

# Tambach remixed: “Christians in South African society”

B B “Tumi” Senokoane & J N J Kritzinger

Department of Christian Spirituality, Church History and Missiology  
University of South Africa

## Abstract

*This article flows from the previous one, which analysed Karl Barth’s Tambach lecture in its original German context. It uses the musical metaphor of “remixing” to describe the recontextualising of Barth’s Tambach approach in contemporary South African society. After recontextualising the theological foundations of the Tambach lecture, Barth’s three viewpoints (regnum naturae, regnum gratiae, regnum gloriae) are recontextualised for South Africa, addressing the issue of poverty as an example.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This article flows from the preceding one (Kritzinger 2007), in which Karl Barth’s Tambach lecture of 1919 was analysed in its original German context. In this paper the two of us have collaborated to attempt a recontextualising of Barth’s Tambach approach for contemporary South Africa.

### 1.1 Tambach, Barth and Mozart

Barth described his Tambach lecture (tongue in cheek) in military terms as “a rather complicated kind of machine that runs backwards and forwards and shoots in all directions with no lack of both visible and hidden joints” (in Busch 1976:110). The highly militarised context one year after the Great War makes that perhaps understandable. We, however, prefer to liken the Tambach lecture to a finely crafted musical piece in five movements. As we struggled to make sense of what Barth said at Tambach, and at how he constructed his lecture, musical metaphors suggested themselves. A movement in European classical music is described as:

a self-contained part of a musical composition or musical form. While individual or selected movements from a composition are sometimes performed separately, a performance of the complete work requires all the movements to be performed in succession.

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Often a composer attempts to interrelate the movements thematically, or sometimes in more subtle ways, in order that the individual movements exert a cumulative effect.

(*Wikipedia*, sv Movement [music])

It seemed to us appropriate to characterise Barth as a musician who composed the five sections of the Tambach lecture as intricately interrelated movements of a symphony. The metaphor became even more attractive when we realised that Barth was not only the composer but also the performer of the piece – and that it was a persuasively presented oral performance.<sup>1</sup>

We also discovered that Barth occasionally spoke of the central role that the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) played in his life. Barth was a reasonably accomplished violin player, who played the viola in Mozart string quartets during the early 1930s in Bonn, listened to Mozart every morning of his life, hung a portrait of Mozart in his study at the same level as one of Calvin; gave a moving commemorative address during the Mozart bicentenary in 1956, was an active member of the Swiss Mozart Committee, and devoted an excursus in his *Church Dogmatics* III/3 to Mozart (Barth 1960:297-299). He went so far as to say that Mozart was the first person he would ask for when he arrived in heaven, before Augustine, Thomas, Luther, Calvin or Schleiermacher! (Barth 1956:8).<sup>2</sup>

The relevance of all this for understanding the Tambach lecture is that Barth (1956:8) described the genius of Mozart’s music in “dialectical” language remarkably similar to that of his Tambach lecture:

The centre (*Mitte*) of Mozart’s music is not, like with the great theologian Schleiermacher, that of balance, neutrality or even indifference. What happens in it is rather a glorious upsetting of the balance, a *turning* (*Wendung*) that has power to make the light rise and the shadows wane but not disappear; to make joy overcome pain but not extinguish it; to make the Yes ring out louder than the ever-present No .... I hear in Mozart an art of playing which I do not observe in the same way with anyone else. Beautiful playing assumes: a childlike knowing about the centre (*Mitte*) – as about

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<sup>1</sup> The document clearly bears the stamp of a spoken lecture. Barth did not rework it for publication, but had it published as it was delivered. It is consequently known as the “Tambacher Rede” in German and in all its translations. The rhetoric is that of a persuasive public speaker. The occasional Latin and Greek phrases, along with numerous allusions to contemporary figures and events, suggest a virtuoso solo performance assuming a well informed audience.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the role of Mozart in Barth’s life and theology, see Barth (1956; 1960:297f) and Busch (1976:32, 220, 362, 409f).

the beginning and the end – of all things. I hear Mozart making music from within this centre, from this beginning and end.

(Barth 1956:42, 8 – own translation)

Barth (1960:297) confirms this in his excursus on Mozart in *KD III/3*, by describing the uniqueness of Mozart’s music as holding together the affirmation of God’s good creation (thesis) and the acknowledgement of evil and suffering (antithesis), but not holding them together “in balance.” Instead his music expresses the fact that the whole world of creation is “enveloped in light” (synthesis):

As though in the light of this end, he heard the harmony of creation to which the shadow also belongs but in which the shadow is not darkness, deficiency is not defeat, sadness cannot become despair, trouble cannot degenerate into tragedy and infinite melancholy is not ultimately forced to claim undisputed sway.

(Barth 1960:298)

There is clearly a deep connection between what Barth said at Tambach and what he heard in Mozart’s music. We therefore regard it as justified to see (or hear!) the Tambach lecture as a musical piece in five movements. The first paper (Kritzinger 2007) has shown how intricately Barth composed his Tambach lecture, and how he developed and refined his basic view (Section 1: The Christian in society *is* Christ in society) in the following four sections of the lecture, particularly through the subtle interplay between his three viewpoints (*Gesichtspunkte*) of *regnum naturae*, *regnum gratiae* and *regnum gloriae* – as thesis, antithesis and synthesis respectively. The ability to hold together these three viewpoints in the delicate way that Barth did at Tambach – presenting a theology for public life that expresses a sustaining but non-triumphalist victory of light within darkness – is a work of art and requires musical sense.

## **1.2 Remixing Tambach**

What we said above has far-reaching implications for interpreting Tambach in South Africa today. The conference at which this paper was originally delivered, “Reading Karl Barth in South Africa today,” was the first in a series entitled “Reading the classics.” What does it mean to call a particular theology

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(or theologian) a “classic?” The leaflet announcing the conference<sup>3</sup> explains this term as follows: “The ideas of certain theologians remain relevant and challenging, decades and sometimes even centuries after their death. Such theologians gradually become acknowledged as ‘classics’ who are re-read and re-contextualised in ever new situations.”

How does one honour a “classic” theologian like Barth? It is possible to analyse his thought and then, from a safe distance, to make some critical remarks about its shortcomings or one-sidedness. That is relatively easy to do – and has some value – but it has been done many times before. We decided instead to honour Barth’s socially engaged approach at Tambach by asking concretely what kind of social engagement it could engender in South African society today if we heard it well.

Secondly, we honour the musical character of his Tambach lecture (argued above) by using a musical metaphor (remixing) to describe our interpretation. We believe that this is the best way (if not the only way) to enter into the logic of this lecture and to replicate it in another context. We understand “remixing” as follows:

[A]t its best, remixing is a matter of giving an older artistic expression new currency. In this sense, remixing is a matter of “revoicing,” allowing the original song to be sung again in a contemporary context that is culturally and aesthetically different. Such a remixing honors and respects the integrity and brilliance of the original piece while helping it to be heard anew in the ears and lives of people with different cultural sensibilities.

