

Nomadic Ecclesia Praxes as an Eschatological Movement in, with, from the Margins of Oppression: A Practical Theology of Freedom and Justice

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This paper seeks to advance the notion of nomadic ecclesia praxes as an inherent eschatological movement as enacted by Jesus Christ. The underlying premise is to depart from the conventional theology of the church as an institutional system. Western theological traditions are re-examined in the light of an African context to envision an eschatological model for nomadic praxes. The aim is to draw on indigenous cultural praxes to redress cultural conformity of the church. Proverbs and artefacts of the First Nation People of South Africa serve as a critical theological source. Their nomadic living realities, their natural spirituality, and their continuous movement resonate with Christian eschatology, a subversive revolutionary praxis. The objective is to illuminate and advance the eschatologically “not-yet” nomadic praxis of Justice and Freedom.

Background and Introduction

I am a practical theologian in the Reformed tradition. My parental and childhood roots stem from the Anglican and Lutheran traditions. In this paper, references to the church pertain to the universal or ecumenical Christian church.

Reduced societal influence, and spiritual impoverishment characterize the contemporary institutional church—resulting in members seeking their own spiritual journey (Gibbs and Coffey 2001, 10–11). De-churched people are leaving the church due to spiritual persecution (Packard and Hope 2015, 15). The continuing conversion of the church is therefore quintessential (Guder 2000, 150–151). No wonder that C.S. Lewis coined the notion “mere Christianity” and defined the Christian church as deep church—a redress of historical and Trinitarian orthodoxy (in Walker and Parry 2014, vii–viii). The Catholic theologian Izuzquiza proposes a form of *radical ecclesiology* to counter institutionalized practices by advancing a true contextual Christocentric community (2009). The aim is to avoid cultural conditioning and the consequent reduction of

the gospel—the root of the institutionalization of the church (Guder 2000, 194).

Emerging churches are a response to the institutionalization of the church to dismantle self-serving cultural church praxes (Gibbs and Bolger 2005, 29). Cultural identity, if de-constructed, lies at the core of an authentic Christian contextual theology (Bevans 1992, 25). Appropriation of indigenous culture as a critical theological source is, therefore, crucial for a more representable church (Bevans 1992, 26). Bevans pleads for “a strong but realistic cultural identity” for doing theology (1992, 27). For example, theology in African villages should engender cultural identity through African proverbs and artefacts (Lewis-Williams 2015). Meylahn (2010, 7), therefore, holds that the African philosophy of ubuntu, calls us into *a continual and whole be-ing becoming*.

Methodological Footprints

It is presumptuous to prescribe a methodology for the purposes of this chapter. I reject quick fixes for



any church. Church transformation should be a never-ending process (Keifert 2006, 39–48). The missiology circular praxis could prove instrumental to enhance process-orientated change (Bosch 2005). Bosch (2005, 424) proposes Nietzsche’s “hermeneutics of suspicion” to disarm Western science, -philosophy and -theology. Furthermore, a new epistemology is required to redress the notion that the world is a static object to be analyzed and explained with abstract ideas. Torres argues for commitment as a precursor to doing theology with and for the poor and marginalized: “*Vox victimarum vox Dei*—the cries of the victim are the voice of God” (in Bosch 2025, 424). Practical theologizing should first work *with* the marginalized and suffering, by employing a hermeneutics of action. Building on Segundo, Bosch (2005) opts for contextual theology by applying a hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle begins with the praxis of marginalization, culminating in reflection as an act of theology to unearth intersubjectivity (Bosch 2005, 424–425). Keifert’s (2006, 61) missional methodology grounded “within the life of the trinity” offers insightful and practice-based ways of operationalizing change in churches.

Following Bevans (1992, 77–78) and Meylahn (2010), I locate contextual theology in ethnic paradigms of thought and cultural practices. Westernized practices of individualization and personalized

theologies should be challenged (Ward 2017). Consequently, this ever-present reality of cultural conformity makes indigenization and continuing conversion of the institutional church a spiritual necessity (Guder 2000, 147).

An illustration of an indigenous culture pertains to the first nation people in Southern Africa, as espoused by Vetkat’s artifacts (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014). The second illustration focuses on the story of the *Karretjiemense* (the Donkey Cart People) of the arid Karoo flatlands in central districts of South Africa (De Jongh 2013). With reference to Zimmerli, parallels are drawn between Jesus’ nomadic ministry and Israel’s Exodus from Egypt (1984).

First, Vetkat captures the significance of an ancient nation’s religious awareness of God (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014). His artifacts serve as a source to recount the meaning and affirmation of indigenous people’s culture through decades of colonial and neo-colonial praxes. His art demonstrates that indigenous expression is lasting (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014). From his art, the following theological features were apparent:

Vetkat’s spirituality demonstrates a deep sense of respect and value for the ecology. Daily encounters with nature and humans are being shared, reflected upon, celebrated, or mourned with adults, youth, and children. He depicts the oppression of a first nation people in South Africa; his incessant pray for the provision of God in the basic needs of the [Khoisan] nation; their longing for God’s restitution and liberation of the Khoisan to regain their identity, culture, political rights, and wellbeing as a recognized nation (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014).

