Amy Casteel, Annemie Dillen, Jos de Kock,
Armin Kummer (Eds.)

Crisis, fear and hope. An introduction into practical theological reflections

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Preface

More than another volume on crisis, this is a volume on practical theological reflections. It is the third volume in the International Academy of Practical Theology (IAPT) conference series. IAPT has continued to give attention to particular contexts in the study of theological thought and action since its founding in 1989. As with any edited volume, this endeavor takes the contributions of dozens of people seen and unseen who contribute their time, expertise, and passion. It is compiled from contributions to the 2021 biannual conference that was planned by four Belgian theological faculties to be hosted in Leuven, Belgium—at KU Leuven, one of the oldest theological faculties in the world, founded in 1432.

The conference theme, *Coping with crisis: hospitality, security, and the search for faithful connections,* had been chosen in 2019 as a response to the characterization of several social issues (human rights, privacy, climate change, migration) as crises. While most of us had planned to gather in Leuven, Belgium to make these discussions and reflect together in person, the conference was moved online. One outcome is that this allowed the participation of more than 200 scholars from Asia, Australia, Africa, North America and South America as well as Europe.

This volume, *Crisis, fear and hope. An introduction into practical theological reflections,* is a collection based on papers and keynotes as presented and discussed during the conference. Since pre-recorded online clips could be accessed independently of time zones, presentations were conducted as live discussions, allowing for greater interaction than in a typical conference. The search for faithful connections, a theme throughout the conference. is a thread that runs through this collection as well.

As both an organizing committee and the editors we wish to thank the authors along with many others for their contributions. Much of the ongoing editorial work was taken up by Amy Casteel, in consultation with the three other editors. We are grateful to all the peer reviewers, to Ana Ashraf, to Johannes van Oorschot and Birgit Weyel for their support of this third volume of the conference series. Ana served as copy editor. Johannes managed the Open Journal System administration from the University of Tübingen. We offer our appreciation to Sofia Nikitaki for her art that graces the cover. A special word of thanks goes to Francesco Punzo, for his work on the layout and typesetting.

As an academy, IAPT continues to strive to do its work through faithful connections in the study of and reflection on practical theology.

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Crisis, fear and hope: an introduction into practical theological reflections

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Crisis. A word that today fills all news headlines worldwide. For each person, the word crisis will refer to something different. Some persons will connect it with an economic crisis that has a direct impact on their household budget. For others, it's about a war crisis that made them refugees overnight. Some will think primarily of an energy crisis, where others will immediately think of the Covid-19 crisis that brought sickness and death to the family. There will also be those who link crisis to a very personal existential experience: an experience that will not make the headlines but that can just as easily determine the course of life.

How does the phenomenon of crisis and how do various crisis experiences relate to faith of individuals and groups of people and the functioning of faith communities? This question forms a common thread in this volume *Coping with Crisis*. In this volume this question is specifically approached from the discipline of practical theology. This means, first, that the question is not raised in its generality or in the abstract but is addressed in the context of specific local, sometimes private experiences of crisis. Second, a practical theological approach to the question means that theological analysis and interpretation is an important part of the discourse conducted.

Coping with Crisis is an outcome of the many scholarly reflections, debates and presentations that took place during the bi-annual gathering (because of the Covid-19 crisis fully online) with the same title of the *International Academy of Practical Theology* in the summer of 2021. The local organizing team, comprised of members of four Belgian theological faculties, had long been looking forward to receiving practical theologians from around the world in Leuven—a charming Flemish town that hosts one of the oldest theology faculties of the world, founded in 1432. Alas, the Covid-19 crisis made it impossible to hold a physical meeting in Leuven and the conference had to be held in a virtual format. What was initially merely the inevitable reaction to an immediate crisis turned out to be a catalyst for innovation in the conduct of a major international conference, which ultimately allowed around two hundred participants from Africa, Asia, Australia, North- and South America, and Europe to attend the conference from July 8 to July 10, 2021.

The online format of the conference consisted of a mix of pre-recorded online clips and interactive live sessions. The pre-recorded online clips allowed participants to benefit from speeches and papers independently of the different time zones they were in. The clips also provided an opportunity for scholars to creatively employ new audio-visual methods to present their contributions. For once, time and space did not constrain participants' choice of which paper presentations they could attend. Every participant had equal access to all the papers presented at the conference. Furthermore, online message boards allowed participants to post questions to speakers and presenters. These questions and comments were then used as input into the live discussions. The nearly one hundred paper presentations in video-clip format, debated in twenty thematic live discussion panels, offered a vivid panorama of the concerns, research questions, and methodological challenges that characterize contemporary practical theology in all its cultural and confessional diversity. The contributions of Karen Reed (St. Thomas University), Sabrina Müller (University of Zurich) and Lindsy Desmet (KU Leuven) received honorary mentions as the most creative, impressive, and memorable video-clips.

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While everybody had a chance to watch the online clips of the academic papers at their personal convenience, the plenary of the conference was assembled every day for a dense program of interactive live sessions in video-conference format. The interactive live program included daily sessions of morning prayer, plenary discussions with the keynote speakers, twenty moderated panels to discuss the papers that had been presented as video-clips, and business meetings. The keynote speakers were available for Q&A and scholarly discussions in the moderated plenary panels. Participants from around the world thus had the opportunity to engage directly with all the speakers. This volume adds to/continues with this discussion and exchange

Like the conference, the various authors in this edited volume consider the multidimensional phenomenon of 'crisis' in both its sense of threat and opportunity. How are people coping with experiences of crisis? In what way does the rhetoric of fear and crisis mobilize people for social action? Does the current sense of 'crisis' lead to valuable and effective positive actions or does it overwhelm our senses, paralyzing our ability to act? And what does the experience of 'crisis' imply for contemporary theological conversations?

The various contributions in this volume each depart from a specific context or locality of practices of people and communities in the midst of some sort of crisis. A practice has a "value-laden, aims-oriented nature" (Bennett 2018, 63). It refers to "… a set of actions that instantiate knowledge, meaning and understanding; action is always socially embedded, habitual and embodied" (Bennett 2018, 67). Against the background of this practice-oriented approach, different questions come to the fore and will actually be addressed throughout this volume. How can a particular experience of crisis be (theologically) understood? How is this experience connected with or embedded in a particular social context? How does the phenomenon of faith relate to this experience? What do we mean when speaking about 'coping' with crisis? What are core values that play a role in such an expression? How is living with crisis embodied in particular situations and how might faith communities act in such situations?

The volume has been structured along the lines of five sides of the crisis experience where connections with the phenomenon of faith might be located and further explored: (1) Justice, (2) Uncertainty and fear, (3) Belonging, (4) Care, and (5) Being church.

The first part of this volume on justice addresses the themes of socio-economic, political and ethical components of crisis, the issue of migration, developing ecological virtues, and the theme of food and welcoming at the table. The second part on uncertainty and fear covers the themes of fear and solidarity, populism, fear as a form of diakonia, and coping with dis-ease. Belonging is the main theme of part three of the volume and addresses the war experience, the refugee experience, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and Christian hospitality. Part four is focused on care and covers themes like spirituality expression and needs, embracing risks, pastoral care, the phenomenon of dementia, and spiritual uplifting of children. Part five has church as its focus and addresses the themes of spiritual care by churches, the existence of spiritual abuse in churches, and the church experience of being in crisis.

We hope this rich sample of perspectives on crisis, reflected on from a practical theological lens, will add to our understanding of an experience rooted in a global and highly interconnected world.

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Making space at the table or turning the table? In search of a more just praxis

Nadine Bowers Du Toit, Professor, Stellenbosch University

Introduction

My choice of this topic is borne out of my own experiences and positionality as a woman of color for whom the metaphor of table and indeed even the idea of hospitality, have become notions which I have both an affinity for and a visceral reaction to. As one of the first generation of South African students of color not only entering historically white universities in South Africa, but now teaching at one, I now sit at tables that people like me were never intended to sit at. I am also the daughter of justice seeking church leaders who fought racism within our own denomination during the height of apartheid. Around our dinner table, many of the informal negotiations which would form the basis for our racial unification as a denomination took place. In a relatively recent Facebook post, I critiqued the notion of "building a longer table, not a higher fence" or some such saying that is popular in depicting hospitality as the answer to exclusion. What I pointed out was that the answer was not to build a longer table, but simply take your place at the table (invited or not) and bring your own chair and cutlery if necessary. I thought I was clever until one of my students – a known campus activist during our student protests for free, decolonized education at universities nationwide – pointed out that actually what was needed was to overturn that table for the unjust space it had created. Or just build your own. The table metaphor, therefore, raises the notion of hospitality and its content. It should not be about merely accommodating, namely building a longer table. And on second thought: wasn't my suggestion to take up space merely another iteration of a kind of assimilation? A kind of middle-class triumphalism that forgets that I have enough privilege now to force a space? What my student was pointing out was perhaps the limitations of hospitality and my own limitations to truly think from the margins and to actually reflect on the possible injustice the space is that the table has created.

These thoughts solidified into what I offer tentatively in this chapter as I reflect on the notion of hospitality in times of crises within the context of the conference theme. A great deal has been written over the years on the notion of hospitality and it has been critiqued by many scholars as requiring problematization, so I do not claim to extensively revisit it from scripture or from the wealth of theological writings on it as the length of this reflection does not allow for that. Rather, I wish to trouble the notion and focus on its relationship to a more just praxis with specific reference to the church, grassroots communities, and academy as spaces where many of us find ourselves situated as practical theologians.

Who serves at the table? Exploring reciprocity within the guest/host dynamic

Hospitality, more often than not as Nouwen points out, conjures up images "of tea parties, bland conversation and a general atmosphere of coziness", dinner party gatherings of friends, and even in the context of local congregations – the welcoming cup of coffee offered by the "hospitality ministry" (Pohl 1999,4). Subsequently, scholars such as Pohl (1999) and Yong (2008) have pointed us both to the richness of this concept within the biblical text, and also the sharp edges of the concept, and the inherent power dynamic between host and guest.

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In a world in crises, Christian hospitality is often presented as the answer to marginalization and exclusion. If we would only be "nicer" to those who have no space at the table and assist them to understand the etiquette of our tables, then we will foster diversity and understanding. What is more often than not touched upon is the inherent notion of power often embedded in our well-meaning practices of hospitality – both in the academy and church. Pohl (1999:120) notes the following: "There is a kind of hospitality that keeps people needy strangers while fostering an illusion of relationship and connection, It both disempowers and domesticates guests while it reinforces the host's power, control, and sense of generosity. It is profoundly destructive to people it welcomes. It is the kind of help, in Philip Hallie's words, which "fills their hands but breaks their hearts."

Often the "needy stranger" is welcomed on our own terms. Vaccine inequality has rendered the Global South at the mercy of Northern wealth during COVID 19—and while most of the north has been vaccinated, vaccines now offered by the North are leftovers given to "needy strangers". In my own field of Theology and Development/Diaconia, this is best articulated by the white savior mentality of some Global North faith based organizations– rooted in a colonial missionary praxis, who bring charitable aid to those in the Global South, but see no need for equitable partnership and mutual respect in their faith based developmental projects. In the context of the migrant crises, we witness again the limits of hospitality, migrants are best welcomed when they practice assimilation into the host culture. Welcome, if conditional, translates into the host remaining in control – or centered in the story. The host remains at the head of the table. Both within the academy and institutional church, those most often on the margins – women, people of color, LGBTQI,[1] etc.– need to learn the institutional language of historically white, patriarchal institutions in order to be offered prize places at those tables, a language which is spoken in the tongues of hegemonic, neocolonial, neoliberal patriarchy. When we cannot or do not want to master this in the name of domestication and resist it, we are no longer welcomed – labelled as "troublemakers", "angry women" or even in the case of one clergywoman I know, referred to as having "bewitched" others with her feminist and liberative approach to the biblical text.

I disagree with Pohl's slightly simplistic answer to this kind of host-guest power dynamic, namely that the best route towards addressing this is through conscious host centered humility (Pohl 1999,120). In an era where "color blindness" builds on the belief that racism does not exist or is an individualized phenomenon and the hegemonies of whiteness and patriarchy remain in place, so-called hosts are blind to power dynamics. They have been comfortably seated at the head of the tables and at the center of discourses for so long, that paternalism rather than humility is the outcome. Addy appropriates Ivan Illich's notion of conviviality, which he both contrasts and compares to traditional notions of hospitality. Addy (2017, 19) notes that while "a hospitable attitude may be a precursor to conviviality… it still implies that the one offering hospitality defines the terms of the relationship. If one is a guest one is expected to leave and if one stays and becomes a member of the community, hospitality in its original meaning ends!" He also makes the point that conviviality as life together invites a kind of hospitality that recognizes power: "if we are hospitable, we can welcome the stranger and maybe learn something, it may change us or not. If we work for conviviality we do not reckon with the 'other' leaving and therefore we have to live together" (Addy 2019, 6).

Letty Russell (2009) points out that it is only when we "decolonize our minds that we begin thinking from the margins rather than from the center. We reframe hospitality as a form of partnership with the ones we call 'other' rather than as a form of charity or entertainment." Inherent in Russell's challenge is not only the call for both host and guest – those at the margins and at the center – those sitting at the heads of tables and with no seat at those tables – to actively resist patterns of domination. The subaltern may speak, but they will not be heard if hospitality is reduced to inter-personal interactions. My Stellenbosch colleague Robert Vosloo (2003,70), therefore, points out the importance of not limiting hospitality to "I-thou" encounters – "however important these encounters may be", because "an adequate ethos of hospitality requires structural and institutional concretization." In other words we cannot be satisfied with a call for the individual humility of individual hosts, but must call for the re-structuring of unjust institutions. This kind of restructuring towards more just struc-

1 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex.

tures and institutions must always start with identifying the idols of power and what constitutes empire in that particular context.

The Accra Confession reminds us that the role of the church is to reject the unjust systems of empire as neoliberal capitalism, which are extractive and which "defy God's covenant by excluding the poor, the vulnerable, and the whole of creation from the fullness of life". Instead God's economy of grace is "for the household of all creation", not only that but it declares that the "poor and marginalized are preferential partners" (Pillay 2018, 5). In building an adequate ethos of hospitality which engages empire, then, those often rendered strangers to these systems are our preferred partners in dismantling them. In advocacy work we often talk about speaking up for the "voiceless" and thereby risk reinforcing our host-like privilege, we need to be constantly introspective lest we become unjust hosts – the voiceless have voices, they are just silenced by the systems.

Yong notes a kingdom reversal in the guest-host typology as exemplified by Jesus and the ways that Christ is depicted as both guest and host. What I find interesting in Yong's discussion of 'Jesus and hospitality' is that he points out "that it is precisely in his role as guest that Jesus also announces and enacts, through the Holy Spirit, the hospitality of God" (Yong 2008, 101). As a fellow Pentecostal I must admit to having a somewhat biased affinity for Yong's pneumatological approach to hospitality, wherein he views the day of Pentecost as signifying "the gift of God, the Holy Spirit that produces many tongues", and that "many tongues open up the life of the church's ministry to many practices" and, I would argue, recognition and valuing of diversity. Pentecost redeems the Babel narrative of the chaos of difference, which needs to be controlled by narratives of "all lives matter" and makes difference rather the starting point for not "only speaking in new ways, but actually hearing and understanding each other" so that marginalized voices are not silenced because of the dissonance and perceived chaos they create, but instead valued and listened to as equal around a table of difference where difference is a gift and intrinsically tied to the inalienable dignity of persons (Vosloo 2003, 69; cf. Welker 1994, 230,23). Russel (2009, 71–72) uses the notion of emancipatory difference in her book on hospitality to make the point that difference is a gift that should be honored. In our current struggles for justice, she further makes the important point that one can even build on relational difference in networks of solidarity and partnership working for a common cause. The struggle for gender or racial justice are examples where having white bodies on picket lines or male clergy advocating for equal treatment of female clergy in synodal spaces prove powerful antidotes to the story of hegemony.

Making space or taking up space? Spatial relations and hospitality

Just as we speak of contested knowledge, so too must we speak of contested spaces when engaging the notion of hospitality (Vosloo 2003, 68). Recently, I read a poem by a young South African poet and activist, Thandi Gamedze, which proclaimed "take up space like it was 1651". 1652 is the symbolic year of the formal colonization of South Africa by the Dutch. In South Africa, space and place is highly racialized and remains segregated in terms of the intersections of race and class 29 years after the advent of democracy – not least in the church. This is a direct legacy of legislation, which forcibly removed people of color from their land during the colonial and apartheid eras respectively. One sociologist indeed makes the claim that colonialism is a direct product of a perverse interpretation of Christian hospitality (Glanville 2020, 4). This has provoked some of my own discomfort with certain interpretations of hospitality and again highlights the ways in which space has socio-political content and the ways in which people experience hospitality as dependent on their positioning in that space.

Lefebre (1991, 404) notes that spaces are socially produced and that "social relations, which are concrete abstraction, have no real existence save in and through space. Their underpinning in spatial." In my country, perhaps like yours, there are no neutral spaces and often, as already implied, spaces are informed by racial and economic configurations of space. Vosloo (2003, 69) reminds us, therefore, that we should: "…not treat values like hospitality as abstract and merely mental phenomena, but they require spatialization. We are painfully aware of the anti-hospitality of forced removals and the cleansing of spaces in the name of order or progress. Hospitality is …also about making room. For Christians the vision of the space within the Triune life for the whole of creation can serve as motivation for 'making room'."

Feminist scholar, Ahmed (2007), makes the point that in a white space[2], white bodies are at home and Byzzheva (2018, 248) adds that white spaces "demands certain actions and ideas: ways of gaining knowledge, ideas about what knowledge is valuable, what constitutes order in the space …who gets to be a body-at-home and who gets to be a stranger." Whiteness is always at home. In higher education, it is often the professor who is the host in the classroom space, thus decolonizing our practical theological curricula will require far more than reviewing our reading lists or inviting guest lecturers from marginalized communities (albeit a start!) if we continue to replicate the normativity of whiteness in theological education spaces – an act which can also be perpetuated by assimilated educators of color (cf. Andraos 2019, 200; cf. Goto 2019). This is no different in church spaces – more especially "multiracial churches" in South Africa. I have had conversations with numerous friends of color who attend such churches (which are inevitably evangelical and white led) listening to their pain of exclusion – despite these congregations often having an almost even split in terms of racial composition. In these churches, even those who have risen to some leadership position, find themselves guests in terms of their own congregation's normative whiteness when they speak out against racial injustice. The reciprocity they once believed undergirded their "at homeness" at such a table, is soon discovered to be nothing more than accommodation.

Volf (1996) identifies one aspect of exclusion as assimilation as "it can entail erasure of separation, not recognizing the other as someone who in his or her otherness belongs to a pattern of interdependence, the other then emerges as an inferior being who must either be assimilated by being made like the self or subjugated to the self." Volf (1996, 146) goes on to make the important point that power hierarchies cannot usually only be struggled against in the quest for reciprocity but that the "heart of embrace can be reached only through self-sacrifice" (Mark 10:41-45). Hospitality that recognizes space as having the content of structural injustices, then, requires a form of *kenosis* – especially from those with power in such spaces. I wonder what the incarnation offers as the ultimate kenotic act of a God who is the host of space and time and yet enters a specific space and time as guest? It should be remembered that those on the receiving end of structural injustices are already self-sacrificing and that often just putting their bodies in spaces which are unsafe for them is enough, having been created by systems that have long questioned their humanity. African women theologians point out, for example, the importance of being hermeneutically suspicious of hospitality narratives attached to women in the bible. These should be interrogated as they often reinforce the servant role of women from whom servility and self-abasement are expected by patriarchy and who have even been violated in the name of hospitality (Oduyeye 2001, 46–47).

Another question that arises is: who has the power to decide where home is? One well known black South African pastor, who has since disavowed his faith having being wounded by the struggle for racial justice in my city, wrote a book shortly after democracy where he called to "disband the white church". His book was in response to the segregation of churches and also questioned the practice of some multiracial churches (mainly white led) at that time bussing in black congregants from townships to majority white parts of the city. At the time I was ambivalent and even friends of his saw this call as an affront to the embrace of African hospitality. Thinking back on it now, he was asking: why in a city like ours should black Christians still be guests? Rather than challenging our spatial dynamics as churches in the city, we have simply replicated spatial injustices and power hierarches between host and guest. I now wonder whether that isn't exactly the kind of *kenotic* action we needed to call for.

In recent months I have become fascinated by Trygve Wyller's use of Foucault's heterotopic spaces within the context of my own field of Diaconia/Theology and Development. I do not claim to be a scholar of Foucault, but Wyller's use of the term is possibly helpful in this discussion, as it argues that the lives and social contexts of the marginalized should not only be seen as "targets for transformation", but rather that their "experiences and strategies for survival and dignity are understood as epistemological starting point" (Gunnes 2017, 54). There is a reversal of power here, which recognizes the agency of former objects of hospitality (migrants, homeless, poor, etc.) as possessing agency in spaces (Gunnes 2017, 55). In the case of migrant ministry, more especially, there has been the tendency to start from church as philanthropic host, welcoming a "helpless stranger" as

2 "White space is one that is normed along the values that continuously privilege white bodies and whiteness (epistemologically, morally, socially and emotionally)" (Ahmed 2007).

needy guest. In a week long block Masters module offered to clergy, myself, and the co-facilitator of this course, have hosted the course at both an inner city congregation and a faith based organization, rather than at the university. Although the students often believe that it's a course on diaconia/church and community development, our aim is to assist clergy to interrogate power and the ways in which race, class, marginalization operates so that they can engage more consciously and effectively as churches in community. On the second day of the course, which happens to be a Sunday, they attend a migrant led service which is conducted completely in Shona (a language spoken by Zimbabwean migrants to South Africa) and hosted by Zimbabwean Christians. They are then invited for the weekly after church meal of that congregation and eat a traditional Shona meal with them after the service – often with their hands. As facilitators, we do not attend and leave the hosting to our Zimbabwean colleagues completely. Year after year, it is noted as one of the most transformative moments in their week long course. This moment is transformative, I believe, because not only are the clergy – who are usually almost always hosts in their congregation – stripped of this power/duty, but they are hosted by those who we traditionally view as guests in South African spaces. They are essentially decentered in this heterotopic space.

Turning the tables/building tables?

Perhaps one of my favorite scriptures is that of Jesus turning over the tables in the temple, not least because in recent years I have had to answer numerous questions on the limits of anger in justice praxis, both from individual Christians and at race and church forums. Jesus' overturning of the tables was of course in response to the religious leaders' unjust gain and exploitation of the poor and so going back to my student's call to rather overturn the table and build new ones, I wondered whether in an unjust world some radical power reversals aren't required to induce more just praxis? Yong (2009:102) points out that in the various meal scenes in the Gospels, not only do we see that "the most eager recipients of the divine hospitality were not the religious leaders, but the poor and oppressed", but also that "Jesus calls for the religious leaders to repent of their self -serving interests precisely in order to share in the meal and fellowship with repentant and forgiven sinners." Yong goes on to point out that:

> To do so Jesus frequently breaks the rules of hospitality, upsets the social conventions of meal fellowship (e. g. Jesus does not wash before dinner), and even goes so far as to rebuke his hosts. Luke shows that it is Jesus, not the religious leaders, who is the broker of God's authority, and it is on this basis that Jesus establishes, through the power of the Spirit, the inclusive hospitality of the kingdom. This involves not only women and children and slaves, but also the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the male who are the oppressed and marginalized of the ancient world (Luke 14:21).

I find this piece interesting, because it mentions notions such as repentance and rebuke as part of Jesus understanding of a kingdom/reign of God's hospitality. Neither of these notions fit into the 'warm and fuzzy' romanticized understandings of hospitality, which are conflict free, and it leads me to wonder why we haven't embraced discomfort and even conflict as part of co-constructing spaces where all are welcome. During the South African student #FeesMustFall protests for free, decolonized education, students were partly protesting the fact that more especially poor, black students, did not feel welcome in university spaces which were essentially still built on colonial and exclusionary praxis. If I think about it now, they were calling for institutional repentance of a lack of hospitality to poor, black bodies over centuries and into the present. Indeed, Russell (2009, 81) points out that one of the starting points of reframing hospitality is acknowledging the inhospitality of colonial practice and the ways in which white power and privilege have affected us all. The African proverb "the child who is not embraced by the village will burn down the village just to feel the warmth", became frighteningly real as we saw our campuses literally burn during this time. In the years that have followed since the protests between 2015–2017, I lament the fact that we have not adequately heeded the students' calls for institutional repentance in their calls for decolonized education as radical hospitality.

So what of simply building our own tables? In my own university, myself and a few other colleagues in various faculties have often wondered whether we should start a black academic caucus. Such spaces are examples of building our own tables, when we know that the other tables often do not welcome or truly listen to us as a minoritized "stranger" (as strange as that may seem in a majority black country, historically white universities remain racialized). In our current global political climate, such actions are viewed as polarizing and undesirable

with regards to building the ubiquitous unity of sameness we seem to believe we are called to. If viewed from another perspective, it is in actual indictment on the lack of institutional hospitality colleagues find in such spaces, where their humanity is still marginalized and so such spaces are created as a means to resistance by creating our own safe and more welcoming spaces where we are no longer strangers, but belong at the table. One thing that I am sure of is that these tables are borne out of a longing for just hospitality and are not a rejection or negation of hospitality. If we truly and justly love our neighbor – by listening to understand the pain of those marginalized by systems and then truly welcome them as equals – then such separate tables will not be necessary.

One of the practices I have been inspired by, in turning the table on conventional notions of hospitality and perhaps even building her own table as one which welcomes all, is the teaching praxis of my colleague in Practical Theology, Nobuntu Penxa-Matholeni. She has been the champion of teaching a Practical Theology module in the indigenous language of isiXhosa – which would be the first of its kind at Stellenbosch University and one of the first in South Africa – as a form of decolonized teaching praxis. In universities in South Africa, indigenous languages (other than Afrikaans which was imposed as the language of the former oppressor)[3] are not seen as "at home" in the academy which still largely centers around western epistemologies and language. Although the module hasn't been officially integrated yet, she has been introducing indigenous Xhosa constructs – much as she does in her own scholarly work – into the pastoral care curriculum at our faculty. When a first language English speaking student of color mentioned the ways that he was enriched by a particular amaXhosa notion as applied within Practical Theology – I was reminded that this module is engaging in radical hospitality. Rev Penxa Matholeni is inviting students to cross borders of language and culture in a new shared classroom space, which directly challenges the exclusionary whiteness that has been institutionalized in such spaces for years. What my colleague is doing is not only overturning inhospitable tables, but also building her own and inviting everyone to share in the bounty and beauty of amaXhosa culture and ways of being in the world – ways which continue to be marginalized in spaces like ours. According to Penxa-Matholeni (2021), the isiXhosa metaphor *Ubuhlobo* brings us all to the place of not owning and proposes a different paradigm. This can be used in family therapy. In this paradigm of "*ubuhlobo*", which is suitable for storying pastoral care, no one is a stranger—the stories, our stories-together equal God's story, bind us together beyond blood relations (cf. Russell 2009, 102).

Conclusion: firesides, not tables?

In this chapter, I have attempted to question the power dynamic inherent in the notion of hospitality as popularly understood: which discourses are centered in these understandings of hospitality (whose stories matter)? Who owns the spaces and places within which such hospitality takes place? In essence, I have implied whether the notion of hospitality as table fellowship is at all helpful in avoiding patronizing and exclusive forms of engagement and whether such tables shouldn't simply be overturned and new ones built. I lastly argued that there is sometimes a need for the stranger to build their own tables and offered the example of a colleague, who in line with decolonizing praxis, was building her own and then inviting all to share in its bounty. In concluding I return to the notion of building "faithful connections". In reading my interpretation of her praxis, my colleague asked the question as to why I was even using the table as metaphor – why not the more decolonized notion of fireside where there are no tables and chairs and everyone is simply seated on the ground? For my ancestors, and certainly in many of our traditional cultures today, the fireside is a place of 'at home', of communal storytelling, eating, dancing, engagement, and also bears spiritual significance. It is a space of faithful connection. Unlike a fireplace, we sit around it and share in its mutual warmth and there is space for all around a bonfire. God is the host. It is not lost on me that Yahweh appeared in the burning bush or the start of the church began with tongues of fire, or that after his resurrection Jesus invites his disciples to a fireside barbeque or "braai" in South African parlance. I

3 There is currently a complex debate raging regarding Afrikaans. Afrikaans is also spoken by people of color in South Africa and is even argued to have originated more from the slave and indigenous communities than the Dutch colonizers, however, during Apartheid it was imposed by the government on a majority black and non-Afrikaans speaking majority as the language of education.

note also that fire in these events is invitational and often requires courage by the invitation of God as host. In searching for faithful connections in an era of fear, distrust, and polarization we often seek to claim host status in ways that reinforce power and privilege by inviting the other to our tables. Perhaps what is needed, is for us to recognize that we are all dependent on the fire and invited by God's Spirit to a praxis that needs no tables at all.

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Enabling resilience through developing ecological virtues

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Most scientists trace the origin of the COVID-19 pandemic to the illegal wet market trade in an endangered species—pangolins. Humanity's disrupted relationship with the natural world is the source of the virus's origin, but its grim spread across the globe arose from social and political conditions that have arisen, at least in part, from the failure of those in political leadership to exercise appropriate distributive compassion and justice towards vulnerable populations.

Importantly, it is *resilience* on the part of communities facing such challenges that enables survival through developing communities of virtue which are then capable of expressing compassion, right practical wisdom, and justice.

Brazil offers a case study for what I am arguing for in this paper. The Brazilian Prime Minister Jair Bolsonaro, who contracted a mild form of the disease, denied the most impoverished and vulnerable indigenous communities access to basic public health care and preventative measures (Teixeira et al, 2020). The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights also report human rights violations which even served to *introduce* Covid into vulnerable populations in Brazil (Indian Resource Center 2020). It is not surprising, therefore, that there has been speculation that the unregulated infection and deaths among indigenous peoples is a form of deliberate genocide to enable unimpeded government sponsored mining projects, devastating the ecosystem and trampling on the environmental rights of those living in the Amazonian region. The original text of the Brazilian Law 021/2020 tried to make basic provision for "universal access to drinking water, the free distribution of hygiene materials, the emergency supply of hospital beds and intensive care units and the purchase of ventilators and blood oxygenation machines", but this was vetoed against by President Bolsonaro (Teixeira et al, 2029). It was hardly surprising that the language of genocide has been used, following in the wake of the President's indictment in 2019 before the International Criminal Court for his policies against indigenous peoples.

At the same time, it is in these highly vulnerable indigenous communities that we find sources of resilience through expressions of deep solidarity and compassion, born of practicing ecological virtues like a second nature. It is also within those communities that the relationship with the natural world and the ecosystem is one of respect and mutuality. As the global community considered the 26th Conference of Parties convention on climate change in November 2021 in Glasgow and the postponed 15th Convention on Biodiversity meeting in Kunming in China in late April 2022, dealing with the twin but entangled aspects of climate change and biodiversity loss, what lessons have we learnt both from these resilient communities and past failures of political leaders in the international community to act? More important, how can other communities become resilient in the face of what will inevitably become more and more challenging conditions?

Resilience is a term that has been used in ecology (Gunderson 2000; Carpenter 2011), but more recently it has come to refer to a desirable future, in both ecological and social terms (Parker and Keith 2019). Resilience is defined as "The ability of an ecosystem to absorb changes of state variables, driving variables, and parameters, that is, to persist after disturbance" (Holling, 1973). In order to measure resilience, the intensity of disturbance needs to be

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measured along with the threshold switch between states (Standish et al, 2014).

Resilience in ecological terms therefore implies that stability can be reached after perturbations and shocks, though shifts in the philosophy of ecology mean that the whole ecological system is understood as being far more dynamic than previously supposed a century ago.

At a popular level, ecology is presumed to be idealised in a steady state model, rather than subject to adaptability and flux. When resilience is used in social terms, does it, like the term the Anthropocene, also mask ideological, cultural and economic imperialisms? (Malm and Hornborg 2009). A correct interpretation of the religious and social meaning of resilience is important in this context. Is it simply about maintaining the *status quo*, or is it more about rediscovering traditions in a new light? I will argue that it is the latter, that the normative aspects of tradition need to be filtered so that they work *within* rather than against the dynamism of the challenges and changes within which we find ourselves—otherwise known as an ecological and social crisis.

One of the terms which has had much purchase in eco-theology, influenced by religious leaders of both Catholic and Orthodox traditions, is that of *ecological conversion*. This is premised on the idea that secular concepts are insufficient. As Pope Francis claims in *Fratelli Tutti*, "Anyone who thinks that the only lesson to be learned was the need to improve what we were already doing, or to refine existing systems and regulations, is denying reality" (Pope Francis 2020: § 7). However, even within Catholic social thought the meaning of a critical concept like ecological conversion is beginning to change.

I will first show how the Magisterium has shifted in its understanding of ecological conversion. I will then suggest that a rallying call for such conversion is an important starting point, but does not yet spell out more practically how the religious community, rather than just individuals, needs to change in order to become more resilient. Ecological conversion needs to include allowing for and giving respect to those exemplar communities that have learnt how to be resilient.

In Catholic social thought the term ecological conversion began being used at the turn of the twenty first century. In a pastoral letter written in 2003 addressed to the Bishops and leaders of the Church, *Pastores Gregis,* Pope John Paul II claims that:

> "There is a need for *ecological conversion*, to which Bishops themselves can contribute by their teaching about the correct relationship of human beings with nature. Seen in the light of the doctrine of God the Father, the maker of heaven and earth, this relationship is one of 'stewardship': human beings are set at the centre of creation as stewards of the Creator" (Pope John Paul II 2003: § 70).

Note, in this example, how he expresses a clear need for a well-functioning anthropology: a correct relationship between human beings and nature. Yet this relationship is one that is premised on an understanding of God as Creator. For Pope John Paul II ecological conversion means in practice *proper stewardship* of creation, inspired directly by Genesis 1.28 and within a presupposition of human beings at the centre of creation.

Pope John Paul II also collaborated with Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, and their joint letter on environmental responsibility published in June 2002 was one of the most significant statements on ecological conversion. What they both pressed for was the need for a cultural *metanoia*, an inner change of heart. Further, it was a change of heart both inspired by and attentive to conversion to Christ:

> "A solution at the economic and technological level can be found only if we undergo, in the most radical way, an *inner change of heart*, which can lead to a change in lifestyle and of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. A genuine conversion in Christ will enable us to change the way we think and act." (Pope John Paul II and Bartholomew I 2002).

Pope Francis, on the other hand, avoids the idea that human beings are at the centre of our world, conscious of the dangers of an inappropriate anthropocentrism. So, "When human beings place themselves at the centre, they give absolute priority to immediate convenience and all else becomes relative" (Pope Francis 2015: § 122) The point is that he starts to *qualify* more traditional Catholic anthropocentrism.

So far practical aspects of how to sustain community resilience in a religious setting is not spelt out, as that requires practical theological approaches that are grounded in specific contexts. Pope Francis provides hints at such changes by encouraging an approach that relies on the concept of integral ecology rather than the technological paradigm, and encourages *communal* and *political* ecological conversion at the structural level as well as individ-

ual conversion, but he leaves details to be worked out at the local level. I suggest, however, that a little more could be said about the need to develop ecological virtues that he hints at in his 2015 encyclical.

The first, most basic disposition that needs to be developed to enable resilience in the wake of ecological and other socio-political challenges and one that ecologists and indigenous communities themselves practice through their work is that of *paying attention* (Deane-Drummond 2021). It is closely related to that of wonder and delight, but not equivalent to it.

Wonder and delight is *also* a pre-requisite for the development of ecological virtues.[1] I am defining the human *capacity* for wonder as an ability to have a heightened psychological and emotional state engendered by particular experiences. Wonder may, therefore, include undertones of fear or anxiety as well as joy, but to be relevant for ecological virtues it is that form of wonder mixed with delight that is the most relevant. [2]

It is important to note that emotions such as wonder are not simply confined to individuals, but have the capability to spread across communities and thus influence wider cultural trends at a collective and political level. While it is outside the scope of this paper to discuss embodied mind theories, the most important point is that newer psychological theories are not individualistic but *collective* in their interpretation of how the mind works. Inter-bodily and intra-bodily resonance theory, for example, according to Thomas Fuchs, who argues in favour of an embodied mind, allow feelings across communities to be expressed as bodily reactions, such as blushing as part of a shame response or contagious laughter. Other people are affected as part of a continuous interactive process (Froese and Fuchs 2012: 212).

Simone Weil's literary works elaborate on what paying attention means at an inner level of consciousness. For Simone Weil paying attention includes "suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated" (Weil 2009: 62). Her primary goal is to stress *receptivity* in the one who is seeking—a point that also coheres with Pope Francis' stress on the idea of *openness to others*. "Above all our thought should be empty, waiting, not seeking anything, but ready to receive in its naked truth…" (Weil 2009: 62). Attention is to be directed both to *truth* and to *suffering*. Paying attention begins to school us in love, and this love is reached through a process of death and dying to self. For her, the human soul had to: "pass through its own annihilation to the place where alone it can get the sort of attention which can attend to truth and to affliction…The name of this intense, pure, disinterested, gratuitous, generous attention is love" (Weil 2005: 92).

Anguish and the importance of the virtue of justice

Weil's analysis, therefore, includes a readiness to acknowledge the difficulties of our current socio-ecological context, including massive loss in biodiversity, combined with increasing poverty, combined with unjust forms of political leadership. For her, the "radiance of beauty illumines affliction with the light of the spirit of justice and love" (Weil 2005: 92).

The thought of true beauty being somehow present even in the suffering and in spite of evil that has surfaced is also a strong theme in the theological aesthetics of Hans Urs von Balthasar (Balthasar 1982). Further, a sense of anguish, as well as wonder, can spread through communities in a way that leads to widespread eco-anxiety, supported by social media and other platforms. There is a fine line between anxiety that can lead to a sense of urgency and action, and the kind of anxiety that leads to despair and despondency. Von Balthasar's approach is relevant to the collective and social traumas that are currently dominating the social and political landscape; for it encourages, at least among Christian believers, a search for collective justice, accompaniment of the vulnerable in their pain, and working towards challenging those societal structures that are partly responsible for setting in motion the suffering that is endured.

Balthasar's approach is more radical than Weil's in that he suggests that the image of suffering Christ not only confronts the evil of crucifixion but also overturns the mundane meaning of beauty. He also envisages beauty classically as one of the transcendentals, along with goodness and truth. For Balthasar, an encounter with the true beauty of Christ crucified does not just transform suffering,

1 Aspects of this and the following section are drawn from Deane-Drummond 2021.

2 It is worth noting in passing that the natural world was, in the past, experienced as threatening rather than awesome in terms of its relationship with wonder (Glacken 1976).

but, even more importantly, challenges a *transformation of human consciousness as to what beauty is really like*.

Can we glimpse hints at Christ's beauty rising to the surface in the loving and compassionate actions that we witness by both individuals and communities even in the midst of the appalling suffering arising in the devastation brought about by global pandemic, climate change, and mass extinctions, that scientists are now calling the sixth great extinction event? There is a paradox here that is worth addressing. We should have no hesitation about collectively working at the socio-political and local levels to control diseases in their destructive course and challenging ecological devastation that arises out of human negligence, overconsumption or other indirect impact through climate change and habitat loss. We might experience wonder at humanity's ability to inflict cruelty, and be responsible for destroying other species irreversibly, but this is not a form of wonder that is appropriately disciplined by love or justice.

Both *ecological justice* and *environmental justice* are relevant in terms of love in action, where the former refers to what is due to all creatures. Political leaders who fail to exercise justice fail in their duty to those who are in their power. Environmental justice is basic rights for all people and cultures in order to live a flourishing and healthy human life, such as access to clean air and water.

1. The connection between paying attention and the classic virtue of *studiositas*.

So, if paying attention is critical for compassion, which then informs the practice of justice as virtue, is there a way in which our desires can be directed towards paying greater attention in the right kind of way towards the common good? In Aquinas we find the classic virtue of *studiositas* fulfils this role as a *moral* and not just an *intellectual* virtue. The orientation of the virtues towards the common good is important, since it impinges not just on what is good for the individual but the good for the community as a whole, and therefore has important social and political implications.

In the case study from Brazil given earlier, Bolsorano failed to consider the common good, failed to exercise compassion and justice, and paid attention simply to his own specific desires rather than the good of the community. *Studiositas*, by being a moral virtue, necessarily moves the individual away from desires that are self-centred towards actions and attitudes that are for the sake of others. The virtues, when considered in this way, therefore have social and political implications insofar as they are capable of critiquing the political *status quo* and so inspiring a different way of setting priorities and policies.

There is a *positive*, but restrained, drive in *studiositas*, and not simply open receptivity. *Studiositas* is antagonistic to a sensibility that avoids the effort in seeking knowledge and so expresses "a certain keenness of interest in seeking knowledge of things; and from this it takes its name" (Aquinas 2a2ae: Qu. 167.2). The overall drive in *studiositas* is towards *right types of knowing.* This right kind of knowing can be discerned not just within the conscience of individuals, but at a community level as well, when collective decisions are made.

Is there a *studiositas* proper to each of the virtues, and *ecological virtues* in particular? Is it the means through which human communities can therefore become resilient in the appropriate way to both the political and ecological challenges that they face? The answer to this seems to me to be yes. *Studiositas*' integral association with *temperance*, for example, is important for any ecological ethic. *Ecological* temperance is about restraining yet directing desires and motivations in a way that aligns with the needs of humanity and all creatures in our common home. At the same time, the positive direction in *studiositas* associated with *charity* expressed as an ecological virtue goes further than a simple loving receptivity. *Studiositas* can also deepen our understanding of what ecological justice requires. Ecological *fortitude i*s about not giving up when there seems to be a reversal in hoped-for positive ecological changes.

2. *Studiositas* and *prudence*, practical wisdom.

What might *studiositas* proper to practical wisdom as an ecological virtue look like in this context? Practical wisdom is particularly important when decision making is complex, as in difficult decisions that need to be made at all levels (political, familial and individual) in a complex scenario which raises the demands of those living in extreme poverty and runaway ecological devastation that we are presently experiencing. Practical wisdom, or prudence, is an *intellectual* virtue, and one of the four cardinal virtues alongside justice, temperance, and fortitude, all of which can be expressed in ways that are perti-

nent for ecological flourishing. The argument here is to some extent circular: prudence sets the mean of *studiositas* as a moral virtue, but at the same time, there is also a *studiositas* proper to prudential reasoning in relation to its role in the moral life, and, in the case under consideration, eco-social responsibility. Nonetheless, *studiositas* can, like any virtue, gradually slip into a vice and when it does so it takes on a different name, *curiositas*. Judging what is the virtuous mean in *studiositas* and when it has veered away from that mean is a task of prudence. Prudence is, further, not just an individual virtue, but as Aquinas recognised, works at the familial, community, and political levels as well. Just as prudence in an individual can enable morally good acts, so prudence at a political level is orientated towards distributive justice.

3. The relationship between *studiositas*, compassion and hope.

My argument so far has stressed the ways in which paying attention to the natural world, refined through the virtue of *studiositas*, and indeed paying attention to each other, is bound up with our ability to show compassion and kindness, along with rightly ordered practical wisdom exercised within community contexts. So, *both heart and mind* need to be engaged in a common eco-social task. Further, in the global context of climate change and biodiversity loss, developing this way of responding and thinking has never been more critical. The virtue of hope is a spur to action by making an experience more intense. When the object of our hope is good, difficult—but possible, Aquinas argues, "the thought of its being difficult arouses our attention; while the thought that it is possible is no drag on our effort" (Aquinas 1a2ae Qu. 40.8). Difficulties, therefore, even those associated with ecological crises, could be viewed as challenges which then invite even greater attention through the possibility of change (Aquinas: 1a2ae Qu. 33.3).

Pope Francis comments in *Fratelli Tutti* that "it is truly noble to place our hope in the hidden power of the seeds of goodness we sow, and thus to initiate processes whose fruits will be reaped by others. Good politics combines love with hope and with confidence in the reserves of goodness present in human hearts" (Pope Francis 2020: § 196).

4. Discovering that this enlarged expression of virtue through connectedness and solidarity with all beings is a way of gaining true resilience through healing our fundamental brokenness, the symptom of which is the various ecological and health crises.

Finding and developing a closer reconnection with the land and its creatures, even in recognising their suffering and pain also, in a profound way, promotes our own inner healing. That healing is best understood not as an individual isolated, beleaguered self, but happens within communities and cultures that understand the importance of community relationships. As Western societies have become more individualistic and isolated from one another, the ability to make close relationships and connections has become diminished. Engaging in ecological restoration and other collective projects has positive psychological impacts on individuals within communities. One reason for this may be that it was within these eco-social relationships that humanity evolved. The moral marker in the very deepest time band in early human communities was our ability to show deep compassion to each other who were sick or suffering.

A study of early human evolution shows, in an astonishing way, the self-sacrifice of others towards those who were sick and disabled in a way that even exceeded that in later centuries. (Spikins 2015; Deane-Drummond 2019: 83–90). It was in this crucible of vulnerability, suffering, and climate change that human communities evolved and learned to flourish. At the same time these early human communities were sensitive too and responsive to the world around them, since it was necessary as a matter of survival. While our relationship with predatory animals was always ambiguous, for centuries human communities have found not just nourishment but medicinal products within their ecological niche. In the current century, our problems are psychological as much as physical and our need for healing relates to rising levels of anxiety and fear. Climate anxiety is a good example of this, but we can expect more to come.

It is worth pausing here to ask why we have been slow to learn these lessons, even through centuries of change. Industrial agriculture dominating the Western world destroys the living fabric of the soil, leading eventually to dust bowls, less nutritious crops and greater and greater reliance on artificial fertilizers. It also prevents the living creatures in the

soil from acting as a carbon sink. Scientific consensus in the Paris agreement of 2015 was that reforming agriculture towards 'Restoration' methods will provide the essential means to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, thus contributing in a significant way to the control of exponential climate change. It also makes economic sense, as farmers are less reliant on government subsidies. This is practical wisdom, but why have we been slow to recognise this? One of the reasons may be the tension between felt individual desires and the failure to understand that commitment to the common good at the social, community, and political levels secures greater resilience within those communities and therefore a different kind and more enduring form of human flourishing.

The practical shape of that ecological responsibility appropriate for educational contexts and not just within ecclesial circles could take some cues from the agrarian context of the biblical world. Such an agrarian context affirms kinship and solidarity between different life forms, without maintaining a total loss of boundary conditions between different species. Such an agrarian approach of belonging to a specific place finds modern expression in the work of authors such as Wendell Berry. Berry made it his life's ambition to find a way of deeply belonging to a place (Berry 2004, 150). It is time to acknowledge that indigenous communities have been exemplars of such sustainable practices for centuries.

Concluding Remarks

I have argued so far that, given the combined ecological and human crises that we find ourselves in, the human experience of wonder in contemplating the natural world is an important first step in energizing a collective sense of responsibility for it. Further, fostering socially and ecologically relevant virtues both build up individual and community resilience and encourage protest against the failure of political leaders to exercise their responsibilities to others in solidarity with indigenous communities who have learnt the art of resilience and ecological virtues. Expression of that collective responsibility arising from an individual's sense of wonder can take the form of not just individual projects, but collective projects such as community gardens, collective works of ecological restoration, conservation or political advocacy for care for our common home. I have also suggested that wonder as an emotion is not simply confined to an individual's brain, but can spread as an emotion across communities through a process of resonance. That resonance can be fostered within community projects, thus potentiating the psychological impact. Wonder may also be positive in promoting freedom from egoistic attachment to purely rationalistic goals. Wonder towards the natural world on its own is, however, morally ambiguous.

Paying attention, understood according to Simone Weil and moderated through the input of Aquinas on the virtue of *studiositas*, demands that our looking is no longer possessive, and such an encounter is also crucially informed by love and justice. There is also a *studiositas* proper to each of the virtues, and, in the specific context of ecological responsibility, temperance, compassion, justice, and practical wisdom come to the fore. If other creatures are included in a more explicit way, this virtue can, at least, begin to show where our attention needs to be placed. Such virtues can be worked out and expressed in collective and political decision making and not just individual acts of discernment.

We might ask ourselves: does focusing attention on the natural world in explicitly *religious* terms make any difference? For Simone Weil paying absolute attention is like a letting go of all pride and is the same kind of activity as prayer. What does Weil have to say to the political leaders who make and pass laws? For her "Extreme attention is what constitutes the creative faculty in man and the only extreme attention is religious" (Weil 2002: 117). In this way, crucially, Weil can claim that "The attention turned with love towards God (or in a lesser degree, towards anything that is truly beautiful) makes certain things impossible for us" (Weil 2002, 2019). Attention in Weil's thought needs therefore to be interpreted as a particular kind of looking and perceiving that then leads to an openness to an experience of deep wonder and awe, without becoming too attached to the creatures that are then contemplated. Aquinas also, interestingly, develops a strong link between attention and prayer, so "attention is absolutely necessary for prayer" (Aquinas 2a2ae: Qu. 83.13).

Reawakening a religious sense of paying attention in a non-possessive way, particularly in ecclesial settings, not only challenges the kind of egocentrism that fosters ecological irresponsibility. It also encourages positive ecological responsibility when that attention is directed towards love of the natural world that is freed from the bondage of possessive

desires. This may be one reason why Rachel Carson was intuitively accurate when she suggested we needed to recover something of the innocence of childhood in order to experience wonder that will lead to appropriate action.

In this sense it is the *transformation of our desires* in heightened experience of explicitly religious wonder *disciplined by studiositas proper to love, practical wisdom, and justice* that is particularly important. But such close encounter with creation shows up a darkness of incomprehension in the face of beauty alongside unspeakable suffering and pain. COVID-19 has focused our attention to suffering humanity. In this way, humanity is forced to acknowledge its own ignorance, and therefore is more likely to adopt a modest view of how to approach ecological responsibility. It therefore encourages what might be termed biblical wisdom, understood as one that is schooled through the experience of patient connectivity with the land and other creatures. Such practices are embedded in the wisdom of indigenous communities. Hence, it is in dialogue and solidarity that we learn from others in sincere respect, rather than treating people or other creatures unlike ourselves as mere objects of our charity or even campaigns for justice. Social and political transformation begins with cultural and community transformation that is also dependent on individual conversion. Resilience and protest against unjust political structures requires, therefore a development of those ecologically relevant virtues which shift the concern of agents to care for others, including the natural world.

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Kenotic hospitality, disruption, and loving an other: Engaging hospitality theologies for migration dynamics

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When confronting popular notions that treat migration as a crisis, there is an impulse to offer a theologically proper response. The discussion in this chapter centers on the question: which new questions may arise upon a critical engagement with hospitality theologies when applied for migration dynamics from the perspective of faithful connections? Four theologians each contribute to the discussion from their own area of experience and expertise. Amy Casteel, brings in the perspective of pastoral work among refugee communities in the United States along with her research focuses on lived religion among adolescents who have migrated to Europe. Néstor Medina offered a view from his research in ethics and liberation and post/decolonial theological debates, and experience as an immigrant himself in the North American context. From a missiological perspective, Dorottya Nagy brought her insights out of her research and experience on migration in/to Europe. Starting from decolonial theology, thinking about migration from the standpoint of heterotopic spaces, Kaia Rønsdal offered a view on migration from borderlands, particularly of Northern Europe. Throughout this chapter, quotations from the transcript of that panel are identified with the name of the speaker in the text and noted as (panel 2021).

Introduction

When confronting popular notions that treat migration as a crisis, there is an impulse to offer a theologically proper response. That response is often hospitality, a concept involves meeting with others, it would fit when new people meet each other. While it makes sense that hospitality is part of the way that connections can be made and even reinforced between people, it needs the balance brought through faithful connections. However, crisis cannot be the only frame through which practical theology engages with migration. Faithful connections offer the support and acceptance needed for human flourishing. When we stop treating migration as a crisis and instead consider migration as the movement of people in search of faithful connections, then a better conversation about hospitality becomes possible.

The conversation partners

This chapter engages four different theological disciplines to offer nuance and depth to the interrelat-

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edness of hospitality and the search for faithful connections from the perspective of migration. Amy Casteel brings in the perspective of pastoral work among refugee communities in the United States along with her research on lived religion among adolescents who have migrated to Europe. Starting from decolonial theology, Néstor Medina offers a view from his research in ethics and liberation and post/decolonial theological debates, and his experience as an immigrant in the North American context. From a missiological perspective, Dorottya Nagy brings insights out of her research and experience on migration in/to Europe. Looking at migration from the standpoint of heterotopic spaces, Kaia Rønsdal offers a view on migration from borderlands, particularly of Northern Europe. Each of the authors have worked with people who have migrated, witnessing and interrogating hospitality as theory and as it is enacted.

Migration

Migration is a broad term that encompasses all forms of moving away from one's usual place of residence. Most people who migrate navigate through the same process (leaving, moving, arriving) but not all encounter the same challenges and hazards along the way. In this chapter, we address international migration which often brings the challenges of unfamiliar languages, unfamiliar customs, unfamiliar landscapes, and unfamiliar habits of living (Medina 2016, 216–219). The application of the concept of hospitality and the search for faithful connections can be understood broadly. Still, the discussion focuses on vulnerable persons who have migrated.

Hospitalities in the context of migration

The concept, hospitality relates to "both biological life, as well as the socio-ethical responsibility of living with respect for other lives" (Rønsdal 2020, 29). In other words, all living things fall into the scope of hospitality. While the discussion in this chapter is focused on what hospitality means in view of the experience of migration, the idea is broader. It begins with life, yes, human life, as well as all living things. This will come back into the discussion a bit later. By beginning with biological life, we move quite quickly into the socio-ethical dimension. There is a responsibility for humans, as living beings, to care for and protect life. People who are already locally placed have a responsibility to make space to interact with people who are arriving, particularly those who are vulnerable. "This should mean that when refugees come to our doors, they are the life held in our hand to care for, to show hospitality" (Rønsdal 2020, 29). There is an ethical dimension to showing care for others. And yet, this responsibility is shared between human beings.

Migration dynamics show that the reverse is also true. It is consistently reported by those receiving people who arrive, that locally placed people who were described as giving hospitality felt they were the ones receiving it. In the words of one such person interviewed by Kaia Rønsdal, "we have never received such hospitality as when the refugees came" (Rønsdal 2020, 32). In Finland, people who were bringing coats and supplies—aid—to others, explained that they received hospitality. Their definition of hospitality was shaped and re-created through interactions among themselves as former strangers. Hospitality came to mean an attitude of openness, sharing space, and an offer of friendship (Rønsdal 2020). This reciprocal relationship is no longer confined to the limited roles of guest and host typically found in theologies of hospitality (Casteel 2021). It is better characterized by the concept of loving one another.

Loving one another is not a vague undefinable ideal, but an embodied action in context. It is inherently contextual and personal. It is a kind of loving that is "measured against the experience of a person or group of people about whom another person or group says that they love them" (Nagy 2016, 370). This shifts emphasis in hospitality from an event of welcome to an event where relationships are built. Building relationships in the context of migration is based not on the similarity of culture or upbringing, but on openness to a relationship that challenges the everyday spaces in which we live. However, theologies that do not address migration and immigration leave an underdeveloped kind of hospitality that does not aim at building equality within relationships (Medina 2015).

A theologically based openness to equality in relationships is made possible by a return to the starting point—that hospitality is rooted in biological life as created by God. Human loving, then, is understood as "characterized by the relationality, the connectedness expressed in the theology of creation. The depth and height of its intensity varies from situation to situation" (Nagy 2016, 371). Such variation in relationality is not a weakness, but a reflection of the variation in creation.

While hospitality can sometimes be used to refer to the individual relationship, human relationships are situated in cultures and communities. A diversity of cultures and ethno-social communities promises a variety of "unique ways in which people perceive the reality of the divine, interpret divine disclosure, and express their experiences of faith…" (Medina 2014, 442). This enriches the worshipping community. And while there is a necessary asymmetry where "God remains God and human beings remain human beings". In the search for faithful connections, "loving between people, then, is about reciprocity but also about the asymmetry of being human" (Nagy 2016, 371). In other words, humans share the experience of an asymmetrical relationship with God. That asymmetry informs the reciprocal way that people can interact with each other. The presence of people who have migrated in any local community calls for a reconsideration of the way we define and enact hospitality theologies.

Challenging hospitality-as-welcome

In the context of migration, the idea of hospitality among Western churches can take on particular nuances. In some cases, the generosity of meeting needs for food and shelter are meaningful and enriching when there is no expectation for ongoing relationships. In other cases, hospitality is urged out of an ethical duty. In still other cases, hospitality toward those who migrate is urged as a tactic. Some missiologists have argued that hospitality is an appropriate theological key to intercultural interaction. Without the proper framing, this explanation risks changing the act of welcome into a tool. Instead of extending hospitality in a way that enables the development of relationships, it becomes programmatic. But such a view does not take into account that the concept of hospitality varies by context and is laden with cultural meanings and expectations.

A theological hospitality that takes into account migration dynamics is based in the concept of reciprocal relationships where loving *an* other is a reflection of a shared creatureliness and not a program or tactic. Loving *an* other as a way of being in the world includes hospitality and the search for faithful connections as a matter of course.

