


Making theology practical: The inclusion of *experientia fide* in the contextualisation of practical theological training



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Currently, South African state-subsidised universities experience pressure and uncertainty regarding future theological training. This became evident after the call for decolonisation of the university's curriculum. The concepts of colonisation, decolonisation and contextualisation are inseparably linked to the issue of culture. Culture is dynamic and vibrant. Wherever a group of people is together, for instance a group of students in a university classroom, culture or a new context originates. Where past theological training – even practical theological training – has purely rested on cognitio, the contextualisation of theological training involves cognitio and *experientia fide*. Experience can serve as a hermeneutical key in the explanation of scripture. Although the work of Calvin is considered as the groundwork for reformed theology, his emphasis on human experiences is often left behind. To Calvin, experiential preaching addresses the vital matter of how believers experience the truth of Christian doctrine in their specific cultural circumstances. A reformational-biblical view of contextualisation of theological training is to find a balance between experience and cognition, where grace restores nature. The aim of this article was to explore the contextualisation of the practical theological curriculum for the students (or believers) to apply the divine truth to the whole range of their personal experiences. Theological training, and for that matter, Christianity, should not only be known, understood and believed, but also felt, enjoyed and practically applied.

Keywords: Contextualization; Practical Theology; Pastoral training; Pastoral curriculum; *Experientia fide*; Theology made practical.

Introduction

The Theological School of the Reformed Churches in South Africa celebrates its 150th anniversary in 2019. Part of the celebrations includes an academic conference as a commemoration of the 150 years. The theme of the conference, '*The Impact of Reformed Theology*', offers the opportunity not only to look back at but also to focus on present and future theological training. The Theological School of the Reformed Churches works in tandem with the Faculty of Theology of the North-West University (NWU), and many modules are completely aligned. The author is a staff member of the Faculty in the sub-discipline of Practical Theology, and with this article aims to participate in the discourse, '*The future of theological training at state-subsidised universities*' with a special focus on theological training at the NWU. Since South Africa became a democratic state under the governance of the African National Congress in 1994, many voices have called for decolonising programmes presented at universities, and universities had to revise their teaching and learning strategies.

The revised Teaching and Learning Strategy of the NWU was approved by the Senate on 25 May 2016 and by the Council on 23 June 2016. Certain keywords that are illuminated in the strategy include outcomes-oriented, student-centred, 'inquiry-based, active, participatory and meaningful learning, supportive and enabling environment' (Du Plessis 2018b:4) and blended learning. 'In short, it boils down to creating meaningful teaching and learning experiences where the students become self-directed and life-long learners' (Du Plessis 2018b:4).

The relation between decolonisation and colonisation was discussed in previous articles (Du Plessis 2016, 2017, 2018a). A short summary of the argument is presented in a footnote,¹ and

1. A short summary of the argument of these articles is that although decolonising of pastoral caregiving initially seems a good and needed idea, the practical implication thereof was no simple task. One of the most known recognised scholars who wrote about decolonising is Prof. Emmanuel Lartey. In his popular book, [*The decolonising of God*], he 'pleads for a paradigm shift away from

Note: Special Collection: Impact of Reformed Theology.

based on that, the author prefers the term 'contextualisation' to 'theological training' instead of decolonising.

At the NWU, theological training was in the past largely based on the instructional theory of teaching and learning (HoTEL² n.d.), where cognition enjoyed more emphasis than *experientia fide*. Through the process of contextualising the content of the modules, theological training is presented in such a way that the information not only needs to be known, understood and believed, but also felt, enjoyed and practically applied. Although students at the Theological School of the Reformed Churches perform practical congregational work, there is no formal credit-bearing practical work included in the curriculum for the NWU faculty students who are enrolled for the Bachelor of Theology (B.Th.) with its various designators. The challenge in practical theological training is to include certain levels of practical work where the students have the opportunity to be 'passionately with' their audience to learn how to find a balance between their knowledge and emotions *vis-à-vis* their faith (*experientia fide*).

The aim of this article is to explore the aspects that need to be considered in contextualising the practical theological curriculum to find this balance. The research question in this article is: What are important aspects for the inclusion of experience, together with cognition, in contextualising practical theological training at the NWU? The article begins with a discussion of important aspects of contextualisation of theology, followed by an exploration of making theology practical, and concludes with thoughts on experiential practical theological training.

