

## Scaffolding leadership dispositions for being radically truthful in the *civitas dei* and the *civitas mundi*: An imaginative educative ethical-justice praxis<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Societies across the globe need a new kind of leadership education characterised with a disposition for radical truth-telling. This ideal should go beyond generalised and familiarised ethical leadership formation. Contemporary leaders should become truth tellers and truth seekers for justice. Attaining such a disposition calls us towards an imaginative ethical-educative praxis for justice. Scaffolding leadership-ethical-presences towards being human may prove indispensable. The rediscovery of a vocation for an ethically re-envisioned educational revolution is called for.

### Keywords

*Leadership dispositions; vocation; ethical; justice; educational revolution*

## 1. Introduction

This study is part of a series of two articles, the first article is titled, *Reconfiguring Christian religious leadership pedagogy within a bipolar cultural tension of diffusion and discrepancy*.<sup>2</sup> The latter addressed the philosophical question of the wounds of humanity as an inherent cultural heritage to be prioritised in religious leadership education and or general

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leadership practices. This article views the prospect of how didactics can reshape leadership education with particular reference to a disposition for being human by being and seeking an authentic ethical-justice praxis.

I presented the Augustinian theology as coined in *The City of God* in the first article. The *civitas dei* provides a true analysis of the signs of our times and the challenges it presents for contemporaries (Gutiérrez 2014:5). Augustine’s notion of contemporary human life as a dialectic between the City of God (*civitas dei*) and the City of the world (*civitas mundi*),<sup>3</sup> informs the educative theory in this article (Wolterstorff 2004:16). These *civitates* are spiritual kingdoms, objective realities; more so, objective spiritual realities of which we are members and our cultural heritage are expressions of that kingdom. The question remains: How do we as contemporary leaders behave as members of these *civitates* and what defines our membership; and how do we express our cultural heritage? Bonhoeffer (1970) may offer a response to the current immoral, amoral, spineless leaders so prevalent in their self-righteous behaviour and systematic-political, and psychologically-engineered bankruptcy to hold a democratic country and its poor captured (Kgosana & Shoba 2019:4):

Now there is no more pretence, no more hypocrisy or self-violence, no more compulsion to be something other, better and more ideal than what one is. God loves the real man. God became a real man. To be formed in the likeness of the Crucified – this means being a man sentenced by God. In his daily existence man carries with him God’s sentence of death, the necessity of dying before God for the sake of sin ... Every man dies the death of a sinner. Humbly he bears the scars on his body and soul, the marks of the wounds which sin inflicts on him. He cannot raise himself up above any other man or set himself before him as a model, for he knows himself to be the greatest of all sinners. He bears all the suffering imposed on him, in

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3 “The civitas lives and is realised therein. It is realised in and by eating and drinking, cobbling and carpentry, work and play, science and education, law and government, love and worship; nothing human but enters into the city. The civitas is not one, or some, nor even all the objects tangible and intangible, which man produces or assimilates, but is the city that is objectified in the producing and assimilating of the cultural objects” (Wolterstorff 2004:16).

the knowledge that it serves to enable him to die with his own will and to accept God's judgement upon him (Bonhoeffer 1970:81).

Nelson Mandela (1994) wore, embodied and articulated humility, the scars of oppression on his body and soul, marks of wounds inflicted upon him, suffering unto death so that South Africans may become free and responsible *civitates*.

## 2. Towards a new kind of leadership education: radical truth-telling

Leadership education that can appreciate Freire's (2001) vision may realise the humanity of the *civitas mundi*: "We are in need of a humanized society with cultural freedom in which we can freely choose values and practices of action and fully participate with human curiosity to demand and attain power and self-determination" (Freire 2001:19). What we need is educational participation in a re-visionary ethical, political and socio-economic dispensation to reshape the lives of the marginalised (Miller-McLemore 1998:194). It is unethical to live or to defend the binaries between the haves and the have-nots or to deny the existence of social classes or to promote politics for the powerful. It becomes impossible to foster vigilant citizenry (Freire 1998:15): "The intent is to break silences, to challenge the status quo, to participate in what womanist theologian Emilie Towns calls, the "radical truth telling" required by an ethic of justice and love' (Miller-McLemore 1998:194). Today's youth and school learners need ethical limits to halt the current abyss of absurdity in public education in South Africa: "It is just as immoral to have our voices silenced, our "body interrupted", as to use the voice to falsify the truth, to lie, deceive, deform" (Freire 1998:66). Bear in mind that it is often "more difficult for people living in deprived communities with high unemployment, social breakdown, a sense of hopelessness to exhibit morally exemplary forms of behaviour" (Muir 2014:203). The tension between these two views does not dissolve our ethical responsibility to live within ethical limits and to exhibit moral models for the youth. Attaining the disposition of justice-in-shalom necessitates ethical formation in doing justice and being just by struggling against injustice (Wolterstorff 2004:135). Therefore: "Practical theology can be a vehicle for pragmatic, socially informed moral and theological analysis"

