

Power of perception: on South African paradigms, pneumatology and theology

ABSTRACT

If paradigms power perception, how then is spirit and Spirit to be understood within the multicultural, multi-ethical, and multiple layers of society in a South African context? Paradigms are constantly evolving and growing in multiplicity and complexity, especially when interacting with one another. In this article an explorative study is undertaken into some prominent macro-level influences that shape paradigms. Attention is paid to culture, heritage and history, socio-politics, economic realities, and ideology, with a focus on spirituality that “impacts on the totality of life” (Kourie, 2000:13). This paper aims to explore the relationship of perceptions and paradigms that shape an understanding of spirit and Spirit within a South African context. Lastly, it (perhaps daringly so!) refers to the current church unification process of the Dutch Reformed Church and Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa in the course of the reflection on paradigms, pneumatology and theology.

INTRODUCTION

In 2009 the Faculty of Theology of Stellenbosch University played host to discussions surrounding the church unification process of the Uniting Reformed Church and Dutch Reformed Church.¹ As the dialogue between the moderators of the respective churches progressed, it became increasingly clear that communication between churches was seriously hampered by certain perceptions of the process, perceptions of motivations for unification, and perceptions of the different partners engaged in the dialogue. Not doctrines nor theologies, but social influences and paradigms² would appear the greater stumbling blocks for a unification process of integrity³ – uniting a church previously divided by the Apartheid ideology. I am of the opinion that perceptions that stem from dichotomous and dichotomizing paradigms are strengthened by certain macro-level influences that work in on world views or paradigms. Furthermore, as will be shown, understandings of spirit, Spirit and spirituality in this paper are taken to point, in a broader sense, to that which creates meaning in human life. As such, in this paper it is not to be limited to personal or individual experiences or interpretations, but would be as much a social endeavour as a theological one; John de Gruchy’s comment earlier in this conference⁴ that “all

1 A discussion that took place 19 March 2009 around the theme “Theology as hope and remembrance.”

2 Although not undertaken in this paper, the work of H. R. Niebuhr (1929) may be especially helpful in this regard.

3 By integrity I refer back to the basic meaning of the Greek word *integer*, “wholeness” or “oneness”. By this I mean to point out a process that is not singularly or blindly preoccupied with becoming one church at the expense of unity within the process itself, as the means justify the end, and not the other way around.

4 During a Keynote address at the Joint Conference of Theology and Religion, entitled “Transforming

social reality must necessarily fall within the natural scope of theological inquiry” is significant in this regard. In this paper I aim to explore how certain macro-level influences impact upon perception and paradigms, and how dichotomous paradigms, enforced by these influences, not only limit fuller expression, experience and understanding of spirit and Spirit, but also tend to cripple a spirituality that impacts upon the totality of life.

IN THE SPIRIT OF THE MATTER

In the popular book *The Shack* the character of the Holy Spirit states that “Paradigms power perception and perceptions power emotions” (Young, 2007:197).⁵ The recognition of certain frameworks that, to a large extent, influence and determine perception and interpretation are also of significance when spirit and spirituality is pondered. Perception and experience, emotion and interpretation, rely substantially on the form and function of contextual paradigms. It will be argued that understandings of spirit and Spirit are impacted by certain macro-level influences, which contribute greatly to the formation of paradigms. Within the context of this paper, the term “paradigm” is used to refer to “an entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques shared by the members of a given community.”⁶ In the book *Paradigm Change in Theology* it is argued that the history of Christianity can be interpreted as a series of paradigms: the Jewish-Christian apocalyptic paradigm of the patristic age; the Roman Catholic paradigm of the Middle Ages; the Evangelical-Protestant paradigm of the Reformation; the modern paradigm of the enlightenment; and the (arguably) post-modern, post-enlightenment paradigm still being formed (Küng et al., 1991). In what way does perception then relate to paradigmatic models or world views? Ott argues that perceptions or impressions of the world are organised by means of a system of thought (what he calls “consensual theory”; alternatively “paradigm” or “received view”) (Ott, 2004:1). As such, Adler defines perception as “the process by which an individual selects, organises, and evaluates stimuli from the external environment to provide meaningful experiences for himself or herself.” She states that “Perceptual patterns are neither innate nor absolute,” and describes the nature of perception or perceptual patterns as (1) selective (response determined by choosing between stimuli), (2) learned (determined by experience), (3) culturally determined (conditioned by cultural background), (4) constant (difficult to change), and (5) chosen (since that which is perceived is filtered and interpreted) (Adler, 1991:69). Not only is perception a product of certain world views or paradigms, but it also impacts the formation and adaptation of paradigms; in other words, perception is taken to exercise a forming influence on paradigms, as well as stemming from certain paradigms. A spirituality that impacts on the totality of life comprises of holistic paradigms, which births perceptions that “effect[s] change at cognitive, volitional and affective levels of the person, and [it] recognises the complexity of the human being” (Kourie, 2000:13).