Contextualisation of theology

Contextualisation of theology is not a new concept and many scholars have contributed to the discourse (Bevans 2016; Flemming 2006; ed. Gilliland 1989; Hesselgrave & Rommen 1989; Hiebert 1987; Hofstede 1980; Keller 2012; Koning 2019; Niebuhr 1952; Olthuis, Hart & Seerveld 1970; Ott & Strauss 2010; Wolters 1990). Contextualisation of theology is important because human life takes place within a certain cultural context. Even the gospel played out in a certain cultural context.

Niebuhr (1952) describes five different forms of interaction between the gospel and culture in his classic work, *Christ and culture*:

(footnote 1 continues...)

globalisation to the internationalisation and ultimately indigenisation of Practical Theology in South Africa. Indigenisation is positioned as a counterbalance to the Western biases inherent in especially, the pastoral caregiving process. It advocates for indigenous African practitioners of the African traditional art of spiritual care and reflective healing practices in a post-colonializing era. Although Lartey's discussion seems to be a workable solution, the question can be asked if his model for indigenisation of pastoral care is, in effect, not just the other end of a continuum opposed to the Western culture on the one end'. In the author's opinion, it is to set these two cultures as opposites on a continuum, thus again promoting one culture before the other. 'The challenge for the pastoral caregiving ministry of the church is therefore to play an active role in the transition of the people of South Africa with pastoral caregiving based on sound exegeses of Scripture where the Gospel and culture are not placed against each other. The answer is not found in the revival of one particular culture, be it African or Western culture. A more balanced way has to be found by means of proper cultural education where we start to speak about the differences with an openness and tolerance' (Du Plessis 2016, 2017, 2018a).

2. HoTEL (n.d.), 'Learning theory' by Richard Millwood is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share alike 2.0 License.

1. The rejection and anti-model: In this approach Christ is portrayed as against culture.
2. The accommodation model: In this approach Christ is portrayed as the Christ of culture.
3. The synthesis model: Christ is portrayed above culture, i.e. to maintain the distinction between Christ and culture.
4. The dualistic model: Christ and culture are portrayed in a paradoxical relationship.
5. The operational model: Christ is seen as the transformer of culture. Niebuhr believes that although Christ is above culture, He operates through it to transform (convert) it. (pp. 45–81, 83–103, 117–148, 149–189, 191–210)

Olthuis et al. (1970) and Wolters (1990) expand on Niebuhr's work, but they all come to the conclusion that contextualisation of theology is extremely important, although also warned against faulty interactions that could lead to destructive results.

In the same light, Koning (2019:10) stresses that contextualisation of theology is very challenging and demanding. Gilliland (ed. 1989) expresses the following warning:

[C]ontextualization is a delicate enterprise if ever there was one. The evangelist stands on a razor's edge. Fall to the right and you will end up in rigid obscurantism. Slip to the left and you will end up in rudderless syncretism. No word in the Christian lexicon is as fraught with difficulty, danger and opportunity as contextualisation. (p. 12)

Included in the process of providing an exegesis of certain pericopes is a stage where the text is placed within the present-day context or, in other words, where the text is contextualised. Stuart (2009) refers to this exegetical phase as the integration or application facet. An important guideline for this facet is to determine who the audience is and what their existential needs are to avoid the temptation of reading artificial life questions into a pericope. Each cultural group has its preferences and unique characteristics and is dynamic and vibrant. Wherever a group of people is together, for instance a group of students in a university classroom, a new culture or context originates. Knowledge and understanding of the culture or context of those to whom ministry takes place will contribute to an effective contextualisation of theology. Contextualisation of practical theology is more of an interpersonal art than a science, as the student learns to journey with people from the same and other cultures through all the phases and stages of life.

