

Political Theology as critical theology

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This article attempts to draw the scope and content of contemporary Political Theology, based on a review of the 2013 publication titled, *Political Theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, edited by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, Klaus Tanner and Michael Welker. The book is a collection of contributions which explore the contemporary content and potential future of the subject discipline. 'Political Theology' as critical theology and as a 'theology with its face towards the world' is committed to 'justice, peace and the integrity of creation' and is multifaceted. It represents a discipline with which theologians reflect on political-theological objectives across continents and paradigms. The article concludes with a brief investigation of the implications of insights offered in the book for the South African context (as part of the African continent).

'There is no such thing as an un-political theology'. (Moltmann 2013:2)

Introduction

The politics of theology

One of the biggest concerns since the genesis of the discipline – or rather the movement (as it turned out) – has been the concern that Political Theology entails a mixture of subject matter that cannot and ought not to be mixed. The liberation theologian, Alistair Kee, described it in his book, *The scope of political theology* (1978), as a concern about a 'strange alchemy between oil and water' (Kee 1978:2). This concern conjures up images about the subject content of Political Theology that was thought to be either a 'theology of politics', which would involve direct political involvement, or a 'liberation theology', which would exclusively (and one-sidedly) involve revolutionary action (Francis Schüssler Fiorenza 1977:143).

When Jürgen Moltmann and Johann Baptist Metz developed the notion 'Political Theology' during the 1960s as a socio-critical theology (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:38), the concern was that this 'strange mixture' would entail the politicisation of the church. In reaction, both theologians pointed out that there is no such thing as un-political theology. Where concern about Political Theology as the politicisation of the church exists, it points towards a lack of awareness of the political dimension of theology, or as I refer to it, a lack of a hermeneutics of suspicion.¹ In his contribution to the book reviewed in this article Moltmann categorically expresses this:

There is consciously political theology, there is politically un-conscious theology, but there is no such thing as an un-political theology, at least not on this earth and presumably not even in the heavenly *politeuma*. (Moltmann 2013:2; cf. Schüssler Fiorenza, Tanner & Welker 2013:vii)

Alistair Kee expressed more or less the same sentiments in his 1978 work, namely that politics and theology cannot be separated and

the attempt at separating politics and theology is invariably done out of self-interest: political theology does not arise from opportunism or the attempt to win a strategic advantage, but of a particular understanding of the way we can be true to the fundamental character of Christian faith. (Kee 1978:3)

A socio-critical theology, true to the fundamental character of Christian faith, and a theology with its 'face toward the world'² in this regard, is much more than a strange mixture of two disciplines. Political Theology could be considered to be a 'foundational theology' (Schüssler Fiorenza 1977:142–177). As a foundational theology, Political Theology

1. For a recent discussion on Ricoeur's use of the notion 'hermeneutics of suspicion', the notion's origins in the philosophies of Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, Ricoeur's adjustment of their insights with regard to 'religion critique', and Ricoeur's most influential publications on the matter, see Alexis Itao (2010:1–17).

2. In reference to the theme of the Political Theology of Johann Baptist Metz ([1968] 1969:83).

analyses the concrete horizons of theology ... it seeks to reflect upon the total praxis (intellectual as well as imaginative, symbolic as well as conceptual, individual as well as social) of religious conversion and flowing from religious conversion. (Schüssler Fiorenza 1977:142)

The book *Political Theology: Contemporary challenges and future directions*, edited by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza *et al.* (2013), is the result of a series of lectures and discussions about Political Theology that took place during January 2010 at the University of Heidelberg in Germany. Contributions and discussions during this meeting highlighted the complex nature of Political Theology and the interconnectedness of various facets of Political Theology (Schüssler Fiorenza *et al.* 2013:vii). Its overall theme and structure portrays the complex and varietal character of Political Theology as critical theology, with a commitment towards justice, peace and the integrity of creation³ (cf. Moltmann 2013:4). Although the contributions speak of an awareness of and a sensitivity towards nuanced differences in different contexts, they also address challenges for Political Theology if it is to remain relevant, and more importantly, effective. The issues are addressed and discussed in terms of a distinction between 'old' and 'new' Political Theology. Although the history of Political Theology does portray a movement from one to the other, it is not a case of a linear movement. It does not represent a shift from 'old' to 'new' or a precise demarcation between 'old' and 'new'. Due to recurring themes, the paradigm changes with regard to the role and function of theology (cf. Metz 2012:316–318) and re-emergence (or recycling) of classic and modern political theories (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:38–43; cf. 1977:3–4). In this regard, the contributions offer a complex portrayal of 'old' and 'new', and an overarching conclusion is that Political Theology today is not about the 'politicization of the church', but rather about a theological-ethical hermeneutic paradigm that problematises power, ecumenical as well as global.