Within the church unification process it is clear that, although sharing paradigms (perhaps

Traditions: Doing theology in South Africa today.”

5 Kourie states that “Current interest in spirituality is evidenced both at popular and scholarly levels” (Kourie, 2000:9). One has only to walk into a bookstore, any bookstore, to experience the upsurge in interest in spirituality; nowhere is this more evidenced than in the popularity of books such as *The Shack*.

6 The definition used by Thomas Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, a definition taken up by Hans Küng in the book *Paradigm Change in Theology* (1991:7). Models and paradigms are used in the philosophy of science, with the purpose of indicating that science is not ahistorical and impersonal; “paradigm” is thus mostly used as epistemological and explanatory theoretical tool. As such, it is normally used to understand the “process of cognition” in science (Van der Merwe, 1989:24 – 25).

even sharing in the post-modern paradigm described by *Paradigm Change in Theology* (Küng et al., 1991)), perceptions are not necessarily shared or mutually understood by the different participants of the different churches – a challenge that would seem to be largely hermeneutic in nature. This has implications for understandings of spirit and spirituality, and so the nature of that which transcends matter would also merit some discussion.

TOWARDS THE MATTER OF SPIRIT

Sinnot claims that every living thing has an “inner directive quality of its own” (Sinnot, 1966:169) and that spirit is the “manifestation of the highest form of goal-seeking” (Sinnot, 1966:171). Values such as beauty, goodness and truth (Sinnot, 1966:173) are attributed to the innate meaning and purpose of life, specifically the pursuit of a good life⁷ that is characterised by justice, freedom and peace. Immateriality, however, is often grouped under ‘philosophy’ or ‘religion’, adhering to well-known limitations in defining or discussing spirit, and is often contrasted with the preoccupation with matter, termed “materialism” (Sinnot, 1966:32).⁸ The temptation to order these into a certain hierarchy, or to emphasise the space created between immateriality and matter by perceptions of the animosity in the relationship of spirit to matter⁹ may already in itself be an indication of a dichotomous paradigm that powers perception. It is claimed that religion or faith create spaces for the intellect and spirit to meet, however varied in form, and may include anything from organised religion to personal philosophy (Sinnot, 1966:188).

Thus, the church unification process is as much a spiritual matter as a material one, since it too has to do with the pursuit of the good life; striving toward justice, freedom and peace. If a dualism between spirit and matter, between perhaps even church politics and church spiritualities, should be identified, it may add to the difficulties of a process of reconciliation and unification, and would point to the neglect to account for all dimensions present within this process.

