


Youth ministry as a public practical theology: A South African evangelical perspective

**Author:**Garth Aziz¹ **Affiliation:**

¹Department of Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

Corresponding author:

Garth Aziz,
azizg@unisa.ac.za

Dates:

Received: 28 Feb. 2022

Accepted: 14 Apr. 2022

Published: 20 June 2022

How to cite this article

Aziz, G., 2022, 'Youth ministry as a public practical theology: A South African evangelical perspective', *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78(1), a7498. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v78i1.7498>

Copyright:

© 2022. The Author.
Licensee: AOSIS. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution License.

Read online:

Scan this QR code with your smart phone or mobile device to read online.

Youth ministry as a sub-discipline of practical theology has traditionally always had an ecclesial focus. The focus was often based on the practices of proselytisation and discipleship, a sort of 'reach and teach' model whereby Christian believers would do the 'reaching and teaching' of the 'lost' youth. This is most true in an evangelical context and is further undergirded by a Western concept of personal salvation nearly devoid of any communal responsibilities and context. The traditional model, therefore, in evangelical churches was reaching the 'lost' with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with the aim of personal salvation for the individual who would eventually become a member of the faith community through a discipleship programme. Thus, the beginning and end of the entire process were the focus on personal salvation devoid of any contextual consideration. Youth ministry as practical theology must move into the area of public theology to engage the practices inherited from the western model by engaging with the public (youths) as public theologians (those who influence the theologies of the youth), and the public faiths and spiritualities (the expression of the youth's theologies) to be relevant to the majority and developing world.

Contribution: In this study, the author suggests that this 'reach and teach' paradigm with an ecclesial focus in the context of the majority and developing world is no longer suitable to meet the needs of youth. In addition, the author recommends a more appropriate framework with youth ministry as public practical theology for consideration.

Keywords: youth ministry; public theology; public practical theology; developing world; practical theology; evangelical.

Introduction

Youth are the world's largest population group, exceeding 1.8 billion with a median age of 18 years (Aziz 2019:2; Bunge 2016:92–93; Omarjee 2018; United Nations Population Fund 2019). The continents with the largest youth populations are Africa and Asia. While the rest of the world has peaked with age, Africa and Asia continue to get younger. Despite the youthful population, the African youth have tremendous challenges amidst what are oftentimes difficult and life-threatening circumstances. These challenges include the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, poverty, rising unemployment, civil unrest and violence, limited access to socio-economic resources, limited access to what is often poor education and many forms of abuse, just to mention a few. It becomes easy to understand why youth will have a difficult time facing and preparing for the future when that future could be perceived as non-existent.

Youth ministry, broadly speaking, is any action and/or activity between a church community and its youth often with the expressive aims of guiding the youth to experience a relationship with Jesus Christ (Aziz 2017:13). Nel (2018:196) observes that youth ministry is integral in 'building up a local missional church', and thus a direct correlation between the future of the church and youth ministry exists. Nel (2018) also eloquently describes youth ministry as:

[T]he deliberate and intentional act is to help youth (children, adolescents and young adults, as they are already an integral part of the faith community) to become what they were created and called to be: people who are already involved in the acts of God, in the service of the communication of the gospel and the Kingdom of God that has come and is yet to come in the world. God is coming to them and through them. As integral part of the faith community, now already, they are in mission. (p. 11)

The purpose of youth ministry and its expression cannot be homogeneous or limited to a single perspective but is often influenced by those who hold the power of influence in the church, which often is the adult community. This, indeed, makes an approach for and to youth ministry extremely challenging. How more challenging is the public practical theological perspective for youth ministry?

The purpose of this article is to address the silence that is ever present in evangelical youth ministries on the social challenges that affect not only the young person but also the communities to which they belong. Furthermore, this article raises the concern on prescribed methods used in youth ministry for reaching youth without any dialogical processes with them. I am a part of the evangelical community; I have witnessed how youth ministry is often void of engaging with the social challenges of youth. I have been a member, church leader and youth minister at various evangelical churches, and the actions are almost identical. For an evangelical youth ministry to be more effective, it needs to engage the youths outside the boundaries of the church.