'Old' and 'new' Political Theology

At least three contributors in the book make the distinction between 'old' Political Theology and 'new' Political Theology their starting point for determining the challenges and future directions of Political Theology (Metz 2013:13–16; Moltmann 2013:1–4; Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:37–41). This is a distinction between an 'old' Political Theology of 'political sovereignty' (Moltmann 2013:3) and 'statism' or *Staatlichkeit* (Metz 2013:13; cf. Metz 2012:319–322) and a 'new' Political Theology as a prophetic (liberation) theology (Moltmann 2013:11) and a theology of justice (Metz 2013:16–20).

In one of his earlier works, Schüssler Fiorenza (1977:143) stated that many of the misunderstandings or concerns about the content of Political Theology can be traced to a failure to distinguish between differences with regard to diverse

conceptions of 'political', that is a good and just life (classic) and the good government of the state (modern). In the same vein, Metz warns against a simple distinction between 'old' and 'new', because the old (or classic) Political Theology's concern with nation and state has its own origin and development (cf. Metz 2012:319; Schmitt 2012:275). Classic ('old') Political Theology had a specific understanding of politics and that was in terms of national and legal policy (Metz 2013:13) and the legitimisation of an absolute and infallible state. This was the main idea of Carl Schmitt's Political Theology⁴ ([1922]1985:1–67) – that together God and the state was the last safeguard and protection from complete apocalyptic chaos. It was a theology of political sovereignty (Schmitt [1922]1985:xvii; 5–15; cf. Schmitt 2012:275–276), which meant that the end justified the means, whatever the means might be.

Moltmann's 'new' Political Theology developed in the two decades after the Second World War in the shadow of the time after Auschwitz and the Nazi-theologisation of the power of the state; therefore it started out as a 'theology after Auschwitz' (Moltmann 2013:1; cf. Metz 2012:322–323). Together with Metz (and also Dorothee Sölle) (cf. 1995:59–72; cf. 1974:1–25) in the German context, this was broadened and a turn towards a 'new' Political Theology involved a hermeneutical rather than a political category. For Moltmann, 'new' Political Theology is based largely on (his theological paradigm) a 'theology of hope'; it is a theology of 'ethical and political anticipation' (Moltmann 2013:4; cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:37), and it is an ecumenical endeavour in a world that is burdened by violence and injustice. For Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (2013:37) this turn in Political Theology in Germany was a 'critical reflection upon past theological conceptions of the relation of religion and society' (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1982:59–101). The theology that emerged offered the reality of the promise of God's Kingdom. Metz (2012) described this 'turn' as one

... which will bring us face to face with the suffering and the victims ... It criticizes the high degree of apathy in theological idealism, and its defective sensibility for the interruptive character of historical and political catastrophes ... it [*political theology*] is not theology in terms of a system, but a theology in terms of human subjects. (p. 322)

Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (2013:38–39) does however make a distinction between the contexts in which this theology emerged. He contrasts German Political Theology with Latin American Liberation Theology, a distinction also made by Moltmann (2013:4–5) in his contribution. The point here is that 'new' Political Theology does not mean the same thing

3. In reference to the objective of the World Council of Churches, stated at its 6th Annual Assembly in Vancouver, 1983 (cf. <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/1983-vancouver>, viewed 02 May 2015).

