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Volume 5 – 2016

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**Practical Theology/Spirituality and Fostering Healthy  
Human Relationships in the Workplace**

Rev. H.P. Khosa-Nkatini  
Ph.D. Student & Junior Lecturer, Practical Theology  
University of Pretoria, South Africa<sup>1</sup>

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**Introduction**

We spend most of our time at work, and how we relate with the people that we spend most of our time with has a huge influence on how we view life. When one speaks of practical theology we often limit its effectiveness to our churches, our congregations, and even our families. Practical theology should also have an effect in our

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.UP.ac.za](http://www.UP.ac.za) and [hundzukhosa@gmail.com](mailto:hundzukhosa@gmail.com).

workplaces and how we build human relations with those with whom we work. Even though we are not of the world, we live in the world, and good human relations are important. This paper will focus on fostering healthy human relationships in a workplace.

In most parts of South Africa when the term “spirituality” is mentioned, it is believed to be a term only fit for Christians. This can bring division among people of different religious groups. With the growing number of churches being established in South Africa, Christianity has become debatable, especially among non-believers. So if one were to bring Christianity into the workplace, which tradition or school of thought would the organization bring, and what would be the basis of that choice? Would the Reformed tradition be good enough for everyone. Would the Pentecostal be good enough? Charismatic? There are several types of Christian churches, and outside we have Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, and more. Brown (1985:15) argues that practical theology must be more than methodological: it must actually do theology to illuminate Christian practices in the midst of life’s concrete problems and issues.

#### **A. Practical Theology Enhances Human Relations**

According to Naidoo (2014:3) in the Christian tradition, spirituality is not just seen as human wellbeing or meaning. It is a deeply lived experience of the person and nature of God in every aspect of life as a primary orientation. Okon (unknown:2) argues that while it is not correct to use the words “culture” and “society” interchangeably, it is appropriate to emphasize that there is a symbiotic relationship between the two concepts. Okon furthermore argues that while culture is a system of norms and values, a society is an independent, self-perpetuating human group with a territory and a shared culture. He says that human society is a system of interrelationships that links people together, and no culture can exist either without society, or independent of society, and society is not a reality unless it exists within a context of culture. Good human relations are enhanced in practical theology as Steyn and Masango (2011:2) argue that theology should meet the praxis of pastoral care for the people it seeks to serve as it interprets human needs. This interpretation points to a theological and hermeneutical analysis of pastoral problems. Practical theology’s effectiveness in fostering healthy human relationships is not limited to just one religion or to a

certain culture. We do not live in a country of just one religion. South Africa is very diverse country, sometimes called a rainbow nation.

According to Wepener (2014: 8) when speaking of worship as body language, which he believes was and still is the most significant feature of the change or ‘reform’ in worship in Sub-Saharan Africa, this includes the dancing, singing, the playing of a variety of musical instruments and other bodily gestures. He quoted a certain Pastor Daramola of the RCCG: “When we Africans gather for worship we make a noise, it is embedded in us. We just have to make a noise and shake our bodies.” Klein in Baloyi ((2013:14) invites every local church to become a centre of healing and transformation through holistic counselling services. When a local church becomes a centre of healing and transformation, it should not be limited to its own members but should extend to outsiders as true reflection of Christianity. Serving all is practical theology fostering healthy human relationships.

### **B. Human Relations**

Naidoo (2014:1) argues that we live in the transition period between the old definition of work as mere survival and the new definition of work as a livelihood. We agree with Naidoo (2014) when she further argues that workplace spirituality has the potential for leadership development: it allows employees and leaders to act from personal truth, integrity, values and ethical practices. When practical theology is applied in the life context of people who spend more time at work than they do at church, they will foster those same values, morals, principles in their workplace. This helps develop leadership in the workplace. Without even preaching, the leader teaches his or her team through example the importance of healthy human relations. Moxley in Naidoo (2014) argued that with the accelerating force of global, societal and organizational changes come the call for a more holistic leadership that integrates the four fundamental arenas that define the essence of human existence:

1. Body (physical ),
2. Mind (logical or rational thought),
3. Heart (emotional, feelings), and
4. Spirit.

## 1. Effectiveness of Practical Theology

According to a book written by Faranani Facilitation services, organizational culture is a set of shared beliefs, values and norms that influence the way members think, feel, and behave. Culture is created by means of terminal and instrumental values, heroes, rites and rituals, and a communication network. The primary method of maintaining organizational culture is through the socialization processes by which individuals learn the values, expected behaviors, and social knowledge necessary to assume their roles in the organization. How many companies start the day off with a morning prayer, or even a moment of silence? The aim of practical theology is not to turn companies into churches but to help individuals carry their full humanity into their workplace. Their spiritual life should not be left at church on Sundays, and employers do well to recognize that.

