

Youth Ministry as an Agent for Reconciliation in the Breakdown of Coloured Families, from Urban Communities in Cape Town: A Post-Apartheid Perspective¹

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Abstract

Reconciliation in its most basic definition means coming together especially in the light of misunderstanding and prejudices. When one thinks of reconciliation from a South African perspective, apartheid, racial segregation and injustices spring to mind with various results and negative consequences. One such consequence is the breakdown of the family and while there are many contemporary factors that continually threaten the family; it is not hard to acknowledge and understand the effects that apartheid and social injustices has had on the family. This paper will therefore highlight some of the effects that the apartheid system has had on the family structure with particular reference to the Coloured Community of the Cape Flats, some of the consequences the breakdown of the family has on the youthⁱ and how youth ministry can act as an agent for reconciliation in the family within this context.

1. Introduction

Theology has to be fundamentally practical (Browning 1991:6) and it is in this quest that practical theologians seek means of interpreting the realities of people in order that they may find divine meaning in their lives (Müller 2004:296), commonly through what is known as hermeneutics. “Jesus himself continues to instruct Christians as to the will of God in practical matters of the life of faith... discerning this teaching is itself a hermeneutical task, not merely an exercise in historical memory” (Anderson 2001:84). Hermeneutics is more than the art of interpreting the Scriptures, as people, we remain hermeneutical creatures always interpreting our realities and seeking meaning to our experiences. Practical theology has to begin in

¹ Article is found in: Harold, G., (Ed.), *The South African Baptist Journal of Theology. Social Justice and Reconciliation: An Evangelical/Baptist Perspective*, 2014, Vol. 23, pp. 231-241

people's realities, their contexts, attempting to make sense of their existence and experience (Müller 2004:296).

According to Baleka (2011:87) there are five significant issues that impact young people in Africa, namely, "family breakdown, HIV/AIDS, globalisation, poverty and corruption" and although these issues are valid, the family breakdown will be under discussion in this paper. While the apartheid system has had adverse effects upon the population of Southern Africa in a historical sense, it also has an effect on the present and future generations which is now apparent, and while in a post democratic South Africa there are attempts to be more inclusive and a political sensitivity to avoid assigning people in groupings, we cannot but be aware of these groupings as they are not only a result of this unjust policy but also a present reality (see Amoateng & Heaton 2007:ix).

This article will focus on the Coloured Community of the Cape Flats and the results and consequences that this system of apartheid has had upon the family (Amoateng & Heaton 2007:vii). I will narrow in on the effects that it has had specifically on the youth of this community due to the breakdown of the family. Finally, this article will endeavour to address and remedy the situation through the reconciliatory work of the youth ministry.

2. Reflecting on the Family in the Coloured Community of the Cape Flats

My interest in the coloured community of the Cape Flats stems from me being defined and classified as one who is neither black nor white as most communities are still reflective of these demarcations (Bray, Gooskens, Kahn, Moses & Seekings 2010:23). Other terms for the coloured community include mixed race (Calix 2013:48) with its roots in the slave industry as well as the indigenous Khoisan peoples (Adhikari 2005:2; cf. Amoateng & Richter 2007:2) and were given a separate status under the apartheid system (Amoateng & Richter 2007:11). I have witnessed and experienced much of the trauma associated with the coloured community and the effects of the apartheid system. One merely has to open the newspaper to see communities plagued by gang violence, violence on school grounds, substance abuse, teenage pregnancies and broken families.

The Cape Flats as described by Geschier (2007:45) at the onset of apartheid was “a vast, sandy landscape with barely any infrastructure such as shops, schools and workplaces” situated in the Western Cape where people of colour were forcibly removed to during the apartheid years in South Africa (Bray et al 2012:24; 27). The Cape Flats which has the largest proportion of coloured population (Bray et al 2012:27; Adhikari 2005:2) in South Africa is prominent with overcrowding in housing due to “discriminatory public-housing policies” (Bray et al 2012:41). Much of the Cape Flats have remained “economically and socially impoverished” (Bray et al 2012:99) and is characterised by violence (Geischer 2007:44, 60-63). It was during the apartheid era that the coloured community suffered the most injustice (Adhikari 2005:4).