In his Doctoral dissertation, *Context and Theology in Southern Africa: A Shift in Theological Paradigm*, Christiaan van der Merwe points to the enormous challenges that churches in Southern Africa face with regards to present-day socio-historical reality. He discusses the variety of ideologies, political and economic systems and problems (both local and international), social change, social developments, environmental problems, ecumenical problems, religions, theologies and so forth (Van der Merwe, 1989:9-13). His perceptions and interpretations lead him to ask hermeneutical questions of his context and of Christian theology and churches, and, of utmost importance, the question of the influences and paradigms that shape an understanding of spirit and Spirit may also come to the fore here. Often, however, the question “does Spirit matter?” is preceded by another consideration, namely “is Spirit matter?” In a post-Reformation,

7 Jechoutek quotes Goulet in surmising that a ‘good life’ is also the ultimate goal of human development (Jechoutek, 2004:4).

8 In *God after Darwin: Theology of Evolution*, John F. Haught defines materialism as “the belief that lifeless and mindless ‘matter’ alone is real” and states that this paradigm has “provided the philosophical setting for most evolutionary science” (Haught, 2000:1).

9 Kourie quotes Borg, in his study of the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, when she says that the current age is one “where many people are ‘cultured despisers of religion’”. She goes on to say that “Christian spirituality has for many decades been identified with a radical world-denying, anti-materialistic ascetic philosophy of life. This has resulted in a polarisation between the spiritual and the material” (Kourie, 2000:10, 12).

post-Enlightenment, and post-modern context,¹⁰ arguably provability (that which can be proved by reason and reasoning) may have become the necessary precursor to credibility (that which can be believed), which often introduces interesting tensions with the role (and priority, one might add) of discussions regarding meaning and that which is regarded as important in life. Without preoccupying ourselves with the philosophical tension of this question or falling prey to an existentialist debate about the relationship between spirit and matter, we shall discuss some macro-influences that shape an understanding of spirit and Spirit within a specifically South African context, with reference to the importance of power of perception(s).

MACRO-LEVEL INFLUENCES THAT MATTER

Culture

Macro-level influences that, by means of constructing paradigms, shape an understanding of that which transcends matter within the South-African context are numerous. Arguably culture, in its various manifestations, plays a very prominent role in determining perception. Diversity serves to expose perception to differing understandings of spirituality and spirit; within the South African setting this is all the more poignant and relevant when relating to a context of multiculturalism. Apparently, cultures or world views in South Africa may be grouped into more Western and more African manifestations thereof.¹¹ With regards to an understanding of spirit and Spirit, and without surrendering the creative tension of different world views to generalising assumptions, it must be emphasised that African cultures would appear to place high value on community (ubuntu), whereas Western cultures in South Africa (similar to its counterparts in Europe and North-America) sometimes still value and encourage individuality and individual success.¹² Fierce competition for scarce resources and a breakdown in relational capacity, be it the will or the ability to relate to others, are often connected to the high value placed on the individual and the individual's capacity for performance. However, not only are these by and large two, often opposing, world views¹³ and cultures found embedded together in South African societies, but are they combined to differing extents, with the result that "a syncretism emerged in the encounter between African and Western world views" (Anderson, 1991:9). The complexity of culture in South Africa adds to the impetus of perception, especially with regards to spiritual matters.

A prominent and disconcerting appearance, which nonetheless serves to highlight important differences within a dual-culture phenomenon, is the way in which spirit and immateriality is experienced. Within a more African centred culture, spiritual involvement is an embodied experience, not easily separated from the realities of life and, by implication, matter. It is argued, however, that this is not to present evidence for further proof of animism in African conceptions of spirit and religion, but rather points to an embodied spirituality (Anderson, 1991:12).¹⁴

10 Kourie says that "spirituality takes place within a postmodern society and a global and interreligious context." (Kourie, 2000:9).

11 A view taken up by Thabo Mbeki in *African Renaissance* (1998).

12 Whereas "individual autonomy is defined and circumscribed by the communitarian ethos" in traditional African paradigms (Jechoutek, 2004:2).

13 Macnamara describes the functions of world views or 'world pictures' by calling attention to the life orientation or direction, enrichment of life (especially with regards to relationships), intellectual satisfaction, contentment, influence, and control that world views may offer (Macnamara, 1980:30).