When a person migrates, they go through a process of movements: leaving, moving, arriving. Awareness of this reality, that migration begins with leaving a place called home, has implications for the understanding of hospitality. Those who leave carry much of this place with them, along with their culturally-informed expectations of welcome and hospitality. To presume that hospitality has universal expectations runs the risk of denying or erasing difference. But a theology of hospitality makes room to celebrate cultural difference because "… to remove ethnic and cultural identity from the theological equation is to engage in a kind of docetism that denies the impact of the human ethnocultural dimension and its contribution to our understanding of the reality of the divine and to our expressions and experiences of faith" (Medina 2014, 441–442). Differences between understandings and embodiments of hospitality can be celebrated in theologies of hospitality. It may be that the complexity itself offers a place to experience 'the reality of the divine'.

Complexity is the realm of migration. People who move across borders expect to encounter differences at the same time that they bring different expectations and practices with them. This is enacted in the space of everyday lives where the people arriving and the people already located, share a "moment of encounter" that is real, present, and material (Rønsdal 2018, 84). These encounters happen in physical spaces which may have previously been designated for another purpose, thus re-defining these spaces.

Shared moments happen in the context of communities and in the context of churches—where there is an openness to them. What is more, when people arrive many continue to nurture relationships from the previous place they lived, creating transnational networks (Medina 2015, 215). The interaction, then, between the mover and the located represents multiple networks and spheres of influence. This adds to the complexity of the interaction between individual persons. These encounters certainly include both physical and social spaces of everyday life; they also include the possibility of a "reality we work to create" (Rønsdal 2018, 82–83).

The practice of theologies of hospitality, then, includes encounters where loving an *other* occurs as a way of being in the world in such a way that it re-defines social and physical spaces. This manner of loving upholds differences as valuable expressions and experiences that inform our understanding of the divine. Hospitalities are actions and embodiments in the present in real spaces that re-shape and re-order those spaces. Hospitality links experiences of welcome with opportunities for faithful connections.

The issue of power

In a very practical way, hospitality is linked to space. It is not something that can be defined in words only—it must be embodied in space to be understood. In the interaction of migrants and locals in border spaces humans encounter each other in a kind of embodied spatial calling (Rønsdal 2018). The concept of hospitality is made visible in the attitudes and habits formed around routine interactions. This requires an openness and willingness to let an other, in effect, disrupt my routines which means they are unexpectedly "setting my life into motion" (Rønsdal 2018, 33). This kind of hospitality is disruptive to spaces and routines in such a way that "the binary of guests and hosts is, in this framework, interchangeable and dynamic. None of us are static, our roles are negotiated and interchange continuously" (Rønsdal 2018, 22). The shifting of power through the shifting of roles is an integral part of a correct concept of hospitality.

But in current practice, power tends to be maintained by the located/placed persons, communities, and societies. Thus, there is a tension connecting an individual's performance of hospitality—in which roles may shift—with the actions of a community of worship or the practice of hospitality at a societal level—in which roles are fixed. Even when a consistent thread can be traced through the belief structures from individual to the greater community, power is often reinforced through actions called hospitality. The current structures of many societies are currently at odds with an understanding of hospitality that seeks to dismantle power dynamics through openness and reciprocity. This is particularly evident in political and economic efforts to control the movement of people. Rather than offering an opportunity for disruption that invites dialogue, hospitality becomes a mechanism for holding onto power.

Enforcement and hospitality

The power dynamic performed in today's politics and in current Christian practices of hospitality both reflect a longstanding presumption that Western identity, Christianity, and cultural superiority are intertwined (Medina 2018, see 98–150). Certainly these appear in individual interactions, but more importantly, the presumption that Western Christianity is normative is a cultural assumption that underpins many of the policies towards people who migrate. These policies not only regulate borders, they have influenced economic and political actions for centuries. The conditions that drive people to choose to leave—financial, environmental, or political—are often created by Western actors (Medina 2022). When people living in the West, who benefit from those financial, environmental, or political conditions, extend hospitality, they may presume it to be a moral good. But what kind of hospitality is it that merely offers the leftovers from what was gained by exploitation of the very people who move because of the exploitation?

Borders are regulated not only by economics but also through political and spatial means. Political measures are justified as though they are moral or ethical. They are articulated as necessary for the protection of the local, placed citizen. Protection can be economic—protecting jobs or preventing access to welfare schemes. It can also be cultural—protecting the dilution of tradition or religious heritage. In the Netherlands, for instance, a government agency worked together with Christian organizations to help define the idea of conversion for the purposes of migration (Nagy and Speelman 2018). This was done to protect Christianity from being diluted by false conversions and the nation from false claims to asylum. Who determines the credibility of a religious experience, on what basis, and for what purpose? What period of time must pass before one can determine whether a conversion is credible? Who or what is protected by the formalization of credibility of conversion?

Once a person begins the process of migrating, they "find themselves in a liminal space, where migrants' human rights seem to be suspended" (Medina panel 2021). Perhaps this is linked to an erroneous view of the human not as *imago dei*—one connected to all life by bearing the image of the Divine—but as the *homo sacer*—one disconnected from citizens and the rule of law (Agamben 1998). The unwillingness to apply generally accepted human rights and international law to the current state of those who choose to migrate is problematic. This moves humans who migrate into the "state of exception" where sovereign nations allow judges to suspend normal order "for the purpose of safeguarding the existence of the norm" (Agamben 2005, 31). This is presumably because the act of humans moving into economically prosperous Western nations threatens that prosperity so the only recourse the nation-state has is to promote "an essential fracture

between the position of the norm and its application" (Agamben 2005, 31). The idea of national sovereignty brings with it a presumption of power, a power that is not shared and, in the case of migration, cannot be yielded. We must remember that ideas of sovereignty are also intimately woven with our history of colonization (Medina 2019b).

Before moving further, a few demographic realities need to be addressed. The first reality is that the vast majority of persons who move do so within the majority world and not into western countries. Second, most human migration into Western nations takes place through so-called regular pathways with the expected documentation, applications, and fees provided by those who migrate. People who move this way typically have a family, employer, or educational sponsor and the financial means to relocate. Third, the rules that govern these pathways are constantly shifting as politics and conditions shift. That is to say that a person who begins the process of migration following all the rules, may find that the so-called regular pathway moves away from them. Along with people who choose to migrate using these regular pathways, there are those who choose to leave a place but are unaware of the regular pathway requirements or who are aware and move anyway or who are forced to leave by violence or disaster. Nevertheless, while all those who migrate find themselves in a liminal space, those who find themselves outside the designated pathways are more likely to find themselves in a state of exception. What is tragic about this situation is that there is no real legal protection for those who choose to risk their lives to leave a place of threat in order to seek refuge.

Without another country that offers the seeker legal protection, nations view those who migrate in this way as "disposable" (Medina panel 2021). This is evident in the enforcement actions taken by nations against those trying to enter. Violent actions by those charged with enforcing the border have become visible and commonplace and government policies that justify such actions are defended and justified as necessary. But the justifications are contradicted by individual cases:

> Claudia Patricia Gómez Gonzalez, a 20-year-old indigenous Mayan woman from Guatemala crossed the border into Texas and approached a U.S. Customs and Border Patrol officer who drew his weapon and shot her in the head (Lakhani 2019).
>
> Jakelin Caal Maquin, a 7-year-old Mayan girl from Guatemala, died in custody of U.S. Customs and Border Patrol after her father repeatedly sought care for his daughter during the 2 hour bus ride to the detention facility (Romero 2018).
>
> Filomena Jacinto-Carrillo, a five-year-old girl from Guatemala separated from her father by U.S. CBP and not returned to her family for more than a year due to the Zero Tolerance: the family-separation policy that lasted from 2017 to 2018 (Dickerson 2022).

While cases in the news from the U.S.A. make headlines around the globe, this is not the only place that such things happen. Other borders are patrolled with similar brutality. Officials found 92 adult men forced to strip before crossing the border between Turkey and Greece on 14 October 2022 (Fraser 2022). A family of Rohingya asylum seekers were killed in traffic while they were fleeing a riot in a migration detention center in Malaysia, April 2022 (Wee 2022). To give another example, Vali, one of many Iranian refugees in an Australian migration detention facility who was already approved for resettlement, continues waiting in detention after 8 years for permission for travel to begin that approved resettlement (Vasefi 2021). Even when direct violence is less extreme, changing policies impact the lives and survival of many who are moving. Because of the strain on local agencies and governments in 2016, the political machine mobilized legislation to "control and eventually stop the flow of migrants using the Arctic route into Norway" (Rønsdal 2020, 23). Yet a few people continued to act in congruence with what they believed was the ethical response—and they were arrested for their efforts (Rønsdal 2020, 28). In each of these cases, richer countries treat human beings who attempt to migrate in these ways as though they do not have basic human rights (Medina 2019b, 10).

Reaching beyond border spaces, rich countries also extend the state of exception to spaces within the political boundaries of poorer nations. Richer nations use "the mechanisms of economics and international political manipulation" in ways that undermine the sovereignty of other poorer nations to protect their resources for their people (Medina panel 2021). Although much of their work is understood as development, mechanisms such as the international monetary fund and the world bank have been used to suspend, violate, or deny the rights of entire populations (Medina panel 2021). In what ways can practical hospitality theologies critically respond to policies and laws that deny human rights to people who migrate? Can hospitality theologies claim relevance for migration dynamics without ad-

dressing the underlying economic policies that benefit the people providing the welcome?

Kenotic Hospitality

There will continue to be power dynamics at play in loving an other. To address the power dynamics, Néstor Medina advocates for a hospitality that includes both transcendence and kenosis (Medina 2022). Here transcendence is understood in the Levinasian sense that as a being, I have a responsibility to an other. That responsibility requires that I transcend my self to consider an other (Levinas 2000, 100). Kenosis is the principle of emptying or self-limitation. Jesus told his followers to love God and to love others based on the love of God. The power in this formulation is divine power. When it comes to power, we are reminded by the life of Jesus that God's ways are different from those of humans. Christians are challenged in Philippians 2:1-11 to treat each other in the same way that Jesus treated others by limiting themselves for the benefit of an other. This principle can be found at play in the everyday interactions that make and re-make spaces where people encounter each other (Rønsdal 2018). Self-limiting for the purpose of making space for another is a way of loving an other (Nagy 2016). Through the exercise of self-limitation there is the possibility of transcendence or responsibility to an other.

Engaging in kenotic hospitality is less about what a Christian has to offer and it is focused beyond the immediate moment. Bringing together the responsibility to an other with the idea of limiting oneself to make room for an other "challenges the privilege of the one who can offer hospitality, and interrogates the historical circumstances that create the power and resources differential within the two and turns that into an ethical-moral imperative" (Medina panel 2021). In this way, hospitality is enacted by making space for an other to engage in the (now) shared space. Kenotic hospitality prioritizes the "acceptance of the existence of another to whom we are morally or ethically indebted" (Medina panel 2021). This responsibility for another is then rooted not only in the shared identity as creatures but also in the act of acceptance. An *other* has a right to existence—here in this space. This requires a second act—relinquishing privilege.

While this short explanation is framed in individualistic terms, kenotic hospitality is not only about addressing the individual. It is about seeing the individual despite the systems and frameworks that seek to de-humanize people who migrate. It is about critically engaging with the causes of displacement. A kenotic hospitality that seeks to make space for an other who has migrated will necessarily identify spaces of injustice. This, then, becomes a call to act on the causes of displacement and call out the injustice in systems.

Two tasks towards a better hospitality

Theological reflection over these matters is, we think, a second step. The first step is taking action to accept the disruption of arrival by an other and extend love in a kenotic hospitality—a hospitality that empties itself of rights and power to meet an other where they are. Such actions are accompanied by a call to carefully investigate our own participation in creating refugees, in how we maintain colonial structures, and in ways we participate in silencing others.

Task one: taking responsibility for an other now

When related to the migration of people, these structures of power visibly play out at borders. Borders are not fixed, discrete spaces. They change over time—through environmental and political processes. They can also be porous and flexible, moving according to geopolitical negotiations of power. This changeability is because spaces are not only physical, but also incorporate the relationships of people. Such an analysis of space offers a different glimpse into moments of encounter and non-encounter, into ways of relating in everyday ways (Rønsdal 2020). One way of opening spaces in civil society may include "surrendering" space to the body or the voice of another. There are often strong connections to places and newcomers may challenge the importance given to sites and spaces. But exercising responsibility to an other by the self-limiting of privilege makes possible an openness to the creative potential present in the re-shaping of space. This challenges the perception of borderlands as places of tragedy, instead exploring the ways that lived interactions challenge binaries and make room for loving an other (Rønsdal 2020, 22).

Focusing on hospitality might distract theology towards abstract concepts and away from addressing "the experience of the actual people who migrate, or to the larger and economic structures of

exploitation, late free market capitalism, or the dominance of the world by a few wealthy nations controlling the affairs of the world" (Medina panel 2021). Spending so much energy only on a response to migration is to ignore the systems and the human experience that both require "the ethical perspective of practical theological views" (Medina panel 2021).

A disconnection exists between the lived experiences of people, the systems that create the conditions, and theological notions. The term 'hospitality' can be used "to blur and actually ensconce or hide those more complicated issues of the reasons for which migration is taking place" (Medina panel 2021). Rather than responding to individual people fleeing difficulties, appropriate theological action would challenge the financial, environmental, and political conditions that force people to flee. This offers a ground from which to begin a reflection over the voices, the bodies, and the spaces that are permitted and welcomed as well as those that are not permitted and unwelcome.

Task two: Theological reflection over (un)welcome others

And so begins the second task: theological reflections over what causes people to move and how societies respond to that movement. Are the terms used in theology to discuss migration dynamics theological or political ones? In what ways are the notions and concepts of hospitality or loving an other theological? In what ways are these same notions and concepts subverted or employed as political mechanisms to manage the movement of human persons?

What if, in the explanation of creation, there is an emphasis that supports the command to love God and love others? Nagy's explanation of hospitality begins with *creatio ex amore* instead of *creatio ex nihilo* (Nagy 2016, 369). (The latter is still dominantly present in text books on systematic theology). Looking at God´s creation as *creatio ex amore* underlines the relationality involved in the acts and processes of creation. If humankind is, indeed, as Nagy argues, *creatio ex amore* then it is necessary that relationship of love be reflected in social processes—personal and political. Such an anthropological stance that centers itself on *creatio ex amore* understands a necessity in the divine to create out of love that is then reflected in humans. For humans, to be created out of love means having a necessity to love and to enter into creative relationships of love which fits well with the idea of kenotic hospitality as conceptualized in this text.

Applying this means moving beyond theologies that simply "legitimize the way Christian communities were dealing with migration and migrants" by supplanting the one who migrates with images of God, Jesus, or the Church (Nagy 2016, 373). Doing this simply continues to ignore the person who migrates and treats them again as an exception, strengthening existing structures that manage human movement. These current restrictive structures and negative attitudes about the movement of people have grown out of a history of Western expansion (see Medina 2018). It is only recently that "criticism of the migration management of nation states and their combined powers" is discussed openly in theology (Nagy 2016, 376). In a similar way, hospitality theologies must critically engage social and political structures that serve as unjust barriers to those who are on the move.

Theologians, particularly practical theologians, who work with "marginalized and precarious" people can use the concept of hospitality as "a reminder of what's at stake when we work with migration issues" (Rønsdal panel 2021). The notions of *creatio ex amore* and loving an other offer practical ways that hospitality might offer a framework for challenging these structures. But only if the hospitality as it is enacted by Christian communities relies on "a bond between the collective and the individual; citizen and non-citizen, and vice versa" (Nagy panel 2021). What happens when the collective actively works against the individual? When through the "mechanism of economics and international political manipulation, richer nations undermine the sovereignty of other, poorer nations" (Medina panel 2021)? What is then the Christian responsibility for an other?

Where to go next?

The answer begins with (re)creating spaces. Spaces to encounter each other in faithful connections. Connections that are motivated by a responsibility to an other that compels us to make room for an other. We make room through an act of acceptance that is expressed by limiting our privileges to make space. There are examples of people who do this at borders (Rønsdal 2020), who do this in communities of worship (Nagy 2017), who do this in the pro-

cess of arriving (Medina 2015). This space is extended beyond the personal interaction to larger spaces.

Rønsdal answers this question by using an example of two people who continued to act in ethical-moral response to people unprepared for winter at the border of Russia and Norway and were arrested for their efforts (Rønsdal 2020). Nagy challenges the all-too-easy adoption of terms and structures of migration management (Nagy 2016). Medina calls for greater focus on the underlying exploitative economic structures that force people to move (Medina 2018).

There is a need to address the underlying structures and contributors of migration. To do so will cost more than a self-emptying of the right to control the offer of hospitality. It is a call to actively support claims by majority-world people of the very rights cherished in Western politics. There is a need for disruptions, rooted in a theological anthropology that equates loving God with loving an other, that expose and disarm exploitative economic policies and structures.

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Loneliness, socio-political crisis and extreme right populism: A challenge for christian churches

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One of the main components of the contemporary crisis is loneliness, not as subjective emotion, but as a social alienation which dehumanizes individuals in the economic, cultural, and political sphere. It is about being ignored as human beings in need to be heard, to be seen, to be cared for, to have agency and being treated with respect. Inspired by Noreena Hertz, the chapter focuses on how social loneliness is manipulated by right wing populism and the far right. The next section criticizes the pretended right wing populist adherence to Christian values and symbols, and it shows how it leads to the construct of an antagonistic ideology that scapegoats migrants and Islam. The final section concludes that Christian churches and individual Christians can contribute to humanizing the crisis context, not only by way of community building and a critical participation in the civil society, but also by taking a courageous stand against dehumanizing political ideologies and practices.

In "normal" times crises can be solved with managerial tools. Today, however, the established methods don't work anymore because we are confronted with a complex cluster of simultaneous crises: climate disruption, the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact, radical right wing populism, polarization, increasing inequality, and massive human rights violations. These developments are intertwined and generate a comprehensive mega-crisis shaking the foundations of western civilization and democracy. According to Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer we have entered an "*Age of Disruption*" the root of which is a combination of 'three divides': the ecological divide, the social divide and the spiritual-cultural divide (Scharmer and Kaufer 2013, 1–4). They are the emanation of a triple alienation: being disconnected from nature, from others, and from our deeper self.

In what follows I will focus on one crucial component of the mega-crisis: the *social* divide with its implications for politics and the ethical-cultural sphere. I will do this via a lens provided by Noreena Hertz in her "enlightening, engaging and compelling" book: *The Lonely Century. Coming Together in a World that's Pulling Apart* (2020). Based on convincing empirical evidence Hertz interprets the age of disruption as a crisis of *loneliness*. Starting from her analysis of social loneliness and its political consequences, I will focus on the link between the different aspects of loneliness and on how they allow extreme right parties to take advantage of the crisis. Subsequently I will criticize their use of references to 'Christian culture' or 'Christian values' as language of legitimation. Finally, I will suggest how Christian churches can and should respond to both the crisis of loneliness and the political manipulation of it by extreme right movements.

Social loneliness and its impact on the society

Loneliness is not simply an emotional or subjective state of mind. According to Hertz it is a collective state of being that's taking "a huge toll on individuals and on society" as a whole. It is a phenomenon that "(…) poses a potent threat to tolerant and inclusive democracy" (Hertz 2020, 226). Loneliness is not only "feeling bereft of love, company or intimacy",

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but also feeling "unsupported and uncared for" by fellow citizens, employers, community, or government. It's about being "disconnected not only from those we are meant to feel intimate with, but also from ourselves" (Hertz 2020, 7–9). In other words loneliness is "both an internal state and an existential one—personal, societal, economic and political". It makes people "powerless, invisible and voiceless", being "ignored as human beings in need to be heard, to be seen, to be cared for, to have agency and being treated with respect" (Hertz 2020, 7–9).

The main catalyst of this loneliness is what the Flemish psychiatrist Paul Verhaeghe has described as neoliberal madness. Hertz narrates how the neo-liberal ideology and its practices have dominated the world for decades, and replaced community-oriented values by individual ones, putting emphasis on individual achievements interpreted in a meritocratic perspective. In a neoliberal society everyone has to be his or her own entrepreneur and there is no space for mistakes or weakness. One is either winner or loser. Individuals are not collaborators any more but competitors, not citizens but consumers, not givers but takers (Hertz 2020, 14). Hertz' critique of meritocracy is not an exception. Several scholars have come to a similar conclusion, as, for example, Daniel Markovits who, according to Lenfield writes in the "*The Meritocracy Trap*" that "meritocracy creates an endless, soul-deadening treadmill of competition" (Lenfield, 2020). According to the same reviewer Michael Sandel calls meritocracy a "tyranny threatening the common good", a tyranny that leads to "cultivating insidious self-satisfaction among the 'winners' who believe they fully earned the fruits of their work without appreciating the luck, circumstances and public goods that allow intelligence and hard work to blossom" (Lenfield 2020). Sandel's judgment is quite negative: "A perfect meritocracy banishes all senses of gift or grace" and "it diminishes our capacity to see ourselves as sharing a common fate. It leaves little room for the solidarity that can arise when we reflect on the contingency of our talents and fortune" (Lenfield 2020). Finally Paul Verhaeghe argues that neoliberal meritocracy transforms higher education as much as business into a 'rank and yank' appraisal system (Verhaeghe 2012, 19, 20, 24).

One of the main consequences of neo-liberal madness is "a significant rise in income and wealth gaps" (Hertz 2020, 12). According to Otto Scharmer the "disconnect between the Haves and the Have nots…has given rise to an extreme inequity bubble in which the richest 1 % of people in the world (adults with incomes over US$ 500.000) own 40 % of the world's wealth while half of the world's population own just 1 % of the world's household wealth" (Scharmer and Käufer 2013, 6). Hertz gives as example of the earnings of CEOs: "in 1989 CEO's earned on average fifty-eight times the average worker's salary, but by 2018 they made 278 times as much" (Hertz 2020, 12). The consequence of the increasing inequality is that a great number of people feel "left behind, branded as losers in a society that has time only for winners" (Hertz 2020, 12). Their traditional safety nets are eroding and their status in the society diminishing.

Another consequence of the neo-liberal madness is that the workplace has become a place of disconnection. Work conditions change and jobs provide diminished social status and standing. The loneliness at the workplace is "not only about feeling disconnected from the people we work with, whether our colleagues or our boss. It's also about feeling bereft of agency, feeling powerlessness" (Hertz 2020, 145). This is reinforced by the fact that our lives are more and more governed by algorithms and surveillance systems. We live in the "Age of surveillance capitalism" (Hertz 2020, 154). We are not only watched, but also permanently rated, and this increases the feeling of not being good enough and a loss of self-respect (Hertz 2020, 158).

Another catalyst in the production of loneliness is the influence of the new social media. We spend so much time online that it diminishes opportunities to meet real people in person: "Every moment in which we are on our phones, scrolling, watching videos, reading tweets, commenting on pictures, we are not present with those around us, depriving ourselves of the multiple daily social interactions that make us feel part of a wider society" (Hertz 2020, 93). According to Hertz smartphones erode the ability to feel empathy, fragment our attention, create a splintered self. Indeed "our devices estrange us from people we already know, including those we love and care for" (Hertz 2020, 91).

Hertz further observes that entire cities and neighborhoods are invaded by 'cold anonymity' (2020, 57). "We live and eat in rootless neighborhoods" (Hertz 2020,65). That is not seldom the result of what she calls "hostile architecture" or "urban design with a focus on exclusion, especially of the poor and homeless" (Hertz 2020, 74, 77). This is a dangerous development in the light of the fact that it is precisely face-to-face interaction with people

different from us "that makes it easier to see what we have in common, rather than what sets us apart" (Hertz 2020, 80).

But, the most dramatic evolution described by Hertz is not economic, technological, nor a matter of urbanization, but political. Something really disastrous is happening: "the bonds of connectivity break down," and "a growing number of people feel isolated, alienated, disconnected both from their fellow citizens and from national governments who, they feel, have not been listening to them or looking out for their interests" (Hertz 2020, 35). Many people experience the system as unfair and they feel abandoned. Their loneliness increases anxiety, which is both symptom and cause (Hertz 2020, 27).

According to Hertz the situation is so serious that it can pave the way to totalitarianism. Her contention is based on Hannah Arendt's solid analysis of "*The Origins of Totalitarianism*" (1968). Quoting Arendt, Hertz writes that "for those who feel they have no place in society it is through surrendering their individual selves to ideology, that the lonely rediscover their purpose and self-respect" (Hertz 2020, 37–38). Still following Arendt, Hertz continues that "for those who feel that they have no place in the world anymore, who feel a lack of belonging and absence of solidarity, for those who fear for their futures and feel abandoned and alone, hatred of others can become as Hannah Arendt saw in Nazi-Germany, a 'means of self-definition' that mitigates their sense of aloneness and restore[s] some of their self-respect… formerly derived from their function in society" (Hertz 2020, 54). Even if one would think that comparisons between our time and the Nazi era are not fully adequate, one must admit that loneliness is an important driver of radical right-wing populism, and that there is a correlation between social isolation and votes for the far-right (Hertz 2020, 38–39). To say it metaphorically: "Loneliness and right-wing populism are (…) close bedfellows" (Hertz 2020, 6).

Radical right-wing propaganda plays with resentment (Todorov 2012, 210) and amplifies the populist followers' feelings of abandonment or marginalization. Simultaneously it promises change by giving people the impression that they can again belong to something. Hence permanent referrals to words such as 'people' and 'community'. But the identity of a community is defined in contrast with 'the others' who do not belong to it (Todorov 2012, 210). These others are especially the so-called elite and the migrants. In fact the discourse of national or cultural unity promotes "tribalism against people who are different" (Hertz 2020, 50), or, to express it with the words of pope Francis, "a culture of walls" (Francis 2020, nr. 28). "Blaming and demonizing others" becomes a political instrument (Hertz 2020, 53). In short, Hertz believes that the causes and consequences of loneliness "are right ***at the heart of the biggest political and social questions our society faces***" (Hertz 2020, 54).

For Christians and their churches this is one of the greatest challenges, particularly because radical right populism justifies its antagonistic identity discourse by way of pretending to defend Christian values or the Christian identity of the European or North American society which creates a dangerous confusion. Hence my second point on using Christianity as legitimation.

Christianity as justification of radical right populism?

Political scientists argue that one of the most important components of politics is legitimacy. Democracy is indeed not only a matter of winning elections, constituting a majority or acting in accordance with constitutional law but also a matter of legitimacy, of spontaneous moral approval by the citizens. The less people approve a policy spontaneously, the more political leaders need coercive power or violence to stay in power. Hence the necessity of a public moral justification. Even Machiavellian or amoral politicians are obliged to justify their policy or decisions in moral terms, and radical right populists do not escape from this problem. However, according to Todorov, in the case of radical or extreme right-wing populism, the discourse of legitimation is not based on ethical or reasonable arguments, but on demagogy (2012, 207). Extreme right propaganda speaks a language of enmity in the name of defending an imaginative uniform and dominant cultural identity, which Germans call *Leitkultur*. Radical right populists propagate such a *Leitkultur* as the alternative for a multicultural society, which they don't understand as a reality but, inadequately, as a political program of their opponents (Todorov 2012, 220). This concerns us directly, particularly as European theologians, because the radical right discourse interprets this *Leitkultur* as 'Christian', or, as based on 'Christian values'. Many recent examples confirm this. The leader of the radical right *Vlaams Belang* recently mentioned in the same breath that he pre-

fers a culture based on being "Christian, Flemish and white". The populist Hungarian prime minister Victor Orban calls himself "the most Christian and thus the most European of all Europeans" (Courtois 2021, 1). In 2018 the German home office minister of Bavaria endorsed the presence or placing of crucifixes in public buildings as an "expression of the historical and cultural character of Bavaria" and as affirmation of "a visible engagement with regards to the fundamental values of the law and the social order" (Roy 2020, 152). His argument was sharply criticized by Cardinal Marx. In Italy, the leader of the Lega Nord appears in public with a rosary. In Austria the FPö puts the cross of Christ on propaganda posters with anti-migrant slogans. Cardinal Schönborn reacted vigorously against it. All these examples show how much radical right populism tries to legitimate itself as a defender of "the Christian identity of Europe" (Roy 2020, 156).

According to Olivier Roy this discourse is a "rehabilitation of Christian signs … at the expense of their religious meaning" (Roy 2020, 152). It leads to a "transformation of Christian religious symbols (…) into cultural *identity markers* alienated from the religious practice" (Roy 2020, 148–150). And, instead of interpreting Christian values for peaceful purposes, the radical populists misuse them as means "to suppress the signs associated with other religions" (Roy 2020, 152). As such the appeal to Christian values and culture becomes a "means par excellence to chase the Islamic signs away from the public space" (Roy 2020, 153).

Whatever be the case, in right wing populist discourse the word "Christian" is nothing else than an "identity marker", or, compared with what has happened in the Trumpist US, a "bumpersticker" religion (Courtois 2021, 1). Defending so-called Christian values serves as an imaginary and ideological reconstruction of the antagonistic cultural identity of a people. As such *identity marker Christianity* becomes a negation of the genuine values of the gospel. It contradicts the biblical call to care for strangers. It opposes Pope Francis' vigorous defense of the dignity and rights of migrants and refugees. In a certain sense one could say that the proponents of *identity marker Christianity* are waging an ideological war against a genuine understanding of Christian faith.

This has tragic consequences because it leads not only to a divisive society, but also to an internal division in the Christian churches. They are divided between open-minded Christians who discern what to do in the spirit of the gospel and a significant group of conservative Christians and church leaders who engage in an alliance with the radical right in the hope that this would be the best guarantee for the protection of their strict moral convictions with regards to gender theory, abortion, and same sex marriage. The best example of the internal division in the Catholic Church is the conflict between US bishops. Many have explicitly supported Trump and a majority of bishops have endorsed a rejection of communion to Biden. A similar conflict is present in the Protestant world: between mainstream churches and some conservative evangelical protestants (Rietveld 2021).

I am aware that in a global context other issues are probably more urgent than what I have mentioned in the first and second section of this chapter, especially the increase of human rights violence, from violence against African Americans, migrants, Uyghurs, Rohingya, and gay people, to the elimination of journalists and political opponents. In her opening of the 47th session of the *UN Human Rights Council*, Michelle Bachelet declared that we experience today the "most wide-reaching and severe cascade of rights setbacks in our lifetimes" (Bachelet, as quoted in The Guardian, 21 June, 2021). At least equally worrying is the nuclear proliferation and the destabilization of the international order by cyber wars. The doomsday clock has moved beyond the 5 to 12 level and Pope Francis speaks of an already ongoing 'third world war.' For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on the question: what should Christians and their churches should do in response to the crisis?

The Christian response

According to Alicja Gescinska the political and social crisis described in the previous sections is mainly a *moral* crisis because of "the coarsening of the debate, (…) the spreading of fake news", and "the legitimation of the lie". Such a moral crisis requires a philosophical answer, the point of which is opening ourselves to a different hermeneutic horizon, leaving the narrow frameworks of interpretation behind, and always keeping in mind what Hans Georg Gadamer wrote at the end of his life: "Der Andere könnte recht haben" ("The other could be right") (Gescinska 2020, 68) or, as the assassinated bishop Claverie said, "j'ai besoin de la verité des autres" (I need the truth of the other).

In Alicja Gescinska's call for a different hermeneutics, Einstein's warning resonates that "we cannot solve problems with the same kind of thinking that created them" (Scharmer and Käufer 2013, 13). But thinking and interpreting the world differently is not sufficient. We need also action, especially community building and restoring the sense of social cohesion. According to Noreena Hertz: "The antidote to the Lonely Century can ultimately only ever be us being there for each other, regardless of who the other is" (Hertz 2020, 248). These words could have been written by Pope Francis in *Fratelli tutti*. The convergence is striking.

It allows us to conclude that one of the most direct and relevant contributions religions and churches can make to a process of change is community building. But the condition is that they don't absolutize their identity dogmatically and that they don't remain closed for outsiders. Church communities can contribute to both bonding and bridging (Putnam, 2000), by way of creating both an internal and inclusive sense of community and a reaching out to others. In collaboration with Christian and secular civil society movements, churches and individual Christians can intensify direct transformational action via advocacy and critical discussion in the public space. They not only *can* do this, they have an *obligation* to do so, and even to leave their comfort zones, because that is a consequence of being loyal to the spirit of the gospel and of the conviction that "action for justice and participation the transformation of the world" are "a constitutive dimension" of the evangelization (Synod of Bishops 1971). Hence the necessity of a church policy that doesn't pay unilateral attention to faith formation, liturgy, and management of church property. It requires that churches invest more energy into *diakonia* and into "fully entering into the fabric of the society" (Francis, 2013). It implies that church communities take care of local communities and reach out to people who feel excluded.

In fact there are three levels of Church action: internal community building, *diakonia* or participation in the civil society, and participation in political debates. Claiming the right to participate in public debates about political proposals and policies and, thus, claiming a public role is in itself already an antidote against neo-liberal and hyper secularized thinking that excludes religion from the public realm. Even John Rawls, who introduced the 'method of avoidance' in political philosophy, has admitted in his book on *Political Liberalism* that churches can play a public role in view of achieving an overlapping consensus about political principles, provided that they behave as 'comprehensive doctrines,' in other words, in so far as they translate their conviction into reasonable arguments. But this becomes problematic when it would imply that they are expected to "thin out" their convictions. In normal times this can sometimes be reasonable and wise, but in the context of the groundbreaking crisis we have partially described, it would lead to extinguishing the critical potential of the gospel. In an era in which even mainstream political parties and movements, including Christian Democrats, are influenced by divisive ideas from the radical right, thinning out fundamental convictions is not adequate. Especially when the public debates are perverted by polarization, fake news, and scapegoating migrants, it becomes necessary to take a stand. As we have learned from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and political theology reflecting upon the Nazi regime, the privatizing of religion and the public silencing of authentic Christian values leads to eliminating the potential for resistance against social evil. It leads to a disconnected life in which Christians' faith life is privatized, while in the public realm they are expected to be obedient to the state, even when it imposes or allows dehumanizing practices. In the time of the Nazi's it has led to becoming guilty bystanders in a process leading to the Shoah, today it leads to non-resistance against a policy that sacrifices migrants on the altar of security and national identity (Castillo Guerra 2021) and who knows what will happen tomorrow. In our context in which even 'solidarity' with undocumented migrants can become a crime, taking a stand is not only a duty for church leaders, but also for individual Christians. They can be inspired by the words of Noreena Hertz: "*each of us has a critical role to play* in mitigating the loneliness crisis," and "reconnecting society cannot only be a top-down initiative driven by governments, institutions and big business, even if the process of disconnecting society largely was[1]." (Hertz 2020, 15).

According to Pope Francis the courage to resist any sort of inhumane political practice is rooted in a fundamental 'metanoia,' an 'inner shift' that starts

1 Scharmer and Kaufer would agree with this: "A new type of awareness-based collective action is emerging … It doesn't use … the old top-down pyramid … In this more horizontal model, each individual node is mindful of the well-being of others" (o. c., p. 17).

from integrating "*the suffering of crucified people into our own suffering*". Only when we "*become painfully aware*" and have the courage *"to turn what is happening to the world into our personal suffering, we will discover what each of us can do about it"* (Francis 2015, chapter 3). In *Fratelli tutti* Francis' suggestion is to focus on the *vulnerability* of people. He writes this in the context of his interpretation of the parable of the merciful Samaritan. This parable not only tells us that we must always become the other of our neighbor, who is "a neighbor without borders", but the parable also "shows us by which initiatives a community can be build, thanks to men and women who *open themselves to the vulnerability* of others". Taking care of the *vulnerability of others* is the moral basis of transforming the society. It leads to an ethics of consideration[2], and the creation of a system in which everyone's talents are valued and in which everyone takes responsibility in turn for the vulnerability of others (Francis 2020, chapter 3). It can lead to a system that restores democracy and ensures participation of all, with inclusion of the poor and vulnerable in such a way that it is not so much politics *for* poor people, but *with* and *by* them (Francis 2020, chapter 3).

In short, more is needed than merely "breathing life into a dying system" (Scharmer and Käufer 2013, 1). We also must heal a wounded world and be committed to "reintegrating the suffering person and to build a society worthy of this name" (Francis 2020, nr. 71–72). When Christian churches become inclusive communities, when they take their service to the world (diakonia) more seriously both in direct contact with vulnerable people, and structurally; when they take away the loneliness and frustrations that are grind on the mill of inhumane ideologies, they can become powerful transformative political and social actors. Co-creating a society in which people can feel again at home and respected, is the litmus test of the churches' credibility.

2 There is an interesting convergence between what Pope Francis proposes and what the French philosopher Corine Pelluchon writes in her Ethique de la consideration, a book inspired by Bernard of Clairvaux' text on consideration. According to Pelluchon the world needs both humility and vulnerability. Pelluchon is convinced that, when leaders accept with humility to be vulnerable like any other fellow human person, they can become capable of participating in the "recovery of the [wounded] world" (p. 119).

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Concepts of care in fundamentalist and non-fundamentalist faith communities: Living on fear or on solidarity

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What makes it possible and attractive for Christian faith communities and individuals to become part of a fundamentalist ultraright movement like the CNP in the US or the rightwing party AfD in Germany? Which arguments trigger them? What Christian values and ideals stand against it? In this chapter, I will argue that at the bottom line, the rightwing movements and the fundamentalist Christians have similar ways of caring for their members and communities. These right wing and fundamentalist ways of caring differ widely from those of non-fundamentalist faith communities. The care of non-fundamentalist Christians is connected to an open and differentiated view of our existential situation and a hopeful outlook. This care is rooted in the trust in God and confidence that their faith community will be supportive. They do not need to idealize themselves or demonize others.

Fundamentalists in the US

In her book *Shadow Network* (Nelson 2019), the journalist Anne Nelson analyzes the history of the CNP (Council for National Policy) in the US and its roots in the Fundamentalist Southern Baptist Communities in the sixties when the Civil Rights Movement gained power, led by Martin Luther King Jr. The conservative forces tried to hinder the public protests, but in 1965 President Johnson passed the Voting Rights Act that enabled many African American citizens to vote. In addition, the Black Power movement and the Women's Liberation Movement questioned white male supremacy. Even the bedrock of conservative power, the bible, was not out of the question anymore. Liberation and feminist theologians showed that the literalistic interpretation for the bible was only one way of many to read the bible. Against all these pluralistic and liberal forces, the movement of CNP wanted to build a counterforce. Anne Nelson details that Paige Patterson and Paul Pressler III from Southern Baptist backgrounds met in 1967 and formed the CNP. From 1979 on, they developed a successful strategy to install conservative presidents at the Southern Baptist Convention each year (Nelson 2019, 6). Then they extended their strategy to state politics. In 1980 they invited Ronald Reagan, who accepted the invitation and supported the CNP (Nelson 2019, 13). Consequently, the CNP joined forces with other fundamentalist Baptist movements and entered national politics. "By the mid-1980s, Southern Baptist annual conventions began to look like precinct meetings of the Republican Party" (Haley 1988, 210). The CNP supported the Republican Party and was looking forward to installing Ted Cruz as their candidate for the presidency. When Trump, instead of Ted Cruz, won the Primaries in 2016, the fundamentalist network scheduled a meeting with Trump to introduce him as the chosen one, even if he did not fit in with the idea of a model of a fundamentalist Christian. But for the greater purpose of gaining influence in politics and jurisdiction, even Trump could be useful.

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When diving into the history of the CNP, I was struck that Southern Baptist communities and their pastors were at the roots of the CNP. At first, the church leaders were afraid that their communities would not tolerate their involvement in politics. In 1980, after a rally in Dallas where Ronald Regan spoke to 15,000 fundamentalists and the New Right came into being, the Republican Paul Weyrich invited the leading pastors of Dallas. He asked, "You don't think that your congregations will tolerate your involvement into public policy?" They answered, "Amen—that is right." Many churchgoers believed that the church should attend to spiritual life and render politics 'onto Caesar' (Gilgoff 2007, 80). But the pastors knew that the involvement in politics offered a huge rise in finances and power. They agreed when Weyrich offered to conduct a poll asking the congregations whether they would support their pastors' active involvement in politics and whether they would be ready to pay for these activities. The congregations agreed on both questions, and Weyrich and the pastors could forge a new fundamentalist political pathway.

Fundamentalists in Germany

I had the hope that for Germans this might be a far-away problem, a problem of the US, where the segregation of society is much more severe than in Europe and, due to the dichotomic political system in the US, where the chasm between democrats and republicans makes it much easier to demonize the other side. However, examples like the very right-wing Marine le Pen running for the presidency in France in 2017 and 2022 tell that Europe has a problem with ultranationalists as well.

In 2014, the rightwing party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) was voted into European Parliament. In 2017, the AfD came into the German Parliament with 12,6 % in 2021, they had 10,3%. The party is constantly moving toward the right; in many parts considered extremist right now. With the refugees coming along the Balkan Route and across the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, many Germans decided to give their votes not to the socialist or conservative democratic parties but to the ultra-nationalist party AfD. On the other side, many Christian faith communities and their members—as well as other volunteers—supported refugees, helping them learn German, organizing clothing, finding housing, and helping to find their way through the German bureaucratic jungle. In complex cases, Christian communities opened their churches to give "Church Asylum"

("Kirchenasyl"). As long as refugees stay on church grounds, they are withdrawn from state authorities because state authorities cannot interfere with religious rites and worship. The parishes referred to the Old Testament laws about the protection of strangers and the Matthew passage on the Last Judgement (Mt 25, 31-46, specifically v. 40): "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

In many ways, the New Right supports values and narratives that contrast the ideals of these Christian faith communities. Many of the right-wing populists, especially neo-national socialists, namely, "Neo-Nazis" are very critical of "the church" and rather venerate "das Volk" and "the nation." "Nature" and "common sense" are used to support neo-nationalist claims and argumentations (Bednarz 2019, 10). On the other side, the New Right tries to instrumentalize the Christian tradition to legitimize the radical rightwing views and messages (Hildago, Hildmann, Yendel 2019, 3). The New Right uses Christian vocabulary and especially biblical language to demonstrate their closeness to Christian culture and to make themselves attractive to conservative Christians.[1] They seek ways to lure Christians into their ultra-nationalist thinking, like the CNP's persuasion of US-American pastors to join their ranks. But the core of the right-wing ideology does not need Christianity or any other religion. The religious argumentation is much more a disguise than genuine interest.

Right wing argumentations appealing to fundamentalist Christian faith communities

What are the arguments and narratives the New Right uses to reach out to Christians? What is it in fundamental thinking that is attractive to Christians?

The journalist Liane Bednarz (2018) lists several markers of the New Right that are congruent with

1 "2. These: Die Inanspruchnahme der christlichen Religion durch rechtspopulistische Akteure erfolgt primär aus strategischen Gründen." Hildago, Hildmann, Yendel 2019, 3.

fundamentalist Christian thinking, giving the impression that the New Right is fighting the Christian cause.

1. **Elitist thinking**: The New Right and their followers see themselves as the guardians of the one and only truth. With this idea, they link into the fundamentalist's understanding of their way of being Christians and especially of the literal interpretation of the bible. More liberal faith communities are called churches of "Zeitgeist": running after today's mainstream thinking, giving up family values and blurring the lines to non-believers. Fundamentalists understand themselves as the only ones seeing "the signs on the wall," and the only rightful ones to define true Christianity. Democracy and a decent culture of debate are not part of their desired virtue (Bednarz 2019, 20).
2. **Anti-pluralism:** The New Right insists that they possess the only truth and that all the others are either stupid, vicious, corrupt, or perverse. People of different opinions are not considered to have a dignity of their own. They denounce the democratic system as a dictatorship and the diverse press as lying press ("Lügenpresse"). They describe the mainstream churches, the democratic political system, and the liberal media scene as doomed to perish. They do not hesitate to verbally abuse these democratic players and agitate against the ones representing these values (Bednarz 2018, 52–58).
3. **Anti-liberalism**: The New Right criticizes the Western democratic system as decadent and supports the "Zeitgeist." One of their most important topics is sexuality. Saying that the New Right has a fixation on sexuality is no exaggeration (Bednarz 2018, 70). They condemn homosexuality, diverse sexual or gender expression, abortion, and the discourse on gender, calling it "Gender-Wahn." Homosexuality, Trans, and all other sexual orientation and gender expressions are said to dissolve heterosexuality, marriage, and – according to their world view – the only legitimate way of being family: mother, father, and children. The New Right also opposes the promotion of equal rights for men and women and persons of diverse gender expression. Furthermore, they resist the right to abortion and understand movements against sexual assault and the demand for political correctness as dangerous to the Natural Laws (Naturgesetz), assumed as eternal laws and biblical truths. The commonalities between the Right-Wing Movements and the fundamentalist Christians are evident in these anti-liberal arguments.
4. **Ethno-pluralism:** Instead of the propaganda of the "Herrenrasse" (sc. Master race) the Nazis proclaimed, the New Right uses the euphemistic idiom of ethno-pluralism. Instead of "races," they speak of different cultures that should not mix but stay within their boundaries. This argumentation is used not only to condemn migration, but also to brand "Islam" and Muslim people as a culture and religion that does not belong to Germany and Europe (Bednarz 2019, 21 f.). Ethnopluralism uses the same arguments as white Christians in South Africa before the Rainbow Revolution: "God gave every people its own culture." They used this argumentation to implement the Apartheid System.
5. **Replacement of the people**: One of the main narratives of the New Right is that we do not live in a democratic state but under the siege and dictatorship of the liberals, the communists, etc. To them, any person of an upright mind must resist this regime—like in the NS-times against the Nazis. The New Right also spreads the rumor that the liberals accept Muslim refugees replacing the "original" German white Christian population (Bednarz 2018, 172). They will take their workplaces, rape their women and daughters, and erase the Christian culture. In 2017 and 2019, Alexander Gauland of the AfD and a member of the German Parliament openly supported this idea in public. For fundamentalist Christians, this is the overpowering force of the Muslim people that they must resist.

Spreading fear

In 2019, the historian Volker Weiss published Theodor Adorno's speech in Vienna in 1967 (Adorno 2019). Weiss used the recorded audio of the speech to reconstruct Adorno's lecture. In 1967, Adorno analyzed that rightwing parties gain their influence and followers by spreading fear, especially the fear of a threatening catastrophe (Adorno 2019, 19f). Adorno points out that the fears the rightwing parties are trying to spread are mostly illusionary and outdated. In his afterword to Adorno's speech, Weiss stresses that Adorno's analysis of the extreme right argumentation is still valid for today's rightwing movements and especially for the AfD, the political

party in Germany that gained access to the German Bundestag in 2017 (Weiss in Adorno, 2019, 77–86). According to Weiss, the AfD directs much of its rage towards political movements and actors, invoking them like revenants. Quoting Jörg Meuthen, a former politician of the AfD, Weiss argues that the AfD uses phenomena of the past to evoke resentments and to scare today's people:

> Der Popanz eines quasidiktatorischen 'links-grün-verseuchten 68er-Deutschland'[2] zeigt, dass tradierte Feindbilder selbst unter völlig veränderten gesellschaftlichen Bedingungen noch ihren Schrecken entfalten können.[3] (Weiss in Adorno 2019, 77).

Instead of analyzing and pointing to the social conditions and real threats that society must face today, right-wing parties bring up pseudo-dangerous "facts" to unsettle those worried about their future, in fear for their jobs and for their way of living. These people, unsettled and in fear, are most prone to the arguments of false prophets, luring them into false security and easy solutions. Nelson (2019, 96) shows that for the CNP. Eric Heubeck (2001) even drafted a manifesto explaining this strategy quite openly: "We will use guerilla tactics to undermine the legitimacy of the dominant regime. We will take advantage of every available opportunity to spread the idea that there is something fundamentally wrong with the existing state of affairs […] Most of all, we will contribute to a vague sense of uneasiness and dissatisfaction with the existing society. We need this if we hope to start people picking off and bringing them over to our side. *We need to break down before we can build up*. We must first clear away the flotsam of a decayed culture." (Heubeck 2001).

The title of Bednarz's book (2018), "Die Angstprediger" (sc. fear preachers), points to the same phenomenon. She presents different messages of the New Right and how they reach out to Christian communities, but Bednarz does not draw the great lines as Adorno does in his speech.

An alternative culture created by new Media and Big Data

For Heubeck, the New Right needs to create new associations "that should provide everything that a person could want in terms of social interaction" (Heubeck 2001). In 2001, this was a kind of wishful thinking, but from 2010 the CNP broadcasted their messages on all social media channels. Significantly, when fundamentalist Churches expanded to mega-churches, they used video screens in their congregational halls to spread ready-made information and messages from the CNP broadcasting networks. In addition, they tried to gather new members by using the data they collected. In this way, the media messages of the new organizations of the CNP were able to gain effective influence. (Nelson 2019, 169)

Already Adorno saw propaganda as the core of the Nationalist movement (Adorno 2019, 41). As the Nationalist ideology is relatively thin, the propaganda consists of pseudo-facts given with the posture 'everybody knows this', and of 'fake news', always appealing to the authority-bound personality (Adorno 2019, 42). Together with the heightened fear, the nationalist propaganda offers charismatic leadership that promises to erase these reasons for fear.

Bednarz (2018) analyzes how media initiatives of the extreme right blame public media as biased in their contributions and manipulated by left-wing activists. In addition, the mainstream churches and publications are viewed as anti-Christian, because they welcome Muslim migrants, whereas the Christian crusaders of the Middle Ages fought against Muslim invasions.

Remedies against fear in fundamentalist faith communities

The markers of the New Right that Bednarz (2018) lists, including the critique of liberal ways in the field of sexuality, have many overlaps with Christians on the conservative side. The rightwing parties and their propaganda profit especially from people who see themselves as Christians and are members of rightwing parties. The strategy of calling themselves 'conservative' instead of 'extreme right' and using Christian vocabulary helps to blur the line between conservative Christianity and rightwing extremists. The ways the rightwing parties deal with

2 Quote of Jörg Meuthen at the party conference of the AfD in Stuttgart in 2016.

3 Translation by the author: "The bogey of a quasi-dictatorship of 'a left-green contaminated Germany of the 1968' shows that handed down enemy concepts can develop their horror even under totally changed social and historical conditions."

fears of real or fake challenges seem reasonable and in tune with Christian thinking. Faith communities seeing the world as a doomed and sinful place can turn to the apocalyptic traditions of the bible and will see the Antichrist everywhere. If you believe that you are on God's side, you can denounce all the others as being on the devil's side. This dualistic worldview was always part of the Christian tradition. It comforted those living as a minority in the Roman Empire, where Christians were persecuted and killed because of their faith. Now this worldview is inadequate, because the description of the situation does not fit—Christians are not a persecuted minority anymore. Though having the financial means, rightwing parties have neither the social intelligence nor the intentions to help those in need. They do not work constructively in politics or other social engagements, because they do not want to work on sustainable solutions democratically and lawfully. All they have to give is a vague hope of understanding the rage, the feelings of helplessness, uneasiness, and the need for change.

Once again, I must stress that the rightwing movements do not have or need to have a Christian foundation. Their liaison with Christians is purely based on strategic thinking to gain more influence and followers and strengthen their messages by framing them in Christian values and traditions.

Remedies against fear in non-fundamentalist faith communities

The German sociologist Heinz Bude sees faith communities neither as a remedy against fear nor as a bulwark against the rest of the society. Instead, he distinguishes many different fears in society and in a pluralistic faith community: the underprivileged fear for their livelihood (Bude 2014, 83–90), the members of the middle class are concerned about losing their status in the future (Bude 2014, 60–82), the young ones are afraid of not finding a proper place in society and of failing their inner goals and expectations (Bude 2014, 91–100) and all are afraid of the opaque systems of data-transferences, and other self-regulating control-loops out of reach (Bude 2014, 118).

Non-fundamentalist Christians have to admit that there is neither a simple analysis of the actual situation nor is there an easy solution. However, instead of the fundamentalist promise that God will take away all fear, mainstream faith communities (in Germany the Volkskirche) believe that by standing together, there is a way to cope with fears by helping one another and others in need. Bude highlights that Christian faith traditions have the narratives of the Exodus, they have the history of welcoming refugees after WW2, and they come together to hear words of hope in the Gospel and liturgy, prayer, and music (Bude Interview 2019, 13 f).

In non-fundamentalist faith communities, Christians must face the fact that God did not promise their fears to go away and all their problems to be solved. They cannot see themselves as an elitist community apart from the corrupt world. They must accept that they are a group of ordinary, sinful people, and some of them are praying more intensely than others. They must accept that there is no way to separate the God-chosen from the lost sheep – at least not in this world. Instead, they must go into the world and work in that pluralistic world to find compromises and solutions.

The Jewish sociologist and philosopher Agnes Heller (2002) sees a special task for non-fundamentalist faith communities in a post-religious world, where Christians, Jews and other religious believers only represent a minority of the society. According to Heller, those not clinging to fundamentalist religious views can have a critical perspective on sciences and the whole of society. Institutions of society and sciences freed themselves from religious bondages during the enlightenment period. Now they find themselves in new dependencies on economics and positivistic worldviews. Heller sees religions and arts as having the potential to see the blind spots and what is missing in western societies (Heller 2002, 79).

The courage to be: its roots and remedies

When talking about fear it is helpful to turn to the theologian and philosopher Paul Tillich, who was heavily influenced by his experiences during WWI and the impressions of the Nazi ideology in the 1930s. After losing his chair as a professor of systematic theology in Frankfurt, Tillich left Germany to emigrate to the US, where he taught at the Union Seminary in New York City. In 1952, Tillich published his famous book *The Courage to be*. Using the language of existential philosophy, he discusses human existence and how to overcome despair when facing the threat of nothingness in the world. Tillich distinguishes fear that may have many actual causes

from existential 'angst' that is part of everyone's existence, because humans must face existential nothingness. Angst, the reminder of the threatening abyss of nothingness, cannot be erased. The only way to confront the existential angst and overcome despair is the courage to be; that is the courage of self-affirmation despite all nothingness. Tillich analyses that many shy away from the existential angst and try to exchange it for fears of certain objects or matters to be able to confront it. But confronting it does not dissolve the angst underneath. Rather, the courage to be can take in and incorporate the angst of nothingness (Tillich 2015, 54).

Besides the individual courage to be, Tillich also analyzes the courage to be part of a whole: courage and participation (Tillich 2015, 66–82). According to Tillich, there are positive and negative ways of gaining this courage to be part of a whole. Tillich calls the National Socialism way of overcoming nothingness in the world "neo-collective." He describes this courage to be part of a whole as identification with the collective group. Through this identification with the group, the individual gains the courage to be by idealizing the collective, as Tillich describes in the following:

> So wird die Angst vor dem individuellen Nichtsein in die Angst um das Kollektiv verwandelt, und die Angst um das Kollektiv wird besiegt durch den Mut, der sich durch die Partizipation am Kollektiv bejaht.[4] (Tillich 2015, 74)

There is another way of participation, another way of courage to be part of a whole. Tillich calls it the way of "democratic conformism." This courage to be is not rooted in simple identification with the collective. The participation Tillich describes is rooted in the creative act of self-affirmation and participation in the universal creative power.

It is not a direct identification with a collective group but a balance between the individual's courage to be himself/herself and the courage to be by participating in a greater cause. In this way, individuals can be part of a group without giving up their courage to be that conquers the individual's existential angst and still participate in the courage to be part of a whole.

Philosophically, Tillich states that Christian faith is neither about ignoring the existential angst nor about soothing it. For Tillich, the Christian message is, the courage to be is rooted in the ground of being—the God Above God, or the God below the human understandings of God. Tillich lays out a way to deal with existential angst and the many fears of today in a critical, self-affirming way without fusing with a group to erase fear. This is not an instruction on how to build a proper faith community. But Tillich's ideas help find criteria for Christian faith communities and others to deal with the challenges of our time, and to distance themselves from communities that use religious language only to disguise their totalitarian ideology. In times when many foundations are shaking, it is most important to understand where to find the power of being and who is this God who infinitely overcomes despair and raises hope. (Tillich 1960, 40).

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4 English translation: "The angst of the individual nothingness will be transformed into the angst for the collective, and the angst for the collective will be overcome by the courage that is rooted in the participation of the collective."

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Dealing with uncertainty: Christian semantics and right-wing populism

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Introduction

Right-wing populism can be understood as both originating from people's experience of crisis and as a driver of crisis. From one follows the other, in defining the relationship between right-wing populism and social crisis phenomena (at least) two perspectives can be adopted: the first perspective addresses the idea that right-wing populism itself represents a form of crisis management, the second raises the question of how to react to or rather *cope with* right-wing populism as a manifestation of crisis. Against the backdrop of our research project, which examines the relationship between right-wing populism and Christian thought, and will be briefly introduced in the following, we therefore take a twofold approach. First, we investigate how populism itself can be interpreted as an expression of crisis (on the controversy of this interpretation cf. e. g. Müller 2016, 20). In this context, we argue that neither left- nor right-wing populisms develop randomly. Rather, they stem from personal experiences of crisis and are often connected to feelings of disenchantment and powerlessness (Priester 2012, 7). This implies that populism can be seen as a corrective to democracy. It renders deformities—such as a fundamental representational problem—visible and in the best-case scenario even enabling them to 'heal'. Secondly, right-wing populism constitutes a kind of crisis within church communication—not only from the perspective of liberal-minded church members, but also from the perspective of a church leadership that cares about inner church plurality (as it is the case in the mainline Protestant church in Germany), it may be asked: how to deal with church members who are (at least partly) guided by images of group related enmity? The crisis, in our view, also consists in the fact that there is little common understanding of how to deal with such prejudicial attitudes when they are found both outside and inside the Church. Thus, in a wider sense, the crisis raises the question of how to deal with ideological plurality. Our study "Religion und Rechtspopulismus/-extremismus: Analysen von Narrationen vorurteilsbezogener Kommunikation und Hassrede online" ("Religion and right-wing populism/-extremism: an analysis of narrative configurations of biased communication and hate speech online") analyzes interpretations of Christian topoi and practices of ideological actors in the context of prejudice-related communication. Such communication, we show, manifests itself in narrative patterns and narratives or narrative fragments. Before we note some findings, let us ask in advance: What is right-wing populism? What is linguistic violence? The design of the study will also be briefly presented.

