synod of Livingstonia*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2016), 49.

attitudes".[19] FBOs in particular are seen as being key in reflecting "women's best interests" and providing support for their holistic (material and spiritual) development; however, they are also critiqued by Tomlin as they possibly tend to impose "their own values and ideologies rather than respond to so-called local gender agendas".[20] Here she cites as an example the key role played by FBOs in opposing harmful widowhood practices in Malawi, but conversely also their anti-condom stance within the context of HIV/AIDS. O'Brian also picks up on the role played by FBOs in the provision of health care to women and notes that not only have many FBOs worked in the area of health care for many years, they also form a critical component of health service delivery in poorer countries.[21] He notes, however, that "some faith-based providers use conservative interpretations of religious teaching to deny access reproductive and sexual rights and health".[22]

Religious feminisms are also regarded as another way in which "attitudes that obstruct the realization of rights" can be challenged. Tomlin notes the challenge for feminisms is how they "disentangle patriarchal values from their justification as religious, and to promote alternative (many would argue 'authentic') interpretations of religious traditions that are supportive of women's human's rights and empowerment".[23]

Scholars have also argued that in the context of African Christianity, for example, gender partnerships would be a transforming paradigm for development in church and society.[24] They argue – drawing on the views of African Christian religious feminists such as the prominent Mercy Oduyoye – that the "partnership of women and men is [...] necessary if the church is to be whole and to be the light of Christ for the world".[25] It is argued here that mutuality between the sexes and partnership in development is what will enable the church to fully realize its potential as a development agent in Africa. This point has also been highlighted in the discussion on the role of faith leaders in addressing gender

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19 Emma Tomlin, "Gender, Religions and Development," in *Religions and Development*, ed. Emma Tomlin (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 148–176, 157.

20 Op. cit., 170.

21 Cf. Jon O'Brian, "Can faith and freedom co-exist? When faith-based health providers and women's needs clash," *Gender and Development 25(1)* (2017): 37–51, 38.

22 Ibid.

23 Emma Tomlin, "Gender, Religions and Development," in *Religions and Development*, ed. Emma Tomlin (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 148–176, 167.

24 Cf. Esther Onwunta and Karel August, "(Gender) Partnership as Transforming Paradigm for Development in Church and Society," *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies 68(2)* (2011): 1–9, 1.

25 Op. cit., 3.

issues such as gender-based violence (GBV) where it is argued that "male faith leaders be targeted and incorporated into faith-based intervention strategies [...] not as sole targets or actors", but as partners with women in the struggle against GBV.[26]

What cannot and should not be disregarded is the intersection between cultural and religious practices when it comes to gender and development – particularly in an African context. Tomlin[27] makes no mention of this, but African scholars note the importance of culture in discussing issues of gender and development as religion is often viewed as reinforcing patriarchal cultural practices.[28] For example, customary laws which prevent women's rights to landownership are often reinforced by "ancient Judaic practices in biblical texts", which in turn lead to women becoming more vulnerable to poverty. Marriage and family size are other issues in which African culture and a literal interpretation of Christian religious texts can re-inforce patriarchy and women's choices with regards to issues such as contraception and maternal health.[29]

In theology the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians has played a particularly significant role in highlighting the importance of religious feminism in cultural hermeneutics. Although this group is firstly defined as theologians and not as development scholars, their role in highlighting the intersections of theology and culture as mutually reinforcing factors in the oppression and marginalization women touches on many issues within the development discourse.[30] Their work, for example deals with issues such as the way in which negative cultural and religious beliefs have increased women's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, GBV, FGM/Cutting, workplace equity, girl child education and the role of women in church leadership and theological education, amongst others.[31]

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26 Cf. Elisabet Le Roux and Nadine Bowers Du Toit, "Men and Women in Partnership: Mobilizing Faith Communities to Address Gender Based Violence," *Diaconia 8* (2016): 23–37.

27 Cf. Emma Tomlin, "Gender, Religions and Development," in *Religions and Development*, ed. Emma Tomlin (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 148–176.

