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NOT BY ORDER, NOR BY DIALOGUE: THE *METANOETIC* PRESENCE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN A FLUID NEW WORLD AND CHURCH

ABSTRACT

Fluid modernity favours new forms of individualism, complexity and non-linear change. Therefore, the emphasis on order, predictability and open dialogue in religious circles, as preferred ways of responding to change and problems, must be augmented by a metanoetic understanding of the kingdom of God. As a subversive, upside-down new reality, God's kingdom is relationally driven, open-ended and in constant flux. Through "metanoia," as the urgent boundary-crossing call of Jesus, individuals become part of this subversive new world where selfless love for God and others dominates. As an ongoing process of personal metamorphosis, "metanoia" simultaneously facilitates new forms of "complexity leadership", where religious leaders turn into sages who create fluid new structures to facilitate familial relationships and a new culture of respect in which believers are allowed to thrive in their Spirit-induced flow states.

If things were simple, word would have gotten around
Jacques Derrida

1. INTRODUCTION: SOME CHALLENGES FACING GLOBAL CHRISTIANITY

Although there are, at present, approximately 2.18 billion Christians in the world, according to a study by Pew, released in December 2011, the demise of Christianity in the West is disturbing (Pew research center 2011). In 1910, 66.3% of Europe was Christian; nowadays, it is only 25.9%. The reality of ever-shrinking churches is at the order of the day. In

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South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Church reported membership losses of over 20 000 people over the past year, while American churches presently experience as much as a 59% outflow of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29 (cf. Kinnaman 2011). On the other hand, Christianity grew in sub-Saharan Africa from 9% in 1910 to 63% in 2010. On a lower level of abstraction though, various “shades of Christianity” exist in Africa and elsewhere in the Two-Thirds World, which often incorporate animism, as well as Buddhist, shamanistic and traditional *ethnoreligionistic* elements in Christian garments.¹ Internally, global Christianity is diverse and divided while, externally, Christians are often viewed as weird individuals stuck on a parallel universe (cf. Radosh 2008).

One major reason for the exodus from organised religion is new forms of non-linear individualism, which is the result of “the retreat of the classic institutions: state, class, nuclear family, ethnic group” (Lash 2005:viii) ... and church! Unlike Descartes’ “*cogito ergo sum*” thinking-type individual, Beck (1992:111) describes today’s non-linear individual in terms of the dictum “I am I”.² Lash (2005:ix) calls the non-linear individual a “combinard”:

He puts together networks, constructs, alliances, makes deals.
He must live, is forced to live in an atmosphere of risk in which
knowledge and life-changes are precarious.

In non-linear systems, which are open complex systems, change rather than reproduction is at the order of the day. Apart from mostly ignoring these shifts of epistemic proportions towards a more fluid culture, the church’s mistake of frequently viewing all forms of individualism as a deviant lifestyle in a small compartment on the periphery of society, only solidified the given socio-religious structure by discharging so-called “deviant elements” from the mainstream.³

1 According to Jenkins (2007:18), “There is no single Southern Christianity that presents a unified face.”

2 Beck (1992:111) writes: “The law that comes over them is called I am I, and then, I am a woman. I am I, and then, I am a man. Worlds gape in this distance between ‘I’ and the expected woman, I and the expected man.”

3 Individualism is not synonymous with narrow self-centeredness, power-lust, or the exploitation of others. It does not equal selfishness. It is a way of viewing the world where the focus is primarily on individuals, instead of on collective groups of people separated by race, nationality, gender, religion and social status.

2. RELIGIOUS RELEVANCE IN A FLUID, COMPLEX ENVIRONMENT

Due to incessant global processes of non-linear change, Bauman, somewhat gloomily, calls this condition “liquid modernity”, where “previously solid bonds of collective identity flowed into less determined, more vicarious forms of individually conducted life policies” (Bauman 2000:6). Social structures that

limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetition of routines, patterns of acceptable behavior can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set (Baumann 2007:1).

This is the reason why Sweet urges us to forget that the earth is flat. It is fluid now:

To flatten the complexity of a situation is to endanger the future. The world today is a dangerous place. Some cheer that it is ‘dangerously flat.’ Others sneer that it is ‘dangerously curved.’ I claim it is dangerously fluid (Sweet 2012:43).

