

Following Jesus when things are falling apart - a post-liberation perspective from South Africa.

By Felix Meylahn

A. Brief auto-biographical and historical perspective on the South African Context

a) Introduction – Who am I and where do I live and work?

I was born in the Northern Cape on Pniel, a mission station of the Berlin Mission Society, where my father was appointed agricultural manager (to generate funds for the mission work of the Lutheran Church in Southern Africa). My first language was German, then I learnt Afrikaans in primary school, was taught Latin by Irish monks (CBC) and learnt to speak English under the tutelage of an Anglican Canon (Kimberley Boys' High). I will briefly come back to my place of birth a little later. I studied theology together with students from all the various Lutheran Churches in Southern Africa at the joint theological training institute (funded by the LWF) which is linked to the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg. And now I am a pastor in the "Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (Cape Church)" and work in the Port Elizabeth Congregation (Friedenskirche). Our congregation in Port Elizabeth was founded by German immigrants just over 112 years ago, but we have since the early 70's become more and more an English speaking Lutheran community in which people from all the different backgrounds feel at home.

b) The first "falling apart".

After this personal introduction let me begin with a description of the historical context of my presentation, which will make clear why I use the "falling apart" phrase in my title. I believe it is very important to mention that we all see things through our own eyes and lenses. What I present here is thus my perspective, which, although I have tried to make it as wide and unbiased as possible, is still limited and one-sided, and should obviously not be taken as the only view of the situation in South Africa. However, the perspective that I offer is not based purely on my own view but tries to give an account of the way many people in my community/congregation experience and perceive South Africa today.

At first, a little historical review: The continent of Africa has been ravaged by Colonialism and imperialism for many centuries. The effects have been well documented in various studies (Pakenham's *The Scramble for Africa* is still a good overview). But I'd like to refer you in particular to a novel by **Chinua Achebe**, who movingly describes the detrimental impact of colonialism on his own culture in the book, "Things fall apart". He describes hauntingly how, through the onslaught of western imperialism together with the work of Christian missionaries, Western, Christian "civilisation" has fragmented and almost totally destroyed the once stable culture and belief system of his people. Of course I do not insist, as some critics do, that the missionaries came merely as the "advance troops of the colonialists" to soften up the people for later exploitation. I believe that many missionaries had the best intentions and brought much to Africa which even today is worth keeping (Education, Medical Training and agricultural know-how and, of course, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, which liberated many from fear and superstition).

c) The rise of the "liberation movements"

Across the continent there arose at the turn of the previous century liberation movements of various kinds. I can't go into too much detail here, but I need to mention the founding of the African National Congress in 1912. Its first secretary was Sol Plaatje, who was raised and educated by Lutheran missionaries on Pniel, the Berlin Mission Station in the Northern Cape Province which I mentioned as my birthplace. The history of the rise of African Nationalism and Black Consciousness is very interesting and important to

understand the later developments in South Africa, but again I can only refer you to the literature. One of the first books on the subject written by an African is Sol Plaatje's "Native Life in South Africa", first published in 1916 in response to the "Native's Land Act" introduced when South Africa was part of the British Commonwealth in 1913. The author was part of a delegation sent by the ANC to Britain to ask the Queen and the British parliament to address their grievances against the harsh laws instituted against black South Africans, but this was to no avail.

d) Diamonds and Gold

I need to speed up a little to get through important stretches along the road to the "New South Africa".

British imperialism was insatiable and, among others, Cecil John Rhodes had the dream of acquiring land all across Africa from "Cape to Cairo". The agricultural and mineral wealth of the continent was just too tempting to leave unconquered. When Diamonds and later Gold were discovered in the two Boer republics of the Free State and the Transvaal respectively, a war was instigated (the so-called "Boer War"), which today is seen by many as the first desperate attempt at a "liberation war" of a South African "tribe" against the imperialism of Britain. The "Afrikaner" people, who called themselves "Boere", farmers, were made up mostly of Dutch, German and French descendants, who had been living in Africa for several generations by this time and had often freely mixed with indigenous people as well as with slaves from the Far East. For the first time in military history, the British used "concentration camps" to imprison the women and children of the farmers (where many of them died) and a burnt-earth policy to force the heavily outnumbered "Boere Kommandos" to capitulate.

