

'Pastoral and ecclesial madness': Facing the failure of 'democratism' within the current civil turmoil in South Africa



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The Zondo Commission's report of 2022 plays a decisive role in the motivation to write the article. Considering recent political developments in South Africa, specifically the uprising of violent protests on grassroots level in many townships, it has become paramount for research *in theology*, specifically, the branches of practical and pastoral theology, to give thorough attention to the following research questions: How can the discipline of pastoral care contribute to social change on grassroots level as well as promote the spiritual healing of communities exposed to constant forms of violence? How does the quest for social and community transformation impacts on theory formation in the discipline of pastoral caregiving? The article takes up the challenge posed by Desmond Tutu: Change the Rainbow Nation into a compassionate society. What will be the implication for pastoral caregiving and the ecclesial ministry? A trans-epistemological analysis of the notion of democracy has been performed. The root of democratic thinking is revisited and critically analysed by means of Plato's radical critique on the 'democratic type'. While taking the mad option of Desmond Tutu seriously, it becomes obvious that pastoral caregiving should shift from a problem-solving approach to a community engagement approach. This approach should explore the irrational option of an ethos of sacrifice, based on divine madness. Paul calls this spiritual option: The weakness and foolishness of God (1 Cor 1:18–25). The divine sacrificial *option* implies the radical engagement of a theology of pastoral madness.

Contribution: My choice for a praxis approach to human suffering within contexts of civil societal unrest and demeaning forms of social stigmatisation like xenophobia, is the transformation of ecclesial and ministerial paradigms emanating from cathedral thinking (churches as demonstration of clerical power and abstract liturgies) into xenodochia thinking: Churches as safe havens (xenodochia) for the stigmatised outsiders in civil society. In this regard, the theological notion of the folly of God, should serve as the Christian spiritual cornerstone for implementing the concept of God as Friend and Partner or Host for Life. The latter is our choice for the madness of pastoral engagements in civil society. The sacrificial grace of God illustrates sheer divine irrationality: xenophilia as xenodochia.

Keywords: civilisation state; democratic type; democratism; hospitable xenophilia; marketplace spirituality; pastoral madness; xenodochia.

Introduction

The report of the Zondo Commission (2022)¹ finds that multiple incidents of state capture took place within South African government departments and state-owned enterprises during the presidency of Jacob Zuma, as senior officials routinely broke law. Devy Pillay (2022), a researcher at the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), points out the close connection between state capture and the unconstitutional erosion of processes of transformation and democratisation in South Africa. Pillay is even convinced that the use of disinformation and propaganda manipulated the public discourse, to divert attention away from their wrongdoing and discredit opponents contributing to what one can call, the public and civil disillusionment regarding the outcome of a so-called new political and democratic dispensation. Pillay (2022) states:

1.The commission found that multiple incidents of state capture and sever forms of corruption took place within South African government departments and state-owned enterprises during the presidency of Jacob Zuma, as senior officials routinely broke law (Zondo Commission 2022).

Moreover, the subversion of the democratic process which the process of state capture entailed was not simply about extracting resources but was further geared towards securing future power and consequently shaping and gaining control of the political order (or significant parts of that order) in a manner that was necessarily opaque and intrinsically unconstitutional. (p. 3)

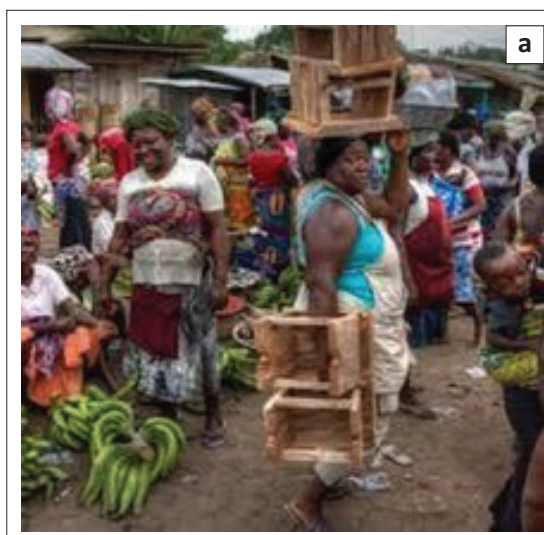
Considering recent political developments in South Africa, specifically the uprising of violent protests on grassroots level in many townships, it has become paramount for research in theology, specifically the branches of practical and pastoral theology, to give thorough attention to the following research question: How can the discipline of pastoral care contribute to social change on grassroots level, as well as promoting the spiritual healing of communities exposed to constant forms of violence? How does the quest for social and community transformation impacts on theory formation in the discipline of pastoral caregiving?

What is the impact of severe forms of violence in civil society, on the conceptualisation of basic presuppositions in Christian theology and practical theology? This regards the ecclesial

more contextual approach, it becomes paramount that theory formation in practical and pastoral theology should shift from the personal, psychic level of healing interventions to a socio-political focus, and a cultural contextual analysis. Gradually, the emphasis is currently much more on a socio-systemic approach. 'The nature of the human personality is understood in contextual rather than individualistic terms' (Graham 1992:19). Botman (1995:10–11) calls such an emphasis a 'socio-theological constructionist approach'. It is in this regard, that the interplay between theoretical reflection and the profane space of the so-called '*civil marketplace*', comes into play.²

The metaphor of 'marketplace' points to social encounters and civil dialoguing, continuously framed by ideas and philosophies of life. It is in this sense, that marketplace discussions provide patterns of thinking, and new ideas for the promotion of ideological and political changes.

In ancient Greek cities, the marketplace was called an *agora*. It refers to an open space that served as a meeting ground for various activities of the citizens.