What is right-wing populism?

Populism can be understood as what Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser in reference to Michael Freeden call a *thin-centered ideology* (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 6). Labeling populism as 'thin' or 'weak' acknowledges its highly fluid and adaptable character and points to the fact that populism does rely on a holistic, more elaborated ideology, i. e., a host-ideology. Although due to its fluid character, populism is able to take on a huge variety of different appearances stretching politically from

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right to left, it does not follow that populism can randomly be morphed into all kinds of different forms of appearances. Rather, populism is characterized by specific key messages (cf. Virchow 2016, 19) rendering it a phenomenon *sui generis*. Its most important feature is a firm *anti-elitism*. Populism's anti-elitism manifests itself in the assumption that society is "ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 6). In other words, anti-elitism or anti-establishment conforms to the idea that society is marked by a dichotomous opposition based on morality. Based on this model, 'the people' are visualized as a primordial entity possessing an invariant homogenous will. Populists consider themselves as the representative of people's will. German political sociologist Karin Priester adds further characteristics to these core elements: the reference to 'one's own', accompanied by a rejection of globalization, cosmopolitanism and universalism, the interpretation of the currently experienced history as decline and decadence, and finally a moralizing with regard to political action (Priester 2019, 12-13).

As indicated, populism can appear as politically right as well as left. What separates the two forms are their concepts of nation and people. Right-wing populists differ from left-wing populists in promoting sociopolitical exclusion: the national autochthonous population is supposed to be the first and sole addressee of social welfare and political concern (cf. Priester 2016, 546). This is not to say that right-wing populists do not invoke the idea of inclusion. Quite the contrary: inclusion is of great importance insofar as it means fostering a shared identity and solidarity with one's 'own people' within a society that is otherwise deemed cold and egoistic (Priester 2019, 17). Against this backdrop, there is still controversy about whether (right-wing) populism originates from sociopolitical crisis. Nevertheless, it is not possible to fully dismiss both the facts that from the perspective of right-wing populist agents society lacks solidarity and socioeconomic stability, and that it is this perception that gives rise to feelings of powerlessness and disillusionment and the need to dissolve them.

Linguistic violence

Looking at texts either located in right-wing populist/extremist communication or texts in other contexts using motifs, narratives, argumentations that can also be found in rightwing populist/extreme contexts, it quickly becomes clear that the reader often has to deal with forms of linguistic violence. In order to see which forms of linguistic, crisis-inducing violence can be found in our material, it was necessary to ask: How can we understand linguistic violence?

Following John Langshaw Austin's speech act theory and its further developments, it has become a conventionalized interpretation in the humanities and cultural studies that speech is always action. With Sybille Krämer, a German theoretical philosopher, we assume that linguistic action can also have *destructive* effects (cf. Krämer 2007, 32–33). Thus, in a performative sense, linguistic violence represents "speech that in being performed is at the same time a form of exercised violence" (Krämer 2007, 35 [translation KM]). The absence of address, silence and silencing can also be forms of linguistic violence. Performative speech 'does' something to a person, and the kind of change that performative speech brings about can admittedly also be negative: disparagement and humiliation can put people in a social situation that is precarious (Herrmann and Kuch 2007, 12), and the precarious social situation can also be produced by misrecognition (in the sense of a symbolic negation). Alterity can either be negated (by forcing the particular into the general, the conventional—on the violent dimensions of the structure of language cf. e. g. Adorno 1996; on the regulating structures of discourse cf. (Foucault 1991), or it can be exhibited, ostracized, and demonized—as is often the case in the material of our study—so that the recognition of the other, the foreign, is no longer possible. Both negate the legitimacy of the other's own place—and in this respect both are a form of violence in symbolic-social terms. With reference to Judith Butler, Krämer also shows how speech and the act of violation are interrelated: in the constitution of our subjecthood, Butler argues, we are dependent on an invocation by the Other, dependent "in order to be" (Butler 2018, 48; here, Butler adopts Althusser's theory of interpellation, cf. Althusser 1977). And this constitution is, of course, also vulnerable. Linguistic violations are "effects of a social practice and of social asymmetries" (Herrmann and Kuch 2007, 13 [translation KM]).

Hate speech lives on repetition, on citation, it updates contexts of injury and hatred, and continues the subjugation of subjects through certain forms of language or forms of address. Butler sees this as a possible ritual dimension of linguistic violence. Linguistic violence can thus very often refer to resentments that have already been socially conventionalized and have migrated into everyday linguistic usage, be it racist or sexist etc. resentments (Herrmann and Kuch 2007, 15).

If one now looks for the 'grammar of linguistic discrimination', various elements can be found: differentiation and separation (between 'us' and 'them'), stereotyping and categorization, disparagement, and devaluation (Krämer 2007, 43–44). Verbal violence or hate speech can be indirect or direct, covert or overt, it can be supported by power and authority, it can be accompanied by physical violence or not, it can be "more or less strong" (Meibauer 2013, 2 [translation; KM]). With regard to the material of our study, the form of *indirect* violation is most interesting and important: the speech's 'victim' is not directly addressed; rather, it is a third party with whom a person or a (constructed) group is discussed (Krämer 2007, 45), and it is an audience with whom forms of linguistic subjection are processed or actualized.

Pejorative aspects can be found on the most diverse levels of speech, from phonology to morphology to pragmatics and semantics. The contextual understanding of language and speech acts makes it clear that the understanding of linguistic violence is also only ever possible in a context-related way.

Design and method

Our research project[1] as its title indicates was primarily concerned with analyzing how agents interpret and accommodate religious topics and practices within biased communication online which manifests itself in patterns of narration, narratives, or rather fragments thereof (cf. Merle and Watzel 2022). As is generally the case with empirical studies online, we were confronted with an overflowing pool of data that we decided to limit by applying two selection criteria.

The first criterion was content related. We focused on journalistic texts and (blog)posts/comments that emerged in connection with the Evangelical Church in Germany's (EKD) decision to establish an alliance (*united4rescue*) to support sea rescue missions on the Mediterranean Sea, the funding and acquisition of a rescue ship (*sea watch 4*), and the ship's first mission. In accordance with this focus, we delimited our time frame to the period starting from the Church's initial decision to support sea rescue operations at the *German Protestant Kirchentag* (DEKT) in Dortmund on June 19th, 2019 through the end of August, to be able to take the ship's first mission on August 15th, 2020 into account, as well as conform to the research association's timetable (2019–2021). Data gathering was conducted via several key words that turned out to be most productive after a first explorative phase of data analysis. Thereby, various platforms and text types came into focus: posts and threads on *Facebook* and *Twitter*, articles from online journals and blog entries, both including user comments relating thereto, as well as letters, mainly e-mails, to the *EKD Info Service* (a contact point for church matters). The second selection criterion complies with our goal to take different communication contexts into account that unfold along a presumed left to right spectrum in order to illustrate how the severity and intransigence of biased communication varies throughout. Our assumptions were both that content, language and interaction rely on its contextual embeddedness and that tracking contextual differences might provide us with some insight into how a scope of action could look like when confronted with right-wing populist and xenophobic statements that draw on Christian thought and values.[2]

1 The research project "Religion and right-wing populism/extremism: an analysis of narrative configurations of biased communication and hate speech online" ("Religion und Rechtspopulismus/-extremismus. Analysen von Narrationen vorurteilsbezogener Kommunikation und Hassrede online") was part of the EKD (Evangelical Church in Germany)-funded research association "Church Membership and Political Culture".

2 The question of data collection was of course considered from a research-ethical perspective. In the context of social media, only publicly accessible comments (accessible without a user account) were included in the data pool. Emails to the Info Service represent a separate 'genre'. All data was fully pseudonymized (names and other information do not allow conclusions about the author). The data has been archived by the researchers and can be viewed if required. On the issue of ethical guidelines regarding internet research, see also: Association of Internet Researchers 2019.

Employing the concept of 'narrative' as an analytical tool enabled us to assess both short posts and longer texts like e-mails because, as semiotic semantic structures, narratives underlie all forms of communication (Müller 2019, 3). Screening our material in our qualitative study, we identified a right-wing populist/extremist master narrative taking both a minimal definition of narrative (Prince 1973) and the key features of right-wing populism outlined above into account. The master narrative reads as follows: a) Germany has been the homeland of the German people (=autochthonous population) and is characterized by a faultless religious social structure, b) the corrupt church elite has been and is still betraying their faith, country and culture for their own (financial) benefit, c) Germany with its social structure and Christian values falls apart—the 'true' Christians recognize this development and resist and fight against the elite as well as the culturally foreign influence. This master narrative allowed us to discover narrative fragments, their variants, and contextual modifications.

Manifestations of crisis: Findings

Against the backdrop of the right-wing populist master narrative and its contextual modifications, particularly three aspects strike us as manifestations of crisis. They provide support to the idea that (right-wing) populism must be considered as both originating from people's experience of crisis and as a driver of crisis.

Resource crisis—crisis of representation?

The first aspect points to the critics' portrayal of the Church representatives as corrupt elite, a portrayal that is associated with experiences of resources scarcity. Anti-elitism, as mentioned above, represents a fundamental feature of populism. It is in this light, that we interpret the comments of those agents who draw on right-wing populist clichés and consider the Church's commitment to sea rescue as overstepping or failing in their actual role as a representative of Christian values and social welfare. The line of thought of such criticism reads as follows: the Church's and its representatives' commitment to sea rescue does not serve their own people but harms them. In supporting sea rescue the Church encumbers their own people with the financial and sociopolitical consequences sea rescue missions have. Moreover, the Church underestimates or deliberately accepts the threats to their own culture and values. This line of thought interlinks the feeling of existential and symbolic endangerment with a feeling of betrayal by the Church and its representatives, rendering them responsible for society's presumed instability:

> It is not the churches that should be destroyed; rather, it is the false and hypocritical church leaders that need to be removed. Get rid of them. A lot of pastors in the smaller communities who do not agree to this crap feel left alone. If there are no churches left, what will we have to set against the Islamists? Soon there will be more mosques than churches. Here, cause and effect are mixed-up. Don't put up with that. Our culture, also for the non-believers, is what it is all about. The churches belong to Europe. Let's make sure, that they once again represent the people of our country. Like the current government failing to represent their people the church leaders need to be replaced because they do no longer represent the believers' values instead they follow the mainstream. (FB #Schlepper (4), 116 [translation AW]

Beyond expressions of pure hatred and disapproval, and conspiracist views that are typical of comments on the far-right, the data confronts us with users pointing to irritating experiences and expressing their astonishment and concern about the Church's setting of priorities in light of resource conflicts they claim to perceive and feel. In their opinion, the Church neglects their essential tasks, i. e., pastoral care, the proclamation of God's word, and basic social, diaconal responsibilities:

> Every other child who lives in Ruhr Valley is genuinely poor. Why is the EKD focused only on foreign affairs? Why do they never denounce the poverty and the hopelessness that is in Germany? (FB #leavenoonebehind (2), 53 [translation AW])

It seems that a lot of users find it hard to acknowledge that the money for the ship's acquisition did not stem from Church taxes, but was raised by donations. Their statements reflect a strong sense of being in a situation of resource scarcity, and the impression of being exposed to a constant (worldwide) competitive struggle. In addition to worrying that the Church fails to satisfy its actual purpose, opponents charge that the Church is overstepping its area of responsibility. Some users' complaints that the Church increasingly acts as an NGO can be interpreted similarly: in representing specific political positions and appealing to the likeminded, the Church symbolically excludes people who have a

differing opinion but who are in fact official Church members.

What we aimed at demonstrating so far is that most of the critical voices throughout the various contexts struggle with the impression of being disconnected from the Church and its representatives. In feeling unheard and misunderstood, they interpret the Church's initiative as clear evidence for such disconnectedness. Such an impression is not least nurtured by the fact that the Church's participation in sea rescue does not seem to be a topic that is embedded in people's daily social environment, i. e., their local Church communities. Rather, it seems to be a debate that is conveyed primarily by the media and associated with particular individuals representing the Church.

Crises of interaction

While the first aspect consequently might be understood as pointing to a crisis of representation, the second one concerns the crisis of interaction the debate on sea rescue exposes. Comments drawing on right-wing populist narratives very often involve verbal abuse, aggression or hate speech. In doing so, they present a major challenge for a joint discourse, or to put it another way, they enhance conflicts in communication by provoking counterviolence. The further right on the contextual spectrum, the more comments involve linguistic violence.

This observation is closely linked to the fact that those contexts constitute filter bubbles or self-referential communities: they repress differing views while self-affirming their own standpoint thus leaving verbal aggression and hate speech unquestioned. Consequently, they seem like hermetically sealed social spheres, although technically speaking they are open to anyone. At times, such online journals and blogs' self-affirming appearance even evokes the impression that commenting serves as a strategy for the users to cope with their feelings of crisis and personal worries. From this, it follows, that contexts tend to particularly function as echo chambers reinforcing right-wing populist and extremist narratives. In comparison, the publicly available threads on *Facebook* and *Twitter* appear to be more diverse and less static or settled. The more dynamic environment leaves room for opposition and the possibility to challenge verbal aggression.

Apart from such rather formal aspects, instances of linguistic violence often appear in our data in comments drawing on the basic semantic figure of 'the familiar—the foreign' (Busse 1997). The further right, the more lucidly users portray this difference between what counts as familiar and foreign in a discriminating way, in order to justify their presumed values: they constitute their own worldview and community by distancing themselves from the foreign that is labeled deviant and, in some instances, is even demonized. In the majority of cases, what is defined as different and deviant equates to the religiously foreign, i. e. people of Muslim belief.

We noticed that the users' strengthening of the difference between 'the familiar' and 'the foreign' corresponds to a shift in who they regard as the 'main perpetrators' being responsible for their own misery and society's decline, economic and otherwise. Comments by what we consider to be the middle field address primarily the Church representatives or rather Church 'elite': they criticize their irresponsible attitude towards the consequences of their involvement in sea rescue. What they find particularly problematic is the allegedly additional burden for the social system and the taxpayers. In contrast, further right users do not take the Church 'elite' for the (sole) cause of their own situations' aggravation or the presumed additional burden. Rather, they hold the culturally foreign responsible while perceiving the Church 'elite' as secondary cause, i. e., the actual perpetrators' *accomplices*. Syntactically, the mounting demonization of the (religiously) foreign manifests itself in the fact that Muslims and also people of color (especially men) are put in subject position, thus labeled as agents who display criminal and deviant behavior and attitudes while the commentators in question present themselves as innocent victims. In their view, it is the culturally foreign and the Church representatives supporting them that pose a threat to our democratic society and set of values. The further right, we are more often confronted with statements that must be regarded as group-based enmity. At the same time, comments that entail insults and defamatory naming towards Church representatives become more frequent. The following comment demonizes Muslims by falling back on generalizations and claiming that immigrants of Muslim belief feel nothing but hate for Germany and consequently are engaged in planning acts of war:

> The overwhelming majority of these 'refugees' are Islamists who brutally fought for ISIS and ruined their own country. These 'people' will hate Germany too, and bring armed conflict to us if we let them in. […] But these two preachers ['Pfaffen'] studied 'Belief', and this is why they

> are actually clueless. At best, these "Christians" only know how to destroy themselves ['den Weg der Selbstzerstörung']. (JF_EKDRettungsschiff (=1), 262 [translation AW])

The increased differentiation between the foreign and familiar equates to an exclusionary notion of nation and people that reflects on the users' interpretation of Christian topoi, values, and biblical stories. In this context, neighborly love represents one of the most frequently discussed and contested Christian topoi, often accompanied by the recourse to the story of the Good Samaritan. Critical comments that can be placed in the 'middle' field are those that question the moral acceptability of the Church's commitment by arguing that the Church oversteps its area of responsibility for neighborly love. By contrast, further right-wing users refuse to consider the Church's involvement in sea rescue as constituting neighborly love stating that it harms their own people. What becomes clear here is that the benchmark of neighborly love represents the idea that the consequences of action need to benefit primarily the autochthonous population, i. e., an increased differentiation between the foreign and the familiar that ultimately leads to the demonization of the latter. This, in turn, colors the comments' interpretation of neighborly love resulting in a narrow, territorially bound rather than universal concept.

From this the question arises how to engage with users that appear to invoke such a narrow concept of neighborly love that presumably results from an emphasized differentiation between the foreign and the familiar. A lot of users in the *Facebook* threads we analyzed who strongly support the Church's advocacy and commitment to sea rescue seem offended by such a narrow concept. They allow themselves to equally provoke their interlocutor and in some instance to question their commitment to Christianity. Our material shows that such provocative responses are anything but beneficial for achieving substantial progress in dialogue—they leave the factual level of discussion. Moralizing and lecturing appear to be equally problematic because they establish an asymmetric communication relation that gives rise to a feeling of intellectual inferiority. We believe that to foster dialogue it is important to closely 'listen', to pay attention to details and, in doing so, to enter into an open-minded exchange about important everyday experiences—because personal experiences constitute both a crucial source to learn something about the interlocutor's intentions and the horizon against which biblical stories and topoi are interpreted. But 'listening' closely does not equate to fully abandoning reasonable objections.

Rather, it is a matter of questioning inconsistencies and non-transparent assumptions on which the statement ultimately rests. Revealing one's background assumptions is a necessary condition for an exchange that aims at mutual understanding.

Practices of crisis orchestration

In comparison to the second aspect, displaying crisis as a practical effect of prejudice-related communication, the third one points to practices of crisis orchestration. Particularly in those communication contexts further right on the spectrum, our data confronts us with comments that paint vivid threats and doom scenarios which in some instances employ extremely violent images. Within these scenarios a key role is attributed to the Church representatives. They are made responsible for a whole set of negative events and developments. As already indicated above, critics consider the (autochthonous) population as suffering from the Church's lack of attention. Apart from such an assumption rooted in experiences of resource scarcity and the emphasis on national priority, some users' accusations against the Church representatives are more strongly motivated by their perspective on the difference between the foreign and the familiar as outlined above. The guiding principle of their accusation constitutes the idea that owing to their support for sea rescue the Church representatives abet culturally foreign influences that ultimately lead to a decline of their own peoples' identity. Such narratives of identity decay rest on an ethno-pluralistic worldview that aims at maintaining cultural purity (cf. Weiss 2017, 16sqq). From this viewpoint, the (post-)modern globalization dynamic represents the relevant source of danger since it makes the blurring of national boundaries more likely, i. e., it carries the danger of—to put it in a term repeatedly invoked by the 'New Right'—a 'great exchange'. Some users in our data also use the term 'Umvolkung' [ethnicity inversion] in this context.

But right-wing populists do not understand the globalization dynamic as the primary reason for cultural amalgamation. Rather, they hold society's (post-)modern attitude responsible—an attitude that in their eyes is, in particular, encouraged by the social elite and frequently characterized as 'liberal decadence' because it lacks awareness for a cultural heritage or tradition. As a result, the imagined cul-

tural community (the autochthonous people) loses its very own identity and historical continuity. From this identity crisis a cultural, or rather religious vacuum emerges enabling other cultural and religious forms to invade.

In our data such considerations manifest themselves in comments that accuse the Church 'elite' of neglecting their role as representatives of the Christian value system by supporting refugees of Muslim belief thus fostering the decay of their own cultural identity instead of preserving the same. Here, users draw threat scenarios that picture people of Muslim belief as criminals showing sexually abnormal behavior and even stage Islam per se as a massive safety hazard. While some comments interpret the Church representatives' commitment as an expression of delusion and misjudgment obstructing their proper perception of the threat others accuse them of intentionally facilitating their own people's cultural decay.

> The process of 'Umvolkung' can't go fast enough for the EKD – especially for Bedfort [sic]-Strohm. These people are doing everything they can to flood Germany with bogus asylum seekers from foreign countries, until our country is no longer recognizable. They have no concern for the German population. On the contrary, they weigh down citizens with ever-more demands in the hope of reaching their own ludicrous goals. They couldn't care less about the fact that the German taxpayer must finance this whole business of asylum-seeker tourism. Sure, [Bedford-Strohm et al.] act like good people … they have a noble character. These dreamers who are totally out of touch with reality at least really believe in what they're doing. (JF_EKD-Rettungsschiff (=1), 169 [translation AW])

It is these comments questioning the Church representatives' good intentions which adopt conspiracy narratives. Some of them claim that they pursue a large-scale agenda that benefits them financially, few even compare this course of action to the medieval selling of indulgence, others consider it to be a manifestation of the capitalist rational, i. e., an asylum industry ('Asylindustrie'). In the framework of those comments, accusing the Church representatives of unethical or corrupt intentions and betrayal we were faced with several cases which identify the Church representatives with biblical figures, namely the Pharisees and Judas thus invoking antisemitic stereotypes (cf. Schwarz-Friesel 2019, 35). Some users even employ the metaphor of Satan in their judgment about the Church representatives—an image that has a long history of being used to dehumanize Jewish people (cf. Schwarz-Friesel 2019, 34) which frequently figures in conspiracy theories (cf. Butter 2018, 94). In doing so, they portray the Church representatives as (self-)destructive force that creates chaos. In some instances, the impression of the Church 'elite' as betraying its own people and faith results in a desire for revenge. It manifests itself in judgment fantasies that are packed with aggressive language and violent images. The following comment deploys the image of 'hell' as description of the punishment the EKD-president (Bedford-Strohm) is supposed to receive:

> "Beford-Strohm is a Judas who betrays Christians by supporting their worst enemies. He should sizzle in the fires of hell." (PI_Seenotrettung (=2), 668 [translation AW])

Concluding thoughts

What our findings essentially point to is that evaluating aspects of crisis within right-wing populist and extremist speech that is related to Christian thought and the church requires a differentiated analysis. It seems to be crucial to distinguish closely between right-wing users who are aiming to obtain cultural hegemony through strategically orchestrating crisis scenarios and using hate speech from those who, due to personal dispositions and experience of everyday resource scarcity, gratuitously draw on right-wing populist narratives. This is not to say that the latter should not be held responsible for their statements and attitudes. For communicative reasons, it is reasonable to compile a detailed picture of one's interlocutor in order to be able to evaluate one's own scope of action. Similarly, it is necessary to distinguish the amount and intensity of verbal aggression and hate speech the comments display. Our material confronts us with very different stages of violent language. The central question here is: what remains when we strip a statement of its violence? In quite a number of cases, we are left with nothing more than language functionally reduced to a tool utilized to hurt others. It is in these cases that the crisis of interaction reaches its peak since all efforts to enable mutual understanding or discursive progress are blighted from the start. But we also came across comments unveiling worries and fears as well as negative experiences that can constitute the starting point of an open-minded dialogue. In light of religious questions, we believe that it is important to foster the *practice of a contex-*

tualizing theology. Our material emphasizes the fact that biblical stories and topoi are open to different readings and interpreted based on individual experiences and backgrounds. With the intention of an understanding between different positions, what is needed is both to evaluate the biblical texts' interpretative horizons as well as to elucidate the conditionality of one's own position.

In closing, we would like to highlight two areas of concern that we take to be important in considering the Church's commitment and tasks. The first area refers to the issue of diversity within the Church: how can the Church become competent to deal constructively with the most diverse spiritual and political views? The second area of concern rests on the idea that verbal aggression and hate speech usually spring from social conventions. Consequently, what needs to be considered is where the church itself employs violent speech or rather speech that can be experienced as violent. Here, violence does not only mean the misrecognition of particular groups, individuals, and their life plans but also practices of stigmatization. The Church needs to raise awareness for violent speech and its systematic culturally inherited character—not least in its own practices.

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Addressing fear as a form of diakonia: Public engagement of the church

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Introduction

Recent global crises—financial, migration, and pandemic—have again revealed fear as an important driving agent in politics and society. Churches are particularly challenged in communicating their message of love and solidarity relevantly and credibly in times of distress and anxiety. This chapter is based on recent empirical research; it identifies public engagement of the Academic Parish of Prague as diakonia, a specific exercise of Christian love. By examining parish activities, it explores—above all—what pastoral strategies in addressing fear were adopted within the congregation and towards mainstream society between 2016 and 2019. By reviewing both specific and interchangeable characteristics of this pastoral effort, it outlines differences between parish and chaplaincy ministry and as such advocates for specialization in church pastoral efforts.

In order to handle a theme of fear—either individual or shared—tangibly, I examined two situations during my research period, namely the migration crisis in 2015 and anti-gender initiative in 2017. In both cases, hateful rhetoric was identified as contributing to emotional anxiety both within the church and society at large. For its capacity to address these issues in public media, the parish tried to soothe general distress, which is, I argue, an example of its "ad extra" mission (Mette 2005).

Research and results

For exploration of this social and pastoral phenomenon I chose an interdisciplinary methodology. While the classic method of observation, evaluation and stimulation provided a practical theological framework (Klein 2005, Fuchs 2001), the grounded theory methodology facilitated the analytical part of the empirical study (Charmaz 2006).

Empirical research was carried out in 2016 when I conducted 11 in-depth interviews with current and former members of the parish, representing various demographic groups. This particular study was embedded within larger research, whose main concern was a religious choice. With a reference to Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (Corbin and Strauss 2008), I followed the structure of an open, axial, and selective coding process to generate a research hypothesis. While a coding paradigm model examined the process of opting for a particular church community, it suggested that people choose the specific parish because it acknowledges their social, spiritual and intellectual capacity and treats them with respect.

These empirical findings were further analyzed and evaluated theologically: having examined four functions of the parish, i. e., martyria, leiturgia, diakonia, and koinonia (Lehner 1994), I eventually identified that diakonia—service to others—is exercised through public engagement in this particular case and constitutes a major appeal for parishioners as well as newcomers. I conceptualized a public activity of the parish as handling with "truth" and "love" for the very specific use of these notions in Czech history and society today (Muchova 2021). In the following theological analysis, therefore, I evaluate how the parish addressed these concepts in its pastoral ministry and propose a possible enhancement in this matter.

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Church in public space

The Academic Parish of Prague was identified as a rather vocal player when it comes to political issues. Although officially established as "parish" in 1990, this church community functions rather as a spiritual center, an open platform for Christians and others alike. Its focus on members of academia constitutes its chaplaincy character—i. e., optional and casual membership—without many typical parish characteristics. Despite a somewhat misleading name, I keep the established term.

This parish, unlike other initiatives, such as the pro-life movements, rarely challenges particular legislation; instead, it is more concerned with the ethical coherency of political representatives. This can be characterized as an ethical-philosophical rather than operational-political position of the parish and should be treated as such (Muchova 2021, 144). The parish, established to serve academia, is clear about its liberal and progressive views on many social issues; however, it sees its political mission in promoting dialogue and critical thinking above all. Tomáš Halík claims, for instance, that not as major a difference between conservatives and liberals exists today as between those who are open to dialogue and those who are not (Halík 2021). This claim, which requires more social research, reveals a main direction of the parish, i. e., an emphasis on reason, freedom and responsibility. While it recognizes a lie as a key instrument for various kinds of manipulation, it addresses the issue often.

This concept has a special political connotation in Czech society. With a reference to pre-war Czechoslovak democracy and the motto on the presidential standard, "Truth prevails," Václav Havel later coined the phrase "Truth and love must prevail over lies and hatred" while re-establishing democracy in 1989. Supporters of Havel and his moral-political standards are sometimes pejoratively called "truth-and-love types" so any reference to this—especially in Halík's texts and sermons—conveys a clear political statement (Muchova 2021). A deliberate use of critical thinking in social and religious themes—a tool derived from academia—is exercised when it comes to political issues. The language may vary if referring to truth and love through pastoral means, such as sermons, or through communication means, such as public media.

Search for truth

An exploration of how the parish relates to truth in public space is demonstrated through two examples, the migration crisis and the anti-gender initiative, which revealed many individual as well as shared fears within Czech society.

Regarding the first case, I did not receive detailed information on migration from my respondents despite posing a direct question. I assume it reflects a general atmosphere in the country where people did not have personal experience with religious and ethnic diversity, so the arrival of large numbers of refugees from the Middle East disturbed various parts of the society in 2015. Rather than showing rejection most respondents claimed not understanding the phenomenon enough in order to take a clear position. One parishioner reported on being involved in an international humanitarian aid effort in the Balkans, and later providing education at Czech schools; she was very critical of some Church representatives for their alleged passivity and ignorance. All other respondents expressed their inability to identify the problems from their perspective and spoke about the role of the parish and Tomáš Halík's "activist" sermons with a certain caution.

Halík soon initiated a debate with his "Ten Points to Fear of Islam" article. He emphasized a necessity to solve the problem in Europe together and not let irresponsible nationalists exploit the issue and set the terms of the debate. Having opposed a collective guilt model, Halík challenged particular prejudices and simplifications about Islam in Czech society. His reported goal was not to educate people about Islam and its magnificence, as some later referred to it, but to provide a rational perspective in times where negative emotions seemed to prevail (Halík 2015). Although his text may resemble a defense of Islam in Europe—and as such would qualify for further elaboration and academic examination—Halík claimed his main task was to challenge the basis for panic with objective data.

I noticed two special characteristics in my research: Halík explicitly accused particular politicians of being nationalists who "drive people to the Muslim fundamentalists" with their hateful rhetoric; and he deliberately sided with a vulnerable minority despite facing misunderstanding and criticism from the public. In partnership with other organizations the parish called for solidarity with refugees by organizing a series of public lectures on the topic meant to outline the official position of the

Catholic Church locally and internationally, to emphasize a biblical message of solidarity, and to propose possible ways for handling personal concerns.[1] A benefit of the parish, therefore, cannot be seen in providing practical humanitarian help. In accordance with its rational approach its main contribution was in addressing society with challenging and disturbing questions of an ethical nature.

Regarding the second case—the anti-gender initiatives—two conflicts were observed. While in 2017 the Church representatives decided against providing LGBT+ chaplaincy,[2] the Academic Parish offered them a meeting space. In 2015 the parish supported a discussion with a prominent representative of queer ministry in the Catholic Church.[3] My respondent, who did not identify with queer community herself, appreciated the parish for its openness and lack of prejudice. Despite her approval of Catholic ethics on the one hand, and her distaste for the Academic Parish on the other, she actually acknowledged the parish community for avoiding easy black-and-white statements. By its willingness to sponsor the LGBT+ community, the parish sided with the marginalized group whose very existence aroused many negative emotions and fears among believers. Similarly to migration case the parish understood its role here as an agent stimulating rational discussion about the topic, this time specifically in a framework of the Catholic Church.

For some Christians truth represents a doctrinal and theological teaching that requires no further discussion. For the Academic Parish truth seems to represent a constant search—questioning each individual situation specifically and comparing it with the Gospel no matter the official Church position. It is not to confront the Church teaching a priori but to negotiate, discover, and eventually receive or reject the outcomes. It enables people to challenge important aspects of their faith and worldview and choose their position—and it actually keeps people active in the search for truth; theologically, in a process of constant conversion. Pastorally, the Academic Parish seems to side with seekers, people who search for truth but are unable to accept Church teaching for various reasons, i.e., lack of spiritual experience, theological knowledge, or other personal circumstances. Martin Kočí proposes a rationale behind this: "The Church has often forgotten those who pose uncomfortable and provocative questions and has favored solidarity with the 'poor ones.' Halík turns the attention of the Church to those who ask disturbing questions and reminds them that they cannot be forgotten either. This is undoubtedly one of the greatest benefits of Halík's work" (Kočí 2013, 248).

Search for truth is often interpreted theologically, such as the ultimate truth of Jesus Christ (John 14:6), or ethically, such as social justice (CV 6-7) in the Church. The Academic Parish is concerned with truth as it is natural to academia—by applying reason and critical thinking. While respecting experiential truth of its visitors, the parish representatives insist on scientific truth based on evidence; the disciplines would involve philosophy, psychology, sociology, political and communication science in this case. By referring to migration and gender through data-based evidence, for instance, the parish aims to address both Christian and non-Christian audience; it operates with theological truth minimally. The respondents asserted that the parish would enter the public space to ask questions—not provide answers—about truth in politics, media, and particular social situations. Early identification of potential dangers in the public mood, for instance, contributes to a balanced debate about certain issues (Halík 2017).

In a time of disinformation media and truth relativism, a credible witness to truth—whose message was tested through critical thinking and reliable evidence—becomes an invaluable and credible messenger for others. This research shows that Tomáš Halík and the Academic Parish seem to choose solidarity with seekers of truth—both from within and outside of the Church—in their diakonia style.

Diakonia as an exercise of love

Diakonia represents love and charity, the essential Christian attitude to other people. It is grounded in the ministry of Jesus Christ: besides preaching the good news of salvation, Jesus served people by liberating them physically and spiritually (Mark 1:32). The Church inherits this method (Mark 10:43-45) and calls on Christians to follow Jesus also in charity and service to their neighbors. Yet, this calling

1 APP. 2015. http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/public/salvatore/Salvatore%20123 %20listopad%20final.pdf [11.8.2017]

2 Duka, D. 2017. http://www.dominikduka.cz/vyjadreni/odpoved-hnuti-logos-cr-a-lgbt-katolikum/ [8.8.2017]

3 Luštinec, V. 2015. https://www.christnet.eu/clanky/5569/akademicka_farnost_praha_se_letos_zapoji_do_programu_prague_pride_duka_pripomina_katechismus.url [20.10.2019]

may have different shapes as people live in different contexts (1 Cor. 12:4-6). No matter what charisma people and communities receive, they are all called to share it with their neighbors and society in order to reveal God's love in the flesh (John 3:16). So, how is diakonia seen in the Academic Parish? Who are the poor in need of help? How specifically does the congregation exercise charity using its charisma and gifts? And, eventually, how is this mission seen by its parishioners: did they associate with a declared vision of the parish or did they find it difficult to follow this approach?

Although some typical charitable activities were observed in the Academic Parish, the main area of diakonia—solidarity with others—was identified in serving truth on a social-political level. This is manifested primarily through its support for truth and justice in media and politics. The parish enters the public space to serve the poor of our times—seekers—who are not addressed by classical pastoral care properly. They may be uncertain about personal issues, confused with existential questions; they may challenge their faith or be disappointed with a certain form of Christianity. While many might be disturbed by social issues, such as globalization, secularization, migration and political instability, the parish tries to address these issues with a respect to integral human development (CV 52).

So, while studying martyria I observed pastoral means (such as homily and catechesis); in diakonia, the focus is on the mission outside of the Church—a secular society that needs the Gospel message being delivered in a different style than the Church congregation does. Despite the pejorative "truth-and-love" typology in Czech discourse, such a reference to universal concepts of truth and love seems to cope better with the Czech public than other religious language does. A close link between sacral (parish) and social (politics) is represented primarily by Tomáš Halík, the parish priest and public intellectual, through his various texts in mainstream media. Thanks to his numerous publishing activities it is possible for the general public to follow his value system over a long period. In outlining the specific mission, for instance, Halík suggested that the parish wishes to oppose populism, arrogance, demagogy, conformism and servility.[4] Sometimes this is not possible without a conflict: "Christian love for a neighbor is not exercised in sentimentalism and artificial harmonization, but, where necessary, in the struggle for others and in enduring the necessary conflicts" (Rahner and Vorgrimler 1996, 158).

Some acknowledge Halík's civil activism and believe in his contribution to Czech democracy: "Halík is a public intellectual par excellence, he is not afraid of controversies, or political conflicts. He holds clear opinions and does not hesitate to pronounce them, but if important, he does not hesitate to persuade others actively" (Pehe 2008, 254). This differentiates Halík from some of his colleagues from academia and the Church who see public activities as superficial and inappropriate.

Likewise, the respondents appreciated the Academic Parish for being critical of certain social phenomena; they emphasized its ability to challenge political, social and societal injustice as a prophetic voice. This is not only a question for totalitarian regimes; but also democracies need to watch for the rule of law and ethics in public space. Christians, with their sensitivity to truth, may detect a potential danger sooner than the general public and it is their responsibility to act. Halík asserts it is necessary to speak up against cowardice and indifference to evil in public. During the visit of Dalai Lama in 2016, for example, the political representation issued a statement claiming a strategic partnership with China supporting its sovereignty and territorial integrity vis-à-vis Tibet. While this statement may first seem innocuous, further contextualization reveals compelling arguments for taking political action, such as abuse of power, disinformation and hate speech (Muchova 2021, 73–74).

Interestingly, the parishioners did not wish their representatives to explicitly support certain politics or political parties; instead, they expected their involvement in democratic dialogue, stressing more general—ethical—issues, as suggested in *Gaudium et spes:* "To pass moral judgment in those matters which regard public order when the fundamental rights of a person or the salvation of souls require it" (GS 76).

Although many claimed similar political views as those presented in the Academic Parish, not everybody shared them fully claiming they were too naïve and impractical for real politics. Similarly, some church visitors who publicly pronounced their conservative political opinions were repeatedly spotted in the parish. What brings people with an

4 Halík, T. http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/clanek/2160/vyzva-k-neucasti-na-letosnim-udelovani-statnich-vyznamenani#.XR96yugzZPY [22.10.2016]

opposing worldview to a church where talking politics—at least in indirect and symbolic form—is omnipresent? Is their attraction caused by different motivations, such as high preaching standards, affirming social status, pursuing liturgical beauty, or pragmatically a convenient time of services? And how shall the parish in its specific diakonia way address such an audience? In this research therefore it is important to recognize a diversity of churchgoers—also political—and ask if this can be attributed, for instance, to an atmosphere of dialogue and tolerance that the parish declares as its priority.[5]

Identifying fear

With reference to Christian love, fear seems to be in clear opposition—bringing division, misunderstanding, prejudice, and hatred (Zulehner 2016). The Academic Parish, for instance, claims to support critical thinking on social media content and public meaning even if it implies being a non-conformist minority (Halík 2017). Pope Francis refers to fear among the general population and asserts that being fearful is not a sin as such; it is mostly an inappropriate reaction to fear that is problematic: "The sin is to allow these fears to determine our responses, to limit our choices, to compromise respect and generosity, to feed hostility and rejection" (Francis 2018).

Paul Tillich differentiates between fear as having a definite source and anxiety, without a specific source. Although different, they cannot be separated; they are immanent within each other. He maintains that this is something natural and all humanity shares these concerns (Tillich 2000, 36–39). Sometimes it seems that Christian teaching strives to respond to people's ontological fear by delineating the message of salvation and eternal life. But is this also responding to particular and concrete fears people have today? Barbara McClure emphasizes the importance of distinguishing fear as life-giving or life-limiting emotion; while fear can be helpful for physical survival, it may be destructive in inaccurate assumptions about others leading to oppression and exclusion, such as in xenophobia (McClure 2019, 178–179). Identifying fear, both in individuals and in a population, and handling it responsibly, may thus become an important service to fellow citizens.

Peter Neuner and Paul Zulehner outline that Kierkegaard, Drewman, Biser, and Benedict XVI see fear as a source of violence, greed, and lies. It is only healing from fear that makes it possible to become a loving person (Neuner and Zulehner 2015, 48). Question remains how a healing process can be carried pastorally. McClure observes that emotions refer to real human experience, and as such, provide the most important tool for understanding people´s lives in pastoral theology (McClure 2019). By healing people´s particular wounds, Klara Csiszar specifies, the Church can realize its diakonia fully; only then can people discover the meaning of their life. People´s fear and wounds should therefore be the foremost pastoral concern of the Church (Csiszar 2021, 136).

Pope Francis takes a conscious stand; he recognizes fear as a legitimate experience but challenges the negative consequences of fearful behavior and calls for developing trust instead (Francis 2017, Francis 2018). The story of sinking Peter who calls "Lord, save me!" embodies therefore a key Christian attitude (Francis 2020). During the migration crisis, for instance, Francis acknowledged the fears of migrants as well as those from the host countries (Francis 2018); during the recent pandemic, he addressed the fears of the lonely, people without work, and civil servants (Francis 2020). In handling fear Francis takes two directions: his pastoral strategy is highly Christocentric, urging faithful to turn to Christ in every difficult situation. His missionary strategy is humanistic, proposing trust as the opposite of fear. By emphasizing solidarity he addresses a non-Christian audience with a universal language of interpersonal relations.

Still, it seems that identification of fear is the first step in any healing process. Monika Renz suggests that without recognizing fear as a very basic human experience, it is impossible to proceed with healing. The first step to individual salvation, therefore, leads through acknowledging human weakness (Mark 10:51) and this weakness could be identified as existential fear (Neuner and Zulehner 2015). For pastoral theology, this is an utmost question—how can the Church address these fears relevantly without ever sliding either into cheap moralizing or into incomprehensible theologizing? How to address deep personal fears on the one hand and common social fears on the other? How to develop a sensitive and professional understanding of the phenomenon to

5 APP. http://www.farnostsalvator.cz/ [31.7.2019]

distinguish between the two? How to understand which fears are justified, and which are imported and promoted by others, for instance, politicians?

The Academic Parish decided to address fear directly by open identification of particular social problems; it chose a transparent and rational way to confront the heated emotions by reasoning. Although this might be a way of dealing with fear in a particular community, it does not pose a universal pastoral instruction. While psychology claims that addressing emotions with reason does not function well enough, it is feasible to apply a somewhat holistic approach when handling people's fear—to address their body, mind, and soul through accessible means, such as personal relations, storytelling, and art interventions.

It is possible to see diakonia of the parish in delineating ethical questions and taking a rational and objective stand in heated public debates. While it may look like a spontaneous prophetic voice at first, a closer look reveals it could be interpreted as a deliberate pastoral strategy as well. My respondents favored solidarity with people in need although they did not know how to address such a complex issue well. Their confusion could stem from a subtle tension between their own emotions bolstered by disinformation campaigns on the one hand, and a Christian call to love and solidarity on the other. Such conflict is not restricted to the Academic Parish; its members perhaps demonstrated certain responsibility in handling the issue carefully due to their rational reflection. I hold that the parish—by entering the public debate—provided its members and audience with basic education, support, and arguments for further dialogue with their friends, families, and colleagues.

Handling fear in pastoral ministry

This research has disclosed two phenomena with a high pastoral relevance: promotion of trust and use of media. The following discussion outlines possible directions for reflective pastoral ministry.

Emotions play a key role in times of distress and insecurity. Global problems—despite being communicated virtually—seem close and threatening with social media. Addressing emotions such as confusion and fear in a proper manner seems thus an important pastoral task. McClure observes that in scholarship of philosophy, psychology, ethics, and theology, emotions were often neglected. Thus, understanding of where they come from and how they function remains a major task for many scholars today (McClure 2019, 8). In pastoral theology both positive and negative emotions need to be carefully recognized, identified, and treated adequately for "the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age… are the joys and hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the followers of Christ" (GS 1). A call for aggiornamento, identification of current needs and adaptation to a new pastoral situation, is urgent once again. So, what are people expecting from their Church in times of crisis? What kind of consolation and support, for instance, can churches offer to people in secular societies? Telling stories has been shown to be much more useful in changing minds as anything else (Rutledge 2016, 154; Coyle 2014). Thus, it seems that identifying experiential truth can be more important than delivering propositional truth in a proper ministerial strategy. Sermons and pastoral counseling, for example, are useful pastoral means for developing trust (Ganzevoort 2012, 218–219).

I return to Pope Francis and his strategy for dealing with fear—to the development of trust. How can trust be maintained effectively and promoted credibly by the Church? Francis is shifting attention from the negative (fear) to the positive (trust) as to emphasize the liberating character of the Christian message: "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear… The one who fears is not made perfect in love (1 John 4:18)." With Francis, however, it seems as if the trajectory was not direct from fear to love, but rather indirect, from fear through trust to love. It may correspond well with the holistic perspective: a way from fear of the body through trust of the mind to love of the soul. It seems as if trust played the role of an agent—bridging a large gap between painful anxieties and liberating love. But how can the church apply its strategy on two different levels, social and individual?

Promoting societal trust—both social and religious—is a rather demanding task in post-communist societies with a democratic deficit (Sedláčková 2013). Czech society, for instance, shows a high tendency to skepticism and distrust (Hamplová 2013). The churches rank as the least-trusted institutions with 25 % of confidence.[6] How—if at all—shall

6 CVVM. 2017. https://cvvm.soc.cas.cz/media/com_form2content/documents/c2/a4279/f9/po170410.pdf [10.4.2017]

churches communicate a message of faith if their fellow citizens struggle with elementary trust? It is a reciprocal relation though; if the Church wants to promote trust in the general population, it needs to be established as a trustworthy partner for communicating ethical, cultural, and political values.

Promoting individual trust, on the other hand, seems pastorally more feasible through individualized ministry and counseling. With a reference to Viktor Frankl´s logotherapy, Csiszar claims that a "logo-pastoral" approach with its existential character would allow for addressing people´s essential concerns naturally (Csiszar 2021). Hence, a large area of pastoral care, from parishes (churches) through chaplaincies (public institutions) to specific ministries (spiritual guidance) would allow for supporting people in their existential and spiritual fulfillment—a natural way of developing trust—and ultimately the most direct access to God.

For addressing people's anxiety a responsible use of media is essential. New social media, observes McClure, "provide public forums for sharing and expressing emotions—often very strong—with possibly grave consequences" (McClure 2019, 3). It is important for the Church to handle media with consideration; a choice identitarian or disinformation media instead of mainstream media contributes to the low credibility of the Church (Petráček 2020). Media strategy and literacy should be reflected when the Church communicates its message such as endorsement of societal trust. Public service media, as a guardian of a democratic society, should be understood as a reliable partner for the Church too. While their mutual relation is often problematic for various reasons, it is necessary for the Church to recognize mainstream media as beneficial in protecting similar values, such as truth and human rights (Muchova 2022). This can be reciprocal, the Church also should challenge the media when they divert from their objective and independent reporting and, for instance, contribute to rising fear and distress through misleading or confusing information.

Conclusion

Examining global crises and their key aspect—fear—have been crucial for the Church throughout its history. Pastoral ministry today strives for understanding the driving forces of human behavior, both social and spiritual, to respond in a relevant and timely fashion. This research has therefore explored a specific form of response as exercised in the Academic Parish of Prague.

By positioning the public activities of the parish under diakonia of the Church, it has argued that the Academic Parish challenged the emotion of fear with reasoning: it tried to cultivate a responsible reflection both within the Church and society. In times of recent crises, the parish emphasized truth in order to navigate people towards critical thinking, and, by doing so, to reduce their fear and sense of insecurity. The parish entered the public space to serve the poor of its context—seekers and disoriented ones. It was recognized as a specific pastoral approach that functions effectively in this particular community and its target academic group; however, it is not universal for the Church in general. This chaplaincy ministry can nevertheless illustrate diversity and pluralism within the Church—each community has its specific pastoral needs as well as charismas that must be treated individually and specifically. This research has maintained that cultivating trust in society is an important pastoral challenge for the future. With reference to Pope Francis it emphasized the importance of nurturing trust as a bridging agent in addressing personal and common fears. Eventually, it suggested a new perspective on using media; in this information age the Church is invited not only to see mainstream media as a partner in spreading its mission—promotion of love—but also as an important ally in their common goal—exploration of truth.

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Open wounds: COVID-19, eucharist and the mystical body of Christ

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This chapter discusses the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, and of curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during the Covid-19 pandemic. Firstly, I situate the discussion of zoom Eucharists in the context of recent work on online worship by Teresa Berger and others. I argue that the online believer is bodily present at worship and that the members of a local church can be suitably gathered in a virtual space to receive the sacrament. Secondly, I consider the effect of Eucharistic loss on the mystical body of Christ, the church, through the lens of trauma. I examine the characteristics of trauma as outlined by Karen O'Donnell, applying them to this specific context, and contend that the loss of the Eucharist is traumatic for that mystical body. Thirdly, I suggest that the absence of the Eucharistic entails the loss of opportunities to encounter both real presence and real absence. The trauma to the mystical body is compounded. Fourthly, I consider the practice of Spiritual Communion and argue that this does not obviate the "benefits" of consuming consecrated elements. All in all, the mystical body of Christ and the church encounters layers of trauma.

Introduction

What is the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, and of curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during a pandemic?

During the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020–2021, church buildings were closed to worshippers in Belgium for lengthy periods of time. At key moments of the crisis, many individuals or families were themselves under lockdown at home and could not meet "in-person" with other believers. Local churches learned to gather together in zoom-type sessions, and services could sometimes be livestreamed from largely empty buildings to people "watching" at home.

The Church of England, (CofE), part of the world-wide Anglican communion, published a series of guidance acknowledging that "[w]hen services of Holy Communion are broadcast live (whether live-streamed or through videoconferencing), those who tune in are participating in a real Eucharistic assembly" (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 6). However, the same guidance indicated that believers could not fully participate in the Eucharist during these virtual services. This is because "participants should not be encouraged to believe that any bread and wine brought before screens during online Holy Communion has been 'remotely consecrated'" (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 7). That is to say, there was "real Eucharistic assembly" without "real Eucharist". Acknowledging the expertise and profound reflection behind the guidance, and its intentions, the practical impact in the context of the pandemic was significant. Members of local CofE churches in Belgium (part of the CofE Diocese in Europe) could not receive the sacrament of bread and wine in physical form for weeks, and sometimes months, at a time. Anecdotally, local Anglican churches either fasted from the celebration of the Eucharist completely because of this restriction in the guidance, or celebrated online with the majority of the participants encouraged to

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practise Spiritual Communion only (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 6).

In such unprecedented adversity, the loss of the Eucharist was hard to understand, given that many aspects of life were experienced via zoom-type platforms during this period. Local churches established ways of acting as a worshipping community online, but were unable to follow that to a logical conclusion, that of consuming consecrated elements. The guidance's curtailment on this participation in the Eucharist in zoom-type settings seemed a puzzling limitation on the work of the Holy Spirit. From a pastoral perspective, wasn't this the one moment when the consolation and strengthening action of the sacrament was needed above all? In a world-wide crisis, surely this was the moment to facilitate, not hinder, "faithful connections"?

In reflecting on this subject, I am taking advantage of the invitation expressed in the CofE guidance, in which the authors "… commend the questions raised by [the practice of consuming bread and wine before a screen] for further theological reflection" (The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 7). The issues at stake are wide-ranging and complex involving, among other things, the purview of the Holy Spirit, CofE canon law, nuances in sacramental theology, differing understandings of priesthood and access to designated buildings. However, my narrower focus here is on the body in various guises: the body of Christ (the sacrament of the Eucharist); the wounded body of Christ himself; the individual human body and, above all, the corporate body of the believers which we call the church (the mystical body of Christ).

The chapter is written in four short sections, concentrating on two situations where the local church (i) fasted from celebrating the Eucharist completely as a result of the guidance, or (ii) celebrated the Eucharist in a zoom-type setting and the participating believers were encouraged to practise Spiritual Communion (they could not consume consecrated elements). First of all, I situate the discussion of zoom Eucharists in the context of recent work on online worship by Teresa Berger and others following the emergence of Web 2.0. I argue that the online believer is bodily present at worship and that the members of a local church can be suitably gathered in a virtual space to receive the sacrament. Secondly, I consider the effect of Eucharistic loss on the mystical body of Christ, the church, through the lens of trauma. I examine the characteristics of trauma as outlined by Karen O'Donnell, applying them to this specific context, and contend that the loss of the Eucharist is traumatic for that mystical body. Thirdly, I suggest that the absence of the Eucharistic entails the loss of opportunities to encounter both real presence and real absence, and so the trauma to the mystical body of Christ is compounded. Fourthly, I consider the practice of Spiritual Communion and argue that this does not obviate the "benefits" of consuming consecrated elements. All in all, the mystical body of Christ, the church, encounters layers of trauma.

Unless otherwise specified, I am using "zoom" to represent any online platform which allows a group of people to gather and participate in an event at a specific point in time. So, I assume that a celebration of the Eucharist via zoom is a virtual synchronous gathering of an identifiable local group of people, most of whom would "normally" be in a physical building together at some point on Sunday morning. I am aware that the discussion of "online Eucharists" could, and no doubt should, be set in a much broader context than this but such settings are not the focus of this essay.

The body of Christ at worship following the emergence of Web 2.0

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted, or ruptured, the weekly pattern of Sunday gatherings of local CofE churches in Belgium and forced a deeper encounter with life online. Such technological developments, so familiar in other areas of life, might barely have impinged on the corporate worship of this kind of church until now. This is in contrast with large (sometimes mega-) churches of other denominations which regularly beam services to multiple locations around the world. Is an online believer present bodily in that "virtual" act of worship and can groups of "bodies" be seen as gathered together for the purposes of celebrating the Eucharist?

My intention here is not to claim that online worship "feels exactly the same" as so-called in-person worship. It is, however, to argue that, one, the boundaries between the two are more blurred than might be obvious at first glance and, two, the online worshipper is bodily present. It is therefore possible to understand that a local church, a particular expression of the mystical body of Christ, is able to gather via zoom to fully participate in the sacrament.

Discussions about the interplay between digital technology and the way in which we worship are not

new (Berger 2018, 7). Key concerns might be: firstly, the intrusion of "artificial" technology into traditional "pure" worship practices; secondly, the hard boundary between real and unreal worlds; thirdly, questions such as "can the worshiper truly be present online"? (This is not an exhaustive list).

As a general principle, it is important "not to compare an ideal or idealised version of liturgical life offline with the worst of digitally mediated liturgical practices" (Berger 2018, 10). To counter the first concern above, "Christian worship should not be understood as an originally unmediated or pre-mediated world to which (artificial?) media technologies then came to be added" (Berger 2018, 7). Indeed, Christianity has always used "historical media forms" such as "bodily techniques (e. g. hands raised in prayer, kneeling, cantillation), oral communication, scrolls, oil lamps, and astronomical computations, to name just a few" (Berger 2018, 7). As she says, current "digitally mediated liturgical practices [should be] interpreted within a larger trajectory of mediated practices in worship across time" (Berger 2018, 8). Moreover, it is bodies themselves which are "the basic materiality and prime media of Christian worship" (Berger 2018, 16).

Secondly, the divide between the real and virtual world is not as deep as might first appear. Prayer and worship are not divorced from the general movement towards the fuller integration of online and offline behaviour in our lives since the emergence of the highly interactive Web 2.0 (Berger 2018, 17). "Today, daily living is no longer divided into 'online' and 'offline' time or practices…[It], in other words, is digitally infused" (Berger 2018, 17).

Thirdly, there is no such thing as disembodied worship. As Berger points out (2018, 19): "Digitally mediated practices are material practices, as are all offline liturgies. In the case of digitally mediated worship, the material practice is enabled, foundationally, by the interface of a human body with a computer or other internet-accessing device. Digitally mediated practices of prayer and worship cannot be separated either from a physical body or from materiality." The body is present and primary online and the online worshipper is able to actively participate, not only in the sense of conscious focus on what is happening, and "singing along with the hymns" but often to respond digitally as well e. g. with candle lighting or whatever other action is required (Berger 2018, 21–23).

As a further part of this whole discussion, it is worth remembering the other side of the coin—that is, how many believers participate in so-called in-person worship with highly technologically-enhanced bodies, in services which often benefit from a great deal of technology too, for example, lighting, sound, music videos (Berger 2018, 20).

The question then becomes whether "isolated" believers online can truly be said to be gathered together for the purposes of celebrating the Eucharist? That is to say, can there be a real ecclesial community online? Daniella Zsupan-Jerome (2015, 542) establishes "the case for a relational understanding of presence in digital communication". Berger suggests that "we forgo arguing whether ecclesial community *can* exist online—everything indicates it already does" (Berger 2018, 44). Sarah Johnson affirms this in her recent work during the Covid-19 pandemic: "Christian community clearly can and does exist online (2020, 191). Indeed, as I have said, the CofE, acknowledges "real Eucharistic assembly" when believers participate in the live broadcast of Holy Communion (see above).

Eucharistic loss through the lens of trauma

I will now consider my opening question on the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, of curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during a pandemic. (By "curtailing", I mean the acknowledgement of "real Eucharistic assembly" without "real Eucharist", i. e., the consumption of consecrated bread and wine). I consider this issue through the lens of trauma, particularly focussing on the idea of trauma as rupture, or wounding, to the body. My main conversation partner in this part of the paper is Karen O'Donnell, particularly her work *Broken Bodies* (O'Donnell 2019). Although trauma is a term originally associated with the medical profession and, more recently, with branches of psychiatry, I will present its relevance to this current day practical issue in the church. I will argue that the loss of the Eucharist wounds this mystical body and, as such, is traumatic. The body is denied the body.

There is no single definition of trauma but O'Donnell (2019, 6) considers that it is above all centred on "*rupture*" which she perceives as taking place in three ways. Firstly, a person undergoes some kind of "rupture in body integrity" which might be "a feeling of being unsafe, or an experience of injury or invasion of the body" (O'Donnell 2019, 6). The second rupture is one of time—this

might be experienced as the intrusion of long-ago trauma into the current moment by means of "flashbacks or nightmares" (O'Donnell, 2019 7). Or, significantly from the point of view of this chapter, there might be "a blocking of the memory of the traumatic event leading to a gap in their memory timeline" (O'Donnell 2019, 7). Thirdly, there is a "rupture in cognition and language" (O'Donnell 2019, 7). This could be because a person can't clearly remember the details of the trauma and so "cannot access it in order to be able to understand it" (O'Donnell 2019, 7). Again, perhaps "the traumatic event is beyond cognition and the trauma survivor has no language with which to express what happened to them and how they felt about it" (O'Donnell 2019, 7).