to bring to light the particularity of our human struggles embedded in hegemonic power and social power relations (Eiesland 1998:103). Building on Theodor Adorno and Karl Barth's premise, Wolterstorff (2004) reflects on despair from the perspective of redemption<sup>4</sup> "to engage in revolt and rebellion for a specific uprising to defeat bad possibilities by preventing its actualisation" (in Wolterstorff 2004:135).<sup>5</sup> These would "oppress people and deprive them of their rights, which violate justice" (Wolterstorff 2004:136).

Abstract political, religious and moral declarations do not actualise in concrete action. Compare for instance, Ackermann's (1998:97) observation:

When racist laws kept people apart in my country, the eucharistic rite of sharing one cup took on revolutionary significance. At some altar rails there was no apartheid. Further exploration of the radical implications of the eucharist calls for imaginative praxis.

The eucharist as an essential part of liturgy signifies and confirms the Christian's life in the world, however, liturgy without justice vice versa does not hold any credibility. Theology is task to develop leaders who can fight for justice against all injustice (Müller 2002:202–203). "[R]evolution begins precisely with revolution in our daily lives" (Foundez 1998b:25). For example, liberation theology must prioritise human experience by integrating the values of empathy, justice and care with rationality and agency (Graham 1998:139). Therefore, the need to combat trampled human dignity, in the concrete daily struggles of the vast majority of humankind, "in liberating love, and in the building of a new, just, and comradely society – as gift of the Kingdom of God [*civitas dei*]" (Gutiérrez 2014:12).

Social institutions are required to "reject justice-destroying actualities and possibilities in a specific uprising" (Wolterstorff 2004:136):

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- 4 "In a way, the topic of a metanoia of humankind is confronting us, mirrored by those whose 'imagination turns to the alternative using the given society as raw material for a para-society', not only protesting against the powers 'up' but stepping 'aside' (horizontal dimension), building up elements of a secular or religious counter-culture. The previous 'political power-paradigm' is not being replaced, but overlaid by a 'life-style paradigm.'" (Nipkow 1985:209).
  - 5 Resistance of the popular masses lies at the heart of their revolt against forms of resistance and its expression (Foundez 1998:28).

Nowhere is the complex mixture of anguish, anger, anticipation and the search for truth and for an ethical foundation for our society more evident than in a unique process taking place at present in South Africa. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (set up in 1995) [The Zondo Commission, set in 2019] explores past [and present] violations of human rights [State capture, institutionalized corruption], people of faith are challenged to wrestle with the meaning of grace, forgiveness, justice and reconciliation (Ackermann 1998:77).

A commitment to abolish injustice in building a new society remains our collective unfinished business. Every form of exploitation must be exposed and rejected for a more human and dignified life; the creation of a new delightful humanity (Gutiérrez 2014:174). Leadership education that builds on a foundation of a culture of human rights will ensure that the suffering and injustices of the past will never resurface (Botman & Petersen in Ackermann 1998:77).

### **3. Beyond ethical leadership formation: truth tellers and truth seekers for justice**

The ethical formation of young leaders in terms of social justice is crucial (Wolterstorff 2004:136). Religious education is synonymous with “social reconstruction by leading people to social action to engage in political activity to reform our economic system until justice and equity is achieved” (Westerhoff in Groome 1980:120). The church, schools and society need to develop leaders to think politically, socially, economically, theologically and ethically (Westerhoff in Groome 1980:120): “How can we cultivate the doing of justice and the struggle for it in young leaders? How can we cultivate the *disposition* in them to act accordingly?” More so: “How can we form their character to act justly or the disposition to respect and struggle for the rights of the powerless and vulnerable?” (Wolterstorff 2004). The answer to these questions goes beyond mere “moral education” or didactic issues of strategy, technique and how-to.<sup>6</sup> It calls, for instance,