4. Metz (2013:13; cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 1977:148–166) traces discussions about Political Theology's focus on the state back to Stoic Philosophy and Ancient Rome and how the conception of the state is found in early Christian theologies, such as Eusebius' theology. Roman political theology was developed further during the Renaissance and influenced the Enlightenment and perceptions of democracy during French Traditionalism. These influenced political Romanticism and the theories of Hegel about the law and the state. Carl Schmitt's Political Theology was formed under the influence of this long history of interpretation (cf. Schmitt [1922] 1985:viii; xxiii 16–36; 53–67).

for all contexts, and 'new' is not always 'better', or different – an aspect which I will take up more extensively in the next section. This aspect about the paradigm shift in Political Theology is also pointed out by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza. A theology in terms of 'human subjects' implies a more concrete and specific form of critical theology – and this is precisely the challenge she makes towards a 'new' Political Theology in her contribution (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:24). Although a movement was seemingly made from 'old' Political Theology to 'new' Political Theology, which focused on people and not systems, this shift in focus did not have a similar impact in terms of the public consciousness of women. She cannot therefore 'label' her particular feminist theology as 'political' or 'postcolonial' or 'liberation' theology *only*, but rather as a 'decolonizing political theology of liberation' (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:23). For her, feminist theology as a critical theology is a process of raising consciousness and she understands this (as well as her own work) as decolonising rather than postcolonial. For her, 'decolonizing' points to a historical redistribution, an ideological deconstruction and ethical-political constructive representation⁵ (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 2007:25). The three forms of so-called *progressive* theology (political/liberation/postcolonial), or the *emergent* theologies, have not theorised the lack of public awareness and consciousness about the religious and cultural exclusion of women and the fact that the 'largest portion of the poor and disenfranchised were – and still are – women' (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:24). Despite the seeming 'progression' in political theology mentioned above, critical feminist analysis and an awareness of the problem of power is still lacking when it comes to the situation of women.

Contemporary challenges: Creating and sustaining awareness

Prophetic Theology

For Moltmann it is the context and community that shape the hermeneutics of Political Theology, and by his own admission he conceives this in a broader sense than he and Metz did at the beginning of their endeavours in political hermeneutics (Moltmann 2013:5). The hermeneutics of a Christian response to war and violence is always complex and a challenge – and the context of a divided Germany and the response to the many atom bombs housed in warehouses in East and West Germany respectively was a challenge. Moltmann writes that people responded to this challenge with the peace movement⁶. There were mass demonstrations (that eventually led to the toppling of the Berlin Wall) during which non-violence was practised. This is not as straightforward as it might seem – the use of violence to deter power is a continuous

debate, in which many different opinions are expressed⁷. The important aspect of this theology of peace, which for Moltmann is a contemporary challenge to Political Theology, is that 'the church becomes an ecumenical church of peace independent of the state' (Moltmann 2013:7). In this regard, Political Theology is a theology which engages constantly and critically with its function and content, with regard to community and context. This links up with how Moltmann articulates 'political theology' in *The politics of discipleship and discipleship in politics* (2006):

... reflective consciousness has no longer a self-forgetting contemplative relationship to reality but has won an immanent, operative and therefore self-critical relationship to reality instead.... A church which engages in this may no longer ask abstractly about the relationship of 'the church and politics', as if these were two separate things which must be brought together, rather this church must begin with a critical awareness of its own political existence and its actual social functions. (p. 36)

The key aspect of his challenge to Political Theology is one of 'speaking up', which Moltmann articulates as the prophetic task of Political Theology. This task is a challenge and it might be articulated differently in different contexts and communities, but prophetic theology is the unifying concept in different forms of political theologies. He recounts that he first realised that South American liberation theologians did not view their theology as Political Theology when a group of students from South America visited Tübingen in 1975, where he was teaching at the time, and the students announced that they were 'seeking liberation from the dominance of European culture and theology' (Moltmann 2013:5). The South American liberation theologians sought to differ from political theologians in terms of their interpretation of contexts and concerns (cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:38). A focused incarnational interpretation of hope (eschatology) highlighted the need for concrete options – more concrete options than Political Theology in general provided. Different concerns and different resources (indigenous native narratives and native spirituality) shaped their 'theology of criticism' as a liberation theology and not a 'Political Theology' as such (Moltmann 2013:4–5; cf. Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:39). Moltmann however suggests that what is 'Political Theology' in one context is 'liberation theology' in another: 'Political Theology as prophetic theology is liberation theology, and liberation theology is Political Theology' (Moltmann 2013:11). He emphasises that the 'theology of liberation' was more influential in ecumenical contexts because it was a phrase encompassing more than just one area for the practice and theology of Christianity.