O'Donnell emphasises that the idea of somatic memory is key to any attempt to understand trauma (O'Donnell 2019, 8). "The place where body and memory come together, for Christians, is in the Eucharist" (O'Donnell 2019, 14).

I am primarily concentrating here on situations where a local CofE church decides to fast from celebrating the Eucharist, as a consequence of the CofE guidance that a full Eucharist cannot be experienced online. I stress that what follows is not a demonstration of how the absence of the Eucharist has been traumatic in a literal, clinical sense. However, I am making connections with the description of trauma above which I think are significant in arguing that the mystical body of Christ, the church, has been wounded by what has taken place over the last months. In all of this, I note that the very existence of non-death loss itself can be traumatic (for an example from a very different context see Mitchell 2018). There is here, in a deeply inter-connected way, physical loss, loss of memory, loss of language, loss of witness, loss of the support to our faith that engaging in sacramental behaviour brings—and this is probably an incomplete list. This culminates in the ultimate breach of the body as I will outline below.

So, I will begin slightly out of sequence with O'Donnell's second point about the "blocking of the memory of the traumatic event" and the "gap in [the] memory timeline". The basis of the Eucharist is Jesus' request that we repeat something in memory of him (Luke 22:19 NRSV). When there is Eucharistic loss, as during the pandemic, local expressions of the mystical body of Christ, the church, lose the opportunity to remember Jesus in the specific way afforded by those non-recoverable celebrations—for example, the participation in the Eucharistic prayers that retell the story of what has happened, the gestures of receiving and the interplay between movement and memory, the allowing of the bread and wine into our own bodies and all the associations there, and the particular togetherness with the communion of saints at that moment. There is, almost literally, "a gap in [our] memory timeline" (O'Donnell 2019, 7).

Closely allied to this is O'Donnell's third point about the lack of available language with which to express what has happened. If the Eucharistic celebration does not take place, including the relevant Eucharist Prayers and ritual enactment, then the church is truly left without words to remember the traumatic nature of Jesus life and death. I express it in this way because O'Donnell (2019, 123–124) indicates that she and Shelly Rambo (2010) locate the trauma in different aspects of the Jesus event. There is a compound effect—the traumatic loss of the Eucharist, and all which that comprises, is characterised by a loss of language in which to tell of the traumatic events the group of believers is remembering in some way.

Both the second and third point above are connected to the issues of witness testimony (O'Donnell 2019, 10–11). A gap in the timeline of our Eucharistic celebrations and the loss of language which prevents us from telling the story of our faith prevents us from bearing witness to the traumatic events we have encountered. Nor can the church perform what O'Donnell sees as one of its key tasks—that of being a "listening community" (O'Donnell 2019, 11). It cannot listen to itself. It does not hear itself repeat the foundational story of our faith in the context of the Eucharist with the consequent support and expression, or means of, grace.

All of this combines together to constitute the main trauma site—the wounding or rupture to the body of Christ (see O'Donnell's first point above). Just as Jesus' body was wounded on the cross, so his mystical body, the church, is wounded by this Eucharistic loss.

This section has focussed on the complete absence of the Eucharist; obviously, when online believers participate in "real Eucharistic assembly", the effect on the mystical body of Christ, the church, is slightly different. The believer can participate in many aspects of the Eucharistic celebration. However, the loss of the consecrated elements remains.

The permanence of Eucharistic loss

The Eucharist, the remembrance in some way of Jesus, is "usually" repeated daily, weekly or monthly

by members of a local church community. But it can never be repeated identically. As O'Donnell points out using the phrase of Catherine Pickstock (2013, 177), the act of remembrance is a case of "'non-identical repetition'" (2019, 19). O'Donnell summarises this concept in the following way: "Non-identical repetition is a form of analogous repetition in which history and novelty are combined. All repetition is, inevitably, non-identical because it differs in location, intent, action and/or outcome" (2019, 19).

My point is that, if each celebration of the Eucharist is unique and cannot simply be repeated, then the loss of any Eucharists during the pandemic is significant. People might debate exactly what is being remembered during such a celebration, but those specific opportunities to recall the great story of our faith are gone forever and cannot be reclaimed. The situation is not rectified by simply "starting up the Eucharists again" once guidance or regulation allows. These celebrations are different to those that would have taken place—they are not a substitute or replacement. The loss to the body is irreplaceable. The trauma or wounding is deepened.

(Real) Presence and (Real) Absence

This chapter began with considerations of the bodily presence of the individual worshipper online and the consequence of that for the body of Christ gathered to celebrate the Eucharist. Entwined with the presence, or absence, of the believer are the concepts of the real presence or real absence of God. The loss of real presence and real absence in situations where a Eucharist cannot take place compounds the trauma to the mystical body of Christ.

The Absence of Presence

Larson-Miller details a number of ways a worshipper might understand God's real presence in the Eucharist, acknowledging "a God who is real and always present even in modalities; through creation, in the incarnation, in humanity, in suffering, in living and dying, in resurrection and ascension, in all places and in all times, and in sacramental liturgy, all 'real' (Larson-Miller 2016, 82). Such ways include, firstly, the notion of encounter, following work by Joseph Bracken and Martin Buber and their concept of intersubjectivity. "…[T]he understanding of all ecclesial sacraments as 'encounter' is faithful to a trajectory in sacramental theology of a meeting" (Larson-Miller 2016, 85–86).

Secondly, she notes (2016, 88) that "language is not an instrument but a *mediation;* it is *in* language that humans as subjects come to be" (Chauvet 1995, 87). One aspect of reinvigorating the way we understand "the creating word is to revitalize the understandings of symbols so that they are entered into as more than a sign or reminder but rather dynamic "transactions that disclose and embody relationships" (Chauvet 1995, 98). A further aspect of this is "to revisit the centrality of the whole person who encounters the unknown by means of the known" (Larson-Miller 2016, 88). That is to say, one way of encountering the unknown God is by means of the known bread and wine, the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Thirdly, she identifies the sacraments as one means of active participation in the life of the Trinity (Larson-Miller 2016, 112). "A re-membering of the trinitarian activity in every sacramental encounter sustains the corporate reality of the Body of Christ, made in the image of God who is pure communion, as well as the temporal present of real presence. Participation in the triune God, with its deep structure of what real presence can mean, remains true to *anamnesis*, which is not a simple remembering of a past event but an acknowledgment of all that God has done and a recognition of the present reality of all God's actions and mercy" (Larson-Miller 2016, 102).

That is to say, the consequence of specific Eucharistic loss is the loss of an opportunity for encounter—this moment of (this kind of) real presence is absent; it is the loss of an opportunity to know the unknowable God through the known bread and wine; it is the loss of this kind of participation in the Trinity. These occasions to experience real presence through means of the sacrament are gone. As Larson-Miller observes, "the locus of Christian sacramental theology is the church, the real and mystical Body of Christ which is the dwelling place of the real and mystical Body of Christ found in the Eucharist" (Larson-Miller 2016, 103). The centrality of the Eucharist to the mystical body of Christ, the church, highlights the traumatic nature of the absence of presence and therefore of Eucharistic loss.

The Absence of Absence

Furthermore, according to Larson-Miller (2016, 107) in all of this there is a need for real presence to remain "in tension with absence". This is, firstly, because of the impermanence of the Eucharist. As Lar-

son-Miller explains, "[r]eal absence is essential, because, as the apostle Paul wrote, 'For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes' (1 Cor 11:26). The Eucharist is temporary, something that the Body of Christ does between the first and second coming of Christ" (Larson-Miller 2016, 108). It bridges the gap in time.

Secondly, the tension between real presence and real absence reflects the fact that believers themselves currently live in the tension of already-but-not-yet. "Real absence reminds us that there is more, that this is not the fullness of the Christ's presence, there is more yet to come … The real absence is a way of remembering the future presence, the full Parousia" (Larson-Miller 2016, 108–9).

Thirdly, real absence prevents the body of Christ, the church, from deluding itself that it can "possess or control the fullness of God's presence" (Larson-Miller 2016, 108).

When the Eucharist itself is absent, then these opportunities to encounter real absence are also missing and so the body of Christ loses, among other things, a means of exploring the relationship between the past, present and future within God and of anticipating the wonder of what is to come. In a sense, there is an absence of absence or, perhaps, it is more helpful to speak about a compounded absence. Such absent absence intensifies the body's (the church's) wounds.

I am not suggesting that full participation in the Eucharist is the only means by which these things can be encountered, thought about or influenced. But I am saying that this is still a form of loss and therefore trauma to the mystical body of Christ, the church. A further nuance is this: during the lockdown periods of the pandemic, some priests "fasted" from celebrating the Eucharist in solidarity with their flock. However, in cases where they did not, the priests concerned did not suffer various aspects of trauma outlined in the pages above. The mystical body of Christ was wounded in another way—a painful division between those who could remember, speak, ingest and experience particular modes of real presence and absence, and those who could not.

This division or wounding is all the more heightened because, in an online Eucharist, there is little reason to understand anything as "absent" other than the physical ("in-person") presence of other believers. I have already shown that the community of worshippers can be viewed, individually, as bodily present in worship and, corporately, as present to each other (that is to say, gathered together). Moreover, and above all other considerations, God is present too—as Teresa Berger points out (2013, 82).

Spiritual Communion

In *Common Worship*, the *Notes on The Celebration of Holy Communion at Home or in Hospital With the Sick and Housebound* state under the heading of Spiritual Communion that "Believers who cannot physically receive the sacrament are to be assured that they are partakers by faith of the body and blood of Christ and of the benefits he conveys to us by them" (CofE website, accessed 2022). This seems to indicate that physical consumption of bread and wine is not totally necessary to fully participate in Holy Communion. Indeed, during the lockdowns, members of the CofE were encouraged to practice Spiritual Communion as I have said (for example, The House of Bishops Recovery Group 2020, 6). Does this negate the argument that members of the CofE were "prohibited" from receiving the Eucharist at certain moments during the pandemic, or invalidate a discussion of the metaphorical effect of this on the body of Christ, the church?

Firstly, I would argue that an understanding of spiritual communion, and its validity, does not obscure the "benefits" of physically consuming the consecrated elements. One thing does not simply replace the other. Although believers worshipping online can participate in many elements of the service of Holy Communion without consumption (see the CofE position on "real Eucharistic assembly" mentioned above), there is genuine value in the gathered people of God "enacting the full ritual in all its complex movements" (Fink 1984, 22). The individual parts of the liturgy most fully signify the presence of Christ as all of them interact with each other—they cannot easily be separated out, according to him (see Fink 1984, 22).

Secondly, while acknowledging there are times when this is not humanly possible, some of the main significance of the Eucharist is that the members of the body of Christ actually consume the bread and wine—that these items rupture the physical integrity of the individual and are taken into their human body. In Angel F. Mendez Montoya's terms: "That is, God initiates a radical self-giving by becoming food itself, incorporating—and thus transfiguring—humanity into Christ's body" (2009, 3). Even where an

individual's understanding of the Eucharist is that the elements are "just symbolic" there is still great meaning in taking everything that they represent into oneself.

Thirdly, is there a need to deny that consecration of the elements set before a believer's screen has taken place, when there is "real Eucharistic assembly" in a zoom-type setting? As the CofE priest and scholar, Richard A. Burridge, writes: "I cannot understand why [his friend's] bread and wine, which I can see and touch and pray over on my laptop screen, cannot be open to the real presence of Christ just as my own bread and wine", (2022, 259). And again: "[…] who am I to say that Jesus cannot fill her elements of bread and wine with his divine and real presence, just as much as I pray that he does mine—regardless of the geographical distance between us, however measured" (Burridge 2022, 259).

In summary, the fact that the practice of Spiritual Communion exists, and is valid for certain purposes, does not negate the wounding to the body when full participation in online Eucharists is curtailed, that is when the believer is prevented from consuming consecrated elements.

Conclusion

To return to my original question: the mystical body of Christ, the church, has experienced multi-layered trauma as a consequence of the CofE guidance curtailing the celebration of online Eucharists during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic itself has been traumatic in the sense that normal life has been disrupted/ruptured for people living in Belgium and in the fact that the effects of this will continue long after the event itself is technically over. That trauma has been compounded by denying the Eucharist (the body of Christ) to the mystical body of Christ, the church, and the consequent loss of faith support and pastoral benefit (among other things).

More specifically, where Eucharistic fasting has taken place, the believing body of Christ has been prevented from remembering, speaking about and witnessing to the crucial story of our faith, and from respecting the commandment of Jesus to "do this in remembrance of him"-—an act of remembrance which is not "the same" each time but is different with each repetition. The narrative of the worshipping community becomes one in which the pattern of celebrating the Eucharist is disrupted. Even where a Eucharistic service has been broadcast live, there has been "real Eucharistic assembly" without "real Eucharist" – a celebration which includes the possibility of consuming consecrated elements. The practice of Spiritual Communion is not a full replacement for this.

Such Eucharistic loss is traumatic. In particular, the mystical body of Christ has lost the opportunity for specific Eucharistic encounters with the real presence and absence of Jesus Christ.. The body endures layers of trauma and is deeply wounded.

The authors of the CofE guidance "… commend the questions raised by [the practice of consuming bread and wine before a screen] for further theological reflection" (CofE 2020). I suggest that these reflections take place, at least in part, within a framework of "presence and absence", specifically the question: who or what is present or absent when an online Eucharist takes place? Concerning the Divine, Teresa Berger (2013, 282) writes, "[t]heologically, we will have to presume that God is able to be present online as well as offline. Given that God is not shackled…we also have to presume that God can mediate God's saving grace both online as well as offline." So God is present and I have argued above that the worshipper is bodily present at worship, fully participative and gathered in community with his or her fellow believers (see Berger, and Zsupan-Jerome). Such gathering must include the priest who is presiding at the altar. The only thing that is absent is the so-called in-person co-presence of other people. Is this a reason for "denying" the body the body?

Perhaps another way to reflect on all this is through the lens of encounter, given that "daily living is no longer divided into 'online' and 'offline' time or practices" (Berger 2018, 17), and the heightened reality of this during the pandemic for local CofE churches. If truly the whole of life can be framed as "a sacrament of the encounter with God" (Morrill discussing Schillebeeckx 1999, 2), it seems important to consider how the mystical body of Christ can encounter the real presence of God in the particular way afforded by online Eucharists. This should include reflection on the need for the physical consumption of the elements.

These suggestions are made in the hope that, in a future world-wide crisis, there will be Eucharists celebrated online within the CofE as a means of strengthening "faithful connections".

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At-homeness, placemaking, and holy anticipation: Christian hospitality in educational practice

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Amid global and local crises of extremism and polarization, how might Christian educators cultivate learning environments that facilitate open inquiry and promote authentic engagement across difference? In this integrative, interdisciplinary article, I propose that New Testament hospitality—with its universal and unconditional welcome, humbling and dignifying dynamic, and anticipation of divine presence and blessing—lays the theological groundwork for Christians to receive those unlike themselves with humility and generosity. Focusing on the role of teachers, I explain how themes from Christian hospitality—of at-homeness, placemaking, and holy anticipation of sacred encounter—might be realized through proven educational practices and mindsets. First, I insist that before Christian educators can extend and model welcome in the classroom, they must be willing to learn how to be "at home" with themselves before God. Drawing from interpersonal neurobiology and culturally responsive teaching, I explain how teachers might explore and embrace their own "situatedness" within their own bodies and minds, and within the formative cultures, histories, and contexts that shape their educational approaches. Next, I examine how teachers can make space for learners to actively contribute to the educational exchange by exercising diverse gifts and expressing divergent views. I show how Marshall Rosenberg's nonviolent communication theory offers a common language for understanding and responding to the life-giving needs and values that underlie conflicting perspectives. Finally, I demonstrate how Carol Dweck's growth mindset helps teachers to experience even difficult classroom interactions as sacred encounters in which God is present and at work.

Like many in our international guild, I am alarmed by the multiple crises of extremism and polarization in communities both local and global. Extremism and polarization flourish when we lack natural opportunities to interact and pursue shared goals with those unlike ourselves on a day-to-day basis. Or, when given the opportunity, as in a classroom setting, we simply do not trust each other enough to speak openly and engage meaningfully. It then becomes easy to suspect and judge one another, not only as holding "wrong" views," but also as being "bad" people—people who must be moronic, malicious, or immoral somehow.

Today, most US institutions of higher learning advertise a commitment to diversity, recognizing that a variety of views in the classroom can spur and enrich learning, at least in theory. Yet, diversity alone does not guarantee the openness and authentic engagement needed for mutual learning. What can Christian educators do about this? How can we cultivate learning environments that encourage open inquiry? How can we promote authentic engagement across difference?

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On Christian Hospitality

Universal and Unconditional Welcome

New Testament hospitality is set apart by its universal and unconditional welcome (Pohl 1999, Jipp 2017). The Roman Empire of Jesus' times had its own share of sociocultural, political, and religious diversity—and with that, conflict. In that context, a distinguishing mark of the early church was its welcome in Jesus' name to all people, regardless of gender, ethnicity, class, or other markers of social status (Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11). Against hierarchy, prejudice, and exclusion, early Christians insisted on welcoming one another, as Christ had welcomed them, without regard for rank or merit (Rom. 15:7).

Whereas classical hospitality followed a *quid pro quo* logic, Christian hospitality extended generous and gracious welcome even to those who could not repay or reciprocate (Lk. 14:12-14, Pohl 1999, Jipp 2017). Christian hospitality thus testified to God's unconditional love, which reaches across all social divisions and cultural barriers to embrace those deemed undeserving. Christine Pohl points out that early church leaders—such as John Chrysostom, Lactantius, and Jerome—saw hospitability as "a significant context for transcending status boundaries and for working through issues of respect and recognition" (1999, 19). This radical, equalizing welcome was further spurred by the notion that hospitality rendered unto strangers is rendered unto Christ (Matt. 25:31-46). As Benedict of Nursia put forth in his sixth century *Rule*, Christ's self-identification with the stranger in Matthew 25 means that Christians are to show hospitality to all, treating even the lowliest guest with utmost care and respect, as though welcoming Christ himself (Benedict 2008, 78).

The Christian duty to welcome and care for "the least of these" also flows from a long Jewish tradition underpinning Israel's responsibility before God for foreigners, widows and orphans, and the poor.[1] As the descendants of Abraham, called out of Ur into an unknown territory, the ancient Israelites understood themselves as the offspring of a nomad, strangers in Egypt, sojourners in the wilderness, and stewards of God's land. Like guests, they depended on God's provision and protection at every turn. As hosts, they in turn recognized their accountability to God for the strangers among them (Pohl 1999, 16). As God commanded them, "You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 23:9). Following, yet going beyond, this ancient tradition of acknowledging God's special concern for vulnerable outsiders, Christian hospitality extends universal and unconditional welcome, not only to those disregarded as poor and needy, but also to those condemned as unclean and sinful, avowing that true worth and righteousness come from Christ (1 Cor. 6:11).

Humbling and Dignifying Dynamic

Israel's experience as both guest and host, under God's providential care and righteous judgment, prefigures another marker of New Testament hospitality: the blurring of host and guest roles, which leads to a humbling and dignifying dynamic within the hospitable exchange. Hosts are not always in the position of giving, nor are guests permanently in the posture of receiving. Christian hospitality understands the distinction between hosts and guests as fluid and ambiguous.

This permeability between hosts and guests is observable in the original vocabulary used for these roles. In English, "hospitality" derives from the Latin root *hospes*, which means guest, host, or stranger (Hershberger 1999, 19). This mirrors the Greek word ξένος (*xenos*), which shares the same meanings. As John Koenig points out, ξένος (*xenos*) can refer not only to the stranger who receives welcome, but also to the stranger who offers welcome (1985, 8). Both guests and hosts are strangers to one another, brought into a special relationship with one another through the hospitable encounter.

1 E.g., Ex. 22:21-24, Deut. 27:19, Psa. 146:9, Prov. 14:31, Isa. 1:17, Jer. 22:3, Zech. 7:10, Mal. 3:5.

In the New Testament, the Greek word translated into English as "hospitality" is φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*), which literally means "the love of strangers" or, in Koenig's rendering, "a delight in the whole guest-host relationship, [and] in the mysterious reversals and gains…which may take place" (1985, 8). In Romans 12:10, 13 and Hebrews 13:1-2, the exhortation toward φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*) is made alongside the exhortation toward φιλαδελφία (*philadelphia*), as in "brotherly love" or "mutual love." This concomitance underscores the Christian vocation to universal love. Welcome in Christ's name is to be extended not only inwardly toward one's own kind of person, but also outwardly toward all kinds of people.

In Christian φιλοξενία (*philoxenia*), extending welcome and meeting needs go in all directions, from ξένος (*xenos*) to ξένος (*xenos*), in every sense of the word. Like the Samaritan woman at the well or Zacchaeus atop the sycamore, hosts themselves may end up receiving the water and the welcome (Jn. 4:1-42, Lk. 19:1-10). Or, like Peter at Cornelius's house or Paul under Publius's roof, guests may end up providing what is lacking and most needed for life (Acts 10:1-48, 28:1-10). The ambiguity and fluidity of these roles serve as a reminder that hosts also stand in positions of need and dependency, while guests, too, have their own indispensable contributions to offer.

Jesus' followers recognized this humbling yet dignifying dynamic in Jesus' own life. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus occupied both host and guest roles simultaneously. As host, Jesus offers welcome to all into God's household through his redeeming and reconciling work on the cross (Jn. 1:12). In his earthly ministry, Jesus especially welcomed those whom society disregarded, such as children, persons with disabilities, sex workers, and tax collectors.[2] In the mystery of the eucharist, he nourishes all who hunger and thirst for righteousness with his own broken body and shed blood, through which he gives abundant and eternal life (Lk. 22:14-23, Jn. 6:35-59). In the eschaton, he presides as the bridegroom at the marriage supper of the lamb (Rev. 19:6-9). As guest, Jesus crossed an unfathomable distance to sojourn among us in a tent of flesh (Jn. 1:14). Born as an infant far from home and raised as a refugee in Egypt, he was often driven from place to place as the Son of Man with nowhere to lay his head (Lk. 2, Matt. 2:13-15, Lk. 9:58). Jesus relied frequently on others' hospitality, dining often with tax collectors and conspicuous sinners (Matt. 9:11, Mk. 2:16, Lk. 5:30). In death, he rested in another man's grave (Matt. 27:57-61). In glory, he stands at the door and knocks (Rev. 3:20).

Divine Presence and Blessing

Finally, early Christians recognized that God's presence and blessing are often mysteriously revealed in the breaking of bread and sharing of fellowship.[3] The mysterious experience of "entertaining angels unawares" pervades Scripture, famously in the stories of Abraham, Sarah, and the three strangers; of Elijah, the widow of Zarephath, and her replenishing jars of meal and oil; and of Elisha and the Shunammite who received a son and then check him back again from the dead (Heb. 13:2). Most significantly, on the way to Emmaus, two disciples recognized the risen Lord just as he broke bread with them (Lk. 24:13-35). Fittingly, the Greek verb, ξενίζω (xenizó), meaning "to receive or entertain a guest" can also mean "to surprise" (Koenig 1985, 8).

Especially in Homeric times (1200-800 BCE), the ancient Greeks also associated hospitality with theophany. Michele Hershberger notes that in the Greek epic tradition, the gods would don human disguises to visit unsuspecting hosts, bestowing glad tidings and generous gifts if welcomed (1999, 18). In Christian hospitality, though, there is a caveat about the timing of the anticipated reward. Offering hospitality in godly love is costly and, at times, thankless. Divine presence and blessing can be anticipated, but instant gratification is never promised. While teaching on hospitality to "the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind," Jesus said, "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Lk. 14:13-14).[4] Motivation for Christian hospitality is rooted not in the desire for earthly blessing, but rather in gratitude for the heavenly welcome we have already received from God in Christ (Rom. 15:7).

In sum, Christian hospitality is distinguished by its universal and unconditional welcome, humbling and dignifying character, and anticipation of divine presence and blessing. Taking these features as the

2 E.g., Mk. 10:14, 14:3; Matt. 9:10, 21:32; Lk. 7:34.

3 E.g., Gen. 18:1-15, 1 Kgs. 17:8-24, 2 Kgs. 4:8-37, Lk. 24:13-35, Heb. 13:2.

4 All Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

theological grounds for educational practice, how might Christian educators extend such hospitality in the classroom, especially in contexts facing extremism and polarization? First, I insist that before Christian educators can extend and model welcome in the classroom, they must be willing to learn how to be "at home" with themselves before God. Drawing from interpersonal neurobiology and culturally responsive teaching, I explain how teachers might explore and embrace their own "situatedness" within their own bodies and minds, and within the formative cultures, histories, and contexts that shape their educational approaches. Next, I examine how teachers can make space for learners to actively contribute to the educational exchange by exercising diverse gifts and expressing divergent views. I show how Marshall Rosenberg's nonviolent communication theory offers a common language for understanding and responding to the life-giving needs and values that underlie conflicting perspectives. Finally, I demonstrate how Carol Dweck's growth mindset helps teachers to experience even difficult classroom interactions as sacred encounters in which God is present and at work.

At-Homeness

As Christian educators, our welcome to students stems from our own experience of Christ's welcome. Christ's indiscriminate, unconditional welcome of us—while we were "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world"—moves us to extend a gracious welcome to all students, especially those who are unlike ourselves in speech, thought, and being (Eph. 2:12b). Because Christ was willing to overcome the unimaginable distance between the holy God and sinful humanity, followers of Christ can venture to extend a welcoming hand across merely human chasms. Our welcome cannot presume to be unconditional and all-encompassing like that of Christ, but we can take concrete steps to ensure that the welcome we extend is wider and warmer than it would be otherwise.

One step is to learn to be "at home" with ourselves in God's presence. Our capacity to be alone and at rest enables us to become genuinely receptive toward others. Henri Nouwen points out that if we cannot sit in solitude with ourselves before God, then our "crying loneliness" will make others into idols and ourselves into devils (Nouwen 1975, 119). Moreover, our efforts to reach out will be excruciating and exhausting, as we exploit others for self-fulfillment, reaping anger, jealousy, anxious clinging, and insecurity, instead of freedom and love (Nouwen 1975, 30, 119). In contrast, being "at home" with ourselves in God's presence enables a receptive solitude of heart that makes possible true fellowship and intimacy, as well as mutual learning.

Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB)

In Jesus's command to love our neighbors as ourselves, we are reminded that tending to our own souls is not only a God-given responsibility, but also a gift to those we seek to love (Matt. 22:39). A chaotic, unkempt house left in ruins is no place to invite a guest. Likewise, we cannot welcome or listen attentively to our students without learning to be present with ourselves and attend to our own inner voices. It is not that our inner lives must be pristine, perfectly "swept and put in order" (Lk. 11:25). Rather, what matters is the willingness to be still before God amid our own mess and lack, lest we end up exploiting others, especially unconsciously, to fill the void or tame the chaos within. Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) offers insights into how we might develop a sense of at-homeness from within, so that we might offer welcome to others from a secure and open base.

Pioneered by Daniel Siegel, IPNB is an interdisciplinary field that understands the human mind to be "the embodied and relational, emergent self-organizing process that regulates the flow of energy and information" (Siegel 2018). IPNB's goal is to promote integration, whereby the mind differentiates and links our embodied and relational experiences in ways that enable greater flexibility, adaptivity, coherence, energy, and stability (FACES) (Siegel 2018). Lived out, integration looks like compassion and openness toward oneself and others. It involves looking beyond external behavior to perceive and reflect on the inner world of one's own self and of other selves. This capacity, which Siegal calls "mindsight," is a learned skill that can be developed and strengthened through practice.

Mindfulness training, for instance, can heighten our awareness of our own bodily sensations, our thoughts and feelings, and our sense of connectedness with others (Siegel 2010). In her book, *Your Resonant Self*, Sarah Peyton offers guided meditations, informed by IPNB, to bolster the mind's capacity for empathy (2017). These exercises direct attention to

one's breathing and bodily states, while exploring, with gentle curiosity, the tone and content of one's inner voices, in order to develop self-compassion and self-understanding. As Christians, our trust in God's compassionate and thoroughgoing knowledge of our innermost being can motivate and sustain these efforts (Psa. 139:1-4, 145:8-9).

Narrative exercises that help us to tell the stories of our lives with others can also promote healthy integration. Autobiographic practices enable us to put our memories into context, make sense of our experiences, and better understand our intentions and instinctual reactions (Siegel 2010, 74–75, 171–173). As we learn to narrate and re-narrate our personal histories, especially from childhood, we gain critical distance, the capacity to differentiate ourselves from important others, and freedom to choose a different path from our current life trajectories. Most of all, we gain the confidence that we "make sense." Siegel underscores that this experience of self-coherence is "essential to our well-being and happiness" (2010, 173). When we make sense to ourselves, especially after a courageous and strenuous process of searching, we can believe that others, including our students, also make sense, even if their beliefs and actions perplex us in the moment. By encouraging integration of our embodied, cognitive, and relational experiences, IPNB helps us to cultivate a non-anxious and open-hearted presence with ourselves and toward others.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching helps us recognize that being "at home" with ourselves before God also means reckoning with the wider ecology of our lives. If interpersonal neurobiology encourages integration of our embodied, cognitive, and relational experiences so we "make sense" to ourselves, then culturally responsive teaching promotes integration of the broader historical, contextual, and cultural influences in our lives so we can make sense of our teaching preferences and approaches. The perspectives and strategies we favor and employ in our teaching do not arise from a neutral ether. Rather, they stem from the larger cultures, histories, and social systems that shape our lives.

Sharlene Cochrane and her colleagues at Lesley University's Cultural Literacy Curriculum Institute emphasize that teachers need to gain cultural awareness not only of their students' backgrounds, but also of their own (Cochrane et al. 2017). By exploring our own cultural heritages, family histories, and social contexts, we as Christian educators can examine how these distinctive legacies affect the ways in which we experience the world, engage in theological reflection, practice our faith, and approach teaching.

We learn to be "at home" with ourselves, in the contexts and circumstances God has placed us in, by examining our own background and history, working through the baggage, understanding our place in our community, and appreciating the values and strengths of our heritage (Cochrane et al. 2017). As suggested by Meenakshi Chhabra, Sharlene Cochrane, and Deborah Wright, exercises for spurring self-reflection could be as simple as recalling times when we have experienced or witnessed infringements or affirmations of dignity, exploring the story behind our names, tracing three generations of women in our families, or using poetic expression (e.g., drawing from George Ella Lyon's "Where I'm From") to contemplate the people, places, sights, sounds, smells, foods, artifacts, and activities that root our sense of self (Cochrane et al. 2017, 22, 47, 87–94).

In all these efforts to become more settled and "at home" with ourselves—both within the idiosyncratic contexts of our embodied, relational minds and within the larger sociocultural contexts of our communities—we can be encouraged in knowing that we do not dwell alone. When we welcome Christ, who first welcomed us, to dwell in our hearts through faith, our sense of at-homeness can be "rooted and grounded in love" (Eph. 3:17). From that inner place, where we dwell at peace with ourselves before God, our welcome to others can be extended as a gift, and not imposed as a burden.

Placemaking

Christian hospitality involves not only extending welcome, but also preparing a suitable place for guests to be welcomed into—a place where hosts understand that they also stand in need of listening and learning, and where guests, too, are empowered to speak and contribute. Commonly used by architects and city planners, placemaking refers to the design of public spaces in ways that maximize the community's assets, local flavor, and potential—all with the goal of promoting human wellbeing. To that end, placemaking requires listening to local residents, and understanding what matters to them

and what would best serve their needs (Teder 2019). Likewise, hospitality in the classroom is an act of co-creation between hosts and guests, between teacher and learners.

Cultivating a learning environment is like placemaking. It involves making space for the other's choice and voice. John H. Westerhoff emphasizes the importance of the learning environment in conveying welcome (2012). The physical space of the classroom is part of the implicit or hidden curriculum, which may matter even more than the explicit curriculum of what is taught (Westerhoff 2012, 15). However, the implicit curriculum involves more than physical space. It encompasses experiences, practices, interactions, and atmosphere (Westerhoff 2012, 77, 95).

One educational practice that accords with hospitable placemaking is the offering of differentiated assessment options, in recognition of students' diverse gifts and vocational goals. Instead of writing a traditional research paper, for instance, some students may demonstrate their learning more effectively by designing a digital media project in the form of blog posts, podcast episodes, a TED talk, or a short film. Others may find it useful to prepare a sermon or curriculum unit using course materials. Still others may enjoy creating artwork, music, poetry, or choreography, accompanied by a reflection. Those preparing job applications may also value the opportunity to sit for a mock interview with the teacher and to verbally articulate their insights. By empowering students to exercise agency in how they demonstrate their learning, teachers make space for variously talented students to shine.

Nonviolent Communication (NVC)

In addition to empowering students to exercise diverse gifts, hospitable placemaking in the classroom involves equipping students to express divergent views. One way that Christian educators can make space for constructive disagreement is by teaching and practicing Marshall Rosenberg's nonviolent communication (NVC). NVC offers a shared language for identifying and responding to the needs and values that underlie conflicting perspectives. Central to the theory is the insight that negative feelings arise from unmet needs, which are, by definition, universal and life-giving (Rosenberg 2015). Connected to this insight is the insistence that needs do not contradict inherently; rather, the source of conflicts lies in the flawed strategies employed to meet different needs. When parties in conflict are able to clarify the needs and values at stake for each side, then unhelpful strategies can be abandoned more easily and better strategies forged cooperatively in their place.

Rosenberg recounts an experience that illustrates the stalemate that ensues when parties in conflict stay enmeshed in anger without comprehending the unmet needs in play:

> I was once invited to Southern California to mediate between some landowners and migrant farm workers whose conflicts had grown increasingly hostile and violent. I began the meeting by asking these two questions: "What is it that you are each needing? And what would you like to request of the other in relation to these needs?" "The problem is that these people are racist!" shouted a farm worker. "The problem is that these people don't respect law and order!" shouted a landowner even more loudly. As is often the case, these groups were more skilled in analyzing the perceived wrongness of others than in clearly expressing their own needs (2015, 53).

Needs cannot be met if we do not know what they are. NVC trains us to identify these needs, take responsibility for them, and make concrete and doable requests of one another in response.

Earlier, I explained that Christian hospitality is characterized by a simultaneously humbling and dignifying dynamic, in which hosts find themselves also in need and guests likewise discover their capacity for meeting another's need. Both hosts and guests, both teachers and students, experience need and can help meet needs. As we think back to conflicts in the classroom, how might our perceptions change if we recognize their source in unmet needs, possibly for acknowledgement (understanding, respect, consideration, appreciation), connection (inclusion, belonging, support), freedom or ease (choice, order, fairness, trust, competence), or meaning (integrity, inspiration, contribution)?

NVC relies on a simple yet disciplined four-step process through which teachers and students can: (1) observe factually the concrete actions affecting their wellbeing; (2) identify the feelings that arise in relation to the observed actions; (3) identify the needs or values driving those feelings; and (4) request clear, concrete, and doable actions that would enrich one another's lives (Rosenberg 2015, 7). In tense and polarized environments, the key is to identify and take responsibility for the unmet needs at play, so that parties in conflict can seek workable strategies through compromise and collaboration, "without criticizing, analyzing, blaming, or diag-

nosing others" (Rosenberg 2015, 67). Strategies that fail to account for core needs on all sides of a conflict only prove to be unjust strategies in need of revision.

Practical theologians like Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger and Theresa Latini remind us that our needs are only fully and ultimately met by God in Christ, but that God nonetheless invites us to participate in meeting one another's needs, however incompletely and tentatively (Hunsinger et al. 2013). By tracing negative feelings to unmet needs, teachers and students alike can learn to view these feelings with patient compassion, taking responsibility for them instead of blaming others, and exploring them with curiosity instead of repressing them. This not only inspires empathy toward others, but also enables us to collaborate more effectively with them to meet each other's needs in creative and mutually satisfying ways, even as we continually bring what remains unfulfilled to God in prayer.

Holy Anticipation

Finally, as we seek to be "at home" with ourselves before God, to invite different expressions of talent, and to make space for healthy dissent without abandoning compassion and respect, we can trust that God is at work in these efforts. When we welcome others as Christ has welcomed us, we can anticipate divine presence and blessing in our acts of hospitality, however flawed and faltering.

The tasks involved are difficult and risky. We make mistakes and experience failure even when we, with the best of intentions, seek earnestly to grow comfortable in our own minds and bodies, negotiate our social and cultural backgrounds, design valuable learning opportunities for variously gifted students, and recognize and respond to the needs and values underlying divergent viewpoints.

Carol Dweck's growth mindset can help us to persevere in these fraught and arduous labors. In her work on learning mindsets, Dweck teaches that our intellectual, relational, moral, and motivational capacities are not fixed. Rather, these are capable of growth throughout our lives, thanks to the neuroplasticity of our brains (Dweck 2016). Our mindsets—or our perceptions of our own abilities—affect our achievement and resilience, for better or for worse.

According to Dweck, the fixed mindset is the belief that our capacities are genetically determined or "carved in stone" (2016, 6). This generates "an urgency to prove yourself over and over" (Dweck 2016, 6). In contrast, the growth mindset is the belief that our capacities can be cultivated through strategic effort and help from others (Dweck 2016, 7). "Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments," says Dweck, "everyone can change and grow through application and experience" (2010, 6).

To cultivate a growth mindset, Dweck recommends focusing on the process that leads to learning, rather than on the outcome alone. This requires effort, as well as adaptive strategies and wise use of resources. The goal is to master new knowledge and skills, in order to build competence, rather than to merely perform for extrinsic rewards. Dweck explains that those with a growth mindset improve themselves by taking risks and embracing challenges, persevering through obstacles or setbacks, applying strategic effort, reflecting on choices and consequences, learning from criticism and failure, and seeking insights and inspiration from others' successes (Dweck 2016, 263). Those with a growth mindset focus on learning, whereas those with a fixed mindset focus on looking good. Dweck acknowledges that we cannot fully rid ourselves of our fixed mindset. However, we can look out for "fixed mindset" triggers and keep working through them. These triggers may include anxiety or a sense of incompetence, avoidant behavior like procrastination, the urge to make excuses or react defensively against critical feedback, and envy toward excellent others (Dweck 2016, 254–263).

The growth mindset is good news for Christian educators. It helps us to accept our limitations, face our failures, and press on toward our goal of extending and modeling hospitality to counteract extremism and polarization in our society. The process of learning, testing, and developing facility and finesse in new schemata and skills—interpersonal neurobiology, culturally responsive teaching, nonviolent communication, even the growth mindset itself—requires much and may amount to little, especially at first. Students may not respond the way we expect. Colleagues and administrators may not share our commitment or support our efforts. Through it all, a growth mindset can help us to focus on doing our part while entrusting the rest to God who ultimately "gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:6). We persevere, knowing from the testimony of Scripture that because God has first shown hospitality to us in Christ and has called us to welcome one another in Jesus'

name, we can anticipate divine presence and blessing as we answer that call.

Sustaining Hospitality

As Paul enjoined the believers in Rome, "Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). As Christian educators, our welcome to students not only stems from, but also relies on Christ's welcome to us. In the same letter, Paul points out that our very capacity to love comes from God, for "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom. 5:5b). We extend hospitality only insofar as we experience God's hospitality. Just as Jesus asked Peter to feed his lambs only after he himself had fed Peter breakfast that morning on the shore of Tiberias, Christian hospitality is sustained by a continual receiving from and receiving of Christ, the ultimate host-guest who nourishes souls with his word, gives rest to the weary and heavy-laden, and comes to dwell with us through his Spirit (Matt. 4:4, 11:28; Rom. 8:9). May Jesus find welcome in our lives and in our classrooms, and may we recognize him in the faces of the students we welcome in his name.

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Participation in times of social crisis: Refugees from crisis countries as a case study

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Karol Wojtyla's philosophical articulation of "participation," or being-with and acting-for others, is employed to inform theological reflection on solidarity with refugees. The first step is to correlate human participation as construed by Wojtyla and participation in the life of the triune God. In the second half of the essay, use is made of the I-Thou and We dynamics, neighbor-love, and other central ideas associated with participation to theologically analyze selected cases of refugee support and advocacy. The focus is largely, but not exclusively, on the European context.

Introduction

In order to give this essay a sharp focus, primary attention is given to the European context. What is commonly known as "the European refugee crisis" reached its peak in 2016. Complex structural problems persist, but the "crisis" has now passed. I note, as the scare quotes suggest, that the term "European refugee crisis" is problematic. It communicates a sense that Europe at that time was a continent under siege (Baerwaldt 2018). Indeed, refugees were commonly viewed as dangerous invaders who put cultural identity and economic security under serious threat.

Though the "crisis" is over, it is useful to reflect theologically on how neighbor-love and solidarity were expressed at its peak. The concept that is employed to inform the reflection is "participation." This term can simply describe the act of taking part in an activity. My interest is in participation as a moral activity. In what follows, I draw on Karol Wojtyla's description of it (Wojtyla 1979a, 1979b). Stated succinctly, participation is being-with and acting-for others with the aim of advancing the common good.

There has been a significant amount of work done on contributions of personalist philosophy to care and neighbor-love (Noddings 2013; Lerner 2014; Pembroke 2002). Wojtyla's work on participation takes us further in this regard because he accounts for not only the I-Thou relation, but also the "We" or social dimension. Personalist philosophers such as Martin Buber (1961, 1970), Ferdinand Ebner (1967, 2001), and Gabriel Marcel (1964a, 1964b) construe a genuine person-to-person encounter as an "I" meeting a "Thou." What characterizes the I-Thou relation is intersubjectivity; the partners participate in the relation as subjects rather than as "its." An adequate ethical treatment of participation needs to begin at the level of the I-Thou relation, but it needs to progress to incorporation of a "We" dimension. That is to say, an adequate articulation of a participative ethic includes both interpersonal and communal elements. For this reason, Wojtyla's conception of participation has been selected to inform theological reflection on solidarity with refugees.

Wojtyla (1979a, 1979b) took a phenomenological approach to his topic; he wrote as a philosopher rather than as a theologian. Pope John Paul II was, of course, a capable theologian; he chose a strictly

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philosophical method to articulate the nature of participation. My first task is to ground the concept in an explicitly theological construct. To do this, I refer to Mühlen's (1963) Trinitarian theology. He mirrors the progression in Wojtyla's work on participation from the I-Thou level to the communal or "We" level. He posits the Holy Spirit as the personal agency representing the extension of the divine self-love expressed in the mutuality of the I-Thou relation between the Father and the Son; the triune God lives and loves not only through an I-Thou relation, but also through a We relation. Human participation is an echo, the faintest of echoes, of Trinitarian participation. Mühlen was writing before feminist theology was well-established. In describing his approach below, I render his German terms for the Three—*Vater, Sohn, und Heiliger Geist*—as Mother-Sophia, Logos-Sophia, and Spirit-Sophia, following Elizabeth Johnson's suggestion in *She Who Is* (Johnson 1992).

In the second half of the essay, I use the I-Thou and We dynamics, neighbor-love, and other central ideas associated with Wojtyla's conceptualization of participation to theologically analyze selected cases of refugee support and advocacy. The focus is largely, but not exclusively, on the European context. Europe is of course a very diverse social, political, and cultural entity. Reference will be made both to countries with extensive welfare programs and a history of welcoming large numbers of refugees, and countries where this is not the case. I have also included a story from the US context and one with an Australian setting. The dynamics they reveal are universal in application; they certainly connect with experiences commonly reported in Europe. Issues touched on include a crisis of solidarity, truth-telling, hospitality as open friendship vs hospitality as power, and a care of person-care of social world paradigm.

The concept of participation has been introduced above. We now turn to developing it more fully.

Wojtyla: The I-Thou relation and the "we-attitude" in social life

In his book, *The Acting Person,* Wojtyla (1979a) is primarily interested in developing a theory of human subjectivity as it is constituted through existence and agency. However, this project eventually leads him into a consideration of the social life of the acting person. Here, participation is the central concept. By participation, he means the ability to act with others in such a way as to simultaneously realize all that results from communal acting, on the one hand, and the personalistic value of one's action, on the other (Wojtyla 1979a, 271). That is, the person who participates is able to be-with and act-with others in such a way that she is also able to be herself and to fulfil herself.

Wojtyla (1979a) introduces another concept in order to extend our understanding of the acting person participating in social existence—namely, the neighbor. The neighbor is one who is capable not only of being-with and acting-with others, but also of participating "in the very humanness" of others (Wojtyla 1979a, 294). Wojtyla concludes that "this participation serves the fulfilment of persons in *any community* in which they act and exist. The ability to share in the *humanness itself of every man is the very core of all participation and the condition of the personalistic value of all acting and existing together with others*" (Wojtyla 1979a, 295: emphasis in the original).

Clearly, the notions of participation and neighbor are very significant ones in the context of communal life. However, Wojtyla (1979b) considers that what he offered in *The Acting Person* is not yet a theory of community. In an essay entitled, "The Person: Subject and Community," he sets out to rectify this deficiency. In order to develop his theory, Wojtyla (1979b) works with two profiles or dimensions of communal life. The first one is the interhuman or the interpersonal, and it is symbolized by the pattern "I-you." The second one has a character that is less interhuman than social; it is symbolized by the pattern "we."

In tracking the contours of the first profile, Wojtyla (1979b) begins with the well-established principle in dialogical or personalistic philosophy (Buber, Marcel, et al) that the "I" is constituted by the "you." His aim is to extend and develop this fundamental truth. He does so by making strong connections with a concept that is vitally important in his philosophy—namely, subjectivity. Through agency which is simultaneously self-determination, the human person experiences herself as a subjective structure of self-domination and self-possession. But more than this, in order for the personal subject to be truly herself, she must constantly move in the direction of transcendence. Self-transcendence is the state of the person who acts in accordance with the requirements of the true and the good.

The way in which Wojtyla (1979b) develops his understanding of the "I-you" relation in terms of transcendent subjectivity is as follows. He begins by

observing that the "you" is another "I," different from my "I." When I say "I," I express a relation that reaches out beyond me, but at the same time comes back to me. "You" is therefore at once a term of distinction or separateness, and a term of communion or contact. The other, the "you," helps me to more fully affirm my own "I." "In its basic shape the relation 'I-you' does not lead me out of my subjectivity; on the contrary, it establishes me in it more firmly" (Wojtyla 1979b, 294).

Wojtyla (1979b) suggests that there is a normative dimension associated with a reciprocal affirmation of subjectivity. The "I" should reveal the "you" to herself in her deepest structure of self-possession and self-domination, and vice versa. In particular, what should be revealed is the tendency to self-fulfillment which witnesses the transcendence that is the true character of the human as a person. The "I-you" relation has the capacity to reveal the truth of each person's personhood, but more is needed. In the interhuman encounter, a person needs to be accepted and confirmed in her authentic selfhood. When this is the case, community is forged.

Wojtyla (1979b) considers that it is vitally important in developing a theory of community to distinguish the interhuman from the social dimension. As we have seen, the social profile is symbolized by the "we." The "we" indicates many "I's" acting in common, and "in common" means that the existence and action of the collection of "I's" is oriented to some value. This value is the "common good." It is here that we see the way in which the "I-you" is distinguished from the "we":

> The relation of the many "I's" to the common good seems to be the very core of the social community. Thanks to this relation, people who experience their personal subjectivity, and therefore the actual plurality of human "I's," realize that they are a definite "we" and experience themselves in this new dimension. Although the person remains himself, this is a social dimension. It differs from that of the "I-you," for the direction of the dimension is changed and is indicated by the common good. In this relation the "I" and the "you" find their reciprocal reference in a new dimension: they discover their "I-you" through the common good which constitutes a new unity among them (Wojtyla 1979b, 298).

Wojtyla's rich philosophical analysis clearly identifies commitment to the common good as the factor that conveys the "I" and the "you" who share in interhuman relations to a new level of shared life—namely, one that is constituted through a new unity. It is only when the plurality of "I's" turn together toward the common good that they become a "we."

It is interesting to note that Mühlen (1963) develops a Trinitarian theology that also has both an I-Thou and a "We" domain. According to Mühlen, Mother-Sophia and Logos-Sophia share in an I-Thou relation, whereas Spirit-Sophia is the mutual love between them. The Spirit is therefore construed as the "We"; it is the Spirit as Love that is the bond in the Trinitarian community. The Three participate in a communion of love in which all fully share, but the Spirit has a particular role in binding the persons together as a unity. In this way, Mühlen demonstrates that participation is a Trinitarian virtue.

I-Thou and "We" in the Trinity: Heribert Mühlen

Heribert Mühlen's thought is significant for us because he explicitly develops a dimension that is only implicit in leading alternate relational Trinitarian theologies such as those of Moltmann (1981) and McCall (2014)—namely, the "We" element. In these other relational interpretations of the triune God, the I-Thou relation is posited as foundational.

Mühlen's (1963) Trinitarian theology is helpful in the context of our project because it incorporates both the "I-Thou" and the "We" domains that are central in Wojtyla's philosophy of subjectivity and community. He develops a theology of the triune God in which Mother-Sophia is the "I-statement," Logos-Sophia is the "Thou-statement," and the Holy Spirit is the "We-statement" (Mühlen 1963, 122–148). His first move is to discuss the "Ich-Du-Verhältnis" (the I-Thou relationship) between Mother-Sophia and Logos-Sophia. He points out that Parenthood suggests the existence of a Child. Mother-Sophia as "I" does not exist in "I-aloneness" (Ich-Einsamkeit); She is the source of the eternally begotten Child. Though Mother-Sophia does not possess any kind of priority in temporal terms (The First and Second Persons are both eternal), there is a logical priority implicit in the term "Mother." Mother-Sophia is the unoriginated Source of Logos-Sophia. Mother-Sophia begets Logos-Sophia in an act of infinite love.

The relationship of the begotten Child to the begetting Parent is characterized by Mühlen (1963) as a Thou-relation. He uses an analogy with human relations to make his point. The "Thou" in a conver-

sation is that person from which the "first" person—the "I" who has addressed the "Thou"—expects a response. In the same way, Logos-Sophia is the response-in-person to the loving call of Mother-Sophia[1] (Mühlen 1963, 133). This mutuality in the loving relationship between Mother-Sophia and Logos-Sophia is an essential feature of the inner-Trinitarian life. According to Mühlen (1963), the love of Mother-Sophia for Logos-Sophia is directed to him as "the Child of the Mother," and returns in the Beloved Child to Mother-Sophia herself. And this situation is fully reversible: the love of the Child for the Mother is directed to the Mother as his Mother, and returns in his beloved Mother to the Child.

Mühlen (1963) goes on to point out that this mutuality in the divine love extends beyond the relationship of Mother-Sophia and Logos-Sophia to include Spirit-Sophia. This reflexivity in the divine self-love is a central focus in his discussion. The circle of life in the Godhead is closed within itself. In an act of perfect love, the Mother begets the Child and the Mother and the Child together spirate, or breathe out, the Spirit. Following the lead of Thomas Aquinas, Mühlen states that with the procession of Spirit-Sophia the divine circle of life is closed; no third procession follows. It is in the Spirit that the divine self-love returns to itself. This is the essential meaning of the "We" in the Trinity. That is, the Holy Spirit can be characterized as the "We" because it is through the agency of the Spirit that the divine self-love returns to Mother-Sophia and to Logos-Sophia in the same moment[2] (Mühlen 1963, 142).

The "We" in the Godhead lives in and through infinite love. In human participation we find a vestige, a faint trace, of divine participation. It is interesting to note that David Cunningham also picks up on this idea (Cunningham1998a, 1998b). He uses the term *participation* to describe an event of relationships. In using this descriptor, he indicates that the divine life is first and foremost an event of mutual indwelling. Further, participation is a virtue that we humans are also called to enact. If the doctrine of the Trinity has anything to teach us about authentic existence it is that communion rather than individualism is the goal of human life. "[T]he focus on *participation* suggests that human beings are called to understand themselves, not as 'individuals' who may (or may not) choose to enter into relationships, but rather as mutually indwelling and indwelt, and to such a degree that—echoing the mutual indwelling of the Three—all pretensions to wholly independent existence are abolished" (Cunningham 1998b, 10). This reflection by Cunningham captures a central idea in Wojtyla's thought—namely, the ability to share in the humanness itself of every person is the very essence of all participation. Participation is a trinitarian virtue that marks our human existence. Cunningham captures this fact with the metaphor of "paralleling" (Cunningham 1998a, chap. 3). Our human life parallels in a certain sense the divine life.

Neighbor-love, solidarity, and the refugee "crisis"

In this final section of the essay, use is made of the concept of participation to reflect theologically on how select individuals and communities have responded to massively large numbers of refugees from crisis countries entering Europe. At the outset, I want to acknowledge the limitation in my analysis. Solidarity and neighbor-love are necessary but not sufficient responses. The participation ethic needs to be both complemented and challenged by a decolonialization approach. Quite apart from political and practical responses, leaders and all people in Europe need to acknowledge their general failure to address their colonial histories. Turning a blind eye to this past is exacerbating the current situation for those who are migrating or seeking asylum. It is clear that colonialism had a significant impact in terms of producing the conditions in postcolonial states that led to large-scale displacement of people and the current refugee crisis (Bhambra 2017; Fonkem 2020).

I turn now to a general description of solidarity responses. From both an historical and legal point of view, the European Union has embraced the fundamental values of solidarity and human rights. The refugee crisis tested the commitment to these values to such an extent that the very identity of the EU has been under threat (Rizcallah 2019). The nature of the response to the influx of refugees varied significantly across EU countries. Solidarity with refugees was strongest in countries with an extensive welfare program and a history of accepting large numbers of immigrants (Koos & Seibel 2019). At the level of

1 "die Ant-Wort in Person auf den Liebesruf des Vaters"

2 "In diesem Sinne kann man sagen, daβ im Hl. Geiste die göttliche Selbstliebe zum Vater and zum Sohne zurückkehrt, und zwar zum Vater und zum Sohne zugleich."

the individual, people who are financially insecure, have little trust in public institutions, and embrace right-wing political ideology tend not to act in solidarity with refugees (Koos & Seibel 2019). Consistent with these findings is the fact that Central and Eastern European countries have shown considerable resistance to welcoming and supporting refugees. We have seen in some of these countries, for example, systematic abuse of migrants' right as part of an overall deterrence strategy. To give just two examples, the Bulgarian police apprehended arriving asylum seekers, fingerprinted them, and detained them prior to deportation; in Hungary it is also lawful to automatically detain such persons.

It is understandable that many who feel deeply threatened by what they see as an attack on their economic and social security, and, beyond that, on their culture and traditional religious identity, and who moreover hold the view that there are insufficient public resources and infrastructure to cope, will support calls to turn back the human tide and clamp down. However, the moral value of participation suggests that people of faith and all people of good will need to rise above such concerns and fears and enact neighbor-love. Authentic participation, striving with others to achieve just action, requires recognizing that we are all neighbors. Costello (2008) captures succinctly this call of Wojtyla to transcend narrow personal interest and a parochial view of the world: "True participation for Wojtyla … requires a certain kind of mutual recognition, a grasp of ourselves as committed to each other before and *beyond* all particular communities, before and *beyond* all solidarity and opposition [emphasis in the original]" (50). A Facebook post on the *No Borders* page on June 16, 2016 speaks to this sentiment. The post included photographs from a demonstration with the caption: "We live together. We fight together. Refugee squats and solidarity groups [sic] demonstration in Athens" (Cited in Siapera 2019, 257).

As we look at the profound challenges associated with large numbers of refugees entering Europe, and also other continents, what are some other expressions of, or proposals for, authentic participation? In order to move beyond the world of the "I-alone" and to enter the world of the "We"—that is, to move from the domain of stranger/enemy to that of neighbor/friend—essential requirements are truth-telling and confession. Writing with reference to the Swedish context and from a Lutheran perspective, Thompson (2017) suggests that in a meeting between Christians and Muslim immigrants "new avenues of connection among neighbors" are established through "truth practice" and confession of unjust and harsh critique of Islam (249–250).

A survey of newspapers and online posts unearths a host of everyday acts of neighbor-love. In the US context, we hear of church folk and other humanitarians who go out on patrol to offer food and water to Mexicans and others crossing the border and almost expiring in the hot desert sun. Groody (2009) supplies the following very telling report:

> Along the U.S./Mexico border, a few groups offer humanitarian aid to immigrants who make the grueling trek of 40 miles or more across deserts, mountains, and other dangerous terrain. One summer in Arizona, as temperatures reached 120 degrees, a group called the Samaritans sent volunteers to keep watch for any immigrants who might be in need or distress. When a group of 20 immigrants came walking along a dry river bed, a volunteer called out to them from a ledge on a hill and asked, "Is anybody injured?" "Do you need any food?" "Do you have any water?" Suddenly the group of immigrants stopped. Unsure of who was speaking to them, they huddled together and deliberated awhile. Then slowly the leader began walking toward the Samaritan volunteers and said, "We don't have any more food. And we only have a little bit of water. But if you are in need of it, we will share what we have with you." (299)

The leader's answer serves as a reminder that Christian love should not automatically be interpreted in a one-way fashion. What characterizes participation as a Trinitarian virtue is mutuality and reciprocity. The ideal for *agape* is not the Christian person sacrificing her- or himself in serving others in need, but communion, giving and receiving (Post 1988; Pembroke 2007:147–156). Hospitality is a Christian virtue with a long history. Indeed, Jesus came as both host (inviting all to share in the Reign of God) and as guest (he came from above). Importantly, the open friendship practiced by Jesus—all are welcome to join him at table—presents an alternative to hospitality-as-power. The latter refers to a model of hospitality, often unconsciously adopted, in which the hosts set themselves over and apart from the vulnerable ones who are graciously invited in. When we forget this, the neighbor may remind us. The call of "Have you any food and water?" from the Christian group received the reply: "We have almost nothing, but we will share what we have with you."

