Re-framing (South) African Youth Ministry : Cutting the Colonial Umbilical Cord of western Hegemony.

Abstract

Youth ministry, as understood in an African context, is predominantly informed, and guided by a West/Euro philosophy and hegemony. African youth ministry, it seems, is struggling to break away from the hegemony of the developed world, one that is not always compatible or even deals with the developing world like Africa. There has been a renewed energy from the youths on the African continent calling for a decolonial conversation, which ideally, should also include theology and youth ministry. The #feesmustfall and #rhodesmustfall campaigns in South Africa have proven that youth in the developing world remains a dominant voice for justice and transformation in spheres controlled by the adult community, those who are traditionally in power, and who hold a philosophy that is often vastly different from the youths and the world that they inhabit. In a sense, one can argue that the actions in the calling for justice and transformation of the youth are indeed prophetic. This article will argue that the youth from emerging nations, such as Africa, has the agency to make a profound difference in (public) areas where there is injustice, thus offering a message of hope. This means of agency amongst the youth in the public domain is an expression of how youth ministry should not restrict itself to only the clerical and ecclesial domains but also ought to act in the public domain as public practical theology. Furthermore, this article will argue, as a public practical theology, that there is a need to build a theological theory, which is local and distinct from the West/Euro context to further the prophetic actions of the youth. The twofold aim of this article will be achieved through a theoretical approach with reflections on contemporary actions of, particularly South African youth.

Keywords: youth, African youth ministry, public practical theology, decoloniality, justice

1. Introduction

South Africa, like many parts of the developing world, has called into question the dominance of West/Euro knowledge systems and the subordinated relationship between the developing and emerging world's knowledge systems. This call to realign where power resides in

knowledge is commonly come to be known as decoloniality or the decolonizing of education and education systems. The premise of decoloniality states that knowledge and power systems of knowledge must be deconstructed and that knowledge is localized as it is most notable that these hegemonic structures and cultures are sustained and expanded in education and education systems (Ward 2017).

The theories engaged in this article are public practical theology, decoloniality, and youth ministry. These are useful theories to engage an indigenous theology because "theology is helpful when it brings a healing, liberation that is not fearful of engagement with the environments within which it is working; adversely, theology is a hindrance when it is oppressive, hegemonic, and fearful of engagements with the environments within which it is working" (Ward 2017). In line with the question by Ward (2017), where and how is theology being done in South Africa?

The challenge, of course, is that many South Africans have been schooled in colonialism and thus more than often perpetuate what has been taught (Ward 2017; Weber 2017:8). This deconstruction of West/Euro hegemonies, therefore, includes a deconstruction of self and historical knowledge learned through schooling, modeling, and various exposures to West/Euro influences.

The following questions are pertinent to the subject:

Why do we need an African youth ministry? Or looking at it from a different angle. Is there a need for specialized ministerial activities that warrant a theological and pragmatic discussion around the lives of young people? If there is a need, what should that look like? In other words, "What is an African youth ministry"? Is it imported youth ministry that is contextualized and as such becomes an African way of doing youth ministry? Or is it youth ministry that is birthed in Africa and informed by Africans for Africans?

How is having an African youth ministry "cutting the colonial umbilical cord of Western hegemony"? This does warrant an answer to what is Western hegemony and what does that look like, specifically in youth ministry? How can we develop a purely African youth ministry? Is there even such a thing? Should there even be such a thing as youth ministry in an African context? What theological approach to youth ministry will assist with developing an African youth ministry?

The assumption in this lecture is that an African youth ministry is vastly different from a youth ministry as informed by the colonial influences of the West/Euro. A further assumption is that youth ministry that is influenced by the empire does not take seriously the lived realities, experiences, and voices of the indigenous young person from the African continent. It is for these reasons that youth ministry that is not from the continent will fail to be meaningful and make a difference for the African youth as its fundamental failure is to listen and take direction from the African youth.

2. Power Narratives

Ward (2017), writing from a white Australian perspective raises many interesting points regarding hegemonic relationships, and if they can be called relationships. He, however, speaks about a continuing spiral of power relations that exists from the developed West/Euro front but is also something that is sustained by those in developing contexts and situations. These would include students and those seeking international recognition through research and publishing.

