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Exploring Current Development of Pastoral Care in Africa Through a Relational View of the Trinity

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Abstract

Pastoral care in Africa has gone through series of changes and been adorned by many colours since the entry of Christian mission to the continent. It began as a theological discipline but later became interdisciplinary, drawing from psychology, anthropology, and others. With the influx of African theological reflections on pastoral care, different themes and approaches continue to emerge. Current discourse on pastoral care on the continent favours communal care instead of individualisation of care. The concept of care of the community by the whole community finds its expression in the African communitarian ethos. The article conducts a contextual analysis of pastoral care in Africa through a relational view of the Trinity. The paper concludes that a relational view of the Trinity provides a stronger foundation for a contemporary, context-specific, communal pastoral care in Africa.

Introduction

The concept of pastoral care in Africa continues to witness series of changes since the entry of Christian mission into the continent. It began with Western missionary ideologies and grounded itself in the shepherding paradigm of scripture (Magezi 2019:8). Pastoral care began as theological discipline but later became interdisciplinary, drawing from psychology, anthropology, and others (McClure 2012:269). With the emergence of African theologies, several changes continue to take place in the field of pastoral theology due to the complex realities of the African lived experience. Consequently, several themes

and approaches to pastoral care in Africa continue to emerge. These developments have been influenced by socio-political and cultural changes as well as emergent theories aimed at addressing complex existential issues in our society.

According to Lartey (2004:90), pastoral care entails caring activities undertaken by people of God. Similarly, McClure (2012:269) observes that ‘pastoral care indicates various responses of a person or persons motivated by God’s love for another or others’. This implies pastoral care is undertaken by those who love God. Van der Watt (2023:2) observes that pastoral care practices are integral to the mission of the triune God in our societies. Since it is the mission of God, it is also the mission of God’s people and it should be undertaken by all members of the faith community. Although there are several approaches to pastoral care, McClure (2012:275) observes that the current dimension of pastoral care should challenge the whole faith community to assume the responsibility of corporate caring for all by the whole congregation, as compared with the traditional notion of care for an individual by privileged, ordained leaders. Pastoral care by the whole faith community should be grounded in a theological resource that underlines the beliefs and practice of the church. One important belief of the church in Africa is the doctrine of the Trinity.

Sakupapa (2019:2–3) relates that the doctrine has become an ecumenical doctrine and a relational paradigm of the Trinity has gained a wide acceptance as a foundation for communal living in Africa. A relational view of the Trinity suggests that the relationship between God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit presents a relational view of God that should characterise the life and ministry of Christians. In this paper, a relational view of the Trinity is conceptualised as a communion of mutual love, equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness observed in the triune God (LaCugna 1991:391; Tanner 2010:207; Venter 2012:1). Pembroke (2006:7) asserts that relationality, which is the central motif of the Trinity, is foundational to pastoral responses. This implies that pastoral care should be grounded in a relational paradigm. The current focus of pastoral care as communal-context, specific care (Scheib 2002) sits well with the African communitarian ethos and could benefit from a relational view of the Trinity.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the current development of pastoral care in Africa through the lens of a relational view of the Trinity. It seeks to underscore resources from the relational view of the Trinity that could inform context-specific, communal pastoral care in Africa. The paper begins with a brief description of the historical development of pastoral care, with emphasis on Africa as well as on a relational paradigm of the Trinity in the African context. It then proceeds with how pastoral care in Africa could be informed by a relational view of the Trinity.

Historical development of pastoral care in Africa

This section provides a snapshot of the key changes in the field. Attention is given to the movement from the individualisation of care to mutual care of the community by its own members.

From its inception, pastoral care denoted the notion of shepherding (McClure 2012:269). This concept of shepherding connects with the theme of God as a shepherd (Ezekiel 34), hence places pastoral care in the confines of theology. The field of pastoral care has witnessed significant changes over the years. New developments in the field and practice of pastoral care have largely been attributed to changes in the socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts (Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern 1999:14), as well as the emergence of theories in theology and the social sciences (Van Arkel 2000:142). Some of the key developments have been in the area of the tension between theological and psychological domains, the need for pastoral care to respond to ethical issues in our society, the sterling contributions of feminist pastoral theologians, the growing attention to the role of pastoral anthropology, and the call to move towards communal care rather than the individualisation of pastoral care (Dillen 2011; Mouton 2014; Van Arkel 2000:142).

