



# The Pragmatism of Practical Theology in the Conservation of the Natural Habitat: An Ecotheology Perspective

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## Abstract

There are concepts which have received little attention in scholarship and important aspects of real-life situations have not been addressed by believing communities. Politicians and policy makers have taken advantage of the laxity on the part of the sacred institution to both exploit and mismanage the natural habitat because the latter is preoccupied with matters of eternity at the detriment of the particularities of everyday life among communities. First, the inquiry will critically engage previous studies that have touched on ecotheology in South Africa (SA) to substantiate my arguments on the failure to address practical issues (hence, practical theology) affecting local communities and the environment. In other words, the study seeks to answer the following questions: (1) what is the contribution of the church in both the collection and disposition of garbage in our cities? (2) what is the relevance of Practical Theology as a field of study in addressing the increase of street loitering and deterioration of sanitary conditions in our major cities? (3) Is it not possible for a church or group of churches to adopt either a community or a street in an effort to maintain it? Second, the present study seeks to decolonize the myth of erecting massive mega churches as if to suggest that God abides in a building. It is argued that the extravagant expenditure by the church could be put to better use by way of awareness campaigns against poverty, poaching, and veldt fires. Ecotheology should encompass awareness on disposing garbage. The present research utilizes the theory of constructivism.

**Keywords:** Church, conservation, constructivism, ecosystem, ecotheology, natural habitat, practical theology, South Africa

## Introduction

Practical Theology is widely discussed in scholarly conversations as ‘ecotheology’ (Fisk, Bennet & Slee, 2022:405). Osmer (2008) writes that, ‘A practical theological perspective usually includes the following tasks: the descriptive-empirical, the interpretative, the normative and the pragmatic or strategic’. Hence, the present study seeks to answer Osmer’s (2008:4) question when he asked, ‘How might this area of praxis be shaped to more fully embody the normative commitments of the Christian tradition in a particular context of experience?’. Nell (2014) seems to have captured Osmer’s (2008:15) question for stating that, ‘The pragmatic task allows one to focus on the development of action-guiding models and rules of art from a strategic point of view and requires a spirituality of “servant leadership”’. Ecotheology involves proper management of the natural habitat. So, if practical theology is perceived in scholarly circles as ‘ecotheology’, it follows that practical theology as a discipline is rightly positioned as a platform to argue against mismanagement of the natural habitat. Lack of systemic management of the environment has become a cause for concern in many parts of the world. In recent years, mismanagement of the natural habitat has had negative ecological, social, and economic impacts in South Africa in spite of the country’s biodiversity and ecosystems



reigning supreme ahead of many world destinations. While on the one hand, laxity and mismanagement characterise the South African ecosystem, on the other hand the indigenous communities of the Amazon Forest of Colombia 'have managed their forests for millennia and practiced their own distinctive ecotheology based on their traditional worldview' (Fisk, Bennet & Slee, 2022:406). However, research shows that South Africa is facing serious mismanagement challenges of the habitat. It emerged that the main factors influencing mismanagement of the habitat include: agriculture, infrastructure development, mining, lack of local community engagement and urbanization, among others. It was established that as a result, there is a critical depletion to the environment which continues to threaten extinction of numerous plant and animal species. The human factor plays a key role in the deterioration of SA's flora and fauna.

The above observation could have led Gnanakan (2016:7) to pen that, 'Our world is facing increasing threats of environmental disasters. These are both natural and human-caused catastrophes, and the impact on the whole planet and its people is devastating'. Several destructive actions on the part of humans toward the natural habitat affect both biodiversity and ecosystem services. For example, several reports have been heard about poaching of and trade on rhinos and elephants (e.g., Schaaf & Rossler, 2010:161:164). It is also on good record that the continuous loss of rhinos and elephants can disrupt and interrupt ecological developments. In addition, human settlement in areas of the natural habitat in search of farming land for agricultural purposes further compounds the crisis on the ecosystem. As human quest for land for agricultural productivity heightens, it potentially destroys the fauna and flora as well as narrowing the land space for the animal kingdom. Pollution from agriculture, mining, and industrial activities can lead to soil and water contamination, affecting both terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