Too often we see lawmakers and bureaucrats motivated primarily by fear, economic and political calculations, and self-interest. This is perhaps especially so when very large numbers of refugees are arriving.

These drives push toward isolation; they are the enemies of communion. When neighbor-love is strong enough, the threats of the authorities will not quash the impulse to hospitality and solidarity. In Vienna, thousands of people welcomed refugees in train stations, offering food and clothing. On the Greek island of Lesvos, volunteers used their own vehicles to ferry refugees from the shore to cities, and this under threat of arrest for "smuggling" offences (Evangelinidis 2016). A Greek Teachers' Union, "Aristotle," worked to get 45 children living at City Plaza to register in the infant and primary schools of the neighborhood. In the Union's Facebook page, we find this post from 18 June, 2016: "No bureaucracies and no bureaucrats managed to stop us … A hive of people, parents, and children, teachers, translators from City Plaza, sweets and fruits to welcome everyone, and the children with a great smile on their lips!" (Cited in Siapera 2019, 257).

Finally, let me offer a story of being-with and acting-for a refugee that highlights the two central dynamics in participation—namely, the I-Thou and the "We." The refugee in question is from Iran and the story is recounted by my friend, Sue. I asked her to write up her narrative for me. What is most prominent in Sue's ministry is her deep and passionate commitment to joining with others to work for justice, inclusion, peace, and ecological sustainability. Before commencing her vocation of ordained ministry, Sue worked for many years in disability care as a social worker. For a very long time now, the social work profession has worked with the "care of person, care of socio-political world" model that is now so well-established in pastoral theology (Pembroke 2017:125–137). Sue has naturally brought this approach with her into pastoral ministry. She knows that the disadvantage, exclusion, and injustice that many vulnerable people experience has structural and systemic roots. Working in concert with others for constructive change in socio-economic and political ideologies and systems is an absolutely central facet in her approach to ministry and mission. In Wojtyla's terminology, the accent is on the "We" dimension: communal being-with and acting-for others in order to advance the common good. As we have seen, there is also an "I-Thou" dimension in participation. In this story, Sue highlights the significance of faithful being-with the neighbor in crisis.

> A young woman, N, was brought to Brisbane from the Nauru Refugee Detention Center requiring emergency medical support. Her mother and brother remained on the island.
>
> Initial contact began on the psychiatric ward. I would visit and initially it was simply about being present and creating a safe space between us. Eventually she shared her struggles with being separated from her mother and brother and being in detention.
>
> I would visit 2 to 3 times a week. I would listen, she would share, and then we would pray. After discharge she was transferred to Brisbane Immigrant Transit Accommodation (BITA). I continued to visit, until the regulations in BITA changed. We would sit over a coffee and chat. When visiting in the evening I would take a meal to share. Occasionally I would take in parcels with personal care items and also some activities that helped her with her anxiety, e.g. coloring books. Our visits always concluded with prayer. Six months after her initial transfer her mother and brother joined her and so the visits became visits to the family. Throughout the support there would be periods where she would be re-admitted and I would visit her in the hospital and simply sit with her.
>
> I also provided support for their trial for refugee status. I continue to support from afar as they were transferred to Sydney. This has been by linking them in with Refugee support services and connecting them to friends of mine in Sydney. We stay in contact via phone, What's App, etc.
>
> I think the most important thing of all was building up the trust and being present. Never underestimate simply being present in a person's life when they are in crisis.

Conclusion

In the thought of Karol Wojtyla, participation is being-with and acting-for others with the aim of advancing the common good. Wojtyla uses philosophical categories to discuss I-Thou and "We" forms of relationship. Heribert Mühlen mirrors the progression from the I-Thou level to the communal or "We" level in developing his Trinitarian theology. Mühlen posits the Holy Spirit as the personal agency representing the extension of the divine self-love expressed in the mutuality of the I-Thou relation between Mother Sophia and Jesus Sophia; the triune God lives and loves not only through an I-Thou relation, but also through a We-relation. Human participation is an echo, the faintest of echoes, of Trinitarian participation.

A central notion in participation is that everyone is my neighbor; the universal communion of human persons takes priority over narrow personal and local interests and commitments. Surveying print and online media reveals a myriad of practical expressions of neighbor-love offered to refugees from crisis countries. People of faith and other people of good-

will are exercising their moral commitment on the one hand, and their creative thinking on the other, to find ways to oppose the forces of repression and exclusion through being-with and acting-for the other in need. The main contribution of this essay to existing knowledge consists in using Wojtyla's concept of participation to shape a theological reflection on striking and illuminating cases of love and care of refugees. No attempt has been made to offer a particular template or model of compassionate care and solidarity with people fleeing persecution, oppression, and violence.

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Crisis as displacement and opportunity: Reflections on the way South Sudanese women cope with war in refugee camps

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Major crises, such as wars, change the foundations of societies, families, traditions, and morals. This is applicable to the war-torn country of South Sudan, and in particular to the women living there, who, ever since the independence of the country from Sudan in 2011, have been displaced and forced into refugee camps. War creates fear, grief, anxiety, and trauma. At the same time, there is space to create effective positive action that raises an awareness of social discontent in relation to existing or traditional structures. War can sometimes lead to social change, igniting hope, empowerment, and liberation. In South Sudanese Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps, women are increasingly becoming agents for change. They have become community builders and peace makers. The next question is, then, how these changes that women make in the camps can be embedded into existing social and religious structures. Prior to the crisis, political, religious, and tribal male leaders elevated themselves as kings and chiefs. With the present crisis however, there is a need for service-oriented leadership of the kind expressed already by women in the IDP camps. This study advocates for an integration of their voices and experience in the existing leadership cultures of South Sudan.

Research in the IDP camps of South Sudan: Context and preliminary findings

Over the past decades, women of South Sudan have experienced various types of discrimination at multiple levels: cultural, social, economic, and political. These women, who are mainly from villages, are often mal-treated. Culturally, women do not hold any authority or any respected position in families, communities or in tribes. In addition, they are denied fundamental rights. South Sudanese women are constrained from participating or even interacting with men outside their families. Due to these restraints their effective role in society and their participation is very low. Lack of education, together with some other factors, increase the low participation of women in society. Most women in South Sudan have had no access to formal education (UNESCO, 2011, 7). Availability of schools is low and even when present, gender inequality is visible. Culturally, girls are expected to be at home, doing domestic chores and helping their mothers. In the spring of 2021, I returned to the IDP camps of South Sudan where I interviewed sixty women. Many of them express their past lives in the forms of stories and narratives; they share similar feelings and experiences. In one of these interactions, a girl recalled, "I was never allowed to go to the school, although I wanted to study." Ground level reports reveal that the majority of the females in South Sudan do not know how to read and write (Scott et al., 2014, 774–775). Women in South Sudan remain voiceless and are generally considered to be secondary citizens. Even regarding choosing a life partner, they have little say as the choice is made by the tribe and family. Women, therefore, get "sold" which is the actual meaning of

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the dowry. In this male dominated society, women are expected to be submissive to their husbands. They have little contribution, if any, in political and social forums. Therefore, women cannot and do not participate in decision-making activities. Although there are a number of publications discussing the situation of women refugees in Africa, very few of these deal specifically with women in South Sudan, or indeed with IDP women in South Sudan.

Method

Selection of camps

I chose three camps out of the many IDP camps in South Sudan, namely, Don Bosco IDP camp, Juba IDP camp, and Wau IDP camp. The criteria for the selection were the following: the selected camp needs to have people from different tribes living together; the population in the camp consists mostly of women; and the camp should have activities or programs empowering women.

Results and analysis of Empirical research

Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews and open-ended questionnaires. The recorded interviews were transcribed into written text. From these interviews I collected important themes and key elements of relevance to the research presented here within the framework of Grounded Theory Analysis. Some preliminary data and conclusions, relevant to the arguments made in this paper, include the following: the two dominant reasons given by participants to come to the IDP camps were civil war and tribal clashes, with sexual and physical abuse the third main reason. The latter figure might not have been the dominant reason for women to join the IDP camp, but all of the interviewed women had been victims of sexual or physical assault on their way to the camps or at the time of tribal clashes or civil war, and all the participants affirmed that they have witnessed abuses. Out of the 60 women interviewed, 42 were Christians, 7 were Muslims, 7 followed African Traditional Religion (ATR), and 4 were atheists. Age-wise, nineteen of the women interviewed were between 20–30 years old, eighteen between 31–40, sixteen between 41–50, four between 51–60, with three participants between 61 and 70 years old. The majority of these women had been in the IDP camps for between five and ten years. They come from a variety of occupational backgrounds, including farming and agriculture, small businesses, self-employment, and casual labour. In general, these women were the main breadwinners for their families.

The Crisis in South Sudan brings forth threats and opportunities

It is clear that the war between tribes in South Sudan, the youngest country in the world, has disrupted the foundations of society. Families, villages, economy, traditions, and morals have been severely affected (Pavlish and Ho, 2009, 419–421). Crises are part and parcel of human history. Its outcomes are hard to predict, but a crisis is always destructive; yet at the same time a crisis can offer new opportunities. The interviews with women in the camp illustrate the destructive effect of the tribal war, but also the rise of new opportunities.

The crisis of war as a threat: women and children as victims

Wars destroy communities. The population, especially women and children, are traumatized by the brutality and savagery of violence. People of all ages and gender remain exposed to the catastrophic stress of war and other atrocities. While men fight the war, women and children become an easy target of revenge. Such revenge takes the form of sexual assault, rape, and other form of sexual abuse. Children continue to witness and suffer massacres. Frequently, women and children are forced to leave their homes and find shelter in the IDP or refugee camps. While women become widows, children become orphans. These two vulnerable groups, women and children, become victims of war. They carry heavy burdens of trauma resulting from anxiety, violence, abuse, and torture. In particular, the loss of trust becomes a threat to women's survival. In the interviews, it emerged that younger girls and women were reluctant to report matters of violence and injustices. They were worried about their future. For example, any physical abuse or rape would lessen their chances of marriage (see also Ingiriis and Markus, 2013, 319). Due to crisis and oppressive cultures, the identity of women becomes "thwarted", that is, they become unable "to sustain or properly take up a gendered subject position resulting in a crisis, real or imagined, or self-representation and/or social evaluation" (Vetten, 2000, 65).

The crisis of war as an opportunity: new roles for women

Despite a crisis' destructiveness, it becomes a reality to live in. Women and children do not have a choice but to move on with life under dire circumstances and they try to make the best of it. As I will show in this article, this contributes to many factors, but primarily to empowerment rather than to self-incapacitation. The prolonged wars in South Sudan continue to change women's roles and disturb social positions. Crises have allowed women in the IDP camps to move forward in life instead of being held back by previous experiences. Suddenly women become heads of families and get responsibilities that are traditionally not theirs. Cecelia (pseudonym), a woman in the Don Bosco camp, says that before the war she was busy with household chores, such as farming, cleaning, and cooking—regular activities at home. She was abused during the war, in front of her children. During the interview, while she was recalling the incident, she depicted that it was a nightmare for her, wishing that she was dead. She wept, then composed herself and spoke again. Over time, she has become the breadwinner, and she considers her children the reason for her survival. Now that her children are at school, she wants to see that they are moving ahead with their lives. She takes on the traditionally male roles of the decision maker and the breadwinner of the family: all the needs of the children are met by her! She wishes to educate her children by all means.

As with Cecelia, before the war women had minimal responsibilities in their families. After the war, that all changed: now these women are forced to be breadwinners, decision makers, and heads of families. In the midst of their suffering, women strongly feel the need to secure the survival of their offspring through the adaptation of additional strategies and coping mechanisms. This goes together with other responsibilities that the women have to shoulder. Because of their stay in the camps, women find a common language to name the crisis and bring increased awareness among themselves about issues that affect them.

The South Sudanese women from the IDP camps have become agents, builders, and makers of peace. These women have created a new powerful identity within the structures of the camp, changing from passivity to activity. One could wonder how this happened. The process has been painful and tension filled. Breaking the traditional cultural barriers and stigmas, these women have assumed new roles in families and in society bringing forth positive signs of change. Amidst their many new roles, two major ones stand out: women as heads of families—thus, income providers—and as decision makers (Pankhurst, 2003, 161). These new roles pave ways to uplifting women and increasing their participation and ability to act as democracy leaders (Neji, 2017, 1–13). Hence, women have earned their respect and appreciation. As they carry on with their newfound roles, women in the IDP camps give meaning to their existence and lay foundations for a future South Sudan. But how then can this positive change be consolidated?

While change is possible, it is both a difficult and painful process. With the help of women's groups, young girls have been encouraged and helped to pursue education. This is a great step towards gender empowerment and equality. As the women respond to the crisis, new social structures allow them to gain a measure of power and control with mutual respect and dignity. Negotiation of strategies and alternatives illustrate how women cope with their immediate circumstances and constraints. Women's sense of self becomes the motivation for gaining a measure of power and control in their relationships (Boonzaier and De La Rey, 2003, 1024).

Not all South Sudanese women and children were dislocated to South Sudanese IDP camps. The women who escaped to Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Congo, and other parts of the world, have discovered new cultures that respect women and treat them as equals. This has affected women who have settled in the Kakuma refugee camp, and in other Ugandan camps, in a special way. These women have experienced other local cultures and a different status of women. Such women share power, duties, responsibilities, and decision-making side by side with men. In the Kakuma refugee camp and other societies mentioned above, men and women have equal opportunities, and discrimination between women and men is not as rampant (Gitau, 2018, 101–119). The experience of different relations between men and women has opened the eyes of these South Sudanese women to the violation of their rights and the oppression they experienced in their own culture. This new context has encouraged South Sudanese women—and their children—abroad to move ahead with hope. They now seek decision-making forums and the necessary education. They participate in choosing partners, contrary to the women engulfed within the cultures of South Sudan (Gitau, 2018, 101–119).

From the interviews conducted, it becomes clear that South Sudanese women have witnessed the value of the educated woman abroad, both in families and in society. The IDP women inculcated the value of education in their children's lives. This is a new decision, which women are making now as heads of the families, against the ideas of their tribe and against the dominant thinking of tribal men. One can notice that almost all children are regulars in schools; it is because of the persisting effort of their mothers. As one of the participants, by the name of Rose, said, "I am encouraging my daughters and sons to go to school. Even though I am illiterate, over the years of my stay in the camp, with the help of other women I have learned the value of education. I want my daughters to be in a good position, I don't want them to suffer, as I have suffered. So, I have decided to send them to the school." Women are lovers and promoters of education. The educated woman is highly regarded. South Sudanese women who have returned home after living in Kenya and in Uganda have brought these impressions, knowledge, awareness, and changes with them. They are ready to participate in leadership and feel empowered to do so. What kind of leadership could best include them?

A leadership that empowers and serves

Empowering leadership positively affects and unites all by fostering participation (Covington, 2008, 378). This is the style of leadership that is needed in South Sudan as a way towards incorporating women's new roles. In many areas of South Sudan, traditions remain untouched. The rules and regulations continue to favour men. During the conflicts, however, some changes started taking place concerning the roles of women. This became a "liberation" from the old social order. The new situation allows women to be heads of families (Pankhurst, 2003, 159) as they become active in society (Neji, 2017, 1).

A good example can be seen in the Don Bosco IDP camp, where women work in various sectors: agriculture, sewing, tailoring, hairdressing, carpentry, brick making, craft making/African designs and bakery. Through these activities, women are empowered as they become owners of businesses and thus directly receive the proceeds (Kabera and Muyanja, 1994, 101). Empowered women are able to reach out to other women and thus serve. This serving leadership acknowledges and nurtures new roles. This new approach leads to justice and lasting peace, and gives women opportunities to have increased participation and equality in society (Neji, 2017, 3). Serving leadership brings forth change. It promotes equality, education, and self-respect. This is both a liberation and a revolution. It is an empowering leadership both at the level of the individual and of the group. As Martha Anyang, one of the participants says, "the new opportunities have widened our scope and have created lot self-confidence and self-esteem, and our new experiences are allowing us to move ahead with positivity."

Serving leadership seeks to increase the participation of all, including women. It generates economic expansion and growth. In this way it reduces poverty and leads to a more profitable democracy (Neji, 2017, 3). As Boonzaier and De La Rey (2003, 1013) put it, "Women [have] invoke[d] the past, discuss[ed] the present, and express[ed] concerns and hopes about their futures." Hopes are raised towards real change, based on empowerment and dignity (Brittain, 2003, 41). Serving leadership is indeed empowerment through effective participation. Through these changes, real opportunities for women's development become visible. When leadership seeks and increases the participation of all, inclusion happens.

Inclusion entails working together and solving issues together. Such processes of togetherness create confidence and the rediscovery of the self. It helps in social and economic growth as well as participation in decision-making. This is what women in the camps are doing through groups which play a crucial role in trauma healing, empowerment and conscientization that help women to open new horizons. They free themselves from traditional shackles. They positively manage their families and their society at large. Having looked at the different processes geared towards women empowerment, the next step in my research addresses the role of pastoral care in the empowerment process.

Role of pastoral care

Pastoral care is all about helping people (especially the troubled) to experience healing by sustaining, guiding, and reconciling with one another and with oneself to attain meaning in life (Clebsch and Jaekle, 1967, 4). In a troubled society like South Sudan, reconciliation with oneself and with others is essential. Especially in re-establishing broken relationships between tribes, between women and men, and between God and humanity. This can only be achieved

through forgiveness (Clebsch and Jaekle, 1967, 7). I believe this is one of the greatest challenges of pastoral care in South Sudan.

Every woman has a unique story. Their faith is uniquely revealed through their experiences and responses. Based on the experiences, needs, and stories of women in the camps, we need a model for pastoral care that will respect, empower, and enhance the lives of these women. This model needs to start with the recognition of past suffering. In doing so it creates an atmosphere of gender equality, dignity, respect, and recognition of key roles played by women within families. This approach provides a platform for women to be reconcilers, rebuilders, and heads of communities.

Within this model of pastoral care, change is generated through the collaboration of pastoral care-giver and care-seeker. Change is possible, and it is essential for the growth and good of society. In order to achieve change, a model of pastoral care needs to approach women as whole persons with physical, emotional, social, and spiritual strengths and vulnerabilities, and support them in their healing process. Clinebell and McKeever (2011, 8) already stated that pastoral care is "the use of religious sources for the purpose of empowering people, families, and congregations to heal their brokenness and to grow towards wholeness in their lives". In the context of pastoral care for women in South Sudanese IDP camps, working with narratives is essential. Listening to stories communicates respect. Women receive the message that they count and that their stories matter. Their presence is acknowledged, their experiences are valued. Each model for pastoral care should build on an encouraging presence of pastoral caregivers that expresses God's presence and care for those who are suffering and are in need of healing.

A model for pastoral care in the context of South Sudan needs to incorporate support for women moving forward, trying to heal the wounds from the past. This moving ahead is motivated by their children and future aspirations. As an IDP woman, Angelina says, "I have learned that you have to have hope and faith in yourself and God; it is the only way to win the battle. Without it, you can never overcome any kind of obstacle. It is essential to have hope and faith to find true happiness. Believe in yourself. Believe in God. If you do that, you can overcome anything that stands in your way. I have been doing that… Furthermore, because of that, I have found the light at the end of the tunnel. Now, I must venture into the light to continue my journey with the hope that brings happiness."

Conclusion

The research presented here shows how through appropriate pastoral care the majority of IDP women are able to stand on their feet, while using the opportunities that come their way. This article contributes new knowledge from women who have gone beyond race and tribe and are able to work together for a common cause of educating their female children, and to raise their voice for the common good. The process of working together and solving their existential problems helps them to grow in confidence and rediscover themselves. It also helps them socially and economically, and enables them in decision-making activities as a path to healing. Also, IDP women have proven that they are able to bring a change in the mindset of a very conservative and traditional people; these IDP women now provide an example to other women in terms of economic empowerment.

The data also show a new level of meaning and opportunity for the women in the camps linked to their displacement, widowhood, and being in charge of their families: "The culture of oppression is changing, so we choose what type of traditions we want to keep. We want to challenge the inconsistencies, speak our mind". Times in South Sudan are gradually changing. Young women are adapting new ways and mindsets. In the IDP camps, one of the women said, "we have suffered enough and more, both culturally and traditionally. We don't want our children to suffer as we have suffered. It is a time for us to move ahead with positivity. Change is taking place. No one defends us. No one fights for us. We must defend ourselves. We must redeem ourselves. We must protect our rights and the rights of our children". It is clear that the current reality and positions are bringing forth new identities among women in South Sudan.

The data also shows that in these places where women are marginalized, victimized, and oppressed, they exhibit trust, hope, courage, resilience, and perseverance in the midst of their pain and suffering. These women, encountered through the interviews, express deep faith, as they raise and sustain their children and families. They are deeply motivated to give a better future to their children. In the midst of the trauma and loss they have experi-

enced, including the loss of their husbands, the women I interviewed express great love and care for their children. These efforts generate hope aimed at not only removing societal disadvantages but bringing social revolution. This will remove hindrances and barriers of discrimination by providing equal opportunities to all, regardless of gender.

In the absence of their husbands, these women have seized opportunities. They have shifted from supporters to providers through increased awareness and are venturing into new spheres. These newly acquired roles have awakened—or rekindled—a desire for social transformation, instead of resignation to traditional laws of subordination and oppression (Chinkin and Charlsworth, 2006, 937–957). These empowered women seek authentic transformation.

The emphasis of this research is on the stories of women as they acknowledge their pain and suffering, seeking to re-establish and re-arrange their lives. They seek to re-value their lives. As a researcher I am enthralled by the stories of the women participants. Though the women appear to have similar stories, the experiences are diverse. Each story reveals the individual's unique identity, thus enriching the learning and generating information. My experience of working for the women in the IDP camps affirms the need for transformative ideas, and this feeds my determination to build up a model of pastoral care for these women.

The dignity, opportunity and identity denied to these women by the society, calls for change. My research with these women who are residing at the IDP camps confirms that change is possible. Such change needs to be achieved through active listening, acceptance, love, forgiveness, and support. One of the best ways for the Church to support the victims would be through spiritual care. The ongoing ministry in the post-war context of South Sudan continues, therefore, to become an important mission of the Church.

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Ordinary pastoral care: Deconstructing the concept of 'crisis' in practical theology

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In pastoral care literature the idea of 'crisis' is prevalent. This observation can also be made concerning the discipline of practical theology. The emphasis on transformation and change in practical theology entails the presumption that its main scope is to deal with crises that need to be addressed. This chapter challenges the use of 'crisis' in practical theology and specifically in pastoral care theories. The name of the field 'pastoral care and counselling' stresses the therapeutic turn and it frames the field as fundamentally problem-oriented. Though crisis-language is virtually everywhere in pastoral care studies and methods, the textbooks, however, also look beyond crisis. Pastoral anthropology provides a significant indicator: pastoral care practices deal with a human being *coram Deo*, 'before the face of God'. The second half of the chapter suggests a broader scope of the field of pastoral care. It suggests three perspectives for a reconstructed pastoral theology: the everyday life of ordinary believers, an interest in spiritual formation, and a reassessment of the local congregation.

Introduction

The COVID19 pandemic caused large and small crises, both in personal lives and in societies. There was global uncertainty about the health implications of the virus. Governments had to improvise and act quickly without the necessary virological knowledge. There was a widespread anxiety among populations paired with the increasing trauma of death tolls in densely populated areas. Many grieved over one or more loved ones; many suffered increased domestic violence, or experienced severe social isolation or mental problems because of the lockdowns. Groups of people felt that their personal freedom was severely restrained which resulted in anger and resistance to government policies. The pandemic thus did not just cause one crisis, it consisted of *multiple crises*.

How should practical theologians respond to this situation full of crises? How did pastors act during the pandemic? Did they use digital means to reach out pastorally? How did the restrictions impact the practice of hospital chaplains (Haußmann and Fritz 2021; Byrne and Nuzum 2020)? That pastoral care is a discipline that is about helping people is evident from a glance in contemporary introductions to practical theology. The language of transformation, change, and improvement is paramount in pastoral care literature. Yet when we pay closer attention to the conceptual and theoretical language in the discipline, the discourse of crisis is inescapable. This raises the more fundamental question: how the concept of 'crisis' is being used in practical theology?

In this chapter, I explore the idea of 'crisis' in the field of practical theology. I start with a general observation concerning practical theological discourse and its development. Next, I focus upon pastoral care in particular: how does the concept of 'crisis' influence pastoral care discourse? I suggest that we need to deconstruct the notion of 'crisis' in order to reassess pastoral care. Finally, in response to this

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critical assessment the final section provides a few constructive theological suggestions to open up a post-crisis perspective for pastoral care and counselling. It is concluded that though humans often experience all sorts of crisis, ordinary life should be approached with spiritual openness that moves beyond the discourse of crisis.

The Idea of 'Crisis' in Practical Theology and the Task of Deconstruction

Practical theologians study all kinds of crises in communities, in churches and in societies. For example, in 2016 I participated in an international research group that studied European preaching during a period that was ill-termed 'the European Refugee crisis' (2015–2016). The project resulted in a collaborative presentation at the 2017 IAPT conference in Oslo (Pleizier and Kaufmann 2018). This study in the field of preaching is not an exception rather it fits a broader pattern. Studies in pastoral care and counselling often choose crisis-related topics about specific mental or societal problems that make people suffer and that call for pastoral care. Practical theologians have extensively studied all sorts of critical issues such as marginalization, migration, race, mental illness, palliative care and decolonialization (Miller-McLemore 2019; Swinton and Mowat 2016).

Studies usually combine two aspects: the use of empirical research methods and a normative-strategic perspective with terms like 'improvement,' 'redefinition,' 'reframing' or 'transformation,' either with a therapeutic (coping) or a prophetic (critical) emphasis. For instance, in pastoral care studies 'improvement' often means helping people to cope with their situation mentally, spiritually, relationally, and culturally. In studies of preaching, 'transformation' often entails the view that preachers should provide critical perspectives on everyday life or political situations. Practical theologies that combine empirical research with a coping or critical perspective, use terms such as 'prophetic' or 'critical' and provide research cycles that start with empirical research and end with a perspective on transformation (Browning 1991; Heitink 1999; Osmer 2008). The volume *Conundrums in Practical Theology* uses the metaphor of the 'canary in the coal mine' to understand the work of practical theologians and stresses that practical theological research may contain conceptual dilemmas, but these

> almost always overflow into more deeply felt and lived quagmires, reflecting social inequities and political injustices that reverberate across academia and the marginalised publics to whom we hold ourselves especially accountable. (Mercer and Miller-McLemore 2016, 3)

Crisis permeates practical theology, and thus affects the self-understanding of the field. Therefore, the second layer of the concept of 'crisis' concerns a meta-perspective: is practical theology a *science of crisis*?

In his recent book *Collaborative Practical Theology* Henk de Roest challenges this paradigm of crisis. He mentions three critiques of the dominance of crisis discourse (Roest 2019, 146–50). First, the rhetoric of crisis legitimizes strategies for change. He quotes Thomas Frank: "The rhetoric of crisis […] lends credibility and force to the speaker's proposals for reform and action." Further, it seems that modernity has drawn attention to itself and generated an anthropocentric approach to practical theology. Are we critical enough if we do not question secular and post-secular prepositions? Citing Gerrit Immink, De Roest suggests that if human consciousness has lost the sense of divine things, it may well be that the interest in the field loses its sensitivity for religious practices as practices of revelation. Thirdly, De Roest argues that "the characterisation of practical theology as 'science of crisis' may reduce the scope of practices to be researched" (Roest 2019, 150). Added to this, a self-critical approach also needs to take into account that crisis-discourse in practical theology is often a Western response to the challenges of modernity and post-modernity in the light of the perceived loss of the relevance of church practices and faith.

Therefore, it appears that practical theology is in a permanent state of crisis. One indicator is the ubiquity of the notion of 'transformation' in practical theological models. Don Browning ends his classic *Fundamental Practical Theology* with 'transformation' as the goal to which the discipline is directed towards (Browning 1991, 278–94). Transformation appears in various conceptualizations. It is dressed in the language of strategy (Heitink 1999), of pragmatism and leadership (Osmer 2008, 175–218) and of normative evaluation (van der Ven 1993, 60–76, p. 152–156).

The dominance of crisis-discourse, however, raises a few questions.

1. Is practical theology fundamentally a discipline of change? The focus on transformation as a response to perceived crises suggests that practical

theology has not deeply enough integrated Friedrich Schleiermacher's view that practical theology is fundamentally a *theory* of practice rather than a science of application.

2. When the concept of 'crisis' appears in scholarly discourse, we need to inquire how it is constructed and to what kind of 'real crisis' it refers to. What real crisis in empirical reality is indicated? Further, how the focus on the idea of crisis narrows the field and what topics are neglected? 'Crisis' may easily become a construction of researchers in order to create a sense of urgency for their own agenda without clearly demarcated empirical realities.
3. In studying the empirical referents of 'real' crises, practical theologians should ask what their role or vocation should be or whether and how theology is part of the identified crisis. Not every economic or political crisis is necessarily a theological crisis. Even if everything might be theological, that does not mean that every perceived crisis counts as a religious crisis or as a crisis that should be addressed theologically. If culture and politics defines what counts as a crisis the implication might be that theology has given away its distinctive agenda.

These three questions give way to a *deconstruction* of the idea of crisis in our discipline. In the remainder of this chapter I start carrying out this task for the field of pastoral care and counselling.

The Current State of Research in the Field of Pastoral Care

Deconstruction begins with the very name of the field 'pastoral care and counselling' since the term 'counselling' conceives of pastoral care as 'therapy' and thus conceptually points to problems and crises in human lives and communities.

Three types of studies permeate the pastoral literature. First, there is a fast growing body of literature on chaplaincy studies and spiritual care. While spiritual care is primarily located in healthcare chaplaincy and many studies concern the domain of palliative care, spiritual care is increasingly studied in other contexts, such as prison or military chaplaincies. Understandably, the field of spiritual care is very much oriented towards crisis. Chaplains and other spiritual care professionals find human beings in vulnerable situations and wrestling with all sorts of existential crises. Spiritual care involves coping with suffering (Weaver 2012), with death (Ferrell 2017) or with moral injury and moral distress (Carey et al. 2016).

A second type of study in the field of pastoral care and counselling consists of those that address specific pastoral topics including disabilities, woundedness, and mental impairments. This literature also reveals a significant ambiguity. On the one hand, mental issues such as dementia are experienced as crises in human lives (Mason 2020). They entail suffering and bring limitations. Pastoral care is often directed towards coping with such painful situations. On the other hand, it is emphasized that these human conditions should not create exclusion, and that human dignity should not be dependent upon social or psychological conditions. In this vein, Anna Katherine Shurley stresses the unique gifts of persons with intellectual disabilities. Her person-centered approach to pastoral care proposes the development of inclusive practices: collaborating, empowering, calling, playing and witnessing (Shurley 2017). Thus, despite the fact that pastoral studies often concern problematic areas such as bereavement, mental illness, or physical suffering, there also seems to be an inherent critique regarding a one-sided orientation towards crisis. These studies already signal the need for a deconstruction of the dominant discourse of crisis.

The general overviews of the field of pastoral care aim to introduce students and professionals to the many approaches in the field of pastoral and spiritual care and counselling. Often, however, the textbooks demonstrate a bias towards crisis. Two examples of highly valued introductory texts illustrate an orientation towards crisis. The influential Dutch textbook by Ganzevoort and Visser (2007) organizes the content of pastoral care practices by critical emotions, such as grief, anger, shame, and fear. These critical emotions point to crisis-like situations that call for pastoral care. Similarly, the German pastoral theologian Christoph Morgenthaler deals with crisis in almost every topic that he raises: the single human being is put into the perspective of 'conflicts' (*Konflikte, Ambivalenzen*), the chapter on human beings in relationship has crisis and divorce right at its center, and an entire chapter has been reserved for 'a human being in crisis' addressing suffering and cancer, vulnerability and mental crises, suicide, and finally bereavement (Morgenthaler 2009, Chapters 6–9).

Pastoral care practices have always engaged with those in need, the vulnerable and the weak. Yet, several tendencies in the recent history of pastoral care and counselling have strengthened the crisis-orientation in the field.

First, current methodologies in pastoral care and counselling – besides providing pastors with very practical approaches that are also often argued for theologically – reflect the influence of the therapeutic paradigm. The fact that the field is labelled with the therapeutic concept of 'counselling' in the English-speaking world is telling. This paradigm has framed pastoral care practices into the discourse of therapy: pastoral care is for those who need the help and the sustaining efforts of pastoral workers. Despite the client-centred approach, and the use of the economic rather than pathologic term 'client' for the care seeker, the therapeutic paradigm approaches people in churches and chaplaincy contexts as persons with problems and crises that need to be solved, accepted or coped with.

Further, quite a few methods in narrative and therapeutic pastoral care stress the importance of transformative moments in counselling. These transformative moments may emerge when experienced reality becomes connected to alternative realities such as the kingdom of God (R. Ganzevoort and Visser 2007, 121). In pastoral encounters the transformative moment can be structured like Biblical parables and moves from recognition, distancing, disclosure towards response. Similarly, according to Capps who adopts insights from the literature on 'change,' "reframing shifts the client's framework from a negative to a positive one" (Capps 1990, 25).

Finally, the paradigm of crisis-oriented pastoral care has been framed theologically by the 'father' of practical theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher. He argues that every request for pastoral care signals a personal lack of confidence in God. Since parishioners are free subjects with their own 'direct access to the divine Word' the religious instruction that takes place in corporate worship should be sufficient. According to Schleiermacher, this means that

> 'whenever such requests are made, as ministers we are to use them to increase the spiritual freedom of our church members and to lead them to such clarity *that no further request will be made*' (Schleiermacher 1988, 55, italics added).

Hence, in this perspective pastoral care is for the weak and it should only be used to make pastoral care superfluous again.

Crisis is part and parcel of pastoral care literature, its studies and methods. The textbooks, however, also look *beyond* crisis.

In Morgenthaler's introductory book on pastoral care, we find two indicators for an alternative approach. First, when he discusses 'human beings before God,' he moves toward spirituality in pastoral care (*Spirituelle Seelsorge*); a type of pastoral care that understands being human and guides human beings within a complete and full reality (*umfassende Wirklichkeit*), (Morgenthaler 2009, 220). Second, in reflecting upon the local church as the location for pastoral care and counselling, Morgenthaler obviously mentions crises (for instance in families) but also mentions traditional Protestant 'visitation' (*Hausbesuch*). Despite contemporary hesitations around pastoral visitation, this kind of pastoral care is less crisis-oriented and it mostly addresses everyday life: "a lot of people enjoy a visit of a pastor, in their rental apartment, at their farm, in their living room or in the elderly home" (Morgenthaler 2009, 317). Earlier, Michael Wilson pointed to the notion 'health' in relation to pastoral care practices in the light of the dominant medicalisation of care, both in healthcare institutions and in Christian communities (Wilson 1975, 1988). Whether in times of health and trouble, Wilson argues that it is 'normal human community, whether a family, a team, a group, or a tribe, that an innate urge to love and be loved finds ways of expression.' (Wilson 1988, 103) Pastoral care is broader than the 'caring for casualties of life,' he adds.

Morgenthaler's assumption that 'a lot of people enjoy a visit of a pastor' and Wilson's view that we have to 'put abnormality firmly in the context of normality' (Wilson 1988, 106) is confirmed by an empirical study among church attenders in The Netherlands. Asked about their desire for pastoral care, a 'general interest in people's lives' is mentioned most often (Pleizier, Zwijze-Koning, and Meulen 2021). It signals the need for a kind of pastoral care that moves beyond problems and crises. This expectation for pastoral care invites a reconstruction of pastoral care as 'ordinary care.'

Towards a Post-Crisis Approach to Pastoral Care

Empirical research is rather scarce in the field of pastoral care in local churches. There is hardly any data about how many people receive pastoral care

and what kinds of pastoral care take place (Pleizier, Zwijze-Koning, and Meulen 2021). As a result of ongoing secularization, local Christian churches suffer depleting membership which severely impacts the availability of professional pastoral care. Pastors with larger congregations also deal with time constraints. These pastoral time constraints create a crisis-defined pastoral care in many parishes: pastors do only pastoral care in situations in which it is necessary.

Also, parishioners often feel that they are only eligible for pastoral care when they face some kind of crisis. In many cases, when pastoral care is offered, it is rejected because people feel they do not need it. This may be one of the reasons why it often seems that the classic practice of 'house visits' does not seem to work the way it did (Drechsel 2015, 98–99). The typically Protestant practice, in which pastoral care is offered to all parishioners regardless of their personal situations is framed within a broader understanding that pastoral care is for those with problems. This leads to the spontaneous response: 'I don't need a pastor; I don't have any problems for a pastor to address.'

Empowered by studies that address pastoral care for victims of sexual or domestic violence, or for those who suffer from mental disabilities, parish pastors are able to act more professionally and feel more confident in pastoral encounters. However, persons with mental disabilities also have specific contributions to make in parishes. This suggests the need for another paradigm. Yet, the fact that they are often treated as 'difficult people,' still assumes the discourse of 'crisis.'

Even though the paradigm of crisis is very much present in current congregational pastoral care practices, it is precisely the context of the parish that reveals the need for a 'beyond crisis' approach of pastoral care. Such a post-crisis approach to pastoral care practices moves into the direction of regular care practices or 'ordinary pastoral care.' To explore the outlines of 'ordinary pastoral care,' I offer three tentative theological statements to re-envision what a post-crisis type of pastoral care might look like in the context of regular parishes. These statements suggest a research agenda for the field of pastoral care by providing a framework for reconstructing pastoral care practices beyond crisis.

Everyday Lived Religion: Ordinary Believers

The first statement:

> Ordinary pastoral care orients itself toward the *lived religion* of ordinary Christian believers.

The concept of 'lived religion' or 'everyday theology' is a well-known and often-used concept in practical theology (Streib, Dinter, and Söderblom 2008; Ganzevoort and Roeland 2014; Wilson 1988; Sremac and Jindra 2020). 'Lived' is put against the theoretical; the everyday 'real' against the idealized 'blueprint' (Healy 2000). More specifically for the Christian faith, Gerrit Immink suggests the notion 'lived faith' (Immink 2005). The notion of 'faith' helps us to think about the reality of life 'before God,' and the reception of, and response to, God's promises. Lived religion, or lived faith, reflects the current condition of believers, whether they feel very religious or not or whether they live happy lives or not. It focusses upon everyday religion, rather than upon problems and crises.

A pastoral care paradigm beyond crisis orients itself towards this lived reality of religion and faith. Pastoral care-givers show a simple interest in how faith is expressed in human lives and how the Christian religion is embedded in the lives of everyday believers. Eberhard Hauschildt coined the term 'everyday pastoral care' (*Alltagsseelsorge*) and considered the birthday-visit an opportunity for pastors to display their genuine interest in the ordinary lives of parishioners. He cites Wolfgang Steck to emphasise that the origin of pastoral care can be found in the everyday life (Hauschildt 2016). According to Wolfgang Drechsel, the parish is the primary context for everyday pastoral care (Drechsel 2015, 57–66).

In such a paradigm pastors are curious about how the Christian faith transforms lives, how it helps people to cope with all kinds of circumstances, and how belonging to a religious community provides a narrative to live by. Those engaging in pastoral care demonstrate an existential interest in the lives of people and in the ways parish members, young and old, live out their Christian lives. Existing pastoral approaches, however, remain indispensible, such as the therapeutic insight that the conversation as such has caring qualities, or the good practice of narrative approaches, that pastors should pay attention to the narrative structures of life-stories.

Therapeutic and narrative approaches thus provide valuable methods for 'deep listening' and for engaging in existential conversations. Yet in the proposal of everyday pastoral care, they are subsumed under the larger interest of lived faith.

The Life of the Soul: Spirituality and Spiritual Formation

The paradigm of ordinary pastoral care stimulates the pastor 'to listen to the soul,' as Jean Stairs puts it (Stairs 2000). Hence, the second statement:

> Ordinary pastoral care orients itself to the life of the soul.

The life of the soul is richer than the problems and crises that emerge in a person's life. Though spiritual formation and spirituality constitute a broad field, this has recently been rediscovered as an area for pastoral care (Meulen 2013; Barber and Baker 2014; Pembroke et al. 2022).

'Spirituality' can be aptly summarized with a term used by Corinna Dahlgrün: the 'search for God' (*die Suche nach Gott*) (Dahlgrün 2009). Dahlgrün opens her rich presentation of all kinds of Christian spirituality with five entrances to the search for God: in solitude, in the presence of other people, in everyday life, in the community of Christians, and in the search for divine forgiveness. Other notions that relate to spirituality, spiritual guidance or spiritual formation are 'discipleship,' 'living a Christian life' and the dogmatic concept of 'sanctification.' Though coming from different Christian traditions, they all point to growth and transformation within human beings that has to do with life in connection with the self, with others, and with God. These aspects contribute to a dynamic and rich understanding of ordinary pastoral care as care for the soul.

Pastoral care that takes spirituality or spiritual formation seriously as a goal in and of itself, deals with questions like: what does it mean to live a Christian life; how does my Christian faith interact with my place in society at large; how am I to shape my Christian life in relation to others in the various communities that I participate in, both ecclesial and non-ecclesial? These questions emerge when people are invited to reflect upon their lives as Christians, regardless of whether they feel that they are experiencing a critical situation in their life.

In a recent experiment with pastors and parishioners a new method of spiritual formation was tried. Its outcome showed that openness—for what is significant for the parishioner according to the principles of counselling—can be meaningfully combined with topics in the Christian faith, contributing to an atmosphere in which spiritual formation can take place within the setting of pastoral care (Pembroke et al. 2022).

Pastoral Care as Ecclesial Practice

Finally, the third statement:

> Ordinary pastoral care practice finds its origin in churches and faith communities and aims to create and maintain communities of faith.

An interest in everyday life and a focus on spirituality or spiritual formation understood as living a Christian life, makes ordinary pastoral care in parishes a function of the Christian community. Pastoral companionship and an interest in the soul point to a unique feature of parish care: it moves beyond the individual and connects with the larger community of faith. In other words, pastoral care in parishes is an *ecclesial practice*. According to Wolfgang Drechsel ecclesiological notions such as *ecclesia* or *koinonia* belong to the 'grammar of pastoral care' (Drechsel 2015).

Two types of relationships are important here. First, pastoral care is an expression of the community of faith: it is a function of religious communities to care for (spiritual) wellbeing. The pastor represents such a community of faith (Hauschildt 2016, 61).

Second, ordinary pastoral care in parishes entails reconnection to a broader community. The modernist and crisis paradigm often isolates the individual. John Patton (2005) introduces a communal contextual paradigm for pastoral care. The community of faith is not just the 'context' in which care takes place. It is also the outcome of care: the practice of pastoral care creates and maintains relationships among believers. When a parishioner meets with a pastor, the pastor represents the larger community of faith to the parishioner.

Pastoral care as an ecclesial practice also shapes its foundational understandings. Stephen Pattison critiques the notion of 'pastoral' in 'pastoral care.' In his critique he both integrates historical aspects and challenges a one-sided clericalism. In his own definition he understands pastoral care as "that activity, undertaken especially by representative Christian

persons, directed towards the elimination of relief or sin and sorrow and the presentation of all people perfect in Christ to God" (Pattison 2000, 13). Though this definition opens up debates around spiritual care, intercultural, and interreligious care, Pattison's approach understands the nature of pastoral care in theological terms and terms that belong to the vocabulary of the church.

Conclusion

Ordinary care presents a specific outlook of pastoral care in parishes. When compared to chaplaincy settings, two differences become apparent. First, chaplaincy care is most often care for the individual, often related to an institutional context (hospital, prison). Secondly, spiritual care offered by chaplains is mostly crisis-oriented. On the other hand, ordinary care, finds its primary context in the parish or the faith community (Drechsel 2015).

Some have suggested that pastoral care will gradually turn into spiritual care due to secularization. The assumptions of a commonly shared Christian faith no longer hold; diversity and plurality in parishes, not only in Western Europe, call for an approach that resembles spiritual care: care in the public domain with a sensitivity for spiritual and intercultural diversities (Nauer 2015). However, pastoral care within the Christian communities will remain a distinct practice among the many varieties of pastoral and spiritual care. Intercultural approaches, such as Emmanuel Lartey's, also provide constructive approaches to pastoral care that move beyond the focus on problems and crisis. Lartey's proposal of pastoral care as 'empowerment' emphasises 'the fact that there is something good, something of worth and value within human persons as they presently are' and the pastoral task is to build up 'the unnoticed strengths and resources within and around people and communities' (Lartey 2003, 58, also p. 68).

We are in need of a post-crisis paradigm to avoid neglecting significant pastoral and spiritual practices. Regular or ordinary pastoral care is one of those practices. There will always be ordinary people, and their ordinary lives, with or without crises, remain worthy of pastoral attention. In the coming years practical-theologians will certainly be intensively engaged with all sorts of crises. However, a critical and constructive attitude is needed with respect to the dominating discourse of crisis.

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Looking for spirituality in the context of the pandemic in the province of Quebec

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When the international pandemic of Covid-19 struck in the Province of Quebec (Canada), two columnists raised a debate about the necessity of spirituality in such a context. The question is addressed from a short observation of the political and existential experience of a very secular society facing an unprecedented crisis. Spirituality then needs to be redefined and epistemologies must be reconsidered. While collectivities (or authorities) cannot impose spiritual meaning, individuals alone are insufficient to reach the spiritual. A "third term" needs to be considered transcending the opacity of reality through the ordinary of daily life.

The context of the first wave of the pandemic: a debate on spirituality

On March 13th 2020, the Quebec provincial government declared a public health emergency related to Covid-19. Ten days later, on March 24rd, a theologian and columnist, Jocelyn Girard, observed that while only essential services were available to the population, spirituality was not counted among those on the list. Here in Quebec, we belong to a deeply secular society (culturally) whose politics confine the religious and the spiritual to the private sphere; however, Girard still considered that the crisis caused by the pandemic should invite attention to the spiritual dimension of human experience. Existential questions would still need to be addressed collectively as well as individually.

Jocelyn Girard's chronicle was followed by the opinion of another columnist, who surprisingly argued—referring to Maslow—that, in the end, spirituality should not be considered essential. It is only when one is fed and dressed, when one feels secure and loved, and when one has a certain sense of belonging that spirituality becomes a need. Several comments on this response accused said columnist of promoting an elitist spirituality; one that he considered more like a luxury.

The debate petered out on its own as the following days and weeks were filled with fear and tragedy: the stark lack of medical employees and resources, massive job losses in all fields of work, the painful deprivation of social contact with other human beings, the daily experience of confinement, and technological fatigue, to name a few. By the end of May, our health system had collapsed and thousands of people had died of Covid-19, ten times the usual numbers that would have been reported for regular flu. But what was most shocking was that 90 % of those who died of Covid-19 were frail elderly people who lived in long-term healthcare public facilities, who lacked proper care and were ultimately left alone due to a severe shortage of staff and conditions of isolation. The situation was unprecedented. Whisperings in the media spoke of a quiet genocide. We felt powerless, torn, hurt, and scandalized. The province—indeed, the whole world, which also knew such sufferings – was in shock.

Was spirituality essential then? Where was it experienced and lived out?

In this chapter, I will rely upon a variation of a revised hermeneutical method of practical theology that introduces a situation or issue, examines the circumstances of that situation by relying on non-theological sources, and puts these sources into

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conversation with theological insights. The final section will open to what Browning calls the strategic practical theology move.

Reactions to the crisis

I understand spirituality from a secular perspective, as a mode of being and inhabiting our lives and our world. Spirituality has something to do with the quest for meaning and with relationality (that is, our relationship to self, others, the world, and what transcends the human—or God). However, my views on spirituality are also rooted in Christianity. The way I perceive and relate to the world, friends and neighbours is inspired and informed by Christian spirituality; or at least, this is my aim. As such, I try to contribute – spontaneously or with more conscious awareness – to the creation of narratives of meanings that are fostered – or put to test – by the resources of Christian tradition, which I correlate with the concrete situations which I encounter. I consider tradition as a dynamic and living reality, which can grow and develop and be reviewed or challenged with new insights that experience and reflection bring to the fore.

While paying close attention to what was being reported by the media during the crisis of Covid-19, I heard politicians trying to invest their decisions with meaning and drawing up arguments to justify them. They invited us to recognize that we were being confined "for the sake of others". We were encouraged to follow the rules voluntarily, motivated by the fact that we could "save lives" by doing so. We were deprived of the physical presence of others, whom we missed deeply, for the very sake of those others, whom we might have contaminated and put at risk. The meaning of our actions profoundly and very concretely transformed our connectedness to one another.

Our connectedness to space and our environment both shrunk and enlarged. Our home was our refuge, a room (often the kitchen) became a designated place for working, resting, and Zooming … We did not sleep much … Taking a walk was allowed. Every day, we routinely took the same short paths, sometimes brightened up by rainbowed windows and painted rocks. We stopped travelling. And we gradually became aware that the seclusion we felt was shared across the globe: everyone who had a home had to stay confined there. And we realized that it was a grace to have a home. But we cursed that it had become our prison…

Time stopped; time slipped by. Some enjoyed the opportunity to make up for lost time and to rest; others buckled under the pressure to respond to the needs of so many. Still others could do neither.

In summary, our connectedness to self, others, the world, and what is beyond, and our relatedness to time, space and meaning required profound adaptations. And we did or did not have the leisure to consciously reflect upon the new ways by which we need to inhabit and invest our lives.

Questioning the Functional Epistemology of the Spiritual

Health care epistemologies often spontaneously consider the person and his or her functionality, his or her capability to operate as an individual and in society. Care is, thus, most easily addressed in terms of needs: what is needed so that functionality can be restored or sustained? Indeed, the medical practice continues to be rooted in the Hippocratic paradigm, oriented toward scientifically demonstrated improvements in patients' physical condition. Within this paradigm, procedures and protocols are designed so the best medical results can be expected from a complex situation. Professionals commit to very specific tasks to respond promptly and efficiently to the identified medical needs of a patient.

However, the theologian and ethicist Guy Jobin has strongly argued that spirituality is historically rooted in a different epistemology than contemporary medicine (Jobin, 2013: 74ss). The well-known "holistic paradigm" includes other essential dimensions of human life within the context of caring for patients, namely the psychological, the social, and the spiritual. It puts the whole person's experience at the center of the healthcare practice. This paradigm often comes to light in units like palliative care, for instance, but is also gaining a hold in other units and with practitioners. Healthcare professionals who wish to practice from a holistic perspective are called to include the spiritual needs of their patients.

Within Christian tradition, spirituality is often addressed in terms of desires instead of needs (Barnes 2020; Roy 2010; Garceau 1997). Spirituality seems to relate to a different dimension of our being, not because it is disconnected from our body – on the contrary – but because it is experienced in a more complex manner. One can truly thrive spiritually, and this thriving needs to be cared for, channeled and nourished (Barnes 2020). But, as the biblical texts remind us in their use of words such as "thirst" and "hunger" when referring to our endur-

ing quest for spiritual wholeness, we can never be truly "satiated" spiritually. Garceau is helpful here, when he distinguishes between needs, which can be fulfilled, and desires, which only deepen and constantly flow toward the infinite. On the one hand, an appropriate response to vital needs can be measured, granted and evaluated. After a meal, one is no longer hungry. In a medical setting, a question could be: "What does this body/person need so breathing is secured while general anesthesia is performed during a surgery?" Or, what does a patient need to alleviate his or her pain from a severe case of Covid-19. Scientific research will recommend specific protocols, techniques and dosages based on an efficiency that has been demonstrated in most patients, in similar conditions and situations.

On the other hand, healthy relational dynamics tend to deepen the "desire" to get to know a friend or a spouse, to enjoy their presence, to participate in the momentum of gift and counter-gift, bearer of a specific quality of life. Relational activities, far from being perfect, can be invested as if they belong to the realm of needs as well as desire. At times, human companionship or care is simply vital, for example to a newborn, but not only to those. It also happens that some people use or instrumentalize others to fulfill their needs, and in that case, are never being satiated. But genuine care and love rather correspond to dynamics of desire. Within this perspective, desire produces self-gift and freedom, not only "attracting" the "object" of desire but more readily participating in a life-giving (and at times suffering) space beyond self.

Hence, desire would better describe maturing spirituality. Spirituality is, indeed, both vital need and a luxury. As Maas puts it: "spirituality is really an essential necessity, or perhaps it's precisely that luxury which is so indispensable for real vitality" (Maas 2011, 77). But spirituality, or faith, cannot be reduced to its functionalities. Maas continues:

> One has to realize that one is using elements [from the spiritual traditions] which had and have a foundation and a *Sitz im Leben* in the relationship between the human person and the Infinite God. Whenever these elements are taken out of the context of the relationship with God, whenever they are removed from the perspective of gazing towards the Infinite and placed within the finite context of solving individual or social problems, apart from any religious perspective, then they have a much smaller space in which to function. (Mass 2011, 77)

Spirituality is not meant to solve problems. Its foundations lay in a non-utilitarian philosophy, in a "gracious" order. Even when public institutions are rooted in secular contexts, the spiritual care they offer would need to be addressed in terms of its own epistemology, from a vision of relationality that goes beyond the human. Hence, "faith can fulfill an anthropological function only when it is understood apart from that function, only when it is grasped independently of that functionality. Or more positively formulated: faith is beneficial at the human level only as a side-effect of dedication to something else, namely, dedication to God" (Maas 2011, 78).

In a secular society that hopes to be inclusive of a large spectrum of spiritualities that ranges from atheist to deeply religious, the relationship with God would need to be "translated" (if such a thing is possible) into a relationship with that which is radically beyond the human, immanent or transcendent. The point is far from simple, but it cannot be overlooked. However, the argument allows for the emergence of a fresh perspective on so-called "secular spiritualities."

Here, spirituality does not compensate for what might be missing from or malfunctioning in human lives. It has no formal use when considered from a utilitarian perspective. However, because of its relational dynamics, it allows the human being to conceive of a broader viewpoint regarding his or her immediate experience. It opens up a space where hope might be conceivable.

At the Heart of the Spiritual: The Individual?

When the Quebec government wants to relegate spirituality to the private sphere—in what we call in French a "laïcité fermée" or a "closed secularism"—its politics are coherent with an anthropology that puts the individuality of the subject of law front and center. According to Christelle Landheer-Cieslak, "one of the particularities of the subject of law described in Quebec's civil code of 1994 is to be autonomous in all things, communal and institutional, especially religious" (Landheer-Cieslak 2020, 229). This means that the law insists that individual discernment must take precedence in decision-making processes, actions or personal involvement in collective causes, to name just a few. In this context, one could question whether governments are as neutral as they claim, since they can actively reinforce individualization and contribute to the instrumentalization of communities, if not to their dissolution. The individual is thus affirmed as such – paradoxically by a collective institution – and acts

as its own gravity center. Collectivities are 'atomized'.

It seems that this vision somehow crystallized during the pandemic, and directly affected the spiritual and religious dimensions. Religious gatherings counted among the first to be proscribed and the last to be reinstated. Cultural and familiar ways to collectively celebrate anthropologically significant moments (births, unions of couples, deaths) became almost impossible. And spirituality, deeply connected to human relationality, was deprived of its natural source of nurturance.

Marcel Gauchet raises the modern question of the conjunction between what is individual and what is collective, viewed as a blind spot within contemporary consciousness (Gauchet 2003, 353). Reading Gauchet, the theologian Patrice Bergeron concludes that a reconfiguration occurred concerning what belongs to the private and public spheres (Bergeron 2010, 374). "If religions are rehabilitated in the public sphere, it is as a private source of meaning" (Bergeron 2010, 375). The search for meaning is displaced from its collective core, and becomes a burden that is laid upon the shoulders of individuals who struggle to make sense of life "for themselves". Hence, religion becomes a private matter.

Multiple implications arise from this observation. Following Gauchet, Bergeron notes the transformation of the societal relationship to religion itself: this includes both a change in the influence of religion on individuals as well as a change in the way religion itself is shaped by people of faith. Questions of values, meanings and ends, although experienced collectively, must be addressed individually. In this context, the transmission of culture and history loses its collective power to support identity building, because of its perceived extrinsic dimension as opposed to inner experience. Therefore, religious (or Christian) transmission becomes highly difficult. These elements also impact contemporary understandings of humans, who are no longer viewed as being shaped by culture. Again, we are invited to reflect on a myriad of anthropological considerations here.

Bergeron's reading of Gauchet prompts him to raise at least two points that are related to our topic here: the need to revisit and question the status of the *divine* as well as the status of the *world* "without God" – and their impact on present anthropologies. Modernity placed human destiny solely within human hands. The idea of God, while still meaningful, becomes unimaginable, "outside" of our world (Bergeron 2010, 379). These two perspectives mutually reinforce each other. Our solitude leaves no space for an ultimate Other, while God's perceived estrangement from our reality prompts us to take full responsibility for our actions and future. God's works in our world become inconceivable. And we are led to believe that we are solely responsible for our own (personal) destinies.

The pandemic and the way it was managed may have helped us realize the price of – and the pain that comes with – such a unilateral vision.

The individual injured by politics?