Drawing on Hopewell (1987, 17), we can assert that the first illustration reveals that Christ was already present in the existential struggles of the Khoisan nation. Ward (2017) supports this perspective as encapsulated by the mission of the apostle Paul. Paul discovered new Christ-like places and -peoples (Ward 2017, 7).

Furthermore, Hardy maintains that the concept “sociality” defines the action of God in the world (in Ward (2017, 5–7). Sociality, or the social life of indigenous people, shapes humanity in how it enacts the purpose of God in the world. These social life forms are precursors to where the Trinity engages people. Human society and indigenous nations’ language symbols and culture are contingent in nature. Sociality is hence “a dynamic shifting and complex reality. This complexity finds its origins in the Trinitarian life of God” (Ward 2017, 5–6). I argue, thus,



Image 1: Portrayal of the Circle of Indigenous Khoisan life, by Alma Jean Stockenstroom (2000). Permission granted by artist.



Image 2: Karretjie people: First Nation people of South Africa, by Anthony Noble (2025). Permission granted by artist.

that the Khoi and San nation's living experience is a dynamic, form of sociality in and through symbols of meaning and transformative power undergirded by life in the Trinity (Ward 2017, 7).

Similarly, churches draw their meaning from Christian and non-Christian sources (Hopewell 1987, 8). If it fails to appreciate its own culture it devalues its identity in God (1987, 9). Moreover, symbols and rituals are central to the religion and existence of the Khoisan—defining their indigenous culture, language, and identity (Lewis-Williams 2015, 206).

The *Karretjiemense* are constantly drifting throughout the Great Karoo. Ironically, they remain oppressed, complete strangers and excluded from political, economic, and social power, despite being first nation people of South Africa (De Jongh 2013, 1). Their entire existence—a “shifting home”—is a constant movement to nowhere (De Jongh 2013, 1).

Natural Nomadic Spirituality

The contributions of scholars such as Boff (1986), Bosch (1979, 2005), Botman (2004), Castro (1985), Gutiérrez (1984, 2004), Bevans and Schroeder (2004), Taylor (2005), and Verkuyl (1993) are used to support the notion of nomadic spirituality. In the lifestyles of the two indigenous groups dis-

cussed, an inherent, natural spirituality reflects their engagement with the environment, society, and God (Lewis-Williams 2015, 205). Obe Phillips, a minster in the Reformed tradition, reflects on a century-old tradition of the Khoi people caring and feeding to infuse a newborn baby. A special fire burns in their hut to symbolize the sacredness of the space. After the prescribed period of isolation, mother and child are ceremonially introduced to the community. Their bodies are anointed with the aroma of boegoe and rich animal fat which bear the meaning of protection and blessing (2024). This is one example of how indigenous communities practiced their Godly inspired spirituality as a natural phenomenon.

I would like to draw parallels between this indigenous “natural” spiritual practice and the way Jesus and his disciples practiced theology beyond the institutional church by moving from place-to-place teaching with parables, engaging in natural resources and impacting on church and society (Luke 10, 1-12; Wimberley 2020, 129). I agree with Goppelt that Christology was exemplified through Jesus' nomadic ministry in Jerusalem, Galilee, and Samaria (1983, 14, 24). Jesus' nomadic ministry captured by Gutiérrez (1984, xviii) who posits that to those who ask, “Where do you live?” Jesus answers, “Come and see.” Those who followed him became wanderers, nomads in strange and familiar places (Gutiérrez 1984, xviii).



Image 3: Karretjie people: First Nation people of South Africa, by Anthony Noble (2025b). Permission granted by artist.

I maintain, therefore, that the notion of nomadic praxes such as the Karretjiemense and Vetkat¹, their natural spirituality and constant movement, have eschatological implications. Their seasonal demographic shifts characterized by a grassroots spirituality resonates with the wanderings of Jesus and his disciples who avoided institutional Jewish praxes (Goppelt 1983). Reminiscent of a disengagement with conformity to the Empire and reengagement with the indigenization and continuing conversion of Christian spirituality (Guder 2000).

Zimmerli (1984, 216), reflects on Isaiah 55:12-13, Isaiah 40:3-5 to depict Israel's joyful exodus. In Isaiah 40:9-11 Yahweh is portrayed as the victorious shepherd, which Zimmerli (1984, 216) views as a nomadic event of a 'new exodus,' with greater depth and meaning than the Egypt exodus. Several nomadic lifestyle examples are found in the Old Testament (cf Numbers 24:5; Job 5:24; 9:27). Niringiye speaks of a dual dwelling—God dwelling among His people, and they dwell in Him (2014, 197):

... God dwells supremely in our midst through Jesus—the Word who became flesh, tabernacling with us (John 1, 14). Jesus... makes the church a dwelling place in which God dwells through his Spirit (1 Cor 3, 16). ... The

ultimate tabernacle/temple remains future (Rev 21) (Harper and Metzger 2009, 28). The church is a trinitarian community. [... an] eschatological community of the Triune God (Harper and Metzger 2009, 14).

