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Public Theology as cultivation of a common public life

ABSTRACT

This is paper is an exposition of "public theology" according to three criteria for such a theology developed by American theologian, Linell Cady. The criteria she sets for a public theology is: An open form of argumentation, an accessible style of communication, and a focus on contemporary issues of public concern. This is the basis on which Cady reconstructs theo-logy in terms of God the Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer.

1. INTRODUCTION

"Public theology" is, broadly speaking, regarded as a corrective to the relegation of religion to the inner, private world of the autonomous individual. The particular counter-contribution public theology has to offer to this individualised trajectory is its role in the shaping and critical transformation of public life. The problem with this understanding of theology as public endeavour is that, although it is clear what it aims to do, it fails to indicate *how* it should achieve these goals. In this article the contribution of American theologian, Linell Cady[1], is analysed as a possible framework that simultaneously describes the characteristics of a public theology and that serves as a source of a public theology methodology.

2. CADY'S PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR A PUBLIC THEOLOGY

Cady (1991a:108; 1993:26) explains that it is possible to create a better understanding of public theology if one is clear about the "opposites" of public. For example, if "public" is contrasted with "**parochial**", public will imply that which is open to all and intelligible to everybody, while parochial stands for that which is available or intelligible only to a select few. In other words, public will be the universally shared, and parochial that which is not universally shared. Secondly, "**professional**" could be the opposite of "public". If "professional" refers to an in-group of persons based on their occupational education and training, it will be contrasted with "public", namely those excluded from the privileged realm of the profession. Finally, "public" can also be contrasted with "**private**". In other words, that which is represented by the social world can be described as "public", and that which is represented by the individual or personal/intimate life, will fall in the category of "private".

According to Cady (1993) a theology can be distinguished as a public theology if it deliberately avoids the risk of parochialism, by way of supporting an open form of argumentation. In order to

1 Cady is currently the the Franca G. Oreffice Dean's Distinguished Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Arizona State University. Her high-profile position as director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict puts her in the forefront of numerous controversial issues. Although Cady has published numerous works only those that concerns itself primarily with public theology is relevant for this study. Her major contribution in this regard is "*Religion, Theology and American Public Life*" (1993), as it concerns the status of religious thought in the contemporary world.

be public and not only professional, a public theology will exhibit a second criterion, namely, to express itself via an accessible style of communication. Lastly, a public theology will not accept the limitation of a private or marginalised role for religion in society, but will attend to the third criterion, namely focusing its agenda on contemporary issues. **These three criteria can be described as her framework for constructing a public theology.**

2.1 An open form of argumentation

The modern epoch as it emerged in the West, has not been hospitable to neither religion nor theology, and consigned both to the private realm where opinion, not knowledge, reigns supreme.[2] From a *modernist* perspective, theology is regarded as a parochial exercise, as it addresses a particular religious community, and is rooted in the experiences and texts of a specific religious community to which it appeals for its justification.

Where Western societies could earlier been characterised by a homogeneous religious sphere, this homogeneity has been replaced with diversity, thereby reinforcing the assumption that theological reflection bears little relation to the diverse public realm. It again becomes merely the self-expression of a particular church tradition. Hence, theology becomes politically and academically marginalised (see Cady, 1987:193; Conradie, 1993:27; Smit, 1999:39; Bezuidenhout & Naudé, 2002:7).

The processes of secularisation and emancipation, of a critical assessment of traditions, and of demythologisation of (traditional authoritarian) texts are not simply historical processes, but something that is still very active today. J.B. Metz claims there is a breakdown of the religious and metaphysical images of the world. "The *logos* of theology is itself affected by this crisis" (Metz, 1995: 31). He warns (1995:32) that a marginalisation of theology (in which the *logos* of theo-logy is entirely concentrated on religion as a private affair) holds the danger of losing continuity with the messianic cause of Christianity. A rationalistic reduction of theology holds the danger of a radical abandonment of symbolism and mythology under the excessive cognitive pressure of the abstract modern world of the sciences.

David Hollenbach also paints a bleak picture of a society where religion lost its function to provide an all-inclusive interpretative framework through which the reality structures of that society could be discerned. In such a society "little attention is given to the moral (and indeed religious) dimensions of social, political and especially economic life. Although secularised societies have developed autonomy, they find themselves sliding into narcissistic subjectivity" (Hollenbach, 1976:292).