(Walsh and Keesmaat 2004:7)

When we, without much musical skill, attempt a remix of Barth’s Tambach lecture for South Africa today, we run the risk of producing a bad imitation or a “rip-off of the original author” (Walsh & Keesmaat 2004:7), but that is not our intention. Instead, we remix Barth’s Tambach lecture for South Africa today in good faith, as a serious exercise in recontextualisation, exploring its usefulness as a contemporary public theology.

### **1.3 Public theology**

The first feature of our remix is that we have changed the title from “The Christian in society” to “Christians in society.” We do this to avoid the

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<sup>3</sup> The conference, “Reading Karl Barth in South Africa today,” was hosted jointly by the University of South Africa, the Protestant Theological University in the Netherlands and the Northern Theological Seminary of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa (URCSA). It took place on 10-11 August 2006 in Pretoria.

pretentiousness that some may hear in the former title, as if there were only one position that could be taken by "the Christian," understood collectively. We do not claim to speak *for* all Christians in South Africa, but we intentionally address ourselves *to* them all, presenting to them the message for our society that we have drawn from Barth's Tambach lecture.

The theme "Christians in society," deals with what is today often called "public theology." Since we also use this term in our paper, we need to clarify what we mean by it. At Tambach Barth was restricted in the scope of his address by the other two papers presented at the same conference, on "The Christian in the church" and "The Christian in the State" respectively. We do not observe these constraints and therefore interpret "society" in a slightly wider sense than Barth did in 1919, particularly to include issues of politics and economics.

The description of public theology by Max Stackhouse is helpful. He pointed out that Martin Marty first used the term "public theology" in 1974 in an article on Reinhold Niebuhr, who represented

... a deep strand of intellectual history, one rooted in the close interaction of religious insight, philosophical reflection, and social analysis. Rightly grounded and formed, they could form a basic conceptual framework capable of providing an accurate analysis of historical experience and of guiding ethical judgment in our common life. The term was used to stress the point that theology, while related to intensely personal commitments and to a particular community of worship is, at its most profound level, neither merely private nor a matter of distinctive communal identity. Rather, it is an argument regarding the way things are and ought to be, one decisive for public discourse and necessary to the guidance of individual souls, societies, and, indeed, the community of nations.

(Stackhouse 1996:165)

Stackhouse (1996:167) points out that public theology, without being called by that name, can be traced back to the "Fathers of the Church" in European Christianity, who "provided a moral and spiritual inner architecture to the emerging complex civilization" – in dialogue with philosophers, scientists, jurists and artists – to strengthen the public processes, structures and resources necessary for the ordering of the common good.

In this article we use "public theology" in this wide sense, without engaging the detailed debates about the various "publics" of theology (religious, political, academic, economic), its various modes (dogmatic, polemic, apologetic), its forms of discourse (prophetic, narrative, technical,

policy), or the spheres in which it operates (politics, economics, civil society, public opinion).<sup>4</sup>

## **2. WHAT DOES TAMBACH HAVE TO DO WITH TSHWANE?**

As indicated in the preceding paper (Kritzinger 2007), Barth delivered his Tambach lecture at a time when there was "a deep political uncertainty and chaos in the countries of central Europe" and when clarity was needed "about the relationship between God's coming Kingdom and human actions for justice." Understandably, there was uncertainty among Christians about their involvement in politics, especially after the ravages of the First World War. The situation in South Africa at present is vaguely similar, even though historical comparisons are odious.

The revolution that gave birth to the Weimar Republic in Germany was not as radical as many socialists had hoped. The nationalists and the capitalist business owners managed to sign a deal with moderate socialists and with the military that prevented a Bolshevik type revolution in Germany. Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (and many other Spartacists) paid with their lives for that compromise. In South Africa the negotiated political revolution that gave birth to a democratic state also delivered less than many people in the liberation movements had hoped for. The existing property rights of the white "settlers" are enshrined in the Constitution, even though it could be argued that 87% of the land became the property of white South Africans due to systematic injustice and land dispossession of black South Africans over 300 years – and that democracy would have to imply a substantial redistribution of land. The ANC, following its Freedom Charter of 1955, insisted that South Africa "belongs to all who live in it, both black and white," and settled for a non-racial democracy in which the existing property rights of white South Africans are respected. In spite of this, the fear of a Communist take-over of the government of the "new South Africa" probably led to the 1993 assassination of Chris Hani, popular and charismatic leader in the South African Communist party and the tripartite ANC alliance.

The Christian churches in South Africa were divided on the question of their public role for most of the 20th century, certainly since 1948 when the National Party took power and started implementing apartheid. Whereas the Afrikaans Reformed churches (with the exception of a small minority of dissenting voices) supported the apartheid policy and gave it theological legitimacy, the "English-speaking" churches and African Initiated Churches were somewhere on a continuum between reluctant compliance with the apartheid state and various degrees of identification with the liberation

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<sup>4</sup> For details on these debates, see Stackhouse (1996), Koopman (2003) and Smit (2003).

movements. After the democratic elections of 1994, South African churches had to refocus their theological agendas in the light of the changing circumstances and new challenges. Two main trends can be identified: Some churches withdrew from public life, concentrating on personal and family ethics, while others, especially member churches of the SACC, gave clear support to the ANC-led government. Many members (and some ministers) of those churches entered politics, creating a close bond between church and state, like in the "old" South Africa.

Both these trends resulted in a situation where the public, prophetic voice of the church has become silent – or seriously muted. Some churches have raised public protest against state policies on issues such as crime, abortion, pornography or same-sex marriages. However, clear public witness of churches, flowing from theological reflection based on detailed analysis of the economic, social and political context has been rare in recent years. South Africa is in need of a vigorous and responsible public theology. It is in this regard that Barth's approach at Tambach may help us.

### **3. RECONTEXTUALISING TAMBACH: A PUBLIC THEOLOGY FOR SOUTH AFRICA**

We begin by taking a few key passages from sections 1 and 2 of the lecture and recontextualising them, to connect with the foundations of his public theology. Then we use his three essential "perspectives" (sections 3-5) in point 4 of this article to address a number of pertinent issues in South African society.

Barth sets out the theological foundations for a public theology in the first two sections of his Tambach lecture. We distinguish four such foundations for the purpose of this remixing exercise: Entering the movement of God; developing "missional" communities that are "open on every side"; Understanding and analysing the context; Forgiveness and ideology.