With the breakdown of the family (see Amoateng & Richter 2003; Holborn & Eddy 2011; Kalule-Sabiti et al 2007), adolescents no longer have the same level of access to necessary guidance and training in morality and civic responsibility and are left to secondary care givers who often come in the form of peers and significant participants in society through the media and social technology. These secondary care givers often have a different ethical and moral perspective in life which often embraces one that is global and may not reflect that which is local and specific to that particular family or community. The breakdown of the family has severe complications and implications in the lives of youth.

Harold has argued (2012:142-148), rightfully so, that parents are primarily responsible for the spiritual formation of children. The role of parents and its importance in the upbringing of children is in no doubt important and listed in the Christian Scriptures (Dt 6; 2 Tm 1:5) and cannot be absconded even though the church has tried to compliment the actual and perceived vacancy through various ministries and services. Foulkes (1989:171) argues that the “strength of family life, and the training of children to habits of order and obedience, were the means and the marks of stability of a community or nation. When the bonds of family life break up, when respect for parents fails, the community becomes decadent and will not live long”. When parents fail in their response to their children; they fail in building a community and ultimately a nation. In the light of the contemporary context, with the dissolution of the

family, one has to ask where the guidance that is expected of the parents is going to come from?

The marriage rate in sub-Saharan African societies has been reported to be just over one-quarter of the population is married and two-thirds of the population are single and have never been married, yet are prone to co-habitation (Amoateng & Richter 2003:254-255; cf. Bray et al 2012:78). Other factors influencing this dissolution include divorce and death (Amoateng & Richter 2003:254-255), HIV/Aids, absent fathers and single parent households and poverty (Holborn & Eddy 2011:3-6). These factors have a direct consequence on children who have grown up in these types of families, often termed as dysfunctional, with results of unemployment, risky sexual behaviour, teenage parenthood, HIV/Aids, violence and crime, drug and alcohol use, and a low involvement in civic affairs and duties (Holborn & Eddy 2011:7-15). One of the significant factors mentioned, or better understood as an outcome of the historical injustices is that of poverty and has a direct correlation with apartheid in Southern Africa (Savage 1987:602-606). Other outcomes include violence and gang-related activities.

“[*the*] basic unit of society ... families perform a number of vital social functions. These include: the socialisation of children and the inculcation of moral and social values; the provision of material and emotional sustenance to family members and care of dependent family members, including children, older persons, and the sick and disabled individuals; the control of social and sexual behaviour and the infringement of taboos; the maintenance of family morale and identity, which creates mutual obligation and responsibilities and the motivation to perform pro-social roles inside and outside the family; and the launch of young people into roles and functions in the wider society” (Amoateng & Richter 2003:244).

Amoateng & Richter continues to stress the importance of the family and regards it as the building blocks of communities and is responsible for values and behaviours, which if not exercised in the family will be absent in adults and directly, affect society (2003:244). If the

family which is part of civil society (Shubane 1992:36) is malfunctioning, then it stands to reason that a part of civil society too is malfunctioning.

Nelson Mandela, during the Rivonia Trial (1964) said that “Poverty and the breakdown of family life have secondary effects. Children wander about the streets of the Townships because they have no schools to go to, or no money to enable them to go to school, or no parents at home to see that they go to school, because both parents (if there be two) have to work to keep the family alive. This leads to a breakdown in moral standards, to an alarming rise in illegitimacy and to growing violence which erupts, not only politically, but everywhere”.

3. The Consequences of Apartheid on the Family

Calix (2013:44) states that “plagued with limited employment opportunities, the Cape Flats is home to a vast number of people and families who precariously exist outside the formal economy and suffer from social exclusion” and is characterised by violence, gangsterism, substance abuse and is an “unacceptably impoverished” area referred to as the “dumping ground of apartheid” (Calix 2013:43). Whilst the coloured community have not experienced the extremes of the apartheid system to that of the black community, the family life suffered none the less due to their uprootedness under the apartheid system (Bray et al 2012:49). This uprootedness of mass dislocation has had adverse and far reaching effects upon families, friends and communities (Bray et al 2012:49). Calix (2013:59) further acknowledges that mass dislocation has brought about the “demise of the coloured family” and whilst the coloured community has a long history in the slave community in the late nineteen hundreds (Adhikari 2005:38), there is no doubt that the current context exists because of the policies of the apartheid system. Apartheid has had severe and devastating effects on families (Bray et al 2012:48).