In a secularised environment no effort is made for organised conversant public bodies that explore and debate the far-reaching effects of this vast associational, secularised life. Public theology challenges this, claiming that a public realm should consist of a community of persons who have the desire and resources to debate the relative merits of the various consequences of associational life. This implies that **a public theology rejects the reductive character of the modernist interpretation of public** (Cady, 1993:16).

What is clear, is that Christians who want to contribute to debates on public issues cannot merely appeal to the Scripture or the Christian tradition "as if such appeals would settle the issues at hand; it will have to defend its truth claims in a way accessible to others in the public

2 The Enlightenment thinkers aimed at demarcating a space that would avoid the seemingly unresolvable religious controversies and develop a secular vocabulary, restricting theology's connections to other subsystems, such as politics, economics, the public media, the legal system, and public education are seriously restricted. Through this process of privatisation (or "parochialisation") religion has become something that one can afford to ignore. One has to remind, thought, that it is not as if religion could not still have a position in society, it was just a very isolated position.

spheres" (Placher, 1989:156).[3]

Cady's first criterion implies the cultivation of such an authentic public life, where debates amongst different sectors, sharing a common life, are stimulated. It is important to create opportunities where sensitivity for public issues is developed and where these issues can be debated through open dialogue and persuasion. Public life, and therefore public theology, is thus closely related to dialogue.

Before further analysing Cady's understanding of this first criterion, a very brief synopsis is given of David Tracy's understanding of what it means to engage in a public form of argumentation.

2.1.1 David Tracy on public reasoning

In a nutshell, Tracy argues that theology has three different audiences or publics: the public of the church, the academy, and the wider society.[4] The discipline "theology" can then also be divided into three sub-disciplines: systematic theology (addressing the church), fundamental theology (addressing the academy), and practical theology (addressing society).[5]

It is important to realise that Tracy's distinction of three publics actually reflects three contextual interpretations of reason.[6] Theological truth claims must be communicated in such a way that they are comprehensible to the respective publics they address. Furthermore, one may only speak of a *public* defence of theological truth claims if the communication process between theology and its publics has succeeded. Thus, a public discourse will always be a *rational* discourse.[7]

The first responsibility for a theology to be public is, in Tracy's view, to give reasons and to provide argument. There is a second responsibility for a theology to be public, and that is regarding the phenomenon of conversation. "No genuine conversation is possible unless the

3 William C. Placher claims that theology can be public in at least three ways, namely if it "appeals to warrants available to any intelligent, reasonable responsible person; it understands a religion as fundamentally a public communal activity, not a matter of the individual's experience; and if it effectively addresses political and social issues" (1985:407).

4 See for example, Tracy, D. 1975. Theology a public discourse. In *Christian Century*, 92, 280-284.; 1981a. *The analogical imagination: Christian theology and the culture of pluralism*. London: SCM Press.

5 As Cady's criterion of "an open form of argumentation" is closely related to dialogue, the relevance of Tracy in this case is not his description of the three publics, but his understanding of public reasoning.

6 For Tracy the modes of rationality will differ in each of the three publics of theology. Fundamental theology deals with academical issues of religious meaning and truth and must, therefore, be "… available to all intelligent, reasonable and rational persons through persuasive argument" (Tracy, 1981b:116). Systematic theology should help the church in its understanding of both the Bible and the Christian tradition or "classics" in its day to day life. "The classics" have public status, "as it is rooted in a very particular context, it gains a disclosive power, speaking to a potentially universal audience, because it expresses, through its very intensified particularity, some aspect of a shared human experience" (Tracy, 1981a:132). Regarding the third public, one realizes that to marginalize art as a cultural expression (and therefore, to privatize religion, also as a cultural expression) from the "open house" is to encourage the drift to scientize and technicize the public realm itself. To marginalize religion is to narrow the comprehensive notion of reason itself (Tracy, 1986:126).

