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# Reformed theology today: Practical-theological, missiological and ethical perspectives

Edited by

Sarel P. van der Walt & Nico Vorster

**Reformed theology today:  
Practical-theological,  
missiological and ethical  
perspectives**

# **Reformed theology today: Practical-theological, missiological and ethical perspectives**



**EDITED BY  
SAREL P. VAN DER WALT  
NICO VORSTER**





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# Contents

Abbreviations appearing in the Text and Notes	xvii
List of Figures	xviii
Notes on Contributors	xix
Foreword	xxv

## **Chapter 1** Speaking about God: Luther as guide in the

<b>field of homiletics</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	1
The high Word in the depth	2
Hermeneutic principle	3
God's hiding and revealing of himself	7
<i>Expositio</i> and <i>applicatio</i>	8
<i>Deus dixit</i>	9
Two poles	10
The creative power of the Word	11
Origin	12
Characteristics	13
Visuality	14
Conclusion	15
Summary: Chapter 1	16

## **Chapter 2** Evaluation of the concept of continuous reformation (*semper reformanda*) in liturgy focussed on the Reformation of the 16th century and the emergent church movement

	<b>18</b>
Introduction	19

Theoretical foundation of the interaction between theory and praxis in liturgy	20
Evaluation of the interaction of theory and praxis in the liturgy of the 16th-century Reformation	21
The 16th-century Reformation as reformation of the existing praxis	22
The unity of Word and sacrament	22
God as initiator enables the acts in liturgy	24
Participation of the congregation	25
The principle of freedom in liturgy	26
Interaction of principles with culture	26
<i>Semper reformanda</i>	28
Evaluation of the 21st-century emergent movement	29
A different view on culture as manifested in a new way of thinking	29
The emergent church movement and the influence of postmodern thinking	30
Evaluative perspectives from Acts 13:13–43 and Acts 19:23–41	33
The influence of preaching on an accompanying liturgy in Jewish culture (Ac 13:13–43)	34
Adaption to a Greek culture (Ac 19:23–41)	35
Evaluation	36
Evaluation of theoretical foundation of the interrelationship between theory and praxis	36
Evaluation of the interrelationship between theory and praxis in the 16th-century Reformation	36
Evaluation of the interrelationship of theory and praxis in the emergent movement of the 21st century	37

A normative theoretical foundation from two passages in Acts on the interrelationship between theory and praxis	38
Perspectives on continuous liturgical reform	38
Conclusion	39
Summary: Chapter 2	39

### Chapter 3

<b>Convinced by Scripture and plain reason:</b>	
<b>Reasonable reformational apologetics</b>	<b>41</b>
By Scripture and plain reason	41
Reason and Christian apologetics before the Reformation	43
The New Testament	43
Augustine	44
Aquinas	44
Reason and Protestant apologetics in the time of the Reformation	44
Luther	45
Calvin	46
Reason and contemporary reformational apologetics	47
From the 17th to the 19th century	47
Recent reformational apologetics	48
Suppressed knowledge of God	48
Aim at heart and mind	49
Philosophical reasoning in reformational apologetics	51
Scripture-based reasoning	51
The application of reasonable apologetics	53
Scientific atheism	54
Polytheism	55
Jehovah's Witnesses	56



Reasonable reformational apologetics	58
Summary: Chapter 3	58

**Chapter 4** **Was the church made only for mission?**

<b>Revisiting <i>missio Dei</i> and <i>missio ecclesia</i> from the perspective of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians</b>	<b>60</b>
Problem statement	60
Kingdom in Ephesians	63
Church in Ephesians	66
The church as an alternative community	66
The church, display window of God’s grace	69
Christ’s unique relationship with the church	70
Church, kingdom and knowledge	73
Conclusion	74
Summary: Chapter 4	75

**Chapter 5** **Missiology and Reformation in a post-Christian Western world**

Introduction	76
Dawn of the post-Christian world – Christendom declared dead	77
Pre-Christendom	77
From pre-Christendom to Christendom	78
The phase of the new post-Christendom	80
The Reformation in historical perspective	81
Reforming the reformation	83
The reforming road ahead	84
Conclusion	85
Summary: Chapter 5	86

<b>Chapter 6</b>	<b>Paying unpaid debts. Reformational antidotes for some of the challenges posed by prosperity gospel theology</b>	<b>87</b>
	Introduction	87
	Background and summary of prosperity gospel theology	90
	Extent	90
	Historical origins	91
	Gnostic-metaphysical origins	91
	Gnostic world view background	92
	Gnostic world views blended with Charismatic Pentecostalism	93
	Experience the gateway to truth	94
	Divine nature of the human soul	94
	Visualisation and positive confession	96
	New revelations	97
	How do these 'new revelations' surface in PT?	98
	Attitude to Scripture and valid hermeneutics	99
	Proposal for some reformational antidotes from the theology of Martin Luther	100
	The sovereignty and providence of God	100
	Effects of the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in our lives	102
	The importance of Luther's theology of the Cross	103
	Main trends in Luther's hermeneutics	104
	Conclusion	105
	Summary: Chapter 6	106
<b>Chapter 7</b>	<b>Towards a pastoral care for Africa: Some practical theological considerations for a contextual approach</b>	<b>107</b>
	Introduction	107