Keller (2012) defines contextualisation of theology thoroughly:

Sound contextualisation means translating and adapting the communication and ministry of the gospel to a particular culture without compromising the essence and particulars of the gospel itself. The great missionary task is to express the gospel message to a new culture in a way that avoids making the message unnecessarily alien to that culture, yet without removing or obscuring the scandal and offense of biblical truth. (p. 90)

This definition links with Stuart's facet of integration and application, as Keller also emphasises the objectivity and supremacy of biblical revelation, the priority of the gospel, the necessity of being receptor-sensitive, the importance of being both affirmative and prophetic, and a comprehensive approach (Koning 2019:12). To Keller (2012:108), Romans 1 and 2 form the basis of an effective contextualisation, as Paul describes, in these two chapters, not only the Jew but also the gentile (multicultural) have sinned against God. He also explains the righteous judgement of God to all cultures. Romans 1 and 2 are thus a good example of how the gospel is contextualised in the same way in different cultures and makes it clear that one culture is not benefitted more than another and that the gospel is not against or in conflict with culture. When the pastor or pastoral caregiver succeeds in applying the message of the gospel effectively to the culture to which he or she ministers, the contextualisation will result in transforming evil in the culture and will renew and transform human hearts. Grace is thus not set against nature, but grace can restore nature.

Contextualisation in multicultural ministry involves an element of paradox. Koning (2019:54) describes the paradox as 'critical enjoyment' and 'appropriate wariness'. On the one hand, we can enjoy the insights, newness and creativeness of other cultures, when recognising their reasonableness, wisdom, reality and aesthetic expressions. On the other hand, there must be spiritual awareness because believers know that sin is deeply rooted in every culture. Although Romans 1 and 2 are described as the basis for contextualising the gospel, it is important to notice that Paul refers to God's common grace in these chapters and not to salvation grace. Keller (2012:109) explains common grace as the 'continuing and insistent pressure of God's truth on the consciousness of every human being' so that they can be saved and transformed.

Contextualisation of theology can take place in a verbal or non-verbal manner. In an article about cross-cultural pastoral care to displaced human beings, four key elements were identified, namely *to be with*, *feel with*, *think with* and *act with* the other in the context of our belief system (Du Plessis 2018a:7). As with the proclamation of the gospel, it is not always necessary to speak verbally in pastoral caregiving. Non-verbal communication in the process of contextualisation means to proclaim the gospel by means of deeds or living out your faith. Chester (2004:13–50) connects the contextualisation of the gospel to the character, reign and grace of God as made known in everyday life through the actions or deeds of believers, in different cultures. Hesselgrave (1991) affirms this statement as follows:

Contextualisation is both verbal and non-verbal and has to do with theologising, Bible translation, interpretation and application, incarnational lifestyle, Christian instruction, church planting and growth, church organisation, worship style – indeed with all of those activities involved in the carrying out of the Great Commission. (p. 143)

Jesus' parable in Matthew 25:31–46 is an example of non-verbal pastoral caregiving. It is an example of being, feeling, thinking and acting together with the poor and marginalised. Calvin (1854) notes that this pericope shows what it is to *live* (thus, non-verbally through actions) a holy and righteous life and that believers show through their actual performances they serve God. Calvin even asserts, saying, 'Christ is either neglected or honoured in the person of those who need our assistance'. Louw (2014a:9) describes it as a 'passionate being with' the audience to whom we minister.

Exposing students already at the undergraduate level to practical work will help them not only to bridge the gap between theory and practice, but also to deal with their own emotions when exposed to, sometimes, traumatic existential needs. Uncontrolled emotions because of exposure to difficult existential life issues are a definite obstacle to effective pastoral caregiving. By including supervised practical work, guidance can be provided to students to deal with the effect these issues have on them personally, as the lecturer can defuse the situation during reflection. Other positive results are that students learn to avoid the 'fragmentation' of human beings because of different dimensions of human existence and learn to work in collaboration with other helping professions. The author is of the opinion that the inclusion of credit-bearing practical work for practical theological training will underline the idea that experience can serve as a hermeneutical key in the explanation of scripture when correctly facilitated by the lecturer. Of course, questions could arise regarding the basis of subjective experiences. To address the issue, the next part of the article will focus on Calvin's thoughts of *experientia fide*. Although the work of Calvin is considered as the groundwork for reformed theology, his emphasis on human experiences is often neglected.

***Experientia fide* – Theology made practical**

Experientia fide assumes an intimate, personal knowledge of God in Jesus Christ and addresses the vital manner of how Christians can experience the Christian doctrine in their lives (Beeke, Hall & Haykin 2017:111). The Latin word *experimentum* means 'trial' or 'proof from experience'. The verb form is *experior*, which means 'to find or know by experience', 'to try', 'to prove' or 'to put to the test'.