To discuss youth ministry as a public practical theology, firstly, there is a need to look at contemporary South Africa with its challenges and opportunities. Secondly, it is important to discuss and conceptualise a public practical theology for youth ministry. Thirdly, it becomes essential to discuss how youth ministry can operate as a public practical theology irrespective of one's theological or political perspectives. This article concludes with some recommendations on how youth ministry can contribute to the discussion on public practical theology in the South African context.

The South African context

There is no single religious narrative or cultural expression in South Africa because of its vast and rich cultural and religious landscape. South Africa has 11 official languages and various religious expressions from Christianity, Islam, Traditional African Religions, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism and other smaller religious expressions (Stats SA 2015:27). Despite this rich cultural and religious heritage, South Africa also has many historical scars from apartheid, even after 27 years of democracy, with the most apparent being poverty (Dreyer & Aziz 2020:41).

According to Stats SA (2021), the reported unemployment rate in South Africa exceeds one-third of the population (34.4%) and currently South Africa has the highest unemployment rate in the world. Arguably, this unemployment rate could have sparked the recent riots of 2021 in the country, resulting in mass looting and destruction of properties (cf. Naidoo 2021). Naidoo (2021) continues to state that the current spatial arrangements of society because of apartheid laws, which gave rise to townships, make it extremely difficult for people to enter the job market. However, young people aged 15–24 and 25–34 years recorded the highest unemployment rates of 64.4% and 42.9%, respectively (Stats SA 2021). Apart from the unemployment rate, there is increased gender-based violence, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown, substance and chemical abuse, poor living conditions, sub-standard educational quality, and access for a large part of the population, as well as a corrupt and inept government (Dreyer & Aziz 2020:41). In many instances, South Africans have not only known struggles but also continue to battle daily for meaning and

survival, and there are no easy answers to the challenges to people's struggles (Dreyer 2004:922).

South Africa is a pluralistic society that is governed by a liberal constitution, and yet, recognises the freedom of religion and speech. All religions are on equal footing in South Africa, and this is most vivid during the supreme court ruling on religion in schools where schools are not allowed to promote a single religion above another as directed by the constitutional court of South Africa (SANEWS 2017). The implications of the ruling are consistent with the South African constitution that recognises the freedom of religion and not from religion. Schools, therefore, have a responsibility to focus on religious education and not religious instruction (see also Dreyer 2007:42–45). In a recent study, it was observed that children who are forced to observe a more fundamentalist religious perspective with a singular experience and metanarrative are prone to not observe the human rights of another person (Dreyer & Aziz 2020:58–59). This is an important consideration within a liberal country where the marketplace is saturated with religious pluralism and is a melting pot of cultural diversity.

Understanding the relationship between public theology and public practical theology

One must acknowledge, as argued by Dreyer (2004:919), that 'not all practical theology is public theology, in other words, aimed at a non-ecclesial general audience'. Although public theology and practical theology 'is directed at a general audience beyond the church' (Osmer & Schweitzer 2003:6), it still requires one to be able to view the differences and commonalities that may exist between public theology and public practical theology.

Public theology

Public theology is not the actual focus of this study; yet, it remains important to briefly discuss what is meant by public theology. Public theology is no new debate but has been in the South African and African context for a while (eds. Agang, Forster & Hendriks 2020; De Gruchy 2007; De Villiers 2011; Dreyer 2004, 2011; Gathogo 2009; Koopman 2007, 2012; Lartey & Sharp 2015). Yet, any discussion on public theology remains a contested space (Dreyer 2011; Markham 2020) and is not dominated by a single definition or praxis (Forster 2020; Smit 2017:73). Public theology, in the South African context, has mainly been in the areas of human rights and national and public policies, as these affect the service deliveries of the ordinary person (see Koopman 2007; Van Aarde 2008). Dreyer (2004:919) defines public theology as 'a theology which critically reflects on both the Christian tradition as well as social and political issues'. Van Aarde (2008:3) views it as a 'theology that people in the public square are doing'. Forster (2020) states that:

[P]ublic theology looks at what faith means in the secular arena ... [it] needs to provide a model of the type of moral, ethical and intellectual education needed to bring hope to Africa. (pp. 15–26)

According to Koopman (2007), 'all Christian theology is public theology'. There is a focus on the public and political spheres of life, but ultimately public theology seeks to make a difference outside of the domain and space of the institutional church.