#### **3.1 Entering the movement of God**

The first, and most fundamental, insight of Barth's Tambach approach is the following statement:

*The Christian:* we must be agreed that we do *not* mean *the Christians*, not the multitude of the baptized, nor the chosen few who are concerned with Religion and Social Relations, nor even the cream of the noblest and most devoted Christians we might think of. The Christian is *the Christ*. The Christian is that within us which is not *ourselves* but Christ in us.

(Barth 1928:273)

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Barth’s starting point is in God, as revealed and present in the risen Christ. Christ is the Archimedean point by means of which God moves the history of the world forward. To recontextualise Tambach one needs to start with this statement, namely that “Christ in us” is the hope of glory. As Busch (1994:3) has pointed out, this statement is double-edged: On the one hand it stresses that hope is *not* to be found in *Christians*, however active (or activist) they may be, but *only in Christ*. On the other hand it affirms that there *is* sure hope in Christ, not only for the church but for the whole of society.<sup>5</sup> This is the faith position (or worldview) from which Barth proceeds, and it contains in a nutshell what was developed more fully later in 20th century missiology as the *missio Dei* concept: God is at work in the world; God is a caring and outreaching God who moves towards people – in Christ and by the Holy Spirit – to impart faith-love-hope and to establish justice and peace on earth.<sup>6</sup>

Adopting a starting point like this seems to us a helpful first step for a South African public theology for the 21st century. To counter the paralysing Afro-pessimism that is growing by the day in black and white communities, we begin with Barth by affirming that there *is* hope for our society, and that that hope is in the risen Christ, who is at work in and through human beings who allow themselves to be drawn into this movement of God within society. The call to public Christian discipleship is the call to enter into this movement of God in society.

### **3.2 Developing “missional” communities that are “open on every side”**

This starting point has vast implications for the self-understanding of the church as worshipping, teaching and caring community, because Barth (1928:274) also said, in the same context:

And “Christ in us” understood in its whole Pauline breadth is a warning that we shall do well not to build again the fence which separated the chosen from the rest – Jews from Gentiles and so-called Christians from so-called non-Christians. The community of Christ is a building open on every side, for Christ died for all – even for the folk outside.

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<sup>5</sup> Busch (1994:3) goes so far as to say that the whole Tambach lecture is an outworking of this one phrase (“Christ in us, the hope of glory”), with its double emphasis.

<sup>6</sup> For a good introduction to the *missio Dei* concept in 20<sup>th</sup> century ecumenical missiology, see Bosch (1991:389ff).



A statement like this can be (and has been) understood as relativising the importance of the church as distinctly Christian community and as inhibiting its evangelising witness in society.<sup>7</sup> We interpret it differently, namely as a call for a Christian congregation that has roots *and* wings, that lives faithfully and "eccentrically," that is non-judgementally committed to collaborating with all and sundry for the coming reign of God in society, and is not primarily interested in increasing its power, size or influence for its own sake. This is the second dimension of a Tambach-based public theology: The need to develop a new congregational culture, in which the church becomes the church by living as the community of the all-encompassing reign of God. A public theology therefore does not start by making press statements or by criticising authorities for their failures; instead, it starts in local congregations who experience the real presence of "Christ in us" by becoming "buildings open on every side." The linocut of Azariah Mbatha entitled "Meeting God in strangers," which is based on the Emmaus episode in Luke 24, expresses this with great clarity.<sup>8</sup> At the centre of the artwork – surrounded by images of many strangers in suffering and despair – stands a table, at which the risen Christ breaks bread. There are no walls around the table and no roof over it; it is open on all sides and in all directions. Around the table there seems to be a force field that creates a dynamic outflow of energy from the centre. Two disciples leave the scene through an open arch, starting their journey back to Jerusalem.

Clearly this cannot mean a Christian community without all boundaries, because that would be a community without identity. Perhaps the question should be stated as: How high are the walls around the church? And: What is the nature of those walls? A Christian congregation cannot sustain an endless activism, turning the church "inside out," as J C Hoekendijk (1964) once suggested. The worship, preaching, teaching and sharing of a Christian community needs to motivate, direct and empower its members for their service and witness in society. To avoid "work righteousness" we need to "rest" in the grace of God (Christ in us) and continually renew our covenant

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<sup>7</sup> Marquardt (1980:25f) quotes the interpretation that Otto Herpel gave of Barth's Tambach lecture, days after he delivered it, in which he says: "So we need to be quietist in attitude, in so far as we don't want to do anything 'Christian' or 'ecclesial' (or anything else) 'for God', but that we allow God to do everything; however, we need to be activist indeed, in so far as we try to recognize where the living God is at work, and then to involve ourselves energetically in his work."

<sup>8</sup> In 1994, the German aid agency *Misereor* used this linocut of Azariah Mbatha as the image on their annual "hunger cloth" to raise funds for poverty alleviation projects. This hunger cloth can be viewed at: [http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/pflege\\_service/1994-Das\\_Hungertuch-Gott-begegnen.pdf](http://www.misereor.de/fileadmin/user_upload/pflege_service/1994-Das_Hungertuch-Gott-begegnen.pdf)

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relationship with God in Christ, as the people who have been drawn to God's dynamic movement into society.

South African congregations, by and large, are church-centred in their approach, struggling to attract more members so that they can afford to pay their minister(s) and to erect (and maintain) their own church buildings. By and large this is a maintenance approach, aimed at strengthening and expanding the church. A radical new vision of being a "missional" congregation, listening to its community and becoming deeply involved in the well-being of the people around them is needed in South Africa, not only in affluent suburbs but also in townships, villages and informal settlements. The theological insights emerging out of such local missional congregations will provide the impetus and generate the insights for the development of a broader public theology for South African society as a whole.

### **3.3 Understanding and analysing the context**

Having affirmed that it is *God's* mission in which we are involved, and that the church is not to see itself as the closed and privileged mediator standing between God and the world, Barth moves on to emphasise that "Christians in society" need to *understand* society around them. No congregation can become missional, and no theology can become a public theology without a deep understanding (*begreifen*) of its community (Barth 1928:273):

Life has risen up against life in death. Our task is not to read something into the strangely confused and ambiguous movements of our time but rather to understand them sympathetically, hopefully, and in their deepest meaning (:291) .... To *understand!* Let me compress into one word the meaning of our part in this unbroken movement of life into death and out of death into life: to understand! We must understand the mighty God-given restlessness of man and by it the mighty shaking of the foundations of the world. We must understand the raw primordial elements of motives and motions. We must understand our contemporaries, from Naumann to Blumhardt, from Wilson to Lenin, in all the different stages of the one movement in which we see them. We must understand our times and their signs, and also understand ourselves in our own strange unrest and agitation.... The essential thing is understanding.

