CHURCH WITHIN THE CITY OR CITY WITHIN THE CHURCH?

CITY AS METAPHOR WITHIN A PRACTICAL, THEOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract

It is argued that "city" is a qualitative term that should be dealt with herme-neutically. It refers to a new state of mind and being within the processes of globalisation and glocalisation. City is a structure of common life and creates a corporate identity. Its impact on urbanisation in South Africa is that due to the period of apartheid, its impacts on township life was that people were sandwiched in between the urban setting of the city and the rural setting of the village. It gave rise to a mentality of temporary, conditional commitment, a life style of commuting and an attitude of indifference. An ecclesiology for urban and township ministry is proposed. The latter implies an ecclesial movement from formal institution to a more informal space of grace: Small groups as a place of healing and a space of spiritual retraite in order to be engaged in issues such as violence, poverty and Aids.

P Watson (2002[3]:80-82) refers to the pragmatic mind of America as reflected in urban life and its architecture. The skyscraper becomes the epitome of pragmatism, wealth, develop-ment and business. The city becomes the place for functionality and consumerism. "In the practical culture it is only natural for even God to be a businessman" (Watson, 2002[3]:80).

The skyscraper, although a pragmatic response to the huge, crowded cities that were formed in the late nineteenth century, where space was at a premium, becomes a symbol of what can be called the megapolis of modern and postmodern culture.

When I refer to "city", more than a demographic understanding is implied. The concept city embodies what one can call "cultural civilization." "The city has been "a focus of civilization" since the middle of the fourth millennium BC" (Willmer, 1989:32). In the city the aesthetic and economic endeavours of humans mesh – closely in a corporal form (Willmer, 1989:32).

The basic presupposition of this paper is that city is a corporate identity. It is more than merely an "urban setting". City symbolizes a very specific fabric of human life; it refers to a way of life, a mode of being. "The city is corporate human power in positive self-assertion and activity" (Willmer, 1989:33). To my view, city symbolises the way people live together in a global world so that they are able to achieve significant control over their environment and cultural context. Therefore, one can view the "global village" as a world-wide web and space that incorporates some view of humanity in its workings and opera-tions. City today shapes the people's humanity and determines human well being. It becomes a network of moral issues and therefore a moral concretisation of responsible or irresponsible humanity.

L Wirth (1962:21-34) sees urbanism as a way of life. This description coincides with the view of H Cox (1967[3]:4): "Urbanization means a structure of common life in which

diversity and disintegration of tradition are paramount. It means a type of impersonality in which functional relationships multiply. It means that a degree of tolerance and anonymity replaces traditional moral sanctions and long-term acquaintanceships."

The technological metropolis of the urban context projects a "secular style" where the place of God and Christian faith is questioned anew. Cox divides the *manière d'ètre* of the secular city into its *shape* (anonymity and mobility as the social component), and its *style* (pragmatism and profanity as the cultural aspect). However, during the past three decades the "secular city" of Cox developed into the "global village" of computer technology and the website of international communication and cyberspace. Both shape and style is determined by globalisation as a process of moulding human beings into a new species of human community.

To summarize, one can say that "city" as a metaphor is the epitome of:

- A *mentality* and *attitude* of our being human in a global society;
- A *systemic network* of relationships determined by communication technology;
- An indication of a *qualitative* rather than a quantative *state of mind* and being;
- An *experience of space* where architecture and structure projects pragmatism and consumerism as well as a simulation of existence where digital communication projects a new species of being human; i.e. the cyberspace of cyberpunks.

City as a Metaphor

The basic problem for the paper is a practical theological and ecclesiological one, i.e. how should the *communio sanctorum* be structured and how should our understanding of our being the church in a global society, be reframed in order to communicate the gospel in an appropriate way within the lifestyle of the urban website? What is meant by an ecclesiology for the city and how does global forces impact on people living in a very unique urban structure, the so-called townships of South Africa?

It is indeed true that city could represent many images. For example: *Jerusalem* represents the *eschatological model* for citizens who view themselves as strangers and pilgrims with no abiding city (Fritz, 1995). In this "theistic" understanding of city, the question at stake is whether God's presence means anything for our largely secularised politics? How could the grace of God be embodied in social relationships so that city becomes a space for rediscovering human dignity? How should the Church meet the dangers of a possible dehumanised society?

Athens represents *citizenship* as active participation in the affairs of the political community. This metaphor challenges a practical theological ecclesiology to take the notion of public theology, justice and human dignity seriously.

Calcutta represents the *social predicament* of people exposed to poverty and structural violence. It refers to the impact of globalisation on local issues such as life within slum areas and squatter camps.