Toffler’s (1974:297) notion of future shock, as

the distress, both physical and psychological, that arises from an overload of the human organism’s physical adaptive systems and its decision making processes,

is now truer than ever.

‘(P)rogress’ evokes an insomnia full of nightmares of ‘being left behind’ – of missing the train, or falling out of the window of a fast accelerating vehicle (Baumann 2007:11).

In a world flooded by the unparalleled growth of technology and science, even complexity has turned out to be very difficult to define, as Heyligen (1996) tells us!⁴ Northrop (2011) concurs, adding that any definition is dependent on the type of system being studied, how it is

4 Notwithstanding, Heyligen (<http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/complexi.html>) states: “Complexity can then be characterized by lack of symmetry or ‘symmetry breaking’, by the fact that no part or aspect of a complex entity can provide sufficient information to actually or statistically predict the properties of the others parts. This again connects to the difficulty of modeling associated with complex systems.”

studied and also who is studying it. Broadly stated though, “complexity is a subjective measure of the difficulty in describing and modeling a system (thing or process), and thus being able to predict its behavior.”

All social systems tend by their very nature and composition to make for even more complexity. Even in religious circles, it is self-perpetuating, expansive and usually develops from the bottom up. Put differently, in these contexts “complexification” flows from individuals who form faith communities that soon become institutionalised structures with formal dogmas, buildings, properties and permanent personnel which, in turn, leads to new projects, church plants, synods, theological seminaries, and so on. At the same time, complexity runs all the way from the top down, not only facilitating, but actually demanding the addition of yet further complexities in terms of institutional regulations, interactions, rules, refined forms of theological reflection and micro-management. In other words, it leads to an increase in the number of constituent elements or components, as well as the variety of constituent elements: “Organizational complexity constantly introduces new possibilities in terms of arranging components in different modes of interrelationship” (Rescher 1998:9).

The problem facing church leaders and theologians, who consider it their responsibility to create unity, clarity, order, stability and a shared purpose for people in church, is that our increasingly fluid new world leans more towards the other side. It favours new forms of complexity, openness, disruption, uncertainty, self-discovery and non-linear change, which also calls for different roles for leadership than is typically presented. What is called for is “complexity leadership” where leaders

allow things to occur over which they have relatively little direct control. They create the structures, rules, interactions, interdependencies, tension, and culture in which complex mechanisms can thrive and unanticipated outcomes can occur - and, they weed out poorly adaptive outcomes (Marion 2008:11).

3. NOT BY PREDICTABILITY OR DIALOGUE

Problems cannot be solved by the level of awareness that created them (as Einstein apparently said). Different heuristic routes need to be followed. To effectively navigate in any context “which is characterized by irreducible plurality, radical particularity and contextually, an increased sensitivity towards irreducible alterity” (Boeve, quoted in Mannion 2007:156), while at the same time simultaneously discovering, opening up to and co-creating God’s future here and now, is obviously not as simple as trying out some new ideas in inaugural lectures of this nature. But let’s proceed in any case,

starting with two of the more popular, but often less effective, religious “answers” to current challenges.

3.1 Predictability and order

The creation of order and stability is part and parcel of most religious “solutions” to the majority of external and internal challenges. As a matter of fact, the “golden rule” of order, inherent in the Western world view (Geyer 2003:3), characterises the deep structures of most forms of religious thinking:

- Order: given causes lead to known effects at all times and places.
- Reductionism: the behaviour of a system could be understood, clockwork fashion, by observing the behaviour of its parts. There are no hidden surprises; the whole is the sum of the parts, no more and no less.
- Predictability: once global behaviour is defined, the future course of events could be predicted by application of the appropriate inputs to the model.
- Determinism: processes flow along orderly and predictable paths that have clear beginnings and rational ends.

The idea inherent to this hermeneutical angle of incidence is that access to, and control over the right forms of knowledge and behaviour are synonymous with order. Numerous solutions to new challenges and problems in religious circles are based on the premise that with more order and knowledge we can increasingly predict as well as effectively plan for the future. However, it ignores the rudimentary characteristic of complex societies, namely

causes and effects are not linked, the whole is not simply the sum of the parts; emergent properties often appear seemingly out of the blue, taking the system apart does not reveal much about its global behaviour, and the related processes do not steer the systems to inevitable and distinct ends (Geyer 2003:4-5).

