# OCCUPYING POLICY SPACES:

# EXPLORING THE ASCENDENCY POTENTIAL OF RELIGION AND THEOLOGY IN GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC POLICY DISCOURSE IN SOUTH AFRICA

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## Abstract

*The aim of this article is to seek an understanding of why there seems to be policy reluctance in acknowledging the potential of practice and academic theology in governance and policy development in South Africa. This study examines these issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. The provocative thesis in this paper is that religion and theology belong in the public sphere. The approach in this paper is to use an informed knowledge of public policy and issues, to engage the implications of what is at stake, and subject this to sharp analytical evaluation and theological critique. Drawing from institutionalism and policy studies, the article examines the change potential of religion and theology within a constitutional democracy, the point of departure being the acknowledgement of a critical distinction between public policy discourse and public discourse. The article takes a premise that although it may have been best left alone by many social and political scientists, religion remains – despite the popularity of the secularism theorists – resilient as part of people's value systems and social identity.*

**Key Words:** Public Discourse; Public Policy Discourse Theology; Public Theology

## Introduction

In this paper we propose an argument for public theology that not only inspires change, but also influences change. For any observer of government and governance in South Africa, there have been critical governance challenges in recent times. A comprehensive review of governance in South Africa in 2011 (SAIIA/CPS:2011), found that there are critical warning signs in terms of the trajectory of leadership and governance. Moreover, the dismal 2012 Auditor General report[1] on municipalities across South Africa and the extensive service delivery protests throughout South Africa emphasise that the dearth of good leadership and accountability in government may be becoming endemic.

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[1] To see the full report on the Auditor General's report on municipalities go to
www.agsa.co.za/Reports%20Documents/Consolidated.pdf

Thus it is important to note from the outset that there seems to be an essential ethical and moral gap in governance in South Africa today and the crucial question becomes who sets the tone, who offers the moral compass needed to begin to address these key governance issues rigorously. Our article points to religion and in particular theology as a critical voice that has remained largely quiet in post-apartheid South Africa. The paper critically examines the potential of theology in not only influencing the key debates around these issues in South Africa, but in ultimately influencing policy trajectory in relation to these issues. It does this by first of all showing the nuances in the expressions of public discourse and public policy discourse as a point of departure for the article. Using institutionalism theoretical arguments the paper sets the tone by examining some of the contradictions in the role of religion in general in political change. The aim is to show that – given certain conditions – religion becomes a practical motivation for change and moral direction. It then examines the concept of public theology and its role in policy showing that in the present South African milieu, theology has to begin to embrace a 'public-ness' entrenched in the understanding of public policy and knowledge areas outside of its own field. We argue that this will enable theology to make those crucial inputs in public policy discourse towards providing the moral compass needed for good governance in South Africa.

## Examining Concepts: Public Discourse, Public Policy Discourse and Policy Ascendency

This section discusses the three important concepts relevant to this paper. The aim is to create a conceptual basis for the ensuing discourse. The first is the notion of public discourse and the second is that of public policy discourse. The third is the notion of policy ascendency and its relevance to this article. We argue that the first two concepts differ characteristically   where policy ascendency is concerned. Thus, it argues that our understanding of these concepts can become the benchmark for assessing the kind of roles religion or theology can play within a polity.

Our conceptualisation of religion in this article takes into consideration the inclusivity of all faiths as espoused in the South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996). However, our focus of analysis is limited largely to theology as an academic discipline in its own right and Christian institutions or churches, because of the rich relationship between theology, the church and state in South African history. This presents the appropriate focus for a comparative assessment of the role of theology in South Africa before and since the new democratic dispensation. The terms theology and religion will be used interchangeably in this article.

## Public Discourse

Put simply, discourse is written or verbal communication. Linguistics paradigms view discourse from a strictly written and spoken communication approach. Social science paradigms, however, understand discourse as derived from and reliant on social practices (Hajer, 1995:4, 42); the structural determinants of discourse (Howarth, 2000:17); and the role that differences in the system play in the production of discourse (Hewitt, 2009:2). Largely, the development of theory in discourse studies[2] shows that discourse has become

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2 From modernist views (which looked at discourse from its strict application as communicating truth), to post-modernist and structural views of discourse which saw discourse within the prism of societal norms,

more a function of not its intrinsic or functional value but more a function of how it is formed, in this case examining influences within a system that shape discourse. To this end, Foucault (as cited in Lessa, 2006:285), defines discourse as "systems of thoughts composed of ideas, attitudes, courses of action, beliefs and practices that systematically construct the subjects and the worlds of which they speak". Thus, this human and social notion of discourse underscores the ability of discourse to affect and be affected by the systems (social, political, cultural, etc.) in which it is formed. Consequently the idea of discourse implies the legitimation and power ascribed to perceived truths which in turn are created and maintained by equally powerful means.