Covid-19 forced populations and their governing bodies to recognize their potential power and to acknowledge the limits of their visions, orientations and actions. Yet the scope of influence allotted to spirituality, even when restricted to its individual expression, was not all that clear. It was put to question and debated, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: is spirituality essential, or a luxury? Religious representatives from diverse confessions repeatedly requested that their members be safely allowed to perform the rituals that would comfort their mourning or foster their resilience and hope, in face of adversity. Therefore, the question of our interest here might not strictly be limited to our individual or collective access to spirituality but rather might concern the contribution of a third term in the equation: the impact of political orientations and decisions on the available space wherein spirituality can be expressed and worked out.

Dominique Jacquemin observed, in a conference entitled "Spirituality 'Masked' By Health Standards" held in February 2021, that while communities and societies need common norms to rely on in order to "function", what is accepted as a collective "norm" (sometimes) casts the human aside (Jacquemin 2021). Although it is normally meant to protect the population, the norm, when considered on its own and uniformly applied to all, divorces human experience from the global view of the situation. Quebec counted among a handful of geographical regions to decree the strictest sanitary measures. In the end, we believe that these efforts truly contributed to the saving of lives. But the stress and pressure that they caused stirred a rather strong response from the population, which even laid siege in exasperation after almost two years of this regime.

Imposing a normative space for religion or spirituality to restore their collective function might re-

spond to the first epistemological paradigm we exposed earlier. This politic would recognize a collective need to access realities beyond the material and to acknowledge a deeper dimension of our existence. But it also clearly risks denying individual experiences, hindering discernment processes, and restraining the life-giving (and chaotic) dimension of spirituality.

The unforeseen critical situation caused by the pandemic might have been inevitable. The whole healthcare system was heavily put to the test – and it collapsed in many ways. But Jacquemin's plea is that spirituality should be reintroduced as a *condition* of existence, integrating people's individuality, their history, and their relationality, none of which can be separated from their identity. In a context where sociability was strongly restricted, and where people were deprived of their relationality (being ordered to keep a distance from others), the capability to find significance in daily life becomes impeded, risking a disconnection from our genuine humaneness. The increase in mental and emotional distress as well as the rising number of resignations in the healthcare milieu can attest to this secondary crisis, created by the politics adopted to control the unprecedented viral attack.

What we have seen, in many developed countries, has been the treatment of too many *anonymous* bodies, without any sense of individual stories or identity. Relationality was also deeply transformed as interpersonal contacts became threatening, carrying the risk of contagion. The pandemic might have exacerbated the limits of our contemporary anthropology. Human beings found themselves in peril; God was outside the world; spirituality seemed lost in the masked crowd. A way of "relating together" seemed to be missing. Individuals alone cannot sustain spirituality.

So where did spirituality stand?

Looking back at community and collectivity, where did spirituality stand in it all? Official bearers, as it were, of spirituality were also put to test. Churches and places of worship were closed and religious communities faced an authentic crisis – which sometimes bore fruit, but not always.

Meanwhile, I was surprised to see evidence of spirituality expressing itself in new or more visible ways in three rather unexpected areas of the public sphere: education, arts, and journalism.

During the first months of the confinement, even when facing technological challenges, the demand for online education, courses, seminars, and webinars, rose significantly. Courses or seminars related to spiritual or existential topics, or to ethical and societal issues, usually attended by a few selected participants, attracted hundreds of them. The imposed sudden halt impacted the societal impetus previously enmeshed in its 'business as usual'. When forced to stop in this way, many chose to take the time to reflect, or to learn new perspectives, question, gauge or develop, adapt and transform their ways of action. In a word, and referring to Jacquemin again, through a learning process, many took the road of "interiority". Learning becomes a way to connect and open oneself to the world beyond the self. Therefore, learning turns into a process or a journey, which cultivates a certain transcending of the self, which, in turn, lets spirituality – even if only partially – emerge.

Spirituality finds a spontaneous expression in the arts. Emotions, attitudes, intuitions towards self, others, the world, or what transcends us, find a language through arts, which are often attuned to interiority. The arts can express hope and despair, meaning and absurdity, destruction and creativity, often in conjunction with personal and collective inner dynamics. Although spirituality concerns both joy and suffering and can be both challenging or soothing, I consider its holistic dynamic to lead towards fuller and broader humanness and never its destruction. During the pandemic, while public art venues were cancelled (theaters, museums, and concert halls were all closed), a multitude of artists (many of whom had become unemployed) creatively attempted to bring beauty to the fore and their art served as reminders of care and compassion to our daily lives. It is fascinating to notice that solo concerts "reached out" to us in our homes, connecting us to music and beauty. Photographs and visual arts were shared on social media – perhaps more than usual – accompanied by meditative thoughts or spiritual sayings. These activities, already familiar to many, allowed one person to reach out to vast numbers, sharing their finds with others, and planting seeds of beauty (through images) and care (through shared messages) in many different places. New initiatives also emerged out of the new means of communication that videoconferences allowed for. These means brought new potential to virtual contacts, while also pressing their users to learn (or readopt) new rules of communication. How much I

was then impressed when I discovered collective music made of gathered solos coordinated and then synchronized by competent technicians: the works of many. "Mosaics" of musicians or actors succeeded in breaking the "walls" of isolation – in reality, as well as on screens – to share music or stories[1]. Communities created a virtual simultaneity which allowed artists to pursue the creation of their art and to offer it to many, fostering our hope. Again, spirituality can be recognized here.

Even some journalists and columnists decided to write about much more than objective information: they voiced collective pains and sorrows, critique and opposition; they also revitalized shared values and hope. In doing so they endorsed a social role beyond the mere exhibition of facts or opinions. Rather, they sustained and nourished – through words and ideas – our human capacity to ponder and wonder, reminding us of a sense of community in which we are bound together (however imperfectly) in sorrow and in hope. I identify some of these journalists and columnists as true prophets as they boldly named what needed to be exposed and as they attempted to sustain our courage in the process. Spirituality was also in action here.

So where was spirituality in this time of pandemic in Québec? Religious institutions might have been silenced in many ways. Nevertheless, they remained active and pled politically for the right to collectively express and share spiritualities, hope and faith. At the same time, spontaneous collectivities or even secular organizations freely contributed to the relaying of sustaining means of spirituality to communities that hungered for such human depths. So in the end, where was spirituality? Reflecting on this question, I am somehow relieved to confirm that spirituality was very much present, but certainly not where I was expecting it to be. Then again, is this not the way of God?

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1 See for example: Symphonie confinée. La tendresse. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEjvRktXeis&ab_channel=ValentinVander ; On fait comme si. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csnxBimwfl8&ab_channel=FlorianMARTINET<NeuerAbsatz/>

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Pastoral care and dementia: Reflections on the role of empirical practical theology in counterbalancing constructions of dementia as crisis

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This chapter deals with conceptions of dementia-as-crisis or critical event and corresponding professional discourse and practices in contexts of pastoral and spiritual care. It contrasts these conceptions with insights from an ethnographic research project with people living with dementia that explores worship practices in care-homes. Analyzing 'dementia-as-crisis' and dementia-related discourse and practice in contexts of pastoral care as simultaneous or co-constructing events, it reflects upon dichotomously organized role schemata and enactments which form the foundations of the dementia-as-crisis dispositive. To illustrate its workings the researcher's own entanglement into its 'doings' and 'sayings' is critically engaged with. On this basis, options for alternative conceptions and narratives of people living with dementia in pastoral discourse and practice are considered.

Introduction

Everyday conceptions of dementia picture it as an experience of fundamental crisis, both for individuals and their families, as well as for aging societies at large. Images of frailty and despair, and, above all, a profound loss of self and autonomy abound. Powerful metaphors such as the erased hard drive, the empty shell, or the living dead (Grebe 2015), convey how dementia is perceived in western contexts. Constructions of dementia-as-crisis which must be managed by specialists run deep. They appear in discourse; however, they also get inscribed into artefacts, make themselves felt in body-routines and become manifest through everyday practices; particularly in therapeutic contexts.

Discourse within the realms of pastoral or spiritual care has also taken on these tacitly assumed understandings of dementia as a crisis to be managed. (Kevern 2009, 205; Kunz 2014, 441). Concomitantly, this has been joined by increasing efforts of professionalization in the field. Starting from small beginnings in the late 1990s (see for example VandeCreek 1999 for the Anglo-American context; Depping 1993 for German speaking contexts), new concepts of pastoral or spiritual care for people living with dementia have been developed. Models of best practice have been suggested and have grown in numbers since, which, in turn, have been taken up by Practical Theologians to illustrate what dementia-friendly practice in church and society might look like (Fröchtling 2008; Roy 2013; Schlarb 2015; Linthicum and Hicks 2018; Stuck 2020). Dementia friendliness in church, again, has become an ongoing commitment for communities of practice whose initiatives, in the meanwhile, have become subject to (often concomitant) scientific research (Plunkett and Chen 2016; Epps et al. 2021 and Friedrich et al 2021).

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Yet, what seems to be excluded from the picture is the possibility that underlying constructions of dementia-as-crisis are, in part, also the result of professional discourse and practice which understand themselves as pastoral crisis management. In this chapter I would like to reflect on this by taking up one of the questions raised in the *International Academy of Practical Theology*'s call for papers for the 2021 conference hosted in Leuven: "How can practices of care be considered as answers"—and I would like to specify: as reactions—"to a 'rhetoric of crisis'?"

Putting the question this way allows for a reversal of the common view on things, as it suggests focusing on the fabrication and workings of crisis discourse in contexts of pastoral care. That is: rather than contributing to the routinization of crisis by offering additional models of pastoral intervention which might work well for people living with dementia, framing the question in this way invites thinking which puts the cart before the horse and critically analyses images of dementia-as-crisis that are taken for granted in pastoral discourse and practice. Further, it encourages a closer empirical look at the interplay between people, things, and discourse in the constructions of dementia-as-crisis.

Accordingly, this chapter aims to draw attention to 'crisis' and 'dementia' in contexts of pastoral care. To explore some of their complex relations, I suggest conceptualizing both as events rather than as stable entities. Or, to put it differently: one can be looked upon as being 'done' or brought about by the other. 'Dementia-as-crisis' might be an effect of pastoral care's discourse and practice; and in turn, dementia-related 'pastoral care' might be brought about by doings and sayings which make dementia appear as crisis. That is, the crisis-discourse—or, perhaps, more accurately: dispositive (Foucault 1980 [1977])—can be looked upon as emerging from a series of micro-practices and discursive acts in contexts of pastoral care, while at the same time dementia-related interventions of pastoral care could be understood as resulting from specific manifestations of the 'dementia-as-crisis'-dispositive. Yet, this picture of concomitant construction would not be complete without reflecting on the researcher's own role within these processes, or, more specifically, her entanglement in the processes of co-construction of 'dementia-as-crisis' and dementia-related pastoral or spiritual care. I therefore opt for reflexive ethnographic approaches (Bonz 2016 and Dean 2017) putting the researching me in embodied fieldwork (Ellingson 2017) to get to the bottom of the constructive processes of 'dementia-as-crisis' in contexts of pastoral or spiritual care.

Illustrations of this approach are offered in more detail in section 4 and 5 where I draw on field-experiences and methodological insights from my current ethnographic habilitation project based in Ruhr Universität Bochum, Germany. Over the past three years I have been engaged in a qualitative study of worship practices with people living with dementia in care homes. In this research context I explore the interplay between 'dementia' and 'worship' by asking how they relationally produce each other. The most important data of my study are fieldnotes based on participant observation of worship in two different institutions next to adjoining settings of nursing, social work, and administration. In addition, data includes interviews and more informal field conversations next to documents, artefacts, and images. A particular focus on professional discourse is due to Adele Clarke's Situational Analysis (Clarke et al 2018, 217–268). My approach—which draws heavily on what might be called classic ethnographic fieldwork strategies (Emerson et al. 1995) and (Breidenstein et al. 2013)—is recursive, flexibly adapting to research findings and opportunities as well as the development and refinement of my research questions upon closer acquaintance with the practices of 'the' field (Hammersley 2018).

Through framing my research interest in this way, I hope to gain deeper insights into the assumptions which motivate and guide pastoral care in settings where dementia is thought a factor which makes a difference between people and puts some in the position of caring professionals while others get constituted as those to be cared for. While this approach might translate into acts of increased self-reflexivity on the part of chaplains, critical objections might be raised by those who must live with the implications and consequences of what has been diagnosed as dementia. Does a perspective which focuses on the constructive character of dementia not overlook the fact that it cannot be undone simply by an interpretative act of (re-)framing? Indeed, this would be a charge justly laid at my door if my critique of the tragedy-discourse of dementia was blind to the very substantial transformations of brain and body that people living with progressive dementia must cope with day after day. Dementia, therefore, seems to be approached best as a complex, multidimensional syndrome. It is misunderstood if it is reduced either to mere biomedical explanations or to

cultural construction. Thus, instead of giving preference to reductionistic perspectives on either side, it seems helpful to look upon dementia as a complex socio-material figuration which gets even harder to grasp in sight of other intersecting categories of human differentiation, such as age, gender, or race. Drawing from Disability Studies (e. g., Schillmeier 2010) which try to overcome both naïve biologistic as well as culturalist assumptions, I prefer to look upon these differentiating categories as time-specific socio-material expressions of framing, making, and coping with difference. In short, my thoughts on the constructive dimensions of 'dementia-as-crisis' are not meant to downplay the manifold challenges people deal with in sight of the numerous and multi-layered changes dementia brings upon them and their families. But I would like to make a case for a little more reflexivity. For pausing and opening spaces wherein we might consider the role of pastoral care in the negotiation of dementia.

I first introduce examples of the 'dementia-as-crisis' narrative in the public spheres of politics and pop-culture. (1) This is continued by a consideration of what is achieved by labelling a situation as crisis. One effect is the emergence of expertise—people, organizations, or institutions who take care and work to generate knowledge to cope with the crisis. (2) Following this, I critically reflect upon practice literature circulating practical advice in the orbits of Practical Theology and pastoral/spiritual care. How does it contribute to the fabrication of dementia as a critical event? (3) I contrast the optic it reinforces with insights from my recent ethnographic research project with people living with dementia. (4) I conclude with some considerations on how Empirical Practical Theology might contribute to a culture of de-dramatization. (5)

Conceptions of Dementia as Crisis

Alzheimer's disease and other dementias have become some of the most feared conditions of late life. In 2012, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared dementia a public health priority. In the same year, British Prime Minister David Cameron declared dementia a national crisis demanding "an all-out-fight-back," for it not only "steals lives and tears at the hearts of families", but it also increasingly troubles the country's health care system and upsets its economy (Cameron 2012). Rationales are similar on the other side of the Atlantic: NGOs like UsAgainstAlzheimer's raise large amounts of money to fight "The Alzheimer's Crisis", declaring that "Alzheimer's is not a normal part of aging – it is a devastating disease" which "can be emotionally and financially ruinous for families, caregivers, and society at large." (UsAgainstAlzheimer's 2021)

In western societies, dementia is perceived and publicly addressed as crisis—an assumption which might be spelled out on very different levels: a crisis for the individual, a care crisis (especially behind closed doors), a financial crisis, and, in sight of growing numbers, a global crisis. This view—which is not necessarily shared in other cultural contexts (Ikels 2002; Henderson and Henderson 2002) — goes largely unchallenged. On the contrary, it is supported instead by the media, art, and pop-culture. Amy Macdonald's song *Left that Body Long Ago* or Lisa Genova's novel *Still Alice,* which became a cinema success in 2014, are but a few examples of a growing body of pop-cultural thematizations which tend to stage dementia as a critical event and, furthermore, give flesh to the bone of what seems to make it so critical: stories of alienation and dependency, loss of autonomy, and, what is more, dignity and self. A rather alarming rationale seems to be at work on the backstage of the public 'dementia-as-crisis' discourse which correlates or even identifies autonomy, dignity, and self. Practical Theology, of course, has critically questioned this kind of anthropology (for the British context e. g., Swinton 2012; for the German context e. g., Fröchtling 2008). However, pastoral discourse and practice have not always proved resistant to the lures of the 'dementia-as-crisis' narrative. For, as I would like to argue in the next section, crisis creates expertise. And it creates necessities, which make it easier to hold one's ground in a situation of competitive worldviews and lifestyles.

Narratives of Crisis and Crisis Management

Practical Theology within the German context, and, especially discourse in context of pastoral care, has come to echo this perspective on dementia-as-critical event (Krause 2022; Pilgram-Frühauf 2021). Not in full agreement, of course; the economic rationale can be sharply criticized. However, the strong political urge to keep at bay what seems to be a rising dread in an aging society is rather instantaneously translated into arguments for pastoral action. A new

genre of training literature has emerged showing what can be done to spiritually support people and families coping with dementia. Having started as a side-topic in the 1990s, this literature has expanded rapidly over the last decade and filled meters of bookshelves. This is perhaps because it offers accessible and, what is more, applicable knowledge: knowledge of medical causes, resulting impairments and needs, and, most importantly, very practical ideas for pastoral intervention—ready-made solutions for those who rush into care homes a few hours in the week to offer pastoral care.

What is happening here? Obviously, what is feared as crisis is kept at bay through acts of professionalization which are meant to contain the uncertain and curb the unknown. Talk of 'crisis', as historian Rudolf Schlögl and sociologist Martin Endreß suggest, is a communicative act which gives shape to what is currently still an experience of the indefinite and obscure (Schlögl 2016; Endreß 2014). Crisis becomes a label taken up for lack of a consensual term to name a situation most participants do not yet have sufficient experience of. Talking of crisis or, a bit less pretentious, of critical events, therefore, is an act of constructing reality when routines fail. And it is an act which positions the speaker in relation to what is perceived as crisis to be someone who competently responds to irrefutable necessities. Crisis, in that sense, creates spheres of attention, generates decision makers, and produces positions of power. Those who decide and act in, what is thought to be and addressed as, crisis claim responsibilities while, at the same time, draw boundaries between what is taken to be ordinary routine and its 'other' which seems to be so very different. Framing a situation as crisis, therefore, is giving the world a particular shape and positioning oneself in a specific relationship to it. Narratives of crisis, therefore, do not necessarily say much about the situation itself. Rather, they reveal how it is looked upon and semantically configurated. This, in turn, leads us to look upon 'crisis' as an assessment or evaluation of a situation by observers, which themselves have to be critically observed in respect to the differences they draw and the power-positions they claim.

Discourse in Contexts of Pastoral Care as Perpetuation of Narratives of Crisis?

Against this background, professional discourse on dementia-related pastoral or spiritual care might also be analyzed as bringing about realities with specific effects. And in fact, a discourse-analytical reading sensitive to discursive constructions of binaries, binary-linkages, and the power they convey might well conclude that professional discourse—most particularly in the shape of practical advice on websites, journals, and in guidebooks—has a tendency to produce and reinforce an optic which corresponds in many ways to the cliché of 'dementia-as-crisis'. Paradoxically, this is also the case for authors who work hard to ensure recognition for people living and coping with dementia: "even caring communities can too easily become part of the problem, rather than the solution" (Kevern 2009, 208). Poimenical discourse works from the assumption that "[c]are is a gift from the church to those in need" (Kevern 2009, 206).[1]

The image that the genre of practitioners' literature tends to convey is that dementia makes people 'especially special': especially vulnerable, particularly emotional, in need of affectionate care, and best addressed with the help of multisensory practices speaking to body and senses. Correspondingly, a group of professionals gets configured, able to respond to the needs of the clientele. While this group

1 Kevern deals with this paradox by suggesting a change of perspective: Instead of focusing on what pastoral practice might offer, he reflects upon the gifts people with dementia bring to church. This line of argument is innovative, although it has not been taken up much during the last decade. Research on dementia and dementia-friendly communities in contexts of pastoral / spiritual care rather works from the assumption that to be a person living with dementia is to be in need of the communities' attention and assistance. At the same time Kevern's suggestion does not seem to go far enough. For the gifts, people living with dementia have to offer, mainly consist in being a continual memento of our human condition—an icon of the "uncomfortable truth, that all of us may at some time become disabled, impaired or different in our abilities, because this is simply human finitude" (Kevern 2009, 216). More recently, cultural anthropologist Harm-Peer Zimmermann has offered a cultural studies perspective on 'care' (Zimmermann 2019) which suggests to include self-care into the picture which makes for a more symmetrical conception of agency in light of dementia. People living with dementia in this light are seen as "capable of acting creatively and responsibly" (Zimmermann 2019, 24). This optic has been adopted by Franziska Pilgram-Frühauf (2021) who has been analyzing literature and training material in contexts of pastoral care with conclusions similar to my own (Krause 2022).

takes on an active role, offering stimulation and support, people living with dementia are pushed into the role of the receiving party. Agency, ability, and initiative are placed on one side, disability, vulnerability, and dependency on the other.

Complementing the binary roles are constructions of dementia as something which seems to dominate the whole personality. Practical advice on how to manage a situation so completely different from what one might expect in the parish does not leave much room for individuality. On the contrary, it appears to absorb everything which makes people special (apart from dementia) and pushes it into the background. Curiosity for other people turns into a therapeutic project. Telling one's story is primarily aimed at helping to stay connected to what might have been the former self and, so to speak, as a prophylaxis for a time, when communication is possible 'only' the long way round—by addressing body, senses, and emotions. People living with dementia thereby get positioned as primarily recieving (*patiens*); as particularly emotional (some)bodies in need of stimulation and activation, meant to work against the tailing off of their physical and intellectual abilities and to ensure as much of their autonomy for as long as possible. Professionals, conversely, are positioned as active and competent experts (*agens*) who take the initiative, rationally working upon the grounds of scientific knowledge to find innovative ways of managing the critical fact that these people are about to make a transition into what seems to be a state of getting lost into themselves.

Perfect materializations of this dichotomous construction (and essentialization) of the *agens* and *patiens* binary are giveaways. Made for the purpose of giving people something to hold on to, these objects are handed out as something to hold and touch which addresses people emotionally rather than intellectually as it is laden with memories and sensory experiences (Plieth 2012). Widely made use of in contexts of worship this object conveys a whole range of images of dementia and, what is more, turns them into graspable realities furnished with the evidence of what has become factual.

Irritating Field Experiences

But do these binary conceptions, working within the 'dementia-as-crisis' dispositive, match with field experience? Insights from my current ethnographic research project with people living with dementia in residential homes suggest a much more nuanced story. The backbone of the 'dementia-as-crisis' dispositive with its clear distribution of agency and vulnerability, rationality and emotionality, autonomy and dependency seems to take on a life of its own in the worlds of pastoral discourse. For what to make of Peter (names in the following are pseudonyms) who declared after having been offered anointing that he did not want to get a sticky mark on his forehead? Or Ludwig, urging the chatterbox next to him to shut up and collect herself for church service? And how to reconcile taken for granted assumptions of dementia with Elisabeth who angrily declared after a sermon on Ps 23 during which she was asked to hold tight to a rag of sheepskin that she did not come to be treated like an imbecile but expected to take something home from church worth thinking about? And how does the pastor who got into a muddle and forgot the words of the creed, fit into this picture? What to make of Martha, who took over and began to lead the congregation in a very clear and reassuring manner?

Completely immersed in professional discourse it took me a long time to realize that what I had to focus on were not what professionals assumed to be crucial needs of people living with dementia, but to do fieldwork on the socio-material processes, whereby dementia is 'done', staged, and maintained—in line with associated binaries and binary-linkages. Or, to put it differently: other than focusing on dis/abilities of people which seem to make all the difference, I would attend to practices of difference-making which give rise to asymmetrical positions such as the giving and the receiving, the disabled and its 'normal' other, the vulnerable and its counterpart construction of active, planning individuals. I had to realize that what distinguishes people and puts them into what seems to be a critical situation, is not only an assessment carried out by competent professionals, but a rather messy complex of socio-material activities and micro-practices which include a variety of participants such as skilled bodies, artefacts (like wheelchairs, altar-pieces or food), discourse, but also species like viruses and germs next to fluids, sounds, light and smells which contribute to positionings of the giving or receiving, the active or responding, of agency, and vulnerability.

To illustrate how these positionings get constructed and maintained let us, in an exemplary way, look at the micro-practices of smiling. In a dementia-ward one meets with a variety of smiles,

some of them enacting delight, surprise, or the pleasant feeling of taking part in something good. Also there are polite smiles, exchanged conventionally between professionals and so-called 'residents' in contexts of (rather frequent) greeting. However, there are also smiles which form alliances among those who know better, i. e., the social worker and her chaplain colleague. Beyond that, smiling can be a genuine effort to save face (Goffman 1967) and to preserve the dignity of a so-called 'resident' faced with lapses of self-control. Smiling, then, is a strategy to tactfully repair the awkwardness a wet seat of trousers has caused for the chaplain, who accidentally sat on an incontinent 'resident's' chair. And finally, there are those unsettling, strenuous looking professional smiles which, reminding us of Arlie Hochschild's concept of emotion work (Hochschild 2012), aim to create an atmosphere of assurance and acceptability in a situation which seems to be on the brink of turning into its opposite—smiles to manage not only what seems to be precarious, fragile, and constantly at risk but maybe also one's own fear of getting unsettled by the un-manageable.

Instead of a Conclusion: Analytical Optics Contributing to a More Balanced Perspective

In the previous sections I reflected upon constructions of dementia-as-crisis in both popular discourse and pastoral practice, asking how it is that pastoral care attends to them and what this might imply for power relations in professional practice. I have argued that picturing dementia as crisis brings about positionings of expertise—professional cultures of knowledge and practice who care and take care. I then moved to consider the often contradictory asymmetrical implications of the 'dementia-as-crisis' dispositive which positions some as caring and 'others' as cared for. My observations were initiated by irritating field experiences which forced me to change my point of view. From the outset I imagined my study as offering overdue empirical evidence to what seemed to be proven, if not best practice. But this is where I ran into difficulties. The work proved more challenging than I had expected. Research partners acted contrary to what seemed to be authoritative textbook knowledge. They were also critical towards pastoral intervention which seemed to enact the kind of dominance of those who know better. This forced me to think again of what I was about. I was pushed to attend to the rather messy and intricate processes which result in the positions of the professional and the so-called 'resident'. Due to an ethnographic research design which emphasizes self-reflectivity, I began to see the need to take a different route. Data pointed towards exploring the possibilities that accrue in moving dementia away from being a critical event to be managed. In the sequel I instead followed the complex ramifications of discourse and practice which seem to build into constructions of 'dementia-as-crisis'.

But how to conclude? There is no conclusive outcome here. At best, critical questions have been raised. In closing, therefore, I turn to my ongoing research activity, which, I hope, might contribute to telling a more nuanced story. For I do not intend to come up with another theory of 'dementia' or, concomitantly, dementia-friendly-practice in church. Rather, I would like to offer analytical ideas which aim at liquefying the asymmetric assumptions implied in the dementia-as-crisis-dispositive taken for granted in contexts of professional pastoral practice. My suggestion, in short, is to empirically dis-assemble and re-assemble the assemblages and networks of discourse and practice which seem to be at work and, more especially, to look for the obvious in rather unobvious and miniscule practices that give occasion to positions of dis/ability, agency, and vulnerability.

Instead of summarizing results, therefore, I go on raising (self-critical) questions. At this juncture, it seems to be the only way to address the fixations of the 'dementia-as-crisis' dispositive. The first to address is the question of one's own site or position. If it is true that constructions of 'dementia-as-crisis' make themselves felt and real, even through inconspicuous acts such as smiling—over which, it seems, we don't have much control—what hope is there to foster a culture of de-dramatization, if not de-essentialization? One cannot change one's cultural matrix nor can one escape its hold easily—neither as researcher nor as chaplain.

However, and this is my first suggestion, practical theology might develop a sense for divergent cases and stories where dementia does not seem to make much of a difference; or at least not such an overwhelming one (Ikels 2002). Stories, like I found in my data, where dementia is not hidden and managed as stigma, but offensively brought into play and even gambled with. Practical theology also might listen more attentively to the narratives of people living with dementia who take the view that it comes

along not only with losses but also with gains (Josuttis 2016, 121–132). This interest in counter-narratives, of course, is not meant to talk down the actual and very substantial challenges people living with dementia, together with those who stand by their sides trying to smooth the transition, confront. On the contrary—it is driven by a deep conviction that occasional changes of perspective might help to ease the way. Which is—this my second analytical suggestion—why I currently put much work into reflecting and decentering my own position and point of view as a researcher by asking self-critical questions: what implicit conceptions of 'dementia' and of 'worship' seem to have inscribed themselves into my data? Which institutional perspectives and discourse seem to determine my perception of things? How is this way of looking transferred and counter-transferred during research encounters? In what ways does my optic change during field-socialization? And, above all, how does my research impact me as a person? In what ways have I changed through my involvement into those various processes of concomitant becoming, reflection and counter-reflection?

This leads me to a third analytical strategy, which is trying to look over my own shoulder as if this ethnographer was a stranger to me to find out about her entanglements into the doings and un-doings of 'dementia-as-crisis'. Why, for example, does she feel the urge to save the situation when the pastor drew a blank and so-called 'residents' begin to moan, murmur, and shout against each other? Is she afraid that something (what exactly?) might atmospherically 'spill over'? If that is the case, where does her fear stem from? Has she finally also incorporated this rather peculiar professional gaze, which scans people's feet and facial expression at first to assess whether trouble might be expected which, in turn, must be managed? And why is she so obsessed with different kinds of rolling walkers and wheelchairs in her data? Obviously, people get depicted and categorized according to the technical support devices they are using. But why then does she call those sitting in enormous mobile recliner chairs 'the silent ones'? Does she look upon them as humans with technical devices or have they become machines to her with human proportions? And what do these binaries which seem to form her optic on different stages of 'cyborgisation' tell us about attributions of dis/ability, agency, and human dignity?

Cumbersome as this kind of data analysis might seem, it is my hope that by focusing (auto-)ethnographically on what seems to be taken for granted by the ethnographer herself and maintained in personal interaction, new leeway might be opened for alternative conceptions and narratives of people living with dementia in pastoral discourse and practice. This approach sets seemingly immovable essentializations of dementia into motion by telling a story of distributed agency. It shifts the focus from individuals to events brought to pass by humans and non-humans which relate within complex and ramified assemblages. Telling this story, of course, might turn out to be uncomfortable because narratives of distributed agency cannot easily be translated into applicable models of best practice. Rather than reducing complexity, this kind of empirical work tends to increase it. But I believe pastoral discourse and practice within the adaptive model is ready to cope with a bit more complexity, which, of course, might shake established professional routines of crisis at first and maybe even cause a crisis of expertise here and there. Much however, might be gained for this kind of self-reflexivity and could foster liberating experiences in practice not only for people living with dementia, but for all who care.

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Children, religious practices, and spirituality in the post-war context of Sri Lanka

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Sri Lanka is a multi-religious country. The expression of patriotism knowingly or unknowingly disturbs the diversity of ethnicity due to its disturbing social setup in Sri Lanka (Jeyaseelan 2018, 83). The previous study shows that Buddhist faith encourages the faith development of children, and thus, it also increases the resiliency of children to face the challenges (Fernando and Ferrari 2011, 52–56). This chapter examines an empirical study on how the children of Sri Lanka express their spirituality in connection with their faith practices. A sample of 50 young children aged 12–14 years old, both war-affected and non-war-affected children in the post-war context of Sri Lanka, who practice the major religions, were interviewed. How the Sri Lankan children have hoped and persevered in their spiritual experiences during the war is analyzed in this research. In this context, the question is, how do the children give voice to their faith community experience in the post-war context of Sri Lanka? My research aims to find out how the spirituality and faith communities of war-affected children and non-war-affected children shape their own lives and the lives of the citizens of the country and the whole world. This chapter synthesizes the detailed role of the faith communities over the children, concerning their spiritual uplifting along with the lay theological foundation.

Keywords: Children, faith communities, spirituality, resilience, Sri Lanka

Introduction

Sri Lanka, situated in South Asia, is an island country in the Indian Ocean with a population of 21.8 million people, the majority of whom are Sinhala-Buddhists. The minorities are Christians, Hindus, and Muslims (Central Bank of Sri Lanka 2020, 1). Sri Lanka has an ethnoreligious mixed community, which means that religious and ethnic identities usually intertwine and must be considered together (Gunatilleke 2018, 360). Though religions support people to develop their spirituality, at times, religion has been the main venue for the war and conflicts throughout the history of Sri Lanka (Fernando 1998, 87–89). Unfortunately, Sri Lankan children also live in the same multicultural and multi-religious context that forms a variety of family structures and economic backgrounds where they are war, non-war or less-war-affected. This chapter analyses how children's faith experiences help them increase their power of resilience amidst their daily life circumstances.

Spirituality and resilience

The word 'spirituality' is often discussed in the academic world as well as in the daily lives of people. Until a few decades ago, spirituality was often defined as being opposed to material things or worldli-

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ness and being attached to 'higher' 'spiritual' things (Brown 1993, 2990; Simon and Schuster 1983, 1751). Spirituality also was often associated with prayer and devotional practices in religious traditions. However, people's perception of the concept of 'spirituality' in contemporary times has significantly changed. Though spirituality includes sacred practices it goes beyond the scope of religions (Haight 2016,144). This expansion of the understanding of spirituality develops beyond the prescribed day-to-day religious practices and now incorporates one's values and meaningful experiences (Hay and Nye 2006, 21–22). Other authors develop the idea of spirituality as a human capacity that helps to search for the meaning of life (Mata 2015, 18) or as a person's relationship (connectedness) with Oneself, Others, World/Nature, and the Transcendent/God (Hyde 2008, 43; Fisher 1999, 30–31). However, not all human beings believe in a form of supernatural power or practice religions or have faith in the divine existence. Therefore, there is also a secular understanding of spirituality, referring to the consciousness of a person, which helps them to realize their ego. This realization of persons' ego leads them to come out from it and relate to others (Hyde 2008, 43). Various authors agree that all human persons, including children, have a spiritual dimension (Nye 2009, 6; Champagne 2003, 44). Therefore, it is necessary to appreciate children's spirituality positively and help children to strengthen their spirituality (Miller-McLemore 2003,148–150).

Different viewpoints seem to reveal an understanding that spirituality does not have a unique definition, and so far, there is no one particular description of spirituality. Thus, the various authors' convictions show spirituality to be a subjective experience instead of an objective definition.

Authors describe resilience as one of the human capacities that support human persons to adapt to life challenges that threaten a persons' daily activities (Masten 2014, 6). Resilience also means overcoming pain when someone faces violence or goes through traumatic experiences (Fernando and Ferrari 2011, 52–77; Halstead and Affouneh 2006, 199–215). Children show resiliency amidst various life challenges and, despite experiencing hardship and stress, children can proceed by relying on it (Aisenberg and Herrenkohl 2008, 303). However, not all children can discover the resilient power in them. Therefore, their family and society need to have responsive support for their development of resilience (Clinton 2008, 213–222).

Spirituality in terms of connectedness might increase the resiliency of the child. In a particular way, spirituality that fosters resilience would contribute to children's resiliency to have a positive attitude even amidst pain and losses (De Souza 2006, 165–175). Having discussed spirituality and resilience, we now proceed to the aforementioned research that analyses the spirituality and resilience of Sri Lankan children.

Previous research

In the context of Sri Lanka, Chandi Fernando, a psychologist with the Toronto Catholic District School Board, and Michel Ferrari, professor at the Department of Applied Psychology and Human Development, University of Toronto, Canada, studied 62 children [5–18 years old] and 15 caregivers in the context of ethnic war in 2002. Their focus was on comparing the spirituality and resilience of war and non-war orphans from Buddhist and Christian orphanages with a group of children from non-war affected families. These war-affected children were in the Northern part of Sri Lanka, and they were later on taken to orphanages in the Western part of Sri Lanka (Colombo). Almost all of the 62 children [boys and girls] were Sinhala Buddhists, except for two who were Christians. These interviews took place mainly in two districts, namely the Colombo district from the Western Province and the Kandy district from the Central Province of Sri Lanka. This research was done to know by what means faith development substitutes for resiliency in war-affected children in the post-war context of Sri Lanka (Fernando and Ferrari 2011, 52–56).

The researchers used sand tray construction, narrating a story, and completing the sentence methods to engage with children. Children used stand tray construction materials to recreate a scene that had happened in their life, and were later allowed to narrate their stories. Secondly, children were given incomplete sentences, for example: "My father is…," (58), and they were to complete it as they wished. These activities measured the emotional and social behaviors of children. Some children participated in both activities, while others participated only in one.

According to Fernando and Ferrari, it is the Buddhist faith that encourages the faith development and resiliency of Buddhist children to face challenges. They specifically emphasized that Bud-

dhist faith practices lead to solidarity, and it helps them to love one another. By implanting human values, the faith practices help children experience interconnection with each other. In this study, they compared the Christian non-war affected children, and those children also emphasize resiliency as the strength to face their daily challenges (70–72). Thus, it was resiliency that was common in both groups. Fernando and Ferrari concluded that "Resilient orphans identified Buddhist and Christian practices used to promote their faith, personal well-being, and sense of belonging" (52). They highlighted that, contrary to previous studies, most orphans demonstrated inner peace and resilience even after having been exposed to war and other life circumstances. I will further explore their research in comparison to the current research in the discussion section.

While I appreciate the bold effort of Fernando and Ferrari for their work, my question is, what about the Tamil children who went through the same war experiences until the last phase of the war? And how would Hindu, Muslim, and Christian faiths also help the resiliency of children? This research was done in the year 2002 nearly 20 years ago, and we do not know how Sri Lankan children experience resilience and peace in the current context. This new study intends to understand how Sri Lankan children who belong to four faith communities share their spiritual experiences and how it has helped them to increase their resiliency. This research also tries to find out whether their faith in supernatural power becomes a hindrance in their life circumstances.

Current study

It is a qualitative empirical *Interpretative phenomenological* analysis (IPA) study that examines how the children of Sri Lanka express their spirituality. Voluntarily 50 Sri Lankan Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian children [12–14 years old, 23 girls and 27 boys] took part in the research. Participants included Tamil and Sinhala war-affected and non-war-affected children. The number of participants enrolled in the study is as follows:

25 war-affected children (This group consists of 7 Hindu, 6 Buddhist, 6 Christian, and 6 Muslim children.)

25 non-war-affected children (This group includes 7 Buddhist, 6 Christian, 6 Hindu, and 6 Muslim children.)

Settings

This research took place in several parts of Sri Lanka. The children whom the researcher interviewed were from nine of the 25 districts and six of the 9 provinces. These are the Northern, North-Western, Western, Eastern, Uva, and Central provinces of Sri Lanka. According to the Department of Census, Sri Lanka, in 2017, 98 percent of children attend school.[1] Therefore the researcher selected schools as a central place for interviewing children. Though the researcher received permission to do the interviews from 8 different schools, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she could only visit 6 schools. Interviews took place in six schools [3 Catholic, 2 Muslim, and 1 Hindu] and two children's care homes. Tamil Catholic school had Catholic and Hindu children, while two Sinhala Catholic schools had Christian, Buddhists, and Muslim children. Both the Muslim schools also had a mixed group of Muslim and Christian children. The Hindu school had a mixture of Hindu and Christian children. The first care home is situated in the Vavuniya district, and it has both Hindu and Christian war-affected children from different villages of Northern province. It has children from only Tamil communities. Children from these homes faced the war when they were very young and lost some family members. The second care home is in the Colombo district, and it also has children from both Tamil and Sinhala communities in many rural areas of Sri Lanka. They have mainly come to this home because of poverty.

Data collection

The researcher gathered qualitative data from the participants by doing interviews after receiving ethical approval. These interviews took place between 15th October 2020 and 15th February 2021 in different places of Sri Lanka. Each interview lasted about 30–45 minutes. The researcher collected the data with the consent of the children and their parents/guardians. She contacted interviewees individually and asked open-ended questions, which children were free to answer. She transcribed the interviews, and with the help of the qualitative data

1 Department of Census and Statistics Sri Lanka. (2017). https://www.parliament.lk/uploads/documents/paperspresented/performance-report-department-of-census-and-statistics-2017.pdf. [accessed March 25, 2021].

analysis software, NVivo12, she added codes to the data. Names of the participants and personal information are anonymized. The researcher identifies children with a nickname in the discussion section.

Results

Although each participant was presented with 17 questions, I only discuss three main questions in this chapter. The discussed questions are as follows.

1. Is your family involved in spiritual practice? How do you practice it?
2. In what ways will spirituality help you to live in harmony with others in the post-war context of your country?
3. Can you tell me how do you experience God or divine existence differently now than before you faced war or other circumstances? And does your faith experience remain the same, or is it changed/different?

Children also got the opportunity to draw a picture to express how their spirituality leads towards a peaceful nation. Many children painted pictures that included all four religions. Most of the children drew temples, church, and a mosque, while other children painted a representative of each religion or symbol of denominations. Some of them also drew a picture of Sri Lanka and a dove as a symbol of peace. A few children also drew a school or a playground in which children gather as one family. When the researcher asked about their drawings, most of them replied that if these four religions work together respecting their cultures and religious practices, there will be peace in the nation.

Spiritual practices of Sri Lankan children

The researcher interviewed 13 Buddhist children (6 war-affected and 7 non-war-affected). Those war-affected children are children of army or navy forces who fought during the war. All 13 of them go to the temple to worship and learn about their religion. When these children shared about their spiritual practices towards a peaceful living, there were various opinions. Many of them directly said that Sri Lankans have to live in peace and unity. Most of the children shared that we have to respect everyone and every religion. They also highlighted that they had faced a terrible war, and therefore they wished to have no more war in the future. There were also other points such as respecting the way of talking, helping each other, and listening to others' ideas. Many of them positively answered that their spirituality helps them live in unity, while it also encourages them to be patient and avoid unnecessary disturbances.

There were 12 Christian children (6 war-affected and 6 non-war-affected) in the group. Among them, 11 were Roman Catholic and one Non-RC child. They were from both Sinhala and Tamil communities. Like the Buddhist children, these Christians also integrated many religious practices when they shared their daily practices. Their daily spiritual practices are loving everyone, reading the Holy Bible, attending daily mass, praying, helping others, and living in unity. When it comes to whether spirituality helps them tolerate others or not, most of the children positively replied that it helps them in many ways to tolerate others. They also said that it helps them love and respect each other, and at the same time, by being patient with others, they try to live peacefully. Many of the war-affected children firmly mentioned that they do not want war. Both war-affected and non-war affected children highlighted that living as children of one motherland, accepting and respecting everyone, respecting other ethnic groups, and living without partiality would lead Sri Lankans to build up a peaceful country. Children were also aware that spirituality leads them towards a peaceful nation, and their replies also have more positive views about it.

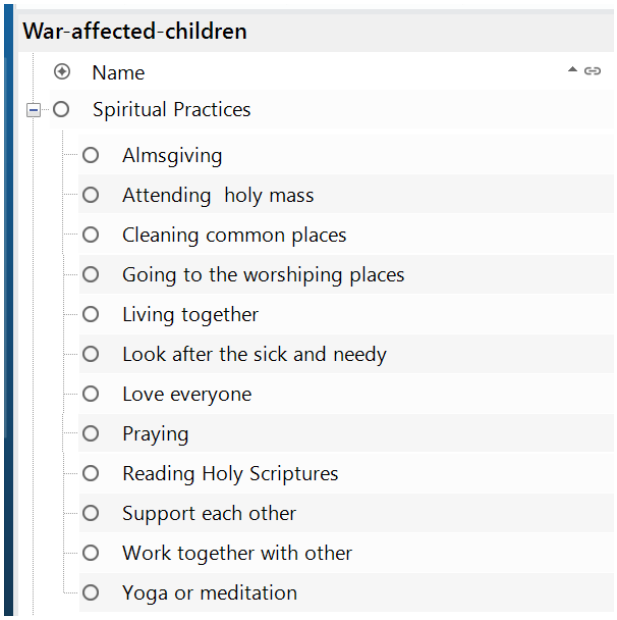
Among the 13 Hindu children (7 war-affected and 6 non-war-affected) interviewed, there were different spiritual practices: helping and supporting others, going to the temple, and fasting and praying, living together with others, cleaning common places such as temples and schools, sharing with others. Like Buddhist and Christian children, all the Hindu war-affected children also said that their spirituality motivates them to live in peace. Children shared that their spirituality helps them to live together with others from different religions. Most of the time, these children grow and study with Tamil Christian or Muslim children. Like Buddhist and Christian children, Hindu children also plead to avoid fighting among religious or ethnic groups. They also underline, that loving others, living in peace and unity, sharing with others, and being in solidarity with others are actions that support children's spirituality. Hindu children also emphasized that respecting other religions, being patient, and

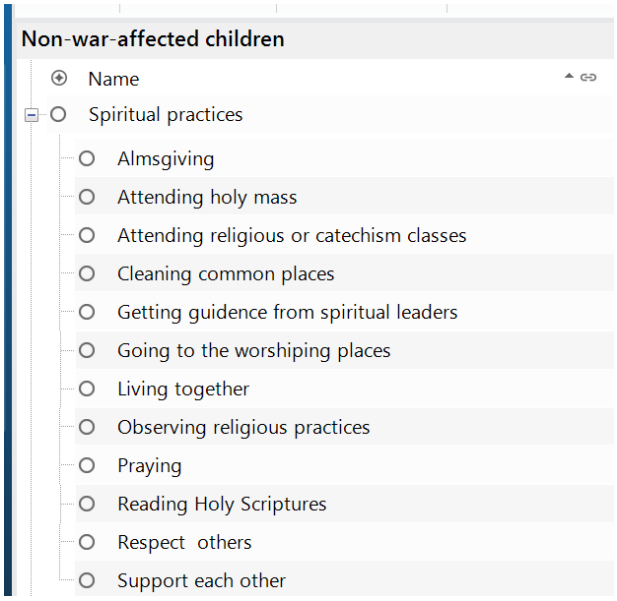
accepting and respecting each other, would encourage every Sri Lankan to have one united nation.

All of the 12 Muslim children (6 war-affected and 6 non-war affected) in this study speak Tamil as their mother tongue. These Muslim children's spirituality is, like the others, also mixed with their religious practices. Most of them refer to going to the mosque, praying five times, and studying the Holy Quran as part of their spiritual practices. Like others, they also mentioned that if Sri Lankans need peace in the country, they all have to live in peace and harmony. They also suggested that Sri Lankans have to learn to respect everyone and all the religions that exist.

Both war-affected and non-war-affected children shared various daily spiritual practices. It is interesting to note. There was a mixture of both religious and spiritual involvement when they shared their daily practices. That shows the engagement of the faith communities of the Sri Lankan children in which they live and grow. Both war-affected and non-war-affected children expressed *living together or learning to work together with others* as one of their spiritual practices. Their responses also give an overview that, even after facing the terrible war and other life circumstances, Sri Lankan children continue to have spiritual practices among their faith communities and with others in the country. There were many different views when children connected their spirituality with peace in the post-war context of Sri Lanka. Most of the children directly expressed that they need to live in peace and harmony and requested to respect everyone's religions, ethnicity, and languages. Children emphasized that Sri Lankans need to learn about the other religions and languages that are practiced and spoken in the country and learn to live as children of one Motherland.

The following two diagrams visually illustrate the spiritual practices of Sri Lankan children.





Faith and resilience of Sri Lankan children

All 50 children were asked how they experience the presence of the divine power in their daily life. Except one non-war -affected child, 49 of the 50 children replied to the question. Five war-affected children openly said that during the war, they felt the absence of divine power. Another 45 of them experienced the divine presence during the war, and they continue to hope that the supernatural power will protect them. However, children who were not aware of divine presence during war highlighted that at present, their faith in transcendence is increasing, and they agree their faith is deepened more than before. For example, Jevathy, one of the

War-affected children	Non-war-affected children
"Lord Siva protected us during the war. Though it was hard to face, we are still alive and living. My faith has increased." Aravind- A Hindu boy	"All are living together after the war. Lord Siva has been continuously protecting us and providing us what we need. My faith remains the same." Kamala- A Hindu girl
"It was rather difficult to face the terrible war. Sometimes, I felt that God is far away from me. But now I experience God's presence as my mother. I feel that my faith is also increasing." Logashwary- A Christian girl	"God encourages me to face any problem in my life. He supports my family and me. My faith remains the same." Hiran- A Christian boy
"During the war, we were displaced. When we had troubles, Allah protected us. Whenever we face difficulties, we pray to Allah." Jasmina- A Muslim girl	"When we have problems, we ask Allah to assist us. He indeed provides us and helps us to face the daily challenges." Fakir- A Muslim boy
"When I think about the war, I am still afraid to talk about it, but now it has changed. Even though many died during the war, my father was saved. My faith has increased now." Rukshi- A Buddhist boy	"Lord Buddha helps us in all our needs, and I experience the power of his presence in my daily life. My faith has increased." Eshan- A Buddhist boy

Table-01: Faith and Resilience

war-affected children states that "My father died during war at that time I felt that God has abandoned us. My faith has changed now, and I experience God's help." Their faith in a higher power encourages them to face their daily struggles of life. What is to be specified is that children from all four religious communities experience the presence of Buddha/Allah/Siva/God in their daily activities. Table one shows some the replies of children.

Discussion

Fernando and Ferrari discovered that children in war situations spoke more about risks. In the sand tray activity, stories of children with both parents and non-war orphans were not problematic. However the war-affected children's stories were colored with the loss of their dear ones, fighting, displacement, desertion, and poverty which demand clinical support of war-affected children. Fernando and Ferrari highlighted that war-affected orphans expressed their abilities to face challenges even amidst war despite being confronted with life circumstances, in contrast to the children who had their parents experienced fewer difficulties, for example, poverty (64).

My findings are consistent with those of Fernando and Ferrari. Even in the post-war context of Sri Lanka, war-affected children are more confronted with life circumstances than non-war-affected children. They still mourn for the loss of their parents and dear ones, some are still afraid to think about their past experiences. Children are aware that due to the war they were displaced, became weak in their studies. Many Sinhala and Tamil war-affected children expressed that though they were very young during the war, they could remember how they underwent struggles. At the same time, non-war affected children, apart from facing few a natural disasters and poor economic problems at home, narrated non-problematic experiences of their daily life. Nevertheless, comparing with the war-affected children, non-war affected children showed fewer life challenges, except for a few natural disasters (floods) and poverty.

Fernando and Ferrari emphasized that Buddhist monks, caregivers, teachers, and other volunteers supported the vulnerable children in increasing their resiliency. They noticed that war orphans took caregivers as their parents and other fellow orphans as their siblings while such behaviors were not noticed in other children who had their parents. The non-war affected children appreciate the help of

caregivers while preferring their parents. The war-affected orphans, on the other hand, experienced parental care and support from caregivers. According to them, this interconnection between caregivers and children reduces the feeling of insecurity. They also emphasized that the caregivers not only supported these children but their families as well. Since children were at children's care homes, their parents did not need to spend a lot of money on them. The caregivers also arranged visits to their families during school holidays and provided all the necessities. Fernando and Ferrari highlighted that providing children a proper education, care, and religious activities cultivate resilience in children (60).

The results of Fernando and Ferrari are also noticeable in the current research. Many war-affected children expressed that sometimes they call religious sisters as mothers. The interviewed war-affected children who lost both parents expressed that they relate to their caregivers (religious sisters) as they would relate to their parents. At the same time, children who have parents or single parents did not speak about a deeper relationship with the religious sisters, preferring to talk to their parents through phone calls and visit them during school vacation. The children who do not have anyone remain with sisters even during holidays. Most of the children in the children's homes shared that their caregivers support their families, and it helps them not worry about their families. Children expressed that the sisters provide them with all the necessities, including proper education and psychological support. Even the Hindu children underlined that they do not see any partiality in the caregivers. They take care of both Christian and Hindu children in the same way. Sisters allow them to participate in Hindu religious activities and take them to the temple, just as they take the Catholic children to the church. This kind of care encourages them to grow positively in the mixed group. Like those children in the study by Fernando and Ferrari, children in the current study also underlined that the support of their caregivers is an added strength for them to face the daily challenges. However, I wonder whether they talked positively about sisters because I am also a religious sister, or would they also have given the same answers to laypersons?

Most of the children in the study of Fernando and Ferrari are Buddhist, and there are only two Christians. Therefore, they mainly spoke about how the Buddhist faith nurtures the faith development of children. They emphasized that Buddhist practices do not stop with faith activities, but also lead children to be benevolent towards the other. Buddhist practices support children to have many moral values such as caring, accepting, empowering, and a sense of belonging. They underlined that Buddhist faith practices stimulate resiliency in the lives of Sri Lankan children. Firstly, it helps children to accept and overcome their traumatic experiences, while it also motivates them to restructure their cognitive system. Secondly, Buddhist faith practices, through its rituals, interconnect children with a larger community in which they live and grow. They mentioned that Buddhist rituals support children to accept their life experiences (70).

In the current study, Buddhist children often expressed their traditions and rituals. They are also aware that the teaching of Buddha supports them to have a moral and truthful life. As that of Buddhist children, Hindu, Muslim, and Christian children also underlined the importance of daily spiritual practices. They explained how their faith in the transcendent has helped them to believe that they were protected during the war. They also realize that the power of divine presence continuously protects them. Few war-affected children highlighted that during the war, they doubted whether the supernatural power abandoned them. However, when children explained their faith, they highlighted that they are now aware that even after losing many things during the war, they are still alive because of the supernatural power. Thus, like the findings of Fernando and Ferrari, these children expressed as well that one of the main reasons they can face trials of war is their faith in supernatural power. These children also mentioned that their religions teach them to live in peace and harmony with others.

According to the findings of the interviews, many children are capable of facing challenges through spirituality, which strengthens their resilience and faith in transcendence. However, children are aware that they have not yet fully recovered or overcome the loss of their parents, as well as other war or difficult experiences. In this context, parents, teachers, religious leaders, and other caregivers have to be more responsible for children. Sri Lankan children face many physical and mental disorders due to war and other life challenges, and there are only a limited number of child counselors in Sri Lanka (Chandradasa and Champika 2018,1). The lack of counselors demands training more people who can counsel and support them to overcome and heal

those past wounds and memories. These children might have many life stories to tell, and they need someone who would listen to them and help them recover from their painful experiences. Therefore, they need pastoral counseling to heal them from their past traumatic experiences.

Differences between previous research and the current study

While the former study took place during the war, and interviewed a majority of Sinhala Buddhists and few Sinhala Christians, this present research is done in the post-war context and includes children belonging to all four religions as well as children from Tamil communities. Fernando and Ferrari established that Sinhala Buddhist/Christian children have potential resiliency to face challenges while they longed to have parental love, support, good education, and security, etc. This study extends the scope of resiliency to children of other religions and ethnic groups and demonstrates that, on top of basic needs, they also speak about lasting peace. Both war-affected children and also non-war affected children have the intention of making a cohesive nation. They underline that all religions teach mutual respect, love, support, and, above all, peaceful co-existence. Thus, while confirming the results of Fernando and Ferrari, this study adds more detail about Sri Lankan children and their resiliency in different ethnic and faith communities. In sum, a child's spiritual development takes place amidst the religious, cultural, economic, and political environment in which a child lives.

Limitations

That this study is carried out only in six districts of Sri Lanka with a small sample of 50 participants, the results of this research cannot be generalized. These are one moment interviews. Future studies conducted with other children in Sri Lanka can validate the current findings. The researcher is a religious sister, and although she built trust with children, they might have shared only limited information due to personal discomfort.

Conclusion

The results of Fernando and Ferrari and the current study show that war-affected children in Sri Lanka are more likely to face many life challenges than non-war-affected children. However, despite these differences, both groups show a certain resilience. Faith in transcendence might help children to face challenges. Support of parents, relatives, teachers, and religious leaders encourages their spiritual development. Spirituality can strengthen them to have a positive attitude even amidst pain and losses. According to the responses of the children interviewed, spirituality continues to contribute to peacebuilding, empowering the relational dimension of human beings as children of the same God or transcendence and stimulating human ethical responsibility to care for each other. There are a lot of social and religious issues among religious communities in Sri Lanka. Children long for collaborative faith communities in the post-war context of Sri Lanka. They long for a harmonious livelihood amidst various ethical, cultural, and religious challenges. Spirituality and resilience of Sri Lankan children can become a means to overcome their traumatic experience of war and other life challenges, and it will encourage peaceful living. Hence, it is necessary to support their spiritual well-being and assist them in their resilience.

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Managing crises: Embracing risks to enable fullness of life

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The pandemic of Covid-19 aroused varied responses in India. While some people shut themselves off out of intense fear, a few brave people along with some organizations and communities risked their lives to offer material and spiritual assistance to those in need. ***Uddhar Vikas Sanstha***, a development and humanitarian non-government organization of the ***Religious of Jesus and Mary***, Pune province, mobilized their staff of different faiths to think of creative and relevant strategies to reach out to the people at the margins. Going door to door masked and taking all the necessary precautions of social distancing and sanitization they visited the families in the slums, carried out surveys, empathized with the people, offered them necessary provisions, and involved them in their own upliftment through training and income-generation activities. This relates well with the prophetic response of Mary of Nazareth who rose to address the crisis at Cana. Reflecting on Mary of Nazareth and ***Uddhar Vikas Sanstha,*** this chapter demonstrates how managing crises is an urgent call to take risks and initiate strategies to enable fullness of life for oneself and others through support, sensitization, and solidarity.

Introduction

While any crisis is a type of small or big disaster causing disruption and distress, it can also be seen as a threshold or turning point challenging us to stop, look back, introspect, and take the risk to plan and plunge forward. The Covid-19 pandemic interrupted the habitual way of functioning and forced the world to usher in a *new normal*. Coping with the crisis is a way of dealing with the situation through positive or negative coping mechanisms and strategies. Managing the crisis, however, goes a step further to perceive the different dynamics, get people involved, and discern together how to respond to the situation. From a practical theological perspective, it involves a continuous process of connecting with people, conscientizing them, and capacitating them to participate in collaborative action. Initially there is need for immediate action to be taken but then with careful discernment more prudent decisions can be undertaken to respond to the crisis and restore harmony.