(Barth 1928:293f)

Whereas “context analysis” is regarded as integral to a contextual theology,<sup>9</sup> the relationship between context analysis and theological reflection is often hotly contested. Significantly, at Tambach Barth didn’t speak of *analysis* but of *understanding*, and yet he made an incisive analysis of European society at the time. We suggest that these two concepts are two sides of the same coin.<sup>10</sup> By *analysis* we mean a rigorous and critical “opening up” of a context by means of theoretical concepts and methods. By *understanding* we mean the sensitive entering into a community, asking questions respectfully and listening carefully, in order to establish a meaningful relationship with the people within it.

In this regard we wish to broaden Barth’s approach, since an emphasis on understanding (alone), without revealing the nature of one’s underlying context analysis, can lead to superficial and impressionistic judgements, which are indeed based on the Bible but may do harm in society by ignoring certain fundamental dimensions of the situation. It could also alienate potential allies in the struggle for justice and become a closed ideology in its own right, and thus be less constructive in achieving social transformation.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand a rigid use of one set of theoretical “tools” of analysis can result in a reductionist view of (what is happening in) a community, which can even

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<sup>9</sup> The question is what is meant by “contextual theology.” Often, on the basis of the insights of the sociology of knowledge, it is said that all theology is contextual (e g Mosala 1985:103f). But then “contextual theology” becomes a tautology – and therefore not a helpful concept. By contextual theology we do not mean each and every theology that is somehow influenced by its context, but only a theology that consciously and intentionally includes context analysis as an integral dimension of theological praxis, along with other dimensions such as personal interests/involvement, theological/biblical reflection, spirituality, and (planning for) action. In other words, the “pastoral circle” (Holland & Herniot 1984) or “praxis cycle” (see Kritzinger 2002) informs this definition. This allows a contextual theologian to clarify “what is the socio-political context out of which a particular theology emerges and which it serves” (Mosala 1985:104).

<sup>10</sup> On this issue we acknowledge the helpful insights of Rev Dr Egbert Rooze, a Belgian Old Testament scholar, who commented on a draft of this article.

<sup>11</sup> This is precisely what Barth was accused of due to his radical and consistent critique of liberalism. Graf (1986:427f) indicates how Barth attacked religious liberalism and party political liberalism as a unitary social phenomenon, since they had the same bearers (the bourgeoisie) and the same worldview based on the cultural ideal of individualism, autonomy and personality cult. According to Graf (1986:430ff) the early Barth’s critique of liberalism was experienced at the time (at least by some Germans) as a critique of democracy, and that his influence was therefore a hindrance to (or a relativising of) democracy (1986:440). In this sense his relentless critique of liberalism could unintentionally have helped create a climate in Germany for the acceptance of the anti-democratic forces of National Socialism some years later.

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alienate a contextual theologian from the very community she/he wishes to understand and serve.<sup>12</sup>

By pursuing an understanding analysis (or analytical understanding), we will be able to avoid positivism ("if you use the correct tools you will get the correct answer") as well as an idiosyncratic use of concepts and methods from other human or social sciences, which could be described as "plundering" other disciplines for "acceptable" terminology. For the sake of the integrity of a contextual theology we will do well to adopt Barth's approach of viewing the "grounding" of a theology in its context as a process of compassionate intersubjective *understanding*. The "tools of analysis" we use in trying to understand our context need to be theologically shaped and conceived, imbued with grace and compassion. When we immerse ourselves in our society to make sense of the meaning-making movements within it, we should do this from genuine human concern. What Barth (1928:291) models for us is a commitment to understanding the movements of our time "sympathetically, hopefully, and in their deepest meaning."

Barth (1928:293) points out that such an understanding of the movements of our contemporaries cannot be separated from an understanding of *ourselves*, "in our own strange unrest and agitation." We cannot be idle bystanders, neutral observers or inquisitive voyeurs. We, who try to understand the unrest and agitation of others, are people who have our own unrest and agitation gnawing at us from within. We analyse and understand from a position of weakness and vulnerability, not from within a cultural, political or religious fortress. The self-assured confidence of a neatly packaged conservative or liberal theology is not a fruitful option. We try to understand because we enter into history with God, moved by the risen Christ and by the searching Spirit, who explores even the depths of God (1 Cor 2:10; see Kritzinger 2002:162f).

Speaking from within the complex and time-consuming reunification process of the churches in the Dutch Reformed "family," we wish to say that organic church unification, if it is to be more than a bureaucratic or administrative exercise, is only possible from a position of shared weakness – and therefore shared strength. The huge power difference between the Dutch Reformed Church and its black sister (formerly "daughter") churches under apartheid made a meaningful, organic unity between them impossible at the time. The new situation of the DRC family after 1994, with the DRC's loss of

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<sup>12</sup> Perhaps this is what happened in the case of Mosala (1985), who announced in the title of an article that it was about "African Independent Churches" but didn't give any indication in the article that he had listened to members of an AIC in preparing it. He doesn't convince the reader that his proposed "black working-class theology" based on Marxist class analysis will be acceptable to AIC members.

political and social power, presents us with a new opportunity to meet "outside the camp" like the ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19), where reconciliation between former enemies and strangers (like Samaritans and Jews) seems possible. However, the differences in economic power and cultural sensibility between the churches in the DRC family are still huge and we could still lose one another "on our way back to the village" if opportunism and self-centredness prevent us from finding each other in joint gratitude at the feet of Jesus (Lk 17:16).

It is significant that Barth speaks about the "strangely confused and ambiguous movements of our time" as the focus of theological understanding. We need to explore what people are doing to make sense of their lives. Barth mentions four names (Naumann, Blumhardt, Wilson, Lenin) perhaps to indicate the outer limits of the field that a "Christian in society" would need to explore at the time: From Soviet Communism (Lenin) to US Capitalism (President Woodrow Wilson); from the pragmatic realism of Friedrich Naumann, the socialist-pastor-turned-politician, to the evangelistic socialism of Christoph Blumhardt – and everything in between.

What is revealing is that Barth speaks of these four exemplary figures as "different stages of *the one movement* in which we see them" (emphasis added), thus suggesting that these movements form part of "the movement of the era," as he calls it. Somehow all these movements are related, since they interact – and therefore mutually influence each other. As Barth (1928:294) said: "To understand means to take the whole situation upon us in the fear of God."

To take "the whole situation upon us" in South African today means that we need to learn to think *inclusively*. We need to "own" all the strengths and weaknesses of our society. To speak with a focus on Tshwane for a moment, it is not helpful to say "the Coloureds have a problem of gangsterism." In remixing Tambach we will have to say instead: "We have a problem of gangsterism among some people in Eersterus." By the same token we should not say "Afrikaners have a problem of right wing terrorism", but rather "We have a problem with a tendency to right wing terrorism among some Afrikaners." We need, from the outset, to avoid strategies of exclusion<sup>13</sup> and resolutely adopt an attitude of "embrace" (Volf 1996).