28 Cf. Fasina Fagbeminiyi and Matthew Oluwatoyin, "Religion, Gender and Development: Emerging Issues," *Gender and Behaviour 8(1)* (2010): 2789–2802.

29 Cf. Oluwafunmilayo Josephine Para-Mallam, "Faith, gender and development agendas in Nigeria: conflicts, challenges, and opportunities," *Gender and Development 14(3)* (2006): 409–421, 410 and 413.

30 Cf. Hazel Ayanga, "Voice of Voiceless: The Legacy of the Circle of Concerned Woman African Theologians," *Verbum et Ekklesia 37(2)* (2016): 1–2.

31 Cf. op. cit., 3–5.

4 Gender, health and wellbeing in Africa

The inclusion of women in issues affecting the wellbeing of societies has several dimensions and it is important to note that an "expanded definition of gender and health" includes as a starting point an understanding "that it is shaped by economic, political and cultural relationships".[32] There are clear links between the just and equitable treatment of women and appropriate health policies. Syed Ahmed et al. note that "gender inequality in health is manifested by marked inequalities between males and females in health-related options and outcomes (e.g. child survival and life expectancy), and attributed to powerful social and cultural forces that overwhelm the supposed biological advantage of women".[33]

In fact, as a result of "malnutrition, frequent pregnancies and traditional dietary customs"[34] rural African women are argued to be the most vulnerable population in terms of ill health. Here one could add the well-established fact that, as a result of biological and socio-cultural factors, women have been proven to be more vulnerable to HIV/AIDs than men.[35] This is particularly important to note in Sub-Saharan Africa, where HIV/AIDS rates are the highest in the world. Yet women play a key role in ensuring better health outcomes for their children, as indicated by issues of child mortality, maternal health and the role of gender in education for all children in the Millennium Development Goals. In Africa women are also often gatekeepers for practices, beneficial and adverse, that affect the health and psycho-social wellbeing of fellow women: women more often than do not play the role of midwives and even the practitioners of what many consider gender oppressive practices such as Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting and virginity testing, amongst others.

The impact of concepts of masculinity should also not be underestimated in the search for health and wellbeing in an African context, as "masculinity can be

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32 Veronica Magar, "Gender, health and the Sustainable Development Goals," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization 93* (2015): 743.

33 Syed Ahmed, Alayne Adams, Mushtaque Chowdhury and Abbas Bhuiya, "Gender, socio-economic development and health-seeking behavior in Bangladesh," *Social Science and Medicine 51* (2000): 361–371, 362.

34 Agnes Aboum, "Women's issues in Health and Education," in *Faith and Development*, eds. Deryk Belshaw, Robert Calderisi and Chris Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 2001), 111–130, 122.

35 Cf. Beverly Haddad, "Gender, Development and faith: Religious networks and women's struggle," in *Religion and Development in Post-Apartheid South Africa,* eds. Ignatius Swart, Hermann Rocher, Sulina Green and Johannes Erasmus (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2010), 121–136, 128.

expressed in harmful ways, such as violence against women or sexual practices that expose partners to human immunodeficiency virus infection. Such behavior can be associated with established norms of masculinity, but also with the partial breakdown of men's position in the general order, under pressures of poverty and economic change".[36] Chitando argues that African concepts such as *unbuntu* should also be used and "de-patriarchalised" in challenging the construction of forms of masculinity in the face of sexual and gender-based violence and HIV.[37] This once again emphasises the need for both genders to work together in tackling issues of health and wellbeing.

5 Exploring the intersections through the work of Theology and Development students

Both the Faculty of Theology at the University of Stellenbosch and the Department of Religion and Theology at the University of KwaZulu-Natal have been funded by the Church of Sweden from 2013, in support of a Masters of Theology programme in the field of Gender and Health.[38] This section explores the way in which my students – almost all enrolled within the MTh Gender and Health programme with a major in Theology and Development[39] – have explored the intersections between theology, health, gender and development in their Masters theses; it briefly analyses the way in which they transverse this complex landscape by touching on some of the issues already noted above. It should be noted that in all theses health and wellbeing are understood as holistic and not in a purely bio-medical sense. The theses cover the following topics: maternal health (Malawi), Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (Ethiopia), challenges of the girl child (Zimbabwe), HIV and AIDS (South Africa) and LGBTQI wellbeing (South Africa).