This article proposes the interplay between the different images in order to create a more human society. It is an attempt to reflect how "Jerusalem", epitome of the "city of God" (St Augustine), can be embodied and enfleshed within structures and mentality of humans within the global megapolis.

The article is furthermore an attempt to make an analysis of the features and characteristics of city life within the processes of globalisation and urbanisation. Its main objective is to reflect on what it means to be the church in a context which demands a more

public and inclusive approach to different life issues rather than a church-/official-centred and exclusive approach.

The first part explores the culture of the global village; the second part deals with contextuality and discusses the interplay between global forces and township life; the third part gives attention to an ecclesiology for the city.

1. Urbanisation: The Metropole Mentality of the Global Village

It is difficult to define postmodernity. To a certain extent postmodernity could be viewed as a philosophical stance which tries to sum up the current mode of thinking and being in the global village.

It is even more difficult to distinguish between modernity and postmodernity. As linked to globalisation, postmodernity can be defined as a process wherein modernity (the critique of reason) has been expanded into relativity and deconstruction due to an intensified experience of translocation. Thus the following description of globalisation by M Waters (1995:3): "A social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding".

Part and parcel of this ongoing process is what Waters (1995:8-9) calls processes of exchange. He divides it into three processes: (a) a local process of material exchanges: material exchanges localise; (b) political exchanges of support and networking: political exchanges internationalise; (c) symbolic exchanges by means of communication and electronic technology: symbolic exchanges globalise.

Waters' further argument is that one cannot understand the global village without reckoning with the dominating force of *capitalism*. "Capitalism encompasses two major processes which tend to increase the level of societal inclusion. First it is driven by logic of accumulation that depends on progressively increasing the scale of production. Second it is driven by logic of commodification or marketisation which drives it towards an increasing scale of consumption (Waters, 1995:36).

The Global Village: A new State and Mode of Being

The following features of a global mindset and mode of being can be identified:

- An *experience of disembeddedness* where local needs are daily moulded by a process of transnational internationalisation. Everyone is assessed in terms of the illusion of sameness;
- An *experience of the concentration of time and space*. This can be called a phenomenology of space concentration. It coincides with the shrinking of our planet; the annihilation of distance; the elimination of space and the generalisation of time;
- The *impact of managerial systems* and big companies on local businesses;
- The new *imperialism of the unknown*: Trust in the incalculable and unpredictable forces of a market driven economy. One can even call the floating finance of stock exchanges as the economical exploitation of the "capitalistic" beyond;
- *Fordism*: Utilisation, standardisation and mechanisation in terms of mass pro-duction: "It aims to reduce the cost per item by intensive mechanisation and by economics of scale in the utilisation of capital equipment" (Waters 1995:80);
- The *migration of labour*. Due to a *Gästarbeiter*-mentality (developed countries profit on the predicament of people in developing countries), temporary migration

all over the globe takes place. People move temporarily according to booming economics;

- *Efficiency and McDonaldisation*. Due to the monopoly of consummation, people develop a drive-through service mentality, geared towards instant satisfaction. "McDonaldisation represents a reordering of consumption as well as production, a rationalisation of previously informal domestic practices, that pushes the world in the direction of greater conformity (Waters 1995:144);
- The *idol of leisure and pleasure*: Globetrotters and jetsetters within the global sport morale of *Sanssouci* (the coolness of indifference and the moral of fitness and leisure/recreation). Public activity or "work" becomes more separated in time from domestic activity which means that to the extent that the latter is becoming undemanding, and could be defined as leisure. Leisure is not anymore restricted to feasts or holy days. It becomes a universal and general expectation. The *homo faber* becomes a tourist: The idea of travel for the sake of leisure and pleasure;
- The *digital expansion of place into cyberspace*. In his book, *The secular city*, H Cox refers to urbanisation as life in the "secular city". Due to globalisation and digitalisation, the concept of the "*secular city*" developed into the concept of the "*cyber city*".

Citizens within the global village are becoming more and more "cyberpunks". Cyberpunks are people who can be rendered independent of corporal location, because of the inexhaustible possibilities of virtual reality. Through virtual reality it is possible to simulate an existence in cyberspace, that is, to simulate a body and a space that can be varied by design and thus by choice. The citizens of the "cyber city" live by the infinite variations of simulated existence and virtual realities.