14 See also Denise Ackermann's formidable work on embodied spirituality and a "spirituality of risk" in, for example, "A 'Spirituality of Risk' for Christian Witness in South Africa" (1994) and *Claiming our footprints: South African women reflect on context, identity and spirituality* (2000).

This differs greatly from a more Western centred culture, where spiritual involvement is often still regarded as a disembodied experience, too easily identified (or maybe confused) with supernaturalism or sentimentalism.

Within the church unification process, culture seems to play a definitive part in the debate – creating not only distance between persons of the respective churches, but often used as bulwark against change and adaptation. The difference in culture of the members of churches (in the case of the Dutch Reformed Church still thoroughly Afrikaans, if not Afrikaner – in this sense perhaps very Western still; whereas in the Uniting Reformed Church more of an African culturality is to be seen) present formidable challenges, despite members of both churches being able to speak common languages: Afrikaans, English and Xhosa mostly. The abovementioned dualism creates tension, not only within own churches, but adds to dichotomous paradigms that are now being harnessed to, paradoxically, address the complex process of unification.

Heritage and history

An important aspect to be considered is the role of heritage, tradition, and collective memories that is often communicated by means of narrative and stories. Fredenburgh calls attention to the importance and challenge of stories within paradigms by stating that the “tension of paradigms is the tension of stories” (2007). In a sense, every heritage involves some cultural indoctrination, by means of a process of informing and sensitising with reference to acceptable morals and practices within a culture. Heritage also involves history, however, which may provide valuable insights into a given context. The influence of John Calvin, in a post-Reformation context, ought to be recognised, especially towards an understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit. When Warfield called John Calvin the theologian of the Holy Spirit in 1909 (Faber, 1989:1), he provided an interpretative key to a century of Calvin studies to follow. Consequently Bolt, following Krusche, describes Calvin’s exposition of the threefold work of the Holy Spirit as teleologically ordered. The first concentric circle involves the work of the Spirit in the cosmos. The activity of the Spirit in the cosmos involves maintaining order and producing life (Bolt, 1989:19)¹⁵ – an understanding that resonates with African embodied spirituality¹⁶ – as well as humanity, with a specific focus on the *imago Dei*.¹⁷ In this regard, attention is paid to the twin faculties of understanding and will that Calvin uses to describe the soul (Bolt, 1989:21-23).¹⁸ The third work of the Spirit focuses on the ‘elect’, ‘regenerate man’ or the church of Christ who partakes in the ‘benefits of Christ’ (Bolt, 1989:26-27). Calvin’s exposition of the work of the Spirit has contributed greatly to both ecclesiastical and anthropological deliberations of spirituality and Spirit; however, the relationship with the cosmos has long been neglected in South African churches.¹⁹ Furthermore,

15 Bolt goes on to state that “The Spirit which maintains order also is the source of *all life*” [emphasis mine – NM] (1989:20).

16 Worthy of note is that the African concept of ‘power’, especially the ‘power’ of the Holy Spirit in African Christian Theology, is viewed as ‘vital force’ or ‘life force’. Anderson goes on to say that “This force or ‘power’ is tangibly perceived and manipulable; and some may have more of it than others” although he states that the African objects to the categorisation of ‘life force’ as “an impersonal manipulable force” as the Western approach to the African world view has been led to believe (Anderson, 1991:58, 60).

17 Calvin argues that the *imago Dei* “raises man above the ‘common mass’ of other creatures” (Bolt, 1989:21).

18 The misinterpretation of the work of the Spirit in humanity has led to an understanding of spirituality that permitted domination by either rationality or emotions – an obstinate perception that continues to flourish in certain South African paradigms.

19 Cf. the very recent Climate Change. A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa (2009).

Calvinism has been equated with stagnant conservatism in many a protestant mind, which has arguably contributed to a hypocritical and dichotomous view of spirituality with some.

