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Faith formation in the tension interplay of tools, processes and the course for social transformation

ABSTRACT

Theological commentators indicate that the church in Africa faces the challenge of converting the Christian faith into practice. This calls for reconsidering the practice of forming faith among African churches. According to Astley (2018:16), in Christianity, faith formation is more than learning about Christ; it is about "learning" Christ. Learning Christ as Christian formation constitutes the shaping of the dimensions of faith, namely orthopraxis*,* orthopatheia*, and* intelligentia *(Maddix et al. 2020:6). This article discusses Gadamer's conversation theory as the means to inform and form these dimensions of faith. This entails that, for faith to be informed and formed in its dimensions, there is a need for an effective conversation among tools, processes, and contexts. The discussion revolves around the following question: How can the tools and processes of faith formation effectively converse with context in order to facilitate the learning of Christ in terms of informing and forming these dimensions of faith? Using conversation theory and literature review, this article discusses the tension interplay of tools, processes, and discerning contexts for a holistic approach to informing and forming the dimensions of faith.*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Astley (2018:16), in Christianity, faith formation is more than learning about Christ; it is above all about "learning" him. This statement distinguishes between having information

concerning Christ, called learning about Christ, and embodying the life he modelled in his life and ministry on earth, referred to as learning Christ. Learning about Christ finds its significance in the learning of Christ. The emphasis on learning Christ raises concern in the face of theological comments indicating that Christians in Africa still face challenges in converting their faith into lived reality. This is evident in the church's struggle to convert the shift of Christian numerical gravitation to the global south into a force for social transformation, by "offering complementary or supplementary approaches, and alternative solutions, to the very complex issues facing society today" (Olorunnisola 2015:67, 70). This minimal effort for social transformation has a direct bearing on the way the church forms the faith of its members. Howard (2017:34) speaks of bridging the gap between teaching and formation. Although teaching aims at forming learners in a particular way, it may not prepare them for responding to issues within their contexts. If the theory-practice gap remains unidentified, the faith formation programmes and processes of the church become ineffective in terms of forming faith for social transformation.

This gap usually lies between the churches' already prepared tools and processes, on the one hand, and the contexts, on the other. Therefore, there is a need for the church to critically examine the approaches it engages in the practice of faith formation. The church is challenged to close the identified gaps between formation and the lived reality in African contexts. In other words, the church needs to discover and close the gaps between faith formation tools and processes, on the one hand, and the contexts, on the other, in order to necessitate a conversation that champions the course for social transformation. In this article, "tools" refers to contents of faith traditions and doctrinal standards adopted by denominations as formal implements for faith formation. "Processes" refers to formal faith formation programmes or outlined activities, duration, liturgies, and methodology. Meanwhile, discerning contexts is about understanding the lived reality as experienced by the people undergoing faith formation. Discerning contexts for social transformation is a critical task for shaping specific faith-formation programmes because God calls his people from and for the contexts (Malloy 2006:5). It is assumed that God has a unique society-transforming message for each context from which he calls people to himself or where he sends those he calls. If the tools and processes are insensitive to contexts, they only facilitate learning about Christ (the information part), but not learning of Christ or the formation aspect, which result in the embodiment of Christ-like life (Astley 2018:16). The struggle to relate the content of the Christians' faith to issues affecting specific contexts is a sign of a faith formation that over-emphasises information overload with no or hardly any emphasis on how to embody the Christ-like life.

According to Maddix *et al.* (2020:6), learning Christ as Christian formation in correlation with Augustine's triad of deepening theory can help learning in the *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia*, and *intelligentia* dimensions of faith. In line with these dimensions, Astley (2018:19) suggests that the formation of Christian faith subsumes the *intelligentia* that constitutes "Christian knowledge and understanding". *Orthopatheia* which is about "Christian belief, valuing, feeling and experiencing", while *orthopraxis* concerns "Christian performance" in the sense of "living and serving in a Christian manner". *Orthopatheia* and *orthopraxis* justify the claim that faith formation is more than simply conveying information about Christ, as it involves the valuing and embodiment of Christ-centric praxis. Christian knowledge must not be limited to the intellect; it must be demonstrated in everyday life lived within contexts such as family, schools, and work environment. With *orthopraxis* in mind, Olorunnisola (2015:69) proposes a shift of focus from Christology as merely reflection on the identity and significance of Christ, to Christo-centric praxis, with the emphasis on Christ-centred society-transforming practice. Christo-centric praxis stresses the fact that faith must lead to its corresponding personal and social transforming action.