7 Tracy writes, "To produce public discourse is to provide reasons for one's assertions. To provide reasons is to render one's claims shareable, public. To provide reasons is to be willing to engage in argument. For argument is the most obvious form of public discourse. To engage in argument is to make claims and to give the warrants and backings for those claims. To be reasonable is to be logical. To be logical is to be coherent. To argue is to demand coherence. To argue is also to demand the kind of evidence appropriate to the subject matter under discussion. To argue is to engage – to defend and correct – one's assertions publicly by providing the appropriate evidence, warrants, backings, appropriate to the concrete subject-matter under discussion (Tracy, 1986:121-122).

criteria for argument are also observed: criteria of intelligibility (coherence), truth (warrants-evidence), right (moral integrity) and equality (mutual reciprocity)" (Tracy, 1986:123).

In the light of Cady's plea to counteract the impact of Enlightenment on religion, and with her proposal of public theology as the possible corrective solution, one can understand that she questions Tracy's emphasis on reason. Cady reminds that reason always reflects the assumptions, values, and interests of a particular historical context. Therefore, if one grants the historical location of human reflection, one has to "abandon the Enlightenment ideal of objectivity, the transcendence of particularity" (Cady, 1993:36).[8]

By now it is clear: reason does not operate outside of local contexts. But this emphasis on the contextual nature of all reflection does not *per se* imply that religion is not parochial. Much critique has been raised against both religious people as well as theologians who often speak (and argue), as if these sources were privileged and unavailable to others. It is therefore necessary to also determine how a theology makes use of its symbols and creeds. As Cady explains, "there is a significant difference between a theology that takes these constitutive elements of its tradition as resources and one that grants special privilege to one or more of these elements as isolated authorities" (Cady, 1993:40).

On the other hand, Cady stresses that it is particularly Tracy's interpretation of systematic theology that proposes an option for the development of a public theology. "It seeks to emphasize and clarify more fully the constructive side of theology" (Cady, 1993:36). This form of theology strongly acknowledges traditions in the exercise of human reflection. This then, is also the model of public theological argumentation that Cady – in important respects – follows.

Cady emphasizes that there is an illegitimate, authoritarian parochialism and a legitimate parochialism, more aptly called contextualism.[9] The aim of her first criterion for a public theology is that "it makes room for a form of theology that self-consciously operates out of an identifiable tradition without thereby abandoning the commitment to open inquiry" (Cady, 1993:33).

Therefore, the nurturing of a public theology for Cady explicitly depends upon rejecting a modernist understanding of public with its impossible goal of objective impartiality and non-traditional inquiry and rational argumentation.

2.1.2 Toward a legitimate parochialism

Reason, as Cady (1993:37) reminds, is always historically shaped and socially located. If theological reflection is rooted in a specific religious tradition, this does not necessarily renounces its publicness. Neither does this contextualization automatically brand theology as a parochial discourse (see Cady, 1993:40). It is, therefore, important to distinguish **how** a theology makes use of its tradition.[10]

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8 It is particularly Tracy's exposition of fundamental theology that reflects the Enlightenment model of reason (where reason is understood as a universal, a-historical capacity of all rational beings). According to her, "… common human reason or common human experience is … a false construct that obscures the irreducible particularity of human life and reflection" (Cady, 1993:36).

9 Read more about Cady's explanation of the contextual nature of theological reflection in her analysis of H. Richard Niebuhr's theology (Cady, 1991:114-129).

10 Cady (1993:40-56) uses the typology of judicial reasoning as developed by philosopher of law, Ronald Dworkin, in order to understand the methodological roles of the past/tradition in theology. Dworkin distinguishes three primary forms of judicial interpretation, namely conventionalism, extensionalism, and instrumentalism. In a nutshell, one can summarize the three forms as follows: where **conventionalism** is an absolute, deterministic use of the past, **instrumentalism** is regarded as the opposite, where the past becomes irrellevant. In the instrumentalistic style of reasoning the only use of the past is to avoid societal chaos. **Extensionalism** (the style Dworkin chooses) views the past as less constraining in one sense and more constraining in another. Rather than identifying isolated rules or laws that must be strictly followed,

Very often theologians have a conventionalist approach with regards to tradition. This implies that they grant such special privileges and authorities to their texts, symbols, and creeds, that their theology must be regarded as parochial. The conventionalist style of argumentation with its references to designated authorities (for example, basing arguments on the use of Scriptural passages, doctrines, ecclesiastical traditions and pronouncements) may result in dogmatism and fundamentalism. This approach is evidently not an open form of argumentation, as it often refuses engagement in the different forms of open inquiry and persuasion that constitute public reflection. Richard John Neuhaus (1984:15-16) rightly notes, "While their message is public in import, it is not public in the sense of being accountable to public reason." Once one has accepted the "truth", as understood by the conventionalist, then – and only then – will you know it is true.[11]