5. She does not set out her understanding of 'decolonize' in detail in this particular contribution. For this, see one of her earlier works, *The power of the Word: Scripture and the rhetoric of Empire* (Schüssler Fiorenza 2007).

6. In his contribution, Moltmann specifically refers to the Mennonites as a role model in the formation of a theology of peace. He referred to this in one of his other works as well: *The politics of discipleship and discipleship in politics* (Moltmann 2006: 15–25).

7. For example, for Dietrich Bonhoeffer 'it was not enough to help the victims that are caught up in the spoke of the wheel, but to jam the wheel itself' (Bonhoeffer in Wind 2002:65, cf. Doblmeier 2003). In a rare public exchange, the Niebuhr brothers engaged on this issue – applied to post-Second World War America (Cavanaugh, Bailey & Hovey 2012:254–264). Richard Niebuhr ([1932] 1992a) wrote about 'The grace of doing nothing' (in Miller 1992:6–11). Reinhold Niebuhr asks 'Must we do nothing?' (in Miller 1992:12–18). For Richard Niebuhr it is about a choice between different kinds of inactivity, not a choice between action and inaction. Reinhold Niebuhr however argues that Christians should be active in politics, not huddle in the catacombs. For him, tragic decisions about lesser evils must be made in a fallen world (see also Cavanaugh et al. [2012], *An Eerdmans reader in contemporary political theology*).

Therefore 'prophetic political theology' is also an ecumenical endeavour, ecologically and globally.

Theology of justice and a humane society

Metz (2013:16) views the 'new' Political Theology as a fundamental theology, whereas Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (see above) describes it as a foundational theology. Although Schüssler Fiorenza (1977:134) acknowledges that 'foundational theology' is understood in different ways, Political Theology to him is foundational rather than fundamental, because he understands 'fundamental theology' to be prior to theology, as a type of prolegomenon, whereas Political Theology as a foundational theology analyses the concrete horizons of theology. I concur with Metz's contention that the new Political Theology's understanding of itself as fundamental theology certainly has 'concrete horizons' in mind, aimed at a public Christian discourse about God which 'proves itself to be, at its very core, sensitive to the suffering of others and committed to seeking justice through sympathy and action' (Metz 2013:16–17). Metz therefore awards Political Theology an epistemological as well as an ethical function – and the challenge therein is a discourse about God which does not only explain, but also experiences, not only teaches, but also learns ... about 'the question of justice for the innocent and unjustly suffering victims of our historical existence' (Metz 2013:17).

In biblical texts a clear message about salvation and justice is communicated, connected to understanding 'time', specifically as regards to 'limited time'. A relationship between God and humanity unfolds as a relationship between the question of God and the question of justice. Many discourses (in religion and also Christian doctrine) about this relationship are about 'remembering' the history of God and humanity – with a twofold aim of hope and resistance; hope about an 'interruption of history' and resistance to 'fight for a level playing field of equality for humanity' (Metz 2013:18). Metz argues for an awareness in terms of perception and memory, which is focused on those who cry for 'interruption' in history in light of God's promise of mercy and justice. This he sees as the challenge of Political Theology – a discourse about the God of love and justice, which proves itself to be seeking justice. For this to happen in a global and pluralistic world, he considers 'God as a subject' for all humanity (Schüssler Fiorenza *et al.* 2013:ix) – together with Karl Rahner, whose anthropological turn in his theology had a great influence on the theology (and political theology) of Metz. There is not a single aspect of the suffering of humanity that does not concern the *whole* of humanity. Metz describes this as a 'transcultural authority' which needs to be recognised to provide orientation for a discourse that should span the width and breadth of continents and religions. It would ultimately be the basis for an 'ethic of freedom' (Metz 2013:20) for all humanity.