Burning Issues for Urban Ministry

The above mentioned features highlights the need to identify basic issues at stake which the church should take into consideration in designing a pastoral model for "urban ministry" (Bakke, 1997; Conn (ed.), 1997; DeCaro and DeCaro (eds.), 1997; Green, 1996; Northcott, 1998; Ortiz, 1996). The important burning issues and needs for an urban or cyber ministry which result from the previous exposition are:

- The culture of *achievement ethics*. Behind this issue lurks the need for a reassessment of norms and values which can address the important component of human dignity and identity within the global village;
- The culture of *detachment and the need for intimacy*, i.e. the need to be accepted unconditionally without the fear for rejection;
- *Disembeddedness* and the need for *embracement and belonging*.

In terms of a practical theological ecclesiology for the cyber city, ministry should deal with these issues. In dealing with them, the Church should be aware of the importance of a *pastoral hermeneutics*: The art (empathy) to understand the mentality of human beings within the global village / the cyber city. Due to this pastoral hermeneutics, the Church has a new calling and vocation: Not to move into the city, but to let the city be part of the liturgy of the Church. This is what we call a new stance: *City within the Church*; i.e. an understanding of existential issues which are at stake within a metropolis mentality and a mode of *koinonia* wherein fellowship reflects current social and contextual realities as determined by an urban and global lifestyle.

Subcultures

Before we design a ministerial model for urban ministry (the Church in the city), the Church should become identified with the needs and mentality of "cyber punks" (and "website citizens"). In order to do this, a pastoral and ministerial hermeneutics must reckon with the following *subcultures* which are developing alongside the culture of the metropole:

- *Glocalisation*: Understanding the impact of globalisation on the development or on the hampering of local resources;
- *Fundamentalism*: The revival of oppressed sentiments within local, cultural regions;
- *Transpostmodernity*: Within the processes of deconstruction and relativisation, the urgent need for reconstruction and reintegration is surfacing. This need touches the area of an integrative spirituality and wholeness;
- *Postglobalisation*: The process of "housing" cyberspace with virtues and values that develop the capabilities of humans in order to cope with life. We can call this coping with life, the rearrangement of basic human capabilities or liberties as it reckons with development and maintenance of local cultural identity as well as global networking.

According to M Nussbaum (Lebaqz, 2001:119) the focal point for developing human dignity in "postglobalisation" and "transpostmodernity", is the language of *capabilities*, rather than rights, liberties or functioning. "The capabilities approach asks concretely, what people are *able* to do and to be." Alongside key capabilities such as *affiliation* and *friendship*, basic Christian virtues like *compassion* and *sacrifice* are becoming of paramount importance.

The quest for intimacy and the need for capabilities bring us back to another question: If these are the basic virtues or capabilities required to live in the cyber city, how does these processes of globalisation and urbanisation impact on cultural contexts, such as the African context?

2. The Impact on Africa: Township Life as Sandwiched in between City and Village

The predicament in South Africa is that the country is being forced to move rapidly from a rural setting, to an urban environment (Moolman, 1990). This movement occurred without the long process of *Aufklärung* as in the case of Europe.

Electronic and digital revolution, along with rapid processes of political transformation, social changes and the democratisation of traditional policies, caused that many countries in Africa were forced to move from a communal system to an individualised system; from a rural approach to an urban approach (Maasdorp and Humphreys, 1975:1-60). Due to financial and economic demands, people migrated to cities. The urban setting becomes the place for hope and job creation.

In South Africa, the policy of apartheid contributed to the fact that slums and squatter camps developed, the so-called townships. (For township development, see *Commission of inquiry*, 1984:3-7). *Townships* in South Africa could be described as the sandwiched in situation of people situated between urban consumerism and existential crises such as unemployment and poverty caused *inter alia* by the policy of apartheid (Becker, 1974:123-255). A township is a very unique place of location. Due to class and race discrimination, townships are located at the edge of the city. It became the marginalized place between the

urban environment of consumption and the rural setting of traditional communality (the village).

A *village* can be described as a more rural setting determined by tribal system and traditional values. As metaphor, village refers to:

- Structural interconnectedness;
- Cultural communality and sense of belongingness;
- Animated cosmology determined by spiritual forces;
- Interplay between ritual, life, play and tradition;
- Intimacy: Support system of the extended family as embedded within the hierarchy of positions (discipline and respect).

The important point in understanding the South African context of township life is that people are caught between the gone by of the romantic rural setting and the materialistic dreams of consumarised urban values. On the one hand: One cannot romantisize Africa anymore. On the other hand, the rhythm of urban life is replacing traditional values and forces people to live according to achievement ethics where identity is not determined by position, but measured by functions.