It is understandable that such isolated and privileged authorities from the past can place questionable constraints on theological inquiry and reconstruction. This conventionalist approach may result in the opposite, namely "theologians who assume that instrumentalism is the only available alternative to the conventionalist mode of argumentation" (1993:51). This instrumentalism mode of argumentation can be viewed as a "forward thinking" indifference towards the past and tradition.

However, there is a more constructive typology to counter either the conventionalist or instrumentalist mode of argumentation, namely an approach that "offers theologians highly critical of confessional, dogmatic theologies an alternative to a pragmatic theology with little incentive to engage in an interpretation of the tradition as a whole" (Cady, 1993:48). This typology (called "extensionalism") constitutes "a form of public argumentation, especially suited to the task of theology: the interpretation and extension of a religious worldview" (1993:48).

The extensionalist mode holds the continuity of tradition in high regard, however, "the continuity it seeks is not a narrow consistency with isolated elements of the tradition, but with the principles of that tradition interpreted as a whole" (Cady, 1993:51). The theologian, thus, becomes involved as an interpreter of the tradition.

One can summarise by saying that it is the a-historical and (so-called) rational and objective dialogue of modernism that confines theology to a parochial sphere. In the light of this emphasis on reason and neutrality, the task of public theology, then, is twofold: on the one hand, to unmask this impossible pretence of neutrality and universality of reason. However, it also shows respect for the Enlightenment partition between open inquiry and dogmatic citation. Therefore, public theology will eliminate the authoritarian traces that linger on in contemporary theology. Public theology can and should take its place in the public arena where discourse should be open to all. By way of an extensional interpretation of the past and a forward-looking interest, theology represents a religious worldview that is a worthy dialogue partner in jurisprudence of the public.

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extensionalism interprets the laws as a whole. Through extensionalism single isolated precedents becomes less constraining as it grants the past a more significant role in the interpretive process (Cady, 1993:43). Dworkin claims that extensionalism "seeks to continue the story that previous legal history has begun but its guiding aim is to create an overall story worth telling now" (see Cady, 1993:45).

11 Some theologians (Neuhaus, for example) regard this parochial form of reflection as a peculiarly modern phenomenon. Other theologians (for instance Gordon Kaufmann) argue that it is a characteristic of more classical Christian theology - although it is a characteristic that only became highly visible and problematic in modernity (Cady, 1993:49). The more classical theologising is better accounted for through the extensionalist model. Kaufmann notes, that, despite the authoritarian model with which theologians have been acquainted, their work "is (and always has been) a creative activity of the human imagination seeking to provide more adequate orientation for human life" (see Cady, 1993:180).

In the process of articulating a model for public theology, Cady addresses a second criterion. This criterion focuses on religion as a professional enterprise, and not as a public endeavour. In the following paragraphs the second criterion of public theology, namely the accessibility and style of communication is discussed as a core requirement for public theology.

2.2 An accessible style of communication

Cady claims that "with the rise of secularisation and subsequent displacement of religion from the centre of intellectual and social life, the professional trajectory has contributed to the marginalisation of theology, **as theologians speak to theologians who speak to theologians**…" (1993:120 – our emphasis).

What stimulated this "self-talk" amongst theologians? Again the answer would be found in the epoch of modernity. Modernism developed a "culture of professionalism", and its institutional vehicle (is) the modern research university.[12] The effect of this professionalism has "insulated and isolated theologians from a wider public" (Cady, 1993:121).[13] The style of most current theological writings reflects this culture of professionalization, and its argumentation has been appropriately stylised for an academic audience.

What strategies should a public theologian adopt to counteract the marginalisation and professionalism that have resulted from rigid boundaries? Firstly, the isolation of theologians from the general public needs addressing. Secondly, there is the isolation of theology as a disciplinary genre from other disciplines that needs to be considered.