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36 Veronica Magar, "Gender, health and the Sustainable Development Goals," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization 93* (2015): 743.

37 Cf. Ezra Chitando, "Do not tell the person carrying you that s/he stinks: Reflections on Ubuntu and masculinities in the context of sexual and gender-based violence and HIV," in *Living with Dignity: African Perspectives on Gender Inequality*, eds. Elna Mouton, Getrude Kapuma, Len Hansen and Thomas Togom (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015), 254–269, 269.

38 Cf. Abstract Gender and Health: https://www.sun.ac.za/english/faculty/theology/Documents/Events/MTh%20GenderHealth.pdf, accessed 3 March 2018.

39 It should be noted that one of the students, Violet Myambo, was not enrolled in this programme; however, her topic certainly addressed the intersection. All students in this group graduated under my supervision between 2014–2017. It should also be noted that most of the students were not part of the same year cohorts.

5.1 In search of a new normative: an exploration of religious feminisms

Every thesis written as part of the Masters in Theology was required to explore the theological implications and intersections of their topic with theology. In searching for a normative theological framework, at least three of the five candidates chose the approach of the Circle of African Women Theologians[40] to discuss and reflect on their respective topic. This was especially true of the theses, which were incidentally also authored by the three women in the group, on the topics of maternal health (Mwawi Chilongozi), the plight of the girl child in Zimbabwe (Violet Myambo) and an analysis of the HIV/AIDS programme "Channels of Hope" (Melany Adonis). A 'feminism' such as that of the Circle highlights the tension with regard to the intersection of gender and religion: as it is argued that while the "Bible denounces oppression but the same text may be used to promote women's oppression if read literally".[41] Both Oduyoye and Phiri et al. call for a contextualisation of the biblical text and a responsible call to engage with culture.[42]

Adonis chose to position her analysis within the framework of being an African woman in her title, which reads "An African woman's theological analysis of a Development Programme: Channels of Hope".[43] The use of the Circle was helpful as they had already done significant work on issues of sex stigma and HIV/AIDS.[44] Although Adonis referred to other feminists outside of Africa, she framed her analysis firmly within the perspective of the Circle and its focus on the intersection between theology, ethics and spirituality as well as its drive to move from theory towards "commitment, advocacy and transforming practice"

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40 Hereafter identified as "the Circle".

41 Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Beads and Strands: Reflections of an African woman on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll / New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 92.

42 Cf. op. cit., 93 and Isabel Phiri, Beverly Haddad and Maponye Masenya (eds.), *African Women's Voices and Visions* (WCC: Geneva, 2003), 250.

43 Despite the fact that HIV and AIDS had been previously studied by theologians from a gender perspective, "no analysis of a social development programme intended for churches has been done through a gendered lens". Melany Adonis, *An African Women's Theological Analysis of a Social Development Programme: 'Churches Channels of Hope',* Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2016), 4.

44 Cf. Isabel Phiri, Beverly Haddad and Maponye Masenya (eds.), *African Women's Voices and Visions* (WCC: Geneva, 2003).

as the starting point for engaging development practice.[45] Chilongozi chose a single conversation partner from the Circle – namely Mercy Amba Oduyoye – to engage with her topic of maternal health.[46] She justified this on the basis of the logic of Marais that for Oduyoye "health and healing are inseparable from human well-being and wellness".[47] She then utilises "Oduyoye's four themes of doing theology in an African context, namely: (1) community and wholeness, (2) relatedness and inter-relationships, (3) reciprocity and justice, and (4) compassion and solidarity" to discuss how they "can be used as theological lenses for [exploring] maternal health in the African context".[48]