Something of this is seen in the sermons of Calvin. His aim to make theology practical to his audience gave rise to the expression of the 'experiential preaching of Calvin'. Calvin views preaching of the Word as 'the most excellent of all things' (Beeke et al. 2017:109) and explains that whenever the gospel is preached, God himself is present. Not many of Calvin's sermons were written down, but from those that have been preserved, research performed by Parker (1947:70–71) shows that there is a recurring pattern in Calvin's sermons. This pattern indicates that Calvin worked systematically through a pericope, following exegesis and exposition of one point with an application and exhortation to responsible obedience, before moving to the next point. Beeke et al. (2017:115) point out that although this pattern can

be discerned in Calvin's sermons, they also find that Calvin frequently departed from it, because 'he was so eager to get at the application that he often introduced it in the midst of the exposition'. Calvin wanted his listeners to know God in an intimate and personal way.

Integral to contextualisation of theology is the need to know God by experience as God reveals himself through scripture and nature to human beings. Calvin understands true religion as fellowship between God and human beings (Beeke et al. 2017:115). The revelation of God should drive human beings to respond with piety and faithfulness. Whenever God's glory is not served, piety cannot exist. Beeke et al. (2017:115) explain that serving God's glory in the context of a certain culture compels discipline, obedience and love in every aspect of life as fulfilling the law. Calvin emphasises the relationship between love and law, and grace and law, and God-ward and human-ward.

The challenge is to find a balance between *cognitio* and *experientia*, or theory and practice or, as Beeke et al. (2017:117) refer to this balance, 'dry scholasticism and experientialism'.³ Calvin emphasises the inseparable connection between the Holy Spirit as the internal minister and the pastor as the external minister in preaching. Without the working of the Holy Spirit, this balance cannot be found.

It is important to mention that Calvin only values experience as long as it is deeply rooted in scripture and springs from the living reality of faith because experience is beyond verbal expression; it is rather a conviction. A faulty experience can produce a false and deceitful god that does not correspond with how God reveals himself (Balke 1978:22). On the other hand, a true experience streams out of the truths of scripture and accentuates the truth even more. True Holy Spirit-worked experiences will always be in line with scriptural truth. In this sense, the Bible is seen as the book of doctrines that is rooted in real, experiential, daily lives. Although Calvin views experiences as a hermeneutical key in the explanation of Scripture, he warns that experiences become unreliable and false when divorced from scripture.

Calvin's perception of experiences is that the Holy Spirit testifies to the word of God in the heart of the believer, who has to respond to the reality of the word. Van Wyk (2011:4) explains that the life of a believer who experiences true fellowship with God (see 1 Jn 1:3) by living in communion with God can be characterised by *praxis pietatis*. Such a believer does not isolate himself or herself from ordinary life, but he or she is someone who portrays the image of God in their relationship with others. Their whole life is lived *with* God, *before* God, and according to his word and will. Their *pietatis* takes shape in *praxis*.

Beeke et al. (2017) quote the following explanation of the biblical doctrine from Calvin's institutes (3.6.4):

³Beeke et al. (2017:117) define 'dry scholasticism' as words without relationship, and 'experientialism' as drawing attention to experiences in a rather mystic way.

[It] is not of the tongue, but of life. It is not apprehended by the understanding and memory alone, as other disciplines are, but it is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds a seat and resting place in the inmost affection of the heart. (p. 118)

Experientia fide includes various paradoxes, e.g. a believer can feel far from God, but at the same time he or she knows that God is omnipresent. God is truly honoured when a believer's emotions and knowing are in conflict and he or she chooses to believe the promises in the word. Beeke et al. (2017:120) explain these paradoxes by saying that faith always involves knowing (*cognitio*) and trusting (*fiducia*). Faith is more than objective believing of the word; it also involves personal, subjective assurance, or – in other words – an inward embrace of God's promises.

Experientia fide requires the inclusion of symbolic and metaphorical expressions through imagination, rituals and creativeness. Symbolic and metaphorical hermeneutics are not new to the field of pastoral theology. 'Prattis (2001:39) refers to symbols and metaphors as "communication vehicles" that operate as pointers to the unknown' (Du Plessis 2016:4), as they help to interpret certain situations. Symbols have three distinctive parts, namely the 'symbol itself, the object it represents, and our interpretation thereof' (Du Plessis 2016:4). Metaphors, on the other hand, are playing with language to understand or interpret a symbol (Du Plessis 2016:4). Metaphors are thus the 'linguistic process by which the truth is carried over (*metaphora*)' (Lane 1987:487). Symbols and metaphors become the lenses through which reality is perceived. Symbols and metaphors enable believers to express and understand those things that cannot be easily verbalised.