Left: Traditional Marke place in Africa. **Right:** The Grand Bazaar in Istanbul, one of the oldest continuously operating market buildings in existence; it houses approximately 3600 retail shops (Anon s.a.a.). A marketplace is a location where people regularly gather for the purchase and sale of provisions, livestock, and other goods. In different parts of the world, a marketplace may be described as a *souk* (from the Arabic), *bazaar* (from the Persian), a fixed *mercado* (Spanish), or itinerant *tianguis* (Mexico), or *palengke* (Philippines) (Anon s.a.a.).

and ministerial role of the church in the healing of skewed ideological perceptions, emerging from processes of political change and radical social transformation.

The disciplinary challenge: Toward the contextualisation of pastoral care (a civil constructionist approach) within the paradigm of marketplace discussions

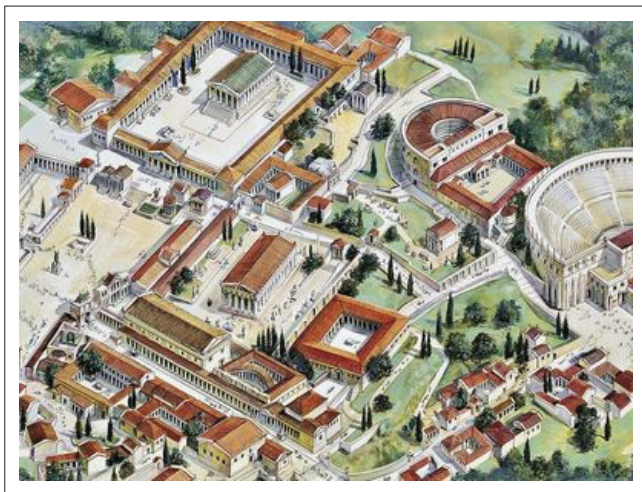
Within the tradition of *cura animarum*, soul care was mostly viewed as a pietistic, individualistic, and private endeavour (see McNeill 1951). However, due to the recent emphases on a

It [*agora*] was applied by the classical Greeks of the 5th century bce to what they regarded as a typical feature of their life: their daily religious, political, judicial, social, and commercial activity. (Anon s.a.a.)

In Athens the agora served as a kind of assembly of the people, regarding a civil societal understanding of processes of democratisation. It was known as a public space, the *ecclesia* as an assembly where public encounters influenced lifestyles in the public of civil society.

2. According to the Constructionist approach, the following prevails:

Since human beings are historically and socially situated, they are always connected to other people. Culture does not exist simply in them, but between them. Any understanding of a particular person's or group's authentic identity will be a function of specific social encounters, and particular evaluations of authenticity are open to negotiation and dispute'



Agora as meeting place of people (*ecclesia*) where citizens interacted freely with one another. (Public domain. For academic purposes only). (Anon s.a.a.)

In history, it was mostly Agora-thinking that fuelled radical social and political changes. Radical, in this context, points to paradigmatic changes that are fundamentally revolutionary, leading to social and political transformation.

We were involved in the struggle because we believed we would evolve a new kind of society. A caring compassionate society. Now many, too many, of our people live in gruelling demeaning, dehumanising poverty. We are sitting on a powder keg. We really must work like **mad** to eradicate poverty. (p. 33)

Desmond Tutu's plea for becoming a caring and compassionate society, touches the very fundamental ideas and concepts that steer praxis-thinking in the discipline of practical and pastoral theology. Tutu's exhortation to operate like a 'mad' carer emphasises the importance of a sacrifice attitude in compassionate care, especially in violent social circumstances.

With pastoral and theological madness is meant a kind of irrationality, which is in vain when assessed from sheer rational principles, but despite obvious discrepancies and paradoxical impressions, it could be viewed as what Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:25 calls, *the foolish plan of God – God in his weakness*.



Left³: From the West Berlin side of graffiti art on the Wall in 1986. (Anon s.a.b.). **Right⁴**: Petrograd (Saint Petersburg), 04 July 1917 at 14:00. A street demonstration on Nevsky Prospekt just after troops of the provisional government have opened fire with machine guns. (Anon s.a.e.)

By means of the so-called 'Revolution of Negotiations' during 1990–1994, radical political and social change took place in South Africa. Due to tight and radical marketplace discussions, our country moved into the spectacle of a *Rainbow Nation*.

In 2004, former Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2004) put the following challenge on the agenda of social and paradigmatic transformation:

3. Construction of the Berlin Wall (the Wall of Shame) was commenced by the government of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) on 13 August 1961. In 1989, a series of revolutions in nearby Eastern Bloc countries – in Poland and Hungary in particular – caused a chain reaction in East Germany. The rulers in the East came under pressure to cease their repressive policies. The Berlin Wall fell, fuelling the future reunification of Germany (Anon s.a.b.).

4. The Russian Revolution (1917) was a period of political and social change. In fact, it deconstructed the whole idea of a tsaristic dominated regime. Russia abolished its monarchy and adopted a socialist form of government.

It will further be argued that to develop a compassionate society, democratisation should be guided by a new understanding of morality, i.e. morality not as acting according to an external set of rules, but as the act of embracing and reducing suffering. This interplay between compassion, morality, and democracy, seems to be strange and in a sense irrational. However, this is precisely where the notion of 'madness' becomes applicable, to describe ecclesial actions of pastoral interventions, within painful contexts of civil societal unrest.

The 'powder keg' of civil societal unrest

Civil unrest is a very deep-rooted phenomenon within the history of social and political change. With reference to the

struggle of black people for justice and freedom in South Africa, 16 June 1976 could be viewed as a kind of watershed event. The riots were a key moment in the fight and struggle against Apartheid.