Smit (2017) explains public theology as follows:

Public theology differs from say church theology precisely in this sense that it plays out in public, it is performed, done, practised in the world, in the open, in society, in communities, in the – controversial – 'public sphere', in life in general, where all and everyone takes part and should be able to take part. It is not the talk of insiders – within the safe and secluded spaces of the church's worship; the theological faculty's isolation; the publications of professional theological societies – talking only to themselves and to the like-minded, but it is talking in public about life in public to all others sharing this public space, from the streets to the market to the public media. (p. 75)

Public practical theology

The understanding of public theology as further developed as a public practical theology is the focus of this study. There have been a very few practical theologian scholars arguing for a public practical theology in the South African context (Dreyer 2004, 2007, 2011; Magezi 2019). As a public practical theology, the traditionally accepted understanding that practical theology which usually focuses on the praxis of the church and clergy now moves into the space of pluralistic religious practices in a society where a Christian praxis and theology are shared with other religions (Dreyer 2004:919, 2007:45; Osmer & Schweitzer 2003:5). While it is a well-established understanding that practical theology is an interdisciplinary discipline, the public practical theologian now needs to be intentional in the engagement with the various social sciences 'in order to understand the psychological, social, cultural, economic, legal and political factors at work in religious praxis' (Dreyer 2007:8). Dreyer (2014) argues that a public practical theology has three tasks:

[T]o include the public as one of the audiences of practical theology; to include everyday concerns and issues in its reflection; to facilitate a dialogue between theology and contemporary culture. (p. 920)

In this sense, Osmer and Schweitzer (2003:6), while reflecting on the works of James Fowler, argue that practical theology 'strives to be fully public'.

Should theology, however, be restricted to only the church? Should all public theology be directed towards the political life? These two questions are just a few which pose a real dilemma, especially for the evangelical church. Van Aarde's (2008:1214–1215) view is that public theology is not the exclusive right of institutional Christianity but 'public theology emerges in multifarious facets: movies, songs, poems, novels, art, architecture, protest marches, clothing, newspaper, and magazine articles'. While not a practical theologian, we can extend on Van Aarde's discussion that a public practical theology begins a conversation with

contemporary society and not only the church. Dreyer (2007:11, see also Dreyer 2004:937) stresses the importance of the church to not only come to terms that they operate within a pluralistic society but also that they need to respect and engage a diverse and pluralistic society through educational programmes. This is because a 'public practical theology has the potential to contribute to the common good and to responsible citizenship' (Dreyer 2004:936).

However, youth ministry has not received much, if any, attention to its role as a public practical theology, and thus, requires some consideration on how to respond. Markham (2020) raises appropriate questions regarding the definition and role of public theology as it relates to confessional theology and in particular evangelical theology. Markham, however, restricts the place of public theology to the Christian domain, which can be criticised as appearing to either not want to engage with the religious plurality or appearing to be fearful of such an endeavour. The strength of Markham's approach is that it takes seriously the voice of the specific religious tradition to engage in the public domain. Osmer and Schweitzer (2003:6) warn of the dangers of shedding religious claims to be universal and have a public role. Van Aarde (2008:1219) also recognises that public theology is not 'value-free or valueless'. Dreyer (2011:6) argues that public theology is the 'praxis of Christian witness in the public sphere'. In other words, it is Christian who practises and participates in the public sphere as they engage with the public and the various theologies in the public (Dreyer 2011:6). It, therefore, makes sense that a public practical theology should arise from the particularity in the person's theology and confession, and yet, it should not be dominated or forced with 'doctrinal truths' as this would usurp the purpose of public theology (Dreyer 2004:939; Van Aarde 2008:1216). However, the role of public practical theology should never be to control any space but to dialogue with the voices in the various public spaces (Dreyer 2011:6).