This human and social science notion of discourse also implies that public discourse is about the projection into the public arena, of these formalized systems of ideas, thoughts, beliefs about a particular issue which in turn – depending on how they are crafted (content or message) and by whom (power/influence) – have the power to affect views on issues. From the examination of the power relations in society which shape and legitimise discourse we can begin to examine the concept of public policy discourse.

## Public Policy Discourse

Seen from the viewpoint of public policy, public discourse is about whose discourse (frame of reference) dominates contested policy spaces. In other words, examining those social power relations that create and sustain a dominant viewpoint demands understanding the contested space of public policy. We know that issues of public interest usually attract interests with various frames of reference. Hence, whereas public discourse is about understanding how discourse gains legitimacy and is maintained within a particular system, public policy discourse is about the contestation of various discourse nodes for dominance in shaping public policy. Accordingly the point of departure of policy discourse is the ability to influence policy and change within the polity.

Consequently, when we talk of public policy we do not just talk of ideas, beliefs or issues that shape society's views, we talk of the struggle between competing discourses to gain prominence in the arena of public policy. As a result, the idea of public policy discourse is linked to power and politics and in particular to the struggle for dominance in the setting of policy agenda.

From our conceptualisation of public discourse and public policy discourse one can make the following deductions:

1. Public discourse originates from and relies on structural and social systems.

2. Public discourse has the ability to ascribe power and legitimate issues.

3. Public discourse has the potential to shape and/or change views on issues.

4. Discourse can be a tool for dominance/hegemony or resistance to dominance/hegemony.

5. Public policy discourse is the utilisation of the legitimating and power character of discourse in the public arena to place stress on public policy towards influencing change.

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influences and power. See Strega's (2005:199-235) modernist explanation of discourse as limited discourse. In this case we present a functional issue aimed at understanding the value of communication as talking or as a study of words in themselves. See also authors such as Foucault 2002 [1969].

From the foregoing, it will be important to examine policy ascendency and in essence the ability of theology to craft its own voice towards shaping public policy discourse towards improving governance in South Africa today.

## Policy Ascendency

Policy ascendency can be viewed as that position where institutions and groups are able to make demands and apply stress on public policy, towards reaching a desired goal. In essence, in terms of public policy, the policy ascendency of theology can be seen within the context of policy agenda setting, where theology plays a more visible role in creating the ethical and moral ascriptions important for governance and policy implementation.[3] Birkland (2010:168) defines policy agenda setting as the process by which problems and alternative solutions gain or lose public and elite attention; or where the activities of various actors and groups cause issues to gain greater attention or to prevent them from gaining attention. For the purposes of this article the significant advantage that theology and religion play in making those prescriptions should not be overlooked.

## Basis for Analysis

As demands on government expand and with the policy space in South Africa still increasing, the role of theology in public policy discourse is even more necessary, given the present governance and public service delivery challenges faced in South Africa. This section aims to analyse the potential of theology (despite historical, structural and internal systemic stresses) for policy ascendency in South Africa.

To examine this potential for policy ascendency we look at three analytical points which illustrate the resilience of institutions, the effect of structural stresses on institutions and the ability of institutions to change path and re-invent themselves in the face of structural stresses. These are:

1.  Institutionalism: as a route to understanding the survival potential of many institutions.
2.  Historical credibility: the evidence that religion can mobilise for change and re-invent itself in the 21st century.
3.  Structure of polity: governance in a democratic and constitutional state (South Africa).