According to Bauman (2007:3),

‘Society’ is increasingly viewed and treated as a ‘network’ rather than a ‘structure’ (let alone solid ‘totality’): it is perceived and treated as a matrix of random connections and disconnections and of an essentially finite volume of possible permutations.

However, since some theologians and church members are often left with a static model of church “that is based primarily on congregations, programs and buildings”, we don’t grasp the

notion of Christian community, worship and organization which, like the NT *ecclesia*, is more flexible, adaptive, and responsive to change (Ward 2002:41).

Perhaps the problem also resides in the type of language we use as one of the storehouses of knowledge. Since we are often left with a “verbal repertoire” that stimulates “vertical” rather than “lateral” orientations, as well as with a large vocabulary for issues (problems?) related to order, fear and conformity rather than flexibility, risk, exploration and fluidity, we become prisoners of our language that prevents us from seeing, hearing or learning in creative new ways.

As C. K. Chesterton noted about institutionalized insiders, it is not so much that insiders cannot see the solution. It is that they cannot see the problem itself because they have no language for it (Hirsch & Catchim 2012:11).

3.2 The “dialogical imperative”

Mannion (2007:15) is convinced that a “dialogical imperative” lies at the heart of the gospel message. This is the reason why Rahner (1973:104) called on the church to open dialogue:

An open dialogue still has a certain meaning even in those cases in which it does not imply that kind of unity which consists in mutually holding the same opinion, but rather in accepting the other person in his uniqueness and otherness, the difference of ‘viewpoint’ being only a very secondary expression of this.

Since the boundaries between church and non-church, insiders and outsiders, have become more porous than ever, pluralism is an inescapable fact. Therefore, according to Rahner (1973:106), if the church is to conduct a dialogue with the world, then it must not be overlooked that “this world is not simply ‘outside’ but is rather present in the church herself”.

Nobody will deny the importance of conversation in church, especially the ones based on open agendas where all who are willing to sit around the table (or in coffee shops, workshops and squatter camps) are welcomed as conversation partners on equal terms, and where faith is not a prerequisite. However, the presupposition that dialogue *per se* holds a magic key to unite people, create order or curb the spread of hyper-individualism is based on a felicitous view of conversational inference or the ability to infer, globally, what the interaction is all about, and what each role player in the conversation is expected to be. Open dialogues are context-bound and activity-specific: “They are founded on practices, which are subject

to certain perspectives that have been adopted by practitioners for certain purposes” (Linnell 2001:281). At the same time, they are based on bodies of fixated meaning and practices of some kind, which could easily force such dialogues into “closed”, orderly forms of communication with the purpose of obtaining predetermined, even artificially manipulated, outcomes. “Conversational involvement” must, therefore, begin by identifying both the linguistic and the sociocultural knowledge that we need to share if such involvement is to be maintained.

Boeve (2004:90-91) refers to an irreducible multiplicity, which characterises our world

... that cannot be reduced to a single narrative nor subsumed within a particular totalizing perspective. Whatever we do to encompass otherness within a single narrative, it will always place itself beyond our grasp.

Therefore, open dialogues cannot force those culturally embedded narratives of different faith communities into a fixed set of axioms or dogmatic propositions, since the very fibre of Christianity calls for respect for diversity.

4. GOD’S UPSIDE DOWN KINGDOM IS PRESENT!

4.1 The “cardiology” of *metanoia*

The search for order and the emphasis on open dialogue illustrate the church’s desire for transparency and relevance. These are admirable routes, never to be abandoned. However, when these routes are intended to abate our fears of the unknown, solve all questions and provide heuristic handles to “routinise” religious activities, they quickly lose their attractiveness. This is the reason why another route is proposed in this instance, one that entails a simultaneous move backward and forward to the kingdom of God. On a high level of abstraction, this is a well-trodden route with relatively few surprises left. However, if we let go of our positions as detached theological observers or specialist problem solvers to that of *metanoetic* insiders, new possibilities could emerge. Without getting entangled in the intricate relationship between subject and object, or epistemology and ontology, we need a new “telescope”, one that will enable us to observe our blind spot

by bending the beam of observation back upon its source: the self that is performing the scientific activity. The instruments ... include

not only an open mind, the normal mode of inquiry and investigation, but also an open heart and open will (Scharmer 2009:15).