The research question of this article is: How can the tools and processes of faith formation effectively converse with context to facilitate the learning of Christ in terms of informing and forming *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia*, and *intelligentia*? The aim of this article is to discuss the tension interplay of tools, processes, and contexts as a holistic way of informing and forming the dimensions of faith, using Gadamer's communicative theory and analysis of scholarly literature.

2. FAITH AS A NOUN AND A VERB

Westerhoff emphasises the shaping of Christo-centric praxis faith in Christians as a tendency of faith formation. He suggests that faith should be regarded more as a verb (doing word) than a noun (a name) (Nishioka 2021:53). The purpose of faith formation is to bring people to faith in Christ, developing their faith for personal transformation, and empowering believers for service, thereby enhancing their personal and social way of life (Williams 2006:642; Wyckoff 1955:19). Wyckoff (1955:23) adds that the purpose of faith formation is to nurture a person in Christian instruction, to redeem individuals and society, and to build Christian character. Faith formation must not only lead to a quality life of relationship with other human beings, but also strive to enhance the deepening of relationship with the triune God. According to Venter (2005:340), a quality relationship with the triune God must lead one to ecological sensitivity, which encourages good relationships with other creations such as plants, animals, and land. Ecological sensitivity should further lead one towards self-gifting and self-donation and endowment of one's

charismata for the service of the kingdom of God. Therefore, faith formation, as forming a quality relationship with the triune God, is expected to result in responsible commitment towards ecological care and love for humanity by fighting against all hegemonic attitudes, actions, and languages that harm the social bond in the community.

All Christian information, regardless of how it is presented, has the potential to form faith because it possesses the ability to shape attitudes, perceptions, and a world view in a particular way. However, what counts is whether the formed faith can translate into using the gifts to necessitate personal, social, and ecological transformation in service to the triune God. Van der Walt (2003:54) is of the view that, although Christianity is growing in Africa, it has hardly any impact on the political, social, and economic aspects of the continent, because spiritual salvation is over-individualised with hardly any or no emphasis on ecology, intellectual and social peace, justice, and material well-being. Such information has caused a wrong type of Christianity with its pietistic, dualist, escapist, and ecclesiastic approach to life.

The low levels of *orthopraxis* on ecological care, as well as personal and social transformation seem to challenge the church to assess its approach to faith formation, in order to establish whether it serves the purpose of facilitating not only the "learning of Christ" but also the "living Christ" (Matthaei 2010:57; Olorunnisola 2015:67, 70). The phrase "living Christ" implies the practice of the embodied life of Christ. The church, therefore, needs to consider faith formation tools and processes that produce active and informed citizens who will be formed for personal and social responsibility (Glennon 2011:359). In the African set-up of *Ubuntu*, where individuals are linked to the community, personal and social responsibility are interlinked. Under the concept of *Ubuntu*, there is nothing like this too personal to be social or too social to be personal. Faith-formation tools and processes should endeavour to equip Christians for a lived relationship with the triune God, care for ecology, and love for all humanity. Out of the desire to form Christians who will transform societies a question may be asked: How can the tools and processes of faith formation effectively converse with contexts in order to facilitate the learning of Christ in terms of informing and forming *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia,* and *intelligentia*. In other words, how can faith-formation tools and processes function as means of more than simply informing members about Christ?

Gadamer's communicative theory, with its emphasis on conversation, has been upheld as the means of informing and forming *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia*, and *intelligentia*. However, Dollahite and Thatcher (2008:611) introduce the transactional theory that emphasises reciprocal dialogue and practical change as a way of informing and forming faith in response to the great commission.

> Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you (Matt. 28:19-20, HCSB).