Rationale, research question, aim and objectives	108
Whence pastoral care and whither Africa?	109
Different voices in the quest for a contextual approach	112
Indigenisation	112
Africanisation	113
An intercultural approach	113
Postcolonisation	114
A contextual transformative approach	115
A contextual approach (contextualisation)	115
A critical assessment of a recent attempt at authentic pastoral care for Africa	116
Pastoral theology in African contexts	116
Three possible epistemologies for a contextual approach: Diaconiology, practical theology and a postfoundational notion of practical theology	118
Diaconiology	118
Practical theology	119
Postfoundational practical theology	119
Synthesis	120
Summary: Chapter 7	121

<b>Chapter 8</b>	<b>Xenophobia and social prejudice through the lens of Calvin: From ‘iron philosophy’ to <i>homo sympatheticus</i> in a practical theology of home within the global dilemma of displaced refugees</b>	<b>123</b>
	Introduction	124
	Xenophobia: The threat of the ‘cultural other’ and ‘intruding stranger’	126
	The refugee dilemma within the global migrant crisis: Between integration (welcoming) and separation (resistance)	127

The migrant crisis and the quest for human dignity	129
The plea for solidarity: A theological dilemma and pastoral challenge within the context of Geneva	130
The practical theological challenge: From the impassibility of ‘iron philosophy’ (Stoic extirpation of passion: <i>Homo apatheticus</i> ) to the praxis of theopaschitic theology: <i>Homo sympatheticus</i>	133
Towards a practical theology and ecclesiology of home ( <i>xenodochia</i> ): From ‘Syria’ back to ‘Geneva’	135
Conclusion	137
Summary: Chapter 8	138


<b>Chapter 9</b>	<b>Hermeneutics and ethics. The quest for a ‘biblical ethic’</b>	<b>139</b>
	Introduction	139
	The ‘book of nature’	142
	The ‘written Word’	144
	The history of revelation	148
	Higher principles	151
	Descriptive and prescriptive material	152
	Deontological and virtue ethics	153
	Conclusion	154
	Summary: Chapter 9	154

<b>Chapter 10</b>	<b>From psalter to hymnal. Recent developments in the Reformed Churches in South Africa in the light of the principles and practices of the Reformation</b>	<b>155</b>
	Introduction	155

## Contents

Zwingli	156
Luther (1483–1546)	159
Calvin	162
A comparison of the views of Zwingli, Luther and Calvin	164
Recent developments in the Reformed Churches in South Africa	165
Conclusion	169
Summary: Chapter 10	169
References	171
Index	196

# Towards a pastoral care for Africa: Some practical theological considerations for a contextual approach

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## ■ Introduction

This chapter focuses on on the field of practical theology, pastoral care and the African context. Commemorating 500 years of Reformed theology not only calls for celebration, but also for a reappraisal of how Reformed theology is applied in different contexts. As such, this contribution is located within the discourse on the contextualisation of pastoral care and counselling within the African context from a Reformed perspective. As a traditional Western approach to theology is increasingly criticised as unfit for the African context, the design of an authentic African practical theology and pastoral care is currently one of the very relevant discourses within practical theology (cf. Dames 2014).

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The urgency for such a design was already highlighted more than two decades ago by veteran South African pastoral theologian De Jongh van Arkel (1995:189), who suggested that the pastoral care and counselling movement in South Africa is a Western-dominated enterprise which is to the detriment of Africans. It is an argument built on the notion of John. S. Pobee (1989:2) that 'Africa is in some form of North Atlantic captivity – one consequence of the colonial history of most African peoples.'

In a country where 80%, of the nearly 55 million inhabitants, are black Africans (Mudzuli 2015) a Western stronghold on pastoral theory poses obvious challenges. How appropriate can theology, developed in the Western world, really be when issues like family, illness and death – which carry a different weight in Africa – are involved? How can theological training from typical Western frameworks prepare African clergy for attending to the pastoral needs of rapidly expanding African flocks? It cannot, because Western approaches to theological training negate the particularities of African beliefs, thinking and practices (Brunsdon & Knoetze 2014:268). Consequently, the matter of a contextual approach to pastoral care and counselling for the African context demands ongoing reflection from all stakeholders to serve the diverse populace of Southern Africa.

