

Report: Simposio Internacional

Teología y VIH y Sida en América Latina

13-15 Decemebr 2011, Lima Peru

(International Symposium on HIV & AIDS. Sida project on theology, HIV & AIDS within Latin America)

Background and task

At the symposium I represented ANHERTHA (African Network for Higher Education and Research). The symposium was the launching of a similar research project funded by the Swedish government through Sida with the main objective to promote theological research on HIV & AIDS (master's level). The intention is to equip spiritual leaders with theological education who eventually can serve as supervisors within local communities, communities of faith and churches.

The director for the Latin America project is Prof Valburga Schmiedt Streck (Brazil).

The institutions involved:

- Facultades EST (São Leopoldo, Brazil)
- Instituto Universitario ISEDET (Buenos Aires, Argentine)
- Pontificia Universidad Javerlana (Bogotá, Colombia)
- Universidad Biblica Latinoamericana (Santa Jose, Costa Rica)

My task as vice-director of ANHERTHA was to submit and explain the report: *The Challenge of Theology and HIV and AIDS in Africa Today*, compiled by Prof Edwina Ward, director of ANHERTHA. The background of the report was the external audit done in 2011 on the whole project in Africa since the start in 2006.

Fundamental to the African project and report is the following phrase: *Civil Society, religious organizations, community based groups and several other formations have all engaged various levels of energy in the drive to prevent and manage the HIV infection. One of the areas that has been lacking in the whole fight is sufficient and articulate theological reflection. The Church of Sweden therefore came up with an appropriate programme to ensure critical examination of HIV and AIDS and all its related social economic challenges from a Theological perspective.*

The report highlighted the fact that the goals of ANHERTHA today are premised on the idea that graduates of the programme would:

- Adopt a paradigm of theology
- Gain appropriate ministerial, counselling and caring skills
- Undo stigma and discrimination
- Understand interdisciplinary action-reflection theory formation
- Promote contextual relevant thinking
- Link spirituality with the dynamics of life (inter alia human sexuality and human dignity)
- Do theological research related to the pandemic and the challenge of being the church within local communities.

Assessment of the Latin America project

The following issues were emphasized within the different presentations of the students:

- The relationship between human suffering and theological reflection.
- Hope within the desperate situation of violence: the quest for a kind of “street theology”.
- Doing theology within the paradigm of “liberation theology” (Liberation hermeneutics).
- Sexuality and the need for corporeality in theological reflection.
- The suffering of women and their desperate situation within the pandemic.
- The prophetic voice of the church
- Jesus and the prostitutes.
- The connection between biblical reflection and the notion of prevention
- Paradigmatic issues and stigmatization
- Methodology and theological differentiation within the vital relationship to humanities/psychology and an interdisciplinary approach.
- Homophobia and the position of homosexual persons within the HIV & AIDS debate.
- Reflection on scriptural passages. For example: A theology from the book of Jonah.
- The quest for “Positive Theology”.
- The epidemic and the ecclesiological challenge for the diaconic involvement of the church.
- The Christian notion of love and people living with HIV.
- The place of communion. Reflections on the Emmaus event (Luke 24: 13-35).

My overall impression was that the paradigm of liberation and therefore the hermeneutics of liberation are fundamental to most of the reflections within the Latin Americas. In this regard the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutiérrez is still playing a vital role in theological reflection. (See his: *A Theology of Liberation*, 1988), With reference to my emphasis on a theology of affirmation, this more fundamental and ontological paradigm regarding the question of human identity and human dignity was quite “new” and “disturbing” for many participants. My basic argument was: When one is free from...., the burning question still prevails: But is one free for...., for what?

Remark

My impression is that the students were well aware of the challenge to theology. However it is still very difficult for them to pose a theological question to the problem of research. The analyses of the problem were often clear as well as the descriptive part. The link with theology and a biblical perspective seems to be problematic.

The easy way out is often to stick to phenomenological observation and methodologies coming from the humanities. More attention should be given to a theological hermeneutics and basic reflection on anthropology in pastoral caregiving. Furthermore, the question of spirituality and the notion of meaning, as well as the problem of theodicy, came up time and again in the discussions. It was also clear that previous models of being the church in terms of hierarchy and the clerical paradigm are not appropriate for the demands on grass roots level.

My own contribution

I was asked to take care of a whole morning session in order to reflect on the theological issues at stake in the pandemic. I therefore include a summary of my presentation.

Theological theory formation in the midst of the HIV and AIDS pandemic . Theologizing within the cultural context of africa

1. Key issues in the master’s programme (Africa)

- Methodology: scientific perspective
hermeneutics
- Ecclesiology of local networking: people oriented
- Anthropology: destigmatization within spiritual humanism and the quest for human dignity

2. African paradigm:

Ubuntu philosophy: interconnectedness of being human and the quest for relational networking within the spiritual realm of life forces

3. Pitfalls in theological theory formation

3.1 Denominationalism:

Confessional and doctrinal barriers: orthodoxy and the rationalistic quest for true faith.

Challenge: ecumenical cooperation

3.2 Ecclesial clericalism: hierarchy versus grass roots needs

Challenge: grass roots ecclesiology – home based church ministry

3.3 Deterministic ontology of sin: *corruptio totalis* and a substantial approach

Challenge: relational model within wisdom thinking – torah thinking

3.4 The Roman imperialistic and Hellenistic pagan interpretation of the power of God: Omnipotence of God (*pantokrator*)

Challenge: notion of the vulnerable God/ *astheneia* of God

Role of a *theologia crucis* in the pandemic

3.5 Hellenistic anthropology: dualism of soul+body ; immortality+mortality

Challenge: qualitative and relational understanding of soul in *cura animarum*. The notion of *nefesj* in a theological anthropology.

3.6 A disembodied Christian spirituality: focus on heaven and otherworldyness

Challenge: integrative spirituality and wholeness: the healing of life

3.7 Moralistic sexuality: the ideology of no-sex-before.....what ? and the mechanization of genitals.

The dilemma of the rubberized penis and vagina in prevention strategies

Challenge: towards a human sexuality of compassionate and sensual intimacy

- the partnership for life
- aesthetics of the sacred penis and sacred vagina
- informed sexual decision making

3.8 Gender discrimination: cultural masculinities and cultural femininities Deconstruction of images from the social media and internet

Challenge: beyond the gender paradigm

The role and place of an eschatological understanding of human identity and dignity

4 Focal points in an academic approach in theological education: towards hope and empowerment

4.1 From liberation theology to affirmation theology

Affirmation of the marginalized

Knowing, doing and emotional functions as determined by being functions

Parrhesia: prophetic encouragement

4.2 From theodicy – positivistic explanation of suffering as the will of God – to paschitic theology.

Derilictio as the no of God to suffering and death

The nausea of God

4.3 From individualistic healing – *cura animarum*- to the healing of life: *cura vitae*

4.4 From ambulance pastoral care and counselling – the healing of symptoms- to prevention care: healing before.....and wholistic healing (*Cura vitae*)

Marriage enrichment programs

Family enrichment programs

Crisis understanding and management

Youth education: identity, dignity and sexuality

Spiritual health and physicality

4.5 From moralistic ethics to aesthetic ethos: *phronesis*;

Respondeo ergo sum

4.6 From anxiety – sexuality: threat of integrity and disclosure, to responsible sexuality: the enjoyment of personal and interpersonal embracement

Conclusion and overall challenge in the pandemic

- Zero deaths
- Zero new infections
- Zero discrimination and stigmatization
- Zero incompetent churches and impotent theologizing

Prof D J Louw

University of Stellenbosch

South Africa

1/18/2012