



Seeking feasible reconciliation: A transdisciplinary contextual approach to reconciliation

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In South Africa scholars in the broad field of practical theology are currently faced with a daunting challenge: to rethink the reconciling role of the institutional church in the light of continued challenges facing reconciliation within post-apartheid and post-Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) South Africa. This contribution investigates whether the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach with a focus on the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation could assist scholars in practical theology to address reconciliation in a post-apartheid and post-TRC society. The article proposes a contextual and constructive approach to reconciliation in order to assist South African scholars in the field of practical theology and the institutional church to address the challenges of reconciliation in a post-apartheid and post-TRC society. The contribution confirms that this approach does indeed assist the field of practical theology to contribute to reconciliation without the risk of speaking a language that nobody beyond theology can understand.

Introduction

The growing divisions within the South African society have caused many people to become disillusioned with the ability of the government, civil society and specifically the religious sector to contribute significantly to transforming and reconciling the nation. One area that bears witness to the lack of transformation and reconciliation is the social life of people, where growing frustration has led to violence and social evils such as high levels of corruption, crime, child molesting, rape, domestic violence, HIV, alcohol and drug abuse, fraud and intolerance. These are distinctive symptoms of a nation battling to come to terms with its past.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa prompted numerous research articles (see Cilliers 2011; Mouton & Smit 2008) and books in theology on the work of the Commission (see Cochrane, De Gruchy & Martin 1999; Du Toit 2006; Meiring 1999; Wüstenber 2009), varying from constructive contributions to highly critical remarks. Many of these scholars endeavoured to describe, explain and criticise the work of the TRC, but few engaged with the notion of discovering new possibilities on how to overcome the present challenge of continuous violence, lack of transformation and reconciliation of a nation moving from the past via the present to the future.

The issue of this article is whether the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach with the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation, as indicated by Leiner and Flämig (2012:11) could open new avenues to assist scholars in practical theology to address these issues constructively within the current post-apartheid and post-TRC society. (The researcher chose the term post-apartheid rather than post-colonial because of the emphasis on the policies of apartheid as the cause of the divisions, conflict and dehumanization within South Africa.) Firstly we conceptualise some of the relevant terminology in the context of post-apartheid and post-TRC society; secondly we focus on understanding the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach with the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation; and finally, we will attempt to contribute a contextual and constructive approach to reconciliation in order to assist South African practical theologians and the institutional church to address the challenges facing reconciliation.

Post-apartheid and post-TRC society

As Kraybill (1992:19–20) argues in a significant contribution on reconciliation that reconciliation is only possible if we understand reconciliation as a process, it has to be understood that the critical notion in this discussion is that reconciliation is a costly and multifaceted process that includes profound issues such as facing the past, memory, confession, repentance, remorse, reparation, restoration and justice (see the work of De Gruchy 2003; Goodman 2009; Graybill 2002; Helmick 2002; Moon 2008; Rothfield, Fleming & Komesaroff 2008; Van der Merwe &



Chapman 2008; Verdoolaege 2008; Wilson 2001; Wüstenberg 1997, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2009 in this regard). Whilst acknowledging all of these concepts as fundamental to the process of reconciliation, this contribution focuses only on reconciliation in a post-apartheid and post-TRC context for the purpose of the discussion on the Hölderlin perspective.

The concept of a post-apartheid and post-TRC society will be taken as the overarching concept to define the societal context in which the current practical-theological discourses on reconciliation are to be located and interpreted. With reference to the South African context, Krog (2003:128) states undoubtedly that it might be true that democracy has already been instituted at a national level, that is, in parliament and to a lesser extent at provincial level, but it has certainly not happened in rural towns where the problems live. Political institutionalisation takes place with difficulty, because people live apart from one another, work apart from one another – mainly as master and servant – do not attend the same church, do not listen to the same music, and often do not buy in the same shops. Economically, culturally, socially and religiously the country has not been transformed. On face value it has changed to a large extent, but not transformed (Krog 2003:128). The post-apartheid and post-TRC society faces actual differences between rich and poor on a socio-economic, political and psychological level. In this regard, Villa-Vicencio (1995:105) remarks that ‘these differences have the capability of destroying the future’. It is beyond the scope of this contribution to engage comprehensively with factors that create these differences, but it is helpful to engage with some of them, as they threaten the attainment of reconciliation within the present context (see public lecture by head Judge Pius Langa on 30 May 2011 at the University of Stellenbosch, in Liebenberg 2011). It is accepted that churches have the ability to reach a large portion of the population and exert a moral influence, which imbues it with a potentially powerful role in many areas of society; however, the church still needs a strong, principled commitment, a clear understanding of the dimensions of the problem, and a clear understanding of the dynamics of reconciliation (Van der Merwe 2003:269–281).

