

AFTERWORD

STRUCTURAL UNITY?

The foregoing research design was presented on the basis of associative networks of meaning derived from the metaphor of architecture. By making use of concepts associated with this metaphor, the domain for the interdisciplinary dialogue between practical theology and future studies was traced out from the very first page.

Concepts such as *construction* and *reconstruction* were put forward in the research, in order to create a possible model of a *theologia habitus* for the future workplace. In these accents, and in the proposal of a specific design, I am cognisant of the accents and semantic content of the reconstruction metaphor, in which there is an inherent implication that existing constructions are no longer effective, and should be replaced in their entirety. In my view, such an approach – even from a postmodern perspective – would be *too* deconstructive, erroneously portraying a terrain in which bulldozers are in the process of annihilating previous constructions. However, to narrow the current design down to a mere extension of the existing construction would, in my opinion, amount to a downplaying of the evolutionary and experimental nature of this design. The fact still remains that existing designs, which are at risk of falling away and being relegated to the so-called “zombie” categories, need to be considered anew, in order to fulfil the well-known architectonic principle which stipulates that “form follows function” (Sebestyen 2003:87).

In my view, the demands relating to the so-called “15 Global Challenges” of the Millennium Project of the UN, which were referred to at the beginning of the study (Glenn, Gordon & Florescu 2008:12-41), comprise an indication of the needs that should be accommodated within a new design of this nature. However, it is true that – as Volf (1991:viii) rightly points out – a proposed design, particularly one that has a distinctly experimental character, calls for criticism, and even runs the risk of not being accepted, and of ending up in the “waste-paper basket” of science. Before this eventuality conceivably becomes a reality, however, I would like to point out the advantages which, in my humble opinion, are offered by this design:

Firstly, in my view, this design – in the context of the experimental and developing nature of the qualitative model of (auto)biographical research that is used – contributes towards the articulation of what is most personal in such a way that it indeed has general meaning and significance. It is precisely in the resonance of accents in this research design with the accents of potential readers, that the validity of (auto)biographical research is confirmed. This contribution towards the possible reformulation, as well as new articulations,

of the language of faith, constitutes a search for relevant accents for the future workplace. Confirmation of this attunement to, and quest for a relevant and contextual interpretation, is put forward by Van der Walt (2009:267) from a Reformed perspective:

Either continue with the current religious teachings and practices and haemorrhage to death through the constant loss of members searching for deeper spiritual meaning in their lives, or adopt a somewhat different approach that would bring members in touch with the quintessential spirituality of the Christian faith.

Secondly, in my opinion – and arising from the need for a relevant spirituality for the future workplace – this design makes a contribution in terms of the development of a relevant and pragmatic *theologia habitus*, with the articulation of specific practical theological accents, as well as perspectives for an accountable future. Mitroff (1998:151) corroborates the importance of this objective by pointing out that “[s]pirituality is an integral part, if not the very essence, of management.” However, it is important, in further reflections on – and in the possible further development of – this proposal, to guard against the danger of deploying spirituality as if it were just another commodity, in order “to support ... corporate interests and working practices” (Carrette & King 2005:171).

Thirdly, the design facilitates the necessary contours for an accountable interdisciplinary discourse, with the discovery of new spaces – and space – in the mapping out of the respective disciplines. In the dialogue of involvement that took shape between, *inter alia*, practical theology and futures studies, not only was a motivation provided as to why certain interdisciplinary partners were chosen (Osmer 2006:343); but the meaning of the newly integrated perspectives for a particular context was also indicated. An important and innovative contribution to the further development of a strategic investigation has thereby been made, with the emphasis on possible experimental alternatives (Ganzevoort 2006:159).

The context that was indicated on a continual basis during the course of the research, was that of the new workplace, as embodied in a dynamic new economy. In contrast to the initial character of practical theology – entailing a defensive, *and* even an offensive stance, in terms of which

[b]usiness was generally portrayed as a source of oppression and inequality; [and] critiques included sweeping generalizations about, for example, the negative aspects of globalization (Miller 2007:99)

– particular attention was focused, during the research, on the semantic moments of “creative and positive potentialities of the marketplace” (Miller 2007:99) – comprising a fourth advantage of this design. This positive,

innovative accent indeed gives utterance to the premise that “[p]ractical theology always reflects the angle of vision from which it is done” (Browning 1991:250).

The fifth advantage can be found in important accents of meaning from the field of futures studies, in terms of which, in the development of the concept of *a memory for the future*, dimensions of the present are taken into account, with a view to their significance for the future. Precisely in the consideration of these dimensions, not only does the functionality of existing constructions become the subject of reflection, but perspectives on, and proposals for the creative and evolutionary development of a *theologia habitus* for the future workplace are created.

This design indeed presupposes that practical theology – informed by futures studies, as indicated by the design – will always remain a building site, with a notice reading: “Enter at your own risk!”. In this research adventure, Taylor’s (2008:204) comments relating to the meaning of a relevant and contextual practical theology are confirmed:

... and for me practical theology is all about risk. Practical theology, in my mind, is daring to believe that life and not theory is where the theological enterprise begins ... The only potential for the future of Christian faith lies in the doing, the going, the practice. A practical theology is not the taking of theology and applying it to a certain situation, but rather it is a beginning ...

However, if this undertaking is regarded as a theological project which, alongside of the people in a society, is in search of meaning, it offers the potential for meaningful transformation in the academic context, as well as in the church and in the world. Therefore – also on the basis of the execution of this research design – a further notice could be put up, bearing the words: “Be prepared to be rebuilt” (cf. Cilliers 2009a:637).