A public practical theology should not only recognise that it is part of a plural society but should also endeavour to dialogue with the many voices as these exist within society (Dreyer 2011:6). However, the role of public theology should not only seek to engage for the sake of engaging but to provide hope amidst a crisis where many voices are seemingly vying for a position on the podium (Agang 2020; Van Aarde 2008:1219). Through the voice of the public practical theologian, a just society is envisioned that is informed by the life of Jesus and an eschaton of peace and hope. This is no more needed than in Africa where there are many injustices against the vulnerable, where politicians are taking from the citizen and where the riches of the continent remain open to the powerful and wealthy only.

In brief, a public practical theology should offer hope through dialogue with the 'other'. Christians should offer hope, which was evident in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ who challenged organised religion and sat with the sinner, the infirm, the rejected and spoke about the Kingdom of God

and the principles that would not only usher in this Kingdom but is a result of that Kingdom.

Repositioning (evangelical) youth ministry

Youth ministry could be an important agency as it is ideally suited to address matters of concern from and for the youth and offer practical hope to the youth of South Africa as they navigate difficult spaces. However, there are varied opinions about the purpose of youth ministry (cf. Nel 2000:63, 2018:196). What exactly is the function of youth ministry in the contemporary South African context? Nel (2000:63, 2018:196) states that the purpose of youth ministry is dependent on the church's theological departure point. Root and Bertrand (2011:218–236) state that the expression of youth ministry is also dependent on one's view of the society. I think that a third opinion may be that the purpose of youth ministry is also dependent on the youth pastor or minister, those who directly decide on the direction of youth ministry (Greenway et al. 2021:2). Nel (2018:196ff.) argues that youth and youth ministry are pivotal in building up the local church as their participation in the church is no less than the adult community. Furthermore, the focus of the local church should not be the local church but the kingdom of God and 'making that kingdom visible ... but also participation in the emancipation of the community' (Nel 2018:202–203). It is through this faith community, the local church, that the youth participates and 'ministers' to the world. Nel (2018) concludes that:

[T]he goal of Youth Ministry is always about preparing people who are entirely part of the local church to understand their personal and public responsibility, and about guiding them into accepting this responsibility. (p. 206)

This goal of youth ministry as described by Nel resonates strongly with the following seven clusters as described by Fowler (1991) who problematises against the priority of a privatised faith:

(1) Public church fosters a clear sense of Christian identity and commitment; (2) Congregations of Public church manifest a diversity of membership; (3) Public church consciously prepares and supports members for vocation and witness in a pluralistic society; (4) Public church balances, nurtures and groups solidarity within, with forming and accountability in vocation in work and public life beyond the walls of the Church; (5) Public church evolves a pattern of authority and governance that keep pastorals and lay leadership initiatives in a fruitful balance; (6) Public church offers its witness in publicly visible and publicly intelligible ways; (7) Public church shapes a pattern of paideia for children, youth, and adults that works toward the combining of Christian commitment with vocation in 'public'. (pp. 155–162)

Youth ministry, like most Christian traditions, is not homogeneous. Each tradition will have a different approach and philosophy to youth ministry, and one might even argue that within every tradition there are nuances within the approach and practice of youth ministry. The varied

approaches to youth ministry are often because of youth ministry being extremely contextual and influenced by various cultures within the youth demographic as well as societal norms and needs. The next section reflects on youth ministry from an evangelical perspective.

A South African evangelical perspective

The epistemology of this article, especially when discussing youth ministry, is evangelical. Understandably, the evangelical movement has come under immense critique, especially during the Trump administration in the United States of Africa. There was on both sides the support for and against Trump within the evangelical tradition; however, popular opinion that an evangelical is white, conservative, right-wing in politics and life choices is justified (Joustra 2019:7). Furthermore, 'Evangelicals are divided on how to approach social and political issues in this cultural moment' (Joustra 2019:16). Joustra (2019:7) is accurate when stating that evangelicalism is in trouble as it is no longer recognised as a set of theological beliefs or movements but as a conservative, right-wing, political label.