The continuous expansion of *poverty* seriously endangers reconciliation. Former head Judge Langa states in no uncertain terms that it not only endangers, but it is dangerous as well (Liebenberg 2011). Liebenberg (2011:2) indicated that 49% of the nation lives below the poverty line of R524.00 per month and 50% of young people between the ages of 16 and 24 are unemployed. In this regard, Littlewood and Herkommer (1999:1–2) describe some of the struggles reflecting the reality of poverty in a post-apartheid and post-TRC society when they investigate social exclusion by attempting to understand and interpret new patterns of social division emerging since the last third of the 20th century, especially regarding employment and unemployment, welfare-state provision, demographic mobility and civil rights. Embedded in social exclusion is the growing gap between rich and poor (Liebenberg 2011) and the lack of economic redistribution. The post-apartheid and post-TRC society has

seen and experienced very little of the expectations created by the process of democratisation and reconciliation, such as reparation, restitution (including land restitution) and justice (especially economic justice). The result is that, for the majority of South Africans, hopes of reconciliation are a vague memory of a not too distant past, overshadowed by a struggle for survival.

A second factor that endangers reconciliation, according to Hugo (2010:617), is *violence*. Violence is a reality within the South African society and it has a devastating effect on victims, perpetrators and society at large (SA Reconciliation Barometer 2011). Nell (2009:235) is correct when he indicates that violence can be structural and institutional. In this regard violence cannot be understood only as a current phenomenon, but should also be understood as a product from the legacy of South Africa’s past (see the definition by Stevens, Seedat & Van Niekerk [2003:356], as they distinguish between three types of violence: *inter-personal*, *self-directed* and *organised violence*. This distinction not only indicates and elucidates the types of violence, but it emphasises the extent of violence on human beings and a society). In this sense, poverty, forced removals, lack of access to health services, separate and unequal education, and lack of adequate housing, over and above political torture and murder, ongoing racial, domestic violence and xenophobic violence should be understood as part of this fragmentary legacy. Violence has profound economic, structural, social and psychological consequences for the majority of people within South Africa. Swart (2008:147) confirms in his research that there is a definite connection between poverty and violence. The recent service delivery protests and the very recent violence at the Lonmin mine emphasise that many people facing poverty believe that violence is the only option left for them. More devastating is that people in desperate need are convinced that it is constructive to employ violence to deal with violence. In terms of violent behaviour, the South African Police Service’s crime statistics (2009:1) reports that 2 098 229 (approximately 2.1 million) crimes were registered in 2008/2009 in the republic of South Africa). Stevens, Seedat and Van Niekerk (2003:354) refer to this kind of violence as counter-violence although given the context of these violent actions it is probably more appropriate to describe it as a cycle (Nell 2009:240) that spirals into total destruction.

A third factor that endangers reconciliation is insufficient human capacity (human capital) in dealing with the values of democracy and the values and principles of human rights as indicated in the constitution. The gradual progress from a traumatic and undemocratic past to a democracy has created enormous pressure on the human capacity to deal with the past, implement the values of true democracy and act accordingly within a post-apartheid and post-TRC society.