In this regard, our angle of incidence will be a *metanoetic* understanding of the kingdom of God, which implies wholeheartedly embracing the kingdom as the presumed core business (and busyness) of the church.⁵ Although this will include a backward-looking focus on the kingdom of God, in terms of Jesus's understanding thereof, this understanding must also transcend itself "to *metanoetic* by a forward looking intentionality" (Urs Von Balthasar 1995:75), because of the enduring eschatological presence of the kingdom.

The kingdom of God is the essence of Jesus's earthly presence (cf. Joubert 2012:97-120). His entire public ministry was kingdom-soaked and kingdom-driven. No wonder the Synoptic Gospels have at least 58 different sayings about the kingdom of God (Allison 2010:164-168). On an ontological level, the kingdom of God presents itself as a divine reality that exists independent of us and that calls us to participate therein subjectively.⁶ This participation requires *metanoia*, an existential experience of, and commitment to God. Caputo (1999:206-207) laments the unfortunate fact that

we have chosen to translate this very beautiful word with 'I repent; which means 'I visit pain (*poena*) on myself again.' ... 'I have a new heart' – that is the Christian translation, Jesus' tune, the dance, not the dirge.

Through *metanoia*

one becomes what one is not. *Metanoō*, I have had a change of heart, I have been transformed, made into something new ... (Caputo 1999:213).

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- 5 Ecclesia is the family of God and the body of Christ on earth. Individuals are born into this family by God's goodness and their confession of the Lordship of Christ. They give visible expression to their new familial loyalties through regular gatherings where God is worshipped and their faith is built up. They give expression to their faith through missional lifestyles of selfless, full-time service to others in the Name of Christ.
- 6 Following Searle (1995), "objective" and "subjective" are understood, in this instance, as predicates of entities and types of entities, and they ascribe models of existence. Thus, whereas conversion would reflect a subjective response to the kingdom, the kingdom is presented by Jesus as ontologically objective, since its existence is independent of the mental state or existential response of any perceiver.

Metanoia is the urgent boundary-crossing call and magnetic invitation of Jesus (Matt 4:17) to a new life of resilient followership and relentless love for God and his handworks. Repentance, in the traditional sense of the word, as a moral turnabout by sinners based on fear of eternal punishment, does not describe what Jesus's "*metanoetic imperative/call/invitation*" implies, namely a radical change of heart. According to Putt (2002:63),

This change of heart on the part of an offender obligates the one offended to respond with an amnesia that denies the efficacy of vengeance and absolves both parties from the alienation of the past. For Jesus, *metanonia* should be an instance of '*le dire*,' of a saying that abdicates the power of the past and reestablished the presence of relationship. With changed hearts and forgotten pasts citizens in God's kingdom can enjoy each day as a gift from the Father.

At the same time, resilience is also called for, where followers can absorb change and provide the capacity to adapt while still remaining loyal to the cause of Jesus. This message equals "*euaggelion*", good news, by the One who is also the "*euaggelion*". Jesus is the kingdom come!

Metanoia is an ongoing process of metamorphosis. It is an incessant longing for, as well as a shared participation in the "relationality" of God, since *metanoia* also equals *agape* or unconditional love for Him and others – as spelled out in the "Jesus creed" in Matthew 22:37-40 (cf. McKnight 2004). Therefore, *metanoia* is fundamentally missional. It is the perpetual mimesis/imitation/adoration of Jesus through the retelling and remodelling of his stories. *Metanoia* is mimetically contagious, a good one at that, which is caused by followers of Jesus who humbly share the abundance from God's table with others around them.⁷ It is *agape*-infused. *Agape*, "ein Leitbegriff des Neuen Testament" (Söding 2009:148), is

a living relation, rather than a commodity that can be passed on, or lived down and as a result its vitality consists in the back and forth exchanges that constitute the relation. There is giving and receiving in both directions (Grant 2000:174).