Metaphors simplify the explanation of concepts that are too multifaceted to express in words. One example where metaphors are often used in pastoral care is in explaining the character of God. According to Louw (2014b:54), 'God-images determine the quality and unique identity of pastoral care'. When working in a multicultural context, the church doctrine, confessions of faith and the convictions of the different denominations will determine the God-image(s) that should be used. The use of images as metaphors is a way of interpreting and understanding a difficult concept along the lines of a certain hermeneutical paradigm. Louw (2014b:55) further explains that images move away from 'understanding the Being of God, in terms of metaphysical ontology, to an understanding of the meaning and significance of the name "God" within different contexts'. The use of symbols, metaphors and images in *experientia fide* implies a hermeneutical shift away from fixed dogmas, as it speaks of God in terms of well-known concepts.

Identifying appropriate symbols, metaphors and images requires a basic knowledge and understanding of the context and culture in which pastoral care is conducted. It is important that the symbols, metaphors and images are applicable in the contextualising pastoral theology, as all the role players have their own convictions and frame of

reference. Louw (2014b:57) lists a few guidelines that should be considered in choosing proper symbols, metaphors and images. In the first place, the pastor or pastoral caregiver should remember that everyone has their own unique image of God based on their own experiences of God. Secondly, everyone's own church dogma and tradition influence their evaluation, and lastly, the pastor's diagnosis should never be based on principles of morality. The assessment should thus never be based on whether the images or metaphor is dogmatically good or bad, correct or faulty, but it should be based on the question if the image is appropriate or inappropriate in terms of the context and culture at stake.

The only way to know and to be sensitive to a culture or context is to *be* there with them – again the passionate *being with* that has important implications for including *experientia fide* in the curriculum of practical theology. Experiential learning is not new to our time of day, as Confucius wrote in 450 BC, saying, '[t]ell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand'.

Experiential practical theological training

South Africa is undoubtedly in a season of change. It is now 25 years since democracy came into being, and currently the South African population is plagued with more social ills than ever before. The high crime rate, unrest and destructive violent demonstrations are but a few to mention. When looking at the daily news reports, it becomes more evident that there are ever-present, unanswered, deeper existential needs that root the destructive violent demonstrations. Although words like 'decolonising' and 'transformation' are used in every system of South Africa, the people at grassroots level are more and more frustrated because of the slow transformation process. Universities are not excluded from these demonstrations; therefore, education and training at state-subsidised universities become increasingly under pressure. One aspect of contextualising the curriculum that is, to the author's mind, very important, but neglected in the B.Th. programme, is experiential training.

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training with the aim of building an expanded, effective and integrated post-school system approved by the South African Cabinet on 20 November 2013 (Department of Higher Education and Training 2003) represents the following:

Government's thinking in the area of higher education and training and is in line with the country's key national policy documents including the National Development Plan, the New Growth Plan, the Industrial Policy Action Plan and the draft Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa. (p. vii)

Important in this white paper is the recognition of community engagement as one of the three core functions of universities, the other two being teaching and research (Department of Higher Education and Training 2003:39). Service learning and work-integrated learning as two components of community engagement create experiential training opportunities for

students. The author interviewed Mrs B. Bouwman, NWU's Director, Department of Sustainability and Community Impact, about the inclusion of service learning in the B.Th. programme's pastoral modules.⁴ From this interview, the benefit of service learning becomes clear. The student will acquire a more in-depth understanding of what he or she has learnt in the classroom because he or she will be afforded the opportunity to apply and relate learning content to real-life experiences. Three requirements of service learning are: (1) it needs to be discipline based; (2) it requires the establishment of a formal partnership with the institution or community; and (3) it involves reflection after the service for the lecturer to facilitate learning. Four general outcomes for service learning are that by engaging in service learning the students will have the opportunity (1) to apply the knowledge and skills they have learnt in the classroom to real-life problems; (2) they will gain a better understanding of the relevance of their learning; (3) they will perform better academically; and (4) service learning will strengthen teamwork and social and civic participation skills.