A fourth factor is the inefficiency of the religious society and specifically the institutional church to commit to, and engage in transformational and reconciliatory action in the aftermath of the new democracy and the TRC process (Van der Merwe 2003:269–281). According to Van der Merwe



(2003:275), the biggest challenge perhaps, and the biggest space for change, is the fact that churches largely reflect the social divisions of society. During the special TRC hearing that was held for the religious society in order to provide an opportunity for them to submit testimonies in relation to human rights violations under apartheid, most of the submissions included an active commitment towards reconciliation. The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Uniting Reformed Church in South Africa (URCSA) were no exceptions. The 1994 DRC synod was dubbed the synod of reconciliation, where many promises were made by the DRC regarding: radical improvement in the living conditions and future opportunities for South Africans who had been deprived of so much for so many years; to make a meaningful contribution to reconstruction and development; to commitment to the ministry of reconciliation; to eliminate injustice at all levels and in all corners of society; to combat poverty and illiteracy, and to be committed to restitution – amending the wrong that had been done (see General Synodal Commission 1997:25, section 10.3.1–3). The URCSA also provided several significant suggestions concerning the possible role of the church in contributing to reconciliation in South Africa (URCSA 1997:21–23). Also see Kuys (1997) in this regard. These include providing pastoral counselling (Goosen 1996:4) for victims of human rights violations, enabling perpetrators of crimes to confess their guilt and seek reconciliation, the preparation of reconciliation liturgies and the conducting of reconciliation services, the erection of appropriate memorials, implementing a ‘process of collective visioning’, and the holding of an annual national week for reconciliation. Very little, if any of both churches’ commitments were honoured or developed into specific actions at all levels of the church society.

Based on the above-indicated factors that endanger reconciliation in the current context of South Africa and the seemingly limited impact theology and the institutional church has had in addressing them, this contribution seeks to explore whether the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach could assist practical theologians and the institutional church in addressing them.

The transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach

In a well written introduction to the book, *Latin America between conflict and reconciliation* (2012), editors Martin Leiner and Susan Flämig became aware that the increase in research from different religious, secular, philosophical and political contexts within the field of reconciliation and peace has not necessary lead to an improvement in the quality of research methodology. In recent years, scholars have discovered that concepts such as culture, religion, collective memory, local traditions and regional particularities play an important role in the evolution of conflict and peace. They specifically emphasise that the same strategies for peace can succeed in one region and fail in another and therefore it is-essential for different disciplines, (such as sociology, history, law, education and psychology [Ferreira & Janks 2009:133–146;

Martin-Beristain *et al.* 2010; Swart 2010:246–250; Stein *et al.* 2009:462–468]) to work together in this endeavour towards peace and reconciliation. In this pursuit they propose the transdisciplinary region centred scientific research approach where they call on academic institutions always to seek to improve the historical, conceptual and empirical quality of their transdisciplinary research and to reject unilateral points of view or a ‘political correctness’ that eliminates important theoretical approaches (Leiner & Flämig 2012:11). Significantly, they stress that this requires an exceptional quality of research to contribute to reconciliation and peace.

The goal of the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach, with a focus on the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation, is a conscious endeavour to move beyond the currently dominant scientific approaches toward peace and reconciliation. It also seeks to explore and discover new possibilities of overcoming challenges facing reconciliation. I will discuss this approach by means of the following four key perspectives:

From a local to a comparative and transcultural perspective

In their approach, Leiner and Flämig (2012:12) challenge the specifically modern perspective where the universal aspects in all conflict and in all peace-building processes are identified according to regional, cultural and particular traditional factors and then applied universally to other contexts. Although they acknowledge that some general and abstract factors are universal to conflicts, such as dealing with past and peace, they do state clearly that process and practical commonalities are universally applicable to every conflict in the world (Leiner & Flämig 2012:12). This is significant, as they argue that universality is only possible on comparison of the interaction between different contexts (e.g. to understand how South Africans, who are convinced by the work of the TRC, react to discussions in Chile about the necessary end of impunity). This, they argue, is necessary because these comparisons can provoke new questions, open new trajectories for future research and help to find new practical ideas on how to improve peace-building (Leiner & Flämig 2012:12). The emphasis on the comparisons approach amongst nations does unavoidably raise the issue of culture and how it should be understood. Culture has been understood in many different ways during the past decades, and therefore this approach argues that researchers should overcome the impasse of communitarian approaches. Leiner and Flämig (2012:12) argue rather for a transcultural perspective on culture; that is, not viewing it as a closed entity (Welsch 1999). Colonialism, migrations, cultural and economic exchange has created a reality where different cultures live together in the same neighbourhoods and form new, increasingly transcultural identities (Leiner & Flämig 2012:12).