The *township* is a settlement where permanent structures (buildings) and informal structures (squatter camps) determine one another. Townships are located on the edge of the city and are subjected to the taxi-movement between inner city (industrial areas) and private life. People living in the townships, become commuters between the darkness of before sunrise and the darkness of after sundown. People are therefore moulded into a life style of commuting, they develop an attitude of impermanence and temporary commitment; they develop a wait and see stance where indifference replaces commitment. Black people are therefore forced into what can be called the continuous switching of roles, from being the humble garden boy for the madam to that of a dignified lay preacher, "…it remains a shuttle process between two worlds" (Hagg, 1990:20).

As a result, township mentality implies the in between of:

- The *illusion of wealth*: Within the reality of chronic poverty and unemployment;
- The *flux of migration*: The in between of urban relationships and rural relationship;
- *Survival through violence*. Within the reality of crime and gangsterism, the slogan for life is not the survival of the fittest, but the survival of the criminal/the gangster; life is on a daily basis being determined by the in between of survival and violence;
- *Moral confusion*. Due to the Aids pandemic, and the fragmentation of life, morality is in turmoil; the in between of traditional values and secularisation;
- *Structural violence and destabilisation*. Due to a lack of appropriate health services, support system and educational institutions, people are exposed to confusion on a daily basis; the in between of permanency and temporariness.

This in between position of township people is further being intensified by what S Mutunga (1998:8) calls the vacuum of identity. The yearning for true identity is the real "urban factor" in township life due to other conflict factors such as ethnicity and the yearning for true identity. "Due to 'pull' and 'push' factors in Africa, urban centres have grown to be conglomerations of diverse ethnic groups and races with very little indication that they are living together peacefully" (Mutunga, 1998:8). For example, in South Africa people have been brought together in the townships because of both economic and social-political factors. These factors do not necessarily create what sociologists call a homogeneous unit principle. (In Nairobi, they call it the *Wa Kwetu*-principle, people from the same ethnic

group coming together). Polarisation takes place and leads to conflict. Other than in the case of North American cities, African cities have not become "melting pots".

"Ethnicity has remained an issue and to deny its existence is to deny the very existence of African peoples" (Mutunga, 1998:11). Besides ethnicity, traditional values, customs and religious connections (African spirituality) add to the complexity of polarisation within township life. PJ Fritz (1998:15-16) calls is the difference between rural and urban oriented perspectives.

In order to understand urbanisation in Africa, one needs to understand how urbanisation changed kinship patterns and customs. E Berry (1998:29) refers to the fact that at the same time that the kinship system is in some ways narrowed down to the nuclear family system, it is also expanded in the urban context. This phenomenon is called "tribalism", i.e. tribal allegiance and the expansion of the kinship system in order to survive. However, the important point to understand is that urbanisation has led to a deterioration of societal moral values which does not only impact on the family system, but on urban youth and their search for identity (Mbugu, 1998:35).

Of special importance to urban and township ministry, is an understanding of specific areas of conflict which determine church leadership styles and ministerial approaches (Fritz, 1998:20-25): Autocratic versus participatory styles; traditional versus contemporary styles; dependent versus independent styles; non-formally educated versus educated thinking styles; circular versus linear logic styles; group versus individual oriented styles.

Existential Issues in Township Life

In terms of the objective of this paper, namely the design of a practical, theological ecclesiology for people living in both the cyber city and the township, the following basic existential problems can be identified: *Aggressive behaviour; emotional suppression, and the coping mechanism of escapism* (for example, drugs and substance dependency). These existential problems should be assessed and understood within the culture of *ubunthu* where the basic rules are: The restoration of a sense of communality, rootedness and respect for authority.

These existential issues should force the Church to reflect anew on urban or township ministry. Due to the previous analyses, our basic thesis is that in order to design an appropriate, ministerial approach, three basic needs for restoring the human dignity of people living in urban settings should be addressed: The quest for intimacy (to be accepted unconditionally without the fear of rejection); the sense for belongingness (where being functions are more important than knowing and doing functions); the need for communality (interrelatedness).

Our exposition thus far poses the following question: How is the Christian Church going to respond to the challenges which had been put forth by processes of urbanisation and globalisation? What should the strategy and shape of ministry be within township life?

3. A Ministerial Approach: An Ecclesiology for Urban Ministry

It is one of the theses of C Geyer (Bäumler, 1993:336) that theory formation and praxis should be orientated towards the needs of people living in the megapolis. In terms of the above mentioned basic needs, i.e. intimacy, belongingness and communality, different routes for urban ministry should be explored.