The change in higher education is not limited to South Africa alone. Scharmer (2009) makes a striking comment on the changing context all over the world:

We live in an area of intense conflict and massive institutional failures, a time of painful endings and of hopeful beginnings. It is a time that feels as if something profound is shifting and dying while something else, as the playwright and Czech president, Václav Havel put it: 'I think there are good reasons for suggesting that the modern age has ended. Today, many things indicate that we are going through a transitional period, when it seems that something is on the way out and something else is painfully born. It is as if something were crumbling, decaying, and exhausting itself – while something else, still indistinct, were rising from the rubble'. (p. 1)

The author finds Scharmer's remark relevant to practical theological training at the NWU. Practical theological modules must become *practical* in nature. Lecturers cannot continue to use certain training skills, methodologies and the epistemological thought paradigms of the previous areas as the basis for planning a curriculum for the present time.⁵ They have to start questioning their own presuppositions and knowledge and must be open to *listen* when *being passionately with* their (changed) audience.

Scharmer (2009:5) explains that in the past, learning was based on Kolb's model of observing, reflecting, planning and taking action to improve the *status quo*. Unfortunately, the call to South African state-subsidised universities currently is not to improve the colonised curriculum, but to *decolonise* the curriculum.

4.The interview took place in the office of Mrs Bouwman on Monday, 10 September 2019.

5.Naidoo (2012:160) distinguishes between four successive socio-political eras that impacted theological education in South Africa, namely first, the missionary era (1867–1948), followed by the burden of the political system of apartheid (1948–1990), and almost simultaneously, the ecumenical initiatives and structures that stood against apartheid (1960–1990) and lastly the post-apartheid era (1994 to present).

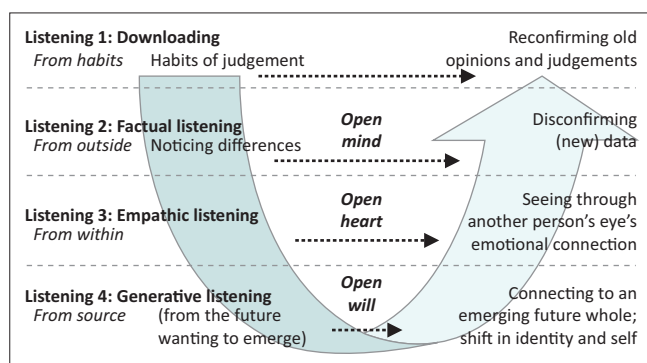
Mugambi (1995:3) voices something of the frustration Africans experience, saying, ‘... in our African context, the prevailing paradigm of theological education and even current proposals for its reform exist within a Western frame of reference that is fundamentally flawed’ (emphasis by the author). Most of our pastoral module content is still founded in the developed world’s cultural tendencies of isolation, individualism and competition, and is in tension with the African communal context. Although, the paradigm shift towards the African communal context requires a different kind of learning, lecturers must be aware not to venture to the opposite of the continuum metaphor used earlier. The answer is not in the indigenisation of the curriculum; it can rather be found in meeting each other in the current context – the here and now. Therefore, the author found Scharmer’s (2009:2) proposed learning cycle (Figure 1) relevant because it allows one to ‘learn from the future as it emerges, rather than from reflecting on past experiences’.

Learning from the future means to focus on future possibilities without being afraid to act what is best (and in line with the word of God) for the present situation in the present context. Of course, a discipline’s (such as practical theology) rich source of knowledge is still valid, but it has to be applied with an open will, heart and mind for the current changed context and not in a rigid manner.

Learning from the future can be a rather new concept for lecturers, but the concept has been described in theological literature already. Burdett (2014:10) describes that Moltmann (1991) initially made the distinction between *future as futurum* and *future as adventus*. Gutierrez (2008) distinguishes between these two concepts by explaining that:

Futurum is the deep satisfaction with the arrival of what have been planned and scheduled; however, at the same time it fears the unknown and what is different. *Adventus* is the vulnerability and openness that gets in touch with the unscheduled and the joyful and trusting hope welcoming the unknown and what is different. (p. 1)

Burdett (2014:10) makes the distinction that ‘*Futurum* describes a future which is an outworking of present conditions and can be translated as “what will be”’, although on the other hand ‘*adventus* is not characterised by reference



Source: Toolshero, 2019, *Theory U model by Otto Scharmer*, viewed 16 September 2019, from <https://www.toolshero.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/theory-u-model-scharmer-toolshero.jpg>.