Dwelling in the desert and desert practices demonstrated the spirituality of the Qumran Community of John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and his disciples. God's people were always associated with nomadism or being pilgrims in the world (Zimmerli 1984, 893). I draw a parallel between Jesus' nomadic ministry and Israel's exodus from Egyptian slavery. Nomadism advanced "the need for mobility and hospitality for the traveler" (Zimmerli 1984, 893). Is this not how the fellowship of brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ should exist (Berkhof 1983, 384)? The Christian Qumran community as reflected on by Matthew, Luke, John the Baptist, and Jesus through their grassroots movement focused on metanoia and repentance as an eschatologically motivated movement (Luke 13:34-35; 6:22; Matthew 11:18-19). Christological belief was understood as the fulfillment of faith, grace, and salvation (Schillebeeckx 1983, 11, 117, 407), and human dignity (Botman 2004).

The Jesus movement was a renewal movement within Judaism as transition from its institutionalized praxis, according to Theissen (in Botman 2004). Theissen defines this movement as "a deep-seated crisis, a deep-seated change in terms of role, structure and fundamental change" (in Botman 2004,

1 "A human group which changes its area of residence seasonally within a larger domain which is its home territory. The patriarchal period was largely a time of nomadism for God's chosen remnant (Douglas 1977, 892).

510). Hence, the Jesus movement evolved from a crisis of renewal in Palestinian Jewish society into a mutual community between the Jesus movement and Jewish society (Boman 2004, 510). At the heart of the Jesus movement lies the principle and praxis of “living as if the status quo is not an eschatological imperative” (Botman 2004, 513).

Drawing from the discussion thus far, I maintain that there is a relation between nomadic indigenous spirituality and the ministry of Jesus and his disciples, undergirded by the writings of several scholars (Zimmerli 1984; Botman 2004; Gutiérrez 1984).

Theoretical Framework for Nomadic Spirituality

Gutiérrez (1984) locates the pastoral spiritual journey of Christians in Latin America within “a deep, personal experience of the living God in the midst of the struggle for justice and peace (xv).” The spirituality of liberation touches every dimension of life (Gutiérrez 1984, xv). His Christ-centered spirituality is quintessential for a spirituality of liberation—a dynamic spirituality of the continually new movements of the Spirit among the suffering and poor people of God (Gutiérrez 1984, xix).

Bosch (1979, 13), on his part, holds that spirituality resonates with being the sending embodiment of Christ “into the heart of the city and its turmoil,” such as Mother Theresa in Calcutta: “Touching the poorest of the poor, she says, means touching the

body of Christ” (1979, 13). In 1952 the Lund meeting of “Faith and Order” reminded the church that it is perpetually “called out of the world and sent into the world” (Bosch 1979, 15). I posit that the church should resemble nomadism because it should, according to Bosch, “be a stranger and at the same time at home in another place” (1979, 24). Bosch (1979, 58) undergirds my point of the nomadic nature of the church as he defines the true nature of the church as “moving from one culture, ethnic, linguistic, or sociological reality” as supported by Illich’s view that the church should move “beyond its social boundaries; beyond linguistic boundaries” (in Bosch 1979, 59).

Although Bevans and Schroeder (2004, 121) use the concept *peregrinatio pro Christo*, wandering for the sake of Christ, to depict an ascetic ideal of pilgrimage inherited from Irish monks. It nonetheless shows a similarity with my notion of a Christo-nomadic-praxis. Moreover, Nouwen (1984) portrays the spirituality of the desert with the notion of “flight.” The desert fathers and mothers perceived it as a way of disengaging with conformity to the world (Nouwen 1984, 13–15).

Boff (1986, 26, 69), from a perspective of a preferential option for the poor, coins the concept *Christ-Spirit-Church* as an innate dynamic divine movement and presence within and beyond the church. The imperative of being sent with a prophetic witness to reinvent churches and reconfigure new social realities is at the heart of the mission of the whole church (Boff 1986, 27, 32–33). Castro (1985, x)



Image 4: Nomadic spirituality, by Anthony Noble, 2016. Permission granted by artist.



encapsulates a futuristic dynamism of how the church should advance “Christian freedom from the perspective of the Kingdom of God” by opting for a preferential praxis for the poor. He calls, for example, on churches in Korea to share all the gifts of the church with the poor (1985, 8). Furthermore, Oduyoye, as cited by Castro, calls for the revolutionization of African Christianity through African spirituality. Building on African spirituality, Dickson, as cited by Castro, points to a “continuity between the Old Testament and African life and thought,” as exemplified by the Exodus story and Jesus’ earthly ministry (1985, 12). The role of the nomadic church community becomes even more imperative in the diaspora.