e) The rise of Afrikaner Nationalism

In the wake of the lost Boer war and jumping on the band wagon of nationalisms arising around the world the "Afrikaners" started seeing themselves as a "Nation" oppressed and exploited by foreign rulers, the Reformed theology of their pastors added fuel to this understanding, using language like, "we are the chosen people to bring the faith to the heathen of this land". In 1948 the "National Party" came to power in the "democracy" of the Union of South Africa and began instituting an ideology that became known as "Apartheid". The basic idea was that different ethnic groups should stay segregated and be allowed to develop separately. Looked at from the perspective of world history the implementation of "Apartheid" as a government system was the legal codification of the elitist, western world-view (white or European supremacy) joined with a Nationalism that took its cue from Nazi Germany. The main ideologues of Apartheid studied theology and law in Nazi Germany during the late 30's and early 40's.

f) The "liberation struggle".

Another jump to get through this background stuff:

The opposition to racism, which had already taken a big step with the founding of the ANC in 1912 of course grew immensely as the harsh racist laws of Apartheid were implemented. But the ANC was not the only, nor even the most popular liberation movement initially. Other strong protagonists of the liberation struggle were the Pan African Congress (PAC with a strong Black Consciousness element as represented by Steve Biko) and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), which had a strong national following until its leaders were systematically eliminated by ANC cadres. (See Anthea Jeffery's book for the details).

Under the influence of Gandhi and others the struggle for the most part was a non-violent one until a faction within the ANC came to the conclusion that non-violence was not going to bring the necessary results and founded the military wing of the ANC (MK. "Umkhonto we Sizwe") and began the violent struggle against Apartheid. In 1978 a senior delegation

made up of members from the ANC and the SACP went to North Vietnam to gather information and to receive training in "People's War", a strategy developed by General Vo Nguyen Giap, commander of the North Vietnamese army. The ANC adopted this military and political strategy as its "blue-print" for taking over South Africa by force (see Anthea Jeffery, "People's War. New Light on the Struggle for South Africa"). *"A people's war, as the term suggests, revolves around the use of people as weapons of war. As many people as possible must be drawn into the war, whether by joining organisations allied to the insurgents, or taking part in demonstrations, or helping with the propaganda campaign, or taking part in violent attacks. In addition, all individuals within the arena of conflict - including those who support the insurgents - are regarded as expendable in the waging of the war, in the same way as arms and ammunition are expendable in a conventional conflict. It also means that children are just as expendable as adults and that there is no bar against using children either as combatants or as targets for attack. As a combatant, a child may be more willing to take risks, and as a victim of violence the child has much greater value in subsequent propaganda and mobilisation."*

For a summary of the various elements of this strategy and the long term consequences becoming visible in SA now, see the detailed study by Anthea Jeffery.

g) The church's involvement in the "struggle"

As is well known, prominent members of the Christian community in South Africa were part of the liberation struggle from the beginning – well known among them are Father Trevor Huddleston, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Allan Boesak. (John De Gruchy's books: "The Church Struggle in South Africa" and "Bonhoeffer and South Africa" are well worth reading for a detailed history of the church's resistance to Apartheid.)

As soon as I began my studies of theology at the University of Natal in Pietermaritzburg in 1981, I tried to inform myself about liberation theology and the struggle for freedom. At first we joined clandestine seminars on liberation theology, led by Father Theo Kneifel, which were announced innocently as meetings of the Catholic Students' Society on the Campus. We read various "banned" works, mostly by South American liberation theologians. We lived together in a residence for theology students, in which black students were officially not allowed to live, but we managed to dodge these rulings for the most part. We studied Liberation theology, we read Bonhoeffer, saw many parallels between the Barmen Declaration and the South African situation and saw this concern expressed in the now famous "Kairos Document", which has a very clear theology of resistance and liberation.