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6 Consider the implications of Ackermann’s (1998:88) proposal: “Daring and imaginative praxis was at the heart of the struggle for liberation in South Africa: defiance campaigns, marches, innovative methods of protest. ... To be ethically imaginative is to be prepared

for an imaginative<sup>7</sup> ethical praxis to actualise justice and truth-telling. Of paramount import are issues concerning goals. What sort of person is it that we want to educate? What goals are the strategies concerning moral education meant to serve? (Wolterstorff 2004). “Goals determine methodologies and methodologies are determined by either concurrent or in-concurrent goals” (Wolterstorff 2004:137). Ethical formation engenders reflection on the type of leaders or teachers we seek to develop (Wolterstorff 2004:137): “The education of the teacher should be so ethically grounded that any gap between professional and ethical formation is to be deplored” (Freire 2001:24). It is for this reason that the universal human ethic condemns global ideological discourses with a fearlessness that opposes exploitation of labour, manipulation and pseudo ideologies “that clothe a rumour into truth and truth into a mere rumour” (Freire 2001:23): “We need truth-tellers and truth-seekers in search for justice and accountability for the horror, pain and the shattering of illusions” (Ackermann 1998:76).

The challenge is to learn to protest ethically with tolerance and humility by learning the meaning of hope and respect. It is not a passive form of protest and tolerance, but an expression of hope in action (Foundez 1998:24).

Human well-being and human flourishing are at the core of God’s vision (Wolterstorff 2004:141). Freire (1999) raises alarm for the conception of “being” as anything *a priori* in history. The emphasis should be on “vocation” or “calling” of “being more” or of humanisation as ontological vocation of the human being (Freire 1999). “We are called to liberate oppressors who dehumanized in dehumanizing the oppressed” (Freire 1999).

The Old Testament concept of shalom encapsulates human flourishing with the ideal of the shalom community in contrast to self-gratification and a superfluous autonomous self. Shalom is about justice by virtue of the fact of being humans living in a just community – an ethical community of leaders (Wolterstorff 2004:141–141). Justice and delight or happiness are

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to stand alongside ‘the others’, the suffering and the marginalized, to hear the cry of need and then, compelled by the ethical demands of imagination, to respond to the need with healing praxis. Acts of imagination are ethically accountable to the common desire for justice and healing and as such are tested in community.”

7 Consider Brueggemann’s (in Biri 2015:38, 40) views of “prophetic imagination as an epistemological and linguistic praxis of the prophet imagining new realities by defying oppressive realities through critical faith-consciousness”.

essential attributes of shalom. Justice combats the marginality of the poor and powerless (Wolterstorff 2004:143).

#### 4. Towards an imaginative ethical-educative praxis

The challenge for an appropriate educational praxis to focus on justice in the *civitas dei* lies at the centre of the question: How can we educate young leaders to engage in that “specific uprising” Barth calls for? (in Wolterstorff 2004:145). How can we cultivate in these leaders the disposition to act justly and to struggle against injustice? (Wolterstorff 2004:145). Ethical formation should actualise an imaginative ethical praxis with leadership eyes, ears, feet and hands that are sensitive for the wounds of humanity. We need a determination of ethical leadership to redress the inequalities within “the complex intersection of race, class and gender” (Howell 2009:148). The bureaucratisation of the mind which destroys socially created relationships between language, thought and reality can inhibit the achievement of full citizenship (Freire 1998:2–3). We need an educative ethic praxis that confronts and deters labour, socio-economic, political, racial, gender and class discrimination (Freire 2001:24).

To advance liberating ethical dispositions we will need to do the following:

- (1) Build a cognitive framework to reflect on issues of social justice within wounded contexts and experiences of humanity (Wolterstorff 2004:145–146). A cognitive framework should include a *Christian social ethic* to deal with new cyber concerns and unfamiliar issues (Wolterstorff 2004:146–147). Such an ethic should relate to *shalom* and the Christian life in terms of justice (Wolterstorff 2004:146–147).
- (2) Apply a structural analysis of society to deal with structural issues of social justice. “Social structures that feed domination and exploitation such as capitalism or the notions of domination and exploitation as merely personal and accidental, should be rejected and redressed” (Wolterstorff 2004:147).<sup>8</sup> Social analysis should be truly informed by the Christian gospel (Wolterstorff 2004:148).

