

Utilization of Christian doctrine as a theological resource: a relational view of the Trinity informing a pastoral response to address child sexual abuse

Ebenezer Tetteh Kpalam
Pentecost University, Ghana
etkpalam@pentvars.edu.gh

Hannelie Yates
North-West University, South Africa
hannelie.yates@nwu.ac.za

Manitza Kotzé
North-West University, South Africa
manitza.kotze@nwu.ac.za

Abstract

The doctrine of the Trinity is a doctrine that should have real and practical implications for daily Christian living. Proponents of the relational view of the Trinity believe that the relationship that exists between the triune God is a relationship of love, equality, and reciprocity. Consequently, this should reflect in the quality of relationship and caring activities created and extended by faith communities. Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is considered a crime in most societies. It has a devastating long-term effect on the child, family, and society. As a result, all stakeholders are called upon to respond to this menace in society. There is evidence that any effective Christian response should be informed by critical theological reflections. As such, theological reflections sparked by public issues of importance should be rooted in the Christian faith traditions. This article posits that the relational view of the Trinity could be a useful theological resource for pastoral response to CSA.

Keywords

Relational view of the Trinity; child sexual abuse; pastoral response; faith community

Introduction

Theology is the study about God while Christian theology is the discourse about God from a Christian perspective (McGrath 2018: xxviii). Theology can also be expressed as faith seeking understanding. Christian theology studies the basic doctrines. A doctrine is a general statement of beliefs of the Christian faith. It refers to general statements of truths about the nature of God and God's relationship to creation. A doctrine encapsulates timeless truths about the issues of life – the Christian life (Erickson & Arnold 2015:4). Since Christian doctrines deal with fundamental issues of the Christian faith such as the nature of God, God's works, and relationship to humanity, it cannot avoid daily Christian life. For example, the doctrine of salvation, creation, Trinity, the second coming of Christ, all have implications for how Christians should live their lives. Consequently, the apostle Paul encourages the Thessalonians to comfort and encourage themselves with the doctrine of the second coming of Christ (1 Thes. 4:16–18).

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a global public health concern due to its devastating effects. It has a lifelong effect on victims, families, and society at large (Rudolfsson 2015:1). It can be described as a sin that affects both spirit and body (1 Cor. 6:18). This position is affirmed in most societies, where CSA is considered a crime. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), CSA is “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or still that violates the laws or social taboos of society” (WHO 2014). Additionally, the United Nations Global Study on Violence against Children (UNVAC) defines CSA as “any kind of sexual activity to which children are subjected, especially by someone who is responsible for them, or has power or control over them, and who they should be able to trust” (East, Central and Southern African Health Community 2011:26). The statistics of CSA are alarming and varies across countries (WHO 2014). Globally, the WHO estimated that in 2002, 73 million boys and 150 million girls experienced various forms of violence before age 18 (WHO 2014). Africa is considered as the continent with the highest prevalence rate of CSA at 34.4% (Behere & Mulmule 2013; Wihbey 2011).

A pastoral response to CSA could be grounded in “child attentive theology” (Konz 2019). It calls for a theology that challenges the Christian community and society at large to honour the full humanity and dignity of children as well as adults’ responsibility towards them (Bunge & Eide 2021:xvii). Bunge (2012:4) suggests that the fields of theology and ethics have not given serious attention to issues of children in Africa. According to Mtata (2009:85), African theology is imbedded in African culture. As a result, it is influenced by the cultural construction of personhood. In the construction of personhood in Africa, Mtata (2009:97) observes that in some communities, children are construed as not yet full human beings. Consequently, the marginalization and dehumanization of children observed in African societies persist in faith communities as well. For example, exclusion of children from the Eucharist and other sacraments are a commonplace in most African societies. African theological reflections are sparked by issues of concern in the African context. Since children are pushed to the margins of society, issues affecting children do not take centre stage. This could have contributed to the limited attention theological reflections have paid to the full humanity of children and to contextual issues such as, discrimination, violence and injustice that have become daily lived experiences of children in some African communities.