Regarding the **isolation from the general public**, this obvious barrier can be overcome by communication with a wider audience in a language that is devoid of disciplinary technicalities and jargon only understandable to those familiar with it. It is those theologians who have commitment beyond the academy that are usually successful in communicating with a wider audience.[14] Cady (1987:203) explains that technical, jargon-filled discourse creates an impregnable barrier between the theologians and the general public. Unless the content of communication is relevant and persuasive, the intelligibility of its expression is immaterial. The theologian should also aim at transforming her professional identity, as this identity can also underline seclusion.

In the attempt to broaden the horizons of theology, it is especially important that both boundaries be reconfigured. Therefore, the **isolation of theology as a disciplinary genre** from those of other disciplines also needs to be addressed. As theology often comes under attack as a disciplinary genre, theologians may feel the need to defend their position against other academic disciplines. Cady proposes that this obstacle of professional marginalisation and academic relevance which creates impenetrable boundaries amongst the different academic disciplines can be overcome by one important change, namely "… for theologians to move beyond the boundaries of the text to engage religion as it is embodied in local contexts" (1993:142).

Cady argues that if theologians involve themselves with the "messier morass of lived religion", and move beyond the "unifying parameters of a sacred text", the antipathy and aversion to religion may possibly be tempered (1993:145), Theology will then become part of our day to day living. It will become part of, and have a say in, our contextual issues.

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12 See Burton J. Bledstein (1976) regarding the impact of the "culture of professionalism" in America.

13 See Cady (1993:122-131) for a detailed description of the emergence of a culture of professionalism that has marginalised theology.

14 Cady (1993:141) makes an interesting observation by stating that present-day academic theologians who have been the most successful in communicating to a broader public and have reflected commitments beyond the academy, can be found amongst feminist and liberation theologians. Their theologies reflect their dedication to traverse the separation from a wider audience.

In summary, Cady states that the threat of lingering in the private realm of society may be due to theology's own making, as it often uses theological jargon and technical forms of communication. This particular style of theology is limiting the general audience from participating in "theology talk". The professionalism associated with theology as a specialised discipline determines the genre of theology and the identity of a theologian as a "specialist" academic. In this regard a public theology suggests that theology should extend its sphere of influence with a more understandable language and reduce professionalism that may create impenetrable boundaries. It requires the reshaping of what has become a "theological genre" toward a more inclusive multi-disciplinary study of religious practices rather than a mere closed reading of sacred texts.

The last criterion is related to the third contrast of "public", namely "private". In a privatised theology the focus is on individually understood spiritual or a focus on intra-ecclesial questions. A public theology, in opposition to such privatised understanding, will set as its aim to address issues of public concern in society.

2.3 A focus on contemporary issues

One of the claims of a modernist viewpoint is that "the most desirable society is one that, as far as possible, maximises the freedom of individuals to secure their private ends" (Cady, 1993:10). However, this emphasis on autonomy has contributed to such overly excessive individualism that a flourishing social life is threatened. As Parker J. Palmer (1981:21) writes: "We have lost the vision that the public life is worth living".

Cady urges that "we have to cultivate a communal sense of public life with values and goals that individuals can embrace that can nurture this public life" (1993:76). It is, ultimately, this common life that we share whose nurturing and transformation becomes the key to our own well-being and survival.

2.3.1 Public theology: Cultivating a common public life

The understanding of "public" as sharing a common life, with its vision of inter–connectedness, compels us to open ourselves to a world of relatedness. In the sharing of the common life, it becomes important not only how I as an individual live, but how "they", differ from the "I", live. It becomes important not only how my group lives, but also how "the other" live, as we all share the planet upon whose well-being we are so completely dependent.

Cady argues that the connection between the individual and the society is established through the development of our social selves. "If the self is constituted by its relations, and dependent for its identity upon cultural narratives, then we can begin to glimpse the deficiencies in classical liberalism. **The individual self needs others for the most basic task of becoming a self**" (Cady, 1993:76 – our emphasis). This is why the cultivation of a public, with the emphasis on community, is a focus of Cady's public theology. The nurturing and extension of a common life wherein inquiry, conversation, and debate take place, is primarily the agenda of a public theology.

