

Together towards Life and *Evangelii Gaudium*

Implications for African Child Theology today

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Abstract

This article contributes to the development of an African Child² Theology and will attend to the implications of Together towards Life (TTL)³ and *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG)⁴ for an African Child Theology. The article wants to answer the following question: What theological understanding is needed to indicate the distinct contribution of the African child to the understanding of the revelation history of God? The history of Christian mission, especially in Africa, has been characterised by conceptions of geographical expansion from a Christian centre, namely Europe, to the “unreached territories” (cf TTL 5). In the new understanding and new generation of mission, the church must focus on marginalised children as “unreached territories”, an essential group through which God conveys his love to the world.

In developing an African Child Theology, consideration must be given to applicable and relevant statements in TTL and EG. We live in a world with many spirits (TTL 25), where people are looking for joy, not as a relationship from within, but in “the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience” (EG 2). Within African Theologies, we concur with TTL (23) on “our spiritual connection with creation”. These three statements imply some specific African contextual considerations for a child theology. A classic understanding defines theology as a “faith seeking understanding”. In the African church, Father Augustine’s understanding takes the form, “I believe in order that I may understand” (Migliore 2014:2). It is in this regard that the article will look at African Child Theology as seeking a deeper understanding of God’s revelation through the hermeneutical lens of the African child.

Key words: Together towards Life (TTL), *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), African Child Theology, children, youth.

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² In this article, ‘child’ will refer to people between the ages of 4–14 years of age. ‘Youth’ will be used as a broader term that will include all young people from 4–35 years of age.

³ CWME (Commission on World Mission and Evangelism). 2012. Together towards life: Mission and evangelism in changing landscapes. <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes> [accessed 16 Mar 2015]

⁴ Pope Francis. 2013. Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the proclamation of the Gospel in today’s world. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html [accessed 16 Mar 2015].

1. Introduction

In October, 2013, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (WCME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) presented a document on mission at the Tenth General Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Korea. The title of the document is “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (TTL 2012), echoing the general theme of the Assembly, “God of Life, Lead Us to Justice and Peace. In this article the document (TTL) is read together with the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) of the Holy Father Francis to the bishops, clergy, consecrated persons and the lay faithful on the proclamation of the gospel in today’s world⁵. The implications of these two important missional documents for a child theology in Africa will be examined in this article.

“Until very recently, issues related to children have tended to be marginal in almost every area of contemporary theology. For example, systematic theologians and Christian ethicists have said little about children, and they have not regarded serious reflection on children as a high priority” (Bunge 2001:3.). Although in recent years more attention is given to child theology and although children was always part of missiology, within missiology very little, if any, is written about the importance and the place of the child as will be indicated in the documents under discussion. Child theology, especially in Africa, is still in a developing stage and is (as indicated later in this article) a process. It is therefore quite challenging to discuss a developing theology in comparison with two extremely rich contextual missional documents, “Together towards Life” (TTL) and *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG), without them attending to children. This is extraordinary, given that in South and Eastern Africa, about 16% of the population is under the age of five years and around 50% of the population under the age of 18 years old (Unicef 2008); this is also true of the children (4-14 window) in the geographical 10-40 window (Bush 2013). It is clear that whoever wants to think and talk about mission needs a good theology of the child. Although Together towards Life (TTL) does not mention children directly and *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG) mentions family and children in only one paragraph, the contributions of these documents to an African Child Theology are tremendous. One of the limitations of this paper is that, within the limited space, it is not possible to do justice to all the contributions that these documents are able to make. The purpose of this article is to describe an understanding of African Child Theology and to indicate the important contributions that the documents TTL and AG can make towards this theology.