Furthermore, within a post-Enlightenment context, the influence and impact of Charles Darwin must also be considered. Since Darwin's theory on 'natural selection' has challenged both science and religion towards a fresh methodology of understanding creation, scientific research has contributed to the theory of evolution in such quantities that the Neo-Darwinist movement came into being. The renewed dedication to the evolutionist theory of 'natural selection', however, was challenged by the creationist theory of 'intelligent design', often (mistakenly) equated with 'science' and 'religion' respectively. Haught argues convincingly that the faulty paradigms within which both creationists and evolutionists function make use of the very same limited methodology and terminology to argue their cases. Both seem preoccupied with (the being and work of a Creator God as defined by) the rigidity of order and design in creation, and neither seem to consider the original novelty and creativity of the creation-act or creation-process (Haught, 2000:4-9). Nor does, for that matter, the possibility of continued creativity and unlimited novelty seem to play an important role. A rationalist dichotomy (where 'science' and 'religion' are opposed) permeates Western worldviews, which allows little space for growing and living paradigms within which fresh perspectives on spirit and spirituality may be conceived or considered.

The story of current church unification would, for me, embody the story of Calvinism in South Africa.²⁰ Both churches claim the identity of "Reformed" and of standing in the heritage and history of Calvin himself; in spite of apparent similarities, the churches have interpreted this very differently in the past. Furthermore, the legacy of the creationism-evolutionism division adds to the insecurity and fear of many Christians, also within these two churches. As fear and uncertainty are most formidable in hindering processes of change, especially processes of integrity, this can be seen as contributing, however indirectly, to the already difficult path of church unification.

Socio-politics

Socio-politics, in the widest possible sense of the term, is pivotal to the discussion of paradigms, since it ponders (and perceives) relationships at every level of societies, and especially within communities.²¹ The power of perception within socio-politics not only involves certain paradigms, but, within paradigms inherently preoccupied with status and influence, also involves the perception of power. Boesak describes power within the African understanding as a "relational reality" (Anderson, 1991:62); Wright concludes that "power is basic to life" (Anderson, 1991:62); Anderson emphasises that, in the holistic African world view (contrary to Western dualism), the power of the Spirit cannot be limited to mystical, personal power, but is expected to meet concrete needs, be it physical, economic, social, or political (Anderson, 1991:63). Oppression, then, is viewed as a lack of power, within which empowerment²² serves to reconcile persons estranged from life-giving dynamism with their "vital force" (Anderson, 1991:63). The ability to relate (relationality) and the ability to respond (responsibility) is severely affected by oppressive,

20 Cf. Smit, 2007.

21 When discussing relationships within community, the differentiation between *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) as distinguished by Tönnies, and cited by Kürtz, that would seek to describe the relational difference or movement from the former to the latter as "a loss of communal feeling and family ties," ought to be kept in mind (Kürtz, 1995:176).

22 Or 'human development', as Jechoutek would refer to "the strengthening of human capability to pull out of poverty and misery" (Jechoutek, 2004:5).

often violent practices that encourages conflict and produces disharmony in paradigms. The South African context challenges its people with all the richness and depth that accompanies diversity. This, however, does not only allow ample opportunity for growth, but is also the breeding ground for tension and fear. Perhaps it is no wonder then that intolerance, conflict and violence²³ of some form is imbedded in a number of South African paradigms.

Societal structures and sociological considerations affect paradigms. Davis, in his essays on Social Theology, explains that religion is affected by the conception and organisation of society, since “religion is a form of social practice” (Davis, 1994:2). He goes on to state that the post-Reformation Religious Wars have had an enormous impact on the emergence of the secular state, since “the history of the West is that of a progressive differentiation between Church and State, between religion and society” (Davis, 1994:3). Perhaps this process of ‘progressive differentiation’ was also projected on the individual and on communities with respect to the material and immaterial aspects of humans, of being human, in which case it has facilitated and inspired dichotomous paradigms to the extent that a systematic compartmentalisation has dominated both perception and interpretation.