The study seeks to encourage ecumenical establishments to foster partnerships intended to empower younger generations. Believing communities should also focus on food security. This entails participating in focus groups and agro economy among rural communities. Ecumenical partnerships with farming communities will facilitate skills required and resources needed towards agricultural activities for food security. Another focus of the present conversation is the on-going debate on climate change. As a critical problem, 'spanning across national boundaries and socioeconomic-political spheres' (Islam & Kieu, 2021:13), climate change continues to threaten the natural habitat in South Africa. The potential of the climate change to negatively affect the fauna and flora of our nation is very high. It is argued that mismanagement of the natural habitat is caused by various macro-economic factors one of which is poor community engagement. Previous studies have shown that communities regard the task of management of the natural habitat as a preserve of the affluent and the capitalist society. So, local communities are usually uninvolved in the conservation management efforts. Another theme worth attention in this study is the thrust of biodiversity.

In South Africa, national Parks and nature reserves serve unique purposes of protecting the country's biodiversity. It is in the best interest of the country and its people for members of the public to participate in safeguarding the country's biodiversity by getting involved in the management of SA's natural habitats. Tanyanyiwa (2016) reiterates that:

Community participation in most cases is inhibited by lack of mobilisation skills on the part of the implementing agency and this is coupled by arrogance among some of the officials who subsequently, negatively label those opposed to their development plans as enemies of development, agents of imperialists.

As Tanyanyiwa observed, the study envisions a strong drive towards educating believing communities to invest in ecotheology by focusing more on management of the natural habitat than on the myth of erecting mega church buildings. In this study, constructing mega-churches



is discussed as a 'myth' because it is a philosophy/story of perceiving God in terms of size and numbers. Hence, Jaja (2014:10) explained a myth as 'a story which is believed to be true and has its origin in the far distant past history of a people'. The present study is premised on the theory of constructivism.

### Theoretical Framework

Constructivism theory is both cognitive (Piaget, 1971) and social (Vygotsky, 1978) in character. According to constructivism theory, knowledge is actively built by learners and not passively received. Piaget's theory of cognitive development lays the foundation for constructivism. In cognitive development, Piaget opined that children actively construct knowledge through their interactions with each other and the environment. Thus, learners construct their understanding of the world through experiences, reflection, and making connections with prior knowledge. In other words, knowledge is gained through active participation. Bruner's (1979) contribution on cognitive development also features in this debate. Bruner's work on cognitive development emphasized the need for structure and representation in learning. According to Bruner, by employing the spiral curriculum, learners will revisit topics at increasing levels of complexity. Also central to the constructivist learning process is social interaction. In social interaction, learners engage with others, including peers, teachers, and experts, to discuss and negotiate meaning.

According to constructivists, collaborative activities facilitate knowledge construction. Vygotsky (1978) came up with a concept called 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD) which is closely linked to constructivism. According to the ZPD concept, a learner can perform through participation and interaction with the help of peers. This approach is also known as 'active learning'. The knowledge gains through active participation cannot be taken for granted. Through constructivism theory as an active learning approach, learners can explore and ask questions as a way of constructing their own understanding of the subject matter. In other words, constructivism theory is not a 'one-size-fits-all' rhetoric or a 'give-and-take' approach. To the contrary, it takes interaction among learners themselves seriously. Mabena, Mokgosi and Ramapela (2021:453) explain that, 'Constructivism theory places the child in an active role in the learning process'. Fitzgerald's (1996) study relates constructivism to other epistemological approaches such as critical theory, hermeneutics, interpretivism, structuralism, and postpositivism. It is further envisaged that constructivism theory focuses on how people acquire knowledge on teaching and learning. Thus, constructivism theory looks at social interaction, context, and individual experiences in knowledge construction. Constructivism can come in different forms such as cultural constructivism and social constructivism. Ormerod (2019:18) maintains that, 'Social constructivism, in contrast with social constructionism, allows meaning to be derived from objects in the environment as well as from social interactions'. Other scholars, for example, Hass (2001:22-31) attempts to link constructivism with neo-functionalism. The latter 'places the emphasis on the social function of the structural elements' (Ormerod, 2019:18). Thus, placing social constructivism in the SA context is in order.