Myambo dealt more loosely with the theology of the Circle in dealing with her topic of the vulnerability of the girl child in Zimbabwe; however, she sought to identify what she terms the "theological challenges" that prevent the church from acting in terms of oppressive cultural practices that are harmful to young girls.[49] Here, religious feminism largely adopted from the Circle as well as evangelical authors was used to highlight the kind of theology that reinforces oppression. These theological precepts included "the concept of female submission, and theological challenges which include the concept of God, the role and status of women in the image of God and a discussion of women in the text".[50]

It is interesting that the two male authors did not base their analyses on the theology of the Circle. The reason for this is obvious in the case of Motsau's thesis, which dealt with "Queer-ing Theology and Development Discourse",[51] as he rightly made use of Queer Theology to critique the current Gender and Development discourse as too binary.[52] Dora's thesis, which dealt with the topic of FGM/Cutting, chose the framework of human flourishing as a normative-ethical coun-

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45 Oduyoye quoted by Melany Adonis, *An African Women's Theological Analysis of a Social Development Programme: 'Churches Channels of Hope'*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2016), 67.

46 Cf. Mwawi Chilongozi, *The Role of the Church with Regards to Maternal Health: A Case Study of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Synod of Livingstonia*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2016).

47 Op. cit., 72.

48 Op. cit., 74.

49 Cf. Violet Myambo, *Churches as Community Development Locus: Addressing the Challenges of the Girl Child in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe*, Masters of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2017).

50 Op. cit., 122.

51 Cf. Arnold Motsau, *Towards 'queering' gender within Theology and Development discourse*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2015).

52 Of course in some ways this could also be considered a theological feminism – or at very least a theological queer liberationist framework.

ter to this practice.[53] This is certainly a framework favoured by feminists such as Serene Jones, which he then critiques from the perspective of the Circle.[54] The use of a feminist framework combined with the drive to Africanise it, is interesting to note in this thesis because it was certainly driven by the student during the supervision process.

5.2 A heady mix: a critique of the intersection of culture and religion

As already mentioned, the reason for the choice of the Circle as representing religious feminism in confronting the issues may be linked back directly to their African sensibility of health as holistic as well as their recognition of the intersections between gender, culture and religion.

Adonis highlights the cultural factors in increasing the vulnerability of women to contracting the HI-virus. She quotes Nadar in highlighting that "feminist cultural hermeneutics affirms the life-giving nature of religion and culture",[55] but critiques and rejects those elements in religion which are life-threatening. In this way she offers her African woman's reading as a way to open up greater space within the church for discourse around the way in which the Bible is interpreted and can be utilised as life giving in the intersection of culture, development issues and faith. Adonis and Chilongozi both follow the Circle's arguments quite closely; Chilongozi highlights the issues in a similar manner and also both critiques and affirms African culture. With regards to maternal health, Chilongozi argues – based on the work of Oduyoye – that "cultural practices, proverbs, and taboos that are life affirming should be encouraged and the food taboos, cultural beliefs that hinder women's well-being during pregnancy denounced. It is important that communities help women to make decisions about their health and the number of children they want".[56] She ultimately argues that the church should critique "the cultural practices or values that aim

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53 Cf. Tihitina Dora, *The Role of the Church in Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in order to Promote the Flourishing of Women: A Case Study of the Wolaita Kale Heywet Church, Southern Ethiopia*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2017).

54 Cf. op. cit., 51–60.

55 Melany Adonis, *An African Women's Theological Analysis of a Social Development Programme: 'Churches Channels of Hope'*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2016), 25.

56 Mwawi Chilongozi, *The Role of the Church with Regards to Maternal Health: A Case Study of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Synod of Livingstonia*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2016), 83.

to relegate women to a lower societal position", adding that this will in turn "help identify the values and utilize the voices that empower women in an attempt to give them a sense of dignity and worth. This includes saving the lives of mothers as they go through pregnancy and childbirth".[57] In this discourse the church is identified as having the potential to shift and transform the cultural discourse.