Agape is more than a one-way self-sacrifice. It involves the mutual growth of self and others involved in the reciprocal bonds of community (cf. Pope, in Grant 2000:175). It also supposes vulnerability on the sidepart

7 C.S. Lewis summarises this type of *metanoia* in his classic work, *Mere Christianity* (1952/2001:177): "He (Christ) came to this world and became a man in order to spread to other men the kind of life He has – by what I call 'good infection'. Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else."

of the care-giver that refuses to turn the recipient of this love into an object of charity.

4.2 A subversive, decentralised empire

Dodd (1961) famously coined the term “realized eschatology” to explain the nature of God’s kingdom in the preaching of Jesus and mainly based his argument on Luke 11:20 and 17:21, which state that “the kingdom of God has come to you” and “the kingdom of God is within you”, respectively. Crossan understands Jesus as a cynic-like peasant who focused on the sapient aspects of the “kingdom of God” and not on any apocalyptic conceptions. However, we would probably be closer to the truth when we understand it as God’s inaugurated kingdom, which is simultaneously both present (Matt 12:18) and future (Matt 12:7; Lk 22:18). However, it is not a

... futurally oriented temporality, full of anxiety about what is coming next, of fear and trembling at the uncertainty of time. On the contrary, the coming of the kingdom lays anxiety to rest, for the rule of God, which is in the midst of us, sustains us. Rather than something futural, this is a presential time, a time of presencing, which lets today be today ... Today is not sacrifices to tomorrow, spent in making oneself safe and secure against tomorrow (Caputo 1993:8).

Jesus’s presence reveals how God is doing power here and now as well as in the future. Both present and future are also intrinsically bound up in his person, as well as in his words and deeds as the Messiah of God. The future reign of God, envisaged by the prophets of old, where justice for the oppressed, the overthrow of the wicked and *shalom* to the nations would become day-to-day realities, has thus finally dawned. This is revealed at the beginning of Jesus’s public ministry in the so-called Nazareth manifesto (Lk 4:14-30) when he read from Isaiah 61, “with its combined echo of both exodus and jubilee” (Wright 2006:309).

The kingdom of God is an alternative, all-encompassing and self-organising new reality. As a sacred anarchy, it presumes a subversive understanding of reality with new organising metaphors, role players, narratives, values, and so on, which in mysterious ways infiltrates other kingdoms to set their captives free. Yet, it is a kingdom without a capital city in Jerusalem, Rome, or elsewhere on earth, or a centralised monarchy that is kept in power with the aid of a powerful royal army. The kingdom of God is an upside down global empire that welcomes the weak, receives enemies as old friends, and the lost as the newly found. It is a kingdom of nuisances and nobodies, as Crossan (1991) famously said. The kingdom

of God is definitely not synonymous with all those opulent dominions of “Christendom” throughout history with their cathedrals, professional clerics, spiritual power mongers, moral decay and infighting. It is a kingdom destined for losers and sinners of all shapes and sizes. Once touched by God’s *agape*, they turn into his foot soldiers that assist in loving others back into his arms through perpetual deeds of kindness, such as handing out cups of cold water to the thirsty; breaking bread with fellow disciples, and extending hospitality to strangers.

Although Jesus did not inaugurate a new religion, his radical understanding of God, himself, others, time and space entailed the people of Israel’s existential participation in an entirely different symbolic world. This includes a new understanding of God as a loving Father who constantly loves people back to life, which essentially invalidated the power of existing Jewish rituals and ceremonies to effect participation in God’s kingdom. Amidst Jesus’s boundary-shifting, rule-breaking, and abolishment of Jewish religious assumptions, he also turned their clean-unclean distinctions inside out. He chose to heal on the Sabbath and

... to redefine its significance around himself. He reached out to those who were excluded by the taboos of society: women, children, the sick, the unclean, even the dead. He declared forgiveness to people on his own authority, completely bypassing the normal route for such benefit, namely the official cult at the temple. He ate with tax collectors, prostitutes and ‘sinners’ (Wright 2006:310).

4.3 These are the days of miracles and wonders ... as well as full stomachs and restored bodies

According to Caputo (2006:132),

the *basileia* is a kingdom of metamorphosis, of *metanōein* and *therapeuein*...Whenever Jesus swings into action, things are transformed; whenever he touches others or others touch him, they are transformed ... The kingdom of God is a land of wondrous change, a marvelous sphere of *kinesis*.