The commission does not suggest a hegemonic approach but directs the church to initiate the conversation. By nature, conversation is most effective in an atmosphere of mutual sharing, of give and take, with no one in an advantaged or hegemonic position. It is possible for the church to misunderstand the commission and be tempted to uncritically universalise its already prepared tools and processes of faith formation by imposing it on all contexts. Faith formation must address contextual issues. The neglect of issues affecting the context potentially antagonise the practice of faith. The proposed tension interplay of tools, processes, and discerning contexts is considered to be a way of facilitating a conversation for a holistic approach to informing and forming *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia*, and *intelligentia*. The authors opine that the interplay of tools, processes, and discerning of contexts in the process of forming faith must take place in the tension of simultaneity and intentionality.

3. DEFINITION AND PURPOSE OF CHRISTIAN FAITH FORMATION

The authors opine that the best way to understand faith formation is to reiterate Westerhoff's suggestion that faith should be viewed as "more of a verb than a noun" (Nishioka 2021:53). First, Westerhoff's perception acknowledges faith to be simultaneously a noun (a name) and a verb (a word describing an action). Secondly, faith is viewed as a word describing an action more than a name. According to Buchak (2022:3), faith is tied to action so that having faith allows one to take risks for actions based on its object. The argument that faith is a verb and tied to an action links it to its practicality, because "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26).

Viewing faith as more of a verb provokes the debate of whether faith should be considered an act of upholding a set of religious beliefs, doctrinal standards, and confessions of faith, or a means of relating to God and his creation (Matthaei 2010:57). Choosing the latter while neglecting the former makes faith void of knowledge or *intelligentia,* while only upholding the former reduces faith to a meaningless set of information about God. Faith must be discussed, as a knowledgeable living relationship with God culminating in Christo-centric praxis.

Faith is a noun, because it is indisputable that there is something called by the name "faith". Furthermore, faith as a noun is branded in various forms. It is branded as a universal and fundamental human innate focused

on the centre of transcendental value and power, structured in relation to the sequence of the human developmental stage (Newman 2004:103; Fowler 1981:24, 119). Faith is also branded in its various religious forms. In Christianity, it is further segmented into diverse faith traditions. The plurality of faith is due not only to multiple religions but also to a diversity of faith traditions within Christianity. Therefore, the formation of faith as a noun is inclined towards particular traditions.

However, whichever brand of noun it may have, living faith is tied to its associated action (Buchak 2022:3). Therefore, faith is a verb, because it is a living and active matter that drives its possessor into taking particular consequential actions. In this case, faith formation takes the shape of forming faith as a "noun" in its plurality of traditions and faith as a "verb" with its related visible action. It is difficult to separate the two or to draw a clearly distinguishing line where one would tell that, at this point, faith as a noun or as a verb is being shaped. The two are formed simultaneously. However, an understanding of faith as a way of life emphasises the traditioning which, according to Simpson (1999:23), concerns lifelong exhibition of the shaped Christian world view, character, and identity through the process of faith formation. To be called into the Christian faith is imperatively being called into a Christian way of life and vocation. Matthaei (2010:57) describes Christian vocation as a personal (and simultaneously communal) response to God's grace through service. This indicates a personal response to God's gracious call to salvation and a state of owning the Christian faith. Faith in the triune God is a call to be incorporated into his active involvement in his world-transforming mission.

Faith is a way of viewing God and his creation in terms of others and the world at large. Therefore, faith becomes the means of figuring out how life should be lived in the world in view of God. It influences views and interpretations of the world such that its possessor constructs the purpose of life within respective contexts (Astley 2018:17). Faith formation cannot be restricted to shaping the cognitive in terms of forming contents of belief about God. It also involves developing the ability to interpret and apply upheld contents appropriately within respective contexts.

Faith is life giving. Faith formation, as both informing about Christ and forming Christ-like, implies that faith in the triune God is transformative in nature. It transforms the possessor's *orthopraxis, orthopatheia*, and *intelligentia* dimensions of faith. The lifelong transformation of the dimensions of faith is evidence of the continued exhibition of formed Christo-centric life of those undergoing faith formation. The theory of the three dimensions also points to the fact that faith is more than actively seeking God in body and mind; it also involves responding to the hidden triune God by embodying his

life as modelled by Christ Jesus (Bennett 2021:20, 29). Such kind of faith also hastens its possessor to serve God by using it to effect a holistic social transformation. This means that faith is, by nature, outgoing, missional, and adds value to the person, the community, and the ecology.