## ■ Rationale, research question, aim and objectives

As the title of this contribution suggests, this research is interested in the journey towards a pastoral care for Africa. Its purpose, therefore, is not to design a pastoral approach to a particular problem typical of the African context nor does it have a specific African country in mind. A number of researchers have already addressed prevalent African phenomena with certain countries in mind. Several authors like Brown and Hendriks (2004), Buffel (2006), Magezi (2007), Magezi and Myambo (2011) as well as Motsi and Masango (2012) engaged issues such as the HIV and AIDS pandemic, poverty, trauma and even avenging spirits encountered in Southern Africa. Instead, the study focuses on some of the practical theological considerations that precede the design of pastoral approaches aimed at the broader African context. Quite often, it seems that attempts at designing pastoral approaches to African issues end up in 'either-or' scenarios, where either the Christian tradition or African context overpowers the other.

The work of Mwiti and Dueck (2007) serves as an appropriate example in this regard. In their quest for a contextualised pastoral approach they opted for an 'African Indigenous Christian Counselling Model' (Mwiti & Dueck 2007:68). They describe this approach as 'an eclectic model of counseling and psychotherapy that integrates indigenous cultural sensitivity, biblical grounding, and carefully selected non-African biological, social, and psychological insights' (Mwiti & Dueck 2007:68). In explicating 'biblical grounding' further, they call God 'our creator, sustainer, and redeemer' (Mwiti & Dueck 2007:69) and also that 'it is in the light of Christ that we Christians find the standards for behavior in culture', adding that 'our confession also serves as the basis of interpreting and assessing indigenous

cultures' (Mwiti & Dueck 2007:69). Although theologically sound, it is not clear *how* the Christian paradigm engages indigenous cultures. Consequently, it creates the impression that Christian theology assumes a normative position, which inevitably steers the pastoral process into an 'either-or' activity where indigenous beliefs are simply replaced with Christian beliefs and practices. While this might not be problematic within a Christian paradigm, it could well be incomprehensible within an African context and casting suspicion on Christian approaches as theology that assumes a paternalistic position. In this regard Berinyuu (1988) remarks that:

Christian pastoral theology is not simply a matter of applying principles of pastoral care taken from another situation, or just applying some Biblical or Christian doctrines to the African situation. (p. 91)

This emphasises the need for greater clarity on how practical theology should engage the African context, culture and world view to develop a pastoral care suited for Africa.

Hence, the main question this chapter seeks to address is *what* does practical theology need to consider in the quest for a pastoral care approach for Africa? Embedded in this question is the assumption that practical theology serves as the scientific 'engine room' for pastoral care. Given that this engine can be driven by different fuels (epistemologies), careful consideration should be given to which would be best suited to engage contexts other than the Western.

The main aim of this research would subsequently be to identify and discuss some of the pivotal considerations or prequestions that should precede pastoral care aimed at the African context.

To this end, the set objectives are:

- To clarify the concepts of pastoral care and the African context.
- To engage in a critical discussion of different approaches (voices) discernible in the quest to produce a pastoral care approach for Africa: indigenisation, Africanisation, an intercultural approach, postcolonisation, a contextual transformative approach and a contextual approach.
- To critically assess a recent example of an attempt at authentic African pastoral care to consider three possible epistemologies for a contextual approach: diaconology, practical theology and a postfoundationalist notion of practical theology.
- To articulate the practical theological considerations necessary in the quest for a contextual approach to pastoral care suited for Africa (synthesis).

## ■ Whence pastoral care and whither Africa?

Clarity on pastoral care and the African context is imperative in the quest for a pastoral care for Africa. What is pastoral care conceived to be and what is meant by the African context within the framework of this research?



Pastoral care is used here, in the generic sense of the word, as an umbrella term denoting all pastoral actions within a Christian framework on both a formal and an informal level. Heeding the classic Latin terms *Pastorem* [shepherd] and *cura animarum* [care of souls], pastoral care inevitably points to care within the faith community towards one another. Whether pastoral care is an exclusive Christian action depends on who is performing such action and why. Generally speaking, any care for a fellow person can be described as a pastoral action, although historically pastoral care is closely associated with the Christian tradition (Gerkin 1997:23). This is mainly due to the shepherd motif, found in both the Old and New Testament (cf. Ps 23; Jn 10:10), which associates God and his Son – and later their followers – with the qualities of compassion and caring. In this sense, pastoral care is particular to the Christian tradition (McClure 2012:269).

Within the Christian tradition the motive for pastoral care towards another is found in God's love for his Creation. In the classic Reformed summation of pastoral care, De Klerk (1978:2) states that God chose to reveal himself in the Old Testament as shepherd based on his covenant love for the weak and vulnerable. Jesus Christ personified this metaphor in the New Testament. It is indeed this metaphor that became the model according to which Christians initially took care of one another.

Since pastoral care has never occurred in a vacuum, societal development necessitates critical thinking about its effectiveness. Questions about who should be offering pastoral care, who should receive care and how it should be performed occupied the minds of early church figures like Chrysostom, Augustine and Gregory the Great alike (cf. Gerkin 1997:33–39). Advances in scientific thinking brought about even greater impetus for theorising about pastoral care, as seen in the contributions of Richard Baxter (1656) and John Watson (1896) (in McClure 2012:271). This already suggested that although pastoral care is driven by God's love, it is also concerned with both context and method.