Within the relationship of the two churches, the question of power is a very delicate aspect to be considered at this point of time, especially in light of the history of oppression and domination in South Africa – which also permeated ecclesiastical structures. I recall a class where we discussed the issues of power and control within the unification process and potentially unified churches, where one of my classmates asked who the father would be within this newly re-united family. Past injustices and violent practices are not to be limited to the socio-political arena, but are deeply imbedded in the memory of a church divided by these very practices.²⁴

Economic realities

The South African dual economy, with its unique combination of elements that characterise developed (First World) and developing (Third World) economies, contribute greatly to a dichotomous world view. Whereas the quality of First World goods and services, such as the medical, engineering and financial sectors, are praised for its progress and promise, the contributions of Third World goods and services, most prominent in a flourishing informal economy, are often ridiculed and devalued. The South African populace is not only divided with regards to differing world views and cultural diversity, but also with regard to ‘class,’ as determined by (basic) needs and especially by standards of goods and services rendered. Inequality of opportunities – which affects the realisation of potential, human development, education, employment, and performance – could also be regarded as a phenomenon of an oppressive nature, since it slows the implementation process of economic justice and responsibility down immensely. Furthermore, globalisation presents formidable challenges to the constancy and stability of paradigms, which are often over-exposed in a technologically-determined and information-crowded global world. However, influx of information may prove valuable and indeed vital to facilitate necessary change, by means of responsible processing and application. This may lead to much needed paradigm adjustments and shifts. Exposure to an international array of perceptions on spirit and spirituality may potentially provide some keys to affecting change in South African paradigms.

Since the advent of democratic politics in 1994, South African political oppression may be a thing of the past, but economic oppression, though nothing new, is a reality that seems to have

23 Defining violence as that which undermines, negatively subverts, or even destroys human dignity and self-worth, and including any form that it may assume (whether emotional, physical or other).

24 See the well-known Belhar Confession (1986).

replaced the former in vigour and intensity. Realities within a capitalist economy and the world of work play a fundamental role in the shape of paradigms within which perception is formed. The challenges that economic realities present, such as poverty, unemployment, HIV/Aids, and an ever-growing inequality of wealth division, has an enormous impact on the dignity and perception of people, especially within an African context where spirituality is characterised by embodiment and holism (Anderson, 1991:18). Within an urbanising and industrialising society, and even in tandem with economic challenges, so-called Traditional African communities (or African Traditional cultures) have managed to preserve the tension of spirituality and materiality; this may largely be due to embodied paradigms, within which an integrally integrated, interrelated and personal²⁵ understanding of reality is emphasised.

In the unification process of the churches, economic realities are pivotal to any discussions on church structures – availability of work for ministers within the new church, division of assets and capital, salaries and so forth. Communities are very much divided along lines of class and economic well-being; and so the accusations that the Dutch Reformed Church are faced with often has to do with the perception of not wanting to share or redistribute (their) wealth, while the Uniting Reformed Church are often accused of wanting to become one church for the sake of sharing in the wealth of the DRC.

Ideology

Paradigms are also constructed of certain ideologies. Eagleton refers to ideology as “a child of the Enlightenment” (1994:1), and places its existence within the modern era. Ideology (as a set of socially conditioned ideas, interests and beliefs that influence interpretation and behaviour) concerns the relation between thought and social reality (Eagleton, 1994:15). Decker brings to attention the nature of ideologies when he refers to the ‘pervasive process’, rather than ‘provincial dogma’ (2004:4) of ideology that deeply penetrates paradigms and thought processes. This would appear to indicate that no ideology can be limited to being exclusively conscious or intentional. In fact, Decker judges ideology unstable “even as it functions to produce power” (2004:7), since ideology includes both ‘particular’ and ‘total’ conceptions (Mannheim, 1994:51) of ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’ decisions and practices within the social sphere. Mannheim describes ideology as an ‘interdependent system of meanings’ (Mannheim, 1994:59), wherein he attempts to emphasise the rootedness of human thought in social milieu. Such an ‘interdependent system of meaning’ would be pivotal to a reflection on world views and paradigms that power perception.