Following Gutiérrez (2014, 36–37), we can concur that African spirituality can inspire a new Christendom in search of a just society. In so doing, I concur with Congar, as cited by Gutiérrez, that the “church fulfills her mission to be the soul of human society.” The church is in essence a subversive nomadic movement with revolutionary intent (Gutiérrez 2014, 75). Church is only true Christo-praxis church if it touches the poor (Matt 5:23-24; 25:31-45 Gutiérrez 2014, 132).

Verkuyl (1993, 369) argues that the church of Jesus Christ will only mature when the Kingdom of God is fully revealed. Neither is it limited to one nation. There is a “cross over to the nations of the world... realized from nation to nation, culture to culture with a continuous breakthrough” (1993, 370). Following Martin Luther, as cited by Verkuyl (1993, 416), the church is consistently being cared for and carried by Jesus Christ. The essence of the church is a nomadic fellowship continuously on route to the kingdom of God (Verkuyl 1993, 416). In the final analysis, Anglican theologian Niringiye (2014, 197) concurs that the metaphor “journey” defines the character and nature of the people of God.

Nomadic spirituality can be grounded in what the postmodern scholar Taylor (2005, 81) coins as “spiritual tourism as a built-in craving for spirituality” and “images of God with a relational magnet that pulls us towards wholeness with the Divine.” Based on research of Hay, Taylor undergirds a relentless quest for spirituality by those on the periphery and beyond the church (2005, 81). He accentuates this quest with the metaphor of a home fire, *ahika*. It attracts tourists across the globe “gathered around it, yarning, sharing their pilgrim tales” (Taylor 2005:163). Home fires are indicative for nomads: “Keep the home fires burning, so loved ones

will always return” (Taylor 2005,163). Being called out of the world and sent again into the world is to be simultaneously a stranger and at home on foreign soil (Bosch 1979, 46). The apostle Paul’s traveling in the world was a constant rediscovery of Christ (Ward 2017, 7).

Thus, faith communities should be nothing short of being nomadic Christopraxes—reconstructing and mobilizing the world in the struggle for liberation of the poor (Botman 2000, 208–209). A case in point is how Vetkat portrays an indigenous model of spirituality of a people conscious of their own fallibility and God’s existence and providence. Christo-praxis is in essence a spirituality of liberation (Gutiérrez 1984, xviii). I wonder whether the established institutional church, particularly the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, will ever reach out to embrace Christ in the wandering lives of the indigenous people to redress historic and contemporary injustices.

New Ecclesia Praxis: Repudiating Westernization and Colonialism

The house of the Lord, the tabernacle, was built with His direct instructions (Exodus 25:9; 26-27). The glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle throughout Israel’s journey from slavery to freedom (Exodus 40:34-38). Based on 2 Samuel 7:2-13, I contend that the church is established in God, not human, religious praxeologies, which are futile and finite exercises (cf. Hebrew 8:2; John 2:19, 21; Mark 14:58; Revelation 11:19a). The Old Testament nomadic tabernacle symbolized God’s continued divine dwelling among His people.

God by His Spirit is the dwelling place of the people of God. A community in the Spirit, a dwelling of God in God. “Through the Spirit—the church became the dwelling place of God. An authentic Christian community on the journey itself” (Niringiye 2014, 116, 197).

The New Testament tabernacle in Jesus Christ became an embodied nomadic journey toward its ultimate culmination in the second coming of Jesus Christ. The New Testament church began as a movement without social influence operating from the margins of society (Gibbs and Coffey 2001, 226). Jesus did not write a book or church doctrines; he established a community of friends (Newbigin 1995, 89). Therefore, the conventional church, in my view, is a colonial Western institutional construct—the

capturing of the first-century Christian movement's mission and values for political, economic security, and social interests (Dulles 1983, 31ff). The Enlightenment consequently forced theology and the church to recognize institutions as futile, fallible, and relative (Hodgson 1988, 52): "Institutional or structural aspects will never be sufficient to constitute the Church—instead it would become a dead rather than a living body; an inauthentic sign of insignificance" (Dulles 1983, 64).

Hence, the call on the church to simulate Jesus' own ministry by transforming maintenance-minded churches into missional communities (Gibbs and Coffey 2001, 212). The church ought to be a mission-driven eschatological, trinitarian community of "the communal and co-missional God who reigns and dwells in its midst as the one to whom the church belongs" (Harper and Metzger 2009, 20).

The church, therefore, basically means "gathering into community," centered upon the reality of and presence of Christ. The church is an eschatological provisional pilgrim or nomadic reality (Hodgson 1988, 24; Berkhof 1983, 322; Dulles 1983, 97). Hodgson (1988, 13) refers to "new ways of dwelling humanly in the world," of experiencing the reality of the kingdom as present, although not yet finally realized (Hegstad 2013, 33).