Where early developments in pastoral care were predominantly steered theologically, 20th-century developments brought about a fusion with developments in the field of psychology changing the course of pastoral care to this day. The contribution of Anton Boisen in his seminal work *The exploration of the inner world*, published in 1971, testifies to the cross insemination between psychology and pastoral care. While it is outside of the scope of this chapter to engage in an extensive discussion of the influence of other disciplines on pastoral care, it has to be noted that since the dawn of the 20th century pastoral care has drawn much on the labours of other disciplines like psychology, lending it some flavour of the human and social sciences and robbing it from any claims to be 'pure theology'. Brunson (2014:2 of 9) refers to this as the 'innate tension' of pastoral care, given that pastoral care is deployed within the tension field between revelation and experience and forever seeking to strike a balance that honours both the biblical and the human text.

Currently, pastoral care has many faces and many applications. The fourfold distinction of De Jongh van Arkel (1995:197) still serves the multifaceted character of this

craft well in claiming that pastoral care can be expressed as mutual care, pastoral care, pastoral counselling and pastoral therapy. Pastoral care can thus be spontaneous and informal, but also organised and highly formal or professional. It can have as only prerequisite the Christian love for thy neighbour or it can require years of formal training at an institution of higher learning. The Western world especially opted for the latter approach as it is apparent in the history of pastoral care and how it developed within Western thinking, namely as a specialised approach to human problems, cognisant of political, economic and social contexts (Lartey 1997:26).

When deconstructed, however, pastoral care denotes a unique approach to helping, in that it involves both informal and specialised care towards the other based upon the love of God, aimed at building faith which empowers the fellow human being to conquer challenges and embrace a life abundant (cf. Jn 10:10). This research is interested in how this form of care can be appropriated within the African context.

If it is accepted that pastoral care is some form of cultural captivity and needs to go beyond the Western world, clarity about these other contexts is paramount. In the case of this research, the African context deserves such clarification.

Publications pertaining to the so-called African context have become abundant. Phenomena such as the African Renaissance (cf. Villa-Vicencio, Doxtader & Moosa 2015) and the current expanse of the Christian church on the African continent (Clarke 2014:1) have brought the African context into the scope of many recent social and theological studies. More often than not it seems that the African context is used in a generic sense, suggesting that the African context refers to a single place or a homogenous group of people.

Owing to the vastness of the African continent and the diversity of people and ethnic groups represented in each country, a generic use of the concept is highly contestable. The classic book of Mbiti (1970), *Concepts of God in Africa*, features the questioning of more than 270 different groups of Africans on their views of God as reminder of the plurality within Africa in terms of faith, beliefs and understanding. Even in the same country, Africans themselves do not represent a homogenous group in terms of ethnicity and expression of cultural practices and beliefs. Current factors like globalisation and urbanisation are instrumental in further diversifying the value systems of Africans, contributing to the fluidity of the notion of a uniform African context. In light of this, the quest for a pastoral care model for Africa inevitably needs to be careful of a generic approach to the African context and always attempt to be specific about which context is at stake.

In turn, this does not imply that no similarities among Africans exist and that no generalisations can be made when thinking and writing about the African context. It is, for example, possible to talk about aspects of an African world view and African culture

which many Africans share, irrespective of their specific contexts. Some of these include sociality and the view of time and ancestors (Van der Walt 2008:172–175). Still, caution needs to be taken to always respect the uniqueness of specific peoples and their self-understanding.

Subsequently, it is contended here that the African context must be understood as any location with a concentration of African people, thus creating a specific context. An African context thus not only exists in Ghana, Kenya or any other African country, but also in a multicultural country like South Africa. It is significant that Mudzuli (2015) indicates that:

[The] black African population remained in the majority at 44.23 million, or 80 percent of the total population, with whites estimated at 4.53 million, coloureds 4.83 million and Indians/Asians at 1.365 million. (n.p.)

Contemporary South Africa can therefore essentially be deemed 'African', as it translates to a predominantly 'African context'. It would, however, be wrong to assume that South Africa represents a uniform African context. Instead it is home to the proverbial rainbow nation, comprising a range of ethnic groups within the more than 44 million Africans.

This underscores the fact that all so-called African contexts will necessitate thorough analysis of their specific ethnic and cultural uniqueness and that this should be the starting point of the journey towards pastoral care in Africa, rendering each project of contextualisation unique and specific.

## ■ Different voices in the quest for a contextual approach

As suggested earlier, the search for a pastoral care approach for Africa is not a new-found endeavour. Consensus about the necessity to appropriate the tenets of Christian theology, within African contexts, has been around for some time. It would thus be of benefit to consider some of the different voices (methods) that have arisen in this quest.

### ■ Indigenisation<sup>31</sup>

Indigenisation is mainly aimed at stripping a Christian theology from all Western cultural adornments, according to Turaki (1999:17), whereby 'the indigenisation principle deals mainly with cultural contextualisation' of Western theology (Turaki 1999:18).