In recent years, there has been gradual awakening to child theologies on the continent and the need to reflect on issues of children theologically (Globbelaar 2016:11). In spite of the growing interest in theologies speaking to the issues of children, there is limited discourse on the views of children and how the church should respond pastorally. Knoetze (2016: 220) relates that there are still emerging different views on the status and value of children in faith communities in Africa. These different views inform the response of churches to issues affecting children. However, Knoetze (2016: 238) suggests that we cannot talk about theologies without talking about the Trinitarian God as revealed in Scripture and God’s missional living in the world. That is, child sexual abuse needs a theological reflections informed by the Trinity. The implication is that African theology could honour children when theological reflections re-examine the full humanity of children and adults’ responsibility towards them in the light of Christian doctrines.

Child abuse is connected with the abuse of power (Reynaert 2015:189). In Africa, abuse of power could be linked to the hierarchical construction of personhood and societal structures. Mtata (2009:85) argues that African theological perspectives have followed this hierarchical ordering in ministry as well as theological reflections, particularly in relation to children. According to Reynaert (2015:191) “when [an] adult abuses a child, there is always power through the adult’s position and possibilities.” The implication is that the abuser has power over the abused. This abuse of power occurs in relationships, and usually relationships of power. CSA is a form of abuse of power in the context of relationships, in which there is a power imbalance. For instance, in Ghana it is reported that a majority of perpetrators of child abuse are those in position of power such as parents/guardians, teachers, religious leaders and community opinion leaders (Child Research and Resource Centre, 2009). This unequal and imbalance of power contributes to the lived experiences of violence and injustice towards children like CSA.

Since CSA is a form of abuse of power in a relational space, reflecting pastorally on it through the lens of a relational view of the Trinity could contribute significantly to addressing the menace. The doctrine of the Trinity is central to Christianity, and the way it is conceptualised provides answers to other practical questions for Christian spirituality (Erickson & Arnold 2015:108). Karl Barth (cited in Kärkkäinen 2006:236–328) opined that the doctrine of the Trinity is the Christian view of God, and that is what distinguishes the Christian view of God from other religious perspectives of God. Also, Ware (2010:107) consents with this understanding when he argued that there are no other possible ways to conceptualise the Christian God except as the Trinity. This argument implies that reflections on the nature and the work of God in human history and creation cannot be void of the Trinitarian thinking about God. That is, the Trinity is essential when it comes to reflections on the impact the belief in the Christian God should have on the day-to-day expressions of Christian spirituality and faith praxis.

The relational view of the Trinity is conceptualized as a communion of mutual love, equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness observed among God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (Tanner 2010:207; LaCugna 1991:391). And this quality of relationship could inform

the foundations upon which community life could be construed. In the Trinity, there is a relationship of equality, interconnectedness, reciprocity, mutual love, and care. This article argues that the relational view of the Trinity could provide sounder foundations for pastoral response to CSA. It briefly discusses the Trinity as a model for human community and provides motivation for utilizing a doctrine to respond to a public issue such as CSA.

The Trinity as a model for human community

Human beings live in a web of relationships. As the popular African concept “uBuntu” teaches “a person is a person through other persons”, or “I am because of you”. It carries the notion that, one is a human being because of other human beings. This implies that our humanity is revealed in our relationship with other humans. Ackermann observed that one’s humanity is “shaped and nurtured” in the quality of relationship maintained with other human beings, consequently, this community-mindedness is what produces growth and development in the individual (1998:17). Desmond Tutu held a similar view when he asserted that “we are made for complementarity. God designed us with unique gifts and ability, and we are made to live in a network of relationships with others so that we need each other in order to fully express our humanity” (Tutu 1995:xiv). This concept of human community is worthy of theological reflections, especially, from the African context. This is because Africans are noted for their strong sense of community. To achieve this sense of belonging, communities are therefore, faced daily with the need to respond to weaknesses and abuses in the relationships that exist. Faith communities are of no exception. Those communities that create and extend personal relationships devoid of abuses and oppressions could be described as strong. It is believed that faith communities have the potential to be those strong communities (Ackermann 1998:19).