A public theology critical of policies

A clear demarcation of 'old' and 'new' or a linear movement from 'old' to 'new' becomes problematic when it is applied

to different contexts and Metz's warning about an oversimplistic distinction between 'old' and 'new' comes to mind. Francis Schüssler-Fiorenza (2013:38–49) asks about the articulation of the 'new' Political Theology in different contexts and the context of the USA in particular. In his contribution, Metz makes a passing comment to this effect, namely that some of Carl Schmitt's 'old' Political Theology is being revisited in the USA (Metz 2013:13). Schüssler Fiorenza (2013:39–42) takes this further in his contribution. He admits that a comparison between contexts is always a complex endeavour and should not be undertaken simplistically. There is however a 'remarkable parallelism' between the Bush administration's justification of a war on terror in terms of 'exception' and 'sovereignty [and] emergency legislation' (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:40) and Carl Schmitt's theories expressed in his famous (or infamous) maxim, 'Sovereign is he who decides on the exception' (Schmitt [1922]1985:5). Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's observation is that Schmitt's ideas are actually being received in a contrasting way: by both conservative political policy and practice and progressive or radical democratic thought. He is concerned with 'democratic paradoxes' (Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, in Fiorenza *et al.* 2013:xi), in which universal human rights are appealed to while at the same time advocating group boundaries based on an emphasis on cultural, social and ethnic differences. The effect is that in certain situations, some 'groups' make the decisions of power and values:

What is learned from Schmitt is the idea that the equality of humankind cannot provide the basis for a specific government or particular state or political institution. Government is made possible by the possibility of distinction or difference. (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:50)

Concern about Political Theology is not about a 'strange mixture' of politics and theology that politicises the church or theologises politics. The concern is the challenge that Political Theology faces in terms of articulating the relation between 'political theology and political practice, between interpretation and action, between theology and human rights' (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:52). He is of the opinion that the emancipatory action that underscores the respective political theologies of Metz (in terms of justice for the suffering) and Moltmann (an eschatological emphasis on the rights of all humanity) points to the incompleteness of contemporary laws, institutions and practices concerned with emancipatory intent and action. At the conclusion of his contribution, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza advocates for the same thing as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza: public awareness. He argues for a public religious discourse in which Political Theology will make the public sphere aware of its values and concerns. For this, Political Theology will have to develop approaches that link its discourse with other discourses. The challenge to Christian Political Theology is to articulate an understanding of human nature and human sin – in order to uncover the power within humanity which leads to oppression, exclusion and genocide (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:59). I understand this 'public awareness' as a hermeneutics of suspicion towards power that needs

to be created and fostered on a continuous basis across disciplines, contexts and religions. The single greatest challenge to Political Theology is not to avoid the issue of power, but to 'decolonize' the ever-present 'panopticon' (in reference to both Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Michel Foucault – in Van Wyk 2014: 3 of 7) that regulates people in a heteronormative way.⁸

Theology of concrete change

In her discussion of the challenge to political theology, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza highlights the issue of language. Her choice of using the*logy instead of theology, and wo/men instead of women, is an epistemological challenge to categories and universal assumptions about any one word or concept that claims to be determinative of the whole of the aspect it aims to denote. For her, language is the greatest instrument of exclusion and marginalisation – specifically with regard to consciousness about women. It has the effect of making invisible even when it attempts to conceptualise. Despite many paradigm shifts in theology, 'androcentric language' or kyriocentric language⁹ makes the presence and actions of women throughout history (in society, the church and theology) invisible by using the generic masculine to refer to all humanity under the guise of inclusivity. Political theologies, liberation theologies and postcolonial theologies are male-dominated and she maintains that they have not examined the exclusion of women theologically (or theoretically) (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:25).

She attempts to use the concept or notion of kyriarchy to portray how different structures of domination and oppression are interlinked and how they intersect. One of the greatest problems for critical feminist analyses is how binary gender dualism determines thought. Kyriarchy as an analytical category views oppression systems as a pyramid with layers according to gender, class, race, religion and culture (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:28), and not as a dualistic structure. This is because knowledge (and the language it is expressed in) is not only gendered, but it is also 'raced' and 'classed'.

In this regard, a critical feminist political theology of decolonising liberation, which is her own designation and interpretation of her enterprise and paradigm, as well as a challenge she envisages for Political Theology, is a socio-political emancipatory movement (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:29). This involves a critical and self-critical feminist theology which uncovers contradictions. She envisages a critical and alternative space, which she coins as 'the ekklēsia of wo/men'. This oxymoron is intended to articulate

8. See also Foucault's (1982) use of 'panopticon' as metaphor in 'The subject and power' *Critical Enquiry* 8, 777–795.

9. This refers to Schüssler Fiorenza's own concept of 'kyriarchy' which refers to 'a complex pyramidal system of super- and subordination, of exploitation and domination' (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:26). She coined the term in the 1990s as a depiction of the intersection of patriarchy and hierarchy, being more comprehensive than both the terms' meaning, while pointing to the aspects that both the concepts attempt to denote.