The kingdom of God is not merely about an internal change of heart. It is also about full stomachs and healed flesh. Jesus’s new decentralised, relational “presencing” of God’s nearness, both here and now as well as in God’s eternal presence, offers real water for the thirsty and real bread for the hungry.

The kingdom is truly good news to the homeless and the poor. It is filled to the brim with miracles for lepers (Mk 1:41), the sick (Matt 14:14),

the blind (Matt 20:34), and the hungry (Matt 15:32; Mark 8:2). The plight of common people, who are as sheep without a shepherd (Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34), fills Jesus with compassion. His heart also breaks at the tomb of a dear friend, Lazarus (Jn 11:35) before he returns him back to life. Jesus's encompassing compassion, which results in healings and full stomachs, is the bread-and-butter business of God's kingdom. It reveals God's incessant longing for fellowship with his handworks.

4.4 The complexity of God's kingdom

The kingdom of God is a subversive, upside-down empire. It is a relationally driven, evolving environment in constant flux. It is complex, but not unintelligible or complicated, which is more or less synonymous with the quantitative notion of "more balls to juggle". Complex systems involve non-linear processes, which are open to random externalities capable of generating rapid transformational change. The behaviour of complex systems cannot be forecast with certainty, or separated into component parts, since those parts are changed by their interaction (cf. Marion 2008:5). The complexity of the kingdom of God is self-generative, in the sense of creating unexpected, dramatically new forms of organic order and growth.⁸ "Morphogenesis", the self-generation of a new body of people (= the church), as well as new relations and new forms of divinely infused abundant life, is at the order of the day in this instance, as expressed in Jesus's narratives about the kingdom.

In Jesus's parable of the self-growing seed, the growth is mysterious and consistent, but it happens completely outside the control of the sower (Mk 4:26-30). It does not happen randomly, though! The kingdom seed was sown intentionally by the farmer, expecting a harvest of sorts. But the outcome depends entirely on God's generosity. He alone provides growth and abundance, as Jesus explains in another parable of seed that ends up on the good soil, which brought forth a thirty, sixty and even a hundredfold harvest (Mk 4:3-9; Matt 13). No mentality of *limited good* is present in this instance, which was intrinsic to the ancient Mediterranean world.

Limited good proposes that all tangible and intangible entities exist in finite quantities. Everything is available in limited amounts or measures, including food, work, property, money, health, safety to trust and loyalty, although such scarcity is represented "on a continuum in which the poles are 'more limited' and 'less limited'" (Foster 1972:59). In limited good contexts, selfless generosity is uncommon, since without reciprocity, any person who takes from others without giving back anything of equal

8 Complexity theory describes this as emergent, non-linear change.

value is considered a thief, and his/her deeds are conceived of as socially destabilising. However, God possesses everything that his subjects need in infinite quantities. Just as he mysteriously, yet consistently, supplies in the needs of even the smallest birds in the sky, he also provides in the temporal needs of those who participate in the kingdom. Therefore "... values such as kindness and hospitality are not finite, similarly grace and healing are not presented as limited ..." in God's kingdom (Lawrence 2003:220).

God's kingdom presents (and "presences") itself mysteriously, surprisingly and unexpectedly, yet abundantly. Like that one grain of mustard seed that ultimately turns into a large shrub, which provides lodging for the birds in the sky (Matt 13:32), the growth of the kingdom cannot be controlled or managed, neither can the outcomes be predicted in advance. The kingdom is a dynamic divine reality that refuses to drift into disorder or equilibrium.⁹ It is not simply the sum of its parts. Emergent properties of the kingdom of God often appear seemingly out of the blue. In this freedom of divinely determined self-organisation and spontaneous, disproportional growth (related to human effort), the ever-evolving kingdom of God incessantly breaks into, interrupts and replaces other realities. It happens at any given time, in various shapes and sizes, and in the most unexpected places (such as the finding of a treasure in the field by a hireling – Matt 13:44). God's sowing fields are literally everywhere. The church is an important storehouse of kingdom seed. However, it can never be contained here; neither can the workers linger here too long. It is their responsibility to intentionally sow the message of God's kingdom everywhere.