Pastoral care in Africa has also gone through different forms and stages, starting from the missionary movement, before the emergence of African theological reflections on pastoral care in the context of Africa (Magezi 2019:8). In the twentieth century, pastoral care gave more attention to theological reflections on the African continent by African theologians. The awakening of interest in theological reflections on pastoral care and the emergence of African theologians led to the formation of the African Association for Pastoral

Studies and Counselling (AAPSC) in February 1985 in Kenya. Among other things, the association aimed at promoting African perspectives on pastoral care and counselling through research and training that was consistent with the African context (Magezi 2016:2; Magezi 2019:8). As a result, several scholars emerged, with series of contributions coming from key African pastoral theologians such as Emmanuel Y. Lartey (Ghana), Vhumani Magezi and Daniel J. Louw (South Africa), Wilhelmina J. Kalu (Nigeria), and many others across the continent. These advances in pastoral theology in Africa ushered in key developments that are worth briefly discussing in this section.

In the first instance, pastoral care became rooted in African theology: the theology done by Africans to respond to contextual issues, that is, theology to deconstruct and reconstruct certain structures in African societies (Du Plessis 2021:1). It called for the need to undertake a theology that seeks reconstruction, taking into consideration all aspects of life (Mugambi 1995:7–9). African theological reflection sought to rally faith communities to embark on a transformative praxis that aims to promote justice and human dignity in African society (Magezi 2019:10). According to Lartey (2013:121–122), there is a need for the decolonisation of pastoral care in Africa. Arguing from the perspective of postcolonial practical theology, Lartey suggests the need for creativity, innovation, and improvisation grounded in the indigenous African communitarian ethos in order to undertake a pastoral care and healing that goes far beyond the individual to be care for the whole community by the whole community. This underscores the need for care that is grounded in a communal-contextual paradigm of pastoral work (Klaasen 2023:1; Scheib 2002:31).

Secondly, African pastoral theological reflection favours interdisciplinary approaches due to the multi-faceted and complex issues in the living realities of human life. The African context and the lives of the people are inundated with complexities; consequently, reflections on and the practice of pastoral care should take on integrated approaches (Magezi 2019:11–12). In the opinion of Louw (2015:14), they should adopt a ‘zigzag’ approach in which the praxis methodology and spiral hermeneutic paradigms are appreciated. Magezi (2019:12) asserts that for pastoral care to meet this demand, it should be undertaken by people who ‘embody Christ and become agents and beacons of desire and wounded healers of life despite the zigzag patterns of suffering’.

Another issue of key concern is illness and healing. Pastoral care should aim at bringing wholeness; Magezi (2019:11) and Louw (2017:1) describe this wholeness as 'cura vitae'. In order for pastoral care to address holistic wellbeing and needs, it should be integrated into the ministry of the church in Africa (Magezi 2016; Molla 2018; Van Arkel 2000). In this way, faith communities will undertake a ministry of caregiving that is rooted in faith praxis and Christian spirituality, which is consistent with lived experiences in the African context (Bowers 2009:94–100; Magezi 2019:9; Mucherera and Lartey 2017). This implies that pastoral care should adorn the clothes of Africa's daily experiences.

Furthermore, pastoral care in Africa should challenge faith communities to hear the voices of the vulnerable and take efforts to heal their suffering (Hendriks 2014:61–80; Molla 2018:189). This involves listening and responding to the daily lived experiences of abuse and the dehumanisation of the marginalised in African society. Magezi (2019:11) observed that faith communities should address societal structures such as patriarchy and any hierarchy that promotes marginalisation of women and children. Hearing the voices of children could also be considered as responding to the signs of the times (Van Arkel 2000:145). This is against the backdrop that there are increasing issues of social injustices such as abuse of children and women, conflicts, and the dehumanisation of certain classes in society. Consequently, pastoral theology should also aim at addressing these ethical issues in society (Molla 2018:189).