Myambo devotes an entire chapter to the intersection between gender, culture and development and argues that development workers seeking the wellbeing of vulnerable groups such as the girl child in Zimbabwe must be aware of the complex interplay between gender, culture and development as well as the ways in which religion reinforces this oppression by continuing to adhere to patriarchal views on issues such as a specific female dignity and subordinate place of women in the church.[58] She makes the nature of these intersections still clearer as, unlike the other students, she includes the African Independent Churches as part of her analysis. She notes the following in her concluding chapter: "What is clearly revealed through the findings is that the patriarchal nature of Shona society defines the role of women in marriage, community and has infiltrated the church. Cultural and societal norms shape people's theological understanding and beliefs as evidenced by their response to social transformation, social justice and their view of salvation".[59]

FGM/Cutting is clearly a culturally rooted practice; however, Dora largely locates it bio-medically and positions it within the gender-based violence discourses addressed in his thesis. He nevertheless notes that "it could be argued that FGM/C is perpetuated by culture with social and cultural construction of gender in patriarchal society. Furthermore, it appears that the practice of FGM/C is continued for the sake of men's sexuality in a patriarchal society (like Wolaita)".[60] The student argues for the evangelical church to be a role player in confronting the issue and be critical of culture more generally; however, the student argues further that, although the church has begun to confront this issue, it remains a

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57 Ibid.

58 Cf. Violet Myambo, *Churches as Community Development Locus: Addressing the Challenges of the Girl Child in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe*, Masters of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2017).

59 Op. cit., 123.

60 Tihitina Dora, *The Role of the Church in Ending Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting in order to Promote the Flourishing of Women: A Case Study of the Wolaita Kale Heywet Church, Southern Ethiopia*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2017), 25.

'women's issue' and does not therefore receive the attention it should within a church that still maintains a patriarchal religious bias.[61]

What none of the students, other than Myambo, do explicitly is confront and address the spirituality at the root of the practices. This may perhaps be because Myambo identifies as an evangelical, or because the Shona cultural practices she discusses at length are so closely identified with their spirituality. This is of course the case for all of these issues, but nowhere is this identification more clear than where she makes the following recommendation:

> (v) The biblical teaching on the reality of Satan and demons is not a strange message to the Shona people since they believe in the existence of good and evil spirits (c.f. section 5.6.8). The girl child should be equipped in order to deal with the spiritual challenges. The girl child should be taught that God is greater than evil spirits.[62]

5.3 The promotion of the role of FBOs[63] and appeal to religious leadership

As the theses are positioned within the field of Practical Theology and relate to the sub-field of Theology and Development, it is not surprising that they either address the church in its denominational form or faith-based organisations in general. In each of these theses not only the role of the particular denomination is highlighted, but also the role of religious leadership in particular.

Inherent in this approach is the argument that the church has a role to play in addressing issues plaguing society and more particularly in addressing issues where health and gender intersect.[64] These arguments are rooted in both prag-

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61 Cf. op. cit., 102.

62 Violet Myambo, *Churches as Community Development Locus: Addressing the Challenges of the Girl Child in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe*, Masters of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2017), 127.

63 It should be noted that the use of the term FBO here refers to any faith-based organisation and includes faith-based non-profits as well as local congregations and denominations.

64 Cf. Violet Myambo, *Churches as Community Development Locus: Addressing the Challenges of the Girl Child in the Eastern Highlands of Zimbabwe*, Masters of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2017), 17–18; Tihitina Dora, *The Role of the Church in Ending Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting in order to Promote the Flourishing of Women: A Case Study of the Wolaita Kale Heywet Church, Southern Ethiopia*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2017), 3; Melany Adonis, *An African Women's Theological Analysis of a Social Development Programme: 'Churches Channels of Hope'*, Master of Theology (University of Stellenbosch, 2016), 5–6 and Mwawi Chilongozi, *The Role of the Church with Regards to Maternal Health: A Case Study of the Church of*