"It was all so clear and simple" is a thought that often goes through my head now. We knew who the enemy was and what "they" were doing wrong and we also knew how it should be "done right". The world-wide pressure that was created especially by the church's support of the liberation struggle was an important factor influencing the Nationalist Party to dismantle Apartheid and hand over power to a democratically elected government.

h) Freedom

At last we had a new Constitution, a "New South Africa" and we were a "Rainbow Nation". We are the most progressive democracy in the world, on paper. I remember with great fondness the 27 April 1994, the day of our first democratic election. I was then serving in Philippi, a congregation on the "Cape Flats", near Cape Town – in one of the most diverse and volatile communities in South Africa at that time. On the day we all came to the polling station in peace and joy, stood in the long queues for over seven hours to be able to make our mark on the ballot paper to elect a new, fully representative government to rule in justice and peace. I will never forget that day! There are many beautiful examples of the "rainbow nation", a phrase coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, actually becoming

a reality - just one example that I need to mention is the Alexander Road High School which my children attend.

i) The second "falling apart"

But, sadly, things are falling apart again. The first 17 years of "freedom" saw an unprecedented increase in nepotism and corruption among the elite rulers of South Africa (see R.W. Johnson's, "South Africa's Brave New World – The Beloved Country since the End of Apartheid"). The saddest part of this development for me is that many of these leaders were once our heroes, they stood up for justice, freedom and accountability against all forms of discrimination and now they have fallen into an elitist, greedy, power-grabbing way of leadership, that they back up with an African National-Socialist ideology, that in too many ways reminds me of the ideology of the "previous regime". It is as John Holloway puts it, that, "the nationalism of the oppressed (anti-imperialist nationalism), although it may aim at radical social transformation, is easily diverted from its broader aims into simply replacing 'their' capitalists with 'ours', as the history of anti-colonial movements makes clear." (*Change the world without taking power. The Meaning of Revolution Today*. Page 64). And so, after all the idealism, the courageous struggle for freedom and justice, things are falling apart again. From our experience in South Africa I have to fully agree with John Holloway's sad cry: "How many times has the scream against oppression been diverted into the assertion of national identity in national liberation movements which have done little more than reproduce the oppression against which the scream was directed?" (ibid. Page 73)

Some of the symptoms of this new "falling apart" that I see are:

- appointments to government positions are made according to party loyalty and often family loyalty and not according to competence,
- billions of Rand could not be accounted for in the Eastern Cape Province's Education Department last year (the poorest of the Provinces of South Africa),
- the so called "Secrecy Bill" (giving the government the right to declare any information secret and threatening vicious punishment on journalists – 25 years imprisonment).
- Poverty, social disintegration and unemployment are worse than ever before, while the ANC members of parliament and local government officials are living in decadent abundance, granting themselves salary increases and so-called "performance bonuses" every year far in excess of the inflation rate. The activists of the liberation struggle have become mindless consumerists who unscrupulously take what they can get without regard to their fellow South Africans for whom they allegedly struggled for freedom and justice.
- This year (2012) marks the centenary of the founding of the ANC (1912) – the higher party officials celebrated this before a huge crowd of supporters with expensive champagne and other luxuries. I quote from the "Tuesday column" on "Facebook" by one of our foremost anti-Apartheid journalists, Max du Preez, called "'A Better Life for All' will have to wait" (posted: 10 January 2012):
"Just about the most memorable moment was when deputy president Kgalema Motlanthe, surrounded by the ANC bigwigs with glasses of champagne in hand, proposed a toast "to ANC unity" and told the ordinary faithful that if they did not have champagne, they could take photographs of their leaders drinking, or raise clenched fists. "The leaders will now enjoy the champagne, and of course they do so on your behalf through their lips," he said. As they have been doing for quite a while now".