Also, pastoral care in Africa should carry out a ministry that is clothed with genuine compassion, love, and care for people. Commenting on the concept of compassion in pastoral care, Louw (2011:1) used the term 'ta splanchnic' to describe a sense of deep and strong feeling of mercy and compassion expressed by the intestines. This implies that our compassion towards others should be genuine and not superficial. This compassion calls for a pastoral ministry that could be described as 'embracing the other and reaching out to the other' (Magezi 2019:12).

Closely linked with compassion is love. McClure (2012:269) observes that 'pastoral care indicates various responses of a person or persons motivated by God's love for another or others'. This implies pastoral care is undertaken by

those who love God. Similarly, Koopman (2010:41–42) believes that theological responses should rest on the assertion that ‘for God so loved the world’ (John 3:16; ESV). This confessional belief has three dimensions, namely the inherent public nature of God’s love, the rationality of God’s love for the world, and the meaning and implications of God’s love for every facet of life (Smit 2009:526). The Trinity presents this dimension of love. The inherent nature of God’s love is the foundation for the communion in the three persons of the Trinity. Scheib (2014:707) suggests that love could be a starting point for reflections in pastoral theology. He grounds this argument in the notion that love is an ‘essential characteristic’ of the triune God.

In the light of demonstrating love, care, and compassion, pastoral care enters the public space. Dillen (2011:209) observes that pastoral care is largely ‘public care’ and advocates for the need to focus attention on this paradigm. In this vein, pastoral care enters the arena of public theology. John de Gruchy observes that ‘public theology is a Christian witness’ (2007:40). Public theology challenges faith communities to leave the church walls and be actively visible in the public space (Magezi 2019:6). The notion of pastoral care as public practice, according to McClure (2012:276), promotes critical reflections on policies and socio-cultural factors that influence suffering. It advocates for a ministry of care that brings liberation. Similarly, it is noted that there are implications of public issues for pastoral theology, and that, in the same vein, pastoral care has public implications (Miller-McLemore 2014). This discourse implies that pastoral care is both private and public. Although, historically, pastoral care has been predominantly focused on individual needs, recent developments call for attention to issues in the public arena.

This new dimension of pastoral care challenges the whole faith community to assume the responsibility of corporate caring for all by the whole congregation as compared to the traditional notion of care for an individual by privileged, ordained leaders (McClure 2012:275). This could be considered as living out one’s belief to the watching world. God, therefore, expects that this relationship of love is expressed in and among believers, and in the communities they serve (Smit 2015:12). These new frontiers of care call for a Christian spirituality that mobilises the whole faith community to create a space in which wounded and broken members will find a haven. As they receive their healing, their lives become another means of promoting healing to other

suffering members of the community and of the larger society (Gunderson 1997:8; Gunderson, Magnan, and Baciu 2018:236). In the words of McClure, it is the 'care for the community and its members by the community and its members' (2012:275).

Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern (1999:80) described this as pastoral care in the 'living web', which seeks to move from individualised care to include paying attention to the social, cultural, economic, traditional, political, and religious factors that cause or promote injustices and the dehumanisation of children in our communities. Similarly, Molla (2018:194) believes that the notion of the living web expands the scope of care to communal care and public ministry. Consequently, the ministry of care could be directed towards societal transformation and helping to alleviate suffering. In the light of this, it is argued that theological reflections on a pastoral response should be placed in a particular context (Dunlap 2009:12; Klaasen 2023:1). This supports the assertion that all theology is contextual (Bevans 2018:30). Pastoral responses should be rooted in contextual theological approaches in order to take into consideration the lived experiences of different people in different contexts. It underscores the critical role of context in the work of pastoral theology's task of helping faith communities to adorn their cloth of caring, healing, and transforming society (Du Plessis 2021:1; Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern 1999:19).