The Trinitarian understanding of God and its connection with the beliefs and the life of the church has sparked a lot of attention. Rice (2014:101) observes that the doctrine of the Trinity has implications for the understanding of the Christian faith. Consequently, this has practical implications for the everyday life of the Christian faith community. Rice (2014:101) opines that the way we encounter God in the faith community

should reflect our understanding and the application of the Trinitarian God in the life of the church. The concept of the Trinity as a model that should inform the quality of relationship within the Christian faith community and society has been explored by different scholars (Volf 1998; Moltmann 1991; LaCugna 1991; Baukham 1995). This relational view of the Trinity argues that the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit presents a view of God that should characterise the life of Christians.

The Trinitarian understanding of God, and the implication for the Christian faith community have taken centre stage in theological reflections. For instance, Volf (1998:67) commenting on Ratzinger's understanding of the Trinity and ecclesiology, observed that the whole being of faith communities, that is, the structures as well as the daily expression of Christian spirituality should be rooted in the understanding of the Trinity. This points to the fact that churches should be organised in such a way that the daily actions and behaviours of her members reflect their understanding of the Trinitarian God. Similarly, Zizioulas argued that ecclesial communion should follow the pattern of the Trinitarian communion, since the church is "imago trinitatis" (1985:23). The church is not a mere organisation but a way of being, and this mode of being should take on the flesh of God's being. This being of God is a relational being, thus, the Trinity (1985:15–17). Commenting on Zizioulas' "imago trinitatis", Volf (1998:67) opined that there is the need to undertake critical reflections on the anthropological communion at the ecclesiological levels through the understanding of the relationality that exist in the Triune God. And that, "the connection between the Trinitarian communion and ecclesial communion can be better understood through critical examination of the communality observed in the life and teachings of Christ".

LaCugna (1991:338) also opines that the Trinity presents a relational concept in which there is no subordination between the Father and the Son or the Spirit. It is a kind of relationship of equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness (Tanner 2010:207; LaCugna 1991:391). This relationality observed in the Triune God offers no place for dominion and hierarchy. According to LaCugna, "the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another, is the hallmark of the reign of the God of Jesus Christ" (1991:391). Furthermore, the argument put forth relates

that, the reverse of this relational view is the source of dominion and abuse of power in relation to moral and sexual issues in our society (LaCugna 1991:393). The practical implication is that if this relationship exists in faith communities, children will not be seen as less important. As a result, they will receive humane treatment. Now, we turn our attention to theological motivation for utilizing doctrine of the Trinity in informing a pastoral response to CSA.

Public theological discourse and Christian doctrine

The relationship between Christian doctrine and public theological discourse is a motivation for utilizing Christian doctrine in this article. Public theological discourse focuses on the interplay between theology and the general society and how they influence each other (Graham 2020:10; Bedford-Strohm 2007). As observed by De Gruchy (2007:40), theological reflections sparked by public issues of importance should be rooted in the Christian faith traditions. These faith traditions include doctrines like the Trinity. This understanding could partly have influenced scholars like De Villiers (1995:566) who argues that in this pluralistic nature of the public, it is imperative to reflect theologically on issues of public concerns through what he described as “thick theological” convictions. In this vein, social problems like CSA should be examined through the lens of Christian faith traditions. De Villiers (1995:566) observed that one thick foundation of the Christian faith is love. Christians confess who God really is and believe that God is love (1 John 4:7). It is therefore expected that this confession of God as love, is a thicker conviction of the Christian faith that should form the framework of faith praxis and Christian spirituality (Koopman 2012:6). Also, Koopman (2012:5) relates that the love of God revealed in the sacrificial death of Christ should form the ethos of public discourse on the notion of justice. Koopman describes this as “moral discernment” in a pluralistic society. In Koopman’s argument, this moral discernment should be rooted in the Christian view of God as “God is love”.

It can be said that love is a central element of the Christian faith, and that this love is embedded in the very nature of the Christian God. Consequently, it is argued that the importance of love can be found in Jesus’ remark on the greatest commandment: “You shall love the Lord

with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and the first commandment. And the second is like it: you shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend on all the Law and the Prophets (Mt. 22:37–40, ESV). Critical reflections on Jesus' answer could partly lead to a conclusion that this nature of God could provide "thick theological foundation" for Christian faith praxis and spirituality. The character of love is expressed in the relationship between the Father and the Son. The Son also demonstrated this character in the relationship between Him and his disciples (Schwöbel 1998:307). God's love becomes the common character of the relationship that exists in the Triune God, and it is expected to exist in faith communities (John 15:9). This is a relationship of mutual love and reciprocity (LaCugna 1991:270–278), which should form the ethos of public theological reflections, as well as a Christian response to a public concern like CSA.