South Africa has a diverse religious landscape, with Christianity, indigenous beliefs, Islam, Hinduism, and other faiths playing significant roles. These diverse religious traditions often intersect with environmental concerns and the need for sustainable living. In my opinion, the above thrust might have motivated South African theologian and academic Botman (2004) to emphasize on the importance of ecotheology in addressing social and environmental challenges. A prominent South African ecotheologian Father John de Gruchy would not have ignored Botman's position for publishing his work on the title 'Christianity, Art and Social Transformation: The Theological Ethics of David Bosch and John de Gruchy' (2007) which emphasized on the ethical and theological dimensions of caring for the environment. Stephen De Gruchy's work, namely: *Keeping body and soul together: Reflections by Steve de Gruchy on theology and development* (2015) also looks at the social dimension of the South African



ecothological debate. Thus, the praxis of practical theology is enhanced and guided by constructivism theory whose main thrust aims at bringing communities together in a teaching and learning process. Particular focus groups are local communities who should not only be receivers of the laws and measures regarding the conservation of the natural habitat but also participants in the formalisation of these measures. The present research looks at Practical theology as a discipline that facilitates the introduction of community programs with the aim of creating various opportunities for the street loitering public. Hence, Practical Theology functions profitably within the frame of constructivism as a cogwheel of community programs such as indigenous knowledge systems and awareness campaigns. Thus, talking of indigenous knowledge, Sumihira (2019:218) opines that, 'The richness of traditional knowledge is in danger of disappearing globally'.

### **Mismanagement of the natural habitat in South Africa**

Various factors contribute to the mismanagement of the natural habitat in SA. Mismanagement of the ecosystem has tended to promote macroeconomic factors which are detrimental to the natural habitat. Representative examples include: urbanization, agriculture, human settlement, mining, and infrastructure development, among others. Sumihira (2019:218) recounts that modernisation and urbanisation are some of the factors affecting the ecosystem in SA. Gathogo (2023:5) concurs with Sumihira to write that, 'As urbanisation becomes the vogue in Kenya and the rest of the continent, water pollution and sewage systems remain a threat to human survival'. SA, like many developing countries, has experienced rapid urbanization, leading to the conversion of natural habitats into urban areas. In my view, population growth and economic development urbanisation. For instance, it is reported that Cape Town's and Johannesburg's expansion programmes encroached onto the natural habitat land spaces. Admittedly, agriculture is a vital sector in SA.

Due to multifarious purposes associated with land economies, SA has been calling for land expropriation so that land as a resource is evenly distributed to include the previously disadvantaged indigenous communities (Rugwiji, 2019). The call for land expropriation in SA is being made at the backdrop of the quest to address the critical issue of poverty which 'originated from unjust social structures' (Wax, 2013:31). The quest for more land entails converting natural lands into farmlands, which consequently results in habitat loss. Wild animals may become too dangerous to nearby communities when huge populations are concentrated in a small piece of the habitat. Mining is another factor that impacts against the fauna and flora of our nation. The increase in mining activities causes deforestation, soil erosion, and contamination of water bodies both of which affect natural habitats and wildlife species (Czyzewski & Tester, 2014:211-226). Once an area is turned into a mining zone, felling of trees, blasting of rocks, open shafts, and frequent movement of mine workers are all threats to wildlife species. Wildlife species will be forced to migrate to distant places or to cross the borders of neighbouring countries. In addition, a mining enterprise either situated within or neighbouring a wildlife habitat exposes animals to poaching. SA is home to rhinos and elephants which poachers target for their horns and tusks. It is reported that illegal wildlife trade networks often operate across borders. Elsewhere it is alleged that sometimes poachers collaborate with some staff members of the wildlife reserve, hence their illicit poaching business thrives (Schaaf & Rossler, 2010:164). All these factors raise the legitimate question of management of the natural habitat.