If we are mindful of church history, then we will recognize that the church failed God's will as it sided with the powerful for its own benefit (Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Modise, 2017). It compromised the radical nature of its missional call by embracing injustice. From a Lutheran perspective, the true church should, or must, embrace an eschatological imperative to redress racism and injustice, in particular, culturally captured church praxes (Hegstad 2013, 38–39).

Bevans criticizes Christianization as being equal to Westernization and enmeshed with colonialism (1992, 76). I sense a similar awareness in Hopewell's (1987, 4) intention to create "a loose fellowship," based on intimacy, fellowship, and service. His objective may resonate with a search for the rebirth of the ecclesial community from below and beyond established structures (Boff in Hodgson 1988, 51–52). The driving force for such a quest should be informed by humanity's symbolic struggles (Hopewell 1987, 4). Hopewell was struck by the similarities of this "loose fellowship" and the bonding features he saw in African villages. Churches can only exist by developing a subculture—a complex network of signs and symbols and conventions (1987, 4–5).

Hopewell (1987, 5) concludes that faith communities are deeply enmeshed in symbols and signals of the world, gathered, and grounded in the church's own understanding and experience. Creeds, organizing structures, and programs do not constitute the essence of the church (Hopewell 1987, 5).

Thus, the basic church community introduces a new ecclesiological reality in building a living church en-route to liberating humankind rather than building structures (Boff 1987, 1,4). The church emanates from the people and should oppose institutionalism (Boff 1986, 8–9). For instance, clericalization is crucial to restore the church through a new praxis (1986, 32). Boff calls for a reinvention of the whole church from its foundations (1986, 32–33). Similarly, Hodgson proposes a new vision of ecclesia as non-racial, emancipatory, and transformative (1988, 52).

In a similar vein I concur that communion ecclesiology is only possible if it is based on justice (Doyle 2000, 126). Hopewell's missionary and ecumenical engagements on the African continent prompted an awareness of injustices perpetrated through colonialism. Local faith communities should therefore particularize their religious behavior and concretely express their faith (1987, 3). Faith communities encapsulate thick, meaning-laden stories which inspire their unique religious identity (1987, 3). This is only plausible through the eschatological gift of salvation and an imperative for freedom and justice (Hegstad 2013, 38).

Mukdani's notion of not "overemphasizing colonialism as a cultural or epistemic phenomenon" and not to "waste energy to challenge the legacy of colonialism" (2013, ix), impoverish our cause to rid society of the pervasive nature of colonialism. Human suffering in the world is so severe that none of us can claim to be innocent. The crisis of humanity is due to the legacy of past theological projects and Christian ministries (Jennings 2013, ix).

For instance, Antonio (in Maluleke 2022, 6) posits that Black Theology highlights numerous crises in Christian theology, namely the discursive structure of theology in terms of the social location of Black humanity regarding Black experience (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014). African theology and Black Theology have indeed exposed these crises in crafting Christologies from the lived experience of the suffering and oppressed (Maluleke 2022, 3). The severity of pervasive systemic injustice ravishing Black communities, as well as first nation peoples such as the Khoisan, and people across the world, leaves practical theology in a crisis (Maluleke 2022,



6; Adonis 1982). The need for the deconstruction, of particularly Western theology, is critical if we are to build a theology fit enough to deal with the severity of the challenges of the oppressed and marginalized (Dames 2014).

Schreiter, therefore, challenges conventional theology in terms of how *context or circumstances* shape the response to the gospel. Localization, contextualization, indigenization, and inculturation of theology are methodologies which shape our response to the gospel as concrete and lively (Schreiter 1981, 1). In addition, Midge refers to a social linguistic process through which the inspirational and orientational traits of the Holy Spirit are defined as a metaphorical, articulated whole of Scripture (2013, 23). This process is grounded in human communities of justice, peace, and love (Midge 2013, 23). It holds the promise of a new living reality. Schreiter (1981, 3) calls for a new kind of Christian identity in terms of context and history—prioritizing contextual analysis and not conventional theology. Theological meaning-making within a cultural context should be grounded in indigenous theology. Contextual theology, the attempt to understand the Christian faith in terms of a particular context, is an imperative (Schreiter 1981:4–5). It is, in essence, practical praxis theology. Thus, the need to deconstruct conventional theologies which support institutional praxes and values.

Deconstructing Western Theology Tradition

In his thesis, *Political Eschatology from the Under-side*, Jennings (2013, xiii) undergirds Mukdani's eschatological-political notion of Christian hope. In so doing, he avoids Westernized notions of "progress" or "civilization." These notions were exposed for what was held for centuries as the ultimate of human achievements. Covid-19 laid bare the fallibility of such beliefs. Christian hope, however, is essentially grounded in the "yearnings of the lowly, the disinherited, and the marginalized" (Jennings 2013, xiii-xiv; Hegstad 2013, 38–39).