In Africa, these current developments in pastoral care sit well with the importance of community life. Stinton (2012:13) observes that theological formulation in Africa should be placed within the context of community since community is central to daily lived experiences of Africans. It implies that current movement in pastoral care finds affinity in the African culture that leans towards communal life (Grobelaar 2012:41). The next section gives further attention to communal care through a relational view of the Trinity.

A relational view of the Trinity in the African context

Christian doctrines are truths about God that are formulated with scripture as their chief source. They are not just speculative ideas that are held, neither are doctrines ends in themselves but are aimed at having practical implications for faith praxis and Christian spirituality in the faith community (Marmion and

Nieuwenhove 2011:12). The doctrine of the Trinity has radical implications for the daily living of Christians (LaCugna 1991:1). That is, the Trinity should inform our faith praxis and Christian spirituality. It could be argued that the Trinity does not only teach about the inner life of God. In this paper, a relational view of the Trinity is conceptualised as a communion of mutual love, equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness observed among God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (LaCugna 1991:391; Tanner 2010:207; Venter 2012:1). A relational view of the Trinity, in the thoughts of Catherine LaCugna, is 'the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another' (1991:391). As a result, adherence to the doctrine of the Trinity should inform the mode of being and way of living in faith communities in Africa.

A relational view of the Trinity is considered the source of the revival and renaissance in trinitarian theological discourse (Kärkkäinen 2017:xvi). The motivation for using the Trinity is the fact the doctrine of the Trinity is widely held by faith communities in Africa. In the opinion of Sakupapa (2019:2), the Trinity is 'ecumenical discourse'. The relational notion of the Trinity has gained wider attention in African theological discourse also due to its emphasis on community life, and the fact that it is connected to the African communitarian ethos (Sakupapa 2019:3). The social analogy of the Trinity connects with themes of African theologians due to the African communitarian ethos. Consequently, several African theologians (Bitrus 2017; Mwoleka 1975; Oduyoye 2009; Ogbonnaya 1998; Sakupapa 2019) discuss the Trinity in relation to community life.

For instance, Mwoleka (1975:204) believes that the Trinity is not an abstract concept or a puzzle to be fixed but a model for community. The communion observed in the three divine persons points to life sharing together. Similarly, Oduyoye (2009:141–145) submits that a relational understanding of the Trinity provides an egalitarian notion for all sexes to live together. She argues further that baptism in the name of the Trinity signifies participation of life in the Trinity. This is consistent with earlier work of LaCugna that the trinitarian life is also the Christian life. This participation points to the communion of fellowship in the Trinity, which is a foundation for caring for another. Commenting on the African notion of the relational view of the Trinity, Ogbonnaya (1998:89) uses the term 'Divine Communalism' to advance the argument that three divine

persons, although distinct in their personality and functions, are one. In spite of the fact that Conradie and Sakupapa (2018:46) raise suspicions about Ogbonnaya's construction of the African community of gods and the trinitarian communion, it could be argued that Ogbonnaya's notion is consistent with the relational motif of the Trinity and African communitarian ethos.

Bitrus (2017:187) made another important contribution of a relational notion of the Trinity to faith praxis and socio-political and economic systems in Africa. According to this, a relational understanding of the Trinity opposes patriarchal dominion, which is typical of African community life, and an authentic African communal life is the trinitarian life. This is in agreement with the observation of LaCugna's (1991:338) that the Trinity presents a relational concept in which there is no subordination between the Father and the Son or the Spirit. It is a kind of relationship of equality, interconnectedness, and interrelatedness that is required for communal care (LaCugna 1991:391; Oduyoye 2009:141; Tanner 2010:207). This relationality observed in the triune God offers no place for dominion and hierarchy, which could hinder the relationality that is needed for care by the whole community in African societies.

In effect, a relational view of the Trinity in African theological thought is consistent with Western ideas on a relational view of the Trinity by key scholars such as Jürgen Moltmann, John Zizioulas, Catherine LaCugna, and Miroslav Volf. These theologians advocate that the notion of relationality, communion, and mutuality in the triune God should form the basis of human communities. The implication is that effective communal pastoral care could benefit from a relational paradigm of the Trinity. According to LaCugna (1991:391),

the primacy of communion among equals, not the primacy of one over another, is the hallmark of the reign of the God of Jesus Christ.