Crisis management

Most disciplines today have a fairly similar understanding of crises and crisis management though they may not all agree on the nature, causes, and responses to the crisis. It is thus necessary to first understand what we mean by crisis and crisis management.

Understanding crisis

Generally, any crisis is complex, multifaceted, and causes disruption and disturbance to the normal functioning of individuals, groups, or the entire social system. According to Arjen Boin from the Crisis Research Centre in The Netherlands, a "crisis occurs

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when the institutional structure of a social system experiences a relatively strong decline in legitimacy as its central service functions are impaired or suffer from overload" (Boin 2004, p.168). Crises can occur from natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, epidemics, outbreaks of disease or due to accidents, human failings, scientific and technological catastrophes, and so on. Since crises bring about fear, uncertainty, and stress, many people resort to diverse coping mechanisms and strategies to reduce the stress. While crises are inevitable and normal, there are many factors that are responsible. For Boin (2004), at the micro-level it is about individual factors and human frailties, at the meso-level it concerns organizational factors and processes, and at the macro-level it is more complicated with powerful interconnected factors playing a strong role. While most crises have dysfunctional and undesirable consequences, they also offer opportunities for change, renewal, revised policies, and transformation. Since crises can disrupt and uncover the limitations of the structure and process of practical reason, it will necessarily lead to transformation.

Another issue with understanding any crisis concerns the subjective perceptions of the crisis, which may differ depending on the amount of threat or harm experienced. This results in the urgency and type of responses to the crisis. From a subjective assessment there are two broad perspectives to any crisis: "the operational perspective that concentrates on the management of the crisis itself and the political-symbolic perspective that tries to map out how crisis managers and the rest of us make sense of the crisis" (Boin, p.167). These perspectives are limited to the individual perception of the situation and do not guarantee any timely responses. Taking the objective reality of the crisis into consideration, in this case the Covid-19 pandemic, it is thus important to look at how the crisis is effectively managed.

Managing crisis

Although crisis management comprises of prevention, preparation, and taking immediate decisions, it also involves a complex process of staying in control, having a good sense of the crisis, looking at all the different factors, and involving others in arriving at an effective, balanced option on how to respond to the crisis. As there could be many stakeholders who share a role in the intricate organization and implementation of appropriate decisions, crisis management must not be the exclusive domain of only the government officials and their agencies (Boin 2004). It calls for shared responsibility in reflecting, planning, and executing any decisions.

From a practical theological standpoint, managing crises concerns moral, social, ethical, and pastoral issues, and must include academics, church hierarchy, pastors, all the faithful as well as all people of good will. In practically every crisis it is usually the poor and vulnerable who are most affected and hence they need special care and attention. Any crisis also raises theological questions concerning the meaning of life, suffering, death, and the presence of God in the crisis, which calls for further reflection and responding.

Phases of crisis management

As such there can be three phases of crisis management – before, during, and after the crisis (Mitroff, Alpaslan and Green 2004, p.180). The first phase, the *before* or "proactive phase" consists in taking stock of the "organization's crisis strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities" and developing resilience and skills to manage the crisis. The second phase, the *during* or "reactive phase" is actually dealing with the crisis in a way that reduces any destruction and enables quick recovery, and the *after* or "preactive phase" assesses the effectiveness of the responses taken in order to prepare for any further crises. (p.180) Thus the *preactive phase* can also be seen as a preparation for the next *proactive phase*.

These three phases relate well with Osmer's four tasks of practical theological interpretation: the "descriptive-empirical task", the "interpretive task", the "normative task", and the "pragmatic task" (Osmer 2008, p.4). These four tasks correspond to some extent with the threefold CCC approach of *Compassionate Connecting-Critical Conscientizing-Collaborative Capacitating* that I developed for my doctoral research. However, this approach and the four tasks are not separate phases but interconnected. In the descriptive-empirical task, one does not only gather information and seek what is going on in the crises. One is present with the persons in the crises, compassionately connecting with them, listening, and attending to them with care and openness. The interpretive task is concerned with examining why things are happening in a particular way in the light of theories and other research. The normative task reflects on what must and ought to be done in accordance with God's will as revealed in the Scriptures and other magisterial teachings. Finally, the pragmatic task deals with how to

come up with concrete pastoral plans and actions to respond strategically to the crisis.

How did Mary of Nazareth manage crises?

Mary encountered varied kinds of crises. In Lk 2:35, Simeon had already then predicted to Mary that a sword will pierce her own soul. Some crises concerned threats to her life and her son whereas others were more social and political. Mary as a young girl would have surely witnessed the violence of the peasant uprising and Roman suppression in Nazareth as well as the political and economic oppression by the ruling Roman administration (Johnson 2003). She and her family had to flee from Bethlehem to Egypt to escape King Herod's massacre of the male children (Mt 2:13-23). Mary may have had to endure great pain and suffering while journeying together with Jesus on the way to Calvary and standing at the foot of the cross (Jn 19: 25). In all these events we can see Mary's faith, her pondering and her acceptance of God's will.

When there was no wine at Cana, there was a different type of crisis causing embarrassment to the wedding hosts. Instead of just accommodating and coping with the situation, Mary of Nazareth saw the need of the moment and responded appropriately. She took the initiative and risk to request her son to perform a miracle while also making all the necessary arrangements to ensure that it would be done (Jn 2:1-11). While there is not much in the Bible about Mary of Nazareth, Elizabeth Johnson notes that "[w]alking by faith, not by sight, she composes her life as a friend of God and a prophet, one who actively partners the divine work of repairing the world" (2003, p.209) Mary can thus be considered an attentive seeker and contemplative in action. This is affirmed by Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* where he portrays Mary as a model and star of evangelization in her "interplay of justice and tenderness, of contemplation and concern for others" (2015, §288). He notes: "Mary is able to recognize the traces of God's Spirit in events great and small. She constantly contemplates the mystery of God in our world, in human history and in our daily lives. She is the woman of prayer and work in Nazareth, and she is also Our Lady of Help, who sets out from her town 'with haste' (Lk 1:39) to be of service to others" (§288). Mary is thus a model and an example to all those who experience any crisis.

Responses to the Covid-19 crisis in India

Covid-19 took the world by surprise, affecting young and old, rich and poor, black and white. Nevertheless, the ones most affected are the poor and marginalized who have the least resources and social support. While the Indian government took advantage of the situation to come up with stringent laws, bills, and policies that to a great extent denied people of their rights and dishonored the socialist, secular, and democratic ethos of the country, there were some religious and secular organizations as well as people of good will who took risks to offer humanitarian assistance to migrants, slumdwellers, and others in need. They provided food, shelter, provisions, medicines, masks, and other amenities. Some institutions even started training domestic workers and other women with skills for alternate livelihoods.

These outreach initiatives correspond to some extent with the way Mary of Nazareth reached out to Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:39-56). Although the situation of Mary and Elizabeth was not a major crisis, it disrupted the normal functioning of their lives. Forgetful of self, Mary took a big risk in the first trimester of her pregnancy to be at the service of her older cousin Elizabeth. She hastened to attend to Elizabeth, assisting her not only with her daily chores but being a source of solace and strength to her. How beautiful it is when women can embrace and encourage each other! The human connection of physical presence, bonding, and support made it possible for them to engage in spiritual conversations, sharing their experiences of joy, pain, hope, and the challenging mission ahead. In their meeting they experienced the inbreaking of the Spirit in their wombs and in their entire being.

Following in the footsteps of Jesus and Mary, the coordinators of *Uddhar Vikas Sanstha* (UVS), a development and humanitarian non-government organization of the *Religious of Jesus and Mary*, Pune province, began to reflect on what God was calling them to do for the marginalized and those most affected in the face of the pandemic. The procedure and process adopted can be framed in keeping with the threefold approach of CCC explained in section 1.3.

Compassionate connecting

Compassionate Connecting with people entails moving out of one's position, privilege, and place to

engage with the other in their context and condition. It requires openness, sensitivity, understanding, care, and the courage to take risks. It involves acknowledging the worth of persons and treating them with dignity and respect. Marcus Mescher rightly states that compassion "is a bold gesture of vulnerability and tenderness that is radically countercultural in a social context that is more inclined to feign invulnerability and foment blame and rage. Compassion draws near the other as equals; this recognition of equality is essential for solidarity that can heal personal wounds and social breaches" (2020, p.186). Compassionate Connecting also includes engaging with people in their daily activities and enabling them to discover and experience the divine presence in their work, worship, and relationships.

The coordinators of UVS first connected with the social workers to reflect on the Covid-19 situation and come up with varied possibilities to respond to the situation. Some of the social workers themselves had lost their jobs in other places, and were now making a new beginning in UVS. They shared their experiences of the struggles they faced as well as what they observed in the vicinities where they lived. After some sharing and discussion, they decided to conduct an informal survey in the neighboring slums to pick out those who were most affected and see what they needed. Going door to door masked and taking all the necessary precautions of social distancing and sanitization, the social workers gathered not just information but empathized with the pain and suffering of the families in the slums.

They found that on account of unemployment and no means of livelihood, the people had no provisions, no proper electricity, and no support from others, since during the lockdowns they were not even allowed to leave their houses. If they ventured out of the house they were beaten by the police and sent back. The education of the children suffered as people did not have internet connection in the home and many could not afford mobile devices for all their children. Domestic violence increased leading to fear, mental harassment, divorce, and even some attempted suicides. Lack of hospital beds and oxygen led to deaths and orphaning of many children.

In one of the families the parents and grandparents both succumbed to the virus, leaving behind only their eleven-year daughter with a debt of twenty hundred thousand Indian rupees. In another case the only earning member of the family died after spending a month in a jumbo covid facility. The wife was totally distraught having to manage her three children and in-laws. Many of the daily wage laborers, construction workers, and support staff lost their jobs. These are just some of the challenges faced by the people on the margins. Volumes can be written on the number of painful stories of loss of lives, jobs, basic necessities, friends, support, and even hope.

Constructive consciousness-raising

In my doctoral research I have used the term creative *conscientization* for this second step, taking the term from Paulo Freire's liberative pedagogy. *Conscientization* or Consciousness-Raising is education for critical awareness which is essential for greater clarity and new insights that can lead to transformation. Constructive consciousness-raising involves critical reflection for resistance and liberative action. It is pedagogical in that it encourages those who are exploited and oppressed to become aware of the contradictions and dynamics operating within the socio-cultural, political, economic, and religious systems and to work with others in acting against them (Freire 2000, pp.88, 35).

The social workers, after carrying out surveys, organized seminars and workshops for some members of each family, in groups of thirty at a time, to give them awareness of the possible causes and effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the preventive measures to be taken. They also educated them on how to maintain good health and hygiene and briefed them on the varied possibilities for employment. Each family received rations, medicines, and other material resources for immediate survival and sustenance. Educational support was offered to the students by paying their fees and providing the necessary digital resources to help them participate in online classes. Some arrangements were made to bring children from the slums in the school classrooms that were not being used, so that they could follow the lessons together from big screens. The social workers then initiated discussions on the prevailing situation and the concerns that needed to be addressed. Many suggestions were given by the people and it was good to see enthusiasm generated to begin again and move forward despite their losses.

Collaborative capacitating

Collaborative capacitating is about enabling those on the margins to participate in liberative action for

change and transformation. Shared spaces can be created to combine worship with the prophetic mission of working in solidarity to establish communities of resistance for justice, equality, and freedom. There is also a need to work in partnership with civil, social, and political movements to reframe policies and systems in favor of people at the margins.

The organizing team and the social workers met to discuss how to respond to some of the suggestions and concerns that came up during the workshops. In order to enable the families to be self-reliant, employment opportunities were provided to some very poor families and 'Learn & Earn' Income Generation Training was given especially to women. New opportunities were offered to the youth to learn computer programs by which they could work from home. Spoken English classes and preschool teacher training programs were offered to men and women so that they could help the little children at home to avail themselves of the online classes. More than training sessions and job opportunities, people found the space to connect with each other, share their stories, and experience strength, consolation, and renewed hope. It was heartening to see joy on the faces of the young and old. In fact, it also brought joy and life to the religious Sisters of my community who were locked in for months without any outlet for active ministry. As the schools were shut, they had no way to interact with the staff and students. Coming together also provided an opportunity to pray together and build community, especially since all the religious places were closed during the lockdowns.

In this way through their social outreach, the members of *Uddhar Vikas Sanstha* by taking risks to move out of their comfort zones enabled the inner (Religious Sisters) and outer (people in the slums) groups to experience joy, hope, and new life.

Reflecting theologically

Although there was no intentional theological reflections or spiritual practices carried out by the religious Sisters with the marginalized since it involved people of different faiths, it can be inferred that the entire response management process was in itself a manifestation of making present the reign of God or what practical theologian Ray Anderson calls *Christopraxis* (2001, p. 54). According to Anderson, "in Christopraxis, the act itself becomes the embodiment of a life of community and wholeness that is derived from God himself through Christ" and reconciliation "is inextricably involved with revealing the power and presence of God through the act." Thus, it can be ascertained that the Sisters' prayer and intimacy with the Lord flowed into their reaching out to others making Christ tangibly present in and through them. In addition, reaching out to the people in distress was also a Spirit-filled encounter and experience for the religious women. The Sisters and social workers first connected compassionately with the people in the slums during the family visits and surveys, and listened to their stories of pain and suffering. They then met to reflect on the information they received and gathered the people together in small groups where they made them aware of the issues and concerns. Together they prayed, broke and shared bread, and discussed concrete plans to move forward.

In effectively managing the pandemic crisis within the prescribed Covid-19 health protocol and regulations, we can observe a certain theological, spiritual, and pastoral movement in the social outreach project of UVS from masking to making connections, from sanitization to sensitization, and from social distancing to solidarity. Making connections through social and spiritual support, sensitization, and solidarity connect with the threefold approach of CCC explained in section 3.

From masking to making connections

In psychological terms masking or putting on a mask is a protective coping mechanism to hide one's emotions, vulnerability, and true self in order to experience security and safety. However, in the obligatory wearing of masks, as prescribed by WHO and the government, the purpose was only to prevent the spread of the corona virus and not to hide one's true personality. Yet the face mask did offer varied benefits and banes. While ensuring protection, safety, freedom, and so-called confidence in relationships, it distances and creates barriers to communication and personal contact. It thus acts as "an interface that at the same time distances and connects the I-other relation" (Tateo 2021, p.135). At the same time, the mask does not prevent the possibility of making and maintaining connections with people.

Making connections involves an ethics and a spirituality of encounter. Pope Francis repeatedly refers to a culture of encounter in his homilies and addresses. In *Fratelli Tutti*, Francis speaks of going

beyond ourselves to encounter others through a welcoming attitude, care, and concern (1988, §48). He sees the importance of communication, dialogue, and listening to build good interpersonal relationships. Communication through dialogue is a significant dimension of any theological enterprise in the multi-cultural, multi-religious context of India. It provides an opportunity to discover the beauty and uniqueness in oneself, the other, and in the divine mystery manifesting itself in persons and all of reality. The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue speaks of four forms of dialogue –

a) The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and unneighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems, and preoccupations.
b) The dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.
c) The dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.
d) The dialogue of religious experience, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith, and ways of searching for God or the Absolute (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue 1991, §42).

Making connections with people allows for a dialogue of life, action, exchange, and experience if one is open to understand, accept, and communicate with those who are different from one in many respects. Engaging in these four forms of dialogue with people of diverse religions, cultures, regions, and languages can bring about clarity and change in one's thinking, believing, and living to enable fullness of life for all involved.

From sanitization to sensitization

Sanitization is seen as most important to ensure proper hygiene for good health and safety during the Covid-19 pandemic. It protects oneself as well as others from getting the virus. However, along with sanitization there is also a great need for sensitization to the diverse aspects of the pandemic. People need to be made conscious of the social, economic, political, and religious dimensions of the pandemic and the involvement of different stakeholders along with the related power dynamics. Raising accurate awareness of the situation can help people to think critically and become sensitive to what is going on. This alone can lead to concrete decisions for change and wholeness. Greater sensitization and sensitivity to people and situations can bring about compassion and interdependence. Compassion is nothing but being "sensitive enough to feel the suffering of other people, enough concern to care about their suffering, and enough commitment to act in a way that tries to alleviate their suffering" (Mescher 2020, p.186). Thus, sanitization of false beliefs and prejudices through sensitization to human rights and dignity can lead to sensitivity to the needs and concerns of people and the entire cosmos.

From social distancing to solidarity

As humans are social beings, maintaining social distance in the family, community, and public spaces was quite difficult for many people during this time of the pandemic. Nevertheless, like masking it also benefits introverts and individuals who prefer privacy and protection. Although physical and social distancing are meant only as a prevention to the spread of the virus they could lead to isolation, loneliness, and even depression and suicide. To counter this, it is important to build solidarity through social and spiritual support and sustenance. To work for the common good requires solidarity and subsidiarity while acknowledging diversity and difference. Solidarity goes beyond charity and paternalism to interdependence and inclusive love that can "generate a shared commitment to building a just ordering of society for the unity and integral development of the human family in right relationship" (Mescher 2020, p.81). This is affirmed by Pope Francis who sees true love as respecting every aspect of reality, since everything is related and connected in and for universal communion (*Laudato Si',* §. 76, 92).

Conclusion

To sum up, Managing Crisis is a
Call to take
Risks and
Initiate
Strategies to
Enable fullness of Life through
Support**,** Sensitization, and Solidarity

Just as masking, sanitization, and social distancing are all necessary to prevent the spread of the virus and ensure good health, making connections, sensitization, and solidarity are crucial for wholeness and the flourishing of all persons and the entire ecosystem. We are invited today in the face of the pandemic to break boundaries and create compassionate connections of support between people of differing generations, classes, races, castes, genders, cultures, religions, and languages in order to sensitize ourselves and others to the signs of the times and collaborate in solidarity to enable fullness of life for all persons and care and healing for our wounded and groaning earth.

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The unacknowledged presence of Catholicism in secularized Dutch society: The case of spiritual care

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This chapter addresses the impact of Catholicism in secularized Dutch society, focusing on its contribution to spiritual care, while acknowledging the decay of the religious field as such, in the past decades. The central thesis is that, even where solid structures have melted, practices such as those originating in pastoral care, have been continued in a secular environment. The empirical findings are followed by suggestions about how to evaluate these findings from a theological perspective.

Introduction

There is a certain self-centeredness in the diagnosis that the church, here predominantly the Roman Catholic Church, is in crisis. In itself, the diagnosis reflects an experience of ontological insecurity. The existence of the church as we know it is at stake, and the future is uncertain. One narrative is guided by fear: will the church survive? Another by hope: the church to come will be purer, or more hospitable.

An alternative perspective starts with society instead of the church and tries to understand the present in light of the past, instead of looking at the future based on the present. This is what I will do in this contribution, which intends to shed some light on the secularized context of the Netherlands by studying the social origins and conditions of a newly constructed practice called *spiritual care at home*. This initiative concerns chaplaincy—both religious and non-religious—organized as a public service and practiced outside an institutional setting. In fact, one can order a spiritual caregiver from the region through a national website: https://geestelijkeverzorging.nl/ (Molenaar and Dwarswaard 2020).

I interpret this version of spiritual care as an ecclesial practice that has been transferred to the secular sphere, that is: not controlled by the authority of religions. My question is: how should we understand and evaluate such a process of transfer from the perspective of a practical theology that is informed by historical sociology?

Concepts and method

Practical theology as an academic subdiscipline in connection with whatever religious tradition is concerned with learning about and from practices. The subject of study is often made up of religious practices, such as in lived religion, but it may also include practices that are considered part of other social spheres such as the political sphere or the sphere of health care, or that have migrated from one sphere to the other. In all cases, the research is ultimately part of the intellectual endeavor to understand the body of wisdom that is contained in beliefs, practices, experiences, expressions, bodily, and material manifestations concerning the sacred. In this regard, practical theology is an integral part of the audacious project of doing theology that is traditionally understood as 'faith seeking understanding'. The theological perspective builds upon the human

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capacity to transcend and reflect on the individual day-to-day existence and research results should contribute to the way people orientate themselves in life. This also accounts for the present study. I learned from my study of the care for people in spiritual need and hope that the outcome of this study serves this profession.

Against this background, I have used sociology, more specifically historical sociology in the tradition of Max Weber and Norbert Elias and sociology of religion, to explain and understand the rise of the profession of spiritual caregiver in the Netherlands. I did not so much start a new historical research project, but gathered and studied the existing research literature on chaplaincy and spiritual care especially in the Netherlands, complemented with policy reports, juridical and government documents (cf. De Groot 2021). Since 2002, I have also been educating chaplains, mainly Catholic, both on a master's level and in a post-academic setting, such as Clinical Pastoral Education. These courses were guided by the concept of the research professional and included making an analysis of the chaplaincy's organizational context and writing a policy report on issues pertaining to the expertise of the chaplain. My own research interest was guided by dissatisfaction with prevailing narratives that use the concept of secularization to explain the rise of spiritual care as a profession that has emancipated from its ecclesial chains (Schilderman 2015), or cut off its roots (van Iersel and van Gastel 2007), depending on the normative evaluation. In a classic formula secularization refers to a process, namely the decline of religion's authority. Such a process may be the outcome of the interplay between certain strategies and circumstances. A reified and teleological concept of secularization that 'causes' certain developments, however, does not have any explanatory value. We have to look closer at specific acts, conditioned by specific power relations, to discover how a profession came into being in a way that was not controlled or planned by any of the actors involved (cf. Elias 1950).

According to Max Weber, in every type of society there are individuals, or even institutions, that try to offer comfort in cases of individual suffering such as sickness and misfortune. He classifies these practices under the general concept of *care of souls* (Weber 1980, 283; 1989, 90–91). What they have in common is that they start off by listening to the person seeking help, after which a ritual act may follow: comforting words or gestures, or religious instruction. This concept has also proven useful outside a religious context (Bourdieu 1985). Weber is mostly interested in care of souls that is practiced from a systemized worldview and promotes a particular cultural community, but it could also be practiced in the setting of a private enterprise and just legitimated by the results. In terms that have become popular almost a century later, the former variety would have its place in *civil society*, whereas the latter would be at home in the *market*. In the spirit of Weber, I would like to distinguish a third variety in which care of souls is practiced in the sphere of the *state* and has to follow bureaucratic procedures. A historical example could be the practice of confession enforced by the Inca regime in 16th century Peru (de Groot 1995, 50–53). State, market, and civil society, conceived as the sphere that is not controlled by either the state or the market, are then three possible settings. In practice, they can be connected or even intertwined. This remains to be seen.

'Spiritual care' in this sociogenetic study is the English translation of the Dutch term '*geestelijke verzorging*' which has become the common term for chaplaincy, that is: care of souls outside the context of a parish or congregation, in whatever religious, spiritual, or humanistic variety. It is not restricted to the setting of health care, but is also used, for example, for prison chaplaincy. In international literature, the term also refers to holistic concepts of health care, including attention to spiritual aspects (Gärtner 2016). This is not how the term is used here.

I am focusing on spiritual care in the home setting as a nation-wide service for a relatively broad audience, provided by registered spiritual caregivers, that is, specialized professionals with a bachelor's or master's degree in theology, religious studies, humanistic studies, or spiritual direction that includes a traineeship and clinical supervision. This form of government-subsidized care of souls as it has started in the Netherlands since 2019 seems unique internationally, although we should realize that the relationship between church and state in neighboring countries such as Denmark and Germany is such that the ecclesial care of souls there is actually also financed from public means.

Spiritual care and Catholicism

The case of spiritual care is relevant for the study of Christianity in secularizing societies in general, but is especially interesting for the study of the development of Catholicism for three reasons. First, care of

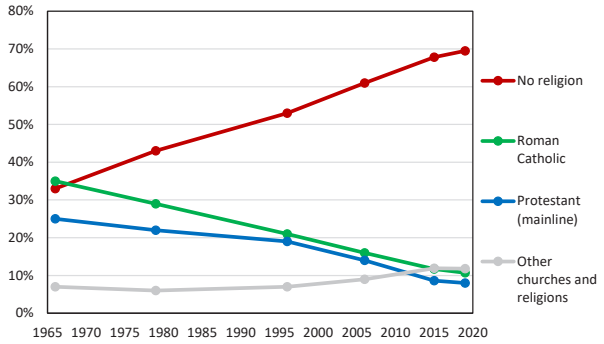
souls can be considered as the factual core business of the Roman Catholic Church, next to liturgy, especially the Eucharist. From Max Weber to Michel Foucault (2018) scholars have drawn attention to individual confession as the paradigmatic model of spiritual care in Western societies. Secondly, although the Netherlands have long been dominated by the (Calvinist) Dutch-Reformed Church, the Roman Catholic Church is the country's largest church since 1930 (Advocaat 1999). Since the late nineteenth century, Catholic orders and congregations have been active in establishing hospitals. It was in these hospitals, and in those founded by Protestant deaconesses and by universities, that hospital chaplaincy as a distinct practice has developed during the twentieth century. Thirdly, in the past years Catholic theologians, including those located at the Catholic university of Tilburg (Jacques Körver), the formerly Catholic university of Nijmegen (Hans Schilderman), and the University for Humanistic Studies (Andries Baart, Carlo Leget) have played a major role in promoting the professionalization of spiritual care in the Netherlands. Their contributions have drawn the attention of an international audience (e. g., Körver and Walton 2017).

In this chapter, I will analyze the development of spiritual care by relating it to shifts in the relations between state, market, and civil society, which includes the church. In the first section, I will demonstrate that in countries such as the Netherlands the Roman Catholic Church is beyond the situation of crisis. But what does this breakdown imply for society at large? In the second section, I will explain that it has enabled the birth of an innovative practice with a background in the churches. Thus, I will interpret this not as an example of the demise of Christianity, but as a process of religion in interaction with modernity, the de-institutionalization of religion, and the re-institutionalization of these practices in other institutional spheres. In the third section, I will evaluate the continuities and discontinuities in this process and I will close with stipulating the relevance of this case study for a well-informed and nuanced view on the changing position of the church in secularizing societies.

The Roman Catholic Church beyond the crisis

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, following reports from the United States and Ireland, several experiences of sexual violence committed by ecclesial representatives against minors in the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands were brought out into the open. The number of reported cases exploded after the Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* started to publish a series of articles in the spring of 2010. The world confronted the church, that is: Roman Catholic clergymen and others, both with transgressions of its own moral norms and with a culture of silence governing the organization in which these acts against church members were committed (Deetman et al. 2011). This scandal probably put a dent in the trust that the Dutch population has in the church (de Hart and van Houwelingen 2018, Gärtner 2020, Inglehart 2020). Yet, it didn't cause a crisis.

Church membership in the Netherlands (1966–2019)



Graph provided by Joris Kregting. Source a) 1966–2015: *God in Nederland* b) 2019: Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS-panel CenterData/Tilburg University).

A look at the figures regarding church membership tells us that the Catholic church in the Netherlands had already started to lose members in the nineteen sixties. According to the latest wave of a series of detailed surveys (*God in Nederland*), 69,5 % of the population deny that they belong to a religion.

According to a more conservative type of questioning in a recent survey of Statistics Netherlands ('Do you consider yourself as belonging to a church or a group with a specific worldview?'), 54 % of the general population says that it doesn't consider itself as belonging to any religious or humanistic grouping (CBS 2020). This figure approaches the nominal figures. For the age groups between 15 and 25 the number is 64 %. The percentage of Catholics among people between 15 and 25 (11,5) is only three percent higher than the percentage of Muslims (8,6).

This decline has been well documented, researched, explained, and even predicted. The dwin-

dling of membership followed the emancipation of the Catholic population from its underprivileged position and the rise of the welfare state. The awareness of a crisis in the church was actually already abundant in the fifties, and concerned two issues in particular: one was the finding that a considerable number of clergymen were struggling with their sexuality, the other was the impression that members of the new professions, such as social workers, were doing a lot better than priests in providing care for people with questions of life (Boelaars et al. 1950; de Groot and Salemink 2012). In this period, Catholicism was not just affected by eroding external powers. Catholic organizations had also played a significant role in the modernization of Dutch society in general, and in the establishment of centers for social and mental healthcare in particular (de Groot 2018).

Declining membership followed the active contribution of Catholic organizations and key figures to a society in which one could turn to professional, secular, support for issues with relationships, children's education, and even existential problems. These organizational efforts were accompanied by philosophical notions such as those about personal responsibility and freedom, subsumed under the heading of *personalism*. Personalist psychology characterized the Roman Catholic Bureaus for Life and Family Questions.

The Catholic Church didn't disappear from the scene all of a sudden; it first made its way up to the front stage, influenced the performance of the whole ensemble, and then withdrew to become a minor character. The present chapter focuses on an episode from this long-term process: the most recent development that followed the establishment of mental health care: the rise of *spiritual care* as a public service outside the institutions.

A sociogenesis of spiritual care at home

Since 2019, spiritual care at home has been funded by the government if patients belong to one of three specific categories: being aged fifty or over; suffering from a life-threatening affliction; or living in the area in the far North of the Netherlands that is regularly hit by earthquakes (de Jonge 2018, Maagdelijn et al. 2018). In the medium term, the secretary of Health, Welfare and Sport wants to achieve "a (nationwide) infrastructure" for spiritual care at home (de Jonge 2020, 2). In a historical and international perspective, it is remarkable that spiritual care is provided for individuals outside any institutionalized context, since these forms of counseling are usually offered by civil society, especially by religious organizations such as churches under a familiar label: ministry.

Another violent take-over of the religious by the secular, as a somewhat blunt narrative of secularization would have it? I beg to differ. I will show how the birth of this new practice is also the result of an ecclesial success story, be it at the cost of ecclesial control (cf. Beaudoin 2008).

Formation of chaplaincy (1930–1970)

Just like in several other countries, hospitals in the Netherlands had often been established by Protestant deaconesses and Roman Catholic religious orders and congregations, and were directed by the clergy (Goudswaard 2006). As secular women entered the nursing profession and the medical profession took over the management, the religious staff started to specialize in liturgy and ministry. As the state started to regulate the financing of hospital care, civil society withdrew.

In this first stage, ecclesial professionals responded actively to the conditions of modernity. The establishment itself of modern hospitals, including the presence of religious professionals, was the result of initiatives taken by civil society, dominated by Catholic and Protestant organizations. While state support increased, ecclesial professionals specialized in becoming pastors. Thus, hospital chaplaincy may be regarded as a modern invention.

Religious initiative in a secular setting (1970–2015)

Hospital chaplaincy remained part of the care that was offered, funded through the collective insurance system (VGVZ 2002, Schilderman 2013). Against the backdrop of both increasing cooperation between the mainline churches and decreasing involvement from the churches in the profession of hospital chaplaincy, these chaplains started to cooperate to such an extent that each chaplain was considered to take care of every patient, regardless of her or his religious affiliation. Patients would encounter the 'spiritual caregiver' (*geestelijk verzorger*) on duty at their ward (Snelder 2006).

In this second stage, the financial support for hospital chaplaincy is guaranteed by the state, inter-

estingly because of the freedom of thought, conscience, and religion as guaranteed by the Dutch Constitution (Hirsch Ballin 1988). However, as the connections of care institutions with civil society weakened, and representatives of the major denominations embraced the spirit of ecumenism, chaplains tended to position themselves as relatively autonomous specialists within the context of care. They started to call themselves spiritual caregivers. This move indicates a distancing away from their being ecclesial representatives in favor of their position in an institution financed by public money.

The world takes over (2015 – …)

The concept of spiritual care appeared successful in hospitals, prisons, army, and elderly homes. It also attracted the attention of groups in civil society who did not have a tradition of chaplaincy, such as the unchurched. At the end of the seventies, the Humanist Association (established in 1946), started a training program which later evolved into the University of Humanistic Studies to facilitate the entrance of spiritual caregivers representing the unchurched.

Thus, the humanist spiritual caregiver was still a representative of a denomination, be it one that was hard to detect in real life other than in a negative way: the category of the 'nones', now baptized as 'humanists'. The importance of representation changed when candidates for a position in providing spiritual care entered the scene who did not wish to, or could not, affiliate themselves with *any* of the existing denominations. After long deliberations, the concept of 'spiritual care' was transformed. Since 2015, 'spiritual care' not only refers to chaplains, rabbis, humanist, and Buddhist counselors, imams, and pandits, but also to spiritual caregivers 'not otherwise specified'. The newly established Council for Spiritual Caregivers without an institutional mandate tests the ideological competence of spiritual caregivers who have no commission from a church or other ideological organization. According to the present professional standard "Spiritual care is professional counseling, support, and advice regarding meaning-making and worldview" (Vereniging van Geestelijk VerZorgers 2016, 10). Unlike the previous version, the current one does not mention 'representing' at all. This definition of the profession marked the completion of a development that had started with the introduction of an umbrella term.

In this third stage, the role of civil society, both including ecclesial authorities and the sphere of lived religion, has diminished, even to such an extent that the option of spiritual care outside religion or organized worldviews has become available. But while the influence of ecclesial authorities has waned, the impact of bureaucratic regulations is growing. As market procedures enter the sphere of health care, hospital chaplaincy is increasingly being challenged to account for its effective and efficient contribution to health, according to the standards provided. This is particularly true for spiritual care at home.

A result: spiritual care at home

It is only since the late twentieth century that care and nursing homes, or rather, the umbrella organizations that administer them, recruit spiritual caregivers themselves. For a long time, it had been the local ministers and pastors that came to see their parishioners and organized services in these homes. Sometimes this is still the case. However, against the background of an ageing population, political tendencies to diminish the role of the state in providing care, and legitimated by the presumption that elderly people generally prefer to live at home rather than in homes, residential care for several categories has been reduced. In addition, hospitals have diminished the average amount of days patients are taken care of. These processes decrease the options that chaplains have to contact persons in need.

Therefore, spiritual caregivers started a lobby to have home-based spiritual care subsidized as part of the national health care system. In 2006, the Council for Health Care Insurances still advised the Assistant Secretary of State to consider this a task for churches and other religious or humanistic organizations, unless spiritual caregivers were specifically helping clients to cope with their illness or deficiencies (Hopman 2006). This point of view changed under new political circumstances. On the one hand, a broad campaign was launched to 'fight loneliness' in society, particularly among the elderly. On the other hand, a movement of senior citizens emerged who argued for a law that would enable professional assisted ways of ending one's life on the basis of a well-considered, enduring death wish on the part of an elderly person, without specific physical suffering. For this presumed situation they coined the term 'completed life', re-

ferring to an individual's conviction that life was actually over and all that remained was to wait for death. Their plea made it to one of the key issues of the progressive-liberal party (D66) who took part in the negotiations for the new coalition in 2017.

Thanks to a particular joint effort of this party (D66) seeking to widen the criteria for voluntary euthanasia, a Christian political party (ChristenUnie) seeking to promote palliative care, and a general plea from organizations of the elderly to invest into spiritual care in the home situation, an innovative cooperation between state and market has seen the light of day. All agreed that elderly people should at least benefit from some kind of 'life-coaches' becoming available to the public. This political agreement paved the way for home-based spiritual care facilitated by the state.

Spiritual caregivers successfully claimed the expertise that was needed for this 'life-coaching', which gave a positive impulse to the ongoing but delicate process of professionalization. Probably, the increasing share of humanistic caregivers and those who do not represent a specific denomination helped government officials to overcome the earlier reserves in sponsoring what was hitherto considered a task for civil society (Bras and Hengelaar 2019). Whereas the churches further lost control over the chaplaincy they had constructed, the cooperation between the subsidizing state and the market-based involvement of spiritual caregivers created a bureaucratic reality with its own opportunities and demands (Liefbroer et al. 2020).

The preceding process of professionalization enabled spiritual caregivers to be allowed to step in when the national government decided to finance spiritual care at home, now that patients and elderly people are expected to live at home as long as possible. The option that they are visited by priests, or persons in a comparable position, is no longer presumed. Caregivers, usually certified to work in institutional spiritual care, are now allowed to operate as solopreneurs for so-called Centers for Questions of Life (*Centra voor Levensvragen*), subsidized by public means, that is, if the request and the person meet the requirements. (The funding applies to people over 50 years old. "For those younger than 50 a supplementary health insurance policy may offer a refund. The other option is for clients to pay for the contact themselves" (van den Berg 2020, 15)).

A devastating success

Spiritual care at home is the result of a U-turn. First, chaplaincy started to become a profession in institutional healthcare and care for the elderly, employed by the government. Then, the same profession, expanded to 'spiritual care', was exported to the home situation. In one way, the new situation emulates the traditional care of souls. In another way, the transfer from civil society to a public-private arrangement involves an important transformation: spiritual care is paid for, is embedded in a bureaucracy, and is supposed to serve the spiritual or existential dimensions of health: experiencing meaning, existence with a purpose, a focus on the future, and acceptance of one's situation (Reijmerink 2017, Huber and Garssen 2017).

This context promotes a functional perspective on the practice of spiritual care. It specifies its object as assistance in the process of meaning-making and encourages attempts to enhance and display its efficacy in this respect. In comparison with traditional ministry, several other aspects retreated: offering practical assistance, mobilizing the community, representing the religious community, and embodying the archetypical person with a divine, or sacred, mission.

Spiritual care as a distinct profession and the practice of spiritual care at home as a subsidized type of care are outcomes of contingent processes in both the religious and the secular sphere. No one planned the birth of this new professional service, and yet the whole development follows a familiar pattern. At any time, political, cultural, or economic factors and initiatives by particular agents can change the course of this process, but up to this point I detect three stages, the same three stages that I observed in earlier research on what happens with religion in liquid modernity (de Groot 2018). First, there are the ecclesial maneuvers in modernity; secondly, an individual ecclesial initiative becomes dominated by the social logic of the secular sphere; and thirdly the world takes over. During these three stages the relations between civil society, state, and market shift.

In sum, first the churches contributed to the formation of a modern profession: hospital chaplaincy. Secondly, against the background of the de-institutionalization of the church, this profession developed into a distinct profession: spiritual care. In a new round of re-institutionalization, the third step, the original religious practice, now transferred to

the secular sphere, is the starting point for a new social formation. Truly, a devastating success.

A transfer of the sacred?

After having established (in section 1) that the decay of the Catholic church, at least in the Dutch province, started a long time ago, it is easier to look at this development from a more detached position (section 2). On the one hand, churches have contributed to the transfer of a part of their repertoire to other societal actors; on the other hand, these societal actors have used the ecclesial repertoire as a resource for new practices (section 3). The genealogy of spiritual care at home shows one instance of the impact of Catholicism in secularized Dutch society. Even where solid structures have melted, practices such as those originating in pastoral care have been continued in a secular environment.

This account of a church liquefying, rather than disappearing, is more realistic and perhaps also less alarming than the narrative of crisis. It does not deny that in the last decades Dutch society, like most European societies, has gone through waves of secularization, rather than de-secularization. However, this case study exemplifies an approach that adds important details to what the term secularization usually refers to, i. e., 1) attention for the formative phase of ecclesial practices in modernity, 2) the active role in the transfer to the secular, 3) the gradual emancipation of these practices from ecclesial authorities and subordination to secular authorities, and 4) the appropriation of Christian culture by the secular world.

In order to determine whether this approach has any further added value to the narrative of secularization, one might take a closer look at the process of transfer and ask what is continued and what is discontinued during this operation (de Groot 2018). A process of secularization may simply imply that the role of the church, e. g., in caring for people with questions of life, is replaced by another institution: medical or psychological. This is in particular interesting with respect to chaplaincy, a profession often described as having 'the sacred' as a common concern (Swift, Cobb, and Todd 2015). As Hans Joas put it in *The Power of the Sacred:*

> The affective intensity of the tie to a sacred entity may be transferred from one idea or one institution to others; this was often the case, for example, where people's ties to Christianity and the church were superseded by a commitment to socialism and the party. But it is also possible for the intensity of ties to dwindle without migrating to new content or other institutions; in other words, there may be a loss of motivation that is not replaced by anything else. (Joas 2021, 249)

Further research should discover whether spiritual care will develop into a profession of the sacred in a secular setting, or secularize to the extent that chaplains become life coaches who restrict themselves to the level of individual functioning, unconcerned with what transcends the boundaries of the self. The transfer could, after all, imply the concern with the sacred as well. The results of the Dutch *Case Studies Project*, which involves detailed analyses of over a hundred examples of spiritual care practice, suggest that spiritual care explores and responds to experiences of self-transcendence, such as ecstasy, anxiety, guilt, and the loss of meaning. Caregivers' interventions are characterized by ethical, aesthetic, existential and spiritual dimensions (Walton 2020, Körver 2020). Spiritual care may still be care of the soul, even if practiced with a lot more attention to what it means for the individual, compared to a historical phase in which a visit to or from the pastor was also the fulfillment of a moral, social, or religious obligation. Current research by Anke Liefbroer, Iris Wierstra, and Annemarie Foppen (2021) has to reveal how spiritual care specifically in the home setting is doing in this respect.

Its *context*, the government-regulated field of market-based spiritual care, however, seems to entail a different discourse, including notions such as resilience, empowerment, and individual autonomy. It will be interesting to see whether this approach will also enter the *practice* of spiritual care, and if so, whether this will result in a more pragmatic, de-sacralized spiritual care, close to the psychological care for people with problems of living, or in a re-sacralization of spiritual care, now governed by the belief in the promises of positive health (cf. Rogers-Vaughn 2016).

Then again, a third option may prevail. Perhaps, we can trust that a profession that deals with questions of life will not fail to see, ask, feel, hear, and articulate how people *resonate* with the world outside them (Rosa 2019)—how others, the Other, life itself carry them and challenge them. In that sense, a certain *care of souls* may continue to be present, also in a secularized society in which the Roman Catholic Church, with its tradition of *cura animarum*, has largely retreated into the wings.

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Spiritual abuse in the Catholic church: Crisis contexts—contours—collusions—consequences

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All forms of abuse imply an abuse of power. Yet, what turns an abuse of power into spiritual abuse? This chapter focuses on spiritual abuse within the Roman Catholic Church—not because it could not happen elsewhere, but because it is only in a self-critical approach that one can deal with this issue appropriately.
In this crisis context, theological approximations and insights into ongoing discourses as well as psychological contributions to dealing with the abuse of power are required. These approaches lead to the proposal of a definition of spiritual abuse—and may and must result in various consequences, for example in the area of spiritual guidance.

Crisis Contexts—and coping with crises?

When talking about spiritual abuse, I think of a desperate woman whose (female) spiritual director urges her to remain in a marriage with a violent husband because this is what the Church expects from her; of a penitent child—what a wording—who is reminded of the secrecy of the confessional, impeding him or her from telling anyone what is happening there again and again; of a woman struggling with her pregnancy, which tempts the deacon of her local parish, who is aware of her situation, to launch an anti-abortion tirade in his first homily; of a young man seeking to discover his vocation and whose accompanist is set on putting him in the priestly garb; and of many other people I know from different settings, in particular in my role as a deacon and psychotherapist.

This initial choice of current and real-life constellations is meant to highlight a variety of things: that spiritual abuse is not equivalent to abuse by clergymen; that possible perpetrators among the clergy are not only priests, but also permanent deacons; that spiritual abuse also happens without the involvement of the clergy; that spiritual abuse *can* be accompanied by sexual violence, as the example of the penitent child shows, but is not always, as the above example of the projection of a priestly calling shows. However, all forms of abuse imply an abuse of power. Yet, what turns an abuse of power into spiritual abuse?

In these crisis contexts I focus on spiritual abuse within the Roman Catholic Church—not because it could not happen elsewhere, but because I feel that it is only in a self-critical approach that one can deal with this issue appropriately.

The first to fall into crises are, of course, those affected by them. Crises are rightly considered to be stressful processes of change whose course and consequences are open-ended. Psychologically, they mark an interruption of the continuity of experience and action that had existed up to that point: the means available to those affected to cope with their challenges are no longer sufficient. Crises are ac-

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companied by emotional destabilization as well as by a more or less strongly disintegrated organization of action: those affected stand there empty-handed and feel themselves in a dis-astrous situation, far from any good star (Latin: *astrum*). But abuse of power also reveals a serious crisis of the Catholic Church and the theology associated with it.

Coping with Crises—this is the title of the 2021 IAPT conference and of this book. Crisis phenomena include climate change, war crimes in numerous regions of our world, ethnocentric, politically and culturally fundamentalist movements, economic and social inequality as well as educational injustice, psychosocial catastrophes and personal strokes of fate, and much more. For the reasons mentioned above, crises as such act as threats—and not at all as opportunities. Coping with crises—this title makes me think of the concept of religious and spiritual coping as developed by Kenneth I. Pargament (1997) and taken up many times since then (Granquist 2002, McAdams and Albaugh 2008, Belzen 2015), also within practical theology (Stahl 2019). According to this concept, religiosity and spirituality can play an important role in coping with crises. Nevertheless, this role proves to be highly ambivalent because it can prove to be a resource in crisis management on the one hand and a risk on the other, thus further exacerbating crisis phenomena. In the context of abuse of power, however, religiosity and spirituality do not have their main role in coping with crises into which those affected have plunged, rather they have facilitated their development or even made them possible in the first place. Therefore Doris Reisinger calls the abuse crisis a single "clusterfuck" (2022) of ecclesiastical power, concealment, and gaslighting. In psychology, gaslighting is the term used to describe a form of emotional abuse by which victims are deliberately unsettled, disoriented, and manipulated. This term comes from the title of the 1938 play *Gas Light*: in it, the British playwright Patrick Hamilton depicts this practice and makes it a publicly perceived and discussed topic. Doris Reisinger, however, can no longer believe in change and renewal—understandably. But the abysses that open up here do not at all absolve me as a practical theologian and pastoral psychologist from dealing with spiritual abuse of power (Kießling 2021a and 2021b).

I will add some *contours* to these *contexts*, first of all by means of theological approximations and insights into ongoing discourses, followed by psychological contributions towards a critical consideration of what is an abuse of power. The keyword *collusions*, that still needs to be explained, will lead to a proposal on how to define spiritual abuse. This results in *consequences* which I will outline in a three-pronged approach: with a view to theological reconsiderations, with a view to the reception of psychological insights, and with a view to spiritual accompaniment.

Contours

Theological approximations

People who tell us what spirit's child they are, which spirit (*spiritus*) they draw from in their lives, offer insights into their spirituality. Life in the spirit, spiritual life, takes place within and outside traditional religiosity, which for its part provides opportunities to locate spiritual experiences and allows for a discernment of spirits. A life according to the Spirit is inspired by forces and impulses which do not originate in myself and that do not stay with me when they reach me—unless I seek to grab them and keep them for myself instead of bringing them to the light of the world—in all relationships in which, out of which, and for which I live. Against that backdrop it has to be understood that religious or spiritual abuse is not limited to my relationship with God while the rest of my world remains intact; it rather affects all my relationships and thus does unending damage.

So how can spiritual abuse be characterized from a theological perspective? What about the right to spiritual self-determination, especially in light of the human right to sexual self-determination? What do the testimonies of those affected draw attention to, what empirical evidence is emerging?

Spiritual self-determination is the title of a course offered by Doris Wagner (2019) at Sankt Georgen Graduate School of Philosophy and Theology. She emphasizes that, like any relationship, the relationship with God has to do with mutuality, so that people enjoy a right to spiritual self-determination in spite of every asymmetry—both in their relationship with God and in their relationship with a spiritual director, who commits abuse if he violates the spiritual autonomy of the persons entrusted to him by confusing his own voice with the voice of God.

According to Klaus Mertes (2017), however, it can also be the counselled person who confuses the voice of the accompanist with the voice of God—or,

inversely, as in the biblical story of Samuel (1 Sam 3:1-12), who hears God's call and takes the voice of God to be that of Eli, until the latter is able to differentiate between them—and, in a third variant, both human beings secretly and fatally take the voice of the spiritual director for the voice of God. That does not only mean an *infringement of the First and the Second Commandment*, but is at the same time an offence against a fellow human being.

Spiritual distress evolves over time when, at first, an accompanist appears to be the long sought-after, attentive listener, before the putative voice of God is uncovered as his own words and exposed as manipulation. Those on the verge of dying of spiritual thirst are happy when they are offered water, without noticing that it is poisoned. The accompanist's open arms turn out to be a trap when they originate from his personal neediness and have a toxic effect on the spirituality of the affected persons, giving rise to the same range of damage that is part and parcel of sexual abuse. For nowhere on earth does power appear more powerful than when it is accompanied by heavenly insignia.

Three forms of spiritual abuse are to be distinguished (Wagner 2019): *spiritual neglect, manipulation, violence*. The differentiation is not totally exact, but useful because it helps us to understand how things can happen which third parties—and retrospectively often also the affected persons—find inexplicable. When children have learned how to tap spiritual resources for themselves, they are well-protected against spiritual abuse; yet those who have not been able to develop spiritual self-determination may be vulnerable and hardly able to defend themselves, or may even be inclined to follow clear guidance they have long been waiting for, grateful for every fruit in their own spiritual desert, while enjoying some tentative benefits and failing to identify the manipulation that begins gently: think of the vibrancy and charisma of a person who intuitively courts those who tolerate his or her offensive behavior in a spirit of submission; think of emotional orchestrations based on distorted information; think of subtle intimidation and threats which disqualify uncertainty, doubt, and initial resistance.

Spiritual manipulation builds on neglect. The protective walls against the manipulator come tumbling down, if ever they existed. However, the walls that are built around that relationship become ever thicker and higher, so third persons hear no cry for help, if it can still be articulated. Even when it is not associated with sexual violence, spiritual violence has the same effect as rape, as murder, is equivalent to soul murder, and can therefore lead to suicide (Kluitmann 2019). This painful insight is made plausible by the fact that spirituality shapes all my relationships, so that spiritual abuse can deprive those affected of all their connectedness and therefore drive them to suicide. I owe this understanding to sufferers I have accompanied. Although there is a drastic lack of research into spiritual abuse (Barnes 2020), impressive testimonies of those affected give some empirical evidence that sexual violence in the Catholic Church usually tends to be coupled with spiritual abuse, but not necessarily vice versa (Haslbeck, Heyder, Leimgruber and Sandherr-Klemp 2020). However, spiritual abuse is often an integral part of the planned initiation of contacts with potential victims, i. e., part of a grooming strategy with the aim of perpetrating sexualized violence.

I find the analogy striking between *spiritual* neglect, manipulation, and violence, on the one hand, and *sexual* transgression, harassment, and violence, on the other. Sexual transgression cannot always be pinpointed to an intention, nor can spiritual neglect. Sexual harassment, by contrast, serves a purpose, and so does spiritual manipulation. Sexual abuse is violence, and so is spiritual abuse.

Spiritual abuse does not only have fatal consequences when it culminates in sexual abuse, even though the structures are shockingly similar, and victims often report the concurrence of both. *Emotional abuse* (Kluitmann 2019) is implied by both. Loyalty, a common, possibly elitist, sense of mission and a certain spirit of sacrifice create strong bonds. Moreover, emotional abuse tends to be accompanied by a sense of shame and guilt—coupled with the victim's impression of not sufficing.

The systemic conditions fostering spiritual abuse are also similar to those of sexual violence: religious communities form closed systems when they offer their members only internal accompaniment and inevitably create a bandwagon effect in cases of spiritual abuse, by stopping people who may have observed or should have noticed something from having someone to turn to. This is where *forum internum* and *forum externum* mix—although a distinction is made between them in Canon Law. Under Canon Law, a father confessor may not avail himself of any knowledge obtained in the confession, not even towards the penitent—but what if that nevertheless happens in closed systems?

The understanding of spiritual abuse as a violation of spiritual self-determination takes us back to the concept of sexual abuse: it is only on the basis of the human right to sexual self-determination that the special moral reprehensibility of sexual abuse becomes unmistakably clear.

When I injure myself in an accident, I receive a wound where I felt sound before. However, for spiritual abuse and for "Sacred Wounds" (Pasquale 2015), this comparison is misleading, because violations of spiritual self-determination are not normally experienced by those who previously felt that they were self-determined and, in so far, sound. At least retrospectively, affected persons often become aware of their own ominous past that never allowed them to believe they had a right to spiritual self-determination. And the simple, yet appropriate description of spiritual abuse as the confusion of two voices and a breach of the Mosaic Law also needs to be embedded in a relational structure that is characterized by emotional abuse, although that is not a specific feature of spiritual abuse. "Spiritual and emotional abuse have much in common, but spiritual abuse bears a particular sinister twist, as principles and maxims of faith are wielded as weapons of command and control, and faith leaders abuse their power for the sake of feeding their own unmet emotional needs" (DeGroat 2020, 125). David Johnson and Jeff van Vonderen already put this painful insight into words 30 years ago: "In those religious systems where the sheep are there for the 'needs' of the shepherd, people's lives get devoured" (1991, 170). The theological consideration of abuse, demanded by many, has gained momentum with the colleagues mentioned and others and must go further. Nevertheless, it can only go further if it opens up for insights from other disciplines.

After all, theologians will not be able to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. That is why psychological perspectives are indispensable when it comes to clearly outlining spiritual abuse. They have an independent role to play if the interdisciplinary interaction with theology is not simply to confirm the latter, but is to be understood as a dialogue between equal partners—in the sense of the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council (1965) *Gaudium et Spes* (36 and 62) and according to the understanding of interdisciplinarity in liberation theology (Boff 1986, Sánchez and Vigueras 2019, Adam and Schmiedt Streck 2021).

Psychological contributions

Humans as such are dependent on fellow human beings for the whole of their lives—on their love, their recognition. This acknowledgement is linked with both their most delightful and their most painful experiences. The latter fuel the longing to be freed from longing for attention. Some attempts to at least mitigate this dependency lead towards gaining, compelling, or buying love and recognition, ideally from a powerful position.

Psychologically, therefore, the focus will be on questions of power and powerlessness, the striking relationship between abuse of power and narcissistic phenomena, and the controversial relationship between narcissism and empathy.

In terms of social psychology (Bierhoff 2000), *power* is understood as an asymmetric relationship between the holder of power and the controlled person(s), that is, the capacity of an entity (person, group, institution) to exert influence on others as they wish—with the aim of controlling and changing their conduct and life, and, where possible, also overcoming resistance.

A *power motive* is a stable, consistent need over time, and in different situations, to pursue power-related goals and seek situations which make this possible. A distinction can be made between *socialized* power motives that lead to a curbed, contained, socially responsible use of power, thanks to a given inhibition tendency, and so-called *personalized* power motives, resulting in an unrestrained use of power without social compatibility.

A distinction can be made between different resources, sources of power and *means of power*:

power of sanctions by imposing rewards or punishment on a target person depending on his or her conduct, where the influencing person is able to control that, as in closed systems;

informational power of those who invoke convincing arguments, but also determine the flow of information;

power of experts attributed to a person's specific knowledge;

referent power of the influencing entity with which target persons identify themselves because they regard the former's characteristics as admirable and their conduct as worthy of emulation;

legitimate power, justified by formal social structures in which leaders are looked upon as authority figures.

Authority is endowed on a person in a position of power—thanks to their competence, traditional reputation or his or her own means of power.

Gaining love and recognition from power relationships is something that will work for a while, not least because one of its characteristic features is denial—on both sides: for powerful action ultimately loses its strength when its legitimacy is questioned, and in return, the insight that one has been deprived of one's own influence, and is powerless as a result, is hurtful.

Yet, the more I depend on relationships of power for love and recognition, act out my power motives, employ my means of power and emphasize my authority in relationships to others, the less weight I will attribute to those persons who have been domesticated and disempowered by me, and the less weight I will attribute to their love and recognition. I may remain the stronger party in such relationships, but my strategy does not work. A vicious circle begins: while I strive to obtain more power, the continuous experience of lack makes me feel *narcissistic* rage. Thus, this psychosocial dynamic develops its addictive character.

As a psychological concept (Freud 1997), *narcissism* typically implies exaggerated self-esteem, hypersensitivity towards criticism, quest for admiration, and dominant interaction patterns. It is true that persons with a narcissistic personality often appear attractive at first sight, but selfish and in love with themselves in the long run.

This is often accompanied by a lack of *empathy*. Did personalities with a narcissistic disorder fail to experience empathy from their parents and other important caregivers? Were they exposed to indifference and coldness? There is that persistent assumption of an unconsciously low self-esteem which calls for compensation by means of boastful grandiosity. Those who, in private, have a gloomy perception of themselves and their situation, seek admiration by putting themselves in the limelight and keeping everything dark out of the focus. This constellation does occur, but empirical evidence tends to point in a different direction (Keenan 2013; Bonelli 2018): it suggests that parents excessively praised their children, shielding them from all criticism, so their behavior appears abnormal because they lack frustration tolerance, though not self-esteem. As adults, these persons simply cannot imagine how and why the ever-present flow of praise, recognition and other "carrots" offered to them should stop all of a sudden. In my work with perpetrators of abuse I have come to realize how powerful their insatiable demands must have appeared to other persons who, being torn between feelings of good intention and submissiveness, fear the constant threat of an outburst of the narcissistically impaired person and thus let themselves be exploited and emotionally abused by someone who establishes interpersonal relationships exclusively as a source of admiration. The powerful person starves without his suppliers, but powerfully keeps them under his spell—a textbook example of a double bind! And here too, black-and-white thinking gives rise to a simplistic division of the world into admirers and no-goods.

Narcissistic *self-idealization* is accompanied by *self-immanence*, that is the inability to develop enthusiasm for other, possibly higher, values and ideals beyond one's own person, and a *devaluation of others*, making any cooperation impossible and disclosing the lack of empathy and emotional warmth, not necessarily as a missing *gift*, but rather as a lack of *willingness* (Bonelli 2018; DeGroat 2020).