Deconstruction of Western theological traditions was quintessential. The synthesis between Western cultural progress and the core of Christianity was shattered (Jennings, 2013). The kingdom of God brought about the collapse of all structures of the world (Jennings 2013, xiv): "Christ is the crisis of civilization, of culture, of religion, even of what is

called Christianity" (Jennings, 2013, xv). However, the church became a pyramidal power structure (Guder 2000; Jennings, 2013, xv-xvi). The fourth century brought the church to a devastating reality of departing from Christ's example, a biblical movement of community by embracing a hierarchical Roman pattern and structure (Paget-Wilkes 1981, 50–51; Guder 2000, 6–9).

Advancing Constantinian institutionalization prompted the end of Jesus Christ's nomadic movement. Christ, I contend, is the crisis of any ecclesial praxis—the crisis of practical theology itself, particularly when millions suffer—while the church exists as an institution with multimillion rands of church buildings and bank accounts (Dames 2014). The cross of Christ bears implications for the church so imperative that it can never be discarded:

The true church to the gospel of Jesus Christ is grounded in the *missio Dei*. But the identity of the church is forged as a crucible to which it is called in discipleship as *ecclesia cruxis*, the coming of the cross. Sinfulness of the church recognized the church as the *peccatrix maximus*, the greatest of sinners in failing to honor its calling (Jenkins 2003, 180).

The church remains oblivious to how it serves and supports the wealthy instead of the poor. It is "in bondage to capitalism" and fixated on "cultural and religious individualism;" operating as "the buyer's market" for entertainment and marketing—national churches even "equates citizenship with church membership" (Niebuhr 2008, 24–25; Jinkins 2003, 181, 185).

Such churches value a morality of economic worth instead of values such as justice, humanity, and freedom (Niebuhr 2008, 25). However, a different view of the church offers a totally new perspective. Wimberley (2020, 129) illustrates how different it is to live in a village-based community. He coins the concept *relational refugees* to highlight the struggle of people in alienating, consumerist cultures who become isolated, separated from nurturing and positive relationships.

We should remember that hope is grounded in a theology of historical transformation (Jennings (2013, xvii). Therefore, Christian hope is true hope grounded in the suffering of Jesus on the cross as a historical-imminent event of the crucified God (Jennings 2013, xvii). Hence, the notion of a theology of the cross as a political messianic theology for the collapse of the Empire (Jennings 2013, xix, xxi). The kingdom of God signals a collapse of the status

quo, and the imminent transcendence of new life and cosmic wholeness—subverting any institutionalist church motives and praxes (Jennings 2013, xxi-xxii). Eschatology, therefore, is in essence political eschatology of Christian hope (Jennings 2013, xiii).

Dismantling Conventional Ecclesial Praxes

Hence, Christendom is nothing less than unacknowledged hypocrisy, a dangerous compromise between Christianity and the world (Niebuhr 2008, 4). Western Christianity consistently removed from its theology Jesus' own renunciation of human power (Guder 2000, 195): "Ministry is theology's polygraph, its infallible lie-detector test, revealing the truth of what the church believes and the identity of whom she worships—the God of the cross or the false deities of her cultural ideology" (Jenkins 2003, 196). Hence, political eschatology is a performative process, a subversive act in ecclesial praxes (Niebuhr 2008, 13). Therefore, a contextual ecclesial praxis presupposes the inclusion of the oppressed and marginalized (Mukdani 2013, 3–4).

From a Charismatic perspective, the Anglican theologians Walker and Parry (2014, 4) propose a structured ecclesia. I view it as a misrepresentation of the ecclesia, as it could promote the conventional institutionalized church. As a solution, the notion of networks could offer a new concrete contextualization of ecclesial theology. Church growth could be advanced through networks as sets of interconnected nodes (Castells in Lord 2012, 95). It could enhance the concretization of a new ecclesial praxis. My use of the term "ecclesia" does not refer to the conventional concept "church," which refers to an institutionalized church structured according to denominational tradition (Niebuhr 2008, 4). The term "ecclesia" here refers to a nomadic movement of Christians always en-route toward the eschaton. Hence, advancing de-colonialism can only profit the cause of those on the fringes of society (Kwok 2005). Therefore, the need to deconstruct religious heritages and conventional theology (Mukdani 2013, 4–5).

The South African Context

In South Africa, the contributions of African, Black, Liberation, and Feminist theology have sought to challenge white colonial domination (Maluleke

2022, 3,5; cf Oduyoye in Maluleke 2022). These theologies sought to redress injustices in class, religion, ethnicity, race and economic inequality (Maluleke 2022, 4; cf Ackermann 1990, 21, 28). These theologies often developed from a liberation of solidarity with the oppressed, exposing oppressive colonial theologies. It was a theology of critical thought and praxis as reflected in a theological cycle of reciprocal action and reflection (Ackermann 1990, 28–29).