Westerhoff's emphasis on faith as being more of a verb than a noun predisposes faith formation towards Vygotskian's *thema* theory, which stresses faith formation as a product of reciprocal relationships of God to human being, human being to human being, and human being to contexts (Kim 2007:309-321). As a verb, faith is a way of life and an act of life-giving within contexts. Faith formation is shaping identity or the awareness of appropriating the Christian faith and the consequential assimilation of its values, beliefs, and lifestyle. It also equips one for a Christian response to contextual matters. Informing and forming the *orthopraxis, orthopatheia*, and *intelligentia* suggest that the truth about Christ must be known, understood, valued, felt, experienced, and ultimately be converted into "Christian 'performance'", in terms of life and Christo-centric praxis (Astley 2018:19). In Christian terms, learning the faith is more about embodying the life and mission of God in Christ than merely knowing its content (Astley 2018:16). This suggests that faith formation in Christianity is the formation of Christ-like life in a Christian rather than merely sharing the information about him. Faith formation is shaping a personal and communal transformed life for participation in social transforming services under God's grace. Successful society-transforming faith formation starts with discerning God's will, what he is saying and doing in contexts.

4. DISCERNMENT: THE BASELINE OF FAITH FORMATION WITHIN CONTEXTS

Faith makes sense by discerning and obeying the will of God, by participating in his mission (Hendriks 2004:4). Van Zyl (2013:110) describes discernment as something to do with deciding among competing voices. It is, among others, a process of sorting, evaluating, and distinguishing God's will and involvement in the world. However, the process of discernment becomes incomplete if it does not result in identifying or determining the will of God after sorting, evaluating, and distinguishing competing voices. It is difficult to separate the will of God from his mission in the world. Discerning the will of God is not far from discerning his mission in the world. Therefore, faith finds its significance not only in discerning the will of God but also in acting upon the discerned will of God. Although not an end in itself, discernment forms the vital part in the practice of informing and forming faith.

Meanwhile, the baseline survey has been used in education circles to assess literacy gaps, barriers, and learners' experiences, in order to inform teaching practice and strategise workable learning support (Wildschut *et al.* 2016:1). Basically, a baseline survey is carried out on a community before implementing the intervening project or programme. It is conducted for the purpose of informing the project or programme implementers of the suitable approach that would bring about ownership of the intervention by the locals. The data gathered during a baseline survey also assists in setting projected change on the beneficiaries after the intervention and means of realising it. A baseline survey offers the opportunity for visualising what the community should be before the project takes off. It also assists in planning monitoring mechanisms during the intervention and means of assessing the outcome after the intervention.

Discerning the baseline is a study that aims to identify God's will and involvement in contexts, regardless of counter-activities and voices. It should result in visualising perceivable personal and social transformation to be evident in the process and after the implementation of faith-formation programmes. Baseline data should monitor progression towards the attainment of visualised change and assess the effects of faith formation. Discerning the baseline is vital because authentic faith formation does not occur in a vacuum. It is informed and shaped by what is happening in contexts (Nishioka 2021:53). Furthermore, all human beings are inalienably linked to the contexts that influence the interpretation and application of faith. These contexts, to which people are linked, possess informal or oral theological voices that may be in contention with formal faith-formation texts and processes (Van der Toren 2015:123).

The informal and oral theologies must be known because, although they are not officially adopted by the denomination, they are formulated by members as they interact with one another or real-life experiences. These informal and oral theologies influence the practice of faith (Hendricks 2004:149). They point to some gaps left by the formal texts for faith formation or unaddressed struggles of the people. The gaps can be closed by continued re-listening to the contexts and identifying God's will out of these oral and informal theological voices. A baseline survey assists in identifying the gaps left by formal tools and processes, as well as contentious issues affecting the practice of faith in contexts. Discerning the baseline is a vital component in the interplay of tools, processes, and contexts for it helps one understand social issues and the projection of suitable approaches.