Barnett (2009) makes a clear distinction between Child Theology and theologies of childhood, children’s theologies, theologies for children, and children’s spiritu-

⁵ On 24 November 2013, Pope Francis published the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, “The joy of the Gospel”.

ality. He then continues by acknowledging the similarities between Child Theology and Theologies of Childhood, describing the latter in the following way: “Theologies of Childhood provide sophisticated theological understandings of children and childhood and our obligations to children, take into account various perspectives on children and childhood from both the Bible and the Christian tradition and ideally honour the dignity and complexity of children.” Grobbelaar (2012:9) argues clearly that child theology is looking at children from God’s point of view and the importance of children within the Kingdom of God. Therefore child theology is also Kingdom theology and missional theology. Since child theology is missional and about the coming of the Kingdom within a specific context it is argued that it is also important to take the socio-historical context in which children are brought up into consideration. Without devaluating the good work that is done in children and youth ministry in Africa, it must be stated that without a good theology, most of the children and youth ministry is done in the same way as development, namely “haphazard[ly] and [on a] small scale, because it is not context specific and because it does not take into account the real wishes (*needs*) of the young people themselves” (Mabala 2011:157). The important thing to note here is a “theology”⁶. There are many good programmes and ministries with and for young people and children, but because they run parallel to the existing congregation ministry instead of being part of theological understanding of the congregation, they only have partial effect for as long as they last. Many of these ministries are also focussed on children in Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres and schools, and very seldom reach the marginalised, out-of-school and rural children. Ecclesiology in Africa will be enhanced if it embraces child theology.

Barnett (2009) also makes a distinction between Theologies of Childhood and Child Theology, stating that Child Theology is about theology, it is an adjectival theology, it is a process and it is wider than children’s issues, since it provides new insights into central themes of Christian faith. This article chooses the option of an African Child Theology rather than Theologies of Childhood and will use these characteristics as structure for the paper. It will investigate how the theological departure, described as “mission spirituality”, of the two documents (TTL and AG) might help in developing an African Child Theology. Although neither of these documents give specific attention to children, youth or families, the missional theology of the documents embraces these groups in Africa by viewing them as “vulnerable and people at the margins”.

⁶ Theology is not only a cognitive exercise but is practical and closely linked to ministry. Grobbelaar (2012:90) writes “But Jesus’ call to us is not to grasp God’s kingdom cognitively but to take up our cross and embrace the suffering and pain that belongs to a life seeking the coming of the kingdom of God, as Jesus did.”

2. African Child Theology

Nyende (2008:39) argues that “there is a need for African Theologians to understand Christianity in Africa more profoundly”. He based his statement on all the twisted experiences such as apartheid in South Africa and the genocide in Rwanda. How did these realities within the Christian communities have an impact on the socio-ethical life and beliefs of children and young people in Africa? We need a theological frame to “understand the mysteries of God at work” in Africa. This theological frame must help us to proclaim the Good News in word and deed. De Gruchy (2011:7) envisions theology “as an activity ‘done’ with a clear regard to social transformation, faithful to the Christian gospel. In so doing, it serves tradition by bringing it into dialogue with urgent questions of present concern”. It is in this regard that I want to see African Child Theology as God’s revelation history in Africa amongst children. History revelation is more than history (something that happened in the past), it contains a revelation (message) as well (Van der Walt 2007:21). History revelation is about the message (facts and meaning) within a context (facts and relation) (Van der Walt 2007:23); African Child Theology can thus be described as the relation between the reality of God, Africa and children.

Mabala (2011:161) indicates that in the context of developing countries, children and youth have largely been viewed negatively, since they have been viewed as a “burgeoning threat”, because the infant and child mortality rate declines and health improves. Nel (2013) argues strongly that development of children and youth in Africa must not only be viewed or described in chronological or developmental stages, but within the socio-historical context. According to the author (2013:68), “generation signifies how particular socio-political events, technological advances, economic shifts and cultural movements, amongst others, shaped the thinking and identity of those born in that particular time and space”. He argues in favour of a social generation approach that will take particular histories seriously, as well as the transcendent reality of the history within the faith community. “This means, in essence, a discerning of personal history, also to indicate how God is at work.” (Nel 2013:69.)