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[3]    Compare e.g. the essays included in Hansen (2007). Habermas (2011:27-28), though, voices the following warning in this regard: "Although religion can neither be reduced to morality nor be assimilated to ethical value orientations, it nevertheless keeps alive an awareness of both elements. The public use of reason by religious and non-religious citizens alike may well spur deliberate politics in a pluralist civil society and lead to the recovery of semantic potentials from religious traditions for the wider political culture".
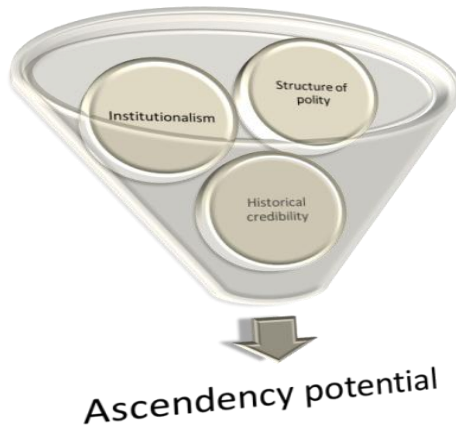
*Figure 1 Basis of Analysis: Policy ascendency potential of theology in South Africa post 1994*

Let us now look at these issues in detail. At the end we hope to show 'how' theology can re-invent itself as a moral and intellectual springboard for moral and ideational transformation in a constitutional democratic society such as South Africa.

**Understanding Religion/Theology through Institutionalism Studies**

New institutionalism emphasises institutional value, or as March and Olsen (1984:738) put it, the centrality of meaning and symbolic action (codes, culture, beliefs and identities, as well as knowledge embedded in institutions). Religion – and by implication theology – usually assumes an institutional form e.g. church (Gill, 2001:119). Thus, by its very nature religion or theology can be studied from an institutionalism viewpoint, because it provides a rich resource of those codes, culture and knowledge which are the very character of institutions. Indeed Gill (2001:118) argues that religion provides some of the most credible insights into our understanding of institutional design and survival, as well as the connection between ideas and institutions.

According to Hall and Taylor (1996:940), "institutions are resistant to redesign ultimately because they structure the very choices about reform the individual is likely to make". Thus, institutions persist because they represent learned and conditioned processes. What this tells us is that large institutions tend to resist change. However, other studies on institutions show us that institutions can change, and therein lies its opportunity for re-invention. Let us examine this closer by looking first at how institutions persist.

New Institutionalism considers how institutions acquire self-sustaining powers (survival and longevity) through the processes that drive institutional design and growth, such as:

1. Conflict: in this case, making use of conflict that emerges as the unintended consequences of policy positions to make themselves indispensable mediators within a polity.

2.  Reaction to threat to self: Institutions have the ability to develop a life of their own and survive where there is a threat to their survival. Indeed, according to Hall and Taylor (1996:945), institutions survive as a result of voluntary agreement by actors - agreements which provide more benefit to the actors than the prospect of any other form of institution.

Thus there is a tendency for institutions (such as churches, religion and theology) to persist through the attribution of path dependence, which encourages the organisation or society to cultivate a particular identity or interest towards these institutions which are costly to shift (Hall and Taylor, 1996:941). However, changes in institutions do occur. There is a branch of scholarship, for instance, that proposes the likelihood of historical paths to be punctuated by crises (Gourevitch, 1986:21-22). Hall and Taylor (1996:942) refer to this as 'critical junctures'. This echoes Krasner's (1984:225) discussion of the historical conjuncture where substantial institutional change takes place, resulting in an intersection from which historical development veers onto another path. For instance, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of Communism can be seen as critical intersections in history that significantly changed world events.

Thus, from an institutionalism viewpoint, we observe the following:

1.  Religion can be seen as a complex repository of institutions, able to structure the character and outcome of group behaviour or conflicts. In this role one can see religion or theology as a depository of moral or cognitive templates from which the individual constructs an interpretation. Ultimately, as an institution religion is able to encourage the cultivation of a particular identity which will be costly to shift.

2.  However, it is also possible for a significant change to the historical trajectory of institutions. Events such as the transition to democracy in South Africa highlight the critical juncture in South Africa as a nation and thus posed that critical space for a reassessment of the role of theology in a new dispensation.

3.  This role seems as yet to be undefined. There is ample opportunity in South Africa today for theology to exert policy and moral pressure within the polity towards the cultivation of a strong ethics within governance in South Africa. This will entail the crafting of a moral discourse which will in turn demand an understanding of the context and space of policy within the polity, having the ability to manipulate these spaces and developing and communicating a well-articulated viewpoint.

## Historical Credibility

Contrary to modern secularisation predictions of the demise of religion, it remains very dominant in the world today.[4] Throughout history religion has been fraught with lessons of survival. There is no doubt that religion still maintains as strong an influence in many societies as it has always done. Studies have shown that in the 21st century religion still plays a dominant role in the social and political economy of many countries around the world. From guiding voting preferences (Evans and Kelley, 2004), to foreign policy decisions in many states from the Middle East to Western states like the United States of America (Haynes, 2008). A recent world-wide survey (Breznau *et al*, 2011) on preferences for religious political leaders, shows an even split in terms of preferences for religious

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4    See Lechner 1991:1103-1119. Cf. also Mendieta and Van Antwerpen 2011:4-5.

political leaders. Even in countries where there seems to be a decline in religious activity (like Germany), religious institutions are finding ways to re-define their roles within the community towards remaining relevant within the polity.