The concept of love is central to the Christian perspective on God, life and the ministry of Christ, and life in the Christian faith community (Schwöbel 1998:308). The love espoused in the nature, and the works of God, according to Ware (2010:107), can only be conceptualised in a Trinitarian manner. Similarly, Koopman grounds his public theology on the assertion that "God so loved the world" or "on the thick description of the content of the Christian faith traditions" (Koopman 2012:6; Smit 2009:526). In Koopman's view, this way of describing the Christian faith should be done in a Trinitarian manner. The Trinitarian view of God throws more light on this notion of love. God demonstrated this love by sending his Son to sacrifice his life for our sins, so that through faith in the Son, the Holy Spirit empowers us to live a life that pleases the Father (Schwöbel 1998:309).

In our effort to live in ways that please the father, it calls on Christians to practice love among themselves as well as in the communities they serve (Jn. 13:34–35). The call to live a Christ-like life, that is life flowing from God's love should be the motivation for our Christian response to issues of public concern like CSA. Koopman asserts that in order for the Christian faith to actively participate in the life of the public and contribute meaningfully to public discourse, her theology should be rooted in the Christian tradition (2010:56). That is, our public theology should provide theological directives and guidelines informed by thick traditions of the

Christian faith for responding to injustice in our society. One critical injustice towards the poor and vulnerable in African context is CSA. Our Christian response should stem from the reconstruction of God's love in the relationship that exists in the Christian community and extends to the larger society. God's being as love and works of love revealed in sending the Son for the sins of mankind and sending the Spirit to empower us can be better understood through a Trinitarian lens (Schwöbel 1998:312). It could be concluded that the essence for utilising doctrine could be linked to the understanding that God's being (love) is expressed in God's relationship of love (works of love). This implies Christians should reflect love in our daily lives. This is because, God's being of love is manifested in the relationship observed between God the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit – the Trinity. This Trinitarian view of God is also reflected in God's relationship towards humankind. The God, whose being is love demonstrated love towards us by sending Christ as sacrifice to redeem humankind, and through faith in the Son, has given us the Spirit to impact us in a way that we could live our lives in God. This act of love of the Father through the atoning works of the Son has changed our being into what is referred to as "Christians". This "new being" is expected to be expressed in the lives of individual Christians as well as the corporate life of the faith community (2 Cor. 5:7). Approaching this study from the assertion that our being must inform our Christian spirituality is one of the reasons for utilising the doctrine of the Trinity.

Use of doctrine where Scripture offers little guidance

Christians always look to the Bible to draw inspirations for their daily lives. The Bible is the source of authority and the gauge, yardstick and the framework within which Christians make meaning of life and their sense of the situations they encounter on daily basis (Cochrane et al. 1991:20). It is believed that for Christians in the Reformed tradition, one of the "solas" is "Sola Scriptura" (Kotzé 2013:104; Cochrane et al. 1991:20). This implies that Scripture alone should be considered in all matters of life. This could explain the reason why some Christians, especially, those in the Reformed tradition are critical about other forms of revelation, and in some cases reject those revelations besides Scripture (Kotzé 2013:104; Verhey 2003:31–37). In spite of this understanding, it is observed that Scripture does not

directly speak to some ethical issues of contemporary times. As observed by Herold (2006:131) and Jones (2001:26), some ethical issues, especially, those in current bioethical discourse like therapeutic cloning and stem cell research were absent during the time Scripture was compiled. In addition, it is argued that where Scripture even speaks about ethical issues, it may be read differently (Kotzé 2013:104; Verhey 2003:31–37). In instances where using Scripture becomes problematic, one proposal is to turn to Christian doctrine.

