**W.J. Schoeman**

Prof. W.J. Schoeman, Department Practical and Missional Theology, University of the Free State, South Africa. E-mail: schoemanw@ufs.ac.za ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2454-9658

**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.38140/at.v43i2.7793

**ISSN:** 1015-8758 (Print)

**ISSN:** 2309-9089 (Online)

**Acta Theologica 2023**
43(2):262-265

**Date received:**
1 November 2023

**Date published:**
13 December 2023

Published by the UFS
http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/at

© Creative Commons
With Attribution (CC-BY)

OPEN ACCESS

# BOOK REVIEW

## *Moving methodologies. Doing practical and missional theology in an African context*

Cilliers, J. (ed.). Published in the book series Stellenbosch Theological Reflection, Biblecor. 2022

*Moving methodologies* is an edited volume with the focus on doing practical and missional theology within an African context. The volume is written by scholars from the Department of Practical and Missional Theology at Stellenbosch University. The authors of the different chapters are from different races, genders, and denominations, as well as from different sub-disciplines within the department. The diversity of different voices from various angles in this volume should be appreciated.

The volume aims to map changes in the methodologies in practical and missional theology, with a specific focus on an African context. This would imply the following aspects, as explained by the editor in the introduction:

- The need is to move away from exclusively working within a Western methodological paradigm towards including methodologies more relevant to an African context.
- The challenges of the African context compel theologians to develop new methodologies that are significant for this context.

- The volume wants to motivate a movement to rethink and develop methodologies for various African communities and settings.
- Methodologies should be moving because God is movement, and the volume tries to map this movement.

The necessary space is limited to give a complete or in-depth overview of each of the twelve chapters. I make a subjective remark on each of the chapters, according to the focus or theme of the specific chapter:

- The first chapter discusses research on race in practical theology by seeking an anti-racist praxis. This includes a reflection from the author regarding her own bias.
- The next chapter explains the need for various methodologies to study practical theology within the South African context. Aesthetics could assist in reflecting reality by using four concepts: observation, interpretation, anticipation, and transformation.
- In Chapter three, the author gives a historical account of the empirical turn in practical theology and explains the tension between normativity and an empirical approach. This is followed by an exploration of the empirical aspect of practical theology.
- In Chapter four, the discussion on youth-led research focuses on the role of power in research and the co-ownership of the youth in doing research as partners. A choice is made for Youth-led Participatory Research (YPAR).
- Chapter five is a theoretical reflection on the role of the self in doing practical theological research as autoethnography. A few auto-/self-empirical examples could have strengthened the argument in this chapter.
- The legacy of Hannes Adonis is used in Chapter six as a historical reflection on a missional methodology to move away from a “sendingwetenskap” paradigm, using a Black experience of coloniality towards a transformative praxis within the South African context. What markers or framework could assist in this movement?
- Chapter seven on congregational research provides a historical overview of the study field within South Africa. The theo-dramatic approach is explored to understand congregations.
- In Chapter eight, storytelling is used as an indigenous methodology to reframe pastoral care. Stories contribute towards a narrative research methodology and developing a narrative pastoral care framework. A case study is used to explain the contribution of storytelling in this regard.

- The aim of Chapter nine is to develop a Dialogical Intergenerational Pastoral Process (DIPP) for the African context. The transdisciplinary focus is, in this regard, a significant contribution.
- In Chapter ten, a missional research cycle is used to enable congregations to develop local ecumenical networks and to develop a training course for congregations who want to do evangelisation in a non-hierarchical and hospitable manner.
- Chapter eleven focuses on the research of rituals and liturgy in Africa and seeks to develop a research methodology, from a theoretical perspective, that combines the theological notion of the Trinity with an anthropological notion of liminality.
- The last chapter reflects on integrating African values and spirituality in ministerial and missional leadership. African oral, symbolic, and written theology is used as part of an ethnographic approach in crosscultural ministerial formation.

I want to make a few general remarks as an evaluation of the volume but also to stimulate the further development of the movement of methodologies within practical and missional theology. The discussion should continue.

The volume pays testimony to the broad scope of study and research that is incorporated with the discipline of practical and missional theology and the various subdisciplines associated with it. This is an essential contribution to the movement beyond focusing only on a clerical paradigm.

The different chapters endeavour, to a great extent, to take an African context seriously. The focus of the chapters is more directed to the South African context. What are the differences between the South African context and the African context? The chapter on race is an example. Could the same questions be asked for the rest of the continent?

The empirical turn within practical theology is an essential movement within the discipline. Some chapters have a more theoretical focus and, to a lesser extent, an empirical reflection as part of their focus. The implications of the specific theoretical focus for an empirical methodology could have been mapped. A wide variety of empirical methodologies are explained and used to assist in developing a contextual praxis. The development of the YPAR as a contextual empirical methodology is an excellent example in this regard.

Most of the chapters start from an inductive viewpoint to describe the methodology of the specific subdiscipline in focus. The inductive perspective could have been used as a marker to indicate a movement away from a deductive perspective and general theories.

One of the stated aims of the book is to find some common ground. A last chapter (thirteen) could have discussed this aspect. A concluding framework to map the movement forward could have assisted in finding this common ground. I would have included, in the final chapter, remarks on themes such as the epistemology used and needed; the advantages of an inductive perspective; the interaction between theory and empirical analysis; interdisciplinary dialogue, and the methodological implications for the movements beyond the South African context for an African reflection.

The volume is well edited. Two chapters lack an abstract, and an index would have made it more accessible to follow themes and cross-reference.

This volume is a good and essential marker in developing contextual methodologies within the discipline of practical and missional theology. I can recommend it without hesitation. It is hoped that there will be a follow-up to take the themes I have indicated further.