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31. In this section the spelling of the featured authors is followed for terms like 'indigenisation' and 'Africanisation'. When it is used by the author in the rest of this chapter, United Kingdom spelling is used.

A critical evaluation of theology in general, and pastoral care in particular always reveals a great deal of cultural saturation. This is especially true of pastoral theology which has come of age in the Western world. Heavily influenced during its early history by questions emanating from the Western world and focusing on problems unique to the then First World, led pastoral theology to become heavily laden with concepts that are in fact unique to the Western experience and culture. This, of course, rendered any attempts of an uncritical use of Western approaches within African contexts untenable.

Recognising the deep Western influence on pastoral care creates concern about the question whether cultural contextualisation is sufficient to appropriate pastoral care within African contexts.

## Africanisation

Closely related to indigenisation, but aimed at putting Africans in ‘charge and control’ (Turaki 1999:19) as well as devise theology themselves, is the notion of Africanisation. Carrying with it the political yearning to be independent from the Western (missionary) yoke, Africanisation is ‘a conscious and deliberate assertion of the right to be an African’ and argues that only Africans can document and communicate the African experience, as experience is not transferable, but only communicable (Ramose 1998:vii).

Turaki points out how the Africanisation approach did not entirely succeed to come up with a truly indigenous African theology, given that Africanisation was more focused on gaining control of the administrative or external functions of the church itself – rather than on the development of a truly indigenous theology (cf. Turaki 1999:19), thereby disqualifying itself as a way to pursue an authentic African theology.

## An intercultural approach

Not solely focusing on the African culture, Lartey suggests an intercultural approach to pastoral theology. This approach values the diversity of cultures, but is wary of dominant cultures that ‘deliberately or unwittingly seek to impose their culture and perspective upon all others’ (Lartey 1997:10). Instead theology must at least take seriously the context and world view of the people it serves, recognising that multiple perspectives exist and engage with the cultures of others in an authentic way. It points to a true faith in and understanding of the foreign culture on both a cognitive and affective level. Above all, an intercultural approach is opposed ‘to *reductionism* and *stereotyping* in any form’ (Lartey 1997:11).

While the notion of an intercultural approach has much potential, it may prove difficult to achieve in practice. It is especially Lartey's strict opposition to any form of reductionism or stereotyping that prohibits the 'categorising' of any group or person, thereby attributing certain characteristics to a group or individual that creates some serious challenges. For one, the negative stance towards understanding a group of people in terms of their culture becomes a problem when in fact no group of people can ever be viewed as acultural as all groups of people clearly exhibit certain traits, beliefs and practices.

## Postcolonisation

Nearly two decades after Lartey's suggestions about an intercultural approach (1997), he published *Postcolonializing God: An African practical theology* (2013), which is a bold attempt at a true 'African practical theology.' In doing so, Lartey articulated some of the meaning of the postcolonial discourse in search of a practical theology suited to the African context. As Beyers (2016:6 of 10) however suggested, the notion of postcolonialism should not be used in an unqualified way. Remarking on Lartey's contribution thus also calls for some qualification. In following Sugirtharajah (2006:8) the hyphenated form 'post-colonial' denotes the historical period where previously colonised societies regained freedom from colonial rule while the unhyphenated form refers to a dialogical response to knowledge systems imposed during the colonial period. According to Glück (2008:1) the 'basic idea of this process is the deconstruction of old-fashioned perceptions and attitudes of power and oppression that were adopted during the time of colonialism'.

In this framework Lartey's attempt at *Postcolonializing God* can be regarded as a dialogical response to practical theological thought imposed on Africa. Lartey himself refers to postcolonisation as a form of criticism which is 'life enhancing [...] opposed to every form of tyranny, domination and abuse, its social goals are non-coercive knowledge produced in the interests of human freedom' (Lartey 2013:x).

In theological terms then, it seems like postcolonisation essentially seeks to restore theology (faith) to what it was before colonisers colonised the minds of their subjects (irrespective of who the colonisers and subjects might have been) in order to restore some kind of tabula rasa theology for the African context.

In the process space is created for 'constructive critique of received theologies' (Lartey 2013:11) and a reappraisal of the 'African religious heritage' (Lartey 2013:25), which includes aspects such as 'mystical connectivity through communal ritual' (Lartey 2013:28) and 'pragmatic spirituality' (Lartey 2013:30).

What transpires, as evident in this approach of Lartey, is the use of postcolonisation as hermeneutic key for practical theology and pastoral care aimed at Africans – as if

colonisation is the only challenge for Africa. Unfortunately, this creates the possibility of a reductionist and exclusive approach to pastoral care. Viewed from a Reformed perspective, hermeneutic keys for practical theology and pastoral care are traditionally sought in the inclusive attributes of God rather than in the exclusive political motives of man.