This is closely related to what Barth says about the autonomy (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) of various spheres of society. The view of liberalism that the spheres of culture, politics, economics and religion are independent entities that each runs "on its own rails" was fundamentally rejected by Barth.

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<sup>13</sup> Volf (1996:75-79) contends that there are three basic types of exclusion, namely elimination, domination and indifference. However, elimination can also take the form of assimilation.

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He went so far as to say that a “thing in itself” (*Ding an sich*) is dead.<sup>14</sup> When “our souls have awakened to the consciousness of their immediacy to God” we realise that society also has its origin in God (Barth 1928:290).

Consequently all the dimensions of society are integrally related to God – and to each other. This holistic understanding of society, where all things are related to all other things, implies that Christian praxis (and theology) is inherently *public* in nature: “It is possible to speak about the most important questions, such as God, in public discourse – in ways that can interact with other sciences and make sense among the people” (Stackhouse 1987:xi).

If we wish to achieve such public witness, we need to establish think tanks and action groups consisting of economists, social scientists, engineers and theologians to overcome the sterile religion versus science polarisations that still exist and to develop credible and workable analyses and action plans for society. For this to happen, the organisational isolation of academic theology from other disciplines on university campuses and the church-centred agendas of much congregational ministry need to be fundamentally overcome. As Christians we will also have to learn – if we have not yet learnt this – how to collaborate with people of other faiths and of no faith in projects for the common good.

Barth (1928:292f) identified specific areas of public life in which tendencies to autonomy (*Eigengesetzlichkeit*) – and corresponding revolts against these – were evident: Authority, family, art, work, and religion. In each of these areas he called on his audience to stand in principle on the side of those who protest against “authority for its own sake,” the family for its own sake,” “religion for its own sake,” etc. It is clear that Barth had carefully analysed the struggles of youth against authority, of young couples against traditional family values, of expressionist artists against “art for its own sake,” and of labourers against work for its own sake. He even speaks of a *God-given* restlessness (1928:294) showing itself in those (and other) movements of the time.

In the light of this discussion the worrying tendency in South African churches to withdraw from public life needs to be challenged fundamentally: “The divine can by no possible means be managed and administered in the form of a thing for its own sake” (Barth 1928:293). What we need is a (re)conversion to “the *dunamis*, the meaning and might of the living God who is building a new world” (1928:280). This means calling congregations away from an individualist “heaven-going” gospel to rediscover the “modified apocalyptic” of the New Testament (cf Bosch 1991:149ff), which for Barth was

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<sup>14</sup> “An independent life aside from Life is not life but death. Dead are all things which claim to be more than material, which claim a kind of reality in themselves” (Barth 1928:290) ... “We cannot longer allow ourselves to be *wholly* deceived by the theories with which those powers have surrounded themselves and by the facts which seem to point to their authority (1928:291).

an "eschatologically oriented politics of a revolutionary social democracy" (Graf 1986:430). It also means calling middle class (mainly white) congregations away from self-satisfied suburban captivity into solidarity with struggling congregations in rural villages and informal settlements, to combat the horrific effects of HIV and AIDS, to work towards overcoming the huge economic disparities between rich and poor within the one the body of Christ. It furthermore means calling limping township congregations away from dependence on donors and a mediocre maintenance ministry into maturity and a missional lifestyle as self-respecting participants in God's movement of mission. It also means calling churches controlled by closed ethnic or nationalist identities (especially the residual Afrikaner "volkskerk" theologies) away from such cultural-political compromises of the gospel into the intercultural diversity and unity of the body of Christ.

To conclude this section, it is good to be reminded that Barth did not see understanding (*begreifen*) in isolation. He mentions it in one breath with intervening (*eingreifen*) and initiating (*angreifen*). Since Christians in society are "Christ in society," and since they have been drawn into the movement of God in society, their understanding is not an abstract knowing, but an engaged and committed embracing of people and situations. If Christ is really "in us" we will not suffer from the "paralysis of analysis."<sup>15</sup> Instead, our understanding analysis of our context will issue in actions to transform it in the direction of God's coming reign of peace and justice.

### **3.4 Forgiveness and ideology**

In two memorable sentences Barth makes a connection between ideology, forgiveness and social transformation:

To *understand* the meaning of our times in God, to enter into God-given restlessness and into critical opposition to life, is to *give* meaning to our times in God. For in contrast to all ideologies, which want to whitewash the autonomous existence of things and make them look better than they are, forgiveness is the power of God on earth that creates a new reality.

(Barth 1928:294, translation adapted)

Debates about the definition of ideology – and about the role of ideologies in Christian theology – are awkward and unpopular. Under apartheid it was common for Nationalist Party politicians to criticise SACC church leaders for

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<sup>15</sup> This term is credited to Dr Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. On a visit to Milwaukee in January 1964, he said: "We have argued and discussed civil rights enough" and cautioned against getting "bogged down in the paralysis of analysis."  
<http://www.onmilwaukee.com/buzz/articles/mlk.html> (downloaded 2007-09-08)

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"mixing religion and politics." They were warned from time to time that their preachers' gowns would not protect them when the full force of the law descended on political opponents of the state. Afrikaner political leaders at the time, together with their theological advisers, were often not aware of – or at least not prepared to admit publicly – the "mixing of religion and politics" in which they themselves were involved. When they did admit such ideological commitments, they often justified them on the basis of a typically South African version of Cold War ideology, namely the struggle for Christ against Communism, coupled with the struggle for the protection of the Afrikaner "volk." In some versions of that ideology, the "separate but equal" protection of other ethnic-national identities were also theoretically factored into the equation, but the macro-structure of the "homeland" policy never had much chance of success due to their lack of financial viability and the refusal of international recognition for such "independent states" created by apartheid. In democratic South Africa since 1994 there are a number of ideologies that are operative in the dominant tripartite alliance of the ANC, COSATU and SACP. Various shades of socialism, Africanism, nationalism, human rights discourse, and neo-liberal (capitalist) economics operate side by side in the policies of the ANC-led government, but often sharply diverging views are expressed by members of the tripartite alliance. In the Afrikaner community there seems to be ideological confusion in the aftermath of the self-destruction of the once powerful National Party. The ideological concept of "Afrikaner volk" seems to have lost its plausibility without a political power base, leaving Afrikaners to negotiate new – and more modest – identities of living in Africa as a minority.

