

CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE NARRATIVE THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION IN THE *POSTMODERN GLOBAL VILLAGE* FROM A POSTMODERN URBAN SOUTH AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

I have come to the last part (part three) of this study namely the critical reflection and summary of the journey. I believe it to be only apt to conclude this study with a critical, reflective and summarising story of the study. The study was the story of a journey (quest) and therefore the study being a narrative study, did not seek arguments or conclusions that could be formulated in concise formulation, but the argument, 'truth' or validity of the study is to be found in the story itself and therefore I tried to tell this story as fully as possible, this being the reason why the study is so long.

This concluding chapter will consist of the following:

<p>1. Narrative theological orientation: a critical reflection</p> <p>I will briefly reflect on the narrative theological orientation as proposed and used by the study in this journey. I give a short summary of the chapters to show how this narrative orientation helped in the discovery of unique outcomes.</p>
<p>2. Pastoral Redemptive Communities: a critical reflection</p> <p>This section will be a brief final reflection on the Pastoral Redemptive Communities as proposed transformative praxis.</p>
<p>3. Epilogue</p>

1. NARRATIVE THEOLOGICAL ORIENTATION: A CRITICAL REFLECTION

This journey began within the context of ministry. In this context of ministry I understood there to be two major challenges, namely postmodernity and globalization, which I believed was dividing the world into villagers and marginalised. In the initial stage of the journey I had a hunch that postmodernity and globalisation had something to do with each other, but I was not sure how exactly they are connected. I believed that these two challenges needed to be faced together and not in isolation.

This brought me to the formulation of the theme of the study and the purpose of the study.

Theme: Towards a narrative theological orientation in the *global village* from a postmodern urban South African perspective.

The purpose of the study: To find an appropriate ecclesiological praxis within the narrative theological orientation that can respond to the challenges of the global village within a postmodern, urban South African context.

The journey began (Chapter Two) with a description of postmodernity and seeking to understand how this condition developed, in other words I tried to tell the story of postmodernity and within the context of this story to discover a way of doing theology. It was towards the end of Chapter Two that I developed a working description (Chapter Two: 12.2.1 Working description) for doing theology in a postmodern context.

Working Description: The narrative theological orientation of this study can be described as a systematically structured, continuous hermeneutical process of critical reflection on Christian activities (praxis) within the social context and in the light of the various narratives that form the dramatic resources with which the faith community constructs and interprets their reality

This working description was influenced by narrative therapy, fundamental practical theology and contextual theology and it gave rise to four movements. These four movements would guide the theological journey of the study.

The rest of the study can be divided into these four movements:

Descriptive theology part one: insertion which is a process of listening and describing the stories of need of both the villagers and the marginalised	Chapter Three
Descriptive theology part two: describing and unpacking (analysis ¹) the stories of need, namely the stories of the past and the clouded stories of the future.	Chapter Four
Descriptive theology conclusion: describing the <i>postmodern global village</i>	Chapter Five
Historical and systematic theology: dialogue between the sacred texts and the questions raised in descriptive theology	Chapter Six
Strategic practical theology	Chapter Seven

¹ The term analysis comes from the pastoral hermeneutical circle and therefore I have included it here, although I am aware that it is not an appropriate term for a narrative study. I included it to indicate my indebtedness to the pastoral hermeneutic circle.

In Chapter Three the stories and the questions of the various ministry contexts were added to my primary and initial questions. These questions then needed to be unpacked and fully described, in other words the stories behind the stories needed to be told. This I tried to do in Chapter Four where I tried to give a fuller description of the global village as the narrative setting within which villagers and marginalised seek to find meaning and purpose for their lives and their practices. In this chapter I tried to tell the story of the past and how this past story clouds the story of the future.

The study truly was a journey as the books and articles that I discovered along the way took me often to very interesting and surprising places where I made amazing new discoveries which were so relevant to the study. Finally I discovered a number of books and articles which combine the global village with postmodernity. As I have already said, at the onset of the journey I had a hunch that there was a connection, and now there were others who substantiated this hunch and this led me to Chapter Five to describe the *postmodern global village*. At the end of Chapter Five many of the initial questions had to be reformulated because the stories behind the questions had been unpacked and described and so these questions were now theory-laden questions as the visional, obligational, rule and role dimensions of these questions had been unpacked. These theory-laden questions could then lead me further into the next two steps of the theological journey, namely historical and systematic theology, which I combined in one chapter (Chapter Six).

In Chapter Six I tried to bring these theory-laden questions into dialogue with the historical texts of the Christian tradition and thereby discover unique outcomes in the fusion of horizons and the re-authoring of stories of the past.

Have all the questions been answered?