The Soweto uprising (or Soweto riots) was fuelled by unrest under the black youth. It began on the morning of 16 June 1976. Students from various schools began to protest in the streets of the Soweto township. The trigger was the enforced introduction of Afrikaans as a compulsory subject. The protest was met with fierce police opposition. Many people were shot and killed.

The following photo became iconic in terms of the fight for freedom and justice.



Hector Pieterson being carried by Mbuyisa Makhubo after being shot by the South African police. His sister, Antoinette Sithole, runs beside them. Pieterson was rushed to a local clinic where he was declared dead on arrival. This photo by Sam Nzima became an icon of the Soweto uprising (Anon s.a.f.).

In 2012, a wave of civil unrest hit the country. On 16 August 2012, the strike at the Marikana mine took place. To curb violence, the South African Police Service (SAPS) opened fire on a crowd of striking mineworkers, and 34 mineworkers were killed while 78 were seriously injured (Anon s.a.c.).

In 2021, violence and extreme forms of riots swept over KwaZulu-Natal. Known as the July 2021 riots, the Zuma unrest or Zuma riots, expanded to Gauteng as well (Erasmus 2023). The protests triggered wider rioting and looting. The unrest was not merely about the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma for contempt of court. It was fuelled by job layoffs and economic inequality that worsened day by day in our country. The unrest was some of the worst exponents of violence that South Africa had experienced since the end of Apartheid.

The alarming fact is that the unrest exposed the ungirding racial tension, that boils under the surface of the so-called Madiba magic. In the Indian-majority township of Phoenix, KwaZulu-Natal, some of the residents had armed themselves to fight off looters, due to the absence of police forces. This in turn, stoked racial tensions between black and Indian South African citizens, with several racially motivated attacks reported to have taken place.

Very recently, the taxi violence in Cape Town underlined the statement and warning of Desmond Tutu: We are indeed sitting on a powder keg. According to Nyasha Bhobo (2023), the city's attempts to regulate minibus taxis, are seen as an insensitive attack on poor black working-class communities.

At the heart of the conflict, is the City of Cape Town's attempt to regulate the powerful minibus taxi sector, by announcing it would enforce bylaws by seizing unregistered minibuses, unroadworthy vehicles and abandoned minibuses, and cracking down on unlicensed drivers. It was pointed out by reporters, that Cape Town's apartheid spatial planning history means that any attempt to regulate the minibus taxi industry, feeds an already volatile situation of increasing criminality and gangsterism, targeting the city's infrastructure. (Bhobo 2023).

In terms of the previous outline regarding the fuelling of unrest and racial violence in South Africa, the powder keg goes hand in glove with escalating forms of ethnic prejudice, skewed processes of stigmatisation, and xenophobic attacks against foreigners. Racial and ethnic stigmatisation are perhaps the most difficult realm to infiltrate. It forms a kind of substrata, that creates a hidden agenda, contributing to the escalation of violence within the field of spirituality.

Phenomenon of skewed processes of stigmatisation

The phenomenon of stigmatisation is a very complex issue indeed. E. Goffman (1990 2:11–12) links the establishment of stigma to social settings of prejudice. The routines of social intercourse in established settings and first appearances enable us to anticipate 'social identity'. We easily transform these anticipations into normative expectations and presented demands. The demands we make 'in effect' and the character we impute to a person, can be seen as an imputation made in potential retrospect; '... a characterisation [*in effect*], a virtual social identity'.

When this identity is assessed as negative, bad, dangerous, weak, even sinful, we reduce the difference to wrong or evil. In our mind, we reduce the person to a tainted, discounted individual. Such an attribute becomes a stigma, especially when its discrediting effect is very extensive. Sometimes it is called a *failing*, a *shortcoming*, a *handicap*. It constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity so that labelled people are pushed to the edge of society. They become social outsiders without hope.

Within the context of civil unrest in South Africa, the notion of xenophobia is a perfect example of how labelling can become a discriminating factor, robbing people of their human dignity in civil society.⁵



The anti-xenophobia walk on Mandela Day 2010, Cape Town (Anon s.a.f.; see also Powell 2017).

Therefore, at stake, is the question of how Christian spirituality and pastoral theology can contribute to processes of destigmatisation, to create within social dynamics a civil space, wherein people can regain their identity and can carry on with their lives, beyond the ethnic and racial categories of prejudice and destructive labelling. Thus, the following pastoral challenge: How can we encounter people coming from a different cultural background (Schneider-Harpprecht 2002:38) without the danger of prejudice and stigmatisation? How can we overcome the threat of xenophobia to heal our civil society?

Toward the method of transpection

Keeping in mind the powder keg of democratism and socio-political disillusionment, pastoral care should probe into the realm of different schemata of interpretation. It is in this respect that the method of *transpection* comes into play.

Transpection means an effort to put oneself into the head (not the shoes) of another person. While *empathy* is a projection of feelings between two persons in epistemology, *transpection* 'is a trans-epistemological process which tries to experience a foreign belief, a foreign assumption, a foreign perspective, and feelings in a foreign context' (Augsburger 1986:30).

Within our South African context, the first field of stigmatisation is the socio-political threat of democratism. With reference to the method of *transpection*,⁶ it is paramount to revisit the core roots of democracy, i.e. the thinking of Plato.

⁵Stigma can be used as a way of denying dignity, respect, and rights to some members of society, and can result in people being isolated or abused. It can lead to discrimination, where people are treated less well because of a characteristic they have' (Carter 2008:7).