It is important to underscore the fact that the Bible gives some direction with regard to God's perspective and heart for children (Ps. 127:3–5; Mt. 18:1–14), and the onus God places on people towards children (Deut. 6:4–9; Ps. 78:1–8; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6: 4). In addition, some references and inferences can be made from the Bible (Prov. 31:8; Mk. 10:13–16) with regard to child protection, which could be considered the general umbrella under which this study falls. Some scholars (Zelyck 2017:37; Grobbelaar 2016:136; Willmer & White 2013) have argued that Matthew 18:1–14 provides a strong framework for theological discourse on the ministry to children. That is, a critical exegetical analysis of this Scripture could provide theological resources for faith communities with regard to ministry to children. However, turning to Christian doctrine will arguably be helpful in an attempt to construct an interdisciplinary pastoral response to CSA that is communal and contextual to Africa.

Additionally, Kotzé explicates that Christian doctrines are not detached from the influence of Scripture (2013:103). Further, she believes that Scripture is the main source of doctrines, although, there are contributions from tradition, reason, and experience. This is in support of Kasley's argument that Scripture still remains the chief source that shapes theological resources with which we respond to issues (cited in Kotzé 2013:103). In analysing theological hermeneutics, Smit (2006:171) observes that Scripture informs our views about God, and that what we know about the Triune God is what is largely revealed in Scripture. This implies the doctrine of the Trinity reflects the God revealed in Scripture. As a result, the use of the doctrine of the Trinity in responding to a public issue like CSA is not a deviation from Scripture. It is, rather a critical integration of insight from Scripture, and other sources. For instance, commenting on the Scripture and doctrine, Durand (cited in Kotzé 2013:104–105) proposes

that all doctrines are products, first of all, of what Scripture reveals about God. This is also true for the doctrine of the Trinity, as Durand further indicates that the doctrine of the Trinity is formulated as a result of the church's attempt to put forth her belief based on what Scripture teaches about the person of God, the Triune God who calls us into a relationship, and into God's own image. We are created in God's image and likeness (Gen. 1:26), and through faith in Christ we become like God (Jn. 1:12). If we become like God, it must be seen in our individual Christian lives as well as the corporate religious activities undertaken by faith communities. This image, the nature of God or the personhood of God, which is based on the witness of Scripture, is expected to become our "being" since we believe in the Trinity.

Commenting on the idea that human beings are created in the image of God, Tracy (2005:67) indicated that although this concept is complex in Christian theological reflections, it can be described in three aspects namely: the relational, the likeness of God, and the functional aspects. The "relational" aspects point to the fact that humans are created for relationship, with a deep longing for the reception and extension of a caring relationship. The "likeness" of God depicts the visible manifestations of the character of the invisible God. The third which is the "functional" aspect of the image of God points out that humans are created in God's image so that they can function as God's representation on earth. Tracy further argues that this image is maintained when human beings care for God's creation and create relationships of nurture. On the other hand, this image of God can be denied when humans use their power to grossly dominate the creation of God. In Tracy's opinion, this leads to complete misrepresentation of God. It could be said that the ability of humans to eschew misrepresentation of God's image could be determined by the views held about God. Schwöbel (1998:312–313) opined that "in Christian theology all discourse about God and God's relationship to humans cannot be abstracted from the way God's being is disclosed to us in God's relationship to humankind through Christ in the Spirit". As a result, Kotzé (2013:103) argues that the doctrine of the Trinity can offer a suitable theological resource, serving as a framework which can guide and direct Christian response to issues where Scripture offers little guidance, and still remain faithful to Scripture, which is the

chief source of Reformed Christian theological discourse. That is, the use of doctrine will always bring us back to Scripture (Douma 2003:40).

To this end, we argue that doctrines are products of a systematic theological discourse, integrating insights from Scripture, tradition, and other theological and non-theological resources, and can therefore be used to address public issues where Scripture offers little guidance (Kotzé 2013:104). Christian doctrine can provide a thicker and broader foundation upon which to construct an interdisciplinary pastoral response to CSA.