The article wants to understand African Child Theology as the “continuing search for the fullness of the truth of God, made known in Jesus Christ” (Migliore 2014:2), especially through and within the child in Africa. This implies that it is not just a repetition of traditional doctrines, “but a persistent search for the truth to which they point and which they only partially and brokenly express” (Migliore 2014:2). Describing *theology* as “faith seeking understanding” has a long and rich tradition. “In the writing of Augustine⁷ (*an African*), it takes the form, ‘I believe in order that

⁷ Augustine’s theological understanding of children can be stated as follows: “(1) Even infants show

I may understand” (Migliore 2014:2). An African Child Theology is thus faith seeking understanding of the fullness of the truth, revealed by God in Jesus Christ, within and through the life of Africa’s children. According to Bevans (2014:298–299), the implications for such a missionary option (as also described in EG) are the following: first, that the proclamation is embodied in the authentic being of the churches; second, that the articulated message has to be a message of joy, given by joyful messengers; third, that the message must be a message of mercy and tenderness; fourth, that it must speak to the experience and culture of the people; and fifth, that it must be a prophetic message in solidarity with the poor. These implications are applicable and will enhance an African Child Theology.

3. Child Theology as theology

3.1 Theology is about Scripture and tradition

“Child Theology is an investigation that considers and evaluates central themes of theology –historical, biblical and systematic – in the light of the child standing beside Jesus in the midst of the disciples.” (Barnett 2009.) Any questions that are raised by the faith community must be answered by a process of discernment in which Scripture plays a normative role (Hendriks 2004:29). The first characteristic of theology is described by Erickson (2001:16) as Biblical. Ukpong (2000:3) refers to Africa, more specifically Alexandria, as the cradle of systematic Biblical interpretation in Christianity. The foundation was laid by Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others who worked rather allegorically and uncritically in a modern sense; it lasted up to the Enlightenment, when it was replaced by other forms of interpretation. Ukpong (2000:4) continues to divide the development of Biblical interpretation in Africa into three phases and describes them in the following way: Phase 1 (1930s–1970s): a reactive and apologetic phase, “focussed on legitimising African religion and culture” and using the comparative method. Phase 2 (1970s–1990s): a phase during which a reactive-proactive “use of African context as resource for Biblical interpretation” is supreme, dominated by liberation hermeneutics and Black theology. Phase 3 (1990s): a phase during which proactive “recognition of the ordinary reader” is predominant. The African context is used as the subject of Biblical interpretation and is dominated by liberation and inculturation methodologies.

Writing about African philosophy, Van der Walt (2003:204) works with almost the same “phases”. He describes an earlier phase (1800–1930) during which “Westerners still denied Africans coherent logical thought and intellectual develop-

sinful tendencies; (2) Adam’s transgression, which implants in his progeny an alien sin, accounts for these tendencies; (3) Baptism remedies these damnable tendencies and should be conferred as early as possible.” (Stortz 2001:79.)

ment". Phase 2 (1930–1970) is distinguished by an “African personality”, negritude (a distinctive and universal black culture) and a proposed “Bantu philosophy”. Phase 3 (1970s–1980s) is distinguished by the challenging of the existence of an African philosophy (or, more specific, an ethno-philosophy) (Van der Walt 2003:205). His final phase is from the 1980s onwards; during this phase, there is a growing agreement that African philosophies should be built on traditional worldviews, cultures and religions. Van der Walt indicates that African Theology developed along the same lines, stating that “the question of identity is a central aspect of all types of reflection in Africa – it is also evident in the quest for an own *Theologia Africana* or African Theology” (2003:205).

In the light of developing an African Child Theology, this paper will only give attention to the last phase (as described by Ukpong and Van der Walt), although it builds on the previous phases. The recognition of the ordinary African readers or non-biblical scholars “as important in academic Bible reading” (Ukpong 2000:17) and the “question of identity” (Van der Walt 2003:205) are important for an African Child Theology. In this case, it is important to take note of the use of the Bible within the African Indigenous Churches (AICs), where the Bible is in some instances subjected to “other” revelations of God such as dreams or visions (Oduro 2008:23; 41–42).