What we wish to explore here is the link between Barth's view of ideology and his rejection of "hyphenated theologies." In the passage quoted earlier, Barth contends that ideologies "want to whitewash the autonomous existence of things and make them look better than they are" (*eine Dinglichkeit beschönigen und verklären wollen*). This "autonomous existence" (*Dinglichkeit*) probably refers to the *Eigengesetzlichkeit* discussed above. So, for Barth, ideologies are those social-intellectual forces that foster – and provide legitimacy to – the fragmentation of human society into autonomous spheres, which each has its own inner logic and value system, immune to critique or accountability. This is certainly not an exhaustive definition of ideology, but it is important to note the contrast that Barth's makes between ideology and forgiveness: Whereas ideology wishes to excuse and adorn the reductionist fragmentation of society, forgiveness is "the power of God on earth that creates a new reality."

One can hear echoes of Marx's 11th thesis on *Feuerbach* as an intertext here: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various



ways; the point, however, is to *change it*” (Marx & Engels [1888] 1968:30 – emphasis in original). For Barth, ideologies interpret and confirm present realities and make them more palatable, whereas forgiveness brings about transformation into a new reality. Examples of ideologies for Barth are the hyphenated theologies that he mentioned early in his lecture: social-Christian, social-evangelical, and social-religious. In South Africa the most influential hyphenated Christian ideology was the “Christian-national” (*Christelikenasionale*) ideology propagated mainly by Afrikaners, which legitimated the racist and nationalist policies of the apartheid government. Another hyphenated Christian ideology common in South Africa was/is the “Christian-liberal” ideology of mainly English-speaking South Africans that blessed individualism, gradualism and other middle class values as gospel truths. The “Christian-liberational” ideology of mainly black South Africans, on the other hand, gave legitimation to various forms of participation in the liberation struggle against apartheid.

Over against such ideologies Barth posits the power of forgiveness as a transformative force in society. It is a question whether one recontextualises Tambach validly by calling the latter (Christian-liberational) approach an *ideology* in Barth’s terms, since it is clearly aimed at transformation. The key issue is whether such an approach isolated and enshrined “liberation” or “the struggle” as a “thing in itself” – which *would* make it ideological in Barth’s eyes. But more important than the philosophical question of what constitutes an ideology<sup>16</sup> is the question how Christians can best embody the power of forgiveness – as the creation of a new reality in public life – in South Africa today, as they participate in God’s movement in society. This brings us into the difficult area of reconciliation and the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which can unfortunately not be explored in this paper. However, the Tambach lecture certainly has something to say to us in this regard.

#### 4. HOLDING TOGETHER THE THREE VIEWPOINTS

Barth’s three essential viewpoints (*Gesichtspunkte*) constitute an integrated approach that sees God’s reign in society dialectically as simultaneously *regnum naturae* (thesis), *regnum gratiae* (antithesis) and *regnum gloriae*

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<sup>16</sup> We do not share Barth’s (Marxian) definition of ideology as “false consciousness,” over against the gospel. We accept a “sociology of knowledge” view that nobody is free from ideology, since all human thinking and acting is situated in time, space, language and power relations. It is therefore not fruitful to place the gospel over against ideologies. Instead, we need to admit that all our theologies are in some sense ideological, and that there are better and worse ideologies, as well as hybridized ideologies – and there are rigid and open ways of adhering to an ideology. Theologians therefore need to operate with ideological suspicion (cf Segundo 1976:9), declare their ideological commitments, and always be self-critically aware of how their own interests, biases and social position influence their praxis.

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(synthesis). These three perspectives will not be treated separately (as in the previous paper), since the purpose of this paper is not analytical. With Barth, we hold these three viewpoints together, in an integrated approach to public life:

To understand means to have the insight of God that all of this must be just as it is and not otherwise [*regnum naturae*]. To understand means to take the whole situation upon us in the fear of God, and in the fear of God to enter into the movement of the era [*regnum gratiae*]. To understand means to be forgiven in order to forgive [*regnum gloriae*].

(Barth 1928:294 – brackets added)

We affirm what is there in society as the good creation of God. We negate what is evil in society, as we become part of the attack of God's reign on every form of wrong. We respect the limit to our Christian activism that is drawn by God in the coming of God's reign as a gift which relativises all our achievements. In remixing this dialectical Tambach approach in South Africa today, we attempt to hold together these three viewpoints as we address the daunting challenges we face.

At the same time we heed the warning of Barth not to underestimate the magnitude of the challenges facing us nor to try and "clericalise" society, since "the giant evils (*Giganten*) of the day against which we have come up to do battle will stand and defy us" (Barth 1928:281).<sup>17</sup> We agree with D J Smit (2003:40-42) that it is by no means obvious that Christians have a unique public role to play *as Christians* in a modern, democratic, secular, pluralist South Africa after apartheid. In many ways it is indeed like "biting on granite," since the autonomy of society asserts itself to such an extent over against the gospel that "our ideals [often seem] impossible and our goals unattainable" (Barth 1928:281).

Nevertheless, with Barth and Smit, we are convinced that Christians do have a public role to play and that we therefore have to develop a public theology for our participation in God's mission. We have chosen one public

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<sup>17</sup> We used this interesting trope of the 'giant evils' from Tambach in describing the six issues in our conference paper, but it was not the first time that the term 'giants' was used in South Africa in relation to Christian public witness. It was also used during the second South African Christian Leadership Assembly (SACLA II) in 2003, where seven "Goliaths" were identified by SACLA: HIV/Aids, Crime and Corruption, Violence, Poverty and Unemployment, Sexism, Racism, and the Crisis in the South African Family. Our use of the concept was not inspired by SACLA, but by Tambach (Barth 1928:281). Given the popularity of the David vs Goliath narrative in Christian thinking – and the enormity of the challenges facing Christian public witness – it is not surprising that Barth and the SACLA organisers used the same metaphor in this regard. It is also not surprising that some of the giant evils we identified are identical to the giants of SACLA II. The usefulness of this trope for public theology in South Africa needs to be critically explored.

issue facing Christian public witness in South Africa, as we illustrate what it could mean to remix Barth's Tambach approach for our context. We initially identified six issues (poverty, HIV and AIDS, cultural diversity, interreligious relations, political partisanship and gender justice) in the paper we presented at the conference, but opted in this article for a more in-depth treatment of one of them (poverty) instead of dealing more superficially with all six.

#### **4.1 Poverty**

Poverty has caused (and still causes) untold suffering in South Africa. It constitutes one of the most serious problems facing – and threatening – our democracy. For this reason it is the area of public life that we have chosen to deal with in this paper, as an example of what a remixing of Tambach could look like in South Africa today.

To remix Tambach for this situation of poverty we are facing, means first to affirm what is there, as God's good creation. When we see sprawling informal settlements with shacks of wood, plastic and corrugated iron, flooded and burnt down at regular intervals, we first of all affirm the dignity of the desperately poor people who live in them. In the midst of dehumanisation and decay there is humanity and resilience, giving birth to flourishing informal economies and cultures of sharing. Even in the worst economic conditions, people are never simply victims; there is always human agency and initiative – at times even more genuine than in privileged communities – and often flowing from religious convictions and cultural values that sustain people in their suffering.