The contemplation of narcissistic phenomena is not meant to raise general suspicion, but it may help to create awareness with the aim of seeing through various kinds of spiritual power imbalances—and a type of abuse that perverts the prayer "*Your* will be done" into the secret hope that "*my* will be done".

And don't the long-term cover-up strategies at the level of the Universal Church show a sort of structural lack of empathy as a pastoral pattern?

Collusions: proposing a definition

I am anxious that spiritual abuse is understood as a specific relational pattern. This makes me think of the term *collusion*. It stems from the field of psychoanalysis and couples therapy (Dicks 2015), but is meanwhile being used beyond that realm. Collusion refers to an interaction pattern between two partners, based on corresponding relational conflicts. Their respective dispositions seem to fit like key and lock; both feel that they are meant for each other and come together under a tacit—and at the same time questionable—mutual arrangement. They are able to control immature desires and oversized fears of relationships by demanding the sort of behavior from each other that contributes towards reducing their own relational anxieties, while providing solutions to the problem of their respective counterpart: a person who is exceptionally fond of being cared

for intensively, spoiled, and nurtured narcissistically is a fit for a partner who likes to help—and who delegates his or her own unfulfilled narcissism with a perspective of basking in some of the other's glowing resplendence.

Collusions give a sense of exclusive proximity and indispensability to each other and are a prerequisite for some people to become engaged in a love affair at all. Such an arrangement remains largely unacknowledged between the players who are part of it, and may appear questionable to outsiders only, although most of the time the nature of their relationship goes completely unnoticed.

I look upon *spiritual abuse* as *collusion of a spiritual authority with a spiritual seeker which, under systemically advantageous circumstances, lets the power of the perpetrator grow and silences those who become victims in such a relationship.*

Consequences

Spiritual abuse turns out to be a systematic pattern of typically "coercive and controlling behavior in a religious context" (Oakley and Humphreys 2019, 31). Characteristically, "a spiritual authority invokes God, the ultimate authority, to *sanction* the abuse" (Diederich 2017, 54).

Abuse of power thus shows the Universal Church and its theologies in crisis. Coping with crisis—this was the meaningful title of the 2021 IAPT conference. But in a disastrous situation, every good star is far away and out of reach, especially when religiosity and spirituality not only cannot contribute to coping with or overcoming crises, but have even triggered them. Nevertheless, consequences are necessary: What is urgently needed is a fundamental change in theology and spirituality, in other words, a diaconal renewal that will raise questions about the office of the deacon and, in the future, of the deaconess, because they pursue a diaconal mission. What is also urgently needed is the recognition and reception of psychological insights—and, quite practically, qualified spiritual accompaniment that resists narcissistic dangers and shows empathy, even double empathy, as will be shown.

Spiritual considerations

In advance of the papal conclave in Rome, the later Pope Francis gave an address to the College of Cardinals in March 2013: "When the church does not emerge from itself to evangelize, it becomes self-referential … The evils that, over time, occur in ecclesiastical institutions have their root in self-referentiality, a kind of theological narcissism" (Nelson 2013).

This fuels my skepticism about a tradition that attributes *repraesentatio Christi* specifically to the ministers of the Church (Werbick 1997). The term describes a relationship between archetype and image. Aren't representatives tempted to usurp what (or who) they represent? Above all, when the absoluteness of the represented figure is reflected in a quasi-absoluteness of the representatives and is meant to be asserted accordingly by them? Doesn't that deny every possibility to distinguish representation from usurpation? A usurpation which does not only threaten the one who is represented but, even more so, those people who turn to the official representatives?

In the Judgement of the Nations (Mt 25:31-46) I discern biblical criticism of this kind of usurpation, because here divine power and dominion are not at all reflected by secular power and dominion. There is no way of acquiring them at all, not even *ex officio*. Jesus Christ encounters those who are suffering and powerless and thus acknowledges their authority. For he who encounters the needy and marginalized people is precisely the person, in whom you encounter God Himself. This dynamic speaks against an archetype/image concept with its static appearance. The encounter with Jesus Christ is not a one-way street, and certainly not from the Church minister to the needy person. The Judgement of the Nations turns this idea upside down. Though calling for humility, it appears unsusceptible to spiritual presumption.

Since then, ecclesiastical practice and theology have been hindered from reproducing God's authoritative sovereignty in the Church's reigning sovereignty and from legitimizing ecclesiastical authority by claiming that it is derived, in an unbroken manner, from an autocratically conceived divine sovereignty (Werbick 1997).

The Judgement of the Nations is the prototype of a *diaconia* that incites solidarity. The longer I have been a deacon, the more vital appears to me a practice of representation, a *diaconia* of representation, which is clearly different from the understanding of representation criticized above. Solidarity does not take away the place of those who are targeted, but seeks to create space for their very existence. Representation refers to an effort that does not replace the counterpart, but sets him or her free.

My representative who believes, hopes, and loves on my behalf, because I am unable to believe, hope, or love, does not eliminate me so that I do not matter anymore. Instead, he walks ahead of me, and I follow, while others follow, too, because he turns around and looks at them. He shows esteem for them by looking at them. He suffers with those, and because of those, who don't follow. In his love, the representative is sensitive to their suffering. In his love, the representative does not coerce anything, but hopes for all: he gives those people, to whom he is a representative, time to return to their place. The representative does not harass them, he hopes for them. His love is representation shaped as hope. The representative makes himself dependent; he is aware that he cannot do what he hopes and for what he hopes but, precisely in this powerlessness, he is free to love. By connecting back to the persons represented by him, he is immune to abuse of power.

By talking of *diaconia*, I also touch on the notion of my own ministry. I am anxious that the diaconate takes on more and more *shape* as a permanent and independent ministry; I am anxious about its diaconal orientation, not in a *profiling* that would have to delimit it against other ministries and services.

Although I see an urgent need to modify the requirements for access to the ministry, the proposal which comes up time and again to ordain permanent deacons as priests is something that disturbs me and appears to me as partly offensive and partly treacherous: with a self-critical view of the ministry, I suspect that the possibility of priestly ordination might be tempting for one or the other fellow deacon, who secretly perceives his diaconal ministry as a preliminary step towards another ministry. When the proposal to ordain permanent deacons as priests comes from deacons, I therefore tend to take it for a sort of treason. When priests, bishops, or lay people make such suggestions, I sometimes feel offended. I am committed to my diaconal vocation and try to live up to it. Therefore, I am glad to have celibate men among my deacon brothers who testify, by their existence, that deacons and priests differ in more than just their form of life.

For the sake of a diaconal Church, I am concerned about why the quest is always for *viri probati*—and never for *mulieres probatae*. For one of the features of mighty clericalism (Demasure 2016) is that it is a male society that, as a closed system, resists being broken up by more men who, as deacons, are already part of the clergy. I strongly advocate for a female diaconate—and, following my research semester in Latin America in 2019, also for seeking inspiration from the new paths of the Church in Amazonia, instead of putting the preservation of an outdated ministerial ideology above the welfare of the faithful. I look upon those efforts of renewal as a service to the Universal Church, not at all as a disassociation from it—and an opportunity to learn from international theology and spirituality. At the same time, the ecological, political, and cultural crises, to which the 2021 IAPT conference was dedicated, are coming up again with Amazonia and the Church there. But there, too, spiritual abuse is a pressing challenge (Figueroa Alvear and Tombs 2019).

(Non-) Reception of psychological insights

When theologians only take *other sciences* seriously, insofar as these confirm their beliefs, more theological narcissism is inevitable. Ways out of the crisis then certainly do not open up. I take it for my duty to call for spiritual detoxication if we, as the Church, do not want to perpetuate closed systems.

In the fight against clericalism, attention is admittedly focused less on deacons and more on priests, especially, of course, on priestly formation. But there is still a massive lack of recognition of psychological insights, as I would like to show by means of a prominent document of the Universal Church.

In *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of 8 December 2016, the Congregation for the Clergy outlines, under the title "The Gift of the Priestly Vocation", the program for a human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral priestly formation, marked by a self-critical spirit inspired by Pope Francis. In terms of pastoral psychology, it is also about how future priests can give esteem to other people, while they themselves cannot expect specific esteem for the form of life they have chosen.

Despite these crucial requirements and impulses, the above title reminds me of Marie Keenan and her observation that celibacy "is rarely conceptualized in seminary formation as a major human 'loss'. No grieving is facilitated or takes place. Instead, celibacy is presented as a 'gift'", whereas the "losses of male sexual expression and fatherhood are largely ignored" (Keenan 2013, 234).

Furthermore, the document persists in explaining its position towards homosexuality—moreover, between questions of mental health and sexual abuse—which is scientifically untenable. Accordingly, men are not admitted to the priesthood "who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homo-

sexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture'" (Congregation for the Clergy 2017, No. 199). What is the purpose of expressly mentioning homosexual practice and culture, if mandatory celibacy is applicable to priests of every sexual orientation and if, in practice, men of homosexual orientation have been ordained nonetheless? And what do deep-seated tendencies refer to, if they do not imply a lack of interpersonal skills that is likewise found among persons of heterosexual orientation? Are they deep-seated, and therefore incurable, as opposed to possibly curable, homosexual "tendencies" which are "only the expression of a transitory problem" (No. 200), as *Ratio Fundamentalis* puts it? How is a candidate going to deal critically with his own sexuality under these circumstances?

Whatever an individual's sexual preference is, it must be accepted. The only viable alternative is self-denial under the sanctioning power of an entity that thus deliberately puts up with favoring collusions which are characteristic of spiritual abuse.

Qualified spiritual accompaniment

In settings of spiritual accompaniment, neither the one who is accompanied, nor the accompanist, has access to the work of the Spirit. Instead, learning to *conduct* a dialogue, means to confide oneself to the third party, to rely on the guiding power of the Spirit—and at the same time to avert the danger that directors and directees become seducers and seduced. "He who is giving the Exercises"—there is not talk of a master or leader here—"ought not to influence him who is receiving them more to poverty or to a promise, than to their opposites, nor more to one state or way of life than to another", one reads in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. In quest of the divine will it appears "more fitting and much better, that the Creator and Lord Himself should communicate Himself to His devout soul… So, he who is giving the Exercises should not turn or incline to one side or the other, but standing in the center like a balance, leave the Creator to act immediately with the creature, and the creature with its Creator and Lord." (St. Ignatius 1914, No. 15).

These sentences contain incontrovertible theological quality standards. Because temptation originates from dependencies which, according to my experience, are unavoidable at some stage, when, in their despair, the accompanied persons attribute all the power and expertise to me alone. But then it is necessary to quickly share the responsibility again, which was assumed by way of representation, and to ensure an *empowerment* of the guided persons (Coetsier 2021) who certainly have their own expertise and gifts, in which I place my trust as a representative, until they themselves are able to develop that trust again.

What is absolutely necessary is the qualified *supervision* of spiritual accompanists so as to identify their intrinsic motivations and needs, such as for recognition, proximity, or distance, and to prevent collusions. These needs of the accompanists, their own conflict situations, and frustrations provoke their experience of powerlessness. However, as persons who also see themselves as masters or leaders, they embody a contrastive or even deadly combination of power and powerlessness, and live "out of an unreflective script of private powerlessness whilst ministering in a site of unsupervised and unchallenged public dominance" (Keenan 2013, 238).

This is complemented by further psychological quality standards because those who act as accompanists practice *double empathy*: in seeking to sense not only the response of their counterpart, but also the response of God and the divine will. Double empathy allows a spiritual accompanist to turn to God in intercessory prayer, both in solidarity with the person entrusted to him and at the same time linking back to God and his kingdom. This habitus may prevent the accompanist from building his own kingdom and holding the accompanied person back from the power of God's grace. Thus, those on a spiritual quest are not silenced, either by coercing them to remain with violent husbands, or by keeping confessional secrets about what was done to them, or by a "steamroller" sermon, or by putting them in a priestly garb, in and under which they fall silent. Instead, they should find their own voice—either for the first time or anew.

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Church in crisis: Coping strategies and reform stress

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The church is in crisis. It is becoming steadily smaller and is therefore looking for reforms to bring about a change. But the church's reforms are structural adjustments, not reforms in the true sense, and therefore limited in scope. They make sense in order to save money, but they cannot reverse the overall social trend. Against this background, this chapter asks in which respects organizational reforms can actually be helpful and inspiring. But above all, the question arises where in society religious and spiritual dynamics can be observed and how the church could take them up and strengthen them.

Church in crisis

In most countries in Europe and in the USA, the mainline churches are under pressure. They are losing their social relevance. In what follows, I will refer primarily to Germany, since that is where I know the situation best. For decades now, church membership figures in Germany have been in continuous decline. Whereas, in the years after the Second World War, more than 95 % of Germans had some church affiliation, currently only about 50 % are members of one of the two major national churches. The 2019 Freiburg Study "Church in Upheaval" predicted that, by the year 2060, the churches will have lost a further 50% of their membership. This development gives cause for concern (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 2019, 6). It seems that the "Volkskirchen" ("people's churches") no longer represent the people ("Volk"), but are becoming minority churches. Even by the year 2030, the churches in Germany will have to reckon with a drop of around 25 percent in church tax income. At the same time, retirement figures will rise dramatically from 2025 and, with them, the costs of providing, in particular, for the clergy. And the upheaval caused by the pandemic crisis is not even included in these predictions.

It is abundantly clear that this trend poses major challenges for the church leadership. How is church life to be financed in the mid-to-long term? What priorities need to be set? Which posts are to be dissolved, which work sectors cut back, which buildings closed? The regional churches ("Landeskirchen") are not to be envied with regard to these weighty decisions and the disappointment that will be caused, no matter what they decide. This also raises the question as to whether and how churches can undergo such a transformation that will put them in a position to stop or at least to slow this downward trend.

In what follows, I will first explore the question of how churches are trying to respond to the crisis in the church. Then I explore the question of whether the reform programs that church leaders are pursuing should not rather be understood as structural programs and how, from a sociological point of view, the possibilities and limits of organizational reforms are to be assessed. After focusing on the limits of structural reforms, I will then address the question of what the church can do to constructively

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confront the crisis. Here I will focus on religious and spiritual needs that can be observed in society.

Reform programs in the church of Germany

Over the past two decades, the Evangelical Church in Germany (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland—EKD) has regularly produced a series of new reform papers. They not only reflect on cutbacks and mergers, but also on what structural decisions might, at the same time, trigger reform processes with regard to a new participative behavior amongst church membership, and how the church as a whole might become more attractive for the people once again. Even a quick glance at the reasons behind the declining membership clearly reveals that demographics are the most significant reason, but that individuals' decisions against baptism or in favor of leaving the church are also major factors. The only aspects that it might be possible to have an influence on are these last-named reasons.

The 2006 EKD reform paper "Church of Freedom" still focused primarily on structural measures, on 'beacons' (Leuchtfeuer), and other centers designed to radiate new and fresh attractiveness. The paper gave rise to many discussions, but hardly to the desired transformation processes (Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland 2006; cf. Karle 2010). Last year, the Synod of the EKD presented "Twelve Guiding Principles for the Future of an Open Church" (Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland 2021). The paper demonstrates that the EKD now no longer believes it can buck the downward trend and grow, as was still proclaimed by the 2006 impulse paper. At the same time, one gains the impression that the church still finds it difficult to actually accept this realization. The paper thus suggests, that, in the end, all will be well—if only church players were to live out church with authenticity and fluidity, and full of vitality, activity, motivation and dynamism. Many of the ideas formulated in the paper's guiding principles are set next to each other without any recognizable structure. What is particularly surprising is that the paper almost exclusively focuses on a highly committed church as 'movement' and ignores the institutional church structures. Spontaneously, one asks: Where does this 'church in motion' take place apart from church venues? And what, in concrete terms, is it supposed to enliven?

What is even more serious, though: This focus on a highly committed church means that the many still quiet voices are lost sight of, including those church members who primarily get in touch with church for occasional services such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages or funerals and the central feasts of the church year. This is all the more astonishing since, over the past decades, Practical Theology has never tired of emphasizing how fatal it is to underestimate this group of all groups, and to disparagingly view them as religiously indifferent. The membership studies that the EKD itself has conducted over the past several decades clearly show that those who do not regularly attend worship are not disinterested "dead wood" (Karteileichen) or nominal members, but rather are Christians who, for a variety of reasons, prefer to remain "semi-distant". As a rule, they have little interest in those missionizing activities and the staging of authentic piety of which the new EKD reform paper speaks, but they are grateful if, in times of crisis, they can turn to a pastor who will support them pastorally at life's turning points, engaging with them in conversation, and who knows how to read an existential life event in religious terms and to observe and celebrate it with them.

This form of church membership, switching selectively from distance to closeness and, without a bad conscience, back again to distance, is not flawed or deficient (Kretzschmar 2012). It is in fact one of the true strengths of "Volkskirche" that, alongside sociable and intensive forms of community, it also permits and facilitates distance. It is an essential feature of Protestantism that it does not encroach too much on the individual but allows people free scope to live out their faith in their own way. Thus, the fact that most people only get in touch with the church sporadically should not be lamented but should be acknowledged as a "normal" form of communication in a functionally differentiated society. It is precisely this distance that is the cohesive kit of a society or church in all its diversity.

At the same time, it must be granted that good advice is hard to find in the present situation. Academic reflection also has little to offer in response to the perplexity which the paper takes as its starting point. At this stage, not even the best of activities and innovations can stop the secularization processes in society as a whole and the associated decline in church membership. A great deal would be gained, therefore, if the church were to openly confess to its own perplexity and helplessness—and, in

the light of that, with an attitude of thoughtfulness and of open, searching questioning, to enter into dialog with the various church players and experts.

Possibilities and limitations of organizational reforms in an empirical and sociological perspective

Organizational reforms are a complex undertaking in which there is always a likelihood of paradoxical effects. Reform processes in organizations should not therefore be understood as linear processes that run in a straight line from the planning stage to their implementation, as church players often assume. Many modifications and a great deal of resistance arise in the course of reform plans, so that it is impossible "to keep reforms on track with their intended effects and to achieve the envisaged objectives" (Luhmann 2000, 341). In Protestant churches, which are not governed top-down, but bottom-up, and which are synodal in their constitution, this is even more pronouncedly the case than, for example, in business enterprises.

This much becomes evident when looking at reform processes not only in churches, but also in universities and schools: In order to enforce a reform in the first place, the past is strategically made worse than it was and, at the same time, the future is idealized. Once the future arrives in the present, it is never as good as it was originally hoped and planned to be. As a result, it is not uncommon for the reform to trigger further reforms. An additional problem is that organizations such as churches can only decide what they are able to decide—and that means organizational questions such as cost savings in certain areas, structural changes, parish mergers, cuts in salaries, etc. What ultimately counts, however, is not open to decision-making —that people are affected by religion, that the Spirit of God takes hold of them, and that they become committed to and involved in a vibrant church. Religious processes and "conversions" are not plannable and are therefore not part of church reform programs.

At the Ruhr University Bochum, we conducted comparative studies on church reform processes in various regional churches in Germany. In the course of this, we were able to observe exactly that: the impossibility of achieving the initially envisaged objectives and the disillusioning realization that it is only possible to decide about structures, and that this is a far cry from making religious communication come to life (Brauer-Noss 2017; Gabriel, Karle and Pollack 2016). Often, church mergers failed even to produce the organizational synergy effects that had been hoped for, but they did lead to upheaval and disappointment and thereby to stress and exhaustion. If nothing else, it became clear that cost savings are not possible without loss—contrary to the rhetoric of the church reform programs. The cutbacks lead either to overtaxing the remaining personnel or to a reduction in the scope of services or to a loss of quality. It ultimately became apparent that structural reforms are primarily motivated by a lack of money and not by theological programs or convictions. To some extent, namely, the content programs are "tacked on" as legitimization for the planned cutbacks, but they are mainly of rhetorical, not of fundamental, importance. The outcome of this is a disjunction of organization and theology: Theology does not play any decisive role in this kind of church reform; it is not a matter of awareness processes or of a church in the power of the Spirit, but of structural reforms and thereby of structural adjustments at a time when there is progressively less and less money available in the churches.

In my view, there is much to be gained if the churches were first to admit to this and thus to acknowledge more clearly the difference between organization and religion: Stated objectively, it is a matter of necessary structural adjustments due to declining resources. These are painful, and they cause disappointment and conflict, although they are frequently unavoidable. But the fact that they are necessary does not mean they are uncontroversial. They should therefore be carried out with great caution and care, otherwise they will lead to destructive reform stress that saps the strength of church players, destroying rather than encouraging the motivation of the very people who are actively involved in the church. Structural adjustments, then, are not to be equated with reforms in the proper sense of the word. They do not lead to more members or more baptisms or to fewer people leaving the church. Any such suggestion is probably illusory. The church leadership is quite justified in wishing for a vibrant and authentic church, but religious awakenings operate on quite a different plane and in a completely different manner than structural reforms do. Religious revival processes cannot be decided according to plan, but generally happen spontaneously and unpredictably—and the model they follow is that of evolution rather than of planning.

At the same time, it is essential to ensure that the structural adjustments necessitated by financial

constraints do not impact negatively on the overall conditions for the working of the Spirit and hence for religious awakenings and formation processes. Here and there, they may even succeed in improving these conditions. To that extent, structural adjustments and reforms in content are not to be seen as totally distinct and separate, even though they are by no means identical. It is my opinion that, by taking this somewhat more modest perspective, the churches might achieve more. At the structural level, they would avoid illusionary expectations that can only ever be disappointed, and would not need to dress up painful economization processes as a fresh start or opportunity. In view of this, they would enter into dialog with many players and experts with a greater willingness to learn, more reflectively, and as seekers. If nothing else, this approach would go easier on the dedicated full-time staff and volunteers who, out of mistaken activism in crisis, always seek the fault in themselves, instead of in the dramatic changes that are to be ascribed to the tendentially anti-church social processes and dynamics with which the church currently sees itself faced.

On the one hand, one could feel a sense of relief that the church has not got it all wrong, for there is much that lies beyond the church's control and its disposing. At the same time, however, resignation can also arise at how little it is possible to change. Resignation is not the manifestation of a church that seeks to confront the world with tidings of faith, love, and hope. I would therefore like to reflect once again on what institutional parameters are better able to facilitate the working of the Spirit rather than obstructing it. What religious and spiritual needs and activities are to be observed in society, and what might be learned from that for what the churches have to offer? I wish to cautiously develop a few perspectives.

Perspectives and ideas for church development

Church leadership measures

Diversity

Let me begin with one or two organizational reforms that are not related to cost factors, but that could indeed revitalize church life. There is probably even more that falls to mind on the catholic side than on the protestant side. Thus, for example, the ordination of women was and is a huge asset for the protestant church. But the protestant church, too, struggles with the diversity of life in society. If the church of Jesus Christ really bids each and every one welcome and is serious about accepting each and every person in their suchness as created by God, then that church must also be serious about putting same-sex partnerships on equal terms with heterosexual couples. What is more, the church's regulations for pastors must be liberalized. It should be made possible, for example, for pastors to be married to Muslims or to partners with no religious affiliation, or to be able to live together with a partner as an unmarried couple in the pastor's official residence. This would not only be of great benefit for the pluralism of the clergy, but it would also be conducive to the credibility of the church, which would thereby effectively present itself as an open and tolerant church that does not shy away from social pluralism and biographical complexity but is also able to perceive these as something to be cherished rather than simply as a threat.

It remains true to this very day that the church, in keeping with the Spirit of Jesus Christ, sees itself as committed to judging people irrespective of their background, gender or status, instead paving the way for community that goes beyond all kinds of barriers and hurdles (Karle 2006). On this point, the church should scale down its official regulatory aspect and make more space for the vibrancy and "untidiness" of the Spirit of Pentecost.

Digitalization

As a result of the pandemic, society as a whole has undergone huge forward surges with regard to digital forms of communication. The church, too, has also been affected by this digital activism. Whereas the church regarded digital communication prior to the pandemic primarily with missions-strategy objectives, thereby implying a certain degree of opposition between church and internet, the perspectives have now become a good deal more realistic and are geared more to the user or member perspective than to the interests of the church organization. This is also due to the immense digital activity developed at the grass roots of the church during the pandemic—with regard to forms of worship, all kinds of dialog formats, digital celebrations of communion, teaching modules, meetings, etc.

Church and theology are now called on to examine in greater empirical detail how digital opportu-

nities are being used in relation to situation and context. What are people already using? What do they regard as helpful? What would they like to see in the future in regard to a blend or mix of analog and digital elements in the church? What support might full-time staff and volunteers need "from the top" in the process? "A more finely tuned, context and application-oriented approach" (Kretzschmar 2021, 277; cf. Kretzschmar 2019) is therefore to be recommended on the subject of church and digitalization. The challenge in this for the organizational leadership of the church would primarily be to act in a helping, advisory, and service-oriented capacity rather than imposing too many regulations.

Spirit and organization

Religion cannot cope with too much organization. Chaos and vitality are part of religious communication. It has not been uncommon in the history of the church for the blowing of the Spirit to have had a contra-organizational aspect. Jörg Lauster (2021) has demonstrated this impressively in his monograph on the history of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God is very often spontaneous and untamable. The church as organization should therefore consider how it can manage to be well organized on the one hand, yet on the other hand not to emphasize this organizational character even more, but at certain points to have the wisdom to take a step back.

In terms of religious sociology, it is evident that the formation of religiosity presupposes religious addressability and hence certain social forms: only so can it flourish. Religiosity does not develop of its own accord but requires conducive social environments. The question is then, what "softer" social bases and social forms might look like that allow more scope for individuality than some traditional formats do. Permit me to suggest a few examples here.

Church buildings as spiritual places

One of the great treasures of the church is its church buildings. A church already communicates religion by the sacrality of the space, and by the traces that centuries of the faithful have left in that space. It receives visitors and draws them into its own cosmos of symbols. At the same time, a visit to a church building affords the opportunity for religious practice in miniature: by lighting a candle or saying a prayer or listening to the organ play and immersing oneself in the space and its religious symbols.

We know from Eastern Germany that attachment to a church building can outlive membership of the church. Wherever church buildings are accessible, they are appreciated and frequented as spaces for quiet and contemplation. The calm of a church interior sets a pleasant contrast to its visitors' daily routine. Visitors especially appreciate the semantic vagueness that is coupled with the stable invariance of a church building. Churches are quintessential loci of the presence of God in the world. They symbolize the inaccessibility of individual and collective conditions of existence. In a world in which digital communication is increasingly gaining in importance, it is precisely "the immobility and materiality" (Erne 2009, 31) of church buildings that establish confidence and trust.

During the pandemic, churches were and are, therefore, often frequented as places of refuge by people who are afraid or are in emotional distress. Aesthetic church buildings, particularly in city centers, therefore need to be accessible, and small-scale religious formats in them (organ music, lunchtime prayers, etc.) should extend a low-threshold invitation to religious meditation and practice. Churches must—quite literally—be open churches.

Church music and art

A further important focus, which is directly linked with church buildings, is on church music and art. Throughout its history, church music has had a central role to play in Protestantism. The Reformation was, among other things, a singing movement of the people. Many people in our own day, who never or seldom enter a church, are nevertheless touched and moved religiously by music and singing. The fact that hardly any singing or musicmaking has taken place since the pandemic is therefore also a major setback for peoples' religious lives.

An immense wealth of modern sacred songs has emerged since the 1960s, choir singing continues to thrive, and Gospel music is enjoying great popularity, but classical music also persists unabated, especially in the form of Johann Sebastian Bach's passions and oratorios, which regularly pack the concert halls and churches.

Religious communication refers not only to verbal forms of communicating and comprehending, but also to aesthetic forms, to music and visual arts. For Friedrich Schleiermacher, worship was a center of regeneration for Christian living, not least because of the great importance of music and singing (Karle 2021, 296–303). According to Schleiermacher,

music gives voice to something distinctive and characteristic that cannot be expressed in words. Not only the classics, but contemporary music too should therefore be given more space in the church. Visual arts with an affinity to religion also have an important role to play. They extend an invitation to individual contemplation and identification. A good number of theaters and opera directors choose churches as the venue for their productions, whereby the space surrounds the piece performed, communicating a further interpretation of its own. All of these are opportunities to offer low-threshold formats of religious communication that is appreciated by many people.

Spirituality

Spirituality is in vogue. Even if it is not to everyone's taste, spiritual and meditative religious social formats should therefore be fostered in the church. Spirituality is not infrequently a kind of "self-religion" (Knoblauch 2009, 127), yet at the same time it is also open for religious questions. For many people, spirituality is attractive because of how it is associated with body-related forms that are perceived and experienced as "holistic" in terms of the "body turn"—as in Christian fasting and pilgrimages, for example. The popularity enjoyed by pilgrimages in particular remains unbroken.

There is also a highly positive response to mystic and meditative forms, as practiced, for example, in Taizé worship with meditative songs and prayers. Allow me to mention here a further social support base for religious activity in the German context that is related to church, yet is often not associated with church. I am thinking of the calendar "Der Andere Advent" ("The Other Advent"), published by a Christian association, which guides its readers six weeks long through the Advent and Christmas season. It is highly aesthetic in design, oscillating between a Christian profile and a low threshold approach, and it invites individual interpretation on the part of its readers. In the shortest space of time, the calendar has proved extremely successful, expanding from an initial print run of 10,000 to currently more than two million readers. This religious and aesthetic form of address clearly meets the needs of the users. On the one hand, they can draw personal and individual inspiration from the calendar, but they can also exchange views on it with other users, either directly or via Facebook (Happe 2015). Weakly determined, searching forms of religious communication should therefore not be discouraged, as is tendentially the case in the EKD's 'guiding principles'.

On the whole, the point is to recognize that church is often a catalyst for religious practice in places where people are not even aware of it as church. Even modern religiosity is reliant on social forms and cannot exist of its own accord. In all of this, it is evidence of the strength of Christianity, not of its weakness, that it is able to leave certain questions in abeyance while at the same time offering concrete interpretations. It is a question of being open for the diversity of late modern spirituality while at the same time holding on to something like the church's own distinctive core.

Persons and places

The latest EKD church membership survey of 2015 reveals that more than three-quarters of all protestant church members know a pastor, at least from sight, and that this is the most significant factor for their church affiliation (Bedford-Strohm 2015, 33pp.; Karle 2015). Personal encounters with pastors, supported by role expectations, enable and strengthen emotionally and cognitively stable relations to church. Pastors are the personal face of the church and have the highest contact rate; they motivate people to become actively involved as volunteers and, at the same time, are often bridge builders between those actively involved in church and those who are more distanced.

But, like pastors, church buildings and local parish life with all its associated activities and organizations are also elementary for people's contact to church. In summing up, the fifth church membership survey comments that:

> Even in all the differentiation, religious diversity and biographical mobility that is characteristic of modern society, the local church would appear to be of paramount importance from the perspective of its members, on occasions even to the extent of shaping their identity. The church achieves this above all because its members in the local parishes are aware of a whole range of highly varied topics, persons, and activities, in which they themselves …, in a similarly wide variety of ways, are able to take an active part. (Hermelink 2015, 67)

But, at the local parish level, it is also possible to offer low-threshold religious educational activities in the form of kindergartens and confirmation classes. Needless to say, the churches also need a wide range of contact points beyond and apart from the local parish but, at the same time, it would be mistaken to

underestimate this sometimes seemingly antiquated form of contact.

Summary

Innovations always involve risks, and this holds true all the more for organizations with survival problems: "High-risk both in the question of whether the environment will accept the changes or rather hold on to habitual expectations; and high-risk too in the question of whether and how the changes can be implemented within the system" (Luhmann 2000, 353) .To this extent, it is crucial to proceed cautiously and circumspectly, and not to regard established factors too readily as the costly ballast of the past. It is not only dynamism, movement, and fluidity that is called for, but also dependability, stability, and consistency. The more critical the present is perceived to be, and the more uncertain the future, all the more important it then is to proceed as seekers and questioners—with confidence in the people who live and embody church in the widest possible variety of ways and in the widest possible number of places.

In all of this, it is vital that the church should avoid regarding its tried and tested social forms, in which the habitual form of religious practices can be established in all their diversity, as being outdated but, as far as possible, it should uphold them and develop them further. Church as movement but with no institutional backbone is without stability and without future; it lacks the accessibility and predictability that guarantee people the possibility of approaching it, even if it has been a long time since they were last there. The focus should therefore be set not only on activity and commitment, but also on receptive forms of religious inclusion, in which people are "only" listeners or attendees or visitors.

At the same time, research on voluntary work reveals that there are many people who enjoy being actively involved in church and who do so with a great deal of motivation. They are a special treasure-trove of the church, and it is important to nurture them, so that religious and helping communication is not only sustained by the church as organization, but by a whole variety of people for whom faith is of importance—even and especially in times of uncertainty.

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Neither cross nor catalyst: Institutions as a container for crisis

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The interlocking crises of a pandemic, political unrest, and racial injustice invite renewed attention to the role of institutions in times of crisis. To this end, this chapter engages with Mary Douglas's and Hugh Heclo's work on institutions to introduce two metaphors for institutions' role in times of crisis: cross and catalyst. When employed to study religious organizations during crisis, however, a third option complements the antinomy Douglas and Heclo present: institutions as a container for the collaboration crisis requires. As practical theology considers the evolution of institutions amid ongoing crisis, this third metaphor can guide research and praxis.

Part one engages Mary Douglas's and Hugh Heclo's work on institutions to consider two dominant metaphors for the role of institutions in times of crisis: cross and catalyst. As Douglas notes in *How Institutions Think*, institutions structure individuals' imaginative horizons, representing a form of social thinking writ large, especially in times of crisis. To constructively extend Douglas's account, institutions are a cross to bear, providing the social scripts that direct individual and collective responses to crisis. Further, as Heclo notes in *On Thinking Institutionally*, institutions are often created in response to crisis and regulate change amid crisis. Heclo accents the agency individuals retain to build institutions, even amid life and death decisions. To extend Heclo's logic, institutions are a catalyst for change.

Part two introduces original empirical research completed during the COVID-19 crisis to consider how existing frameworks can inform the study of religious institutions during times of crisis. This research identifies a third metaphor that complements this antinomy Douglas and Heclo represent: institutions provide a container for the collaboration crisis requires. When examined as a container for collaborative activity, institutions become sites of inquiry that invite interdisciplinary perspectives. Four features evince how institutions function as a container in crisis: connection, care, change, and collaboration.

Finally, the conclusion identifies three implications for research in practical theology in the wake of crisis. First, crisis requires an interdisciplinary approach in order to adequately consider and constructively engage how crisis impacts individuals and communities. Second, crisis provides a category that invites empirical and normative inquiry. Third, if institutions represent a container to navigate crisis, there is an ongoing need for contextual and constructive research about the form of institutionality that can sustain faith communities in the wake of this crisis.

Introduction

The interlocking crises of a pandemic, political unrest, and racial injustice invite renewed attention to the role of institutions in times of crisis. Practical theology has a history of prioritizing the challenges that confront communities of faith (Miller-McLemore 2012)—including the specific challenges before religious institutions—but the field has underexplored the role of institutions with(in) crisis. For ex-

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ample, Scharen and Campbell-Reed conclude their report "Learning Pastoral Imagination" by identifying the challenge before pastors, theological educators, and local communities of faith: "[W]e are by all accounts living through a time of dramatic shifts in religious life generally and in the institutions responsible for training leaders for communities of faith" (2016, p. 46). According to Scharen and Campbell-Reed, the challenge is acute, but the way forward is not clear.

Crisis is an experience that "brings one up short" (Osmer 2008, p. 21). Recent reflections expand this analysis, demonstrating the relevance of ongoing inquiry at this intersection. For example: Benac and Weber-Johnson's edited collection, *Crisis and Care* (2021), introduces two metaphors: a famine and flood to describe how crisis impacts faith communities. Like a famine, crisis can slowly grow, eventually eroding a community's reserves and resilience. Like a flood, crisis can also come suddenly, sweeping individuals and communities away in a deluge of despair (pp. 2–5). Sabrina Müller observes in *Lived Theology* (2021) how the "phenomena of crisis" (p. 5) posed by declining congregations invites a reassessment of the common priesthood that guides protestant communions. Kiara Jorgensen and Alan Padgett's *Ecotheology* (2020) identifies the mounting climate crisis as a site that demands theological reflection and collective action. Thomas Long's *What Shall We Say?* (2014) details the complex relationship between the preaching vocation and the crisis of faith. And Jean Proeschold-Bel and Jayson Byassee review recent empirical data to detail the severity of a mounting clergy health crisis in North America in *Faithful and Fractured* (2018). These and other recent reflections on crisis decry a single narrative (Werntz 2021); however, they illustrate how the complex crises that confront communities of faith interact with a shifting institutional landscape. Nevertheless, the precise relationship between institutions and crisis in this moment invites renewed reflection and clarification. In this absence, there is, as Dykstra and Hudnut-Beumler note (1992) the need for "an alternative metaphor" (p. 330) to guide religious life.

To address this need, this essay undertakes an interdisciplinary investigation to explore three metaphors for the role of institutions in times of crisis.[1] Part one engages with Mary Douglas's and Hugh Heclo's work on institutions to consider two dominant metaphors for the role of institutions in times of crisis: cross and catalyst. Part two introduces original empirical research completed during the COVID-19 crisis to consider how existing frameworks can inform the study of religious institutions during times of crisis. This research identifies a third metaphor that complements this antinomy Douglas and Heclo represent: institutions provide a container for the collaboration crisis requires. While existing metaphors for the role of institutions in crises express the capacity for institutions to constrain and catalyze individuals' response to crisis, the third metaphor, institutions as container, clarifies how institutions direct the collective experience and constructive responses. Finally, the conclusion identifies three implications for research in practical theology in the wake of crisis.[2]

Existing Metaphors: Cross and Catalyst

Existing metaphors for the role of institutions accent either institutions' capacity to restrict human agency or their capacity to catalyze collective action. The metaphors of "cross" and "catalyst" express these dominant metaphors. Research from Mary Douglas and Hugh Heclo provide two representative accounts of these views.

Mary Douglas: Institutions as Cross

Mary Douglas's Abrams Lectures, as collected in *How Institutions Think* (1986), clarify "the extent to which thinking depends on institutions" (p. 8). As she concludes: "For better or worse, individuals really do share their thoughts and they do to some

1 Research on institutions identifies a plurality of definitions for "institutions." This plurality, as Scott (2014) and Heclo (2008) note, can introduce conceptual ambiguity. For the purpose of this chapter, "institutions" is defined as organized, patterned processes of social engagement that offer dynamic, ordered ways of living according to a vision for individual and collective flourishing.

2 I presented versions of this argument at three international conferences in 2021: The International Academy of Practical Theology (IAPT), the International Society for the Sociology of Religion (ISSR), and the British & Irish Association for Practical Theology (BIAPT). Conversations with Steve Taylor shaped this work, and Savannah Green provided research support. In each case, I am grateful for colleagues' thoughtful engagement.

extent harmonize their preferences, and they have no other way to make big decisions except within the scope of the institutions they build" (p. 128). For Douglas, however, crisis clarifies the formative function of institutions. She introduces this with the Speluncean Explorer example of five members of a society who become trapped underground while spelunking. When help cannot reach them and their supplies run out, they determine the only way they can survive is if they eat the flesh of one of their party and emerge many days later as a party of four. When they are tried, the judges arrive at three different conclusions according to the institutional frameworks that direct their thinking: conviction for murder, acquittal, and withholding decision.

This example introduces institutions' spacious social influence that represents a form of social thinking writ large, especially in times of crisis. As Douglas writes: "[I]ndividuals in crisis do not make life and death decisions on their own. Who shall be saved and who shall die is settled by institutions" (p. 4). Although individuals may conveniently ignore the way institutions direct decision making, crisis crystalizes institutions' spacious influence. A pandemic. Economic fragility. Racial injustice. Political Unrest. These are the recent caverns we have fallen into, and the competing responses demonstrate institutions' enduring ability to direct responses. Amidst the modern and post-modern prioritization of autonomy and rationality, Douglas's account makes visible the seemingly invisible influence of institutions in contemporary society. For her contemporary readers, Douglas's comments represent a rhetorical appeal to *think* about the institutional production and extension of knowledge through institutions and the type of institutions that constitute the imaginative boundaries in contemporary society.

Although Douglas does not use the metaphor of a "cross" to describe her understanding of how institutions think, it provides a fitting category to describe the two-fold function of institutions within her account. On the one hand, institutions are a cross to bear; they express the social scripts individuals inherit, directing their individual and collective action. Unlike the trapped miners, contemporary readers are not able to free themselves from the cross of institutions. As Douglas notes: "Only the individualists, bound not by ties to one another and imbued by no principals of solidarity, would hit upon the cannable gamble as the proper course" (p. 8). On the other hand, institutions are also a cross for crucifixion, providing justification for the execution of violence upon the individuals institutions deem "guilty" of crimes against the broader society institutions support. While Douglas acknowledges the moral impasse this conclusion represents, she does not a provide a convenient exit from institutions. Individuals can only proceed by "recognizing the individual person's involvement within institution-building form the very start" (p. 67). Hence, amid the "life and death decisions" (p. 4) institutions govern, individuals can navigate crisis with an awareness of how institutions may be a cross to bear or an instrument for execution.

Hugh Heclo: Institutions as Catalyst

Hugh Heclo's argument in *On Thinking Institutionally* (2008) provides a second metaphor: institutions as catalyst. If Douglas accents individuals constrained ability to think apart from institutions, Heclo prioritizes the individual's ability to think within the institutions they inhabit. This form of thinking requires considering the ways individuals may think within institutions, stewarding the institutional spaces that mediate meaning. For Heclo, thinking institutionally involves moving beyond thinking *about* institutions to thinking as agents *within* institutional frameworks that are infused with meaning and values. Such a way of thinking involves seeing institutions from the "inside out" (p. 82) and engaging in the practice of "faithful reception" in which one receives meaning from external referents in the past while also attending to the tradition one is creating (p. 98). Similarly locating the inception of institutions in relation to crisis, Heclo offers a more optimistic account of individual moral agency beyond crisis. Institutions, as Heclo notes, are "often created in response to some crisis [and] preserve stability by adapting to changing circumstances of their social setting" (p. 54). Crisis catalyzes institutions.

While crisis may catalyze the formation of institutions, individuals retain the ability to act as moral agents in the wake of crisis. Specifically, they have the power to determine which values and practices will be preserved beyond times of crisis. Adding an affective dimension to the reception and transmission of values through institutions, Heclo compares thinking institutionally to "receiving and passing on a kiss through a veil" (p. 110). This distinction by Heclo acknowledges the formative capacity of insti-

tutions while also accenting the agency that individuals possess within institutions to decide which values are worth transmitting, thereby shaping institutions through their stewardship. In this way, Heclo picks up where Douglas concludes by accenting the agency individuals retain to build institutions, even amid the challenges of life and death decisions.

To extend the logic of Heclo's account, institutions are a catalyst for collective discernment. The enduring quality of institutions and their ability to transcend space and geography allows individuals to exert moral agency by shaping the scripts that future generations will receive. In doing so, they become catalysts for collective discernment and generational change. To receive the invitation to think institutionally is to become a steward of the institution one inhabits; it is to undertake a practice of faithful reception and transmission between the generations an institution spans. Without minimizing the way institutions can function as a cross, Heclo's attention to the transmission of values allows him to accent the catalytic promise of thinking institutionally. As Heclo notes, "As a basic orientation toward life, institutional thinking understands itself to be in a position primarily of receiving rather than of inventing or creating" (p. 98). This form of "faithful reception," as Heclo notes, "gives life meaning by establishing a connection with exterior referents in the past" (98). To think institutionally is to become an actor in the catalytic transmission of values and practices through institutions.

A Third Metaphor: Institutions as Container

While Douglas's and Heclo's work helpfully accents how institutions constrain and enable activity during crisis, another metaphor is needed. The metaphor of a container provides an apt image to describe the dual function of institutions. I will develop this metaphor by describing original empirical research completed over the last four years, with specific attention to data collected during the pandemic.

This research examined ecclesial-organizational adaptation in the Pacific Northwest, a region of the United States that includes Oregon, Idaho, and Washington. The region is distinguished by a history of religious entrepreneurship and a marginal social position for religious organizations. According to Mark Silk, a scholar of American religion, the region provides a case to consider "the American religious future" (Silk 2019).

Two critical cases where individuals across different types of organizations are engaged in collaborative responses to the challenges they face organized this research. In times of crisis, this research across the Pacific Northwest identified these two sites as hubs that provide a container for the uncertainty crisis brings. Neither a megachurch nor a denomination, a hub is a densely networked organizational form that anchors religious life within a particular community and facilitates webs of connection across a broader ecclesial ecology. Three different forms of crisis impacted these hubs: 1) the crisis of a shifting ecclesial landscape; 2) the crisis of a marginal social position; 3) the crisis of a pandemic. When combined, people of faith and religious institutions in the region both have prolonged and acute exposure to uncertainty.[3]

The findings presented here reflect a series of follow-up interviews and a focus group completed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic with a subsample of participants across these two hubs. These interviews and focus group occurred between December 14, 2020 and April 1, 2021. Nine individuals participated in the follow-up interviews, and fourteen individuals attended a focus group. Interview and focus group audio were transcribed and coded using a deductive and inductive coding strategy. This small-N design provides a basis for further theory building about the relationship between institutions in times of crisis. Table two provides an overview of the demographic information for interview participants in this phase of research.

The crisis named in this moment had been building for some time. As one organizer noted prior to the pandemic, pastors and people of faith throughout the region recognized the fragility of existing structures. "They know the current models aren't working. I'm talking about non-denoms, denominational, Presbyterian, even the big, big churches, both Presbyterian and non-denom. They're swimming really hard just to stay even. Everybody recognizes that there are challenges, that we don't control these factors." When focus group participants gathered, they noted the gravity of crisis and the reality of hope: "[The church] has made it through every moment of crisis and challenge and attempts by cul-

3 For a full description of these two cases, see Benac (2022).

Figure 1: Research participant overview

Participant	Denominational affiliation	Gender
1. Interview Participant 1	Reformed	Male
2. Interview Participant 2	Reformed	Did not identify
3. Interview Participant 3	Wesleyan	Male
4. Interview Participant 4	Vineyard	Female
5. Interview Participant 5	Reformed	Male
6. Interview Participant 6	Non-denominational	Male
7. Interview Participant 7	Reformed	Male
8. Interview Participant 8	Non-denominational	Female
9. Interview Participant 9	Reformed	Male
10. Focus group particpant 1	N/A	Male
11. Focus group particpant 2	N/A	Male
12. Focus group particpant 3	N/A	Male
13. Focus group particpant 4	Reformed	Male
14. Focus group particpant 5	Reformed	Female
15. Focus group particpant 6	Reformed	Male
16. Focus group particpant 7	Wesleyan	Female
17. Focus group particpant 8	N/A	Male
18. Focus group particpant 9	Wesleyan	Female
19. Focus group particpant 10	N/A	Male
20. Focus group particpant 11	N/A	Male
21. Focus group particpant 12	Wesleyan	Male
22. Focus group particpant 13	N/A	Male
23. Focus group particpant 14	Reformed	Male

tures to distort the gospel. And so, what we're trying to do in a variety of different ways … is to help people think not about the binaries that have been given by the culture." As expressed by individuals interviewed for this research, religious leaders were able to think beyond existing institutional templates during this time of crisis. Amid the characteristic uncertainty of religious life in the region, they no longer had to think *according to* or *within* the institutional structures they inhabited; instead, they had an opportunity to think *beyond* them. Four features evince how institutions function as a container in crisis: connection, care, change, and collaboration.

Connection

Individuals identified how their connections to individuals in times of crisis created the relational conditions to sustain their work. These connections, in turn, created a space for them to innovate in ways that extend connection to the people they serve. As one neighborhood-based pastor noted, "We just felt really fortunate to be positioned as we are, already deeply embedded in the neighborhood. It's just allowed us … Well, it's just been our safety net, and our people that's already very established here. So, we shifted in some ways, we went to zoom meetings

pretty quickly, but we've been noticing how other people are waking up to the gifts in the neighborhood, the gifts of neighboring." The connections named throughout these interviews were specific, frequently rooted in a local geography, and marked by trust that emerged from a history of previous relationship. Although some individuals identified how denominations, health care providers, and large congregations provided a degree of stability, crisis catalyzed a more local practice of connection in their particular religious environment. As one participant shared: "So I think just the adversity has renewed some of the need to be connected together."

When many existing religious institutions had to shutter their doors or migrate online, existing connections and collaborations became the connective tissue that provided a container for leaders' responses. While individuals acknowledged the value of the broader organization, in these times of crisis, they more readily named individuals as the source of relational support. Connection created the relational contained for resilience amid crisis.

Care

Institutions provided a container for care amid the crisis of precarity in this moment. For example, a pastor at a megachurch in Seattle observed how their work early in the pandemic pivoted to extend care to those in their congregation as well as in the broader community. Although COVID-19 introduced numerous changes for their congregation, care remained the primary axis for work and ministry. He notes, "Since we last talked, quite a bit has changed with the event of COVID when that hit in March. We shifted quite a bit in terms of dialing down on some of the things I was doing and really ramping up some of the other things… Still, just being aware of how do we still care and sense needs as they are arising and just be on the lookout for folks." This priority led them to extend hospitality and shower facilities to many in the homeless facility who were not only displaced but now without a place to shower amid stay-at-home orders and the closure of gym facilities. While he acknowledges mixed responses from people in the congregation, they prioritized care throughout their response. Several others noted the expanded needs for care in the communities they serve. For example, these religious leaders frequently extended care to address the precarity of isolation, the inability to gather in person as a worshipping community, the expanding public health needs, and the impact of the pandemic on elderly and other vulnerable communities. As one leader observed, he thinks care is the "glue" that holds their community together: "There's a learning curve that has happened where they had enjoyed just a lot more personal care, but we're hoping that's kind of going to be the glue that keeps us—that has kept us together during this crisis—but will keep us together afterwards. We'll see." Although his concluding comments, "We'll see," express the ongoing uncertainty so many religious leaders face about the future, care remains a primary feature of institutions' role in time of crisis.

Care requires meaningful connection in order to have the intended effect on the community these leaders serve. As one leader reflected on his history of service in his community, he observed how meaningful connections only emerge in conditions marked by an abundance of care.

Most of what I've seen from my congregation and I've been passionate about for 15 years is [meaningful connection] rooted in a real care for the concerns of the people and for the contextual concern. What matters in this context, when you really understand, not in a general sense, but in a specific sense, what we endure day in and day out. And, so connections actually happen when people feel like there is a genuine concern for their well-being holistically from those who say that, whether that's an institution or individual who says that they want to, for the connection to last or to be durable.

Noting how care crosses creates the container for institutions *and* individuals to pursue their work, this particular pastor expressed the priority of care, in times of crisis as well as beyond the crisis of this moment. When sustained by existing relational connections and knowledge of the needs of their communities, leaders extended care to those in their congregation and their broader community.

Change

Institutions create a container to sustain the change crisis requires. While the leaders engaged in this study are mindful of the way their communities are always evolving, they also note how crises catalyzed a greater level of creativity. For example, a Presbyterian pastor spoke about the surge in creativity amid the pandemic. "Well, creativity is just normal right now…. [Our church and other local congregations

share a] practice of experimenting and developing a language and capacity as a congregation for trying new experiments and learning from them." Noting how this was a learned practice they acquired through exercise, he observes how broader institutional partnerships created the container to acquire and practice this skill. Without dismissing the severity of the crisis, the leader also wonders whether their perceived stability is a byproduct of a long history of presence in this particular community. "I just wonder if part of what we're benefiting from is the long tradition and the deep roots that the church has." For some leaders and communities, change involved experimenting with a new form of worship (frequently online), others adapted to extend their ministries beyond the church walls, others regard this time as a confirmation for their longstanding vision to reimagine church, and still other ministry leaders transitioned into new roles—both within and beyond congregational ministry—during crisis.

Crisis introduces unavoidable change for those commissioned to care for a community and steward institutions. As one leader noted, this particular crisis introduces a "a bit of a shuffle" in the way they organize and pursue their common life. Nevertheless, amid the precarity of crisis, institutions marked by connection and care create the conditions for creative and nimble responses. Leaders serving in contexts marked by connection and care were able to imagine and pursue the changes that enriched their common life, rather than simply reacting in an attempt to reclaim equilibrium and certainty.

Collaboration

Finally, institutions provide a container for collaboration amid crisis. When I first met this First Free Methodist pastor in 2019, he was upbeat and enthusiastic about the trajectory of their work and ministry. "I think we're going in the right direction, which is encouraging, very encouraging," he offered at the end of our conversation. "And I don't anticipate being the same church 10 years from now. I hope that 10 years from now, not that we're not standing, sitting, passing the plate, but that we're doing that in whatever context." When we connected two years later, in February 2021, he was upbeat and profoundly grateful for his community, but also weary. "It's been a long year with this," he shared early in our conversation. For this pastor and so many others, they carry the challenges of the last year like a weight upon the soul, bearing silent testimony to the visible and invisible changes in their communities. I then asked him about any changes to the challenges he faced since we talked. With marked enthusiasm, he responded, "The only one that's a lot less of a challenge right now is partnership."

This theme was repeated throughout this work: in times of crisis, existing connection to and through institutions create a container for collaboration. Notably, collaboration creates the container for the other three to emerge and is enlivened in institutional contexts marked by connection, care, and creativity. Like the movement of a helix, these four features hang together in a virtuous pattern of relation. While crisis disrupts the status quo in institutions, bringing us "up short" (Osmer 2008, p. 21), institutions also create a container to navigate crisis when they are marked by connection, care, a willingness to change, and collaboration.

After Crisis: Implications for Practical Theology

While the particular crises that catalyzed these and similar reflections will abate, there remains an ongoing need for scholarly attention to how crisis impacts faith communities and the attendant practice(s) of religious leadership, both amid and beyond times of crisis. To this end, I'll conclude with the three constructive proposals for practical theology that explore the relationship between crisis, institutions, and moral formation.

First, crisis requires an interdisciplinary approach in order to adequately consider and constructively engage how crisis impacts individuals and communities. Just as the cascading crises of this moment are not restricted to a single individual or community, crisis scholarship requires an approach that intentionally crosses sectors and disciplinary silos. If crisis disrupts the very structure or belonging that ground a common life, research must similarly bleed through disciplinary barriers in order to promote connection, care, collaboration, and change. As an intrinsically interdisciplinary field (Miller-McLemore 2012; Osmer 2008; Swinton and Mowat 2016; Ward 2017), practical theology is well situated among the theological disciplines to lead and convene scholarly conversations about contemporary and future crises. Future research may engage in cross-pollinating work with researchers in crisis communications, ethics, political science, or-

ganizational studies, and philanthropy, among others.

Second, crisis provides a category that invites empirical and normative inquiry. Unshakeable encounters with crisis introduce questions and conundrums that require more than thick description. Indeed, as Douglas notes, Crisis forces those in its grips to make "life and death decisions," (1986, p. 4). To return to the image of the Speluncean Explorer example Douglas employs, individuals in the dark cavern of crisis must determine the way of life that will guide their response. Those beyond the cavern, however, face the crisis of determining which responses will pattern practice for those who follow. The cataclysmic disruptions crises bring resist neat division between objective observation and constructive proposals. Accordingly, empirical research that stops short of normative reflection understates the gravity of crisis; and normative reflection that is not grounded in empirical analysis risks overreaching. Ongoing practical theological reflection can combine empirical and normative reflection on crisis by prioritizing ongoing research about "the way of life" that sustains communities of practice (Miller-McLemore 2012).

Finally, if institutions represent a container to navigate crisis, there is an ongoing need for contextual and constructive research about the form of institutionality that can sustain faith communities in the wake of this crisis. Although practical theology has historically noted the need to study the shifting institutional landscape that surrounds religious life—as Scharen and Campbell-Reed observe—the field has yet to identify "institutions" as a sub-field that merits its own attention. There remains, as Dykstra (1991) notes, a need to consider how the building and care of institutions may itself represent a form of "Christian practice" (p. 57). If institutions provided a container for crisis, the making and sustaining of institutions to this end requires a constellation of Christian practice that support the life of faith.[4] Accordingly, future research may extend the three metaphors introduced here—cross, catalyst, and container—by considering the kinds of institutions and the supporting conditions that sustain the life of faith, within and beyond times of crisis.

4 It is beyond the scope of this argument to review debates in practical theology about the dually formative a deformative capacity of Christian practice. For an account that accents practices' formative function, see Dykstra (1991). For an account that notes practices' deformative potential, or "characteristic damage," see Winner (2018).

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This book offers essays on 'crisis' and practical theology written by participants in the IAPT conference 'Coping with Crisis' organized in Leuven, 2021. Here crisis is considered as a multidimensional phenomenon that includes a sense of threat and also a sense of opportunity. The various contributions in this volume each depart from a specific context or locality of practices of people and communities in the midst of some form of crisis. Against the background of a practice oriented approach, different questions come to the fore, which will be addressed throughout this volume. How can a particular experience of crisis be (theologically) understood? How is this experience connected with or embedded in a particular social context? How does the phenomenon of faith relate to this experience? What do we mean when speaking about 'coping' with crisis? What are the core values that play a role in such an expression? How is living with crisis embodied in particular situations and how might faith communities act in such situations? The volume has been structured along five main aspects of the crisis experience where connections with the phenomenon of faith might be located and further explored: (1) Justice, (2) Uncertainty and fear, (3) Belonging, (4) Care, and (5) Being church.

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