In the same vein, Moltmann also uses the concept of 'Imago Trinitas' to drum home his relational view of the Trinity. He argued that since human beings are created in God's image, they are expected to live out that image on earth (1985:241). Similarly, Volf (1998:4) argues that ecclesial communion should reflect the trinitarian communion and advocates for a 'non-hierarchical but

truly communal ecclesiology based on a non-hierarchical doctrine of the Trinity’.

The implication is that faith praxis and Christian spirituality should imitate the trinitarian relationship. That is, a relational notion of the Trinity could inform and reform a communal pastoral care in Africa.

A relational trinitarian paradigm of pastoral care in Africa

It could be argued that the current focus of pastoral care leans towards communal care and sits well with a relational view of the Trinity. This focus on pastoral care that aims at demonstrating compassion and reaching out to each other as well as giving voices to the marginalised seeks to transform the whole community. The trinitarian nature of God, according to Bevens (2018:34), emanates from the ‘relatedness and giftedness’ of the three distinct persons to each other. This connectedness and serving one another depict the traces that should reflect in faith communities as the whole community seeks to care for one another. Making reference to David Cunningham’s notion of ‘Trinitarian practice’, Bevens (2018:43) observed that theological reflections should be grounded in the notion that the Christian faith is a trinitarian faith since it seeks to invite faith communities into the trinitarian mission of the Christian God in the world. As a result, Mwoleka (cited in Bevens 2018:43) concludes that the trinitarian faith is more about ‘imitating’ the trinitarian God and extending the divine mission. This calls for a pastoral ministry that challenges faith communities to participate in the Trinity and extend it to the larger society.

The notion of relationality as a central theme in the Trinity is also a key concept in pastoral care. This is because the relational dynamic of the context in which pastoral care takes place has attracted theological reflection (Dillen 2011:204). Consequently, the importance of the topic of this study to reflect on a pastoral response from the paradigm of a relational view of the Trinity cannot be overemphasised. Reflecting on the current developments in pastoral care from the paradigm of relationality, which is the central theme of the Trinity, certain key elements are worth discussing. As Pembroke puts it

since the relational element is at the very centre of pastoral work, it seemed to me that the doctrine of the Trinity must

have the potential to make a major contribution to pastoral theory and practice. (2006:7)

Firstly, proponents of a relational view of the Trinity opine that there is a 'community' in God. God exists in relationship as the Father, Son, and Spirit. That is, the belief is that there is communion and relationship in the Trinity (Ogbonya 1998:89). Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God – the image of the Trinity – and called to share in this communion (Oduyoye 2009:143). Since human beings are created in the image of God, it also implies that we are created for communion with God, others, and the entire creation (Medley 2002:2). Marmion and Nieuwenhove (2011:2) observed that sharing in the dynamics of the triune God has important, far-reaching, practical 'implications for anthropology, ecclesiology, and society'. The community of believers are invited to participate in this community of mutual love and fellowship that exist in the triune God. Smit (2015:11) commenting on Moltman gave a vivid summary of the New Testament testimony as 'the great love story of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit' in which the whole creation and humankind are all together. The participation in this communion is a strong foundation for communal pastoral care.

In the same vein, Migliore (2004:68) opined that God's love, presented originally through God as the Father, is humanly enacted in this world by the Son and becomes vital and present until today through the Spirit. The Father adopts us into the covenant community through the redemptive work of the Son and our lives in that community are empowered through the indwelling of the Spirit. According to Smit (2015:10), at the individual level, God's children are called individually and, at the group level, are called collectively to participate in the life of the Trinity. The faith community becomes the family of God, which is expected on one hand to participate in the life of the Trinity and on the other hand to extend the grace and the love of the Trinity to the world through caring activities. This is what Volf (1998:417) opined is the 'social program' of the Trinity, where the self-giving love of the divine Trinity is expected to constitute faith praxis and Christian spirituality. The faith community is called to share in this self-giving love. Donovan (2000:357) observes that openness to participate in the love of God and the extension of love to all human beings is the basic predisposition for pastoral theology. This

is because pastoral care has its root in the openness of one's life to God as well as the openness to God's acts in the life of others.