With Barth (1928:300), we commit ourselves "not to what is mortal and godless in the world but to the living and divine element which is always there." As a result of this a Christian response to poverty can never be one of condescending "charity." We need to say this for *theological* reasons when remixing Tambach, not only for reasons of "development theory." On the basis of Barth's first theological viewpoint Christians should strengthen and deepen approaches to development that are "asset-based," "people-centred"<sup>18</sup> and aimed at "sustainable livelihoods" (cf De Gruchy 2005). This ties in with approaches to mission that takes its starting point in creation, which has been emphasised particularly by Asian missiologists like Song (1975). Niles (2004) has recently restated this case with persuasion, quoting Song:

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<sup>18</sup> David Korten developed the approach of "people-centred" development, which he defined as "a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations" (Korten 1990:67). See also Speckman (2001) and Swart (2006).

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When salvation gets divorced from the creation, it is bound to lose its universal dimension and significance. This inevitably leads to the impoverishment of Christian understanding of history and culture [and we may add, 'mission'] and has proved to be detrimental to the wholesome appreciation of Asian history and culture in God's revelation.

(Niles 2004:140)

We begin our theology of poverty by "hearing creation unresentfully and impartially" (Barth 1960:298) and by seeing "life as it is" as a "parable of the kingdom of God" (Barth 1928:306-310). But then, as we move directly to Barth's second viewpoint, namely saying NO to what is wrong in society, we share the sentiment of Barth that suffering and tragedy are closer to us than the naïveté of affirming the world as good. The affirmation of the world as it is should not become an abstract or romantic cop-out: "True perception of life is hostile to all abstractions" (Barth 1928:313). *We suffer* the ugly realities of poverty: what it looks like, how it smells, how it destroys people, their health, their self-affirmation, their sensitivity to others: "We can honor the Creator of the original world only be crying out to the Redeemer of the present one" (Barth 1928:312).

#### **4.2 Context analysis**

So we face the painful question *why* so many people in (South) Africa are poor. This is where thorough context analysis comes into play, entering into the "movement of our time" with compassion, but also with a hermeneutic of suspicion, to get behind the facade of the ideologies that want to make ugly realities look better, seem more palatable, or even appear inevitable. We cannot make a significant difference to poverty if we have a superficial or inadequate analysis of its causes. Poverty in South Africa is the result of various factors, and cannot be understood apart from the cumulative effect of three centuries of colonial history. Wilson and Ramphela (1989:189-253) identify the following causes of poverty in South Africa: colonial conquest, slavery, assault on worker movements, the 'colour bar,' unequal allocation of resources, migrant labour, urban influx control, forced removals, Bantu Education, unemployment, population growth, and inflation. This does not mean "blaming everything on apartheid," as passive victims of our past, but it is impossible to understand the causes of poverty in South Africa without taking into account the nature of British colonialism, the impact of slavery (and its abolition), the migration of some Afrikaners into the interior, the discovery of diamonds and gold, the wars of the Boer republics against various African

groups and against the British Empire, the legalised dispossession of the majority of Africans from their land through the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936, the establishment of an urbanised and industrialised capitalist economy, the vicious racial engineering of apartheid, and the nature of our negotiated transition to democracy in 1994.

Since 1989 (the end of the Cold War), neo-liberal capitalism has become the dominant economic force in the world, placing countries in the South with weaker economies increasingly at the mercy of multinational companies and the Bretton Woods institutions (The World Bank and International Monetary Fund). This is where the first "giant evil" rears its head: The global – and increasingly imperial – market, controlled and dominated by the countries of the North.

With Barth we wish to *understand* the movements of our present time that impact on our economy – and thereby affect poverty: the immigration of people from other African countries into South Africa; the emigration of South Africans (mainly young people) to countries like England, Australia, New Zealand; the restlessness of millions of unemployed youth in townships and informal settlements, the popular uprisings of people against political leaders due to "lack of service delivery"; increasing corruption in the private and public sectors, the magnitude (and viciousness) of violent crime; the inability of many government departments and local authorities to put their good decisions into practice, and many more.

We also wish to understand what poverty does to people. Many poor people have sunk into apathy and indifference, singing songs like "Hamba 'nhliziyo yami, uye ezulwini, akukho ukuphumula lapha emhlabeni" [My heart, go to heaven; there is no rest here on earth], "Re bafiti fatsheng le" [We are visitors on this earth], and "Shiya lomhlaba nento zawo" [Leave the earth with all its problems]. We identify with Barth (1928:314), who sighed with the struggling people of his day: "Why are we always making preparations for a life that never begins?" People who were born poor and remain poor think that it is normal; that they should not enjoy comfort or success in this life. These songs are enjoyable to sing and true to some extent, but at the same time they contain a "false denial" and a "false affirmation," expressing a spirituality alienating them from constructive participation in God's mission in society.

On the other hand an abundance of money has its own negative effects on people. One of these has been called "affluenza" (James 2007), an epidemic of "obsessive, envious, keeping-up-with-the-Joneses" that causes depression and anxiety. With money anyone can buy isolation and comfort in South Africa, cutting themselves off from the masses of suffering neighbours, but there is no ethical way of separating oneself totally from them. Freedom is

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indivisible. In the words of Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu, in his prophetic and passionate letter to Prime Minister John Vorster on 6 May 1976, just weeks before Soweto erupted:

The Whites in this land will not be free until all sections of our community are genuinely free. Then we will have a security that does not require such astronomical sums to maintain it .... We are committed to Black Liberation because thereby we are committed to White Liberation. You will never be free until we blacks are free.

(Tutu 1983:4)

The sad reality is that, whereas political freedom has been extended to all, economic freedom and self-reliance is still a distant dream for millions of South Africans. We can remix Tutu's statement for our context by saying: "You – elite, middle class and affluent people – will never be free until we, the unemployed and hungry, are free."

In order to understand these movements with any measure of insight, a public theology will have to be done by groups of Christians, working together on a multi-disciplinary and intercultural basis, to unravel the complex dimensions of this problem – and to devise strategies in response. Barth did not propose or foresee such cooperation in his Tambach lecture, but it is implicit in the logic of a public theology attempting to remix his approach for today. The South African economy, in the context of a rampant global market, is so complex that no theologian (or even group of theologians) can hope to have an adequate grasp of all its dimensions in order to propose strategies that could make a difference.

