The Details Of Theological Reflection

Introduction

This chapter presents the details of theological reflection. It begins by giving a brief explanation of what theological reflection is all about. It presents the community's movement towards insight by explaining the participatory sharing methodology, community perspective and disposition, faith traditions and practical insights. Finally, this chapter presents ministerial reflection by drawing building blocks from the religious social teaching of the Church.

Understanding theological reflection

Theological reflection is the third part of the pastoral cycle where the agent of change relates the issue with what different faiths says about the issue or the problem at hand. Theological reflection does not necessarily mean that you look at what God says about the problem from the Christian point of view, but it is a holistic view where it takes into consideration all the faith, be it African tradition, Hinduism, Muslim faith or even the Buddhists.

Theological reflection is the discipline of exploring our individual and corporate experience in conversation with the wisdom of a religious heritage. The conversation is a genuine dialogue that seeks to hear from our own beliefs, actions, and perspectives, as well as from those of the tradition. It respects the integrity of both. Theological reflection therefore may confirm, challenge, clarify, and expand how we understand our experience and how we understand the religious tradition. The outcome is new truth and meaning for living (Kinast, 1996).

Theological reflection is a way of doing theology that starts from the experiences of life and results to searching in faith, for deeper meaning, and for the living God. However, it is deciding the way to live out of this reflective search that is the critical intention of the method of theological reflection. It places the reflector in conversation with other sources of the revelation of God, primarily the faith tradition of the person or community. The world context of the experience is also particularly revelatory of meaning and the living God. The faith tradition and spirituality of the reflector are additional significant sources revealing the experience of God. Critical conversation among the sources is a process by which clarification, differences, or insights mutually challenge and expand one another. From this deepened awareness of God's presence in the experience, decisions are made for more relevant and prophetic choices in ministry. Through this critical conversation the reflector is usually challenged to a response of conversion of heart, mind, and action (McAlpin, 2009).

Community movement to insight

When the researcher was journeying with the community n theological refection, the researcher decided to use the group response method learnt in the Lumko workshop. According to Hirmer (2010), group response method helps the community to see the situations and problems of daily life in the light of the gospel, sharpen their prophetic insight and make them realize God's the daily events. The two key questions guiding group response sharing method are: which

problems of our community are similar to the problem mentioned in the passage? What is God saying to us about our problem? (Hilmer, 2010). The group response faith-sharing method has four dimensions or main steps explained by Hirmer. Introduction, 1 reading the passage, 2-finding problems of the community that are mentioned in the text, 3-finding what God is telling us about our situation or problem, 4 finding out what God want us to do and conclusion.

Reading of the Scriptures

After the welcome address by the researcher, the volunteers were asked to read the bible text. They were instructed to read the text aloud, slowly and clearly for better understanding. The bible text was taking from the book of Psalm 10:17-18 “Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless. Surely you will hear their cries and comfort them. You will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed, so mere people can no longer terrify them”. The text was read twice. The researcher the asked the participants to take 3 minutes of silence and reflect on the text.

After the moment of silence, the participants were invited to say a phrase from text or a word that touched them. The words said by the participants were: Lord, you know the hopes of the helpless, you will hear their cries and comfort them and you will bring justice to the orphans and the oppressed. Through this the participants were able to internalize the word of God.

What problems of our community are mentioned in the text?

The main purpose of this step is to make the bible an echo where today’s life becomes visible and reflected. After mentioning the phrases that stood out for the participants in the text, they were requested to take a moment of silence to reflect on the problems in their community that is reflected in the text.

What does God tell us about our problem?

After the reflection and identifying the community problems in the text, the participants were requested to take 10 minutes of silence to reflect on what the Lord is telling them about their problems. The main purpose of this silent moment is to make participants look out of their present situations and view themselves as standing on the side of God and view their problems with the eyes of God (Hilmer, 2010).

The participants shared that God was telling them that if we love Jesus and seek to conform our lives to Scripture, we need to care for children wounded by poverty and oppression– physically, emotionally, and spiritually – and promote a society that shares resources to meet their needs. We also need to protect children and their families from exploitation and advocate their cause to those in power. For the Christian, every child is a human being created in the image of God. This affords him or her all human dignity that must be protected from abuse. The vulnerability of children makes them all the more deserving of our regard, and obliges us with greater responsibility towards them. This responsibility is even more heightened with regard to children who are victims of misfortune, injustice and abuse.

What does God want us to do?

In the fourth step of the group response sharing method, the participants were invited to share

their reflection on concrete plan of action that should be drawn to counteract the challenges facing the community keeping in mind God’s insight (Hilmer, 2010). Sharing thoughts on what participants felt God was calling them, is to undertake or partake in activities to curb their challenges.

The participants said that it was necessary for them to be empowered and trained on caregiving skills for them to be able to give effective care to the OVC.

Ministerial reflection

The theological reflection that the researcher carried with the group made her to have an insight and mage her enriched. The insights were guided by the catholic social teachings. These principles are dignity of the human person, common good, justice, option for the poor and vulnerable and solidarity.

The principle of the dignity of the human person reveals that every person has inalienable dignity regardless of race, age, color, class and other human categories. There is a unique and sacred worth that is present in each person because he or she exists (Agostoni, 2005). Human dignity entails that there are certain things that children of God deserve, hence, vast inequalities prevent people from attaining what they have to preserve their lives and develop their potentials. In a world concerned with materialism and declining respect for human life, the Catholic Church proclaims that human life is sacred which the dignity of the person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. Our belief within the sanctity of human life and the inherent dignity of the human person is therefore the foundation of all the principles of our social teaching.

The principle of the Common Good in a global culture is driven by excessive individualism; our tradition proclaims that the person is not only sacred but also social. How we organize our society in law and policy and in economics directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in the community. Our Church teaches that the role of the government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good of all humans.

The principle of Option for the Poor and Vulnerable proclaims that a basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members in society are faring. In a society warped by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition recalls the story of Judgment Day (Matthew 25) and instructs us to put the requirements and needs of the poor and vulnerable first. That the major task of Christians is to assist brothers and sisters who have less and hence find it difficult to make ends meet. According to (Bosch, 1991), he states that the bible communicates God’s “preferential option” for the poor. Both the Old Testament and the life of Jesus have a strong focus on the poor. The poor not only being those who lack materially, but those who are marginalized, those who cannot participate in society, and feel that they are unable to and lacking resources to do anything about it.

The principle of solidarity in the Catholic social teaching proclaims that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live and that we are one human family despite our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. God’s love is not limited to a particular race, nation or even geographical location. Hence all these principles call upon us to take care

of each other because we are all family. We should hence not watch others suffer but instead help them and it is for this reason that Nyumbani village which is an innovative village settlement was built to address the problem of orphans and vulnerable children and their ageing grandparents.

Conclusion

This chapter presented theological reflection. It demonstrated how a group of the OVC and their caregivers through group response and faith sharing method link their daily life experiences with this espoused belief.