Mismanagement of the natural habitat causes loss in revenue gained through wildlife viewing by tourists. The infrastructure development (i.e., construction of highways) is another threat to the environment. It is also alleged that although material and monetary resources can be availed towards the management of the natural habitat, corruption hinders progress (Folarin, 2010:312-324). Hence, some scholars, for example, Ignatius (2009:626) challenges the church to continue emerging as a 'voice of the voiceless' by condemning corruption in SA. Another contribution which could be put to good use is the involvement of local communities



in both the management and maintenance of the environment. The rural norms and cultural practices should be adhered to. African cultural heritage embraces all aspects of African life such as ecology, health, history, medicine, philosophy and poetry (Awoniyi, 2015:2). In Africa, kings/chiefs are the custodians of the rural constituencies. African king/chiefs always consult 'their community in order to ensure the sustainability and the community appropriation of the kings' project for the community' (Kavusa, 2022:16). Hence, for the sustainability of a project on ecosystem, project managers should engage rural communities. Unfortunately, local communities only feature as either respondents or culprits on the disappearances of the animal or aquatic species. Usually, some rural communities are extremely incapacitated to afford three meals a day. An alternative measure for wildlife management is desirable towards wildlife conservation and against poaching by rewarding/incentivising local communities in one way or another so that they find it both shameful and unhelpful to engage in or support poaching for survival. Proper management in its entirety is key to resolving ecological crisis.

### **Ecotheology**

Ecotheology is a discipline that seeks to facilitate an interface between religion, spirituality, and the environment (Kavusa, 2022:1-28). For Troster (2013:382), ecotheology is 'The integration of the new scientific perspective on the natural world with traditional theological concepts, producing a new theological paradigm'. Because 'environmentalism depends on people's sense of connection with nature, a feeling that is often spiritual' (Gottlieb, 2006:152), Scandrett (2009:1) maintains that, 'Ecotheology includes the moral responsibility which human societies have for the environment'. Scandrett (2009:1) reiterates that, 'Much ecotheology is derived from biblical creation narratives and seeks to re-establish the createdness of human society with respect to the natural environment'. In SA, ecotheology has gained significant prominence due to the nation's unique socio-political and environmental challenges. However, in the recent past, much attention was paid on phenomena affecting humans such as HIV/AIDS, Ebola virus and Corona virus more than climate change and environmental crisis which affect the fauna and flora of the nation. Although to date, much has been said and written about the ecosystem, little has been achieved and implemented in real praxis. If anything, this is the thrust that South African scholarship needs to begin re-examining.

It appears to me that Africa in general and SA in particular are not in short supply of scribes on the ecosystem. What South Africa needs is the practical part of the learned skill. I am therefore arguing that ecotheology must transcend into a tangible object towards development of human life and conservation of the natural habitat. In addition, the church is accused of focusing more on eternity and less on what is better described in the philosophy that says, 'Our minds, our hands'. Familiarised with this philosophy is Laley (1981) who wrote that the African traditional cosmology is dynamic which recognises and integrates the duality of the mind and body. Another scholar who drew a distinctive line along this thrust is Temba Rugwiji who maintained that, 'In Africa, the term "democracy" exists in theory but not in practice' (2018:278) and that '... IKS is more of a theory which does not transcend into praxis' (2018:383). In SA, Father John N. de Gruchy is celebrated as a prominent figure of ecotheology. De Gruchy's (2007) work tended to connect theological reflection with environmental issues, such as caring for the environment. However, the need for ecotheology (and environmental justice) that should include local communities cannot be overemphasised. Water scarcity is another crisis impacting against descent living in SA. Schirmacher and Johnson (2016:27) admit that, 'Water is an essential commodity for life. Without water life is threatened, with the result being death' because everyone has the 'right to clean water' (Nagle, 2010:335-350). Ecotheological discourses should be premised on the responsible and equitable use of water sources and the protection of aquatic life. Henceforth and Hart (2006:79) reaffirmed that, 'When water is pure, its life-giving role can be fulfilled. When water is polluted, it endangers health and life not only for humankind, but for all the biotic community'. Meanwhile, Nagle (2010:341) concurs with Hart's by writing that, 'Several Christian organizations have joined the campaign for a right to clean water'.