## **A contextual transformative approach**

A more recent and local voice, became discernible in the approach of Dames (2014) who suggests a contextual transformative approach to practical theology in the South African context. On the necessity of such an approach Dames (2014:13) refers to Botman (2000:201), who states, 'Practical theology should arise out of a *status confessionis* and a prophetic theology with a liberation emphasis located in the experience of the poor black people.'

Dames shares the sentiment of Buffel (2006) in this regard, who seriously questions pastoral theology that is neither contextual nor liberating. This contextual transformative approach is clear in terms of its agenda, not seeking a general contextualisation of pastoral care, but focused on addressing issues pertinent to the South African context including pathological socioeconomic conditions, HIV and AIDS, intercultural theological training and moral formation (Dames 2014:99, 113, 122, 145).

Dames's focus on the role of mission (Dames 2014:78) and the possibilities of a transversal model of a cross-disciplinary approach marks his contribution as an approach that warrants further exploration in the quest for a pastoral care approach for Africa.

## **A contextual approach (contextualisation)**

The last voice explored is contextualisation. This approach is not, in the first place, concerned with culture or the eradication of some form of political-historical deficit, but with making theology itself relevant within a certain context.

According to Turaki (1999:19), the 'overriding goal [*of contextualisation*] is that of making theology relevant and meaningful in its application within context'. As such, contextualisation goes beyond indigenisation and Africanisation and is interested in theological relevance. Hence, Turaki (1999:20) states, '[c]ontextualisation as a tool of doing theology in Africa focuses principally on making the essence of Christianity relevant and understood within context'. This way both revelation (the Word of God) and experience (context) are deemed non-negotiable variables in the search for a pastoral care approach for Africa.

From a Reformed perspective contextualisation holds much potential for addressing the issue of pastoral care in Africa, given its focus on making theology relevant within a certain context.

## ■ A critical assessment of a recent attempt at authentic pastoral care for Africa

The previous sections set out to address some of the prequestions deemed important in the quest for a pastoral care approach for Africa. It showed that such an endeavour should at least have a clear definition of pastoral care in mind; respect the contextual uniqueness of all African contexts; and apply a method that serves both context and revelation. In the following section, the focus now shifts to a critical assessment of a recent example of a pastoral approach aimed at the African context in order to identify issues practical theology should explore further in terms of contextualised pastoral care.

### ■ Pastoral theology in African contexts

After considering typical Western notions of pastoral care, including those of Clebsch and Jaekle as well as Clinebell (Masango 2013:744–745), Masango contends that pastoral care among Africans begins with a mother and members of a village nurturing a child that the child may become ‘a good person among other villagers’ (Masango 2013:745).

This way Masango broadens the individualised Western concept of pastoral care to an approach that is community based and ‘cares for life instead of problems’ (Masango 2013:746). At the very core of this community-based approach lies the African notion of ubuntu, which Masango explains in the words of Mbiti (1986:85), ‘I am because you are [...] You are because I am.’

In terms of the African people (as caregivers) Masango distinguishes between the village and villagers with rural Africans in mind and those in urban areas who became caught up in modern Western systems, influencing their own understanding of ubuntu. Following Mucherera (2009), Masango recognises that Africans are currently caught between ‘worlds and cultural systems which challenge old patterns of life’ (Masango 2013:747).

Irrespective of this ambiguity, Masango (2013:750) maintains the opinion that Africans honour ubuntu in as much as they honour the elders among them as well as the memories of those who passed on (good ancestors). Here the notion of honouring the dead and communicating with them comes to the fore, as Masango highlights the African

belief that those who had led a good life are with the Lord and respecting their memory aids communication with God (Masango 2013:750).

This line of thought is also carried forth by the African imperative to nurture communal life. 'Therefore, when we care for each other, we are caring for God, who lives within us' (Masango 2013:750).

This communal character of an African pastoral care approach directly opposes and challenges the Western notion of individuality. 'African scholars are of the view that the western world rotates around being self-centred, the right to privacy and respect of personal space in their lives' (Masango 2013:751). Opposing this, the African notion of pastoral care seeks to nurture ubuntu by handing the African values down to the young by drawing on 'music, folk stories, proverbs and idioms' and at the same time 'engage the monster of globalization' which is the greatest threat to the African way of pastoral care (Masango 2013:753).

Reviewing Masango's work on the pastoral framework described earlier on in this contribution, leads to at least the following conclusions.

It seems like Masango's notion of African pastoral care relies heavily on the romantic ideal of the 'village' and the purpose of such pastoral care is upholding mutual respect for the living and the dead, grounded on the principles of ubuntu.

One of the most pressing questions, which arises from a critical engagement with this approach, concerns the sufficiency of such an approach for current African contexts. Are the majority of African people today still part of the 'village' and is nurturing traditional African values still adequate to care for Africans confronted with new contexts and new challenges? Davis (2014) reminds that urbanisation is on the rise and the 'village' is shrinking as 'too many people are moving to South African cities'. Seen within the bigger context of the African continent itself, South African urbanisation patterns merely echo the trends across Africa. 'At present, the African continent is 40 percent urbanised' and 'according to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) [...] Africa will be 50 percent urban by 2030 and 60 percent urban by 2050' (Van der Merwe 2014).