⁶D. Augsburger (1986:29–30) refers to *interpathetic caring*, the process of 'feeling with' and 'thinking with' another. Such an attempt requires the one to enter the other's world of assumptions, beliefs, and values and temporarily take them as one's own. He is referring to M. Maruyama (Augsburger 1986:30) who coined the concept of *transpection*. With *transpection* is then meant an effort to put oneself into the head (not the shoes) of another person. While *empathy* is a projection of feelings between two persons in epistemology, *transpection* 'is a trans-epistemological process which tries to experience a foreign belief, a foreign assumption, a foreign perspective, and feelings in a foreign context' (Augsburger 1986:30).

Democratism: The democratic type within the failure of democracy

Democratism is an ideology that purports to welcome unmediated popular rule, but in practice it accomplishes the opposite forms of dictatorial 'democracy', that find popular consent in theory rather than in actual practice. Democratism in practice, is rule by a minority of experts or elites.

When democracy becomes an abstract '-ism', it tends to change processes of democratisation into the ideology of democracy, leading to the popularisation and massification of human dignity, by means of the abuse of political power. When few overrule the vote of the majority by means of power abuse and fraud, democratism⁷ sets in, as interpreted by Cole (2023):

In his Republic, Plato claims that a just city will be one in which its rulers, the guardian class, will outlaw practices likely to lead to corruption. This is because the primary aim of the rulers of a just city is unity, and maintaining the unity of the city requires preventing and eliminating anti-social and irrational elements. According to Plato, it is part of the duty of the rulers to keep the soul of the city and its citizens healthy. If the citizens were to become self-indulgent, for instance, their appetites could disrupt the harmony of the city; therefore, rulers would be justified in creating laws limiting what citizens could consume. (n.p.)

For Plato, wisdom and the striving towards the 'vision of goodness' are more fundamental than merely the democratic plight for human rights. *Goodness* is the highest object of knowledge (Plato 1946:228). Plato (1946) therefore reminds his friends of the fact that the law and order is not designed to make one class especially happy, but to ensure the welfare of the commonwealth as a whole:

By persuasion or constraint, it will unite the citizens in harmony, making them share whatever benefits each class can contribute to the common good; and its purpose in forming men of that spirit was not that each should be left to go his own way, but that they should be instrumental in binding the community into one. (pp. 228–229)

This emphasis on 'community wholeness', was for Plato based on the greatest possible mutual friendship (Piechowiak 2019:25). It points to what Plato called the supreme philosophical disposition, namely 'gentleness'. 'A proper training would produce courage; but if that element is overstrained, it naturally becomes hard and savage.

⁷Finley (2022) describes democratism as follows:

Previously understood as a regime type among others with, at best, limited potential for good in the concrete, the idea of *democracy* has been transformed into an ideal in the imagination of many prominent Western intellectuals. Guided by this abstract and idealized notion of democracy, political leaders pursue legislation and foreign and domestic policies that promise to bring about a new age of liberation and equality. Yet in practice, policies guided by such idealism often undermine democracy.

Democratism is an ideology that purports to welcome unmediated popular rule, but in practice it accomplishes the opposite, forms of dictatorial 'democracy' that find popular consent in theory rather than in actual practice. Democratism in practice is rule by a minority of experts or elites. Proponents of democratism claim to be the real arbiters of democracy as they put forth elaborate plans for bringing into existence their specific interpretations of democracy. Their schemes often entail social engineering and some subtle forms of coercion. Because democratists frame their arguments using the language of democracy, they often escape notice as perpetrators, not of democracy proper, but of an oligarchic pseudo-democracy' (n.p.).

Gentleness, on the other hand, is characteristic of the philosophical disposition' (Plato 1946:98).

The surprising fact is that Plato linked justice and ethics to the basic notion of aesthetics (living well and well-being): the beauty of orderliness, harmony, and bestowing grace. Soulfulness, and therefore the whole life of human beings, stand in need of rhythm and harmony. When spiritual excellence is combined with bodily beauty in a living person, it constitutes proper love (*eros*) (Plato 1946:86). Without harmony and justice, life becomes chaotic (Plato 1946:87).

The democratic type

The previous outline regarding what one can call the aesthetics and poetry of life, helps one to understand why Plato questioned the contribution of democracy to the instalment of a commonwealth of good and beauty, within the realm of Athenian politics. The core problem with 'the democratic type' – the democratic person – is the difficulty to control the realm of desires. In the long run, the pleasures of the moment gain the upper hand over the democratic temperament, based on the principle of freedom and equal rights for all (Plato 1946:274). Perhaps then the reason why an oligarchy, that is, the striving to become as rich as possible, cannot direct the transition to democracy. 'We can see that at once, that a society cannot hold wealth and honour and at the same time establish a proper self-control in its citizens' (Plato 1946:274).

The democratic type of human person, is in fact the product of oligarchy wherein the striving to become as rich as possible, leads to neglect, namely, to curb riotous living and attend to poverty. Neglect leads to revolution (Plato 1946):

And when the poor win, the result is a democracy. They kill some of the opposite party, banish others, and grant the rest an equal share in civil rights and government, official being usually appointed by lot. (pp. 275–276)

In a nutshell, Plato (1946) describes the character of the 'democratic type of man' as follows:

- Freedom without inner discipline, because 'all are free'. Liberty and free speech are rife everywhere; 'anyone is allowed to do what he likes' (p. 276).
- Every person arranges his or her own manner of life to suit his or her personal pleasure. The result is the diversity and variety of individuals.⁸
- Authority becomes an irrelevant option. No one is obliged to be in authority, however competent the person is. Nobody needs to submit to authority if you do not like it. The implication is that one responds to the dynamics of like – dislike. 'A wonderfully pleasant life, surely, for the moment' (p. 276).
- Instead of self-control, tolerance sets in.