In the paradigm of care by the whole community to the whole community, the notion of mutuality observed in the Trinity could make a significant contribution. The notion of mutuality is key in the Trinity. Life in this community should be built upon the notion of primacy of equals and not primacy of one over the other (LaCugna 1991; Mwoleka 1975:204; Oduyoye 2009:143; Sakupapa 2019:5). Mutuality implies the possibility of coming to a balance of power, where both parties have an influence on each other and whereby each partner has the possibility to express his or her own opinion, to give to the other and to receive from the other (Dillen 2011:205; Scheib 2002:34).

In addition, the caregiving and pastoral ministry of faith communities should aim at transforming the faith community to function in line with trinitarian ecclesiology. Volf (1998:191) asserts that ecclesial communion should reflect the trinitarian communion. This challenges faith communities to continually explore and pursue parallels of trinitarian communion for the ecclesial communion (Bitrus 2017:187; Mwoleka 1975:204; Scheib 2002:29). Consequently, the mode of being of faith communities as well as their structures should reflect the relationality in the triune God. That is, pastoral care should be fashioned to be parallel to the relationship of equality, love, and mutual fellowship. When relationships become truly mutual, it is more likely to promote the atmosphere required for a communal pastoral care. Tanner (2010:370) argues that in the Trinity all forms of hierarchical structures in relationships are replaced with mutuality and reciprocity, which affirms the dignity of all individuals. This notion of affirmation of the dignity of all could create a safe space for mutual care for one another. Participation in the Trinity results in deconstruction and reconstruction of ecclesial structures that remove all elements of barriers, subordination, abuse of power (Kärkkäinen 2007:185).

Secondly, the relationship of love and fellowship that exists in the Trinity points to communal care (Scheib 2002:31). It implies that all members should experience that love and fellowship that create a safe environment for all. The fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit is extended to human beings. It is also an invitation of all into fellowship, which creates a space for all – men,

women, children, rich, and poor – to come into friendship with God and among themselves (Kärkkäinen 2007:106-107; Oduyoye 2009). The notion of friendship as an element of pastoral care has received some criticism. It is believed that the notion of friendship could be romanticised such that the boundaries as well as the power balance in pastoral relationships are crossed (Dillen 2011:206; Dillen 2017:3). However, it is argued that friendship emphasises mutual fellowship and an adequate balance of power, where the dignity and the contributions of all members in the pastoral relationship are appreciated (Dillen 2017:3). Commenting on the notion of friendship, Kotze and Noeth (2019:1) assert that this kind of friendship creates both a private and a public space where Christians live in freedom and in a non-hierarchical way. This understanding provides the basis for a community in which all human beings strive to extend care to each other. This is important for the way Christians live since there is no hierarchy among friends; it calls for an atmosphere of love, care, and the upholding of the dignity of all human beings because we are all created in the image of God.

According to Moltmann, in the Trinity ‘each Person receives the fullness of eternal life from the other’ (1981:173–174). In other words, in the notion of communal care, each member receives life through the caring nature of the triune God in the other. This supports the concept of *uBuntu* in the African context, where members of the community assent to the idea that one exists because of the other, and that one’s life is meaningful through the relationship that is formed with the other. The relational space of love, compassion, and care in faith communities serves as a protective layer for all its members.