- Very high crime prevalence, very often accompanied with extreme violence. The rape statistics show that a woman is raped every 20 minutes in South Africa and many white farmers have been murdered or driven off their land by threats of violence).
- With the exception of the Revenue (Tax) Department, no Government department is functioning efficiently (corruption and mismanagement are rife).
- Government schools, especially in township and rural areas, are in total chaos and the teachers often do not get paid, and do not come to school because they "have" to earn money with other "business" etc. Jonathan Jansen, black rector of the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, and a well known educationalist, wrote in the Sunday Times that if he was a poor black South African, he would rather send his children to school in Zimbabwe than to a school in rural South Africa.
- "race" has to be filled in on all documents and applications, and is then blatantly used to discriminate against "white" students and candidates for appointments, bursaries etc.

This all begs the question, why? There is, of course, not one simple answer, but way back in 2001 George Soros already said, "South Africa is in the hands of global capital. That is why it can't meet the legitimate aspirations of its people." Today I believe one would have to add: The ANC elite, many of whom have become multi-millionaires over these last 17 years, are not even trying to meet those legitimate aspirations, they are merely making sure that they remain in power.

B. Following Jesus when Things are falling apart

Or falling into the hands of the "ambidextrous God".

There is a verse in the letter to the Hebrews (10,31) that has always intrigued and frightened me, it sounds even more frightening in German: "Schrecklich ist's, in die Hände des lebendigen Gottes zu fallen." Hebräer 10,31 - "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Hebrews 10,21

And yet, I believe, to fall into the hands of the living God is our only hope, and the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ could be described as precisely that for both the preacher and the hearers: a falling into the hands of our "ambidextrous God". This phrase or metaphor has helped me to understand better what has been happening to us in South Africa. In this critical, dangerous and often hopeless situation, I see God getting a hold of us with both of his hands and not letting go. I will try to describe now, what that means to us as South Africans (remember that I am speaking for myself and for the members of my congregation and community).

a) Before "Liberation" it was all so clear and simple – we knew what we had to do: resist Apartheid, support those who struggle for freedom, take God's "preferential option for the poor and the oppressed", and make it a practical reality in our communities. Much good was done, and this way of life, practiced by many brave Christians, despite all its ambivalences, was a major factor in bringing about the changes that led to the liberation from Apartheid. But, in view of our present situation and the symptoms I have described, I have to ask the question: Did we not confuse our activism, and even our political ideologies with the Gospel, using the Law only against the others and claiming the Gospel for ourselves in smug self-righteousness? Looking back at that time, I shudder to remember the smug hypocrisy that I and many others displayed as we condemned the "others" and yet lived quite well in a system that granted us privileges, while harshly discriminating against others. But, as much as we should critically reflect on our own part in the past, there is something more than our personal failings at stake here: to put it in

rather harsh theological terms, the "wrath" of God's left hand, of God's Law is showing us in no uncertain terms that God's law is not to be mocked.

b) The "post-liberation" reality that I have merely begun to describe above reveals the costs at which the glorious "liberation" was bought: The "People's War" strategists taught the youth that education, law and order, obeying civil authorities, as well as thinking for yourself and taking responsibility for your actions are not to be seen as valuable in the "struggle", as things one should strive for, whereas disobedience to state authority, destruction of public property, "making the country ungovernable" and, of course, blind party loyalty (ignoring nepotism and corruption in your own ranks) are acceptable means of gaining and keeping power. Whoever did not abide by these "rules" was eliminated by the most horrible death imaginable ("necklacing", a tyre drenched with petrol, hung around your neck and set alight). The results of this "education" are clearly visible today. In addition, the youth have learnt that entitlement on the basis of your "victim status" is the best card to play and if that is somehow questioned, it can only be because your questioners are irredeemably racist. Teachers in schools and universities are often threatened with assault by students who fail their end-of-year-exams, because "they have the right to pass" and the professors are just being racists, who do not want them to earn the degree to which they are entitled. The concept that (in its first use) the Law is there to sustain and protect life and make living in a community possible has gotten lost along the way. I suppose that this is not something unique to South Africa, but the stark consequences of such forgetting can be seen clearer there than in a society where a lot of "first-use-of-the-law-things" still seem to function quite well.