'a political Other' in its entirety. 'Ekklēsia', denoting the democratic assembly (which for a very long time did not include women), is qualified by the genitive of 'wo/men', which for Schüssler Fiorenza (2013:34) includes all non-citizens of modernity in terms of gender, class, and race. She attempts to show that the church and the democracy (theology and politics?) need critical self-awareness, because neither is what they claim to be: free and fair and inclusive. The challenge is being aware of what shapes your (church's/theology's/politics'/democracy's) social vision. It requires insight into your understanding of the concept 'liberation' and your 'construct of Woman as the Other of Man, or of a "black" or "savage" as the Other of a "white" or "civilized" European' (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:35). From the perspective of such an understanding and awareness one can take part in the establishment of a public sphere and of 'the ekklēsia of wo/men' – particularly as a space from which concrete changes can be conceptualised and enacted.

The grounds for the arguments Schüssler Fiorenza makes in her contribution are illustrated in part by another contributor, Jürgen Moltmann. As part of his vision about the contemporary challenges faced by Political Theology, he describes feminist theology as a 'form of political theology, which deals with overcoming cultural patriarchy, but also fighting for "human rights" for women' (Moltmann 2013:8). He does, however, mention this in passing, which might be due to a more extended contribution by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza on the subject (to which he refers). On the other hand, a comment by him in one of his earlier works seems to reiterate the challenges voiced by Schüssler Fiorenza. Because it is so illustrative of the argument she makes, Moltmann's account is provided in full below. By his own admission (Moltmann 2000:269–270) he did not come to feminist theology himself. It came to him through his wife, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (Moltmann 2000):

... it was not always easy for me personally to understand the necessity for taking this road, but I was curious enough to go along with it in keen anticipation ... every learning process involves pain, and every process of personal change even more so, if it means surrendering a prejudice to which one has got used to. The two of us started out off as equal and evenly matched partners. Then came the era of profession and children. A division of labour followed. For me, one responsibility followed another ... father of a family ... pastor and a professor of theology ... eaten up by [my] work. It was the practical application of feminist theology to myself which for the first time slowly opened my eyes to the estrangements involved. It took some time for me to arrive at my own case history, and for me to realize how I had been turned from a young human being into 'a man'. It was not easy to surrender the power ... the encounter with black theologians had already made me very much aware that I am a white theologian and that this existence puts its stamp on my perceptions. The encounters with Third World theologians had made me aware that I live in the First World and that too put its stamp on my thinking, whether I like it or not. But living with feminist theology brought this necessary self-enlightenment with incomparably more force into the very heart of personal existence. (pp. 269–270)

Future directions of Political Theology

Exploring a South African context

In his contribution, which is the concluding chapter, Michael Welker (2013:81–86; cf. Welker, in Schüssler Fiorenza *et al.* 2013:xiii–xiv) sets out three main tasks for a Political Theology of the future:

- a socio-theoretical awareness of the complexity of different relationships
- a clearer assessment of the state of affairs based on continuous social analysis
- a greater courage to engage multi-contextual and pluralistic environments.

He employs Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Sanctorum Communio* as a model for his starting point, because of its high level of socio-theoretical awareness and because it is a theological study of the sociology of the Church (cf. Bonhoeffer [1986] 2009). The greatest danger to practicing critical theology is presuppositions about each other with regard to 'the human': individual, global, private, public, community and society – especially with regard to their value categories and systems that we associate with. These value systems are visible sometimes, but they are invisible or hidden just as many times (maybe more), and the way we think about humanity and being human mutually influence one another. It shapes the structure and content of different relationships. The self-relation of the individual person (understanding of self), the relationship to God (how God is understood), one-to-one relationships (interpersonal understanding), and social relationships (forms of sociality and community) are multifaceted relationships which influence one another and connect and intersect on different levels at different occasions.