As with many development projects, many children and youth theologies “are top-down and silo-bound, so that they do not address the interlocking needs of young people” (cf. Mabala 2011:157). In Africa, the subject of Biblical interpretation “means that the conceptual framework of interpretation is informed by African socio-cultural context. [...] In this way, the people’s context becomes the subject of the interpretation of the Biblical text” (Ukpong 2000:16). In this regard, we need to ask what the different contexts of children in Africa are. This has the implication that there is no absolute meaning of a text and it would be difficult to have one African Child Theology. When the text is read dynamically within the contemporary context, it evokes the reader to appropriate reactions, responses and commitments within the context. According to Ukpong (2000:17), “the Bible is seen as a *sacred classic* – a book of devotion and norm of morality, as an ancient literary work worth attention beyond its time”.

West (2003:5–6) describes “contextual Bible study” in South Africa as a reading process that takes place within the framework of Liberation hermeneutics. This framework includes the following:

First, a commitment to begin the reading process from the experienced reality of the organized poor and marginalized, including their language, categories, concepts, needs, questions, interests and resources; second, a commitment to read

the Bible communally “with” each other, where power relations are acknowledged and equalized as far as possible; third, a commitment to read the Bible critically, using whatever critical resources are available, including local critical resources of biblical scholarship; and fourth, a commitment to social transformation through the Bible reading process.

In EG, Pope Francis gives new expression to the way in which the church must proclaim the gospel in today’s world. African Child Theology must have the Biblical characteristics⁸ of “a missionary impulse capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures can be suitably channelled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation” (EG 27).

3.2 African Child Theology must be embodied in the churches

TTL (57) states clearly that the church has not always existed in history, but came into being, both theologically and empirically, for the sake of making God known. Making God known is not about expanding the church, but it is about the church “embodying God’s salvation in this world” (TTL 58). An African Child Theology must be embodied in the churches in this sense, since “the parish is not an out-dated institution” (EG 28), especially within the African context. EG speaks about the church as “a mother with an open heart” (Ch. 1, Section V) and not as a toll house, but as “the house of the Father, where there is place for everyone, with all their problems” (EG 47). “The church is a gift of God to the world for its transformation towards the kingdom of God.” (TTL 10.) With the emergence of strong Pentecostal and charismatic movements as one of the most noteworthy characteristics of world and African Christianity today, their insights for an African Child Theology must be taken into consideration (cf TTL 5).

Within the context of Africa, an African Child Theology must empower the churches with an “authentic” ministry. It is important to note that the AICs “represent a wide spectrum of religious understanding and practice, ranging from groups only one step removed from traditional African religious reality to Christ-centered, Spirit-led, biblically oriented communities of faith” (Oduro 2008:10). The authenticity of the churches, as well as the ministry, is founded in “the Triune God who is the creator, redeemer, and sustainer of all life” (TTL 1; 29). If the authenticity of the church is Trinitarian founded, the ministry can only be described as *missio Dei*⁹.

⁸ Cf. the description of Wright (2006:21–22; 29–32) of the whole Bible as a missional text.

⁹ *Missio Dei* can be described as follows: “The life of the Church should always reveal clearly that God takes the initiative, that ‘He has loved us first’ (1 Jn 4:19) and that he alone ‘gives the growth’ (1 Cor 3:7).” (EG 12.)

Historically, child theology (children's ministry) was (and in many instances still is) viewed as a theology (ministry) "of" the margins. An African Child Theology must therefore develop from the margins (cf. TTL 6), realising the "distinctive contribution" that may come from the marginalised children in and from Africa when the Bible is read with them (cf. West 2003).