Again, the idea that pastoral care should rally the faith community to carry out this ministry of caregiving aimed at the transformation of society is in line with the trinitarian paradigm of pastoral response. It is the extension of the Trinity to larger society. This is what Volf opined about the Trinity as a ‘social program’. This social programme involves the faith community’s effort to demonstrate trinitarian relations and strive to build structures that are parallel with trinitarian relations. Commenting on Moltmann’s notion of trinitarian community, Kärkkäinen (2007:113; 2017:203) observed that all forms of the notion of hierarchy and dominion are foreign to the nature of the triune God. In the Trinity, God as the father does not imply exercising power over but rather being a loving parent. Using concepts like fatherly and motherly parent,

Moltmann proposed a community that is built on trinitarian ideas, in which there is an equal fellowship of men and women, children and adults, as well as the rich and the poor (Oduyoye 2009:89).

The context of Africa is inundated with community and cultural structures, which if mainly hierarchical could hinder communal pastoral care. McDougall (2005:139) supports this opinion by indicating that our communities should be structured based on egalitarianism as explained in the concept of 'imago trinitatis'. According to Matei (2004:213) the antidote to this societal problem of abuse of power and dehumanisation of the marginalised is to hold a trinitarian view of God in which we promote a 'community of equals, vulnerable and open to the human suffering, who experiences this suffering in himself'. Pastoral responses informed by a relational view of the Trinity should strive for creating relational spaces for communal care.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the trinitarian paradigm of pastoral care is consistent with Miller-McLemore's notion of 'pastoral care in the living web'. This concept espoused that pastoral care should respond to the whole community. That is, it examines and responds to the social, political, and cultural structures and practices that treat people in relation to their gender, race, status, and physical ability (Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern 1999:80). The living web is the space that could promote oppression and injustice if not informed by a triune God. The living web in a relational paradigm of the Trinity is a space of interconnectedness, mutuality, and care for each other and of the whole community. The living web in the Trinity becomes a relational space of life giving and life flourishing together, that is, the whole community flourishing. According to Miller-McLemore, pastoral care in the living web of life seeks to address injustice and promotes acts of liberation, resistance, nurturance, and empowerment in public spaces. The focus on the living web as a public space implies a shift from pastoral care's focus from care of individuals to communal care, which is contextually relevant.

The notion of pastoral care in the living web is communal in nature. As a result, pastoral care in the living web of Africa should be rooted in the trinitarian paradigm in order to rally faith communities to carry out a transformative pastoral ministry that promotes a living web of justice and compassion for each other in faith communities and in the public space.

To this end, the location of pastoral care as an integral part of the church's ministry in Africa is in line with current trends in pastoral care (Magezi 2016; Scheib 2002; Van Arkel 2000) where care is provided from the perspective of the Christian faith and spirituality within the context of faith communities (Magezi 2019:9). For pastoral care to be integrated into ministry praxis implies care that is rooted in the mode of being and praxis of faith communities. This calls for theological resources that emanate from the being of the church. There is a need for an ecclesiology that is relational and finds its expression in the spaces created in the Trinity and extended to all creation. This is the motivation for utilising the resources of a relational view of the Trinity to inform and reform a pastoral response in Africa.

Conclusions

The paper relates that pastoral care in Africa has gone through series of changes and been adorned by many colours since the entry of Christian mission to the continent. It began with Western missionary ideologies. Pastoral care began as a theological discipline but later became interdisciplinary, drawing from psychology, anthropology, and others . With the emergence of African theologies, several changes continue to take place in the field of pastoral theology due to the complex realities of African lived experiences. Although pastoral care began primarily as care for individual needs by an ordained or trained individual, current discourse has shifted from individualisation of care to communal care – care of the whole community by the whole community. The article opines that current discourse on pastoral care as communal care is trinitarian. The concept of care of the community by the whole community finds its expression in the African communitarian ethos – *uBuntu*. It is consistent with a relational view of the Trinity, which emphasises love, connectedness, mutuality, and reaching out to each other in a relational space that is life-sharing and life-flourishing. The paper concludes that a relational view of the Trinity provides a stronger foundation for a contemporary, context-specific, communal pastoral care in Africa.

It is, therefore, recommended that pastoral care practitioners on the continent pursue practical measures aimed at empowering the whole community to be actively involved in the care of the community. Finally, there is need for further

reflections and research on the importance of trinitarian-informed pastoral approaches in specific contexts in Africa.

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