Nishioka (2021:53) further proposes that having faith does not relegate its possessors into being passive recipients of the shaping influences such as pandemics, social or cultural practices etc. in context. Prevailing circumstances

in various contexts influence the reflections of what it means to have faith in given scenarios. However, the faith, built up under reflections influenced by prevailing scenarios, contributes to the transformation of contexts. This means that faith is formed in the mutual conversation of faith itself and the contexts of its formation. A baseline survey supports strategies for the formation of a faith that leads to transformation of societies.

Discerning baseline implies that implementers of faith-formation programmes should consider the identified prevailing social challenges and account for the opportunities for forming faith in such contexts. It is about from what is faith being formed? and What kind of faith is to be formed? What is it that we want the formed faith to respond or transform and how will it be done? Faith formation based on a discerned baseline also entails that the church determines how the prevailing social scenario will differ from the present reality. From the outcome of discerning the baseline, the church should also have projected markers of growth in the *intelligentia*, *orthopraxis*, and *orthopatheia* in the process of utilising the tools and processes. Briefly, discerning the baseline informs the use of faith-formation tools and processes in the surveyed context.

The implementation of faith-formation tools and processes must be informed by the outcome of discerning contexts. Since this exercise is cyclic, the church has to be a constant learner of the contexts of its service, so that it forms a Christo-centric and Christo-praxis faith that can result in theo-centric social transformation. Discerning the baseline of contexts is vital for a number of reasons, two of which are discussed below.

- The first reason is that faith formation occurs by combining both how the church teaches the faith and how the people learn the faith. Tools and processes are predetermined contents, methodology that the church intends to engage in forming the faith and at a given period. Meanwhile, contexts influence the way people learn the faith, because they create an environment for the reception of the gospel. Therefore, faith is formed in conversation with the context and is practised in contexts.
- The practice of faith in contexts links one to the second reason for discerning baseline of contexts, namely “living Christ”. The authors argue that learning about Christ should culminate into living a Christo-centric life. However, “living Christ” is indicative of learning Christ. Since life in Christ is translatable, faith formation has to equip Christians to critically analyse what it means to have faith in particular contexts. Discerning baseline is fundamental for the appropriate and responsible application of faith in contexts for the transformation of societies.

5. FAITH FORMATION IN TENSION

Tension is defined as the force transmitted through a rope, string or wire when pulled by forces acting from opposite sides. For tension to take place, the pulling forces at either end must be equal. If the applied force at one end is less than the other, then tension reduces. In this article, the word "tension" is used with the concept that certain positives come out of forces pulling in the opposite direction. For example, the beautiful musical sound from a guitar, drums and other instruments is produced out of equally distributed tension force. The use of the word "tension" suggests that the church needs to attach equal respect to tools, methodology, and contexts in the process of faith formation in terms of informing and forming the *intelligentia*, *orthopatheia*, and *orthopraxis*. Tension ensures that, in as much as tools and processes are given the deserving attention, faith formation should be sensitive to the contentious issues affecting contexts. The insensitivity to issues affecting the contexts forms a faith that struggles to resonate with the lived experience.

The tension interplay of tools, processes and discerned contexts can be successfully maintained through other tensions that seem to be forces pulling in opposite directions such as unity in diversity, yet and not yet, intentionality and simultaneity, and so on. Among many other existing tensions that may necessitate the formation of a contextual faith formation, the authors only discuss intentionality and simultaneity alongside the tension interplay of tools, processes, and discerning contexts.

5.1 Faith formation as intentional

The church is intentional in its approach to faith formation among its members. In this article, the word "intentional" refers to a planned or well-outlined process and tools for faith formation. The word "tools" refers to the Bible, church traditions, doctrinal standards, liturgical books, and teaching manuals used for faith formation. "Process" refers to programmes and a planned roadmap used to attain the goals or objectives for faith formation. This entails that faith formation must, to some extent, be intentional in capacitating congregants' faith for meaningful participation in God's agenda of transforming societies. As a way of being prepared, the church puts up contents and estimates a period and process when faith formation should be accomplished. Tools and processes are significant, because the church needs to be deliberate or intentional in terms of having a clearly projected kind of faith it intends to form. However, contextual analysis or discerning contexts help in the way tools and processes are to be applied, in order to actualise holistic faith formation.