Constant dialogue and discourse are vital contributions to the practical and dynamic communication of paradigms and ideologies (Eagleton, 1994:11), especially since “like conventional religion, ideology seeks to shape men’s [and women’s] behavior” (Gouldner, 1994:202). In fact, religion and ideology, like ideology and bias,²⁶ embraces an intimate relationship in many paradigms. MacNamara discusses ideology as a ‘world view’ or ‘world picture’, of which the function would be the wielding of control and power to implement a system of doctrines, often by means of policy, censorship and propaganda, and especially in terms of political agenda (MacNamara, 1980:31). One such ideology could be the Apartheid ideology of previous regimes which has left a legacy of separateness and division that still poses great challenges to integrating

25 Anderson, in his discussion on the African inner being and world view, states convincingly that “A person is inextricably bound up with everything that happens in the universe; it is a personal universe” (Anderson, 1991:19).

26 Elster argues that “ideological beliefs belong to the more general class of biased beliefs” (Elster, 1994:238).

and non-dichotomous paradigms. This is of even greater difficulty when it is considered that the Apartheid past of South Africa not only haunts but often still dictates South African identity today, and in so doing subverts the adaptability and possibility of change.

The ideological impact of Apartheid upon the unification process may not be so self-evident. Different world views and experiences add to the complexity of perception, of different perceptions, and has to do with education (different forms and contents and focuses and qualities of past and present education offered, to different communities; different opportunities, often still favouring those who were favoured in the past, due to the availability of resources to go to prestigious schools, universities and so on), media (perhaps not propagating Apartheid ideology any longer, but still with the agenda of bringing certain ideologies to the fore, in my opinion), globalisation (in spite of the world having become a global community, access to this community is still limited to those previously privileged, who have the means to access and use the internet, travel, and so on) and so forth. Again, the complexity of the unification process is brought to the fore.

WHY PERCEPTIONS MATTER

Instances indicating the relevance of a discussion of macro-level influences that determine paradigms, and in turn perceptions, of spirituality are numerous. We will contend with mentioning only one, though very important process that is steeped in the power of perception and the influence of paradigms. In my view, the current process of church unification of the Dutch Reformed Church and Uniting Reformed Church does not adequately account for macro-level social influences that hinder or strain communication, and in effect relationships, between churches. Consequently, the URC have called for a moratorium to be placed upon unification dialogues, and the process seems to have encountered some formidable hindrances – even come to a stop, for the time being. I am of the opinion that dichotomous paradigms not only impact upon individual spirituality, but most significantly upon “collective spirituality” or “spirituality-in-communion”, if you will; in this instance through attempts of reconciliation and unification within the social sphere. It is my contention that this attempt at reconciliation, like many others, do not take proper cognisance of the macro-level influences that place strain upon holistic paradigms, embodied spirituality, and as such, reconciliation itself; the perception of the ‘other’ influences not only ‘personal’ or ‘individual’ spirituality, but may compromise the entire process. Perceptions of spirit and Spirit may well lead to the formation not only of certain theologies, but of certain world views (paradigms) within the churches especially. As such, the construction of an understanding of spirituality could impact greatly upon every level of reconciliatory processes.