The challenge is therefore the transformation of our very modernist understanding of public (with a strong sense of self-sufficient individualism) to a radically inclusive public, common, global life (without being subject to totalitarian control). This relies upon a paradigm shift in our understanding and evaluation of the natural order. As Cady writes, "Rather than continue to regard the physical world as radically 'other'", we need to recognise the intimate interdependence of all life forms that constitute a reciprocating field. It is from this perspective that not only the legitimacy but the urgency of recognising a common life becomes most apparent" (Cady, 1993:82-83). Or as Richard Niebuhr (1970:62) insists, "faith in God cannot become incarnate

except in a universal community in which all walls of partition have been broken down".

Public theology seeks to nurture, deepen, and transform a common life that, while damaged and obscured, is never totally eroded. Thus, public theology is not simply proposing a utopian communal vision. It is, rather, offering a constructive agenda that grows out of issues experienced in our everyday lives. Cady remarks that a public theology is not simply a theology with a political agenda, despite sharing the aim to overcome the marginalisation of religion (1991a:120).

It is clear from the paragraphs above that a public theology also seeks to facilitate an analysis of the public life in an effort to transform this life in the direction of a universal community with a vision of interdependence. It undertakes this task out of the conviction that the absence of a sense of such a common life produces divisive, non-critical and anthropocentric political and moral factions. The task of a public theology, in this regard, is therefore twofold, namely, to recognise the commonality of this life we share, and to nurture, deepen, and transform this common life in and through the appropriation of religious symbolism.

One may ask why religion needs to be a role-player in cultivating a new understanding of public life. Cady argues that firstly, religion constitutes a form of discourse that continues to command significant meaning and power within our culture. "Religion in our own time continues to grasp the minds and hearts of the majority of the inhabitants of the modern world" (Cady, 1993:93). Secondly, religious discourse retains substantial power as a motivator of human life.

This is particularly significant for a public theology that is concerned with defending the realisation of an inter-relational sense of public life. "I am not aware of alternate traditions of discourse in our culture that can generate a recognition of and commitment to the radically, inclusive, relational public life proposed herein. Therefore the role of religion and theology in reconfiguration of public life is … indispensable" (Cady, 1993:94). Or as Palmer wrote, "a public theology aims to move beyond a minimal vision of what is possible among people" (1981:36).

The Christian tradition does indeed offer adequate resources and the rationale for cultivating an inclusive, relational reconfiguration of public life. But in agreement with Cady, a Christian theology that contributes to the upliftment of a public life will need to reconsider the symbol of God. In this regard Gordon Kaufman has aptly called "God" the anchor symbol for an entire worldview (see Cady, 1993:94).

The development of an interpretation of God constitutes the central agenda of a Christian public theology, displacing such foci as ecclesiology, Christology, or anthropology. Obviously the latter topics are inextricably interwoven with interpretations of God's nature and activity. They also can be the lenses through which a comprehensive theological vision is fashioned. Nevertheless, such topics can easily overshadow theological reflection upon the divine reality. Because it is primarily in and through an excavation of the meaning of God that the religious basis and rationale for an inclusive common life emerge, **a Christian public theology will focus primary attention upon the nature and activity of God** (Cady, 1993:94 - our emphasis).

The reinterpretation of the nature of public life and the public exercise of reason will not be sufficient if some characteristic features of theology and interpretations of God are not altered. In other words, a particular and revised understanding of God may facilitate the development of a public theology.

2.3.2 Public theology: A revised understanding of God

What has to be acknowledged is that modernism also influenced our very understanding of God. In the following three sections, the effect of modernism on our use of the symbols for God will be analysed, and Cady's alternatives - the symbol of God as creator, sustainer, and redeemer – will be set out.

CREATOR GOD

With its emphasis on the natural sciences, modernism impacted decisively upon our understanding of the relationship between God and the cosmos. The negation of the role of the Creator God risks a misunderstanding of the relationship between God and creation. As Cady warns, "Not only are we left with a very anthropocentric deity, but it becomes increasingly difficult to see God as more than a human projection" (1993:100). It is this modern scientific development that requires revision of the Christian affirmation of God as creator.

Affirmations about God as creator surely unmask the anthropocentric frame of reference that typically characterised earlier formulations. "We cannot continue to regard the human species as the raison d'être of the created order, with other life forms largely props or tools for our use and enjoyment" (Cady, 1993:101). God as creator (of the whole of creation) acknowledges that life is meaningful. In agreeing with the Divine Source for creation, one agrees upon a shared common public life. This offers the foundation for the argument that, on both macro and micro levels, all forms of life may claim their need for survival, as all originate from the same source.