Interestingly, Ward argues that the power of the developed world is waned and is no longer a superpower. Like that of the Ward, hegemonic powers resided not in its economics but in its linguistic powers which influenced culture, politics, and the like. Weber (2017:2), in a similar fashion, argues that "Africa and its youth are often negatively portrayed by the media to the outside world, while Western culture has mostly been portrayed in a favorable light and associated with freedom, justice, equality and emancipation." Hegemonic powerplays were mainly about usurping the local and indigenous cultures, nullifying, and demonizing them as backward and inferior. Or as Maluleke (2021:309) argues that colonization "was about the takeover of bodies, minds, souls, spirits, religions, and spiritualities". It is for these reasons Weber (2017) argues that if a youth ministry model is not contextual where the local and indigenous contexts prescribe the nature and purpose of its context, then it is something that needs to be stripped of its colonial roots. The cultural destruction was achieved through translation and application through the power of language, and more specifically, the English language which still is considered supreme over indigenous languages as is the case in South Africa (Ward 2017). It raises many emotions when one considers the supremacy of English in a country where there are 11 official languages and most of those are indigenous and spoken by most of its citizens.

2.1. West/Euro Hegemony – A Dominant Voice

How is having an African youth ministry "cutting the umbilical cord of West/Euro hegemony"? What is West/Euro hegemony and what does that look like, specifically in youth ministry?

Ntamushobora (2009:48) discusses five points of western hegemony and what African theology needs to be liberated from.

> The Western hegemony from which African theology needs to be liberated can be summed up in five points. First, Western theology was centered on an individualistic worldview that did not fit the African believer's community-oriented worldview. Second, the Western theological curriculum taught in Africa was a transplantation of Western curricula and was expressed in foreign terms. Third, African theology was considered non-rational, non-systematic and was denied authority of dialogue with other theologies. Fourth, the methods used to teach the Western theological content were centered on formal education which was considered the best form of education. Last, the individualistic worldview did not prepare the African believers to be stewards of their community. Consequently, Africans have remained poor materially, despite the rich resources on the continent.

Ward (2017) states that two of the most powerful ways that hegemonic relations are sustained are through language and presence. English is still used as the dominant language in a multi-lingual world. Secondly, presence, in this case, refers to who is used for citations and to inform the discussions. In this case, the dominant voices in most research are those coming from West/Euro traditions and geographies. After all, "language is the carrier of culture" (Ward 2017).

Ward (2017) continues,

> Translation is always one of the first acts of colonialism; it possesses by reimagining the strange and foreign in terms of the familiar, the motherland. It is not simply that something is lost in the translation; something is erased. Often colonialism attempted to erase other mother tongues, chasing the utopian dream of homogenization so the 'outpost' can be recognized as a

geographical extension of the homeland … colonization becomes not just as an historical act whereby one people is subjugated to another, more powerful people, but as an imaginative act that changes the way people come to think about, articulate and experience the world in which they live, or have come to live. It starts to forge a new collective memory, a new mentality, such that it becomes difficult and strange to think outside the box, outside of the categories that have been handed down and taught as normative, as universal.

Weber (2017), too, refers to many prominent voices in the decolonial conversation and argues in line with Ward (2017) that the success of the colonial and hegemonic narrative was creating a class of scholars and practitioners schooled in colonialism and thus perpetuated and sustained the power relationship. Ntamushobora (2009:48; see also Maluleke 2021:308) says that this is especially notable in African leaders. The appropriate response is not to be reactive due to historic inequalities but to an intentional change of self. It is important to identify this sense of self in leadership especially the influences of colonial powers as these interplay in relationships between the leaders and the youth (Weber 2017:8).

2.2. Decolonial Theories – Deconstructing the Voice

With the above in mind, how then does one proceed to deconstruct the voice of colonialism? By reiterating the many decolonial theorists, Weber (2017) is correct in stating that theories and models must be born within specific contexts by the Indigenous peoples that address their plights and struggles.

Ward (2017) proposes three steps, namely, provincializing Europe, translation/contestation, and affirmation. Provincializing Europe is based on the writings of Dipesh Chakrabarty that argues the thinking of the developing world is still seeped into West/Euro thinking and cultures and must be addressed from the margins. Translation, for Ward (2017) is an act of contestation. This translation must continue from the margins by the Indigenous – decolonization should not be a reset to what once was but a recreation of what it should be through the acts of the Indigenous. Affirmation is not just about acknowledging who we are as a nation but also about owning and accepting who we are as a cultural group, language, etc. Affirmation is not a pursuit of nationalism or even narrow nationalism but an acknowledgment of our history, present, and future.