Yet in terms of scholarship, there seems to be a cautious application of religion as an significant variable in the study of politics and policy. Indeed some authors have argued that religion is incompatible with democratic governance (Kepel, 1994 in Gill, 2001:127). Gill (2001:118) views this peripheral relationship with religion by political scientists as continued adherence to secularization theory. Yet, there are significant examples which highlight the role of religion in politics and policy. Examples include the majority demand for a theocracy in the Iranian revolution of 1979 after the Islamic revolution; the influence of the Catholic Church in the rise to government of Solidarity and Lech Walesa in Poland in December 1989 and its continued influence as seen in Poland's European Union accession, as comprehensively discussed in Maciej Drzonek's article (2004), and the influence of the Dutch Reformed Church in the crafting of the apartheid ideology in South Africa (Smit, 2007a:18-20; Smit, 2007b:28-29).

Moreover, the recent Arab spring which heralded new Islamic democratic government in some Arab states (Tunisia, Egypt and Libya) questions the notion that religion is incompatible with democratic governance. On the contrary, it is important to note firstly, that outcomes in politics are perhaps more about the strategic calculations of interests (such as identity recognition and popular support), than doctrines and religious values (Esposito and Voll 1996:15,194); and secondly, where there are structures which allow for participation in governance, religious extremities can be tamed (Nasr, 1995:273).

This leads us to our final analytical thread, which is the structure of the polity. In the next section, we examine whether the governance structure in the South African polity applies those checks and balances needed to ensure effective participation in policy without encouraging the excesses of power and influence.

## Structure of Polity: Governance within the Framework of South African Constitutional Democracy

The history of non-inclusion of the majority of South Africans in governance informed the principle of inclusive government as seen in South Africa's constitutional and legal framework. A unique aspect of the South African experience which has made community and public participation imperative, is the history of prolonged pro-democracy movements which were capable of mobilising previously excluded constituencies (Heller, 2001:133). Public participation is sometimes limited to participation in a political process (elections; public accountability through parliamentary institutions). However, a review of the South African legal and institutional framework shows that the South African interpretation of public participation extends beyond public participation in electoral processes, to the inclusion of citizens in the policy and decision making process of government (Houston *et al*, 2001). Nevertheless the issue of how inclusive these participatory platforms are in practice has been the subject of debate, with some authors holding the view that these platforms are yet to provide credible dividends of citizen's voices in the execution of public policy (Nzewi and Fakir, 2008:14).

## Institutionalising Public Engagement: Constitutional Underpinnings

The South African Constitution (Act 108 of 1996) is founded on principles of democratic governance. For instance, the Bill of Rights (chapter two of the Constitution), concretizes the values of individual rights, provisions for local government support, social equity and the representation of all citizens in governance. The parliamentary provisions ensuring accountability and transparency in government and public administration are value driven, premised on the ideal of equitable, efficient and effective service delivery. Thus, the South African Constitution is people oriented and makes provisions for participatory governance. Consequently, constitutional provisions stipulate directly the need for engagement with the public through public hearings, as well as individual and interest group lobbying, representations and petitions in the process of legislation. Houston *et al.* (2001:145) argue that these constitutional provisions make South African legislatures deliberative bodies as they provide opportunity both for the examination of draft legislation and for the introduction of public and opposition views into the legislative process.

Further reflections on institutional provisions on public participation bring to light those state institutions supporting constitutional democracy, or Chapter 9 institutions of the constitution, such as the Public Protector and the Human Rights Commission. These institutions are unique in terms of their independence, and citizen focus on orientation.

Consequently, there is an expectation for public participation in the processes of the South African state. The debate continues as to the levels (how deeply participation is entrenched in policy and planning), and the scope (range of participants with access to participation channels) of public participation in the South African governing processes. In this case the role of theology in informing policy and public discourse is one that should be encouraged, especially in those key governance issues of the day.[5] Given the conceptual and contextual framework as argued above, we will turn our focus to theology, and its contribution to public policy discourse.