I have a question that I would want to ask you here today in this regard, because I am not quite clear on this yet. Looking at the stark consequences of ignoring our joint responsibility for "first-use-of-the-law" matters in our South African context, could one say that the killing/drowning of the old Adam, second use of the law can also be seen in this "falling apart", in other words a kind of socio-political second use?

And could such communal second-use-experiences drive communities to the crucified Christ, like the second use of the law does with the individual Christian? Perhaps I'm completely off the track with this, that's why I thought I should ask.

I very briefly want to describe the stark consequences of ignoring the first use of the law as they are experienced by various members of our communities:

- **Teachers** struggling with little or no salaries with huge classes and no material
- **Nurses** and other **medical staff** working in hospitals that are in a mess
- I have already mentioned the struggles that **lecturers** at university and other staff working at tertiary education institutions are having.
- There is a grass-roots organisation in the townships, calling themselves **Abahlali baseMjondolo** (shack dwellers), that have established themselves to fight the battle against a government on local level that has not come through for them in any way, although at election time far reaching promises of poverty alleviation etc. have repeatedly been made.
- These people are trying to make life work in their communities, trying to do the necessary work of caring for life, and in my estimation, unwittingly co-operating with God's left hand.

I could continue endlessly describing the critical situation our country is in and the many people that are quietly going about keeping life safe and possible, but I need to get on to the next part of my presentation.

In describing our situation like this, which could be understood as mere moaning and groaning, I need to remind myself and others to not fall into a similar trap of smug

hypocrisy about these problems in the "new" South Africa, as happened to us under the previous regime. We are all in some or other way co-responsible for the situation and there are none that could be called innocent or blameless. Troubled consciences abound, because it is certainly not just a matter of separating the good from the evil and then siding with those that are deemed to be good. If we want to stay, we need to soberly face our own failings and those of each other with the clarity that comes from living as forgiven sinners.

c) And yet, many **People are leaving the country**, because for them the situation has become unbearable. Many trained and skilled people cannot find work (often because untrained or not well trained people are appointed on the basis of their race). Many others do not want to continue living under the constant threat of violence. I know of no family in my congregation/community, white or black, in which there has not been a case of serious crime perpetrated against them with impunity by criminals who get away with it more than 50% of the time, because the justice system is so corrupt – so they leave – and those that remain, either can't leave (for financial reasons) or are tenaciously holding on to the idea that they do have a responsibility, a calling (vocation, "Berufung") to be in South Africa, and to do their share of the work of "care and redemption" in this part of the world.

d) My question as a pastor and particularly as the trainer for the "lay preachers" of our church is this: what does the task of preaching, fulfilling our calling as servants of the Word, contribute towards dealing with this crisis situation?

The more my work has been governed by the distinction of "Law from Gospel" (getting to know the Crossings Community and your resources on the internet has revitalized this thinking in my work tremendously), the more have people been saying: "We need that Word!" "We come on Sunday to get our shot of Gospel adrenalin for the week!" I have tried to understand what is happening, why they say that and how it works – I'm a little scared that systematizing it too much may in fact mess it up – but for my own clarity I need a system of sorts, even though every system is also an oversimplification of the matter. Such a systematization does help me to keep my focus clearly on the distinction of "Law and Promise" and helps me to recognize it at work in the people around me and in myself.

e) I have found for myself as well as for the members of our congregation and church, that such clear "law - gospel" distinction, **the understanding of God as "ambidextrous"**, as caring for and redeeming the whole of creation is a welcome help in keeping us in South Africa and keeping us sane while we work and live there as disciples of Christ.

After again reading Werner Elert, Christian Möller and Oswald Bayer together with the writings of Ed Schroeder and Robert Bertram and many others on the Crossings Website, I believe that this kind of preaching, this way of "experiencing" the Word, is a rediscovery of the **sacramental character** of the Word and of its proclamation. (c.f. Christian Möller, Seelsorglich Predigen "Die Gleichzeitigkeit von Jesu und unserer Situation ist ein sakramentales Ereignis" page 22, and again on page 23 Luther's "sakramentaliter meditari".) Christian Möller puts it very succinctly: "Den biblischen Text *sacramental* zu meditieren, heißt für Luther, ihn mit der Erwartung auszulegen und zu predigen, daß Gott auch tut, was er verheißt (Ps.33,9) weil Christus für sein Wort einsteht, es mit seiner Gegenwart begleitet und in die Herzen der Menschen übersetzt." (Seite 24) "*For Luther, to meditate on the biblical text sacramentally means to listen to and to preach the text with the expectation that God will do, what He promises (Psalm 33,9), because Christ stands in for his word, accompanies it with his presence and translates it into the hearts of the people.*" (my translation). And recently Oswald Bayer has reminded me again of the "Performative Word" that does what it says!