Nel (2015:553) writing from a Black South African perspective argues that a postcolonial theology "is based on an epistemology rooted in intersubjective dialogue, to continue the quest for self-identity and affirmation, towards socio-political, economic, cultural and religious liberation for all." These aspects of a postcolonial theology by Nel shares similar characteristics to those discussed by Ward (2017).

Decolonization thus is not contextualization but a replacement of colonial theories, structures, and leaders from the public and specific contexts. Of course, decolonization does not assume a complete rejection of West/Euro philosophies and knowledge systems but places African and emerging philosophies, knowledge, and knowledge systems as a center of priority.

2.3. Contextualisation – An exercise in decolonisation

Contextualisation is an exercise that an individual, in this case the African youth ministry, has when interpreting, applying, and contextualisig the scriptures. The exercise must be one where the individual is empowered to do the contextualisation exercise on the scriptures and not the already contextualised scriptures or models that have been inherited from colonial structures. The contextualisation exercise is always dynamic and incomplete which allows for the local to begin the exercise. Part of the colonial hegemony is to be adamant that the contextualised project is already complete and thus denying the opportunity for a local approach and interpretation. As Igboin (2013:1) states that " a theoretical framework involves how ideas are communicated in or introduced to new climes".

Igboin (2023:3) further argues:

> Authentic contextualisation is one that is socially and culturally located, because the people to whom the Bible is being presented are socially and culturally situated and located. They are bound with their culture. They have an identity. They have a being, an ontology. They have a cosmology. They have a certain belief system and practices believed to have been authentic to them. They are indeed human in all ramifications, and thus they desire to be heard. Thus, 'contextualisation begins as soon as the emerging church starts to grapple with the issues facing them in the society. The freedom for self-theologising must be introduced and maintained' (Stutzman 1992:107). Anthony Gittins (2000) agreed that every human being has a history that must be connected with in the contextualisation process.

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Contextualisation, therefore, must be a process and not an end product (Igboin 2023:2) and is in a sense "a form of resistance to theological and structural hierarchy and imposition when communicators are not sensitive to or blatantly disregard the culture they tend to bring the gospel to." (Igboin 2023:4). The local voice and experience must be the starting point and consideration in the contextualisation project.

3. An African Youth Ministry – Indigenous or Contextualized Voice?

Weber (2017), while addressing the tension between decolonization and contextualization, asks the question of whether youth ministry models currently employed in South Africa should be decolonized. Or are the models just not contextualized? In other words, are the models being employed in an African context suitable for the actual context? Weber (2017) thinks that the heart of the problem is contextualization, in this case, specifically youth ministry models employed in an African context. Theology, of course, is always contextualized. There is no dispute about the need for contextualization of theology, models, and methods. The challenge is that often the contextualization of these is based on the West/Euro paradigms (Amenyedzi 2023:3). How do we contextualize what we have inherited so that it becomes useful and meaningful in any local context? In this way, we still prioritize an inherited theology, model, and method.

This leads to an interesting discussion on how youth ministry was brought to South Africa and how models used in youth ministry should, indeed, be contextualized. Correctly, Weber (2017), acknowledges that decolonization is not contextualization. The decolonization process for Weber starts with listening to the indigenous voices. The area lacking in Weber's approach is that she focussed on youth ministry models and not youth ministry. Decolonization is more than just how we do youth ministry but why we do youth ministry. Of course, every theological tradition will have different perspectives on why we need to do youth ministry with the central purpose being the salvation and spirituality of the young person.