According to Beyers (2010:1) the dominant religion of the west has been Christianity. The result is that a Christian (Western) understanding of religion dominated that scholarly field. A Christian theology of religions led western scholars to arrange religions in a hierarchical structural implying that some religions were inferior to others. In his research Wepener (2014:9) mentioned that in many worship services in AICs and Pentecostal churches he often observed what Ellis and Ter Haar call “spectacular forms of hyperkinetic trance,” speaking in tongues and the sharing of visions and dreams (sometimes about the visiting researcher). Practical theology should aim at teaching people of different religions how to live with one other without being judgmental of the next person’s faith.

Social media shows how people differ even in the same religion. In Christianity for an example, some still love their quite traditional type of churches, while others want the loud music and drum type of churches, and Christians prefer different types of pastors. Practical theology plays an active role in empowering people to embrace the diversity in Christianity. There is a lot of hate speech on social media, and maybe it is because people focus more on belonging to a certain congregation then belonging to the body of Christ which is all of us in our diversity.

Dreyer and Pieterse (2010:1) argues that

The role of religion in the public sphere also causes problems for theologians. It is possible, for example, to summarise broad patterns in Protestant theology in

reaction to the Enlightenment and the loss of a religious worldview. Generally speaking, orthodoxy clings to its traditional theological positions; Pietism flees from rational criticism of religion to the safe harbour of the subjective religious experiences of the individual; liberal theology tries to reconcile the Christian message with the views of the Enlightenment by digging out the core message of Christianity from the Bible and building hermeneutical bridges for the understanding of the message by modern minds; and political theology accepts the principles of the Enlightenment and tries to show that the Christian faith is in line with this thinking if we understand it as realizing the ideals of modern people: liberation from oppressive structures and political oppression, eradication of poverty and restoration of human dignity (cf. Jonker 2008:135–137). There are mixed models of these extreme positions in Protestant theology, but a brief overview of the theological reactions shows the intensity of the theological debate in its efforts to digest the radical cultural changes that have taken place in the church in the past three hundred years.

One cannot ignore the challenges that come with religious exercises in the workplace. This might create discomfort to other members whose religion might be against the practices of other relations. The aim of practical theology in this context is not to promote a certain religion, but it is rather to use the pastoral care common to all religions to promote healthy human relations in society at large.

Kelcourse (2002: 146) says that pastoral counselling can be understood as a form of prayer: through faith hearing another attend to that of God in them. However due to diversity in the workplace the practice of pastoral counselling with biblical texts is not always applicable to all employees. Pastoral counselling therefore should not be limited to just one religion. It is wrong to limit pastoral counselling only to Christians or to a certain group of people. Comfort and care can cross religions without proselytizing or judging. The study of theology does not only cover Christian beliefs, but it also involves a brief introduction into different religious groups found within the scholars' country. Pastors should therefore be open to becoming care givers with sensitivity to matters of faith and a diversity of religions in the workplace and community. Denton in Naidoo (2014:2) argues that research suggests that when considering how to bring spirituality into the workplace, organisational cultures need to be transformed collectively, and this done by transforming leadership where spiritual practices and values are incorporated into culture of the organisation.

## 2. Challenge to Practical Theology

There are several challenges to practical theology:

- To explore sensitivity to different religious practices and rites within the workplace;
- To study other religious beliefs and practices rather than focus on just one religion;
- To explore ways to bridge the gap between Christians and other religions in the workplace;
- To explore ways to bring men, work and family together;
- To explore ways theology can be more relevant to everyday struggles in the workplace: professionally;
- To explain the different disciplines within the study of theology (practical theology, pastoral care, liturgical studies, family counseling, trauma counseling, dogmatic, church history, missiology, systematic theology, liberation theology, black theology, Old and New Testament studies, etc.)

According to Dreyer and Pieterse (2010:1), there are many questions regarding the role of religion in the public sphere. How must we deal with the issues of religious education in public schools? How do we deal with different religious calendars in our business life? How should we view prayers at public gatherings? How do we deal with religious groups' petitions regarding the death penalty, abortion, same-sex marriage? How do we deal with atheists' claims to freedom of speech? These demonstrate the presence of religions in the public sphere.