⁸: 'A democracy is so free that it contains [...] a sample of every kind; and perhaps anyone who intends to find a state, as we have been doing, ought first to visit this emporium of constitutions and choose the model he likes best' (Plato 1946:276).

The democratic type contributes to the following dilemma: Disillusionment in the public marketplace of civil society. The democratic type fuels the *brutality of populism*. Knowledge and right principles make place for basic appetites and needs of people (Plato 1946). Plato (1946) further states:

[M]odesty and self-control, dishonoured and insulted as the weakness of an unmanly fool, are thrust out into exile; and the whole crew of unprofitable desires take a hand in banishing moderation and frugality, which means, as they will have it, are nothing but churlish meanness. (p. 279)

To sum up: The predicament and dilemma of the democratic type is that they are directed by an immediate appetite (surviving desires) without changing a disposition of having (consuming) and wanting into the wise disposition of gentleness, simplicity, self-control, inner discipline, responsibility for the self and the other, sharing and just evaluation (prudence). Plato (1946) states that, instead of the philosophical position of wisdom, the following destroying and harmful vices set in:

Insolence, Anarchy, Waste, and Impudence, those resplendent divinities crowned with garlands, whose praises they sing under flattering names: Insolence they call good breeding, Anarchy freedom, Waste magnificence, and Impudence a manly spirit. (p. 279)

Although the social and political, as well as the cultural setting of Plato differed from our postmodern context, the similarities with the contemporary disillusionment, regarding the outcome of the democratic slogan of 'liberty, justice and equality for all', became quite evident. In fact, the following summary of Plato (1946:280) of the democratic type, sums up the current civil societal dilemma of many in South Africa: 'His life (democratic type) is subject to no order or restraint, and he has no wish to change an existence which he calls pleasant, free, and happy'.

The current global socio-political dilemma: The failure of liberal democracy and the option of the civilisation state

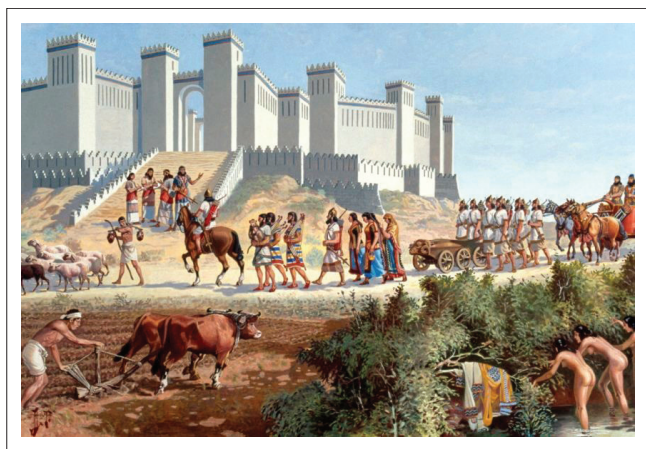
In the *Time Magazine* (13 and 20 February 2023), Bruno Maçães made a very bold statement about the failure of democracy, very specifically, in the Middle East and other developing countries. He calls the threat of liberal democracy *the crisis of liberalism*, as a universal programme of political and social life. Maçães (2023) states:

Liberal ideas, for all their intellectual appeal, derived from the economic and military power of countries – France, Britain, and the U.S. – where they originated from the 18th century. That power is weakened today. (p. 18)

The following question is posed: If the idea of liberalism is no longer so sure about final truths, what will be the alternative?

Toward the civilisation type⁹

According to an article by *National Geographic* (1923), civilisation describes a complex way of life characterised by urban areas, shared methods of administrative infrastructure, and division of labour. The notion of shared, communal communication is one of the building blocks in civil societal development. Shared communication is another element that all civilisations share. Shared communication may include spoken language, alphabets, numeric systems, signs, ideas, symbols, and illustration and representation. Shared communication allows the infrastructure necessary for technology, trade, cultural exchange, and government to be developed and shared throughout the civilisation.



National Geographic. The Key Concepts of Civilisation. 2023. Public domain. For academic purposes only.

According to Mações, political reason should organise collective life around principles that express our fundamental relation to truth, to the world and to each other. 'The idea of organizing a state around a distinctive civilisation is increasingly gaining ground around the world' (Mações 2023:18).

It seems that the time of nationalist or even theocratic states are fading away. Mações therefore argues that one cannot anymore place our hopes for delivering a good life and for political salvation only on Western values. Thus, the plea for a civilisation perspective. 'The civilisation state is a third type beyond both liberalism and nationalism' (Mações 2023:18).

Mações (2023) also explains:

A civilisation looks up from the world of blood and instinct to the world of light and progress. The challenge today is to turn

9. According to Tharoor (2023), 'civilizations' rest on an overarching framework for social and political life subsuming elements of religion, ethnicity, and language, while liberalism seeks to transcend such elements in claiming universal applicability for its values and principles. States, thus understood, might well have a territory and a people, but their centre of gravity would lie in the way of life embodied in the state. Tharoor (2023) further explains:

The illusion of a homogeneous people inhabiting an ancestral land is not part of the logic of a civilisation state. Civilization is not identity, but identity emerges from a consciousness of belonging to a civilization — Christian, Islamic, Arab, Orthodox, Hindu, Jewish, whatever (n.p.).

revolt against liberalism into a civilizational rather than a national project. (p. 18)¹⁰

According to Tharoor (2023), liberal states permit multiple parties, ethnicities, religions and (where necessary) languages to flourish, whereas 'civilisation states' do not, or seek to subordinate these multiplicities to a civilisational idea or political philosophy.