Doctrines inform practice

Theology is faith seeking understanding. This means that theology is a “practical discipline” as it engages in systematic reflections of the faith shared and practiced in a faith community, within a certain cultural context (Graham 2000:10; Grenz 1993:17–18). The faith that is shared in a given context is grounded in a set of belief systems. For instance, one common doctrine of the Pentecostals is the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the “glossolalia” as the initial evidence (Kgatle 2020:1; Musoni 2014:134; Yong 2007:248). As a result of this belief system, one common practice among this strand of the Christian movement is praying in “tongues”. Consequently, in their individual and corporate expression of Christian spirituality with regard to prayer, one is more likely to hear a Pentecostal praying in “unknown tongues”. It is believed that our faith commitment and expressions is rooted in our doctrines. The efforts of Christians to live as God’s people in the world is grounded in their faith in God (Poon 2013:5; Grenz 1993:17–18). Thus, Christian spirituality and faith praxis is informed by the beliefs that are held about God.

Practical theology comes from a tradition that theory informs practice and practice informs theory. As Browning (1991) observed, practical theology uses the “practice-theory-practice” paradigm. In other words, underneath all Christian praxis is a set of body of knowledge or system of belief or body of wisdom. Graham (2017:4) argues that doctrines are the “meaning-making that serve practice”. If doctrines are the theories upon which Christian practice is based, it is imperative that any theological reflection on the Christian response to CSA should factor in the contribution of the

doctrine of the Trinity. Furthermore, Graham argues that with recent developments, practical theological thinking is moving away from the work of the few ordained to a broader sphere where there is a need for more comprehensive theoretical frameworks for theological reflections in order to investigate the “action-guiding world views” of Christian communities’ (2017:4). In this line of argument, it implies that practical theological discourse should adopt methodologies that take a critical reflection on the world views (doctrines) that guide the praxis of faith communities, in order to live up to the standards.

Similarly, practical theology in recent times is concerned with the interplay between doctrine and praxis. This ushers the discipline into an arena where emphasis is laid on the extent to which doctrines are lived out in the Christian life and in the public space. Graham observes that doctrines are expected to inform activities of Christians such as relating to one another in the community, worship, ritual as well as spirituality (2017:3). She further opined that practical theological thinking through the lens of doctrine helps to determine the extent to which faith communities “practise what they preach” (Graham 2017:3; Graham 2000:106).

Critical theological reflection in this way supports the idea that pastoral responses are the “body languages” of the Christian doctrines and traditions (Graham 2017:4). This position is taken further in the argumentation that practical theology is “bidirectional” in a way that, on one hand, doctrines inform and shape Christian praxis, and on the other hand, Christian praxis reforms doctrine (Stoddart 2014:xii). In the same vein, Nieman (2002:202), examining the religious activities performed by faith communities, indicates that those activities are products of their theologies. In other words, the doctrines that are adhered to determine performative roles of congregations. For instance, Cahalan (2011:90), reflecting on Catholic theology, remarked that “Catholic theology has largely been based on the assumption that getting the doctrines right will ensure right practice”. It could be argued that any pastoral response should be guided by the doctrines that are held by the faith community. This interplay between Christian faith praxis and doctrine is another motivation for utilising the doctrine of the Trinity.

Additionally, Cherry (1997:240) observed that there is the need to revive the understanding that Christian doctrines guide the Christian life. This will make us eschew the situation where doctrine and practice are separated from each other, partly due to how academic curricula were organised. She further argued that pastoral functions such as “spiritual and moral healing” are determined by a body of knowledge derived from Christian doctrines (1997:12). This implies that faith communities engage in careful interpretations of the Christian doctrines, and these interpretations serves as the body of knowledge that inform Christian spirituality and pastoral praxis. It is believed that pastoral praxis “entails the Christian spirituality and faith praxis that is aimed at transforming society” (Cahalan 2011:89). The second Vatican Council was instrumental in the shift of focus in the concept of “pastoral”. Pope John XXIII referred to the Second Vatican Council as a “pastoral council”. In this Council, the pastoral is concerned with the relationship of faith communities to the outside world (Cahalan 2011:89). Furthermore, the Council opined that “pastoral” means “resting on doctrinal principles” (Cahalan 2011:89; Flannery 1987:903). This is an indication that doctrines set the agenda for the way the church relates to the world. As Cherry (1997:240) observed, Christian doctrines are the chief of all Christian instruments that should guide the Christian living, including pastoral functions. In other words, pastoral responses to the problems of society rests upon the doctrinal principles adhered to by the church. The way the church engages with social problems like CSA is influenced by her doctrinal principle.