A public theology, with its agenda of sustaining and nurturing a common public life, celebrates that God, as force of Life, makes life possible. Commitment to God, therefore, brings forth respect for life, and a respect for everyone and everything that share life. It is this respect for life, and the celebration of our Creator God, that has profound implications for the social agenda of our day. Faith and commitment in God "is not to create an oasis of salvation within a larger fallen world but to work toward the transformation of the whole" (Cady, 1993:104).

God's relationship to the cosmos is not an abstract or timeless relationship. In other words, God is not simply creator in an abstract sense, but God is creator of *this* life with its particularities. It is not only a vertical affirmation, but also a horizontal affirmation. Faith in God affirms our role as representatives of God in this life, with this life's needs and urgencies, in order to transform the brokenness of, and the alienation in, the web of the creation.

It is from this perspective that the second characteristic of God comes to the fore, namely the role of God as sustainer.

SUSTAINER GOD

Monotheistic faith does not affirm the creator role of God, and then, on the other hand, denounce a sustaining role of God within cosmic life. The Creator is not absent, but is continuously and actively involved in sustaining this created order. The creation is "a work in progress" (Cady, 1993:106).

Affirmation of God's role as creator does not – as is the case with references to the role of God as ongoing provider and sustainer of this life - "trespass upon the terrain of modern science" (Cady, 1993:107). Previously, the modernist struggle between religion and science resulted in a mechanistic worldview, forcing the consigning of religion to a private sphere. Lately, a new understanding of nature has urged a creative approach between religion and science.[15]

Twentieth century developments in science acknowledge nature as an "open, dynamic process more akin to an integrated organism than to a machine" (Cady, 1993:107). This does

15 Twentieth century developments in science construe nature not as closed and static, but as an integrated organism, and not as mechanistic as Newtonian science envisaged. As John Polkinghorne (in Cady, 1993:107) eloquently describes, the world of order and disorder to which modern physics has pointed, is "a world kept in being by the divine juggler rather than by the divine Structural Engineer, a world whose precarious process speaks of the free gift of Love". For an overview of the science-theology debates, refer to the many influential publications by theologian, Wentzel J. van Huyssteen, professor of theology and science at Princeton Theological Seminary.

allow for what Cady calls, "an understanding of God and God's relationship to the created order…" (1993:107).

Although there may be room for God's continuing creativity, new developments in science "clearly alter the traditional portrait of God's providential role in the cosmos. Beyond displacing humans from the centre of the cosmic drama, the emerging picture of God's continuing creativity makes it difficult to construe God as the 'divine protector'" (1993:107-108). Where God has, historically, been viewed as the Protector who knows about "each hair on our head", historical events have disillusioned this perception. The dichotomy between evil and suffering and the providence of God is at the forefront when a new understanding of the role of God as sustainer is being questioned. One can argue that the sustaining and protecting role of God becomes most visible in and through the consequences that follow particularly where this role of God is ignored.

For the purposes of developing a public theology, it is important to study the interconnectedness of the consequences for ignoring the sustaining role of God in the cosmic life. In this way monotheism provides support for the attempts of public theology to establish the creation of a common life. It also supports the fundamental interconnectedness of each action upon the whole.

To complete the monotheistic understanding of God as a source for public theology, there is still a third symbol that needs emphasis, namely the redeeming activity of God.

REDEEMER GOD

Redemption implies that creation has not yet embodied the fulfilment of its divine intentions. It is this motif of fulfilment that provides the motivation and direction for transforming our current understanding of public life. As Cady argues: "Unless God's redemptive actions are found within this world, the transformation of our common life receives very little theological support" (Cady, 1993:112).[16] God's role as redeemer should be analysed in terms of the implications it has for transforming our common life into - as Cady calls it - "the universal community of being" (1993:112). This universal community acknowledges the interconnectedness that maximises the potential of life for all, and sustains the well being and flourishing of each member.

A public theology should include the critical edge of the wide variety of liberation theologies in order to impact on our public life. It will need to be decisive regarding the reigning social orders, seeking to discern that which undermines the transformation of our common life into the universal community of being. "For God's redemptive role will be linked with the actions directed toward removing the obstacles to genuine community" (Cady, 1993:114). Therefore, we must at all cost avoid reducing the scope of God's role as redeemer.