Especially in the light of Masango's own observation that urban and rural Africans do not share the same value system any more, this should signal that a paradigm shift or shifts are on the cards for African pastoral theology. Just as urbanisation is responsible for Africans contracting typical 'Western' illnesses (cf. Puoane & Tsolekile 2008), so will urbanisation create new spiritual and emotional challenges in the long term that will not necessarily be addressed by the notion of African pastoral care as conveyed by Masango.

Other themes that will beg the attention of a contextualised approach from a practical theological perspective are the concept of 'good ancestors' and the absence of Christian texts as epistemological basis for an African pastoral care. While the inclusion of ancestors



within an African pastoral framework and the role of care for the community, ubuntu, music, folklore and such are all true to the African context, it is foreign to the Christian character and paradigm of pastoral care as previously suggested. Seen within the framework of this study then, it implies that from a practical theological vantage point, more should be done in order to devise a theologically anchored approach to a pastoral care for Africa.

This requires exploring a number of epistemologies that could possibly aid the integration of the African context into the development of a pastoral care approach for Africa.

## ■ Three possible epistemologies for a contextual approach: Diaconiology, practical theology and a postfoundational notion of practical theology

### ■ Diaconiology

This epistemology undergirded early pastoral theorising in Southern Africa. Derived from the Greek *diakonia* [service] and *logos* [word] and anchored in the theological tradition of Abraham Kuyper (Heyns & Jonker 1977:297), diaconiology deduced principles from the Word of God regarding the practical service of the church in the world, including pastoral care. Given the strong focus on the Bible as point of departure, diaconiology may even be called true to the reformational *sola scriptura*. Janse van Rensburg (2000:77) remarks that this epistemology acknowledges the objective truth of the Bible thereby providing a strong normative or ethical basis for theological theory.

In terms of pastoral care based on a diaconiological epistemology, a metaphor like that of the shepherd (Ps 23; Jn 10:10) plays a pivotal role in that it provides clear guidelines for the pastoral work of the church (cf. De Klerk 1978). Although a diaconiological epistemology considers both biblical principles and in fact the findings of the human sciences as well, Janse van Rensburg (2000:78) points out, it would still be fair to conclude that a diaconiological epistemology proceeds from the Word to praxis (context) in order to determine, in this case, the scope and method of pastoral care. In this equation, the Word of God thus carries more weight than the context.

The greatest challenge in using a diaconiological epistemology to engage the African context would, therefore, be to avoid a mere ethical evaluation of cultural aspects foreign to Scripture (Mwiti & Dueck 2007). Such a pastoral care would most probably not be true to the spirit of honest contextualisation, as it would be disqualifying all African beliefs

and values that are foreign to the Scriptures and only apply Christian principles within the African context.

## Practical theology

Whereas the diaconological epistemology takes the Bible as point of departure, the subsequent practical theological epistemology, championed by inter alia Friedrich Schleiermacher and Jürgen Habermas (Janse van Rensburg 2000:80), centres on the context. If a diaconological epistemology causes a division between nature and grace, practical theology seeks to bring nature into the scope of theological investigation to thereby move from context to Scripture and from Scripture back to the context, creating a practical theological circle. This is evident in several of the definitions of practical theology that have become known in the field, of which the following are but two. Heyns and Pieterse (1990:6) state that ‘practical theology is one of the fields of theological study. It focuses on people’s religious actions, with the accent on the word “actions” – these represent the object of study’. Swinton and Mowat (2006) argue that practical theology is:

[C]ritical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world with a view to ensuring faithful participation in the continuing mission of the Triune God. (p. 25)

The claim in both instances that practical theology represents *theological* study and reflection emphasises the circular movement between context, Scripture and context.

In terms of both pastoral care and the context, a practical theological epistemology provides more assurance that the context receives careful attention, in fact, that both Scripture and context are considered. For the purposes of a contextualised pastoral care for Africa then, it seems that much potential resides in this epistemology. If Lartey’s (1997:11) conception of ‘authentic participation’ in terms of intercultural engagement is taken seriously, however, the question remains if it will be able to critically reflect on contexts like the African in a truly unbiased way. Given this concern, a postfoundational view of practical theology is worth considering.

## Postfoundational practical theology

Postfoundational practical theology attempts to transcend the challenges presented by diaconiology and practical theology in terms of their bias towards ‘foundations’, presented by both revelation and context, as well as the school of thought that suggests that *no* foundations exist, thus being anti- or nonfoundational.

Müller (2011:2) suggests that practical theology follows the route of a postfoundational notion of practical theology that ‘consists of an effort to move beyond both foundationalist

and nonfoundationalist claims' (Müller 2011:2 of 5). Also referred to as 'transversal rationality', it offers a 'responsible and workable interface between disciplines' (Müller 2011:3 of 5) and, therefore, contexts. In this regard Müller (2011:3 of 5) explicitly states, '[c]ontextuality is a key concept in the postfoundationalist approach'.