Liberation theology and Christian doctrine

Another motivation for utilising Christian doctrine relates to the emergency of liberation theology, which seeks to reflect on Christian praxis aimed at promoting justice and addressing the needs of the poor and vulnerable in society (Rowland 2007:5). The importance of liberation theology for this study rests on the argument that CSA needs theological reflection and pastoral responses. This response is based on a theology of relationship informed by a relational view of the Trinity, in which there is the using and shifting of power in life-giving ways amongst parties that enjoy equal worth. Liberation theological thinking, therefore, calls the church to rise up to the

realities of the daily lived experiences of the poor and marginalised. This is also an invitation into a way of theologising, with the resultant Christian spirituality and faith praxis that show real commitment to the needs of the vulnerable. Rowland (2007:4) argues that liberation theology also involves the everyday lived experiences of the vulnerable in society and is grounded in the life and witness of the church to promote the common good.

With the shift of pastoral theology from the care of the individual by the few ordained or clerics to a response to the wider community, pastoral responses are expected to promote the good of society. As a result, public pastoral theological response should aim at addressing suffering, injustice, and promoting reconciliation in society (Thompson 2008:276). This response, according to Miller-McLemore (2004:62–63), should promote healing, guidance and, in effect, promotes liberation in society. Similarly, Bidwell (2015:137) observes that public pastoral response should engage the responsibility of people and rally faith communities to create caring attitudes towards one another. Bidwell further argues that, for public pastoral responses to achieve this vision, it should be embedded in religious resources including texts, traditions, and beliefs. This is because faith communities are more likely to be motivated to create and sustain faith praxis and Christian spirituality that are grounded in their doctrine. Miller-McLemore (2012:5), reiterates that for Christian spirituality and praxis to be sustained, it must be rooted in doctrines and traditions. That is, if their actions, especially, towards the good of society are detached from their Christian convictions, and therefore, are not reflective of their faith, they are highly unsustainable. This implies that theology in its basic form finds its root in the faith praxis of the Christian community (Ward 2017:25).

One doctrine that occupies space when it comes to the concept of quality of human relationship in faith communities, and also extended to the outside world, is indeed the doctrine of the Trinity (Kärkkäinen 2014:23–24; Charry 1997:viii; LaCugna 1991:1). There is evidence that CSA thrives in relationship of trust, especially, where abuse of power is more likely to occur. Tracy (2005:67) observed that in Scripture, and throughout human history, abuse of power has been underneath sexual abuse of children and women. For example, in Scripture (Mic. 2:9; 3:1–3; Isa. 10:1–2; Ezek. 22:6–12), the abuse of power by those in leadership was observed. This abuse of

power was often perpetrated by men. Tracy argues that abuse of power is as a result of the fallen nature of human beings. Jesus was referring to the fact, in the new nature (Christianity), abuse of power in human relationships is unacceptable (Mt 20:25–26). This is because, human relationships are grounded in a Christian understanding of God. Christian spirituality and faith praxis should seek to address this problem. In other words, if the relationship in the Triune God becomes the basis of pastoral responses to CSA, this abuse of power will be reduced, if not completely prevented in faith communities and the society at large.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it can be concluded that the motivation for utilising doctrine stems from the idea that practical theological discourse and Christian doctrine are inseparable. That is, theological reflection on Christian spirituality and faith praxis with the aim of transformation of the Christian witness in the public space has to be rooted in our belief system. As observed by Miller-McLemore, “Practical theology refers to an activity of believers seeking to sustain a life of reflective faith in everyday” life (2012:5). This implies that pastoral response should be motivated and sustained by our being, which is our doctrine. Factors such as the dynamic interplay between doctrines and practice, where Scripture offers limited direct guidance, liberation and public theological discourse have strengthened the motivation for utilizing a Christian doctrine to respond to a public issue such as CSA. The use of doctrine allows for an interdisciplinary theological discourse that gives adequate attention to both the priority of Scripture and retrieval of traditions. It could provide useful theological resources for reflections on pastoral responses of faith communities.

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