Based on this rediscovery of the "sacramental word", I'd like to introduce to you a "**pattern**" that I am using as a "grid" for my thinking, preparation and practice of teaching and preaching God's Word in the South African context, so that the Christian community to which I belong and in which I serve up the Gospel can itself also discern and consciously experience/recognize the two hands of God in their lives, and thus become "coworkers of joy"(2 Cor.1,24) with and for one another in Christ.

C. Finding ourselves in the Story of God's Faithfulness

The model presupposes/takes as its point of departure Luther's three experiential "rules" for being a theologian (oratio, meditatio, tentatio), and then takes the "Law – Gospel" framework also found in his Small Catechism and combines that with the three steps of meditation used by the mystics of the middle ages (purgatio - illuminatio – unio) which Luther had learnt and practiced during his years in the Augustinian Order and later filled with new theology, in order to understand what the "Word of God" is doing to us and with us – or, to use the ambidextrous metaphor, how God is handling us, what it is like to fall into the hands of the living God - or, to use narrative language, how we find/discover ourselves and the life we are called to live in the Story of God's Faithfulness, which kills us and creates us anew as free children of God.

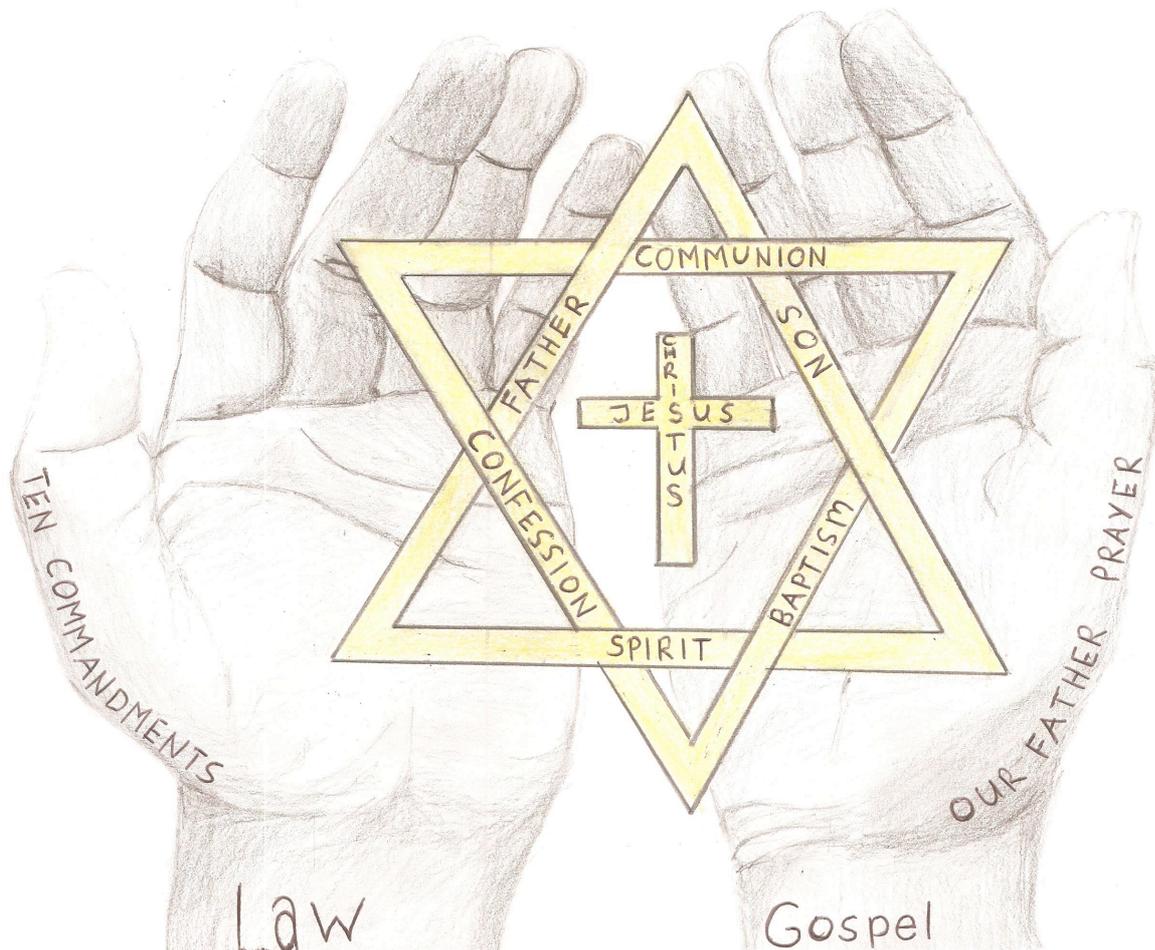
Luther encourages all Christians into a life-long Catechumenate which takes us into the pattern and process of Baptism. Johannes Viebig calls this the "practice" of the Word of God. And Martin Nicol's Book, "Meditation bei Luther", shows in a lot of detail the meditation practice in which Luther lived and worked all his life, and it shows very clearly, how the Reformational rediscovery of the Gospel was in fact the result of this continuous "practice of the Word of God" in **prayer, meditation** and **agonizing struggle** (oratio – meditatio – tentatio). This threefold experience (Erfahrung) of the Word of God is what makes one a theologian, says Luther.