Research has proven that the youth ministry was a result of the Industrial revolution (Nel 2018, Root & Dean 2011). Yet, Nel (2018:177-178) raises an important point that youth ministry in the South African context cannot be traced before the 1800s. Correctly, he argues along with other scholars that youth ministry is no older than the 1900s. Weber (2017) and Nel (2018) recognize that the West/Euro influences in South African youth ministry came through various para-church youth organizations such as SU, YMCA, etc. One can argue that South African

youth ministry was birthed because of the influences from the west with a large component of it being on entertainment and "keeping" the youth busy and out of mischief. Influences from Europe's focus on youth societies can also be seen in the South African context where external programs or programs within the church were set up to administer youth functions (Nel 2018:185ff.). While Nel (2018:191ff.) briefly discusses the history of South Africa, it must be noted that there is still much to reflect on and research but that there cannot be a homogeneous discussion of the South African youth ministry. In Nel's (2018:191ff.) case, youth ministry is discussed from a white Afrikaans perspective and history and is not representative or reflective of a multicultural and multilingual South Africa where some cultures and theological traditions still do not have a youth ministry. One must acknowledge that youth ministry in the South African context mirrors that of the West/Euro because of the various influences. It is equally interesting to note that many Black churches in South Africa either do not have a dedicated youth ministry or that the youth ministry cannot be pinned down to specific biological markers except for marriage and child-bearing which generally ends the period of adolescence.

3.1.Conceptualizing African Youth Ministry

What, then, is an "African youth ministry" if its origins cannot be traced to the soil of the continent? Is it imported youth ministry that is contextualized and as such becomes an African way of doing youth ministry? Or is it youth ministry that is birthed in Africa and informed by Africans for Africans?

As mentioned in the discussion on decoloniality, we cannot undo the past. Trying to argue away youth ministry in Africa is shortsighted and will repeat the mistakes of colonialism. Besides, ministry to youth is something that has always been a part of the African community whether practiced in families through the actions, modeling, and stories of adults and elders within communities. In agreement with Black (1991:92), ministry to and with youth is anything that is done to and with youth through the actions of fellow Christians. This activity of ministering to youth is not only limited to the church but also within society.

The challenge with youth ministry in Africa is that most, if not all, the research look at a youth ministry in Africa by employing West/Euro methods and methodologies, contextualizing West/Euro models and theologies, and pursuing our understanding based on our educational upbringing that was and is still influenced by West/Euro pedagogies. Wherever I look, I cannot

find an African youth ministry that is uniquely African by Africans and for Africans as it remains a contextualization of imported theologies and models.

3.2. Developing an African Youth Ministry

How can we develop a purely African youth ministry? Is there even such a thing? Should there even be such a thing as youth ministry in an African context? Especially when one considers the philosophy of *ubuntu*? Another important aspect is to consider African spirituality as these are experienced and expressed by her youth. Africa is comprised of many cultures, languages, and heritage. Any attempt to reduce this complex reality to a single question or action seeks to minimise the complexity of the lives of Africans. However, it still is a requirement to at least recognise African spirituality and how this has shaped and continues to shape the lives of Africans. African spirituality is connected to the ancestors, the land, and one's experience – both personal and communal. We need to recognise that the youth inherit the beliefs and faiths of their communities, and families, and try and make sense of these complexities with their faith and experiences. To deny these complexities is to deny the individual's faith and continue the work of colonialism.

Nel (2015) argues that radical change happens through youth activism, a reaction, and a revolt against the empire and the traditions of a universal and homogenous Christian faith that were imposed on the Africans by the missionary. This activism, according to Nel (2015) is a "mix up public and personal, political and cultural, the local and global, which goes beyond the old binaries". An African youth ministry, as Nel (2017:7), argues, "should prioritize the everyday life experiences, the biographies of young people, as they negotiate, make connections, change, adapt and intermix, as they attempt to find meaning in the context of social change and structures. Theologically, this is the process of discerning their vocation, their mission in life."

An African youth ministry must be informed and shaped by the youth of her soil as argued by Amenyedzi (2023:5), "African youth research is done by African people who understand the real contextual issues; and is within African cultures and researched from an African (Afrocentric) lens". It should no longer be the leaders who have been shaped by colonial knowledge and knowledge systems but by the youth who experience the (South) African reality, its challenges, its heartaches, its joyous celebrations, its future hopes, and its promises. Like many societal changes that occurred in South Africa that came from the actions of her

youth, so too, change in theology, theological education, ministry, and more specifically youth ministry should come from the actions of the youth.

But how do we get to that point where the youth are the agents who facilitate this change? It is my opinion that this can happen in the public sphere which is occupied and shaped by youth through a public practical theology.

