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The Contemporary Theological Project

African Youth Engage With Psalms of Lament to Find Their Own Voice of Lament

June Dickie

ABSTRACT

The biblical psalms of personal lament show certain characteristics which can assist African youth struggling with various issues to voice their own laments. In this empirical study, “pain-bearers” from various sectors in South Africa (refugees, AIDS-sufferers, and members of the LGBT community) participated in short workshops where they studied Psalms 3 and 13. They then composed their own laments using features of biblical lament: complaints, petitions, requests for justice, and an honest expression of their mood (often oscillating between negative and positive statements).

Analysis of the lament compositions shows they include the elements considered essential by trauma-therapists (establishing safety, reconstructing the trauma-story, and restoring connections with one’s community), and lament-researchers (restoring the voice of a subject, providing a sense of justice, and connecting with God), and could result in biological healing, a possible application of the work of neuro-researchers. Thus one can posit that the expression of lament could promote wholeness for sufferers.

June Dickie is postdoctoral researcher at University of KwaZulu-Natal. <junedickie@gmail.com >.

“Give Us Today Our Daily Bread”: Martin Luther’s Theology of Prosperity

Ibrahim S. Bitrus

ABSTRACT

Luther has largely been seen as an austerity theologian. In this article, I would argue that Luther is also a public theologian of prosperity. I contend that his interpretation of the Fourth Petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us today our daily bread”, is an embodiment of his theology of prosperity, though his other writings also support my thesis, as we shall discover in this article.

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Experiences of Violence and Self-perceptions of Visually Impaired Refugee Women in South Africa and Implications for Pastoral Care

Sinenhlanhla Sithulisiwe Chisale

ABSTRACT

Women with disabilities (WwDs) are at high risk of experiencing violence in South Africa. This violence is intensified when a WwD is a refugee who lacks proper social support systems. Written from a feminist theology of disability and a symbolic interactionist perspective, this paper seeks to discuss the lived experiences of violence by refugee WwDs and how they develop a sense of self from those experiences. It also explores the implications of their experiences and self-perceptions for the pastoral ministry of the broader church in South Africa. The paper follows an exploratory qualitative approach. Data was collected through life history narratives with three visually impaired refugee women from Zimbabwe in Johannesburg and was analysed using thematic analysis. Findings indicate that refugee WwDs experience violence in amplified proportions due to their immigrant status in South Africa. The church is an accomplice in this violence because pastoral care practitioners and preachers tend to extend exaggerated and negative piety that destroys the woman's self-esteem.

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The Centurion (Matthew 8:9) and the Bishop: On the Nature of Authority

Frank England

ABSTRACT

The centurion in Matthew 8:5-13 (Luke 7:1-10), who seeks healing for his servant, is presented as one “under authority” and yet also in a position of command. Jesus, the centurion appears to recognise, similarly is one “under authority”, possessing the power to act and to command, and also the power to bestow authority upon others to act. Authority, however, is not unrestricted. Rather, bestowed authority empowers a recipient to effect changes within a defined remit, and it demands accountability. Respect – perhaps not always deserved – and obedience – perhaps not always warranted – seem to be given willingly to church leaders, and within the Anglican Communion, to bishops. Within the context of southern African Anglicanism, it is asked: What lessons may the centurion teach the bishop about the nature of authority, its limits, responsibilities, and accountability – lessons, perhaps, with embedded implications for the conversational practice of listening and speaking?

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I Will Gather among the Sheaves! Facilitating Embodied and Emancipatory Translation of the Book of Ruth for Translational Dialogue¹

Nathan Esala

ABSTRACT

The processes of Bible translation and/or the oral performance of biblical discourses in Africa are most helpful for a local community when a local community controls the processes of translation in a way that they find useful and liberating. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) is one tool that structures the power dynamics inherent in translation in favor of a marginalized group within a local community, so that the marginalized group can reopen the processes of translation so they can calibrate the choices inherent in translation in a way that will be useful and liberating to them. As an example of emancipatory translation practice, the paper describes a CBS with young women in school in northern Ghana reading the book of Ruth in the context of sugar daddies. It describes a “breakthrough” in the CBS event when a male facilitator used his body to dramatize harvesting and gleaning in a way that encouraged the young women to interpret the narrative from their own embodied socio-cultural perspective. Facilitators can also discourage marginalized groups from interpreting/translating from their own perspective. Emancipatory practices of translation have significant contributions to make to the translational dialogue around sacred texts. How can dominant modes of translation welcome the inclusion of different perspectives in the ongoing study, translation, and performance of sacred texts? How can marginalized groups keep exploring their social visions in and beyond the sacred texts so their voices and vision are heard in society? How can socially engaged translators facilitate the inclusion of marginal voices in public translational and social dialogues?

1 A previous iteration of this paper was entitled “Invading the sheaves? Breakthrough into performance, exegesis, ecology, and translation.” Translation and the Tradition of Oral Performance Seminar (Misano Adriatico, Italy, April 24-28, 2017).

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Spaces and Tables – the First World Council of Churches’ Pre-assembly of Women and Men

Anders Göranzon

ABSTRACT

This article documents the process leading up to the first WCC pre-assembly of women and men. A chronological narrative is intertwined with analytical sections and historical reflections, told from a specific point of view – the author’s own experience as moderator of the men’s gathering.

Has the time come for women and men to join forces on the journey for gender justice? Does that mean that safe spaces for women (and men) are no longer needed? The author claims that the pre-assembly of women and men was only one step on the journey for (gender-) justice and peace.

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