The call for ecumenism indicates that one of the major sources of the ineffectiveness of the Christian faith is an overemphasis on tradition rather than the unifying grace of God. Bennett (2021:20) and Astley (2018:16)

claim that recently, faith has been viewed in a self-focused way or means of clustering the like-minded around a set of beliefs about God; hence, it has become more divisive than unifying. In this regard, tools and processes for faith formation take the form of fortifying "doctrinal roadblocks" against untoward doctrines (Sell 2008:151). It intensifies the means for inclusion and exclusion or worse still, to some extent, as a show-off of how one denomination is better than the other. Faith loses its unifying force for social transformation, as it becomes the source of fragmented efforts in response to issues affecting contexts. Hendriks (2004:22) suggests that denominational diversity must be considered a blessing in disguise, as it broadens the learning web base. Unfortunately, in some instances, disunity and lack of love have rendered plurality a source of division.

The church faces the challenge of using its traditional diversity to solidify its nature of being a unified force of faith for the transformation of the world, while simultaneously maintaining doctrinal uniqueness. Overemphasis on one at the expense of the other takes away the vital element of the tension of unity in diversity, on which Christian faith thrives. If there is no diversity, Christian faith is likely to degenerate into "lifeless uniformity or deadening sameness" (Migliore 1991:201). Meanwhile, overemphasising diversity undermines God's unifying grace in Christ; hence, it fails to express the image of the triune God. Lack of unified diversity fragments the church's effort to transform its social settings.

One of the ways in which the unity in diversity tension can be balanced is through the tension of intentionality and simultaneity. In being intentional, the church needs tools and processes for faith formation. The neglect of tools and processes, on the one hand, and the context, on the other, creates an imbalance in the formation of faith. If the church has no tools and processes for faith formation, it becomes directionless or without an envisaged outcome of its efforts. However, the church in its faith-formation practice needs to be sensitive to God's voice and involvement in respective contexts.

5.2 Faith formation in simultaneity

Despite the church being the body of Christ bound together in love by the Holy Spirit, it remains a collection of finite human beings. There is more to faith formation than the church can ever plan for. Williams (2006:641) argues that, in a Christian context, formation should not be limited to local church ministry such as Sunday school, leadership development, and family life education. After all, receiving Christ as a saviour is not the end of formation, but the beginning of a long journey towards discipleship and the formation of a Christ-like personality. This is where knowledge acquired and values adopted are demonstrated in the believer's everyday life. To live such faith

is not by might but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Through simultaneity, the church recognises the limitation of its intentional preparedness for issues of faith formation. It provides room for God in his infinitude to do his work beyond human finitude. Simultaneity implies that God still speaks outside the doctrinal standards. It closes the gaps left by formal processes and tools used for forming faith among congregants.

Most of the mainline churches have already prepared tools such as catechism, books for ministry to children, symbols, and other documents used for the formation of faith. However, human limitations to grasp God's involvement in contexts and the high pace of contextual shifts, due to globalisation, create gaps that faith-formation tools and processes may not address. These gaps are further widened by the fact that tools and processes used for faith formation were developed from a background that is different to the current African contexts and introduced to Africa by missionaries (Moyo 2023:156). Unfortunately, some of the early missionaries used these tools and processes hegemonically in collaboration with colonialists to corrupt the minds of the indigenous people, in order to destroy their moral principles/values that held their community together. Buntu (2013:2) claims that the impact of such Eurocentric imperialism on Africans has contributed to self-negation, as well as cultural and spiritual confusion.

An investigation is essential to establish whether these exotic tools and processes can facilitate the learning of Christ or if they merely inform members about him. Therefore, faith formation must confront and reconstruct the received Christian faith transmitted with foreign precepts that prevent faith from being enculturated in a specific context. The tension interplay of tools, processes, and discernment of contexts is proposed for realising a contextual faith formation.

Apart from the missionary Eurocentric approach, certain gaps may widen, due to unexpected events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which has recently destabilised fundamental formal means and processes of faith formation, as church gatherings became risk factors (Moyo 2023:40). Faith formation in simultaneity involves discerning God's will, involvement, and voice that speak to the unaddressed gap arising from faith-antagonising situations. The simultaneity aspect of faith formation is a source of hope that God in his infinitude can still speak beyond human limited preparedness. However, simultaneity can lead to more individualism and self-centredness if there are no guidelines. It is meant to work in tension with the intentional aspect of faith formation.