4. Public Practical Theology

Why a public practical theology if public theology is such a contested and often hostile space in South Africa with so many expressions such as public theology, public theology as prophetic theology, and public practical theology (Laubscher 2022)? However, a public practical theology should "include [sic] everyday concerns and issues in its reflection; to facilitate a dialogue between theology and contemporary culture" (Dreyer 2014:920). A public practical theology, through a dialogue with the locals, is to provide hope in situations of crisis where "a just society is envisioned that is informed by the life of Jesus and an eschaton of peace and hope" (Aziz 2022:6). In this sense, a public practical theology takes seriously the context of the person, the voice, and the experience of the person into consideration when reflecting and engaging any praxis. This consideration of the local, the contextual, goes contrary to the criticism of Maluleke (2021) that sees a public theology as a global theology masked in imperial robes attempting to negate the past and the individual experience. Public practical theology is a useful approach, especially in a diverse, multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual country like South Africa where existential experiences are so vast and different that there is no homogeneous or universal story. Therefore, "public practical theology has the potential to contribute to the common good and to responsible citizenship" (Dreyer 2004:936) especially when there is a deconstruction of hegemonic narratives.

A public practical theology becomes especially useful when we begin to view the ordinary person as a theologian en route to making sense of her faith and God in a unique context and lived reality. Secondly, when we not only become aware of context, but we also take it seriously and have intentional and active engagements with the various and unique contexts of the person. Thirdly, to learn the language of silence, or place-sharing (Root 2012) by listening to the various stories, sharing in the "yearnings and brokenness" of the youth, and not providing easy answers to complicated existential challenges and thus perpetuating the grip of the empire. A function that Osmer (2008:33) calls "priestly listening" through a "spirituality of presence".

Fourthly, to be the church by presenting and representing the love and hope of Jesus Christ (John 13:35) (Aziz 2022). Why PPT and not another theology?

This consideration of the local and contextual nature of PPT, goes contrary to the criticism of Maluleke (2021) that sees a public theology as a global theology masked in imperial robes attempting to negate the past and the individual experience particularly of the vulnerable black person. Indeed, a PPT must begin in the local context, with the local context in consideration, and answers for the local context (Müller 2004:300) and then further afield for Africa. In a similar fashion PPT, too, can address the "visions of hell on earth" from the perspective of the "non-persons" (Maluleke 2021:307). However, in agreement with Maluleke (2021:307) the answers for the Africans must come from the Africans in the trenches. Yet, unlike Maluleke's definition of the public (2021:307), it is merely the non-persons not in the church, those who walk the streets, meets on the street corners, develops their thinking, and live their philosophies outside the church structures and ideologies. PPT, therefore, is not too far from what the BLT's wish to achieve, instead, its theologies are not limited to only the liberation of people from their oppressive shackles through various imperialistic hegemonies and legislations but a theology that is also liberating in spirituality and hope. That is why PPT is vastly different from a systematic public theology as its focus is on the local and not the global (see Müller 2004:296). The approach must respond to the question posed by Laubscher (2022:2), "What kind of theology is currently required in South Africa"? While the answer to this question does not exclude nor negate other theologies, it should afford the theologian to respond to contextual needs and theological persuasions (Aziz 2022). After all, a public theology, or in this case, a public practical theology should have the same goals as Christian theology, which is "the transformative progress of the society from where it presently is to where it should be, according to God's standard" (Luca 2021:199).

5. Moving Forward

In a podcast conversation (Becker, Sonnenberg & Noval 2022), it was clearly expressed by Shantelle Weber and Garth Aziz, two South African scholars of theology and youth ministry that many contextual realities are unique to South Africa, as is the case in all countries. What makes the South African context unique is that we are still overcoming the oppressive history and injustices of the apartheid system. A legalized system that enforced and justified racial oppression basing it on a theological premise of white supremacy. The current context is still one where most Black citizens of South Africa are still experiencing the consequences of the

apartheid system with extreme poverty, unequal and non-existent access to socio-economic resources such as adequate housing, consistent supply of water and sanitation, quality education, and meaningful employment. The stark reality is that the ones most affected by these restrictions are Black youth who still reside in townships designed by the oppressive systems through spatial apartheid which separated housing and residential zones based on racial policies. From these varied and complex histories and experiences, the very youth we seek to minister have become suspicious and cautious of those such as lecturers, ministers, etcetera. who have been influenced and schooled by the empire.