However, historically, an evangelical response takes seriously the Bebbington quadrilateral, which focuses on conversionism, activism, biblicism and crucicentrism (Bebbington 1989:2–3; Harris 2008:201). Joustra (2019:10) admits while the four quadrilaterals of Bebbington are upheld by evangelicals, the beliefs remain 'thin' and 'generic' and centred around the person and work of Jesus Christ. However, evangelicalism is a varied movement that embraces different theologies and perspectives if the centre remains the person and work of Jesus Christ (Aziz 2020:114; Joustra 2019:8; Olsen 2007:41, 53–56). After all, Jesus was a missionary who was always interested in the liberation of the person – their spirituality and context (Aziz 2020):

An evangelical ministry should have the mission of Jesus Christ, as saviour and liberator, as the central and normative task. Evangelicalism has to centre its mission on the person of Jesus Christ. His mission, therefore, should be the central pillar of Evangelicalism. The starting point, therefore, should be in the mission of Jesus which is a contextual response to people's realities ... His first response was always to and from the context of people so that they may have an encounter with God. (p. 114)

Perhaps, the greatest task of evangelical theology in the contemporary context is to reconsider its approach in relation to its central tenets and how these are practised within the society without marginalising and ostracising people through political ideologies and agendas. Evangelicalism must take the South African context seriously and consider the various nuances of its youth. The focus of evangelicalism in the South African context should not be only on the spirituality of the person at the expense of the lived realities of the youth and so create a dichotomy between sacred and secular and entrench the belief of a private or privatised faith. This approach to a privatised faith often at the expense of the lived realities of the youth has become the dominant focus of youth ministry,

which is also echoed by Nel (2018:204). He recognises that the person's faith cannot be in isolation of a 'broader framework', which directs one to the kingdom of God that presents hope and peace.

Youth ministry in the South African context

Clark (2001:82, 2008:10), Nel (2003:68–69) and Senter (2001:126) are some of the scholars who have discussed how youth ministry, formally, was a response to the Industrial Revolution in America where there were changes to the culture where both parents in many families began working, youth were provided opportunities in education and churches were in need of knowing how to respond to this change. The initial focus of youth ministry to maintain the status quo of the church was to keep the youth in the church and out of mischief. This usually resulted in youth ministry being part of the educational ministry of the church. When the church could no longer keep up with the changes, they resorted to a single personality leading the youth ministry, which was customised around the para-church organisation design by engaging in various activities. The focus in youth ministry then shifted to evangelism for youth to have a relationship with God through a confession in Jesus Christ (Aziz 2019:1). Proselytisation remains a very important if not the primary aim of evangelical youth ministries (Aziz 2019:1).

While youth ministries remain the auspices of the local church and will have to subscribe to the theology and mission of the particular local church, it becomes a challenge to call for a public theological response for youth ministry if there cannot be a consensus on what that expression should look like even more so if the point of departure is one of a 'Biblicist fundamentalism' (Van Aarde 2008:1217). Van Aarde (2008:1219) citing the works of Van Elder recognises that a universal confession of faith is not possible as 'every congregation needs to learn how to confess the faith in its particular context'.

The purpose of youth ministry is to help youth have a meaningful relationship with God (Aziz 2014:13). What this means is that every aspect of the lived realities of youth should be significant as they reflect on God and his engagement with them throughout their journeys. However, this should not be a position where the youths are mere recipients and passive bystanders. Instead, youth are active agents in their theology and spirituality (Aziz 2019:3; Dreyer 2004:939). The adolescent world is complex, and there are no easy answers or shortcuts. It would be arrogant to prescribe a single approach or be prescriptive in the journeys of youth so that they may experience this meaningful relationship with God. It is argued that the youth no longer seek answers from the church, or perhaps, may assume that the church may no longer have the answers to their questions (Dreyer 2004:922). Youth ministry, therefore, should be descriptive and a 'meeting by the well' where an open and honest dialogue can take place outside the dogma of the institutionalised religion. Dreyer (2007:11) suggests that such an approach to

meaningful and respectful engagement begins with religious socialisation so that young people can live together in a world where others have different beliefs of their own.

South Africa with its liberal and secular constitution that recognises and respects all religions and non-religions as equal and valid has no Christian state. South African youth must be equipped to live in such a world and respect the various religions and its expressions. Youth ministry, therefore, has an enormous and vital task of being an agency that can assist the youth in this manner so that the youth may experience hope through meaningful conversation where the message of Jesus Christ engages in their lived realities.