THE POWER OF PERCEPTION: SOME CONCLUDING REMARKS

Paradigms not only provide frameworks of reference, but also serve to assist individuals and communities in the interpretation of meaning and orientation within a network of interpersonal relationships. It would seem that a great number of perceptions in the South African context are crippled by absolutist and dichotomous paradigms, which limit a fuller experience and deeper understanding of spirit and spirituality.²⁷ This has important implications for the identity formation and dignity of people in South Africa, as well as the soundness and quality of theology and pneumatology in South African churches. There are, however, examples of mature, sensitive

²⁷ “Even though until this century the Church opposed the modern secular world, a duality of Church and world, of sacred and secular, nevertheless determined theological reflection” (Davis, 1994:6).

paradigms that give birth to vibrant, visionary and promising perceptions on spirituality and life; one such is an integrated and interrelated African paradigm that bears to fruit an embodied spirituality, where reality and spirituality is inseparable, personal, and in solidarity with the rest of the community. Within the urbanising and globalising processes in South Africa, these perceptions are often challenged. In response to the crisis that such an encounter may bring about, another promising paradigm is proposed. In her discussion on cross-cultural spiritual direction in South Africa, Fresen, quoting Augsburg, proposes “interpathy” as a new paradigm or model that may facilitate healing and affirmation of life in relationships; she describes this as the most profound level at which cultural woundedness and separateness can begin to be healed (Fresen, 2000:179). “Interpathy” may prove valuable to explore not only in order to bridge otherness with regards to culture, but also when confronted with other macro-level influences such as history and heritage, socio-politics, economic realities, and ideology, since “Interpathy involves letting go of my own framework of thought and values and the willingness to enter into that of the other” (Fresen, 2000:179). This may be a paradigm to be explored with more intensity²⁸ within the current and complex unification process of the Dutch Reformed Church and Uniting Reformed Church, especially since the power of perception within this process has been established: that, according to Adler’s definition of perception, it is indeed selective, learned, culturally determined, constant and chosen.

“Contemporary spirituality impacts on the totality of life; it is non-dualistic; it does not posit a bifurcation between the secular and the sacred. It encompasses the entire life of faith, which includes body and mind, as well as the social and political dimensions” (Kourie, 2000:13). The totality of life is spiritual life; despite dualistic perceptions and dichotomous paradigms, since “there is no real dichotomy between everyday living and living in the Spirit” (Kourie, 2000:19). However, “There needs to be greater resonance between the inner and the outer dimensions of reality” (Kourie, 2000:28). In conclusion, it could be said that greater attention ought to be paid to the power of perception within paradigms; this is not necessarily determined by the fixed pattern of a set paradigm, but involves a dynamic process that is based upon certain assumptions, confirmed by lived experience, coloured by emotion, and remembered through stories and tradition, which in turn constructs, deconstructs and reconstructs paradigms in an open process of continual adaptation and shifting.²⁹ It is here that the promise of the power of perception lies, in my view. With regards to an understanding of spirit and spirituality within such paradigms – informed by culture, history and heritage, socio-politics, economic realities, and ideology – it is clear not only that perception(s) wields great power, as was shown in using the example of the current church unification process, but also that spiritual realities are a crucial and inescapable part of South-African identity, as spirituality indeed impacts upon the totality of life.

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28 Also see Miroslav Volf’s paradigm of embrace in his book, *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996).

29 See Van der Merwe (1989: 33 – 36) for a discussion on paradigms shifts and paradigm breaks. In short, he convincingly argues that paradigms and models are “inescapably conditioned by different situations.” Since new paradigms develop out of existing paradigms, there seems to be an unbreakable historical link between paradigms, “no matter how polemical or antithetical they may be.” He mentions that, even though paradigms are regarded as incommensurable or incompatible, this seems to be due to the “fundamental differences in the hermeneutics of the respective paradigms.” Nonetheless, specific elements of existing paradigms are rejected and others again accepted into new paradigms, which provide some continuity with historical paradigms. Also see Küng’s chapter in *Paradigm Change in Theology*, “Paradigm Change in Theology: Proposal for a Discussion” (1991), for a discussion on the dispute between Kuhn and Toulmin on ‘evolutionary’ or ‘revolutionary’ changes in paradigms respectively.

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KEY WORDS

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SLEUTELWOORDE

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Spiritualiteit
Kerkhereniging
Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk
Verenigende Gereformeerde Kerk.

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