The advancement of Black Theology by South Africa theologians was a defining period to subvert oppression. Contextual Theology became prominent and the reviving of African and South African Black Theology, materialized (Maluleke 2022, 5). Black Theology functioned from a crisis perspective of Christian theology, advanced discursive practices; centering social context in theology; and embracing the meaning of black humanity by challenging the systemic and pervasive genocide of Black people (Antonio in Maluleke 2022, 6). As such, Black theology subverted and redressed traditional western theological thought (1977, 122). Black theology advanced total liberation of all people in and through Jesus Christ (Boesak 1977, 12).

Following the discussion above, I suggest redressing conventional Christian theology by discarding any form of theology that oppresses and marginalizes people (Mukdani 2013, 5). Because of the pervasive political and economic power of white colonialists and Black neo-colonialists, this is an indictment for both the new political dispensation and colonial-oriented theology in South Africa.

Marginalized or voiceless indigenous people such as the *Khoisan* nation are an expression of "the kingdom of God" (Mukdani 2013, 6). As an ecclesia of freedom, it dismantles hegemony and institutionalized injustice (Mukdani 2013, 6). Truth-seeking justice is critical to transform society and liberate creation and the oppressed (Wolterstorff 2002; 2004). This is attained by dismantling and reconstructing a Western interpretation of doctrine and Scripture and elevating marginalized cultures (Mukdani 2013, 6–8). The praxis of missionaries was a typical colonial project maintaining Western interests and power over indigenous communities. Such missionary ecclesial traditions cannot claim to represent the kingdom of God (Mukdani 2013, 8–9,12). A new *kairos*-Church dawned with Covid-19, seeking to be missional, relevant, contextual, and liberating, dismantling centuries of being trapped inside Christianity's own walls (Beukes 2020, 1, 3).



However, racism remains a Eurocentric-colonialist virus (Mukdani 2013, 11). It is for this reason that Mukdani (2013, 13) argues for an intellectual border-crossing methodology. His notion of border crossing should also include the colonial cultural enclaves. A persisting crisis in some church circles is the practice which informs and structures the lives of Christians through Western experience and religious creeds, whereas Christianity in its core is a multi-nonracial praxis (Mukdani 2013, 14). Therefore, the prophetic church should prioritize local ecclesiological contexts in seeking “traces of God in their own history,” by designing new theologies from their cultural grassroots (Mukdani 2013, 14–15). For example, Vetkat’s artifacts demonstrate the Khoisan’s awareness of God’s providence. In addition, the insistent movement of the Karretjiemense may correlate with the eschatological reality of the “not yet” reality—a liberation praxis against western oppression and suspect missionaries (Berkhof 1983).

Goeiman (1998, 12) observed a cultural spirituality of apathy in two congregations where he ministered during the 1980s and 1990s. This spiritual culture of submissiveness and powerlessness is a direct result of historical oppressive, institutionalized missionary praxes (Goeiman 1988). As a minister it dawned on me that not all the congregants I ministered to were convinced to be converted or ministered to in terms of Reformed dogma, institutionalized norms and structures. Theirs was a distinct indigenous spirituality, vested in their own indigenous cultural experiences. Many of these members ultimately became either refugees from the church, de-churched, or spiritual seekers of communities which resembled their own indigenous idioms, language, and culture (Dames 2014, 60–120). Ultimately, institutionalization in these reformed traditions culminated in the loss of self-worth and identity among indigenous Christians such as the Khoi and San (Dames 2016, 72; Adonis 1982). No wonder the emerging church became a form of revised ecclesia, beyond traditional ecclesiology captured by Western culture. It is a concrete process of reclaiming the ecclesia movement as embodied by Jesus Christ (Mukdani 2013, 18). The Gospel and Culture Network may very well be an indication of how ecclesiology practitioners are reclaiming the ecclesia movement (Bevans 2005; Taylor 2005; Keifert 2006).

Eschatological Christo-Praxis: Embracing Nomadic Praxes

Christianity is in essence a religion of freedom—an ecclesia of freedom (Hodgson 1988)—an eschatological ecclesia of unity and justice (Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Modise, 2017). Therefore, eschatology is the essence of a renewed humanity and a new eon—a continuum of the renewal of human culture, humanity, and creation (Berkhof 1983, 319, 321, 323). This renewal is a performative action of the Spirit—a participatory event, intervening in history in an emphatic, holistic new way (Berkhof 1983, 328; Hegstad 2013, 39; 48). It is a historical power which touches us, transforms us, and enlists us for service in the continuing work of Jesus Christ (Berkhof 1983, 238). Hence, König broadens conventional Christology through a pneumatological eschatological perspective, “Jesus Christus die eschatos” with its tripartition (in us, for us, and with us) and the embodying of the eschatology (in Berkhof 1983, 523). Following Berkhof (1983), I hold that the eschatology is already present and observable in the culture(s) of the first nation people such as the Khoisan (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014; De Jong 2013). Institutionalism of the church and colonialism and its destructive influences do not resonate with eschatology nor with the *eschatos*.