Ward (2017) argues that the most productive means of decolonization that will not repeat the faults of the empire and end up as second colonization is the "reshaping and bending these vast and complex, multidimensional networks in a way that best serves to make sense in a South African context to multilingual, multicultural South Africans". Colonialism cannot be undone, while it can be repeated, it should be reshaped by the local and indigenous to best suit the local and the Indigenous. An African youth ministry must be shaped by African youth.

5.1. African Ecclesiology – A Focus on Community

I belong to a church where the concept of "teen church" is practiced. At a certain point in the worship service, the youth are allowed to proceed to a separate venue from where the adults are congregating and worshipping. The children are completely removed from the service and often do not even participate in the proceedings. This separation is the reality of children should not be seen, should not be heard, and should not disturb. This separation model is heavily influenced by a western theology of age segregation based on life stages resulting in the youth being passive objects, consumers, and specific functions of the church (Nel 2017:2). The ecclesiology of my church is also heavily influenced by the western concept of individual piety and salvation (Aziz 2020a:113). In agreement with Nel (2017:5), a renewed ecclesiology must stem from a covenantal relationship with children and youth who are gifts from God for the building of God's Kingdom (Nel 2018:57). Nel (2018:213-240) goes into some lengthy discussions on how youth is not only an integral part of the church but is the church and how the church can minister to them and incorporate them as it does the adult community. In this sense, then, the church does not differentiate ministry between youths and adults, something that has been addressed by various scholars (Root & Dean 2011; Nel 2003; Strong 2015). The church is a gathering of many generations in one community, a beautiful picture of family and *ubuntu*.

What I do believe should be an integral part of the African church is the intentional focus on family and community and worshipping as family and community. Family and community are vital aspects of the African landscape. The focus, therefore, should change from personal piety, salvation, and discipleship to family and community where meaning and purpose are not a silo experience and journey but one of communal interest and worship. African theology, according to Ntamushobora (2009:49), "is both reflected in the mind of an individual through critical thinking and experienced in the community". As Kretschmar (2020:5) states, "In many [*African*] churches, there is a keen awareness of God's presence, an emphasis on prayer, and on the family and community, along with joyous celebration and a reliance on God's power in times of both struggle and success."

The challenge, of course, in many African cultures and communities is that the place and role of children are often subservient to the adult. This subservience can be addressed by the covenantal approach where children and youth have worth, purpose, and agency. African ecclesiology does not prohibit the agency and actions of youth. On the contrary, African history is transformed through young people and so, too, can African ecclesiology. The value of children and youth lies not in their age but in their humanity and through their humanity, they can contribute to an ecclesiology that does not silence or separate them (Aziz 2020b:5). After all, God approaches young people in the same way that he approaches adults (Nel 2000:22).

5.2. African Methodologies – Finding the Voices

The heading "finding the voices" may be problematic as the youth are part of every fabric of society, including the church. There is no "rock to unturn" to find their voices. Instead, finding the voices is the intentional process required by an institution that has relegated the voice and presence of the younger generations to insignificance as discussed above. Aziz (2019), Nel (2017), Weber (2017), and Nel (2018) have all expressed the need and urgency to listen to the youth, engage with the youth, be guided by the youth, and journey with the youth.

An African methodology has always been storytelling, sharing values, and beliefs (Schoeman 2013; Masango 2006:937); whether around a campfire, through stories of generations passed from one to another as expressed by the elders of communities and families, and even now in contemporary times through various technologies and social media. Furthermore, African philosophy must recognise the humanity of each person and that humanity is directly related to the next within community of each other. All these processes are uniquely tied in with the

principle of *ubuntu,* which is not a Christiani or theological concept but one that can bring deeper meaning to religious constructs and expressions. This becomes applicable because *ubuntu* is not limited and confined to one culture or ethnicity but traverses language, culture, ethnicity, and religion because it is tied to one's humanity (Khumalo 2017:29; Koenane et al. 2017:267)

Archbishop Tutu (1999:31) describes *ubuntu* as

> Ubuntu is . . . to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in what is yours." . . . We say, "A person is a person through other persons." It is not "I think, therefore I am." It says rather: "I am human because I belong. I participate, I share" . . . What dehumanizes you inexorably dehumanizes me."