Above: Depiction of a consciousness of belonging to a civilisation state: The mutuality of understanding. Tharoor (2023) formulates this phenomenon as follows:

The very concept of a civilization state is profoundly illiberal. It implies that any attempt to introduce 'imported' ideas like democracy or human rights must be resisted, because they are 'foreign' to the civilization in whose name the state is being constructed.

The civilisation state is creating a sense of coherence and belongingness despite differences.¹¹

The previous-mentioned notion of a 'civilisation state' could be viewed as one option for transforming the public of marketplace encounters. However, when any form of political, social and community engagement are proposed, the core problematic question remains: Despite political tensions and schisms, violent campaigns about human rights, cultural and tribal, and linguistic and moral differences, how could the discipline of practical theology contribute to uphold and strengthen the moral fibre of our civil society?

The quest for morality: Reducing suffering

It seems that the current 'powder keg' in South Africa is void of morality, goodness, and beauty. Most needed is a new moral basis to prevent democracy developing into the

10. According to Zhang Weiwei (2012), a civilisation state, or civilisational state, is a country that represents not just a historical territory, ethnolinguistic group, or body of governance, but a unique civilisation. The term 'civilisation state' was first coined in the 1990s to describe China. Proponents of the label, 'civilisation state', describe China as having a unique historical and cultural unity, derived from a continuous process of cultural syncretism.

11. See Tharoor Shahsi, 2023, *Civilization states are profoundly illiberal*, viewed 18 May 2023, from <https://www.noemamag.com/civilization-states-are-profoundly-illiberal/>.

so-called neutral stance of amorality,¹² i.e. the dilemma of the absolutism of democratism, wherein the majority abuse their political power to gain from the system to the detriment of the strange other, the outcast, and the suffering minority groups. Therefore, the urgent quest for a new moral awareness.

The quest for morality is not a plea for a new form of civil societal legalism. Harari (2018) warns:

There is something deeply troubling and dangerous about people who avoid killing just because 'God says so'. Such people are motivated by obedience rather than compassion, and what will they do if they come to believe that their god commands them to kill heretics, adulterers, and foreigners? (p. 239–240)

Morality rather points to a new form of reframing the notion of suffering-with the stranger, the underdog, and the exploited human beings. Harari (2018) further warns:

Morality doesn't mean following 'divine commands'. It means reducing 'suffering'. Hence in order to act morally, you don't need to believe in myth or story. You just need to develop a deep appreciation of suffering. (p. 234)¹³

In his book *Morality*, Jonathan Sacks (2020) argues that to restore the common good in divided times, within the absence of a shared moral code (the danger of anomie), one must shift from the arena and politics of competition to the arena of cooperation; from the ruthlessness of activist demands to the mercy of sharing and the covenant of shared belonging and the devolution of collective responsibility.

Imagine now that [you] have a certain measure of influence, or friendship, or knowledge or love and you decide to share that with nine others: You do not have less. You may have more. That is because these are social goods: goods that exist by sharing. These are goods that have a **moral or spiritual dimension**, and they have this rare quality that the more we share, the more we have. (p. 1)

Schipani and Bueckert (2009) explain that morality means to be compassionate and to embrace suffering to care:

Moral character that integrates a plurality of attitudes and virtues such as: capacity for wonder and respect in the face of the stranger; sensitivity and receptivity; courage to risk and to be surprised; freedom to be vulnerable and open to learning and growth; disposition to recognize, accept, and honor those deemed to be different; hospitality grounded in compassion, humility, and generosity; passion to care and creative energy to transform the inherent violence of separation, prejudice, and the alienation into a way of being with (empathy) and for (sympathy) the other as neighbor and partner in care and healing. (p. 317)

12. **Amorality** (also known as *amoralism*) is an absence of, indifference towards, disregard for, or incapacity for *morality*. Thus, the stance that ethics is merely a smoke screen for legalism. Some simply refer to amorality as a case of not being concerned for the moral implication of actions. Immediately, the danger of a total immoral stance in life emerges. However, amoral should not be confused with *immoral*, which refers to an agent doing or thinking something they know or believe to be wrong.

13. 'Secular ethics relies not on obeying the edicts of this or that god, but rather on a deep appreciation of suffering' (Harari 2028:239).

The unpopular and irrational alternative: 'We really must work like mad'

I want to come back to the very challenging option of Desmond Tutu (2004:33): 'We really must work like mad to eradicate poverty'.

To probe civil societal dynamics and to become engaged in the turmoil of violent unrest and xenophobic fear, pastoral caregiving is faced with many options.

- *Ethos of equality*: Humanising the inhumane predicament of abused, suppressed, underprivileged and poor people – encounter the underdog, the stranger, the outcast in society.
- The urgent demand of creating a moral basis for change and peace. *Educational and pedagogic approach to community care*.
- *Social engineering*: Enforcing change by means of the law, the Constitution and political decision-making, reforming, and reshaping by means of rapid change and revolutionary destabilisation of unjust or unfair institutions; #MustFall campaigns and the decolonising of established social structures and relationships.
- *Democratisation of life*: Fostering human dignity by means of an edict of human rights and constitutional governing. Rule by means of court cases to drive social and judicial change.
- *Redistribution of wealth*: Robin Hood tactics – tax the wealthy to give to the poor.
- *The greening of life*: Drive the optimisation of human welfare by means of 'green energy'.

All the verbs (humanising, creating a moral basis, enforcing change by means of the law, fostering human dignity, redistributing wealth, greening all spheres of life) in the previous-mentioned options, are indeed important. One therefore needs a kind of mixed approach. There is no one kind of solution. Perhaps, there is no solution to the powder keg of unrest and severe poverty, driven by the global force of a market driven, capitalistic economy.