The questions have not all been answered because being a narrative study I cannot answer the questions. All I can do is tell the story of the process of seeking to find new answers to questions and this process continues. In the journey I might have discovered 'answers' which the very moment they have become answers have also already become questions again. Yet I believe I have responded to the questions that I set myself in the previous two chapters. The journey has not come to an end, but has only begun. Elie Wiesel in his book *Twilight* says it in the following way:

"I was right to ask these questions, you said. But then you added, "If you try to seize the answers they will elude you. Don't be discouraged. Like the question, the answer needs freedom. But while the questions never changes, the answer is ever-changing: What is important for man is to know that there is an answer. What is important for man is to feel not only the existence of an answer, but the presence of the one who knows the answer. When I seek that presence I am seeking God"" (Wiesel 1988:107-198).

It is this that I found extremely useful in the narrative theological orientation of the study – it gave me the tools with which to journey, to discover and to describe, a journey I find exciting because it is a journey within a ministry context – a journey with a specific congregation. As I said in my working description it is a **continuous** hermeneutical process, the answers ‘need freedom’ to become questions again. It is also a process that allows the study to be in dialogue with other studies and other communities as it brings in a systematically structured critical dimension which I sought to do by bringing in other disciplines (philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics and history) as well as defending myself within the context of the validity claims.

I found this orientation very useful as it takes the postmodern context seriously and does not seek to ignore its reality.

2. Pastoral Redemptive Communities: a critical reflection

The narrative theological orientation of the study made this journey/study possible, because without these four movements the discussion would not have been possible within a specific ministry context, but it would have been a highly academic discussion. These four movements made it possible to take the congregation along on this journey. I found this very reassuring that the unique outcome of this study is also the unique outcome for the congregation and a journey that the congregation has fully embraced. This joint process of a development and a journey within the congregation and the journey of the study made this study so exciting and worthwhile.

In Chapter Two I argued that transformative praxis is the focal point of my narrative theological orientation.² Therefore I proposed in Chapter Seven a concrete transformative praxis namely the idea of Pastoral Redemptive Communities and argued for this praxis within the context of the five dimensions and in comparison to praxis in the *postmodern global village*.

These Pastoral Redemptive Communities are not the answer. It is not an ecclesiological model that can be applied to different contexts, but they are a narrative tool as they were born out of a re-authored story and thus opened the future for us as congregation. Yet, already now at the end of the first year of their implementation new challenges are already arising, challenges that will question these communities so that the journey will continue. Because these communities are communities of and under the cross they can in the context of the theology of the cross never be complacent or understand themselves to be an answer, but maybe only to be a single step in the rhythm of God’s

² Chapter Two: 11.1 Transformative praxis as the focal point of the study’s narrative theological orientation.

dance with us as congregation.

3. Epilogue

How does one end a journey and a study where probably too much has been said already about something which cannot be argued conclusively, but is better passed on through tradition, poetry, metaphor and praxis. I found a 'new' Psalm that I believe captures in poetry (the language of metaphor) far better the essence of this study than what all these pages of descriptive language could ever do. It is my prayer that the Psalms (the bread of life) will resonate not only in the words of this study, but in the journey that is only now beginning.

Epiphany

Blessed be God: Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. And
blessed be the One who forgives our sins.

We stand in the holy presence of saints; with our
fathers and mothers, we bear witness to your
glory.

Let all living who have ever lived join hands with
the children who are yet to be. Let prophets and
martyrs, healers and preachers, draw near to the
throne of grace.

We have been called to a holy purpose; before time
and space, we were claimed by Living God.

Ours is a bold and a perilous mission: to carry faith
into the midst of evil, to oppose injustice with
love, to overturn apathy with shouts of hope.

For freedom, we have been set free; the Holy One has
already paid the bitter ransom.

Listen and heed the Word of God: "When did you call
that I did not answer? When did you weep that I
was not there?"

In the desert I cracked open the rock that you might
drink. With salvation-light I have shattered the
bondage of death.

With fire and cloud have I led you; my covenant goes
before you as beacon and guide.

“Pay attention, my forgetful people. Do not submit yourselves to slavery.

Do not listen to the easy words of moral gods; put nothing in the place of wilderness faith.

Honour the creation: be good stewards of body and mind; respect the earth and its marvellous creatures.

Be vigilant against the demons of envy. Grace bestowed upon another is always grace imparted to you.

Speak the truth; do not inflict harm by falsehood or by silence.

Harbor no malice or hatred; seek justice and freedom for all creation.

“Repent, my beloved. Let your hearts respond to the unfading comfort of my Word.

Be alert, as one who waits to hear a familiar footstep.

There is no moment when I am far off, no time when I am absent.

Your wrongdoing I have set aside, and I have erased your sin.”

Listen to the Word that liberates; hear the good news that nourishes every hungry child:

“Though my people disobey, I will not forsake them.

I am their steadfast teacher; their judge and their strength.

With compassion I will shelter all creatures, from the smallest to the largest.

Not one will be lost from the holy and infinite caravan, the caravan of God that is travelling, full-glorious and infinite and free, into the dawn of redemption day” (Bell 1991:143-145).

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end Amen.