Ubuntu methodologies and principles still play an important role in society no matter how urbanized, modern, or postmodern South African society is or is becoming. The nuclear family, while entrenched in South African philosophies is not a viable model for Africans. It's what Abaunza (2013:17) calls "high-context cultures" where there is an interconnectedness between people and people is treated as family as opposed the Western concept of individualism or "low-context cultures".

Mburu (2019:38) discusses family through the lens of *ubuntu* as,

> It is the extended family, not the modern nuclear family of father, mother, and children, that serves as the primary unifying factor in society. The extended family provides social support and fellowship not only between individuals but also between families, clans, and entire communities.

It still takes a village to raise a child, a similar concept to kinsmen in biblical understanding where the family includes the parents and primary caregivers, extended family, and neighbours (Aziz 2014:232-235). Kretschmar (2020:3) also discusses the importance of family and culture in the formation of children and youth and how the principles that contribute to healthy families must be incorporated within the church that can reflect these values and cultures.

Another aspect of *ubuntu* philosophy is to recognize that "a person is a person through other people" so that we can recognize the humanity of youth and their invaluable contribution to

the making of the other. In other words, ministry with and among African youth must begin with the humanity of the person (Ndereba 2021:11). The aspect of *ubuntu* recognizes that a person is whole, is part of a community, is shaped by the community, and shapes the community to which they belong. Salvation is more than just a personal and cognitive process; it is also communal. *Ubuntu* does not only recognize the physical and spiritual but sees them as interconnected. One's connection with God becomes possible when there is a connection with the community (Mburu 2019:37). Ultimately, the concept of *ubuntu* is tied in with the *imago Dei* that places the person in the center of the narrative (Maluleke 2021:314; Masango 2006). Yet, *ubuntu,* simultaneously places the community as a priority and not the individual as it is the "is the people in context who give individuals the meaning and the essence of life" (Resane 2022:3).

5.3.African Public Practical Theology of Youth Ministry – Hearing the Voices

Where and how does a public practical theology of youth ministry assist with developing an African youth ministry? Weber (2017:8) says that the "ecclesial spaces become open spaces for dialogue and empowerment around what church should and can be". This, however, is a good starting point for dialogue but in Weber's context limited to the church space and does not reflect on the public space, something that is urgent in the deconstruction of power. We must note though, that Weber (2017) does speak about the influences that youth have within civic society but is limited within the church, this however does not address a public engagement of theological hegemonies. Nonetheless, spaces must be created to not only hear the voices of the youth but allow the voices to inform theologies and programs (see also Maluleke 2021:313). After all, in ministering to youth, we should walk alongside youth as they struggle with the existential questions of life and purpose.

An African youth ministry must distance itself from the narrative of "saving" people from their primitive cultures as expressed by the missionary. Instead, it must create a context where the young person can be confident of their agency within the church and society to re-create a context where they not only experience God but can worship God in their various cultural settings. It must create a space where the youth will know who and what they already are in Christ by "becoming the person God created and recreated you to be: someone in Christ" (Nel 2000:101). An African youth ministry should consider how the cultures and contexts shape its youth and how these youth make meaning of these cultures and contexts. It is important to note that while there are African distinctions in theology and praxis, it does not imply a sort of

African relativism. Instead, African theology, and in this case, African youth ministry must be in line with the rest of Christendom and not be isolated (Ntamushobora 2009:49). A Christendom that expresses hope in Jesus Christ, recognizes a common humanity where one's worth is found in our humanity, and a missional response of love and acceptance that reflects the Father's heart in the person of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

6. Conclusion

The theological task in any context is to seek and express an understanding of our faith which is "Jesus Christ in you (us), the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). The Christian faith should not be a once-off experience of an individual but a journey whereby this faith produces hope not only for eternal life but also within the varying contexts of the youth. This hope must give meaning to youth in their contexts as they create or re-create an understanding of this hope so that they can make sense of their lives. Theology, after all, is lived and interpreted by the ordinary person experiencing God in their journeys. This life experience, the theology employed, and the community that they inhabit must be informed by and through their agency and not something that is forced on them.

An African youth ministry for Africa's youth must be informed by Africa's youth. As Africans, we must be courageous to give the youth the freedom to not only question the inherited systems, models, and knowledge of the empire that is easily and sometimes unconsciously fed to them by those in leadership. We must give them the right to deconstruct it and even destroy it so that they may begin again.

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