The vision and missional praxis of ecclesia is eschatological hope (Mukdani 2013, 19; Greenwood 2002, 43) that speaks of the lived realities of oppressed people (Wolterstorff 2002). Eschatological hope is the deconstruction of western societal power and the reconstruction of a counter society with an inherent counter-cultural consciousness (Mukdani 2013, 20). Vetkat envisions a harmonious society in equilibrium with fellow human beings and nature (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014). To realize counter-cultural consciousness and harmonious societies, we need to enhance contextual theological praxes as politico-eschatological praxis engendering non-racialism (Mukdani 2013, 20). Politico-eschatological praxes seek concrete socio-cultural and ethical-political transformation (Mukdani 2013, 20–21). Vetkat’s equilibrium methodology is a silent yet revolutionary act for truthful transformation (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014). This is the missional call of the church Jesus Christ envisioned and modelled.

The church is life, a shared praxis towards freedom and a new humanity (Giussani 2001, 5, 234). It

is the Holy Spirit that can inspire and orient God's eschatological new creation (Mukdani 2013, 23). Renewed faith in the invisible church remains at the core of Christianity as a continuing dialectic movement toward God and the world as commissioned by Jesus Christ (Niebuhr 2008, 50–51): "The Church is the continuity of Christ... a mystery of the community of believers" (Giussani 2001, 5, ix).

Eschatology, therefore, inspires a new way of reflection on the "church" as a grassroots faith community in continuous transit. As such, it is eschatologically grounded based on a non-institutionalized model (Mukdani 2013, 22–23). The church is the consecrated catalyst for a restored humanity (Dulles 1983, 98). It is a sign of recreation and redemption of creation from corruption (Hegstad 2013, 32). It calls for a collective response to resist oppression and totalitarian tendencies and practices (Hegstad 2013, 25). Human existence is characteristic of fragmentary, ambiguous histories of freedom (Hegstad 2013, 27–28). Indigenous nations (Weinberg and Tomaselli 2014; De Jong 2013) signify this ambiguity in their existence as vulnerable and marginalized people on the periphery (Mukdani 2013, 18). An ecclesia of freedom should therefore be nothing less than a context in which humanity enacts a mutual obligation for justice (Mukdani 2013, 29). Hence, ecclesial praxis is a performative ecclesiology which espouses the eschatological concretization of, for instance, indigenous cultures (Mukdani 2013, 20–29).

The objective of faith communities should be to advance Jesus' eschatological dream for a new humanity through the praxis of the kingdom of God (Newbigin 1997, 153). Therefore, the "church" should exist on the margins, always engaged in the reconstruction of theology (Mukdani 2013, 33). The entire existence of the *Karretjiemense* (De Jong 2013) is on the margins between fenced-off properties of farmers and provincial roads. How does this serve as a critique of economic, political power, and public theology? Perhaps a robust reconstructive contextual theology should prioritize the voice of these voiceless communities (Mukdani 2013, 33–34).

Therefore, Mukdani's notion of an ecclesia of freedom can advance justice-seeking, truth-seeking praxes. It requires a shift from ecclesial-centered to people-centered realities (2013, 37; Wolterstorff 2002). It is a shift from pastoral and ecclesial authority to a public missional ecclesiology beyond church walls (Van Gelder 2009, 95, 97–98). The eschatologically inspired formation of churches should be

shaped by indigenous cultural realities (Mouw 1999, 11–12). True people-centered ecclesial communities are characteristically non-racist (Mukdani 2013, 33). The *Confession of Belhar* refers, in this regard, to God who opts to stand on the side of the oppressed (Plaatjies-Van Huffel and Modise, 2017). However, I argue that the White cultural and economic interests of the Dutch Reformed Church diffused the radical witness of the *Confession of Belhar* with its toxic institutional vested interests. Resulting in the economic, moral, and ministerial disempowerment of a once vibrant, dynamic, and radical Christo-liberating church. It may very well remind us of the divide and rule tactics of the former apartheid regime (Botha 2009). I call on marginalized churches in Southern Africa to rediscover and regain that which is unique to them: their indigenous culture, identity and creativeness. We should perpetually redress racism if the church is to become a truly revolutionary reality (Mukdani 2013, 37).

Conclusion

Practical theology should advance the well-being of human beings toward God's preferred future—a futuristic nomadic church (Mukdani 2013, 40), "the eschatology as a continuum of renewal" (Berkhof (1983, 319). Hegemonic institutional church practices, which are at the root of the oppressive experiences of indigenous first nation Christians, should be dismantled (Mukdani 2013, 41;42). The two illustrations of indigenous culture reflect that life is not a fixed, structural reality, but a pilgrimage (Newbigin 1979). Jesus did not intend to establish institutional churches (Berkhof 1983). The church should embody and advance eschatologically, "not-yet," nomadic praxes of justice and freedom.

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