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8 “The actuality is that the Christian community is, at best, an unreliable ally of the state, a fact underscored whenever it joins with others who are not of its fold to witness against all those economies that trade on violence, ecological rape, and human indignity, and whenever it embodies an imagination for human society [...]” (Goroncy 2017:36).

- (3) Integrate social ethic with structural analysis in terms of justice issues with a critical consciousness of affirmation and disapproval (Wolterstorff 2004:148). We can only succeed in shaping young leaders to redress issues of justice if we ourselves act justly and with mercy (Wolterstorff 2004:148). We also need to value worship and the liturgy to form and transform ethical Christian leadership in terms of identity and action (Murphy 2004:16):

Therefore, an emancipatory use of the Eucharistic motif of sacrifice must be informed by critical consciousness about both the demand for sacrifice of unjust power and the complexity of interlocking oppressions (Ackermann 1998:100).

Worship and liturgies played a formidable role during the liberation struggle in South Africa. It may prove invaluable for ethical leadership education today (Ackermann 1998).

## **5. Scaffolding leadership-ethical-presence towards being human**

The world is in dire need of a leadership capacity to strategize dispositions by being truthful human beings that prioritise guilt and social sin in honouring the wounds of humanity.

Foremost, our being in the world is greater than just “being”, it is a “presence”, a relational presence to the world and to others – a presence that can transform, intervene and reflect on life – a presence to embrace and redress the wounds of humanity (Freire 2001:25–26).

There are multiple examples of a relational presence of past leaders regarding the vulnerable such as Mother Theresa of Calcutta, Henry Nouwen, Nelson Mandela, et cetera (Nouwen 1984:31; Mandela 1994).

To educate is essentially to form our “presence” in this world (Freire 2001:39). Wolterstorff (2004:148) proposes three ethical formative strategies to develop a cognitive framework for young leaders to act justly and to struggle against injustice.<sup>9</sup> He proposes the advancement of a

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9 “Moral education will remain blind if it is not aware of the self-destructive potentials of modern progress and if it does not start from this line” (Nipkow 1985:204).



disposition for reasons, discipline, modelling and empathy. Van der Ven (1998) offers similar proposals – both informal (discipline, socialisation) and formal (transmission, development, clarification, emotional formation and character formation or moral formation.<sup>10</sup>) Hence, the exploration of mere reasons for acting in a certain way is inadequate (Groome and Freire in Wolterstorff 2004:149).<sup>11</sup> The point is to shape dispositions to action through *discipline* and to respect the authority embodied in discipline and the embedded values and norms of society (Wolterstorff 2004:149; Van der Ven 1998:49). Discipline should go beyond rewards or punishment. It should employ words of praise and words of dispraise; words of encouragement and of chastisement. Discipline “is an indispensable component in our struggle for justice” (Wolterstorff 2004:150). Discipline in the public-school system in, for instance, South Africa, is in dire need of social justice and liberation.

Modelling for example, should become a progressive formative strategy by which exemplary leaders can model disciplined ethical actions and behaviour (Wolterstorff 2004:150). Modelling is not just about imitating someone or something. It can also change us in our ways of being; our imagination and expectations (Wolterstorff 2004:151). Nipkow (1985:199) refers to the transformation of our value priorities. Empathy for the oppressed under conditions of injustice is another example of fundamental importance in ethical formation (Wolterstorff 2004:151).<sup>12</sup> Van der Ven (1998:49ff) refers to empathy as support, warmth, affection, intimacy and love:

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- 10 Moral education on the ethical implications or consequences of contemporary challenges such as the wounds of humanity “are not sufficiently met by a principle-oriented ethical theory only (“de-ontological” ethics) looking at what “should” be, but must also lead to a consequences-oriented ethics (“teleological” ethics) which is bothered about the maybe fatal side-effects despite best intentions (Nipkow 1985:211).
  - 11 I depart from Wolterstorff’s (2004:149) notion that Freire (1998) and Groome’s (1980) pedagogy only focuses on the continued development of regenerative themes, because: “He invites learners to come out of apathy and the conformism – akin to being ‘dismissed from life’ – in which they often find themselves. Freire challenges them to understand that they are themselves the makers of culture, leading them to learn the anthropological meaning of culture” (Freire 1998:xi).
  - 12 Developmental and anthropological perspectives on values such as “love”, “care” and “compassion” are being ignored, values which are typical of humanity with its emphasis on reconciliation and peace (Nipkow 1985:210).