From interdisciplinary to transdisciplinary research

The transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach acknowledges the emphasis on interdisciplinary



and cross-disciplinary approaches. However Leiner and Flämig's approach (2012:11) favours the concept of 'transdisciplinarity' above interdisciplinarity because, according to them, the latter departs from the concrete co-operation of several disciplines working on a particular topic and function as a mere addition, as opposed to transdisciplinarity, which acknowledges the complexity of conflict and requires continuous co-operation between the different disciplines for solutions. The essence or requirement of this continuous co-operation between various disciplines is to willingly '... accept changes in the orientation of their scholars and the boundaries of disciplines in the process of co-operation' (Mittelstraß 2005:18–23). This requires, more or less, four new research orientations to which the various disciplines need to adhere:

1. The unlimited will to learn from other disciplines and the acceptance to change the concepts and theories of one's own discipline.
2. The gain of interdisciplinary competence, up to the point where one can productively discuss the work of the other discipline.
3. The capacity to reformulate the approaches of one's own discipline in the light of interdisciplinary competence.
4. The formulation of a common text in which the unity of transdisciplinary argumentation replaces the simple aggregation of different results from several academic disciplines. (Mittelstraß 2005:18–25)

These four orientations form the operational basis of the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach. In relation to the above, Leiner and Flämig (2012:13), emphasise that transdisciplinary research as a whole (practical research and the sciences) has to remain aware of being embedded in the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) where we and sciences are living and operating. According to them, scientists need to accept that the various sciences are abstractions from the life-world. Scientists can therefore contribute to a common image by discussing the interpretation of the experiences in the life-world (Leiner & Flämig 2012:14).

In relation to the difficult question of values in transdisciplinary research, the rationale should be that the research has to integrate the experiences on the ground, and the results of this approach have to be expounded in different publics, such as the scientific community. Only an approach that can translate its values into those of other religions and cultures can be convincing in the globalised scientific community (Leiner & Flämig 2012:14). They emphasise that transdisciplinary research, if it is not at the expense of the quality of disciplinary methodological research, can integrate values and world views (Leiner & Flämig 2012:15). This encourages them to integrate philosophers and theologians from various religious backgrounds into their programme. A Buddhist understanding of peace seems to them as important as a Mennonite or an atheist one. According to them, the inclusion of these views is an important attribute of Christian peace research (Leiner & Flämig 2012:15).

The media- and symbol-oriented perspective

Leiner and Flämig (2012:15) introduce the media- and symbol-oriented perspective to indicate that conflicts and peace processes are heavily laden with highly symbolic communication. They further emphasise that national and religious symbols and their history play a fundamental role in the understanding of the development of conflict as well as of peace processes. They emphasise that the media often amplify this kind of symbolic communication (Leiner & Flämig 2012:15), by informing the public and creating its perception of conflict or peace. Even acts like terrorist attacks, for example, seem to be more important as communicative acts than as the action of destruction itself (Leiner & Flämig 2012:15).

The Hölderlin perspective

The Hölderlin perspective originates from the novel *Hyperion*, by the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770–1843), when he wrote: '*Versöhnung ist mitten im Streit und alles Getrennte findet sich wieder*' [Reconciliation is in the midst of dispute and all things separated find each other again.] Leiner in particular follows this perspective as an antithesis to the widespread perception in scientific disciplines of reconciliation as an event that occurs only after violent conflict or even after a successful peace-building process, perhaps even many years later (Leiner & Flämig 2012:16).

They base their argument on German theologian Jürgen Moltmann's book *Ethik der Hoffnung* [ethics of hope] with a chapter titled '*Und Frieden mitten im Streit*' [And peace in the midst of dispute] where he indicates that the fundamental reconciliation (Harvie 2009; Moltmann 2010:265) between God and humankind has already occurred. Our small attempts at reconciliation only try to mirror, in a human way, God's act of reconciliation. With this as a departure point, they claim that within a Christian context, they integrate a Christian self-understanding into their research, and that the great reconciliation has already been accomplished and seems to be, in fact, a major source for their own practice of reconciliation (Leiner & Flämig 2012:17).