The mad option

While taking the mad option of Desmond Tutu seriously, it becomes obvious that, in the face of the complexity factor, pastoral caregiving should shift from a problem-solving approach to a community engagement approach. This approach should explore the irrational option of an ethos of sacrifice, based on divine madness. Paul calls this spiritual option: *The weakness and foolishness of God* (1 Cor 1:18–25). The divine sacrificial option of a *theologia crucis* implies the radical engagement of a theology of pastoral madness.

Toward the praxis of pastoral madness

Within a praxis approach, the engagement of civil society comprises of the following:

- Mobilising local spiritual energy and goodwill among ordinary people and citizens outside governmental structures, to organise themselves within local communities around social issues of common interest or need.
- Voicing the needs and concerns of ordinary citizens and protecting basic human rights.
- Addressing the quest for human dignity within the context of processes of democratisation and transformation (caring for the well-being of humans in society realities).
- Shaping and empowering human capital to maximise social efficiency within local communities; developing existing human capital by means of information and education.
- Reaching out to basic community needs with actions of diaconical service.
- Creating public spaces of hospitable caring and friendship – befriending. Thus, the option of Plato (1946:13): To promote friendship is to do good (Singer 2015:23–74) to an honest person; enemies can only be harmed when they are wicked – the unjust. ‘Then only the just man is happy; injustice will involve unhappiness’ (Plato 1946:38). In a nutshell, justice together with all the other virtues, are geared to address the quest for human dignity: ‘the improvement of a man, about becoming good’ (Piechowiak 2019:69).
- Advocating on behalf of the voiceless to create more structure and order within societal disorder.

Spiritual madness: An irrational appreciation of suffering

The verbing actions of mobilising, voicing, addressing, shaping, empowering, reaching out, creating, advocating, all of them are indeed relevant to penetrate the predicament of democratic disillusionment and violent unrest. However, they are not meant for rational and easy solutions, but most of times, for irrational and painful engagements that will test the intention behind the action, the significance of severe forms of sacrifice and the pain of spiritual woundedness. All these mentioned verbs are exponents of what is meant by the challenge to reduce suffering by means of ‘suffering’, i.e. the hospitable companionship of an ethos of sacrifice, and the dangerous risk of befriending hospitality; an appreciation of suffering (Harari 2018:234).

An appreciation of suffering and the challenge to reduce suffering by means of suffering, perhaps sounds like an irrational paradox. However, it creates an awareness of a new kind of spiritual and pastoral madness.

The psychiatrist Sean Baumann (2023) points out that madness is not about the classified abnormality of being insane and incompetent. Madness points to an irrationality that is prepared to persist in hope against all rational forms of hope. Madness is about the courage to be, by moving into an in-between space; being on the edge of life. For many of us, what lies beyond conventional portrayals of sheer rationality, is often shrouded in mystery, misconception, and fear. The human mind, and therefore that what we call ‘soul’, is in fact intangible, mysterious, and ephemeral.

Baumann (2023) writes:

A patient is standing in the middle of the river. He gazes across the water to the city and the mountain above where the sun is setting. His back is turned to the hospital. The nurses are waiting for him patiently on the riverbank. He seems uncertain whether to cross the river or to return. There is no danger. He is on the edge, in an in-between space, as is the hospital where I have worked as a specialist psychiatrist for over 25 years. (n.p.)

Being and living on the edge means, that madness refers to inter alia behaviour that is not reasonable when considering certain situations, but not necessarily meaningless. Madness can lead to confusing (what they in technical psychiatric terminology call, a *disorder*). On the other hand, it can indicate an irrational perspective causing excitement and uniqueness (see Baumann 2023; Maj 2012:137–138).

What then is the implication of madness as an irrational persistence, to hope against all forms of successful outcomes and hopeful solutions, while one is at the same time prepared to embrace the compassionate option of reducing suffering, by means of suffering?

Pastoral madness: The suffering option of divine foolishness

The notion of shifting pastoral care, does not imply the following:

- The introduction or design for a new model in pastoral caregiving.
- A kind of quick-fix-approach to heal the scars in civil society, or personal life.
- Problem-solving techniques, or a therapeutic skill that can change the whole of society.
- The exchange of the tradition of *cura animarum* and spiritual care for a humanistic model of merely social engineering, politisation¹⁴ and *ideological politicisation*, i.e., *change and transformation for the sake of gaining political control over others in terms of a power struggle*. Due to power struggle, ‘politics is war by other means’ (Foucault 2023).¹⁵

In *Madness civilization: a history of insanity in the age of reason* (2001), Michel Foucault sends out a warning regarding the struggle for supremacy,¹⁶ i.e. to win control over the haves in order to shift power to the not-haves, while ending up with

14. *Politicisation* is a concept in political science and theory, used to explain how ideas, entities or collections of facts are given a political tone or character, and are consequently assigned to the ideas and strategies of a particular group or party; thus becoming the subject of contestation.

15. For Michael Foucault, apparently peaceful and civilised social arrangements are unfortunately supported by people locked in a struggle for supremacy, which is eternally susceptible to change, via the force of that struggle itself.