The question of climate change in SA should not be ignored because of its devastating effect to the ecosystem and on livelihoods of both humans and wildlife. Climate change has become a global crisis with profound social and ethical implications. Ecotheology should encourage dialogue and collaboration among faith groups in SA. Ecotheologians often engage in interfaith dialogue and collaboration to promote a shared commitment to environmental sustainability (Almirzanah, 2021:1). Another preoccupation as part of ecotheology that requires the attention of the church is defence and security because 'no place is totally free, not even a church' (Van Wyk, 2002:7). In his book on the title *Shooting back: The right and duty of self-defence* (2002), Charl van Wyk explains how he managed to quell the terrorists who had stormed from the front door of St. James Anglican Church during the evening of 25 July 1993. According to the book, if Charl had not shot back, the raining bullets and hand grenades discharged by the terrorists would have claimed several lives. If the church is encouraged to participate in the conservation of the environment, Charl's reaction is commendable. If SA has to protect what is left of the environment, a sense of urgency is required.

### **Practical theology**

Practical theology is a branch of theology that focuses on the practical application of religious beliefs and principles in real-life situations. While on the one hand Bediako (1992:311) and Nwachuku (1994:514) had argued about Practical Theology being 'localised' and 'contextualised' as a lived religion in West Africa, on the other hand Dreyer (2014:505-514) also posits that Practical Theology in SA needs a distinct identity. It is now within the public domain and a quest which the majority of the African readership shares that Practical Theology engages practical realities, life challenges and particularities which communities and individuals face on a daily basis. These life challenges and particularities include drug addiction, homelessness and loitering.

In SA, street loitering is becoming a serious problem. Practical theology can only become practical by addressing this phenomenon so that our cities remain not only tidy, but also habitable places which everybody including visitors would want to be part of. Lately, the political leadership has been seen to be hesitant to address the matter of street loitering due to various reasons. One of the reasons is the historical and racial question of apartheid because most cities are 'governed' by the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA). It is alleged that DA is predominantly white in terms of both executive and membership representation. The missionary church and white rule hegemony has been accused of depriving 'local people of their land and other forms of wealth' (Dube & Molise, 2018:165). Hence, wa Thiong'o (2009:28) stated that, 'Apartheid dismembered South Africans from their land'. Meanwhile, churches and religious organizations may operate shelters, food programs and outreach services for individuals experiencing street loitering. Practical theology encourages religious leaders and community members to engage with those who are loitering on the streets. This engagement can include listening to their concerns, providing support, and offering resources, such as access to shelters or social services. By working together, these groups can pool resources and expertise to create comprehensive solutions.

The concept of a church adopting a city for maintenance purposes is a unique and innovative approach to community service and urban improvement. While this idea may not be a common practice, it has the potential to have a significant positive impact on the maintenance, cleanliness, and overall well-being of a city. A city adoption program could be initiated by a church or a coalition of churches in partnership with local government authorities. This program would involve the church taking the responsibility of maintaining and enhancing specific areas within the city. The maintenance activities could encompass a range of tasks aimed at improving the city's appearance, cleanliness, and functionality. Church volunteers and members could regularly organize clean-up events in public spaces, including streets,



parks, and sidewalks. The initiative may also include planting flowers or trees to improve green spaces. In some cases, churches may assist with home repairs or maintenance for vulnerable and low-income residents within the city. Churches may develop community gardens on vacant lots or underutilized spaces to promote urban agriculture and beautify the city. Churches may also engage in fundraising efforts to secure resources for maintenance purposes. These funds can be allocated to purchase tools, materials, and equipment necessary for clean-up and beautification projects. Studies on the role of faith-based organizations in community engagement, such as maintaining public spaces and supporting vulnerable populations, can offer insights into the potential of church-led city adoption programs (McMillan & Chavis, 1986:6-23). Research on the church's role in community development and social services can shed light on how churches can effectively engage in urban maintenance and improvement projects (Weathers & Sorey, 2010:125-142). Exploring case studies of local community adoption programs or church-led initiatives in specific cities can provide practical insights into how churches have successfully adopted and improved parts of a city. Studies on interfaith collaborations in community service and social initiatives can illustrate how religious organizations work together to address urban challenges (Rusciano & Steen, 2014:233-250).