Recommendations

Considering the above discussion, there is, indeed, a need for youth ministry to not only enter the public practical theological context but also actively engage in the dialogue. However, the way forward should not only be for the youth pastor or trained theologian but every young person as they not only engage with the various voices but also reflect on the divine actions of God as these intersect them daily (Dreyer 2004:939). In this section, the author suggests some recommendations on the role of youth ministry, and those actively engaged in youth ministry, as public practical theology. The first would be to ask who is the theologian? Secondly, it is to reflect on the context and not to continue the mistake of being prescriptive in the evangelical tradition. Thirdly, it is to learn another language, the language of the market. Finally, the most obvious in my opinion is to be the church as it was intended to be where every Christian is the church.

Redefine who the theologian is

If theology is about reflecting on God's actions, then theological reflection is not the domain of the professional only. Theological reflection is the domain and activity of every person. In this case, it stands to reason that theological reflection is also not purely a Christian activity but the activity of every person irrespective of religious persuasion. No one has a monopoly on reflecting on divine actions. A theologian is not someone who has a theological degree, and this, too, should be recognised in youth ministry. Every young person is an active agent in journeying with God irrespective of what that journey may look like. The theologian, therefore, cannot be only the professional. Unfortunately, in many churches, the concept of the youth being the church of tomorrow and not having the maturity or capacity for theological reflection is still dominant. There must be a deconstruction of who the theologian is, and it can only start when there is an understanding that theology is a reflection on God's activities with humanity. The young person is a theologian capable of theological reflection.

Become aware of the context

A typical evangelical response is to keep the sacred and the secular separate, a sort of dichotomy between what belongs

to the realm of the church and what belongs to the world. Often, it is viewed that the secular has the potential to corrupt the sacred. Furthermore, there is the general view that the Gospel of Jesus Christ should not have a social component as the church should only be concerned with eternal matters and the faith of the individual. A public practical theology, irrespective of the theological tradition, should always consider and begin within a specific context; otherwise, it becomes a theology that is out of touch with people and stands a chance of being meaningless. However, an awareness of the context is still not enough as a public practical theology must engage context to transform context, and hopefully, the transformation is one of correlational actions whereby the voice and experience of the young person in context will shape the discussion and action.

Learn another language

Considering the above discussion, it is important for those involved in youth ministry to learn another language. However, this response may yet be another problem as the youth in youth ministry is already well versed in the language of the market – a language that is well rid of Christian jargon and clichés but one that recognises and knows the ‘jargon of that field’ (Forster 2020) and is accessible to everyone (Dreyer & Pieterse 2010:5). The language as mentioned in this article is one of music, arts, movies, clothing and so forth. The language of the market is what matters to the market. Perhaps, it is the ‘professional’ who should be silent and listen instead of being the one who claims to have all the answers. Listening, however, should not imply passivity on behalf of the professional but active listening taking its lead from the youth. As Dreyer (2004) states,

[S]ecularised young people do not like power, history, institutions, and grand narratives. They have no vested interests. They only have themselves and their own fragile personal stories. Listening to their stories in a reflexive way requires agency to transform modernity. (p. 922)

Be church

The church was never meant to be a building or some form of institution. The church was always meant to be a person in a community with others who share the same confession in Jesus Christ. However, the church was never just an individual in need of salvation but a community worshipping and sharing together. The western concept of individual piety should be critically engaged in the South African context, especially when we consider that a church is a community within a community. The concept of *Ubuntu* resonates strongly with the biblical idea of clans and kinship. It should not be the priority of the institutionalised church to merely proselytise the youth so that they may become part of the institutional church. Instead, it should be the goal to usher in the Kingdom of God so that young people may be called the church of God. Dreyer (2004:929–930) speaks about agents and agencies that can make a difference ‘and contribute to the process of healing and enhancement of the social world’. Every individual, the church and youth ministry can serve in this capacity in a world that desperately needs

answers. More so, Dreyer (2004:930; cf. Dreyer & Pieterse 2010:6) argues that the practical theologian is a change agent, and thus if we are to redefine who the theologian is, then every young person has the potential to be a change agent and bear a message of hope.