FIGURE 1: Scharmer's proposed learning cycle.

to ontology or a particular state of affairs derived from the present, but gives priority to that “which is coming”. For believers, *adventus* refers to the second coming of Christ, the eschatological perspective in theology. In the ancient Greek world, the term *adventus* was also used in a secular context with the meaning of the arrival of a person. It literally means the personal presence of somebody, like, for example, the pastoral student in a practical setting which not only involves the cognitive, but also feelings, emotions and certain behaviour. The wording Gutierrez (2008:1) uses to define *adventus* (see the above quotation) is typical characteristics that a pastoral caregiver must have when performing pastoral work in a community. It is a vulnerability and openness for the other to welcome the unknown, when keeping their eyes and hearts fixed on the Lord Jesus with an eschatological expectation.

Back to the South African context, Venter and Hendriks (2012:237) warn that pastors and theological academics must change their thinking about faith discernment. In modernism, decision-making was aligned with rational arguments, research, facts and reports, and the findings were often seen as an answer from God. In effect, most decisions are solely based on cognition. The increase in violent demonstrations has to be seen as a call to *listen* (with an open mind, open heart and open will) to the need for a deep change.

Because of the Faculty's reformed paradigm, the five *sola* confessions form the foundation of theological training and curriculum development, i.e. *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *sola Christi* and *solus Deo gloria*. Van der Walt (2007:80) refers to redemption or reformation as the ‘between time’ and bases it on the parable of Matthew 13:37–43, where it is told that the seed and weed grow together. If we as lecturers of practical theological modules want to stay true to our reformed roots, we have to become relevant to our context of living in a broken world and deal with injustice by making theology practical and bring about deep changes in this way. The inclusion of experiential training asks lecturers to leave their comfort zone and to listen to the existential needs of the audience to whom they and their students (have to) minister. It asks for a change of thoughts and hearts.

According to Koning (2019:83), contextualising theology asks for certain commitments. The first is ‘sacrificially entering, studying and understanding the target culture and its people, values, history and worldview’. This commitment links with what Bevans (2016:12–13) calls the incarnational sacramental nature of Christianity and states that ‘Christianity, if it is to be faithful to its deepest roots and to its most basic insights, must continue God’s incarnation in Jesus by becoming contextual’ and ‘the whole movement of the Bible, is one of interpreting the ordinary, the secular, in terms of religious symbolism’. God is not primarily revealed in ideas (*cognitio*), but in concrete reality through human experiences. To continue the sacramental nature of Christianity as seen and understood also in pneumatology, practical theological students have to reveal God’s presence in a truly sacramental way by entering and serving the other in their context.

The second is a commitment to a balanced view of culture and society. The gospel communicator should not fail in being prophetic or in appropriate affirmation (Koning 2019:83). Tisdale (2010:10) defines prophetic preaching as 'countercultural and challenges the *status quo*'. Communicating the gospel in a prophetic way does not shy away from speaking against sinful behaviour and the suffering of human beings, and therefore it has to be more focussed on communal, corporate and public issues than on individual issues. Through prophetic preaching, the audience is encouraged to work towards a social change. Tisdale (2010) also states the following:

Prophetic proclamation requires of the preacher a heart that breaks with the things that break God's heart; a passion for justice in the world; the imagination, conviction, and courage to speak words from God; humility and honesty in the preaching moment; and a strong reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. (p. 10)

The practical theological student cannot learn these qualities through gaining knowledge alone; experiencing the other or a *passionate being with* the other in their context and society is necessary. Through witnessing hurts, fears, illnesses, brokenness, loneliness, disappointments and griefs of others, a deep sense of our dependence on God is awakened. The inclusion of experiential training in the curriculum will lead the students to understand the nature of the Christian faith and the heart of God to be able to serve in a practical way.