A social-theoretical awareness of the complexities involved can only function on the basis of a 'socio-analytical honesty' (Welker 2013:83). This honesty means looking at the power dynamics that surround different types of relationships – institutional, moral and social. A Political Theology of the future must create a prudent awareness that there is no such thing as a 'neutral observer' and it must try to differentiate between power interests and interpret it within a theological framework (Welker 2013:82–83).

Socio-analytical studies which form the stepping stones of the awareness can furthermore not be done from the perspective of one context. A pluralistic environment requires a multi-disciplinary approach, and a 'multi-systemic' approach in which Political Theology is self-critically positioned in the church, the academy and society. Welker argues for an approach which appreciates the complex interplay between systemic organisations on the one hand and social institutions and civil society on the other hand (Welker 2013:84). It is about developing a real picture of the contexts. For Welker there is only a vague comprehension of how politics and

law, politics and the economy, and politics and the media are interdependent. That is why some approaches to Political Theology only get as far as describing the problem and morally complaining about it.

The awareness and analysis must be developed in light of what Welker describes as Political Theology's context of theological-pneumatological observations (Welker 2013:84–85). The belief held by the Christian faith and theology is that the Holy Spirit cultivates diversity and creativity – the Spirit of God is poured out on all believers, irrespective of age, class, gender or race. The differences are not eliminated by the Spirit. 'Binary differences' (Van Wyk 2014:5 of 7) still exist, but they are integrated into a complex 'reconciling diversity' which is never a 'reconciled' endeavour, because stability and dynamics are both connected in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit compels us towards bearing prophetic witness and resistance every time an attempt is made to make another human being invisible: '[A]gain and again Political Theology must perceive the powerlessness and the limits of moral and legal power' (Welker 2013:85).

The overarching theme and the single greatest challenge for a Political Theology of the future is the awareness, the concrete examination and the constant critique of power and its symbols. It will not be able to avoid a continuous critique of ideology – even in the face of 'new' theological paradigms aimed at progress in terms of emancipatory action.

Exploring a South African context

Direct linear transference of meaning and value from one context to another is problematic. Comparing contexts is a complex endeavour which needs to take differing paradigms and epistemologies into account. Engaging with different contexts and paradigms other than your own from the position of your 'situatedness' (or *Sitz im Leben*) involves a critical self-awareness. The challenges and tasks expressed by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza speak to the heart of this matter. Presuppositions are expressed in language. Language becomes a tool of exclusion. Her notions of 'kyriarchy' and 'ekklisia of wo/men' seek to provide a theoretical framework to 'decolonize' the constructs of power used to give expression (language) to the ontology of human beings. This is done from the perspective of feminist theology, from which perspective the 'social vision and analysis of liberation theology is shaped by the West', but which advocates 'radical democratic well-being' (Schüssler Fiorenza 2013:35) for all the invisible people of modernity. Her critique, challenges and suggestions with regard to critical and self-critical awareness in terms of 'kyriarchy' are valid for the articulation of a Political Theology in terms of the theoretical and political practices of the South African context, as part of the context of Africa. One of the greatest theological issues for a Political Theology in South Africa (and Africa) is the issue of colonisation and the exploration of postcolonial (or in Schüssler Fiorenza's terms, decolonizing) liberation theology. One of the key aspects of postcolonial theology is the question of a language for the

'subaltern' and if the 'subaltern can speak' (cf. Said 2006: 24–28; Spivak 2006:28–38). Under the influence of Michel Foucault, Schüssler Fiorenza's choice of using 'decolonizing' instead of 'postcolonial' denotes a critical and self-critical stance towards presuppositions about context and paradigm; this for example is seen in the work of the African feminist theologian from Botswana, Musa Dube (2012: 585–600). She maintains she cannot consent to using 'Africa' as designation of a uniform people (Dube 2012:585). For her the concept denotes common oppression of many people, and not a uniformity of people. Dube uses the designation with a critical awareness that it has been imposed on the context itself. She advocates a decolonising reading of the Bible (Dube 2012:596–599) with which 'true conversations of equal subjects' will be able to take place in a postcolonial and multicultural context. Dube's concern about the imposition of designations as descriptions correlates with the South African feminist theologian Denise Ackermann's concern about language and how it contributes to the formation of consciousness (Ackermann 2011:6). Both of these theologians' concerns correlate with those of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, as expressed in her contribution. Furthermore, both Dube (2012:599) and Ackermann (2011: 4–5) remind us of the gross under-representation when it comes to women's participation in discussions that effect policy and paradigm shifts in the church (and church polity) and theology in Africa and South Africa.