5.3 Faith formation in the intentionality and simultaneity tension

Having an oversight on how people learn the faith leads to unidirectional teaching or what is termed "the banking system". The banking system undervalues the learner's input in his or her learning process and relegates him or her to a mere recipient of knowledge (Freire 1970:60-65). Lawson (2017:344) suggests that faith formation continues beyond the formal practices of the church. He proposes asking the question: How do people learning the faith assist in knowing people's ways of learning outside the formal church processes of forming faith? Being simultaneous would help the church discover informal influences on faith formation and use them to inform and shape Christians' faith. Faith is formed in the tension interplay of intentionality and simultaneity. Simultaneity leaves room for God's unique message for the contexts at hand.

The tension of intentionality and simultaneity implies that God communicates a faith-forming message to his people through both the intentionally planned contents and processes, on the one hand, and simultaneity, on the other. He has not sealed the means of communicating to his people, because context reveals or brings about new reflection about God. This also leads to shaping faith in him. Therefore, continued faith formation depends on continuous reflection on God, his transforming mission, and the role of the church in it. Faith formation occurs in the tension of simultaneity and intentionality, deliberate or planned. This means that the church is meant to balance between being intentional and simultaneous in its practice of forming faith so that it does not miss out on God's unique message for the given contexts. In both extremes, faith creates a dichotomy that will likely result in failure to coordinate the *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia* and intelligentia dimensions of faith (Maddix *et al.* 2020:6). The interplay of tools, processes and discerning of context in the process of forming faith should occur in the tension simultaneity and intentionality.

5.4 Continued interactive tension of tools, processes, and discernment of context

Faith formation is experiential for both the church and those whose faith is being formed. The term "experiential' indicates that faith as a verb is formed in the dimensions of *intelligentia, orthopatheia*, and *orthopraxis* through encountered experience. Human beings, at individual and communal level, continue to experience life anew. Therefore, discussing faith formation as experiential entails that it is a ceaseless task. Radecke (2007:1) views faith as a matrix of meaning that continues to undergo construction, negotiation, disassembling, and reconstruction throughout one's life, in an attempt to make sense of the

world, life, relationships with others, and God. From its inception, the church has been refined and better equipped to carry out its mandate of forming faith in the midst of experiences (Acts 10:28, 15:1). The experiences encountered in the processes of preaching the gospel expanded their understanding of God and the nature of the church's calling in the world. The church is both the teacher and the learner as its faith is formed through the same experienced contexts. Therefore, the church and its members draw faith-forming lessons from its tools and processes as well as the shared context.

Experiential confirms that faith, being active and a living thing, grows to maturity through on-going conversation with realities in the contexts. It also suggests that faith is formed with a continued attempt to relate the learnt contents of faith to the lived context. This calls for an ongoing interactive tension of tools, processes, and discerned context. Through experiential formation, faith learns from contexts and faith transforms contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

The existence of already prepared tools and processes may, at times, deafen the ear and blindfold the eye of the church from contextual issues in the process of faith formation. The insensitivity to contentious issues affecting the context is likely to form a faith that fails to resonate with the realities of life. The authors suggest that, regardless of having tools, processes, and contexts, the church needs to listen to African contexts, in order to form faith that is relevant for social transformation. Faith formation as informing and forming the *orthopraxis*, *orthopatheia*, and *intelligentia* comprehensively implies understanding, valuing, feeling, and experiencing the known truth about Christ. This known and internalised truth has to be converted into "Christian 'performance'", in terms of Christo-centric praxis (Astley 2018:19). Put differently: Faith formation equips for informed and passionate Christo-centric praxis. The church should consistently seek the correct means of ensuring that faith formation is contextual, by maintaining the tension interplay of tools, processes, and discerning of contexts for contextual faith formation. This tension interplay becomes effective if the tension of being intentional and simultaneous is well balanced at all times, in order to facilitate meaningful learning about Christ and learning Christ.

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