3.3 African Child Theology is a theology of joy

An African Child Theology is a theology of joy that is described as "a missionary joy" and a sign that "the Gospel has been proclaimed and is bearing fruit" (EG 21). "Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction." (EG 7.) It is a "life-giving" theology about an "abundant life for all" (TTL 1). African Child Theology is not a theology *for* children; instead, it is a participatory theology in communion *with* "all of creation in celebrating the work of the Creator" (TTL 22). It is about how and where we discern the life-giving work of God (TTL 1). Authentic Christian theology is not only in *what* we do, but also in *how* we live out our theology (TTL 29). "The joy of the Gospel fills the hearts and the lives of all who encounter Jesus." (EG 1.)

3.4 African Child Theology is a theology of mercy and tenderness

As a theology founded in the Trinity, an African Child Theology can be nothing else than a theology of mercy and tenderness. Nowhere has God revealed his mercy and tenderness more profoundly than in the Lord Jesus Christ. "While Christian theology has many topics to explore, the decisive basis and criterion of all that it says is the person and work of Jesus Christ." (Migliore 2014:168.) Within the African context, there are indeed different views on who Jesus is (cf. Shoko 2008). The centrality of the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ "for the whole oikumene" (TTL 4) is also central in African Child Theology. According to EG (11), "Christ is the 'eternal Gospel' (Rev 14:6); He 'is the same yesterday and today and forever' (Heb 13:8), yet his riches and beauty are inexhaustible. He is forever young and a constant source of newness". An African Child Theology wants to confess Jesus Christ in a specific context; it must therefore be an Incarnation Theology of mercy and tenderness. "Incarnation is translation. [...] The first divine act of translation thus gives rise to a constant succession of new translations. Christian diversity is the necessary product of the incarnation." (Walls 1996:27–28.) The Lord Jesus Christ gets involved through his incarnation and He involves his followers as He kneels down to wash their feet (cf. EG 24), and as He died on the cross. Through incarnation into the world of the African child, we find a "new translation", a new understanding of the inexhaustible grace of Christ, filled with mercy and tenderness.

3.5 African Child Theology takes the experience and culture into account

An African Child Theology takes the experience and culture of the children (people) into account. As in many countries, it is also true of Africa that “globalization has meant a hastened deterioration of their own (*African*) cultural roots and the invasion of ways of thinking and acting proper to other cultures which are economically advanced, but ethically debilitated” (AG 62). The fast and rapid “cultural” changes in the lives of African children today demand a constant seeking “of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness. [...] There are times when the faithful, in listening to completely orthodox language, take away something alien to the authentic Gospel of Jesus Christ, because that language is alien to their own way of speaking to and understanding one another” (EG 41). Nel (2013:52) asks the important question: “What does ‘youth’ mean in the virtual spaces of social networking websites and applications?” And it may be added: What language are they using? The multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts of Africa, as well as new communication technology, bring the children (people) of Africa into a greater awareness of one another’s identities and pursuits (cf. TTL 9). Authentic theology is missional, therefore “evangelism is grounded in humility and respect for all and flourishes in the context of dialogue” (TTL 89).

In a “flat” Africa, relationships are becoming even more important than already recognised in African culture. “God’s way to the universality is through the particular [...], so the transmission of the gospel message by the church makes use of concrete and diverse languages, experiences, philosophical conceptualities and cultural practices.” (Migliore 2014:206.) EG (34) is clear on the fact that the central aspect of the message, the salvation of Christ, should not be eclipsed by what is secondary. We may not, though, hold fast to a formulation while we fail to convey its substance (EG 41). African Child Theology takes the socio-historical as well as the spiritual context of Africa seriously, therefore the discernment of the Spirit of God is essential “wherever life in its fullness is affirmed and in all its dimensions, including liberation of the oppressed, healing and reconciliation of broken communities, and the restoration of creation. We also discern evil spirits wherever forces of death and destruction of life prevail” (TTL 24).