The model of God that this presupposes is not a single being standing over against the whole of being, but a characterization of the nature of and potentiality within being itself. God and humanity within this theological framework do not stand in opposition. Humans, rather, participate in the divine life. We are its embodiment, not alone, but with other forms of life (Cady, 1993:115).

Cady is noticeably silent about the theological significance of Jesus. She states that her silence is in part deliberate insofar as a public theology is most dependent upon an adequate

16 In contrast to many traditional theologies that view redemption as a theological abstraction or mostly having "private" effects, thereby sustaining oppressive patterns in "this life", it is particularly imperative that redemption should also have a direct and concrete effect on this life in its social and cosmic dimensions. This is the foundation of theologies such as feminist theology, liberation theology, and eco-theology.

understanding of God. According to her, the Christ centrism of the majority of American Christianity "is symptomatic of the very individualistic anthropocentric worldview that a public theology seeks to combat" (Cady, 1993:116). She does, however, acknowledge that there is a place for a reformulated Christology within a Christian public theology. For example, incarnational symbolism has the ability to overcome the devaluation of the body, nature and women.

Furthermore, incarnational and pneumatological symbolism "can be appropriated to underscore the intimate connection between the divine and the cosmos" (Cady, 1993:16). The lack of a more pronounced Trinitarian exposition (including Christology and pneumatology) in Cady's work misses some very fruitful social interpretations of the Trinity-doctrine by theologians as diverse as Leonardo Boff, Miroslav Volf, Jürgen Moltmann and many others. The aim of this exposition is, however, not to serve as a critical analysis of Cady's work, but to sketch a framework in which public theology may be fruitfully constructed.

One can conclude by acknowledging that devotion to God implies an active involvement in the public realm, and an active concern regarding its configuration. The affirmation of God through the classical symbols of creator, sustainer and redeemer facilitates two crucial emphases. Firstly, a holistic emphasis that recognises the interconnectedness and value of the created order. It avows the fundamental commonality that unites all created beings. Secondly, it emphasises the revelation of the disparity between the present order of creation and a redeemed common life.

The third criterion of public theology, namely the focus on contemporary issues, includes, but also transcends, a mere prophetic engagement with socio-political or economic issues. Public theology is aimed more than social critique, as its actual effect should lead to the cultivation of a communal life. This inter-relational interest of theology is in direct opposition to the individualism of modernism. The transformation of public life is then theo-logically grounded in a new understanding of the three aspects of monotheism, namely God as creator, sustainer, and redeemer.

3. CONCLUSION

Cady's proposed model for a public theology gives a fruitful framework for interpreting other theologies as possible "public" theologies. It is, however, her concern for the status of religion in an increasingly secularised world that we particularly value. Her understanding of the cultivation for a common life is timely, given the growing intolerance not only amongst individuals and societies, but also amongst nations, where differences are excluded instead of transcended. Her theological suggestions regarding a new affirmation of God are not only convincing to those within her own religious tradition, but are comprehensible to those outside this tradition. We regard her work as a very good example of what Harold E. Breitenberg calls a "comprehensive public theology" [17] – one that combines both method and constructive proposals.

Cady's understanding of the publicness (or privateness) of theology provides a good explanation of the technical and normative use of the concept "public theology". With her exposition of the different contrasts for "public" (parochial, professional, and private), she promotes insight into the different social realms, which influence (and restrict) the genuine

17 He defines a comprehensive public theology as "religious informed discourse that intends to be intelligible and convincing to adherents within its own religious tradition while at the same time being comprehensible and possibly persuasive to those outside it. Second, public theology addresses issues that bear upon a religious community but also pertain to the larger society, including those who identify themselves with other faith traditions or with none. Third, to achieve such ends, public theology relies on sources of insight, language, methods of argumentations, and warrants that are in theory open to all (Breitenberg, 2003:65).

publicness of theology. She also demonstrates that a shift in the notion of "public" does have profound implications for one's understanding of "the-logy" (notion of God) and ultimately on the construction of a theology (reflection on God). Her vision of a common, inter-connected public life is clearly a normative vision that presupposes the transformation of public life, as we know it today in South Africa and in an increasingly inter-netted global world.

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