There may be several reasons and influences that undermine and affects the family structure and cannot only be pointed to one isolated factor or incident, however, Calix (2013:52) states that “issues of systemic poverty, violence and gang activity within the coloured community

of the Cape Flats serve as lasting legacies of coloured stereotyping under apartheid ... the abhorrence at the level of broken families and youth delinquency – tied almost exclusively to the mass dislocation, confusion and chaos that resulted from forced removals under the Group Areas Act of 1950”. Amoateng & Richter (2007:vii; see Sachs 1990) seems to confirm that these policies of “migratory labour, influx control, the Immorality Act” has not only affected the family during the apartheid period but remains a challenge in the new dispensation by not only affecting families but actually undermining the traditional family, which includes that of the extended family as well as the institution of marriage (Kalule-Sabiti, Palamuleni, Makiwane & Amoateng 2007:89). Kalule-Sabiti et al (2007:89) asserts that “nuptiality patterns [*marriage*] are of great importance to the institution of the family”.

So while there are many contemporary influences, it has to be noted the lasting effects that the apartheid system has had on the family and the generations to follow (Bray et al 2012:95). Apartheid has severely damaged the family (Sachs 1990:41). Cloete (2013:49) contends that growing up in a stable family for many South African youth will only be a dream. For many young people, the guidance needed by the family structure has become obsolete and to remedy or fix the family requires more than merely attempting to change policies (Sachs 1990:40).

4. The Structure and Responsibility of the Family

How would we define and construct the family? Sachs (1990:45) maintains that there are no standard criteria or definition for family or even that there is “an ideal family” especially in a South African context. Amoateng (2007:40) illustrates the various definitions and frameworks of the family. Examples would include multiple married partners, single households, partners who have lived together for an extended period of time and not having been married and even where traditional and civil marital rites are observed. Contemporary society also recognises both heterosexual and bisexual marriages as legal and legitimate. Amoateng and Richter (2007:15) states that families are contextually defined.

Considering the various standards for family, Christian theology has the Bible as normative text for measuring and defining standards. It would be good therefore to reflect on how the concept of family was developed in the Christian scriptures. Cloete (2013:7-9) however

cautions us from attempting to take families as reflected in scripture as the ideal for family structure. She continues by stating that the two worlds, that of the biblical world and the contemporary world are too different to merely transpose the one into the other.

The family structure of the Old and New Testaments differ quite a bit to the contemporary family in that contemporary society identifies the family as nuclear consisting of parents and where there exists, children, whereas the biblical understanding of family includes more than mere blood relations (Amoateng & Richter 2003:261; De Vaux 1973:20; see Williams 1996; Scaer 1990:86). Scaer (1990:87) states that God “endorses the family as the basic unit in society” in order that the salvation of God may be made known. The biblical family comprised more than merely blood relations and is limited and restricted to heterosexual relations and is not confined and limited to the modern understanding of the nuclear family of father, mother and offspring. The family in ancient Israel was tribal and operated corporately (Williams 1996). De Vaux (1973:20) describes the family as those who are “united by common blood and common dwelling-place.” The family would therefore include “servants, the resident aliens or *gerim* and the ‘stateless persons’, widows and orphans, who lived under the protection of the head of the family” (De Vaux 1973:20; see Williams 1996; Scaer 1990:86). The family structure was patriarchal in nature and the “proper word to describe it is *bêth ’ab*, the ‘house of one’s father’” (De Vaux 1973:20). Patai (1960:114-24) asserts that the family in ancient Israel was patriarchal in nature. While children were the property and responsibility of the father (Williams 1996), the family, which would include the blood relations as well as sub-tribes and servants had an obligation to help and to protect one another as well as the stranger although it weakened over time and mutual assistance was neglected (De Vaux 1973:21-23). The extended family had a function to help ensure and create a harmony and “stability for rearing children” (Williams 1996). Gangel (1977:326) states that the family has an added responsibility of emphasizing the importance of economics and the engagement in work and was primary in teaching and training children in matters of belief.