5. "COMPLEXIPACITY": NEW SPIRITUAL SKILLS NEEDED AS PART OF THE CHURCH'S "METANOETIC" PRESENCE IN FLUID CONTEXTS

"Complexipacity" (as a combination of the terms complex and capacity) is a vital spiritual skill needed in the present-day church. Snyder (quoted in Sweet 2012:43) coined this term to refer to a paramount survival skill in our complex new world, namely the capacity to "assimilate complex ideas, systems, problems, situations, interactions, or relationships". Due to the astounding, never-ending rate of technological innovation, our ability to process complexity needs to improve. However, the solution is not to be

9 According to the complexity physicist Peter Allen (quoted in Geyer 2004:7), "orderly equilibrium systems are 'dead' systems".

found at the opposite end of complexity.¹⁰ Amidst the various forms of complexity that mark our world, better integrative spiritual skills, based on inner, shared experiences of the *metanoetic* reality of God' kingdom, provide creative new opportunities for the church to *presence* herself in a fluid world as communities of individuals who love God and others in magnetic ways.

5.1 A new community of individuals in the flow of the Spirit

Believers are not spiritual islands. They should form part of a global *metanoetic* community of individuals. When properly understood, it is never about individualism versus the group; freedom or domination. It is about “reciprocal conception”, about “society shaping the individuality of its members and the individuals forming society out of their life actions ...” (Bauman 2001:xiii). Jesus refuses to turn his followers into lifeless, robotic photocopies of each other, by forcing them to be mindlessly obedient to depersonalised religious laws. His call to each of his followers to sacrifice his/her own family and carry his/her own cross (Lk 14:26-27) entails becoming more what they already are: individuals who are equally loved by God. The carrying of a cross by all in the family of God, which entails following the same route as their Master, becomes deeply personalised in terms of individual choices, risks and self-expressions of discipleship.¹¹ In this process, these disciples' identities are transformed

... from a 'given' into a 'task' – and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequence (also the side-effects) (cf. Baumann 2000:xv).

They “presence” the kingdom in unique ways and according to their own gifts, by joining others on the road to help carry their burdens.

As beloved children (Matt 18:4-5), little ones (Matt 18:6, 14) and sheep of the Good Shepherd (Matt 18:12-15), followers of Jesus experience a deep sense of knowing that they are loved by God. Their lives are constantly

10 Norman (2010:10) is convinced that: “we truly need to have complexity in our lives. We seek rich, satisfying lives and richness goes along with complexity. We need complexity even while we crave simplicity ... The real challenge is to tame the complexity that life requires.”

11 Bauman (2000:31-32) refers to Jean-Paul Sartre who said: “It is not enough to be born a bourgeois, one must live one's life as a bourgeois.” This is also the obligation on all who follow Jesus to take up their cross in order to realise their uniqueness, but also their sense of belonging to the new family of God on earth.

inverted from being bound by selfish intentions and identities to an opening up to both Jesus and the Spirit, whose presence is identified with living water in John 4:1-15; 7:37-39.¹² In John 7:39, living water is also linked to the Spirit as the divine stream. In the same way that water sustains life, the Spirit also gives life, which now flows out of all who believe in Jesus. They are round-the-clock distributors of abundant living water, but never the source thereof.

Just as people experience a physical thirst that must be met by water that comes from outside themselves, their thirst must be met by water that comes from a divine source outside themselves. Their need must be met by divine action, through the gift of revelation and God's Spirit (Koester 2006:412).

The living water of the Spirit flows from those whose thirst has already been quenched in the direction of those who are thirsty.

Jesus gives no instructions as to how this outflow of living water should take place, no detailed programmes nor any reference to the expected outcomes - just the assurance that abundant streams of life-giving water will constantly flow from them. The responsibility rests solely on the shoulders of each individual believer to figure out where there is a scarcity of living water and how to let it flow effectively in that direction. The church is not a static reservoir of living water, but individual streams that constantly flow in the direction of the needy, the self-righteous or the lost. It is all about the intentionality of being in the flow!

Csikszentmihályi is well known for his research on flow states, as a reference to any person's deep concentration and complete absorption with an activity at hand. This causes

... the person in flow not only forgets his or her problems, but loses temporarily the awareness of self that in normal life often intrudes in consciousness, and causes psychic energy to be diverted from what needs to be done (Csikszentmihályi 1988:33).