Conclusion

This study sought to highlight the need for youth ministry to position itself out of the traditional perspective of being an evangelistic or outreach function of the church to reach the lost so that they may join the institutional church. This article sought to raise awareness that the church is the individual within a community but that this community is not dominated by a single narrative or confession. It is further argued that the young person is a theologian who is actively involved in reflecting on the divine. The young person as a theologian is immersed in a pluralistic society where every voice has equal footing, as it ought to be, and that it is not about who makes the boldest claims. Instead, the young person as a theologian should bring a message of hope in a context that is often in search of meaning and answers. A message of hope does not presuppose having the answers but creates the agency for positive actions.

The narrative in youth ministry should change from the corporate institutional nature to one of deconstruction where the individual is the bearer of hope. Youth ministry, to make a meaningful contribution to the South African context, must move beyond its silo mentality that holds the keys to eternity but one that will recognise that God is, indeed, active in the life of every young person.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced him in writing this article.

Author's contributions

G.A. is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct this research was obtained from the UNISA College of Human Science Research Ethics Committee (NHREC Registration: Rec-240816-052, 90222210_CREC_CHS_2021).

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

References

- Agang, S.B., 2020, 'The need for public theology in Africa', in S.B. Agang, D. Forster & H.J. Hendricks. (eds.), *African public theology*, Langham, Bukuru.
- Agang, S.B., Forster, D.A. & Hendricks, H.J. (eds.), 2020, *African public theology*, Langham, Bukuru.
- Aziz, G., 2014, 'Youth ministry as an agent for reconciliation in the breakdown of coloured families, from urban communities in Cape Town: A post-apartheid perspective', *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 23, 231–241.
- Aziz, G., 2017, 'A practical theological reflection of the office of the career youth pastor', PhD thesis, Department of Practical Theology, University of Pretoria.
- Aziz, G., 2019, 'Toward a contemporary understanding of youth ministry as a descriptive agency', *In die Skriflig* 53(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v53i1.2403>
- Aziz, G., 2020, 'South African Baptists and gender: A practical theological approach', *South African Baptist Journal of Theology* 29, 111–123.
- Bebbington, D., 1989, *Evangelicals in modern Britain: A history from the 1730's to the 1980's*, IVP, Leicester.
- Bunge, M.J., 2016, 'Task, sources and significance of theologies of childhood', in J. Grobbelaar & G. Breed (eds.), *Theologies of childhood and the children of Africa*, pp. 92–112, AOSIS, Cape Town.
- Clark, C., 2001, 'The missional approach to youth ministry', in M.H. Senter III (ed.), *Four views of youth ministry and the church*, pp. 77–96, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Clark, C., 2008, 'Youth ministry as practical theology', *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 7(1), 9–38.
- De Gruchy, J., 2007, 'Public theology as Christian witness: Exploring the genre', *International Journal of Public Theology* 1, 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.1163/156973207X194466>
- De Villiers, E., 2011, 'Public theology in the South African context', *Theologia Viatorum* 37(1), 83–107.
- Dreyer, J.S., 2007, 'The national policy on religion and education in South Africa: Reflections from a public practical theology', *Practical Theology in South Africa* 22(2), 40–50.
- Dreyer, J.S., 2011, 'Public theology and the translation imperative: A Ricoeurian perspective', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theology* 67(3), a1157. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v67i3.1157>
- Dreyer, J.S. & Aziz, G., 2020, 'Religion and socioeconomic rights among the youth of South Africa', in H. Ziebertz (ed.), *International empirical studies on religion and socioeconomic rights*, pp. 39–61, Springer, Switzerland.
- Dreyer, J.S. & Pieterse, H.J.C., 2010, 'Religion in the public sphere: What can public theology learn from Habermas's latest work?', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 66(1), a798. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.798>
- Dreyer, Y., 2004, 'A public practical theological theory for religious education of secularised youth', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 60(3), a615. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v60i3.615>.