Many church members in SA are a part of various societies (e.g., funeral societies, food allocation societies, business engagement societies, transport societies, loan societies, etc.). Perhaps, the philosophy of collaboration might have motivated Vygotsky (1981:163) to note that, 'Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships'. So, collaboration and partnership in maintenance and cleaning the environment may not pose as challenges.

Research on public-private partnerships for urban maintenance and beautification, which often involve collaboration between local governments and non-profit organizations, can provide insights into effective city adoption models (Sclar & Hutchinson, 2016:163-194). The church can also play the role of the disposal of garbage in the cities. Garbage of various types are a nuisance in urban centres. An assortment of liquor bottles, plastic bottles and papers, unwanted clothes and blankets, plastics of food leftovers and many others are ugly scenes to match the beauty of a city. The political leadership (the sitting government) should take a leading role in the garbage collection and disposal. Neuman (2014:178) supports the aforementioned conclusion by concurring that, 'The jobs of anyone working in any government job (e.g., every police officer, post office clerk, schoolteacher, and garbage collector) depend on the political party staying in power'. Reluctance on the part of the government to support the local authorities with both human and material resources will not yield into positive results in waste management as well as management of the environment. While the primary responsibility for waste management typically lies with local governments and municipalities, churches can play a significant role in promoting responsible waste disposal, environmental stewardship, and community involvement.

By complementing the efforts of social workers (Gunarathne, 2019:138-154), churches can use their platform to educate congregants and the wider community about the importance of responsible waste management. Preaching and teaching on environmental impact of inappropriate disposal of garbage and the rewards gained from recycling and decreasing waste. Sacred institutions can as well mobilise communities to participate in cleaning up streets and public places. In addition, churches can also participate in clean-up programmes by familiarising themselves with local government calendar of community campaigns or events. Thus, Mpofu (2021:7) reiterates that, '...all stakeholders (communities<sup>1</sup>) should engage in advocacy raising awareness and engaging companies that cause environmental damage through local clean-up programmes'. Alternatively, individual congregants can volunteer in litter collection activities by partnering with city council staff members from whom

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<sup>1</sup> The insertion is mine.



they can access necessary materials and equipment such as gloves, overalls and plastic bags. The plastic bags full of garbage can be left for collection by the local authority truck/s. Such gestures by the church cannot go unnoticed; sooner or later more and more people from the neighbourhood would join the campaign as a worthy cause of reducing waste and promoting tidiness within the surrounding environment in which they live.

### **Decolonizing the erection and growth of mega-churches**

Commencing this section with the political context of SA prior to examining the breath and length of decolonization is in order. According to Furnivall (2014:513-29), 'Contemporary anticolonial activists believed that independence would improve political freedom and economic development'. Elsewhere, scholars revealed that, 'The colonial experience of African people is characterized by the forceful imposition of Western education and knowledge systems' (Nwosimiri, 2022:25). Meanwhile, after attaining independence, African societies in a new dispensation of post-1994 SA, are still mourning that apartheid stands in the way of the actualisation of freedom. This makes me worry, perhaps, several other wishful thinkers too. I am of the view that 'Decoloniality' as a philosophical thrust came into being as a consequence of whether it was necessary to fight against the apartheid system for the so-called freedom of the African majority in SA. While 'decolonisation' refers to 'anti-colonial' tendencies/approaches that shaped apartheid/colonialism, 'Decoloniality' tends to implicate various off-shoots that sprouted after 'Decolonization'.

In this section on decolonizing the erection and growth of mega-churches, there is a tendency to tackle 'Decoloniality' as well. In order to avoid the temptation of elucidating both (which would be too broad for the present study), I will discuss 'Decolonization' as 'demystifying'. SA is striving or is yearning towards poverty reduction from among its own people. Nevertheless, the worsening of impoverishment in SA cannot be overstated for everyone to see. The majority of South Africans is extremely poor and several scholars have explored on this phenomenon. Confronted by this reality, numerous church groupings which appear to be well-resourced, embark on erecting mega-church buildings when the majority of South Africans is adversely devastated by poverty and starvation. It can be argued that mega-churches are anti-African; most indigenous church groupings, popularly known as 'African Initiated Churches' (AICs), congregate in an open space (Musoni, 2022:1-16). The growth of mega-churches in SA has drawn more questions than answers. There is nothing wrong in erecting places of worship. However, one may need to respond to the following question: What is the purpose of building a mega-church when the community around and members of the congregation are languishing due to extreme penury? Admittedly, the church continues to offer spiritual and moral benefits to both congregants and members of the community. However, the massive expenses expended on expansion projects have raised concern from among social constructivists who view the sacred institution as missing the mark in terms of getting its priorities right.