3.6 African Child Theology must be a prophetic voice in solidarity with the poor

“How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points? This is a case of exclusion. Can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving? This is a case of inequality.” (EG. 53.) An African Child Theology must be a prophetic voice in solidarity with the poor, not only in the cities, but also in the rural areas where there is a lack of infrastructure (such as ECD centres and schools) or

schools without water and toilets. In EG (41), it is stated that the gospel compels us to go to the poor who are “the privilege recipients of the Gospel”. The socio-economic situation in the world is criticised by both documents because of the myth that “the global market will save the world through unlimited growth” (TTL 7); EG (53) states that “today we also have to say ‘thou shalt not’ to an economy of exclusion and inequality (*especially regarding children*). Such an economy kills”.

African Child Theology addresses the issues that drain the joy of living, when a “lack of respect for others and violence are on the rise, and inequality is increasingly evident” (EG 52). The (African) child grows up “under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless” (EG 53). What kind of theology is needed to “proclaim God’s love and justice to a generation living in an individualized, secularized, and materialized world” (TTL 8)? In such a world, “inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve” (AG 60). In these circumstances, African Child Theology must not only be a prophetic voice in solidarity, but a transformative theology that “resists and seeks to transform all life-destroying values and systems wherever these are at work in our economies, our politics, and even our churches” (TTL 30). In conclusion, it must be affirmed “that the economy of God is based on values of love and justice for all and that transformative mission resists idolatry in the free-market economy” (TTL 108).

3.7 African Child Theology is an adjectival theology

Barnett (2004) states that “just as Liberation and Feminist theologies were set in and rose from new understandings of poverty and women, so child theology arises at a time when there is a change in the general consciousness about children”. African Child Theology may be described as a double adjectival theology, since it criticises traditional theological content, processes and hermeneutics from the particular standpoint of the child and from a particular context of Africa. In this sense, it may be classified as a “liberating theology”, a “doing theology”, not a theology to learn only through textbooks and lectures, but also through engaging in doing theology with children within different African contexts. We cannot talk about African Child Theology without talking about the “new” understandings and an emphasis on African Traditional Religion (ATR) with its rich spiritual beliefs. African Child Theology will fail the children of Africa if it does not attend to spiritual matters as manifested within African traditions (cf. Oduro 2008:23).

Regarding the “African” adjective, it is noted that all adherents of ATR are born into a religious realm, and conceiving a child can in some cases even be seen as a response to a religious call (Sakuba 2008:390). Nyende (2008:44) states “that this ‘enchanted’ world is ubiquitous in Africa: apparently no sphere of life in Africa

is spared the influence of this so-called traditional worldview". Writing about fundamentalism in ATR, Sakuba (2008:391) starts with fundamentalistic tendencies within the context of an African family, since this is the place where one views the series of classes between the young generation and an older generation. This is quite normal, but of no less importance for African Child Theology, since "ATR finds expression in everything an African does" (Sakuba 2008:390). An African Child Theology therefore has to take notice of the influence of ATR in and on the lives of the children of Africa. The context is current and therefore new, but the message stays authentic, although it must be interpreted anew. An African Child Theology calls on the churches "to discern the work of the life-giving Spirit sent into the world and to join with the Holy Spirit in bringing about God's reign of justice (Acts 1:6–8). When we have discerned the Holy Spirit's presence, we are called to respond, recognizing that God's Spirit is often subversive, leading us beyond boundaries and surprising us" (TTL 25).

Regarding the "child" in African Child Theology, it must be kept in mind that "the dignity of the human person and the common good rank higher than the comfort of those who refuse to renounce their privileges" (EG 218). Clark (2013:20) comments on EG that "Pope Francis is reiterating a concern for the dignity of vulnerable people that is first and foremost God's concern, and therefore it must be ours", as is clearly argued by Wright (2006:44) when he comments that "Biblically, all true liberation, all truly human best interests flows from the God" who revealed Himself in the Old Testament as YHWH and as incarnated in Jesus Christ. A missional hermeneutics must therefore have a liberationist dimension. As an adjective theology, African Child Theology can be nothing else than a liberating theology, a theology of the cross. "The cross calls for repentance in light of misuse of power and use of the wrong kind of power [...]. [Because of the sins] that divide and trouble us in church and world, we are called to repentance, to critical reflection on systems of power, and to accountable use of power structures. The Spirit empowers the powerless and challenges the powerful to empty themselves of their privileges for the sake of the disempowered." (TTL 33.)