Thirdly, there has to be (Koning 2019):

[A] commitment to being comprehensive. It is not just the message that is contextualised, but [also] the church as a whole need to be contextualised. Contextualisation extends far beyond evangelistic strategies. (p. 83)

Bevens (2016:14) speaks about the 'catholicity of the church' as 'the essence of what the church should be'. The Greek words, *kata* and *holos*, refer to the 'all-embracing, all-inclusive, all-accepting nature of the Christian faith' (Du Plessis 2018b:3). Through real and honest *koinonia*, the students can learn how to empower vulnerable others by being with them, and before even thinking of giving advice or to act, they have to become silent to learn to feel and think with the others. In the electronic world of today, where information is available by the touch of a button, silence seems to be uncommon and makes people (especially students) uncomfortable. Nevertheless, silence is a prerequisite for observing others' feelings and thoughts. In her book *Prophetic preaching*, Tisdale (2010:22) refers to the rare combination of bold prophetic truth speaking and the spiritual discipline of silence, where prayer, meditation and reflection are the norms. This combination again shows something of the balance that needs to be found between cognition and experience. Silence adds to *experientia fide*. In silent observation, the student learns to understand, accept and acknowledge the other, and only then, actions can be birthed from the resulting deep-rooted compassion for the other. Stepping out of our own comfort zone into the lives of others does not only have an effect on the others, but also changes us to live more consciously.

TABLE 1: Author's suggestions for the inclusion of experiential training.

Level of experiential training	Responsible role players
<i>First-year students: Guidance to inner healing in preparation to fulfil their calling. Attendance of a weekly session must be preferably compulsory for the students.</i>	Lecturers act as guardians and mentors in the presentation of pastoral programmes (small groups), where the students can be guided to inner healing in preparation for fulfilling their calling.
<i>Second-year students: Silent observation of service learning events (of the third-year students) with reflection sessions afterwards. Two events per semester.</i>	Lecturers in collaboration with the NWU's Department of Sustainability and Community Impact. Other role players: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-disciplinary: Other faculties, for example psychology and social work with a view to the pastoral counselling and psychology group • Community: Local churches with a view to the Bible and church ministry group • Intra-disciplinary: Ancient languages group with a view to the Bible languages and Bible translation group
<i>Third-year students: Participation in service learning events in the community and relief agencies, with scheduled reflection sessions afterwards. Two to three events per semester.</i>	Lecturers in collaboration with the NWU's Department of Sustainability and Community Impact. Other role players: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-disciplinary: Other faculties, for example psychology and social work with a view to the pastoral counselling and psychology group • Community: Local churches with a view to the Bible and church ministry group • Intra-disciplinary: Ancient languages group with a view to the Bible languages and Bible translation group

NWU, North-West University.

Fourthly, 'a commitment to being dynamic is necessary. Because culture is non-static and ever changing, faithful Christian ministry requires ongoing re-evaluation and adjustment of approaches' (Koning 2019:83). Nobody can deny that South Africa has experienced numerous changes over the last century. Lastly, 'a commitment to interdisciplinary research is required. Insights from anthropology, sociology, history, economics, psychology and linguistics should be harnessed' (Koning 2019:83).

The theory of service learning or experiential learning is well documented since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, but the challenge to lecturers lies in practical implementation. Certain challenges that the lecturers must overcome are for instance: (1) no or very little money in the budget for community engagement; (2) certain risk factors for the safety of the students that are involved in the programmes; (3) expectations of the community members as they can become dependent on the service; and (4) sustainability of the programmes. Nevertheless, these challenges can be overcome with good planning in collaboration with the NWU's Department of Sustainability and Community Impact. My initial thoughts or suggestions for the inclusion of experiential training in the B.Th. (Bible and Church Ministry; Pastoral Counselling and Psychology; Bible Languages and Bible Translations) programme of the Faculty are set out in Table 1.⁶

Conclusion

In this article, the author has reflected on the inclusion of experiential training in practical theological training as a form of decolonising programmes presented at state-

⁶These thoughts are provisional. The Deputy Dean for Community Engagement, the Director for Teaching and Learning and the programme leaders must all be involved in the process.

subsidised universities in South Africa. South Africa is currently in the 25th year of democracy and the slow pace of transformation causes various emotions and reactions. The first part of the article is about the contextualisation of theology as an important theme in the discourse about the colonisation–decolonisation of theological training. In the second part, the focus shifts to theology made practical with a discussion of Calvin’s view of experiential preaching. The role of symbolism, metaphors and images has been included in the discussion. The last part of the article is an appeal for the inclusion of experiential training in the curriculum of the B.Th. programme of the Faculty. The inevitable deep change necessitates a revised teaching and learning cycle that allows one to learn from future as it emerges. The article is concluded with provisional thoughts on the level of service learning or experiential learning that can be included.

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A.L.d.P. is the the sole author of this research work.

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