Moreover, they state that with the Hölderlin perspective they want to pay attention to the elements speaking for and perhaps even leading towards reconciliation: internal and external groups and individuals who disagree with the conflict, common laws and customs, moments of economic co-operation, common feelings, correlations of acting and reacting, et cetera. In this regard they indicate:

We are particularly interested in exploring how these elements develop in a conflict. Which role in the peace process do those people play who never wanted the conflict to become violent? Sometimes peace is made between the strong actors in a conflict, and the difficult work of people who were willing to end the conflict is not sufficiently acknowledged. (Leiner & Flämig 2012:17)



Towards a contextual approach to reconciliation

The first part of this contribution indicated some of the challenges facing practical theology and the institutional church within a post-apartheid and post-TRC society. This was followed by a short explanation of the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach with the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation. The following is an attempt to contribute a contextual and constructive approach to reconciliation for South African scholars in the field of practical theology and the institutional church to address the challenging factors facing reconciliation in a post-apartheid and post-TRC society.

A transdisciplinary approach is critical

The local practical theological discourse has yielded very few transdisciplinary research publications on the role of the institutional church in the light of continued challenges to reconciliation within post-apartheid and post-TRC South Africa. In my efforts to understand this phenomenon, the suspicion arose that some practical theologians within South Africa might still be pursuing a modern perspective, conducting research on local, regional, cultural and particular traditional domains, and then projecting their findings universally onto other contexts. Although, according to Van der Westhuizen (2010:1), foundationalism is in decline and under constant criticism; the indication is that practical theologians might still be caught up in foundationalism which results in using a language that may be internally coherent but powerless to communicate its content because it is cut off from all non-theological discourses (Park 2010:3). In this regard, Van Huyssteen (1999:62, 63) explains that theological foundationalism implies biblical literalism, or positivism of revelation, which isolates theology from other reasoning sciences in that it denies the crucial role of interpreted religious experience in all theological reflections.

On the other hand one might argue that there are indications that practical theology is in a certain sense still caught up in the impasse of communitarian approaches. It engages with theories or systems of social organisation based on small, self-governing traditional communities and, to an extent, on an ideology that emphasises the responsibility of the individual to the community and the social importance of the family unit. In this regard some practical theologians could even be non-foundationalism and therefore post-modern, emphasising the crucial epistemic importance of community, and acknowledging that every community and context has its own rationality. Van Huyssteen (1997:3) explains that, at the heart of this epistemological brand of non-foundationalism, we often find fideism: an uncritical, almost blind commitment to a basic set of beliefs. In this sense fideism can in some cases ironically turn out to be foundationalism-in-disguise.

Most practical theologians in South Africa are well aware of Van Huyssteen's (1999:113) emphasis on a post-foundationalism theology as an alternative to the

foundational and non-foundational approaches. Van Huyssteen (1999:113) proposes a post-foundationalism theology that fully acknowledges the role of context, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the role of tradition in shaping religious values. Theological reflection in post-foundationalism also points creatively beyond the confines of the local community or culture toward a plausible form of cross-contextual and interdisciplinary conversation. Against the alleged objectivism of foundationalism and the extreme relativism of most forms of non-foundationalism, post-foundationalism emerges as a viable third option that allows cross-disciplinary conversations with our beliefs intact, and the shared resources of human rationality in different modes of reflection (Park 2010:4). Van Huyssteen's transversal approach also argues that interdisciplinarity must remain person- and perspective-specific in light of the pluralism of today. Instead of generalised statements about the relationship between theology and social sciences, concrete accounts of their relationship and interactions are preferred (Osmer 2006:338–341). In this regard, Van Huyssteen (2000:9) explains that interdisciplinary discourse is the attempt to bring together disciplines or reasoning strategies that may have widely different points of reference, different epistemological foci, and different experiential resources. This resonates well with the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach as discussed.