16. Foucault saw there had been three major shifts in the treatment of madness in the period under discussion. The first, with the Renaissance, saw a **new respect for madness**. Previously, madness had been seen as an alien force to be expelled, but now madness was seen as a form of wisdom. This abruptly changed with the beginning of the Enlightenment in the seventeenth century. Now rationality was valorised more than anything else, and its opposite, madness, was excluded completely. The unreasonable was excluded from discourse, and congenitally unreasonable people were physically removed from society and confined in asylums. **The History of Madness** thus takes seriously the connection between philosophical discourse and political reality. Ideas about reason are not merely taken to be abstract concerns, but as having real social implications, affecting every facet of the lives of thousands upon thousands of people who were considered mad, and indeed, thereby, altering the structure of society (Foucault 2001).

the predicament that the haves-nots become culprits of the abuse of power, by means of the power insanity (the insane paradox of power voluptuary). With reference to the above-mentioned, the warning of the political madness of struggling for supremacy, which is evident in democratism, should be opposed by the irrationality, the foolishness of an ethos of sacrificial validation of the other.

Madness is a way of seizing *in extremis* the illuminating groundwork of the truth revealed by means of sacrifices that underlies our more specific realisations of what we are about. Therefore, the notion of sacrificial offering exposes how madness reflects a different view on the realm of human suffering. Crucifixions reveal a strange form of madness (*Introduction* by David Cooper, in Foucault 2001:viii).

In terms of pastoral caregiving, the notion of a crucified Christ, crucified in our place on our behalf (the spiritual violence of substitutionary suffering) (1 Cor 1:18–25) exposes the following irrational, pastoral challenge: Become mad with compassionate caregiving (comfort) and divine foolishness (sacrificial love).

Comfort in pastoral caregiving, as a theological and spiritual endeavour, is based on the following mad, strange kind of rather irrational wisdom and divine paradox: The weak, crucified Christ portrayed as the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:18–25). Divine wisdom is revealed ambivalently, i.e. in folly and weakness. The wisdom-metaphor unmask reality with the aid of an apparent contradiction: A crucified and suffering God (weakness) exposed as the power of our salvation; the irrational logos of the cross (*logos tou staurou*). This notion of power is marked as ‘foolishness’ (a variant of the aesthetic category of ugliness). It affirms God’s identification with the vulnerability of suffering human beings. It opposes destructive domination and affirms constructive opposition. God becomes the helpless innocent victim of the Roman soldiers. The sacredness and divinity reside in the cry of protest: ‘My God, my God why have you forsaken me?’ Within the act of forgiveness, Jesus as the icon [*eikon*] of God, not of Roman power, became an innocent and helpless victim of Roman imperialism.

Pastoral madness presupposes a spiritual risk. Davies (2001:xx) formulates this mad risk as follows: ‘If compassion is knowingly to put oneself at the risk for the sake of the other, then self-dispossessive virtue is predicated upon a prior state of self-possession’. Translated into theological language, one should link compassionate madness to the discovery that in Jesus Christ as the, ‘compassion of God’ (cf. Lk 1:78), God has already preceded us. By means of the stigmata of the suffering Christ, compassion is about divine madness: ‘... divine self-emptying and self-dispossession for the sake of creation’ (Davies 2001:xx).

Compassion thus creates a human bond of xenophilia. In this sense, xenophilia penetrates xenophobia. It displays human dignity. ‘*Humanitas* is to be displayed to those who are

“suitable” and “unsuitable” alike, and “this is done humanely [*humane*]” when it is done without hope on reward’ (Lactantius in Davies 2001:35).

The madness of compassionate xenophilia is captured by the hospice metaphor (*hospitium*). Hospitality implies the irrational risk to invite the stranger, outsider, enemy into the comfortable zone of your personal comfort zone,¹⁷ i.e. befriending the strange other (Opke 2021).

Conclusion

My choice for a praxis approach to human suffering within contexts of civil societal unrest and demeaning forms of social stigmatisation like xenophobia, is the transformation of ecclesial and ministerial paradigms emanating from cathedral thinking (churches as demonstration of clerical power and abstract liturgies) into xenodochia thinking, i.e. churches as safe havens for the stigmatised outsiders in civil society. In this regard, the theological notion of the folly of God should serve as the Christian spiritual cornerstone for implementing the concept, *God as friend and partner or host for life*. The latter is our choice for the madness of pastoral engagements in civil society. The sacrificial grace of God illustrates sheer divine irrationality: xenophilia as xenodochia.

The following photo illustrates pastoral madness, exemplified in an ecclesial space of hospitable xenophilia and caring xenodochia:



Refugees exposed to xenophobic violence, gathering in the Methodist Church. (Refugees in Methodist Church, Cape Town, South Africa 2019).

During the xenophobic violence, many foreigners, displaced refugees, and illegal migrants found safety and care within the church in the downtown of Cape Town. The picture illustrates exactly what is meant by pastoral madness, by

17. In the Old Testament, Abraham is depicted as the prototype of the good host in Jewish culture (Wright 1983:431), even though he was considered a sojourner in the land (Gn 23:4). Hebrews 13:3 summons one not to forget to entertain strangers, for by doing so, some has unwittingly entertained angels. Pohl (1999:24) points out that Abraham’s kindness to the strangers connects hospitality to the presence of God, hospitality actualises the blessings and promises of God.

summoning communities of faith to become havens of safety and healing: hospitable *xenodochia*.

However, due to hospitable madness, appropriate theory is time and again met by painful resistance and disillusionment. The outbreaking of violence within the church building of the Methodist Church, and the fact that, after the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Athlone (Cape Flats) gave shelter to displaced people, some of them broke into the church and stole costly liturgical objects, while looting the place. This very disillusioning event proves the fact that compassionate madness, being with the strange, even violent, and hostile other is not about 'success stories' of performed truth, but narratives of even painful disillusionments – pastoral madness; pastoral morality: combat suffering, by means of suffering in founding a spiritual ideology, for the creation of a 'civilisation state' in pastoral care.

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