## The Public Character of Theology

In the contemporary South African society theology cannot afford the luxury of the "privatised isolation of individual religiosity, or the ineffective security of the denominational confessionality" (Zabatiero, 2012:56). Theology can only be true to its nature if it is public.[6] It has a public dimension, and therefore it cannot be hidden in the sanctuaries, nor in the 'holy of holies' of the temples. Theology has a privileged position in the public square and therefore should be in the midst of the struggle for justice and in the struggle for the humanity of human beings.[7] If theology does not claim its place in the public square, we will hear the voice only of the pseudo-theology of prosperity (Zabatiero, 2012:56). Theology should not only be produced ecclesially but should be an academic exercise of public importance, otherwise it becomes focused merely on the internal affairs of the churches and their religious practices (Passos, 2012:24).

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[5]    In this regard Smit (2007c:343) remarks as follows: "… theory matters, … theoretical frameworks and paradigms have an influence upon the developments taking place within and around them, more specifically, … prevailing and dominant theoretical paradigms concerning social and economic justice in South Africa today have an influence on the implementation of policy, legislation and general transformation".

[6]    Smit (2007d:11-46) provides an extensive discussion of foundational questions regarding the use of the term 'public theology'. Drawing on insights from Habermas, Smit indicates that the term 'public' can be understood as having a variety of possible meanings, namely a narrower and a more general usage (2007d:39).

[7]    Cf. also Koopman & Smit 2007:271.

Theologians should be intellectuals who are actively participating in the public sphere. They should be the custodians of justice, democracy and peace, and this requires of them to be in tune with the cries of the people and to be fighting for emancipation, justice and freedom of the excluded (Von Sinner and Cavalcante, 2012:5). The basic challenge of theology in democratic societies is to live in the public square. This implies that theology should learn how to participate in public life. In democratic and plural societies – such as the South African context – "the recognition of plurality, as a concrete expression of the right to freedom of belief and of expression, is a prerequisite for participation in the public square" (Zabatiero, 2012:57).

De Gruchy (2007:27) states the important fact that "there is no universal 'public theology', but only theologies that seek to engage the political realm within particular localities". These theologies do, however, share some commonalities with regard to their approach and substance. If we would consider the 'genre' of public theology, in other words, what public theology embodies, we can use the following points of departure to explore this notion.

De Gruchy (2007:27-28) identifies the following commonalities that give public theology its meaningful coherence. Firstly, on the one hand public theology engages the secular world in terms of its issues and on the other hand it turns to the Christian tradition and its resources necessary for this debate.[8] Public theology should learn the language of the secular world and take seriously the insights of those academic disciplines that deal with the issues of public debate. However, this should be done in such a manner that the Christian discourse relates to the issues of the debate, but does not lose its particular contribution and insights. Secondly, public theology, when done in this way, makes a constructive and challenging contribution to public debate, and also to the health of humanity. It has the potential to heal, reconcile and change, in other words to make a difference to the world. Thirdly, it is ecclesial theology, in other words it is theology "that is embedded in the life of a community of people who are seeking to witness to God's reign over all of life". Fourthly, public theology can be described as utopian. It keeps on hoping for a better world in which there are solutions for all the problems facing us. In this regard Smit (2007c:348) states that public theology brings an eschatological perspective to the discourse as it speaks the language of hope.

## Between Public Theology and Public Policy

Theology is one of the voices among a number who should be an agent of social transformation. Examples of such voices are inter alia pressure groups, politicians, NGOs, international institutions, academics and artists (Nyiawung, 2011:143). Pressure groups (such as trade unions and civil groups) make use of the revolutionary mode to make legitimate requests. They rally for better conditions for their members. Theology should also remind society of its responsibilities. Theology and the churches should also be (a) pressure group(s) that stand(s) against injustices in the society and campaign for justice and righteousness (Nyiawung, 2011:158).

It is evident that public theology should be relevant to public policy debates and formulation as it is offered as a form of discourse. Theology seeks to develop frameworks and discourses befitting plural societies, and how people in these societies should live together.

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[8]    Cf. also Smit 2007c:346-353.

Wariboko (2009:1) states that unfortunately contemporary theologians struggle to develop models which are appropriate for public discourse and relevant to public policy making.

Therefore public theology has rejected any form of theological discourse that withdraws into spiritual isolation. Instead, it proposes an understanding of theology that addresses the developments and issues of our times and investigates how society should operate. It accepts the responsibility of clarifying the foundations of policies and ideas that influence and shape our societies (Wariboko, 2009:1-2). In this regard De Gruchy (2007:39) states that public theologians should have an informed knowledge of public policy and should be able to comprehend the implications of what is at stake. These policies should be subjected to sharp analytical evaluation and theological critique. This requires interdisciplinary knowledge.