The most effective way of doing this is by presenting to the person the human faces and the human voices of suffering “the voices of the night” (Brueggemann in Wolterstorff 2004:151). “[W]hat prevents Afrikaners from genuinely hearing the suffering in the voices, and seeing the suffering in the faces, of the blacks in South Africa, and then responding appropriately, is the awful fear of the consequences for their lives if they did respond appropriately. This is a species of the “rich young ruler” syndrome ... an important contribution we as teachers can make to ethical formation of our [young leaders] is dealing with such fear (Wolterstorff 2004:152).

Ethical formation embedded in empathy necessitates dialogue, communication and intercommunication in search of love, hope, humility, faith and mutual trust (Freire 1974:45). We are called towards “a true quality of life” by stopping ecological and human destruction, particularly the organised exploitation of the poor and dependent nations (Nipkow 1985:200). The implications of Nipkow’s (1985) and Wolterstorff’s (2004) proposal are radical for education, our lives and for contemporary institutions in the *civitas dei* and *civitas mundi*:

The skills for coping with the reality that the powers are still alive and active in our world, rebelling against the Lord God and crushing his human children. The despairing sense of inutility – the feeling that our struggle against injustice leads to nothing or even worse conditions. [O]nly in the messianic light do the tears of God over the world’s injustice show up. Beneath and behind the injustice of this world are the tears of the wounded God (Wolterstorff 2004:153–154).

Injustice cannot be treated as a mere human condition. The fact that most moral educational theorists focus on values and personal growth is highly unethical. We should prioritise guilt and social sin and embrace and model empathy (Nipkow 1985:196). Religious people have an inherent conscience to redress guilt and social sin through Christian religious practices (Engemann 2015:66). These practices are a form of being human or becoming human in and through religious faith and human life (Engemann 2015:64–65). Human beings are directive and purposeful and can exert dignity as instruction of leadership education to enhance basic human needs such as health, education and justice (Engemann 2015:71).

Furthermore, governments should support humans to this end. They are tasked by God (1 Pet 2:14) with a judicial authority to punish the wicked and praise those that do good as well as a right to educate for goodness, justice or righteousness (Bonhoeffer 1970:340). Human justice should be inspired by divine justice by advancing a preferential option for the poor and oppressed (Dreyer 2002:90).

## **6. Towards a vocation for an ethically re-envisioned educational revolution**

Human-leadership-beings and our need to excel as human beings of the *civitas dei* and *civitas mundi* is a deeply emancipatory act to stem engineered baseless pronouncements by leaders who suffocate and oppress humanity, dignity and delight of ordinary people (Engemann 2015:79). Engemann (2015) may in this case, resonate with Freire's (in Elias 1994:136ff) theology of prophetic theology, a theology of hope, which denounces oppression and oppressors and announces a transformed world. Freire's (in Elias 1994:137) theology is essentially anthropological and grounded primarily in the actual life of individuals in the world. Thus, "theology can better lead to cultural action for freedom, and to conscientisation". Liberation theologians say Freire (in Elias 1994:137) can assist "all Christians to recover their vocation to challenge injustice and oppression in society" by advancing the humanisation of human beings.

An ethically re-envisioned educational revolution is a necessity if we are to deal effectively with the wounds of humanity. There is an emerging new Christian and non-Christian spirituality driven by a collective responsibility for the plight of humanity (Nipkow 1985:207–208).

## **Conclusion**

Immoral, amoral and spineless leaders belong to the dustbins of a forgotten age. A healthy and prosperous world requires new kind of leaders who are educated to with a disposition for radical truth telling and living. This ideal should go beyond generalised and familiarised moral or ethical leadership formation. In essence, leaders should become truth tellers and truth seekers for justice and the wellbeing of humanity. Attaining such dispositions

necessitate an imaginative ethical-justice educative praxis. Scaffolding leadership ethical-justice-presences towards being human may prove indispensable. The rediscovery of a vocation for an ethically re-envisioned educational revolution could be our only resort.

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