Another correlating aspect of the theologians' contributions is that of a hermeneutic framework towards articulating postcolonial/decolonising *liberating* theology in terms of what is suggested by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and the distinction and/or separation of political and liberation theology referred to by Jürgen Moltmann. The students from South America who visited Moltmann in Tübingen voiced their concern about the difference in perspective and paradigm; they preferred to speak of their theology as liberation theology and not Political Theology. Moltmann argues that the one *is* the other, albeit different contextual articulations of prophetic theology. Prophetic theology is certainly a prominent function of a South African (and African) political/liberation theology as well (Tutu 2012:482–502). The 2012 publication, *Prophet from the South. Essays in honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak*, is illustrative of the prophetic witness of a liberation theology in South Africa. The main aspects of such a liberation theology is 'resisting power' (Smit 2013:77–95; cf. Dibeela, Lenka-Bula & Vellem 2014:11–35) and it is articulated in terms of 'Black Theology' (cf. Dibeela *et al.* 2014:201–276). On the other hand, Emmanuel Katongole (2011:1–25) uses the concept and notion of *Political Theology* specifically in his discussion of the challenges and tasks facing Africa in terms of a Christian social ethics and Christianity's role 'in the search for peace, democracy and development in Africa' (Katongole 2011:2). He suggests a shift from strategies to stories,

to provide a fresh way to talk about politics: politics as dramatic performance grounded in a particular story that requires, and in the end shapes, particular characters ... this way of thinking

about politics in Africa also provides a way to view Christianity itself as a form of politics ... [albeit] a unique performance grounded in different stories. (Katongole 2011:3)

With this he acknowledges the political dimension in theology (and Christianity), which correlates with Moltmann and Metz's argument about the political nature of theology. Furthermore, he underscores a unique and different source for doing theology in Africa, namely the use of 'stories' (narratives), something also emphasised by Francis Schüssler Fiorenza in his comparison and distinction of contexts of Political Theology. Lastly, it acknowledges the role of the political (in terms of theories and policies).

In his contribution, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza highlights the role of Political Theology in a critical stance towards government policies and understanding democracy. One of the most prominent aspects of South African church history has been the issue of a self-critical and a critical awareness with regard to government policies, and specifically the issue of democracy. Although giant strides were made (see for example the 25th anniversary edition of *The church struggle* in South Africa by John de Gruchy and his late son, Steve de Gruchy [2005]), one of the greatest religious and political ethical issues (and challenges) in South Africa and Africa remains the articulation and practice of democracy (cf. Sindima 1998) and the role of religion in state affairs and government policies (Sindima 1998:1–13). In the South African context, it remains a challenge to reconcile diversity. Even though the ideology of apartheid and the apartheid system are for the most part in the past, the legacy thereof and how the different peoples of South Africa grapple with the legacy remain a challenge. Johann Baptist Metz's concern about 'old' and 'new' and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza's expression of the re-emergence of 'old' political theories and policies is just as relevant for a South African context as any other. It was George Orwell who expressed caution about complacency and presuppositions in this regard in his famous novel *Animal farm* (Orwell [1945] 1983:83). Very soon a liberating policy or paradigm becomes the next oppressing one, and the oppressed become the new oppressor. In a 2014 public lecture at the University of Pretoria on social cohesion, Allan Boesak, in his (unpublished) reply on receiving a Festschrift in his honour, titled *Prophet from the South: Essays in honour of Allan Aubrey Boesak*, edited by Dibeela *et al.* (2014), expressed the same type of concern applied to the current South African political landscape.

It seems the overarching theme of the contributions (also in reference to how it applies to a South African context) is that the price of freedom is constant vigilance.

Therefore, the challenges and tasks outlined by the publication in terms of a European and North American background are relevant to a South African (African) context, but in a nuanced way. Political Theology is emphasised as a critical theology (with its face towards the world!), which uncovers and criticises power, paradigms, theories, policies,

traditions and theologies that stimulate and perpetuate oppression, alienation and violence.

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