Practical Christian theology attempts to not merely preach the gospel, but to "care" for the person as a human being first without prejudice to that person's religion. One cannot expect a Christian to teach Islam, but a Christian can give care to a Muslim without being threatened by that Muslim's faith.

In order to explore this research Osmer's approach to practical theology will be used (2008:4):

- What is going on?
- Why is this going on?
- What ought to be going on?

- How might we respond?

Osmer (2008:4) regards these as of utmost importance when dealing with practical theology research. We give a few proposed answers to these questions in the context of this paper.

**a. What is going on?**

One of the basic human rights in South Africa is for one to have the freedom of choice of religion, yet some feel that this right is discriminated against at work. People feel as though they are being forced to shy away from their spiritual practices in their workplace. When then does this basic human right start and when does it end? The spirituality in the workplace is limited mostly to Christians, and Christianity is often seen as the rightful choice of religion in South Africa. Some workplaces also limit workers' practice of their religious beliefs due to the rules that come with working in a certain company. When other religions enter a mostly Christian work place, there is no small dilemma.

**b. Why is this going on?**

The dilemma is complicated when the Christian faith has the highest percentage of adherents in South Africa. Religion is often seen as divisive and unhelpful in the work environment. Consequently, there has often been a failure:

- To explore sensitivity to different religious practices and rites within the workplace;
- To study other religious beliefs and practices rather than focus on just one religion;
- To explore ways to bridge the gap between Christians and other religions in the workplace;
- To explore ways to bring men, work and family together;
- To explore ways theology can be more relevant to everyday struggles in the workplace; and
- To explain the different disciplines within the study of theology ( Practical theology, pastoral care, liturgical studies, family counseling, trauma counseling, dogmatic, church history, missiology , systematic theology, liberation theology , black theology , Old Testament studies, New Testament studies etc.

Even though all employees do not always belong to the same religious faith, they often have to deal with the faith issues the majority of the employees belong to. When your boss is a Christian, he might at the end of the day in his speech end by saying “May God bless you” or “we thank God for a project well done.” Statements such as these might bring discomfort to an employee who does not believe in god (for whatever reasons they might have). When looking at the country of South Africa as a whole, Christian holidays are celebrated and acknowledged more than any other religion in the country. This might limit knowledge and even practice of holidays celebrated by other religions.

**c. What ought to be going on?**

Organizations need to be well informed and aware of other religious groups, their rights and rituals. They also need to be sensitive when speaking about faith, values and morals. It is wrong for any organization to assume values, morals, faith and ethics are the same for all employees. The point of argument is not to change any organization into a church or spirituality society. But employees should have the right to pray or not to pray, to believe or not to people, to talk of a different god or believe differently without offending others.

**d. How might we respond?**

One also needs to find a theory on how to sensitize spirituality in the workplace. The mostly Christian South African universities also need to create awareness that includes other religious groups in its studies. When we talk of pastoral care givers, it is not only limited to Christians. We can respond theologically by doing more research on other religious faiths. Organizations can also include a five minute of “silence” every day at work to allow individuals to talk to their gods in a way that is not harmful to others and to the organization. Organizations can also organize annual events where employees are taught or introduced to different faiths outside of the organizations.

**Conclusion**

Dreyer and Pieterse (2010:6) state that if we, as religious people representing the churches, want to join the public debate on the burning issues in South Africa society, we have to accept our secular



state, our constitution with its liberal values of a modern state and renounce and claim to a monopoly on power.

According to Manetsh (2013:94), Calvin and his colleagues believed pastoral ministry to be of especially “crucial importance” for the life of the community. Kelcourse (2002: 146) says that pastoral counselling can be understood as a form of prayer. He adds (2002) that in therapy an interpersonal dialogue is formed between the pastoral counsellor and counselee where God is present. Some of the weakness of pastors today and care givers is that they tend to preach about what they are told or heard, and that makes it hard for people to come forward to their pastors without fearing their story might be part of the sermon on a Sunday morning. A wise pastor cares and is careful to guard all confidential information.

We agree with Baloyi (2013) that the church should become a centre of healing not a show. Klein in Baloyi (2013:14) invites every local church to become a centre of healing and transformation through holistic counselling services. The psychological help that modern society affords can help those who are overtaken by the dangerous fanatics who turn Christian faith upside-down with people eating grass, snakes, drinking fuel or having DOOM sprayed in their face all in the name of healing. Pastoral care for these can gently lead them into the fold of a more wholesome and true Christian faith.

Even with all the challenges that Christianity faces in this context, a practical theology can have a positive effective in fostering healthy human relations.

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