### **4.3 Working for justice and freedom**

Careful context analysis is not enough, however. In a remixing of Tambach, context analysis is not just aimed at understanding; it is to become part of God's No to evil, suffering and oppression in society, since "the kingdom of God advances to its *attack* upon society" (Barth 1928:314). This will involve "criticising, protesting, reforming, organising, democratizing, socialising, and revolutionizing" (Barth 1928:320), since the realities of structural exclusion, economic exploitation and educational disadvantage are hard realities that "stand up to defy us." With Barth, we need to "enter fully into the subversion and conversion of this present world" (Barth 1928:318), and not escape this challenge by "walking down the broad, light, well-filled streets of the romanticists and humanists" (Barth 1928:318). The resurrection of Christ compels us to engage these realities head-on; to walk down dusty township

streets and down the footpaths to rural villages, committing ourselves to solve all our problems together.

This requires before and above all the conversion of the church to God's mission movement into society. With Barth (1928:318), we lament: "How terrible if the *church*, of all institutions, should not see this, but put her effort into maintaining for men a balance which they must finally lose!" We need to avoid safe "church theologies" that try to preserve a careful balance between the Yes and the No, without ruffling too many feathers and alienating too many well-earning members – who after all keep the church afloat financially through their contributions. Our bluff is being called as Christians in South Africa; it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God (1 Pt 4:17). The inequality gap between rich and poor in our country is among the highest in the world and seems to be widening. And this gap runs right through the Body of Christ! What we need is not merely some outreach projects, services for domestic workers or soup kitchens; what we need is "a new approach in God to the *whole* of life" (Barth 1928:318), an awareness that being Christian in society is to be (part of) Christ in society, taken up in the arrival of God's reign, which is a new world of justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rm 14:17).

If we as Christians, who make up a statistical majority of 70% of South African society, do not commit ourselves to significant processes of people-centred development, anti-racism and church re-unification, but continue in our lukewarm and comfortable private Christianities, we should not be surprised when South African society at large leaves us behind or even spits us out. Tambach remixed takes us beyond quick-fixes and shallow optimism (a false affirmation of the world) and Afro-pessimism (a false denial of the world). In a few moving sentences Barth (1960:298) situates Mozart's life (1756-1791) in the aftermath of the Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755, which killed between 60 000 and 100 000 people, but also shook the faith of millions of Christians in Europe at the time. While theologians and preachers tried to defend God (by developing theodicies), Mozart was composing music, having "the peace of God which far transcends all the critical or speculative reason that praises and reproves," being "pure in heart, far transcending both optimists and pessimists." Appreciation of music is culturally conditioned, so we do not imply that we should all share Barth's appreciation for Mozart, but we need such a transcending spirituality to sustain us in our struggle for a just and peaceful society in South Africa.

At this point we need to hear Barth's third viewpoint of the *regnum gloriae* most clearly. We do *not* build the reign of God on earth. We should refrain from hyphenating the gospel and the reign of God to our projects and

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programmes: "We must fortify ourselves against expecting that our criticizing, protesting, reforming, organizing, democratizing, socializing, and revolutionizing – *however fundamental and thoroughgoing these may be* – will satisfy the ideal of the kingdom of God. That is really beyond us" (Barth 1928:320 – italics in original). This is not an excuse for passivity or apathy; instead it is an urgent reminder that "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the power which moves both the world and us, *because* it is the appearance in our bodiliness (*Leiblichkeit*) of a *totaliter aliter* constituted bodiliness" (Barth 1928:323 – italics in original).

This eschatological dimension, which both empowers and limits human activism, is the key (the synthesis) that holds together the Tambach lecture (in the same way that it characterises the uniqueness of Mozarts' music for Barth). And yet it is so often neglected in the worship and preaching of congregations. This delicate interplay between Barth's three viewpoints should be "mainstreamed" in the weekly worship and daily life of churches – in liturgies, songs, sermons, Bible studies, Sunday school curricula, et cetera in all the languages of worship – to become a way of life. Otherwise Christians will continue to fall into the traps of falsely affirming or denying society, and thus remain less fruitful and effective than they should be in God's mission of transforming society towards the final reign of God. To push the musical metaphor one step further, this triple viewpoint of societal involvement calls for wide adoption across denominational, cultural, class and "racial" barriers to create a harmony of ecumenical activism for the reign of God.

It is therefore essential that black and white, rich and poor, Christian communities collaborate in fighting economic injustice and exclusion, to "make poverty history." Following the suggestions of Duchrow (1995), the struggle for alternatives to global capitalism needs to be twofold: the empowerment of poor and suffering communities at the bottom of society, coupled with a vigorous prophetic protest against, and a subversion of, the totalitarian structure of the global economy (Duchrow 1995:230 ff): The mission of the churches is to work with those presently sidelined and excluded "in rejecting systemically unjust structures and shaping symbolic life-giving alternatives" (Duchrow 1995:276). The mobilisation of African cultural resources (such as *stokvels*) in the struggle against poverty is an important component of what needs to be done (cf Kritzinger 1996). Ecumenical collaboration between different denominations is also essential in this process, since no single church or theological tradition can hope to make a significant impact in isolation.

In an article such as this it is not possible to give a detailed blueprint for Christian views and actions that could alleviate (or eliminate) poverty, nor to address all the dimensions of poverty. We have only tried to develop a vision



and framework for actions against poverty based on Tambach, which could bring about economic transformation. In this regard the Accra Declaration of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches is worth noting. It raises a strong prophetic voice against countries and companies that dominate the global market at the expense of the poor and unemployed – and at the expense of the world's fragile ecosystem. The integral connection between economy and ecology in the context of globalisation needs to be factored into a public theology if it is to have any significant impact on poverty.<sup>19</sup>

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The time has come to face our "giant evils" head-on in South Africa. We need to go beyond statements that Christ has identified himself with the suffering, the oppressed and the poor (Mt 25:31-46, Lk 4:18-19). As correct and beautiful as this theology may be, we now need concrete interventions, particularly from the church. Gone are the days for a Christology of "Jesus sympathises with the poor" and of a Christian praxis of charity. With Barth (1928:313) we wish to say that "light is locked in arduous but victorious *struggle* with darkness," which means that:

Today there is a call for large-hearted, far-sighted, characterful conduct toward democracy – no, not toward it, but within it, as hope-sharing and guilt-sharing comrades; – and it is largely in this field that we must work out the problem of opposition to the old order, discover the likeness of the kingdom of God, and prove whether we have understood the problem in its absolute and in its relative bearing.

(Barth 1928:319)

The risen Christ empowers the poor (and whoever is prepared to join them) to work towards democracy – and within democracy – as comrades who get their hands dirty, discerning social, economic and political movements that are likenesses of the kingdom of God, and working within those movements for justice and freedom. Will the churches in South Africa be large-hearted, far-sighted and characterful enough to become part of this movement of God in society?

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<sup>19</sup> Another dimension neglected in this article is the gender issue. The feminisation of poverty is a central feature of the problem, which should inform the kinds of strategies adopted to combat it.

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