Different routes for urban ministry:

- The development of a *theology of communication and liberation*: It should be the prophetic task of the Church to voice the needs of the voiceless and to speak out

against oppressive structures which deprive people from their basic rights. In this regard, a theology of liberation is appropriate;

- *Acts of service and community development* which embody and enflesh a compassionate *diakonia*;
- A *reframing of God-images*: Instead of an official and institutionalised God – the God of hierarchy – urban ministry needs a compassionate God. Within a pastoral assessment, pastoral ministry should consider God-images that portray the Partnership and Friendship of a living God;
- *Social competency*: The church should display a deep concern for social issues. Ministry should therefore focus on real social needs as related to poverty, violence and Aids. The social competency of the Church must represent the engagement of God with public life (see T Koch, 1991:69);
- *Developing a liturgy of the street*: The Church should become the open place and space where people with diverse cultural backgrounds and needs, meet. The Church and congregation must become an open space where diversity is being experienced as an enriching and stimulating event;
- *Church as a family*: The *communio sanctorum* should be structured according to the basic principles of fellowship and *koinonia*. With the church as a family is meant a small group approach. This model implies interaction and sharing. In order to imply this model, there should be a presence of the church beyond the so-called "official paradigm". Lay people should therefore be equipped in order to make contact with people in their homes and working places. It is becoming the task of the Church in urban ministry to start with networking: The bringing together of different cultural groups and diverse needs within local settings. H Lindner (2000:240) refers in this regard to the interconnectedness of above and below;
- *Plurality of congregational structures*: In order to minister to diversity and plurality, several different congregational structures and models should be in place. There is not anymore "one approach" possible. If the Church is going to be relevant to urban life, different approaches and model should be designed. There is not "one strategy" which can really address the needs of people living in the megapolis (Löwe, 1999:446).

4. Conclusion

Basic Problems

In order to conclude one can say that the basic problems in city culture today are:

- Resentment towards commitment: Detachment and the fear of rejection;
- Escapism: Drug abuse; sexual violence (rape); structural violence (suppressed anger and aggressive behaviour and manifested in crime and gangsterism);
- Class separation and the distinction between the haves and the have nots; the rich and the poor; developed countries and developing countries;
- Moral confusion: The claim for human rights (democatisation) without maturity and responsibility (permissiveness);
- The depleted self: Depression and stress due to an overexposure to achievement ethics;
- Spiritual voidness: The vacuum of nothingness and despair without any attachment to the ultimate and a commitment to sound values/norms.

Basic Human Needs

Within the paradigm of urban ministry, the following basic human needs should be addressed: The need for embracement (grace and human dignity); the need for intimacy (unconditional love); spiritual direction (commitment to the ultimate and sound values); hope and meaning (imagination/vision and anticipation/future).

In the light of the different features of urban life and the characteristics of the cyber city, a design for a practical theological ecclesiology should reckon with the following dynamic ecclesial movements:

- From formal institution to a more informed space of grace (*soteria*): The congregation (a small group approach) as a place of healing and a space of spiritual retraite. (Silence and solitude; experiencing the presence of God). (For a multidimensional healing of the city, see Ellison, 1999:38-42);
- From communication to *communio* (fellowship, *koinonia*): The small group approach. (Home visitation; marriage and family enrichment). The principle of *koinonia* implies another paradigm shift: From polarised thinking in township life, towards synergistic cooperation (Fritz, 1998:17);
- From entertainment to worship and mutual sharing (*sacramentum*): Narrative preaching, participation of members, sharing through prayers. (Utilising the eucharist for a celebration of healing);
- From *kerygma*/pulpit to a liturgy of care (*leitourgia*): Developing a caring congregation/community. (Equipment of lay workers; grief groups; hospital care; prison care; visiting the sick' terminal care and the Aids pandemic;
- From dogma to charisma (*marturia*): The sacrificial life stance of reaching out. (Cell group approach in flats and the townships);
- From office (hierarchical authority) to service (*diakonia*): Community development. (Overnight shelters and food kitchens).
- From church building to family worship, (family-/marriage-/relationship- enrichment) *oikodomein*: (Projects focusing on prevention, the empowerment of people and the enrichment of family life);
- From formal catechism (Youth education, the accent on rational knowledge and church dogmatics) to life learning (*didache*). (Youth education and the development of life skills; the integration of faith and life);
- From denomination to corporate unity (*oikumene*): Ecumenical cooperation. (Cooperative and joint ecumenical projects);
- From management/bureaucratic administration to care (*parakalein*): Developing the church as a caring community. (Pastoral identity: Pastor as soul friend, guide to and interpreter of life).

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