Amoateng & Richter (2003:243) cites Parsons (1951) in explaining the popularisation of the nuclear family in both Western and non-Western societies, “the nuclear family was a logical product of the industrial-capitalist order” in which the father and mother had specific roles and functions in the household while in South Africa two family patterns dominate, namely, the nuclear family and the extended-family (Amoateng & Richter 2003:261).

While the concept of the household is not synonymous with that of family, it is generally agreed that it is the most basic concept by which to understand the dynamics of family. The concept and functions of the household is consistent with that of the biblical family and can be defined as “a person or a group of people that usually live and eat together regardless of whether they are related or unrelated” (Amoateng & Richter 2003:249) quoting from the Institute for Resource Development 1987. Although writing from an economic perspective, Amoateng & Richter (2003:249; cf. Amoateng & Richter 2007:17) recognises that household and family are not the same, the family which is “to be regarded as one of the basic constituent institutions of the capitalist economy” is best understood and examined via the household. “This means that a household can contain a family, but that household members do not necessarily have to be a family ... The household performs the functions of providing a place of dwelling and of sharing resources, these functions can be performed among people who are related by blood and people without any such relationship” (Department of Social Development, 2008).

The South African context bears many similarities to that of the biblical family and the saying, “it takes a community to raise a child” fits adequately within the concepts of family and household. The family ultimately, however one defines it, should be a community which has the infrastructure in assisting the young by supplying them with the necessary resources for survival and protection; to be morally and ethically balanced individuals; and who have a civic responsibility in contributing in community and nation building.

5. The Role of Youth Ministry in the Reconciliatory Process.

The family has an important and critical function in the nurturing, protecting and socialising of children. While there are many opinions that seeks utilising the family in youth ministry as to not continue isolating youth from adults through what is commonly termed as family ministry (see De Vries 1994, Pearce 2003, and Fields 1998). This paper has sought to highlight the instability and breakdown in the family as well as its various nuances and makeup within a contemporary society. It therefore stands to reason, that if the family within this context of the Coloured community on the Cape Flats has experienced much breakdown,

how effective is it to assist youth in experiencing God as well as helping socialise them? In agreement with Sachs (1990:40), it will require more than policies to remedy the situation of the breakdown of the family, the youth ministry can aid to reconcile what it means to be a family as an extension of the family.

The family and household structures as depicted by the biblical family can therefore be seen in the function of youth ministry serving as an extension of this household. Youth ministry requires of it to have a holistic approach, as explained by the South African Youth Workers Association (2001:9-10), “Youth work offers learning opportunities that support and promote the personal, social and economic development of young people”. Youth ministry can achieve this through teaching in areas of morality, life skills and responsible citizenry as well as imparting parenting skills and knowledge and understanding of youth and its culture to guardians of youth. Youth ministry has a responsibility to assist in the duties that is required and expected of families specifically in caring and protecting of its members as well as religious training and education. A further function as the extension of the family would be to assist youth build meaningful relationships with adults and particularly significant adults who would assist them in their adolescent journey (Black 1991:82-84).

Furthermore, youth ministry attempts to facilitate youth into a deep and meaningful relationship with God (Black 1991:82-84), a function that was primarily required of by the family. Youth ministry therefore serves as a hermeneutical exercise in assisting adolescents to experience God and his plan for salvation as well as meaning and understanding within their contexts. Whilst I have acknowledged the role of families, parents in particular in religious education, and without removing that responsibility from them, youth ministry should aim in equipping parents and families to once again take up that mantle of religious education. But also it can serve to augment where that is lost through religious training and education.

6. Conclusion

Whilst the family has experienced breakdown due to the effects of a historically unjust South Africa, it is possible for the situation to be remedied in assisting adolescents through the hermeneutical process of youth ministry. Whilst the family will continually be faced with many challenges that will undermine its function and influence with adolescence, the role of youth ministry as an extension of the family and serving as part of the household can assist in equipping families for effective and holistic working in the lives of adolescents as well as the building up of families by offering the necessary support and skills training to guardians.

¹ In this study when talking about youth, it will be inclusive of children, youth and young adults (Nel 2000:8, cf. National Youth Policy of South Africa 2008:11), “that age group between childhood and adulthood” (Borgman 1997:X). The word youth will also be used interchangeably with young person and the more scientific term, adolescent.

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