One of the largest challenges confronting the public sphere is the ethical dimension. The concept of the public sphere is used here to describe the fact that in democratic societies private actors' discussion about public issues could influence the state and the market to act (Zabatiero, 2012:58). The public sphere is thus extremely dynamic but also an extremely fragile dimension of social life, requiring citizens to undertake additional effort to comprehend the topics that are under discussion. It challenges the participants in the public debates (whether formal or informal) to pay attention to the needs and the rights of all the individuals that will be affected by the decisions to be taken. The ethical demand is extremely challenging (Zabatiero, 2012:59).

In South Africa, given recent ethical and good governance challenges, the role that theology can play becomes even more critical. These challenges, especially those bordering on ethical dimensions of leadership, include the nexus between state and party; inefficiency and public service backlogs at the local government levels and lack of accountability in both government and business. Under these circumstances public theology should require public policy engagements that are informed and strategically targeted towards making a difference in the lives of citizens. The work of the Bench Marks Foundation[9] mirrors this type of approach. As a church organisation, the Foundation is engaged in gathering information on mining corporate responsibility by monitoring mines across South Africa and publishing policy gap reports to put pressure for change. Understanding the critical role of research and multi-disciplinarity in the public policy process is critical for this type of policy influence.

Johann Baptist Metz introduced the term 'political theology' into the theological and public debate (Moltmann, 2000:114; cf. also Frey, 2008:137). This term implies that theology should get out of the narrow boundaries of bourgeois religion as a private affair. To him this implies that theology should be critically engaged in the modern society. The purpose was to formulate a theology with its face turned to the world, and formulating the message of Christianity prophetically. In its centre should be the political dimension and relevance of Christianity. The prophets in Old Israel diagnosed the problems in their societies. Prophetism in word and in the Scriptures is not concerned with the future, but

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[9]   The Bench Marks Foundation also played a critical role in the recent Lonmin massacre, where South African police shot and killed a group of mine workers. It may be important to note that one of its members is also the President of the South African Council of Churches which is presently handling negotiations between the Lonmin company and its workers in the aftermath of the tragedy. For more see http://au.christiantoday.com/article/south-african-council-of-churches-president-brokers-meeting-between-lonmin-executives-and-miners/13937.htm or http://www.ewn.co.za/2012/08/29/Stability-needed-for-Lonmin-wage-talks.

with the present times. This concern was based on religious-ethical principles, which are to be traced back to the pre-exilic times and which were extended in the post-exilic period in the social laws of the Torah. It is conspicuous how cultic and social order are linked in the introduction of the book of Isaiah, in which the categories of justice and righteousness are inextricably linked and are absolute priorities (Berges, 2012:160-161; cf. also Groenewald, 2011:1-3).

The voices of theology should be in tune with the cries of the people. Their voices should link to the cry of the excluded, in other words to the citizens whose rights are denied. Theology is thus challenged to have the courage to pose the questions that nobody else is prepared to ask. Theology must reinvent itself in order to ask these questions and to be able to enter the public square. Theological education must train people to be capable of the requirements of intellectuals in the public sphere (Zabatiero, 2012:67-69).

## Conclusion

A public theology should be anchored in the 'lifeworld' of the people in order to contribute to the expansion of the communicative efforts of a society (Jacobsen, 2012:21-22). The article used three key analytical points to demonstrate the ascendency of theology and religion in governance in South Africa. From an institutionalism viewpoint it showed that although institutions like religion or theology by their very nature are resilient, they do sometimes suffer stress when threatened by seismic events which may then necessitate adjustment or change. Historically both in South Africa and globally, religion has shown its ability to mobilise for change and ultimately even change regimes. Public Theology should thus realize dialogue between theology and society. In a constitutional democracy such as South Africa, it should be in dialogue not only with governmental organiza-tions on public policy, but also be equipped with the critical knowledge and diagnosis of policy problems towards influencing change. It should be accessible to all, at least in principle, and therefore its basic challenge is to learn to be one voice among many in the public sphere. In other words, it must recognise plurality as a prerequisite to participate in this dialogue and to give concrete expression to the right of expression and of freedom of belief. Public Theology is thus a synonym for 'common' – as a political category. In this way, it is thus understood as capable of making a contextual contribution in the struggle against violence, poverty and racism, as it should contribute to the common good of society.

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