In his Small Catechism, chapter IV Part 4 on Baptism, Luther reminds us that Baptism "signifies that the old person in us with all our sins and evil desires is to be drowned through sorrow for sin and repentance, and that daily a new person is to come forth, and rise up to live before God in righteousness and purity forever." How does such drowning and being raised up happen in daily life? It happens when we practice the "Word of God". In an article called, "Evangelische Meditation als 'Übung des Wortes Gottes', Anstöße aus Luthers Kleinem Katechismus und Erfahrungen mit Meditationstagungen." Johannes Viebig, in view of the meditation retreats that he leads, asks the question: "How does God meet us personally? And we found the answer: in his ordering Word, in the witness of what he did for us and in his giving himself to us (Hingabe), through which he binds us to himself. In this we rediscovered the three phases of meditation, the 'purgatio' (Reinigung), the 'illuminatio' (Erleuchtung) and the 'unio' (Einung) – and that these three ways of meeting God (Begegnungsweisen) are congruent with the order found within the Small Catechism of Martin Luther, which mirrors these three steps: In the **Ten Commandments** we encounter the **ordering Word**, which purges us, the 'purgatio', in the **Baptism Creed** we have the **witness of what he did for us**, the 'illuminatio', and in the **Communion** at the Table we have **the giving of himself to us**, the 'unio'." (Viebig 82, my translation). The basic distinction of "Law from Gospel" and its impact on us can be seen working behind the scenes here. The Law does the 'purging' and the Gospel does the 'illuminating' and the 'unio', the binding together with God in Christ.

In my work as pastor in the congregation, in preaching, teaching and pastoral care, in the retreats that I lead with our church wardens and our confirmands, I have taken this scheme and developed it further into a pattern for discerning how God handles us in our context, in our daily life. I'd like to briefly show this pattern to you, using a drawing by my

daughter, Mia Meylahn, which shows the two hands of God and the gift these hands give to us through the Word, as summarised in the Small Catechism.

The work our ambidextrous God does through the Word "Care and Redemption"



Care and Redemption

To make it easier to remember left and right, the hands are facing away from the viewers, as if they were our hands. Of course they should be turned around towards us, since they are God's hands, giving the gift of Life in Christ to us. But that would just make things more complicated, as the left hand of God would then be on our right and the right hand on our left.