Practical theologians have been drawing increasingly on other human sciences in their research, rendering transdisciplinary research, or as Osmer (2008:163) calls it, cross-discipline research familiar to the field. He affirms that it forms an inherent part of each of the four tasks of practical theology. In its empirical work, it necessarily engages social science and makes choices about the research methods and approaches that are best suited. In its interpretive work, it engages the social sciences, natural sciences and philosophy to place particular episodes, situations, and contexts in a broader explanatory framework. In constructing a normative perspective, it enters into a dialogue with dogmatic theology, Christian ethics, philosophical ethics and normative social theory. In its pragmatic task, it engages action sciences such as education, therapy, organisation change theory and communication theory. Although Osmer (2008:163) illuminates the links with cross-disciplinary thinking, he emphasises that at no point does it merely take over the methods and frameworks of cognitive fields, but applies them critically as part of a cross-disciplinary conversation in which the distinctive theological perspective of practical theology retains its own voice. This raises the question of whether Osmer's understanding of cross-disciplinary research does indeed adhere to the principles of the transdisciplinary research approach. To my understanding, Osmer falls short in his explanation of his approach by neglecting to point out that its own voice or approaches might change during the transdisciplinary process.

The interdisciplinary dialogue principle is referred to and applied to some extent by more and more practical



theologians in South Africa. It remains debatable whether this dialogue adheres to the principles indicated in the post-foundationalism theology of Van Huyssteen, and the four principals posited by Mittelstraß (2005), within the transdisciplinary dialogue. In my view these four research orientations have not been implemented sufficiently by South African scholars within their different disciplines. I propose that a transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific approach could contribute to address constructively the factors that endanger reconciliation.

Interreligious research is fundamental

Although South African practical theologians recognise the importance of the religious society and its reconciliatory role in the multi-religious society, they hardly engage with theologians from other faiths in this regard. The reason might lie in a limited understanding of the 'other' and how to integrate different values and worldviews. Van Huyssteen (1999:239) indicates that rationality in post-foundationalism is an awareness of the shared cognitive, pragmatic, and evaluative dimension, which can inform an account and provide a rationale for the way one thinks, chooses, acts, and believes (Van Huyssteen 1997:39). He continues to explain that this rationality describes the dynamic interaction of our various disciplinary dialogues with one another as a form of transversal reasoning that justifies and urges an acknowledgment of multiple patterns of interpretation, as one crosses the borders and boundaries of different disciplines (Van Huyssteen 2000:427). Through transversal reasoning, this rationality provides a common ground for communication between people who have different beliefs and cultures (Park 2010:5). This correlates well with the focus of transdisciplinary research. When not done at the expense of the quality of the research methodology, this approach can integrate values and worldviews and hence align philosophers and theologians from different religious backgrounds, to serve the outcome of the research. Interreligious communication and research are fundamental in the pluralistic South African environment if it is to contribute to local and global research on reconciliation. This is motivated by Roman Catholic theologian Küng's view of mondial responsibility, that entails that world peace is not possible without peace between the world religions (Küng 1992:177). This area still needs to be developed by practical theologians within the South African transdisciplinary environment.

Exploring developing transcultural identities

Practical theologians have in recent times committed themselves to a hermeneutical approach and contextual, eco-systemic and intercultural research (Thesnaar 2012:227). They have also begun to apply wisdom theology (Ganzevoort 2009:187) in their understanding of culture with a focus on interconnectedness, relationships and systems (Osmer 2008:17) that have the ability to set in motion a creative process of reconciliation, by implementing metaphors, symbols and rituals (Hugo 2010:617) within particular

communities. However, the transcultural perspective on culture as indicated by Leiner and Flämig (2012:12) is still lacking. This aspect warrants further development, and empirical research needs to be conducted on transcultural identities within the South African context, from the paradigms of a transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach.