3.8 African Child Theology is a process

"Child Theology promotes an open-ended and inclusive process, respectful of all who take part, whatever their formal status or training, and is determined to involve male and female, practitioner and academic, ordained and lay on equal terms." (Barnett 2009.) Hendriks (2004:27) argues that theology is about a specific time and place (and, it can be added, specific people), and then shows that Christian theology is always contextual. I want to argue a process, because: "(1) theology is human enterprise; (2) it speaks of the living (initiative-taking) God who is in a liv-

ing relation with a dynamic creation; and (3) theology is done as a way of discerning what the church should confess." TTL (43) affirms this statement:

The affirmation of God's mission (*missio Dei*) points to the belief in God as One who acts in history and in creation, in concrete realities of time and contexts, who seeks the fullness of life for the whole earth through justice, peace, and reconciliation. Participation in God's on-going work of liberation and reconciliation by the Holy Spirit, therefore, includes discerning and unmasking the demons that exploit and enslave.

If theology really wants to engage the hearts and minds of the children in Africa, it must seriously regard the social, economic, cultural and political processes influencing their lives. If we want to engage with the African child, the way in which theology is done is critically important. In Africa, we find what EG calls a "popular spirituality". It is a spirituality "incarnated in the culture of the lowly" (EG 124). Engaging in an African Child Theology and "to understand this reality, we need to approach it with the gaze of the Good Shepherd, who seeks not to judge, but to love" (EG 125).

In many African Reformed schools, theology "is still done by studying faith's traditional texts (Systematic Theology and creeds)" (Hendriks 2004:28), which is then applied to the context and might easily lead to a static, institutionalised and "dead" theology. In this way, theology becomes disconnected from the context and the people (in our case, the children in Africa). EG (231–233) pays attention to this with the concept of realities that are more important than ideas; there is a need for theology to engage with reality as revelational history, as explained earlier. An inductive or "bottom-up" methodology should be developed (Hendriks 2004:28). It is in this regard that the "contextual Bible study", as described by West (2003:5), can be of help to us.

True faith and theology are distinguished from fideism in the way that questions are continually asked and answers are sought, while fideism maintains that there comes a point where we must stop asking questions and just believe (Migliore 2014:3). "We are led by the Spirit into various situations and moments, into meeting points with others, into spaces of encounter, and into critical locations of human struggle." (TTL 26.)

3.9 African Child Theology comprises more than children's issues

African Child Theology must be a holistic theology, taking into account the revelation of God within the history of Africa as well as within the lives of children in Africa. The lives of children certainly touch family issues, political issues et cetera, but it is most of all a reflection of our understanding of humanity. It is important to acknowledge God's revelation about humanity in African history as well as his current revelation (as discerned by the faith community).

Whilst Child Theology will not let go of the child lest it forfeits the very sign chosen by Jesus, neither will it make the child or childhood the ultimate focus or boundary of its reflection. Though for Christians already committed to and engaged with children and young people, Child Theology may sharpen and throw light on their understanding of children and obligations to them, the focus of Child Theology remains the major themes of Christian faith and life. (Barnett 2009.)

4. Conclusion

Throughout this article, the important contributions of TTL and EG to an African Child Theology are indicated. It also indicated on how TTL en EG could be enhanced if they had worked with a child theology. This article did not attempt to describe or comment on theologies of childhood, children's theologies, theologies for children, and children's spirituality. It has clearly shown that TTL and EG have important contributions to and perspectives on an African Child Theology. The purpose of this paper was not to go into the rich diversities and stories about Africa's children; first, it discussed African Child Theology as a theology with the implications thereof; second, it indicated African Child Theology as an adjective theology; third, it indicated African Child Theology as a process; and fourth, it stated that African Child Theology is wider than child issues; it is about the revelation of God in the life of the African child.

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