This flow state is an optimal state of intrinsic motivation, marked by deep concentration, a distorted sense of time, and absorption. The

12 Particularly, in John 4, when Jesus interacts with the Samaritan woman at the well, it becomes clear that he is the true source of living water so that she or anyone else, who believes in him, will never have any spiritual needs. As the Messiah "he will be like a spring (= source), which keeps on supplying her spiritual needs. The reference to Jesus as the spring of water not only describes his sustaining function, but also typifies him as the true supply of that which quenches spiritual needs (well or spring.)" (Van der Watt 2000:231).

person is fully immersed in what s/he is doing so that temporal concerns such as time, food or even the self are disregarded. This also happens when *metanoetic* people are *en route* in God's kingdom. They flow. They sacrifice. They endure. They commit. They distribute water in deserts and desolate places in their flow states of selfless commitment, passion and empathy.

5.2 Hierarchical leaders no more; sages and editors perhaps

The never-ending story of most church leaders is how to get people "involved" in organised religious activities. This perceived need to change passive observers of formal religious activities into active participants is based on a conception of church and society as a linear system where machine-like adjustments (by the right religious specialists) would induce the necessary results. However, in the present fluid world, such leaders must resist this urge to "fix" people, since they have deliberately stepped down as professional religious specialists in order to become sages, servants and editors. They live, serve, teach and help others from their inner convictions. They know that their call as spiritual editors is to assist fellow travellers to write their own life-texts on the paper of God's kingdom with pens filled with the ink of Jesus. Such leaders do not control or limit the outcomes, but they constantly provide the necessary intentionality to guide followers of Jesus to become "biographical solutions of systemic contradictions" (Beck 1992:137). In other words, they assist believers to personally, but uniquely address the impasse of religious institutions to adapt effectively to change, by infusing new life into existing forms of religious expression (such as worship services or the sacraments) in order to bind the family of God together in meaningful, collective experiences of his transcendent reality. At the same time, wise leaders constantly recalibrate their own ecclesiology/ies, and that of others according to the priorities of God's kingdom.

Leaders know that the current mind-boggling pace of change (let alone how to predict and control its direction) does not lead to Utopia. It is, in fact, *Dys-topia*, since most people are still not free. In solid modernity, people "were determined by their role in the production process; now they are determined by their role in consumer society" (De Groot 2007:181). Everything is driven by choice. There is no escape.

Now we are forced to be 'autonomous individuals', flexible and mobile: free to work at home or at the office, to work full[-]time or

part[-]time ... We are no longer attached to one place, and that's why we long to be home (De Groot 2007:182).

Effective leaders are sensitive to the challenges facing present-day “combinards”, who are anything from “alone together”, to “individually connected”, to “(un)happy all along”, by gently, but deliberately leading them towards new ways of belonging in communities of faith, which are both highly relational and missional. This is part of the fluid “leadership dance”, or the ability to understand that currently it is about both individuality and the group, about speeding up and slowing down, and solidity and fluidity.

Fluid leaders know the difference between being the captains of ineffective church boats stranded in the religious harbours of safety and irrelevance, or an adventurous life in the kingdom of God which entails constantly embracing the storms of flexibility, rapid change, adaptability, uncertainty, renewal and innovation. Leaders on the open seas of the kingdom are vulnerable, since they know that the future of their ministry or church is inherently unknowable. On the other hand, the beauty and certainty of God's new future joyfully pulls them forward and keeps them in their flow states. They are able to constantly regroup, modify, adapt, think on their feet and deal with ambiguity. They view boundaries as “permeable membranes” (Blandin 2007:148) in order to allow people to move in and out without ever feeling threatened.

Fluid leaders are not lone rangers; they form part of relationally driven teams made up of passionate, competent people who know how to let the living waters flow in unique, yet kingdom-oriented ways! They do not place all their hope in strategies, formal programmes or ecclesial micro-management, because they know that planning will not necessarily produce more order and stability or, for that matter, the right kind of change. Fluid leaders are more concerned about people's character development than measuring results and success. They are committed to intentional editing of fellow believers to *metanoetically* write and act out new stories in God's kingdom. Perhaps Keene (quoted in Blandin 2007:148) should have the last say in this regard: “leadership [in today's complex organizations] has more to do with being than doing”. This is equally true of all followers of Jesus.

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