The church cannot escape the accusation that it has always identified itself with the elite. This notion is depicted by individuals affiliated to the church who do not mind donating huge sums of funds towards erecting a super-structure that identifies with them and not with those that suffer. A deliberate neglect of the environment by some churches is not only disturbing, but also counter-productive. SA's colonial history is a painful one; It is marked by European colonization and missionary activities which both symbolise a legacy of Western religious structures. In my view, this legacy influences the way Christianity is shaped and practiced. It is probable that the emergence of AICs (see Musoni, 2016:1-16) was a decolonisation reaction to the Western religious structure of the part of the church. Individuals or organizations who/which donate funds to the church do so generously without considering the unpleasant environment in which people live. Many people (and visitors to SA) would want to enjoy game-viewing and expect to derive an exciting experience of the natural habitat. Maintenance and conservation of the wildlife reserves is critical if SA should continue to present itself as a tourist destination. Although Mega-churches have gained popularity in SA, there is little to celebrate





when the playing field remains uneven; the majority of citizens continue to languish in poverty and the natural habitat impacted by macroeconomic factors. Veldt fires, poaching, mismanagement, and cohabitation between humans and wildlife is reportedly not favourable. If ecotheology would be accelerated and its focus on conservation of the natural habitat be prioritised, both our flora and fauna will not be threatened by extinction. It is in the context of the above observation that the present study seeks to demystify the mega-church project. It is argued that the church should prioritise community development, spiritual salvation, social justice and addressing particularities of everyday life among local communities as opposed to towing Western models of constructing massive centres of worship. However, it is not an overstatement to say that some church groupings in SA have adopted indigenous spirituality and interfaith practices as ways of decolonizing their religious institutions and create more inclusive spaces (West & Nkosi, 2015:106-133). Nevertheless, decolonizing the myth of erecting mega-churches in SA is an ongoing process.

## Conclusion

The research has explored various aspects of ecotheology and practical theology. Interface between ecotheology, practical theology, waste management and disposal of garbage was illuminated. The complex interplay between religion, identity and colonial legacies was also reconnoitred. Land expropriation and land ownership were deliberated in view of the natural habitat which is deprived of sufficient space of land. Ecotheology must participate in the fight against veldt fires, illegal hunting and poaching. Practical theology must be practical enough to move away from the church premises in an effort to interact with particularities affecting the ecosystem on a daily basis. It was explored that the question of climate change is not the task of the so-called 'secular' technocrats. There is need for the clergy and the church at large to join in the fight against the rising threats of climate change. The study also highlighted that SA continues to grapple with its historical past due to the country's colonial injustices related to land dispossession. The question of decolonization was also addressed. It was highlighted that believing communities need not focus much on erecting mega-churches when poverty continues soaring in our nation.

The study argued that efforts to decolonize the mega-church agenda must include promoting economic empowerment within congregations, especially in communities with a history of economic inequality. It was argued that it is not logical for believing communities to erect mega-churches when a large portion of its membership as well as communities in the neighbourhood are languishing in penury. The task of decolonization may not be embraced by the project management team and individuals who form part of the church. However, various initiatives including academic writing, dialogue and community engagement constitute diverse, inclusive and culturally-relevant forms of decolonizing the mega-church myth. The discourse also demonstrated that theological scholarly publications in SA have contributed immensely on environmental themes as well as writings that promote decolonized approaches to religion and church leadership. Thus, ecotheology and practical theology are quintessential towards promoting environmental and human dignity. The research showed that practical theology should incorporate a program aimed at participating in cleaning the environment and disposal of the garbage as well as adopting a street, terminus or any public place for maintenance. Preaching at church may include themes on environment conservation and protection of the natural habitat.

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