According to Van Huyssteen (1997), a postfoundationalist approach to practical theology endows the theologian with the responsibility to look beyond his or her own discipline and culture in search of a true interdisciplinary dialogue.

In terms of the search for a pastoral care for Africa with a true, contextualised theology as the outcome, a postfoundational view to practical theology presents the possibility for engaging the African context *transversally* rather than *conversationally*. Apart from creating space for a true authentic participation with the 'other', it will most probably facilitate greater potential for an *authentic* understanding of the 'other'. Müller (2011) points out that a postfoundationalist approach implies:

- *Real* concern about a real person. Concerns in this paradigm are never theoretical, but always local and embodied.
- A *not-knowing* approach, but at the same time an approach of active engagement.
- *Holistic* in the sense of being fully committed to the real contextual story, but also committed to the exploring of traditions of interpretation.
- A *social-constructionist* approach where a person is part of the development of a preferred reality that makes sense to him or her. Such an approach creates both the most profound and the most fragile moment, a moment of true pastoral concern. (p. 3 of 5)

From a Reformed perspective, concerns regarding the normativity of Scripture in a postfoundationalist approach are obvious. Van Huyssteen (2007), however, raises the so-called 'degrees of transversality', which safeguard interdisciplinary or intercontextual dialogue against transgressing the own discipline's or context's natural boundaries. This means that even a postfoundational approach will ultimately heed the boundaries of its own chosen method, while at the same time creating what Müller (2011:4 of 5) refers to as an 'ecotone' where interdisciplinary dialogue may take place to the benefit of all stakeholders.

## Synthesis

This chapter sets out to engage practical theology, pastoral care and the African context on the grounds that a need to appropriate pastoral care in the African context exists. The focus centres on the prequestions for practical theology, that is, what the most basic issues are that practical theology should consider in the quest for a pastoral care approach for Africa.

This focus gives rise to the imperative of establishing a clear definition of pastoral care so that practical theological theorising may be clear on what it intends to appropriate within the African context. Pastoral care represents a unique means of support to the

Christian paradigm in its aim to build faith that empowers fellow humans to conquer challenges and embrace a life abundant.

Research into the quest for a pastoral care approach for Africa also warns against a generic use of the African context. Although it is recognised that some similarities between African people exist, in terms of culture and world view, the African context represents a diverse phenomenon. An African context comprises any concentration of Africans and yet the diverse nature of the African people requires careful exegesis of specific contexts, rendering every African study unique. This would imply that a generic African pastoral care model would be difficult to attain and that pastoral studies within African contexts should be specific and unique to a certain context.

As attempts to appropriate pastoral theology within African contexts are not new, the chapter also considers different approaches like indigenisation and Africanisation. Owing to the political inclination of most of such approaches, contextualisation is indicated as method of choice from a Reformed perspective in that it is concerned with making theology itself relevant within a certain context. Given that pastoral care is representative of a Christian (theological) approach, contextualisation makes provision for sustaining the theological character of pastoral care within different contexts.

In the light of these considerations, a recent attempt at a pastoral care approach for Africa was critically assessed and found to rely heavily on typical African concepts such as ubuntu and the welfare of the 'village'. The biggest difference between a Reformed and African approach seems to be on the theological nature of pastoral care, since no biblical base could be identified in the latter approach. Another point of concern is the applicability of this approach to current African contexts, where notable shifts in terms of world views and the influence of phenomena like urbanisation are taking place.

On these grounds it is suggested that the quest for a pastoral care for Africa would indeed benefit from further practical theological investigation and hence the description of three different epistemologies for further practical theological study. Cognisant of a diaconological, practical theological and a postfoundational conception of practical theology, it is concluded that practical theology can be utilised as a means to engage African contexts theologically in the quest for a pastoral care for Africa.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 7

This chapter is located within the discourse on the contextualisation of pastoral care and counselling within the African context from a Reformed perspective. It is based on the notion that Western approaches to pastoral care cannot uncritically be applied within African contexts. Assuming that practical theology serves as the theoretical engine room

for pastoral care, this study is interested in the practical theological questions preceding pastoral care aimed at Africa. It attempts to clarify basic concepts such as pastoral care, the African context and some of the approaches previously applied in the appropriation of pastoral theology in African contexts, like indigenisation, Africanisation, contextualisation and such. Having opted for the contextualisation of pastoral care within the African milieu, it critically assesses a recent example of an African pastoral care approach. In light of several theological concerns, the research suggests that the quest for a pastoral care for Africa can indeed benefit from further practical theological investigation. To this end, three different epistemologies for further practical theological investigation are described. Cognisant of a diaconological, practical theological and postfoundational notion of practical theology, it is concluded that practical theology has the means to engage African contexts in an unbiased way, in the continuing quest for a pastoral care approach for Africa.