- Forster, D.A., 2020, 'The nature of public theology', in S.B. Agang, D. Forster & H.J. Hendricks. (eds.), *African public theology*, pp. 15–23, Langham, Bukuru.
- Fowler, J.W., 1991, *Weaving the new creation: Stages of faith and the public church*, Harper Collins, New York, NY.
- Gathogo, J., 2009, 'African theology of reconstruction as a practical theology for all', *Practical Theology for South Africa* 24, 99–121.
- Greenway, T.S., Powell, K.E., Hanle, L.E., Jacques, P.E. & Schnitker, S.A., 2021, "'Many are the plans": An analysis of goals described by youth ministry leaders', *Archive for the Psychology of Religion*, 1–16.
- Harris, B., 2008, 'Beyond Bebbington: The quest for an evangelical identity in a post-modern era', *Churchman* 122(3), 201–219.
- Joustra, J., 2019, 'What is an evangelical? Examining the politics, history, and theology of a contested label', *Review of Faith and International Affairs* 17(3), 7–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1643999>
- Koopman, N., 2007, 'Public theology in (South) Africa: A Trinitarian approach', *International Journal of Public Theology* 1(2), 188–209.
- Koopman, N., 2012, 'Public theology in a suffering world?', *Strangers and pilgrims on earth* 22, 887–895.
- Lartey, E.Y. & Sharp, M.A.M., 2015, 'Practicing public pastoral theologies in contexts of difference', *Journal of Pastoral Theology* 25(3), 133–134. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10649867.2015.1123504>
- Magezi, V., 2019, 'Doing public pastoral care through church-driven development in Africa: Reflection on church and community mobilisation process approach in Lesotho', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75(4), a5501. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i4.5501>
- Markham, I.S., 2020, 'Public theology: Toward a Christian definition', *Anglican Theological Review* 102(2), 179–192.
- Naidoo, P., 2021, 'South Africa's unemployment rate is now highest in the world', *Aljazeera*, viewed 29 August 2021, from <https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2021/8/24/south-africas-unemployment-rate-is-now-the-worlds-highest>.
- Nel, M., 2000, *Youth ministry: An inclusive congregational approach*, Malan Nel, Pretoria.
- Nel, M., 2003, 'Youth ministry as practical theology: Making a case for youth ministry as academic discipline', *Journal of Youth and Theology* 2(1), 68–83.
- Nel, M., 2018, *Youth ministry: An inclusive missional approach*, HTS Religion & Society Series Volume 1, AOSIS, Cape Town.
- Olsen, R.E., 2007, *Reformed and always reforming: The postconservative approach to evangelical theology*, Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Omarjee, L., 2018, 'Beat poverty by investing in young people – Bill and Melinda Gates', *Fin24*, 18 September, viewed 14 July 2019, from <https://www.news24.com/Fin24/beat-poverty-by-investing-in-young-people-bill-and-melinda-gates-20180918>.
- Osmer, R.R., 2008, *Practical theology: An introduction*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Osmer, R.R. & Schweitzer, F.L., 2003, 'Introduction', in R.R. Osmer & F.L. Schweitzer (eds.), *Developing a public faith. New directions in practical theology: Essays in honor of James W. Fowler*, pp. 1–11, Chalice Press, St. Louis, MO.
- Root, A. & Bertrand, B.D., 2011, 'Postscript: Reflecting on method. Youth ministry as practical theology', in A. Root & K.C. Dean (eds.), *The theological turn in youth ministry*, pp. 218–236, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL.
- SANEWS, 2017, 'Court ruling on religion in schools welcomed', *SANEWS*, 28 June 2017, viewed 29 August 2021, from <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/court-ruling-religion-schools-welcomed>.
- Senter III, M.H., 2001, 'The strategic approach to youth ministry', in M.H. Senter III (ed.), *Four views of youth ministry and the church*, pp. 113–135, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI.
- Smit, D.J., 2017, 'Does it matter? On whether there is method in the madness', in S. Kim & K. Day (eds.), *A companion to public theology*, pp. 67–92, Brill, Leiden.
- STATSA, 2015, *General household survey 2015*, viewed 29 August 2021, from <http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0318/P03182015.pdf>.
- STATSA, 2021, *Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Q2:2021*, viewed 29 August 2021, from http://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q2_2021.pdf.
- United Nations Population Fund, 2019, *Youth participation and leadership*, viewed 20 May 2019, from <https://www.unfpa.org/youth-participation-leadership>.
- Van Aarde, A., 2008, 'What is "theology" in "public theology" and what is "public" about "public theology"?', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 64(3), 1213–1234. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v64i3.81>