Communicate constructive symbols of reconciliation and peace

A well-known concept within the research of South African practical theologians is the media- and symbol-orientated perspective, as introduced by Leiner and Flämig (2012:15), to indicate that conflict and peace processes are steeped in highly symbolic qualities (Du Toit 2011). It is recognised that national and religious symbols and their history play a crucial role in the understanding of the development of conflict as well as of peace processes in South Africa. Whilst conceding that the way the media can inform and create public perceptions on conflict, peace, transformation and reconciliation, practical theology research in South Africa still needs to explore the paradigms of a transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach. This could pave the way for the institutional church to develop and communicate constructive symbols and rituals for reconciliation and peace. Pollefeyt (2004) echoes the fundamental importance of this in his understanding of the role of symbols and rituals in reconciliation:

Reconciliation is actively giving the wounds of perpetrators and victims the chance to heal by means of symbols and rituals, so that both parties can find their humanity together and share it with each other. (p. 158)

Embodying reconciliation in the midst of the conflict

Is the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation just a new effort from theology to emphasise the importance of reconciliation? Is there anything unique and fresh about the so-called Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation? These are valid questions that need to be posed. Whilst the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation is undoubtedly one isolated theological perspective, it has to be assessed as such. However, given its nature as being embedded in the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach, in my view this perspective should not be viewed as a one-sided endeavour from theology, but rather as part of the transdisciplinary process toward reconciliation. From this perspective it should rather be allocated within the parameters of the post-foundationalism approach.

In terms of the second question, the uniqueness of the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation should be focused on the emphasis it places on the notion that reconciliation processes (on different levels) should not start only when the conflict has subsided, but should already be present within the conflict. Cases of major conflicts in past and present times bear witness to relationships and covert negotiations between members of opposing groups, which ignited the conflict, but



later played a fundamental part in ending the conflict in the transition that followed. These on-going actions towards reconciliation between people from the opposing sides could be described as the eye of a big storm. In the eye of the storm it is calm and one is almost unaware of the storm raging around the eye. The relationships formed between people from opposing sides and the secret negotiations represent the eye of the storm, the bearers of peace, reconciliation and hope in the midst of conflict. It is therefore an active call for all Christians to seek reconciliation within the storm of conflict.

The uniqueness of the Hölderlin perspective on reconciliation is further emphasised by the notion that all things separated will find each other again. This notion is then further embedded in the theological perspective on reconciliation between God and humankind, which emphasises that reconciliation has already occurred and that our small attempts at reconciliation are only to trying to mirror God's act of reconciliation in a human way. Based on what God has done, we need to embody reconciliation and peace by, amongst others, respecting the human dignity of all involved in the conflict, especially the 'other', and emphasising justice and not revenge. These aspects within the framework of the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach open up a completely new way of thinking about researching the theme of reconciliation. This perspective is not limited only to reconciliation during the conflict, but also, before and after the conflict. In this regard, according to my understanding, it is indeed a fresh breeze within the South African practical-theological research on reconciliation.

Conclusion

The transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach on reconciliation with the emphasis on the Hölderlin perspective endeavours to create a new space for dialogue between different disciplines within the post-apartheid and post-TRC society. It acknowledges the fact that every research has a foundational basis, but these foundational aspects are not impervious and can be changed within the dynamics of the transdisciplinary, region-centred scientific research approach. In line with the post-foundational approach, this one is a conscious endeavour to challenge tribalism within theology and to encourage theology to participate in transdisciplinary research on reconciliation within the society. Although the dynamics of journeying together as disciplines remain challenging – the precise 'end' of the reconciliation process cannot be guaranteed – the commitment of the different disciplines should be to journey together towards this 'end' in peace.

This contribution has argued for a responsible approach to reconciliation and peace to assist practical theologians and the constitutional church in this quest. A contextual approach to reconciliation and peace entails that a transdisciplinary approach is critical; interreligious research is fundamental; there is a need to explore developing transcultural identities; constructive symbols of reconciliation should be communicated; and peace and reconciliation should be embodied in the midst of the conflict.

This approach further provides practical theologians with opportunities to engage with other disciplines when conducting empirical research on the theme of reconciliation in order to understand the elements speaking for and perhaps even leading towards reconciliation in the wake of conflict; internal and external groups and individuals who disagree with the conflict; common laws and customs; moments of economic cooperation; common feelings; correlations of acting and reacting and other elements, in a holistic way. Practical theology should therefore participate actively within the life-world to ensure that it can overcome its lack of empirical research (Steinberg 2010:5) in order to assist the institutional church and its networks of reconciliation agencies in their endeavours to contribute to reconciliation in the midst of conflicts in South Africa.

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