On the left we have God's Left Hand, the Law, the Ten Commandments; this is the hand which cares for the whole of creation. It makes life possible, bearable, livable for all beings, and it calls, entices and even forces all to work with it for the sustaining of creation. Much of what I have been talking about above happens here, as we experience the left hand of God caring for us and as we work with it to "make the new South Africa" work as best we can.

But this hand is also experienced in the terrible, fatal experience of wrath (the second use of the Law), which drowns the Old Adam, punishes and puts down all that within us that is born out of mistrust and unbelief, all the stuff we do to impress God and boast before humans. As I asked before, could we see this part of God's Left-hand-work happening in the terrible falling apart that we are experiencing in South Africa today? Is this the cross

we are called to bear as we stay, work and struggle on in South Africa? If yes, then we can only do it, because we have "inside information" about God's further plans of action, we know about the Right hand of God.

On the right, then, we have God's Right Hand, the Gospel, the hand that reaches out to us, that grabs a hold of us and does not ever let us go again. It is inscribed with the Our Father Prayer, although, of course, the Gospel is more centrally found in the Creed (especially in the Second Article). However the Lord's Prayer, and in particular the explanation that Luther gives to the "Introduction", i.e. the "Our Father in heaven", is to me a core experiential description of how the Gospel-God deals with us, how the Right Hand of God handles us: "With these words God wants to attract us (Luther says, "Gott will uns locken"), so that we believe he is truly our Father and we are truly his children, in order that we may ask him boldly and with complete confidence, just as loving children ask their loving father."

And in His two hands, God holds out the greatest gift there is: His Son Jesus Christ, and in Him we receive faith (Trust) in the triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. How? We are called, invited, or even grabbed by the scruff of our necks, to join the creative and loving dance of the Holy Community (perichoreisis), the dance of "care and redemption". This Divine "handling" takes place through the Word and through the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion, as well as through Confession, which Luther never quite took off the list of the Sacraments. These different aspects of God's handling of us, the dynamic Trinity and the gifts of new life in Baptism, Communion and Confession, are composed into a star of David, reminding us of the truth that "salvation comes from the Jews" (according to Christ in the Gospel of John), and in the midst of these peculiar people, the Jews, we find the Saviour of the World, the crucified Lord, Jesus Christ.

As you can see I am still stammering about these matters myself, but I have had some very interesting conversations about this drawing and the message it tries to convey. And what is more, it seems to reach down deeper than our understanding, because it uses the image of the ambidextrous God holding out the gift of Christ to us, and as we are joined to this Christ in Baptism (we celebrate the remembrance of Baptism regularly in Port Elizabeth), we come to understand at an experiential level, that, united with Christ, we are safe (saved) in these two hands of God. And then the adventure begins of discovering exactly how that is true for us:

Then the teachers, the nurses, the doctors, the lecturers, the shack dwellers get to know, experientially, perhaps through prayer, meditation and agonizing struggle, or more probably, through hearing the proclamation of the Word, that while the left hand of God lies heavily upon their shoulders, pushing them to stand firm for the sake of the children, the patients, the students, the community, and this heavy hand makes them realise that they are co-responsible for the mess, for the "falling apart" all around them and they experience how their trust in themselves has to die, how it is in fact killed every day - while experiencing all of that, they suddenly or gradually come to the glorious illumination, the discovery that they are also, gracefully held by the other, the right hand of God, where they find sustenance for their failing faith/trust and true peace through forgiveness for their troubled consciences. And bound together with Christ in their Baptism, they discover that whoever is plunged into the waters of union with God in Christ, surfaces next to the Poor, and discovers that he/she loves God by serving the neighbour. "Wer in Gott eintaucht, taucht neben den Armen wieder auf."

I end off here, with the hope that I have been able to give you some insight into how the community I serve tries to hear the Word of God and live by it (which is my very simple understanding of Discipleship), as it faces the critical situation in which South Africa finds itself at present.

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